Some Observations on Negative Forms in Tamil

The origin of negative forms in a language might be as old as the origin of the positive forms in that language. The history of literary Tamil extends over a period of not less than two thousand years and negative forms in Tamil could be traced in the earliest literary works. Grammarians sometimes fail to record important features of the language. The failure of Tolkāppiyanār to treat negative forms in *Tolkāppiyam*, the earliest among extant Tamil grammars, which even modern linguistics acclaim as excellent in many respects, can be explained only in that way. Though Tolkāppiyanār had used a few negative forms in his grammar and though some references in that grammar, point to his awareness of negative formation in Tamil, he had not treated negative forms as such. Medieval Tamil grammars, like Vīracōliyam which makes some bold innovations in grammatical theory and Nannūl which is relatively faithful to the school of *Tolkāppiyam*, have some inadequate references to negative forms, already existing in Tamil literature and inscriptions of their age. Beschi, the well-known Tamil scholar who hailed from Italy, was the first to recognize the importance of negative forms in Tamil. Also known as Vīramāmunivar, his talents found expression as a poet, an author, a lexicographer and a grammarian. He treats negatives in Section VII of his work *A Grammar of the Common Dialect of the Tamil Language* which he published in A.D. 1728.

According to Beschi, negative is a mood. Caldwell (page 468) feels that negative is a voice rather than a mood. Professor T. P. Meenakshisundaram (page 215) corrects Caldwell and supports Beschi in the following words:— "The voice has to do with the relationship between the subject and the verb, the verb and its object or the verb and some other noun whilst mood has to do with the various kinds of the event in relation to desireability, reality, contingency, etc." This paper will be listing a number of observations on negative forms in literary and spoken Tamil. For observations on negative mood in the literary language, the treatment of negatives in *Ilakkanaccurukkam* (A Brief-Grammar, pages 119-137) by Ārumuka Nāvalar had been utilised. This re mains the best contribution, so far, to the section on negatives by the school of traditional Tamil grammar. For observations on negative forms in the spoken language, Jaffna dialect of Tamil, which is the speech variety of the author of this paper, had been utilised.

Considerable work had already been done on negative forms in Tamil after Ārumuka Nāvalar. Caldwell, a pioneer of Comparative Dravidian Linguistics, was a contemporary of Nāvalar. Through the comparative method, he had shown that the Tamil-Telegu-Canarese negative is altogether destitute of signs of tense. Jules Bloch carried further the work of Caldwell by comparing the negative formations in many Dravidian tribal languages. P. S. Subrahmanya Sastri who had the advantage of a better knowledge of Tamil, when compared to Caldwell and Jules Bloch, had dealt with negative formation in six types. Alfred Master had done painstaking and critical work on negatives in Dravidian and had published his findings in his paper on the Zero Negative in Dravidian. Professor V. I. Subrahmaniam's paper on negatives, published

about eighteen years ago, can be considered the latest worthy contribution in this field.   He was mainly concerned with new segmentation of Tamil negative forms and his study was mainly based on *Puranānūṟu*, a classical text.

This paper on negatives in Tamil concentrates on aspects which had received little or no attention from the other scholars.   What has been attempted here, is mainly a grammatical study to clarify certain issues and so the most comprehensive exposition in a traditional Tamil grammar was chosen as the starting point.   Nāvalar had mentioned three negative particles:— *ā*, *al* and *il*.   Through comparative studies, Caldwell came to the conclusion that the negative particle should have been *a* and not *ā*.   Before proceeding further, it is only proper to show the difficulty in the proper segmantation of Tamil negative forms.   This particle is easily recognisable in third person finite verbs:—

masculine singular	:	*naṭa+(v)aa+ṉ*	'not walk-he'.
feminine singular	:	*naṭa+(v)aa+ḷ*	'not walk-she'.
epicene plural	:	*naṭa+(v)aa+r*	'not walk-they (rational).'
neuter singular	:	*naṭa+(v)aa+tu*	'not walk-it'.
neuter plural	:	*naṭa+(v)aa*	'not walk-they (irrational).'

How to isolate person-number-gender (PNG) markers from negative particle, is a problem here.   If *aa* (*ā*) occurring in the above forms is taken as negative particle, terminations *ṉ*, *ḷ*, *r* and *tu* can be said to denote masculine singular, feminine singular, epicene plural and neuter singular respectively.   But this approach fails to explain the neuter plural verb as neuter plural termination is not available there.   The traditional Tamil grammarian gets over this difficulty by postulating the PNG markers as *aṉ* for masculine singular, *aḷ* for feminine singular, *ar* for rational plural, *atu* for neuter singular and *a* for neuter plural. In *sandhi*, the short *a* in each of the forms gets elided before the preceding long *ā*. If the negative particle is taken as short *a*, elision of the following *a* in each of the PNG markers need not be postulated.

But it should be noted here that neither the long *ā* nor the short *a* is adequate to explain the first person and the second person finite negative forms.

first person singular	:	*naṭa+(v)eeṉ*	'not walk-I.'
first person plural	:	*naṭa+(v)oom*	'not walk-we.'
second person singular	:	*naṭa+(v)aay*	'not walk-you.'
second person plural	:	*naṭa+(v)iir*	'not walk-you (plural).'

Alfred Master was led to formulate his theory on the zeroi morpheme because of these difficulties. But it should be noted here that *ā* was isolated as a negative particle by Tamil grammarians quite early. If *ā* was given up as negative particle, it becomes difficult to segment negative participles like *naṭavaatu*, *naṭavaata* and *naṭavaamai*. Hence, V. I. Subramaniam was led to propose new segmentation for these forms.   But it will be sufficient for the purpose of this study to take this particle as *a/ā*.

The particle *a/ā* can occur only as a suffix.   The word suffix answers for *iṭainilai* (that which stands in between) and *vikuti* (that which occurs at the end) in the structure of verbs in Tamil grammar.   Alfred Master seems to use

the terms infix for *iṭainilai* and suffix for *vikuti* when he says that *ā* as infix and as suffix is peculiar to Tamil and Malayalam languages only, among the Dravidian languages.   If Gleason's definition of infix (page 73) as a morpheme which is inserted into the stem with which it is associated is accepted, then Tamil verbs cannot be said to have infixes.   Gleason's definition of suffixes (page 59) as affixes which follow the root with which they are most closely associated can accommodate both the *iṭainilai* and the *vikuti* of Tamil verbs.   Whether *a/ā* and the other negative particles should be referred to as *iṭainilai* or *vikuti* remained a matter of controversy with the traditional Tamil grammarians.   As negative suffix *a/ā*, the one most used among these suffixes, displaces tense suffixes which usually form *iṭainilai* in Tamil verb, and as that negative suffix is followed by PNG markers in finite verbs, the designation *iṭainilai* might have appeared appropriate.

In adjectival participles and in gerunds or adverbial participles, parallel forms are found:—

ōṭā *kkutirai* 'horse which does not run' ōṭāta *kutirai* 'horse which does not run.'

taḷarā *naṭantaṉ* 'walked without lassitude (he)'/*taḷarātu natantāṉ* 'walked without lassitude (he).'

According to the traditional interpretation, the forms at the beginning (ōṭā *kkutiral* and *taḷarā naṭantāṉ*) are derived from the parallel forms.   But the earlier forms are preferred in poetry and in early Tamil literature.   V. I. Subramaniam also has noted this fact.   The latter parallel forms ōṭāta *kutirai* and *taḷarātu naṭantāṉ* are preferred in prose and in latter Tamil literature.   Therefore, it appears quite probable that the truth is the reverse of the traditional interpretation, i.e. ōṭā *kkutirai* and *taḷara naṭantāṉ* should have been the earlier forms when compared to their parallel forms.

Unlike the particle *a/ā*, the negative *al* and *il* also occur as bases for some *kuṛippu viṉai* or appellative verbs.   The verbs, formed from these bases, do not take tense markers and they are sometimes termed defective verbs.   The form *il* can be said to be a contradictory negative while the form *al* can be said to be a contrary negative.   This contrary negative denies only the particular thing indicated, i.e., it will mean that the thing indicated is something else.   PNG markers are added to both bases:—

allaṉ 'not he'/*ilaṉ* 'he is not'
allaḷ 'not she'/*ilaḷ* 'she is not'
allar 'not they'/*ilar* 'they are not'
alla 'not they (neuter)'/*ila* 'they (neuter) are not'
allāy 'not you'/*ilay* 'you are not'
allīr 'not you'/*ilīr* 'you are not'
allēṉ 'not me'/*ilēṉ* 'I am not'
allēm 'not we'/*ilēm* 'we are not.'

Here, PNG markers of masculine singular, feminine singular, epicene plural, neuter plural, second person singular, second person plural, first person singular and first person plural are respectively added to the two negative bases. It is not possible to explain why the form *al* has almost always its consonant

doubled while the form *il* has almost always its consonant remaining single. Two sets of forms are exceptions to the above pattern though they are formed from the two bases:—

anru 'not-it'/*inru* 'it is not'
allana 'not-they/*illana* 'they are not.'

In the first set of forms which are neuter singular, the PNG marker should have been -*tu* and not -*atu*. The second set of forms which are neuter plural, is equivalent to *alla* 'not they'/*ila* 'they are not', but here *illana* is found instead of *ilana*.

The particle *il* can occur in verbs between tense suffix and PNG marker. Examples like *natantilan* 'had not walked-he' and *perrilan* 'had not obtained-he' are cited for the past tense forms and *natakkinrilan* 'is not walking-he' for the present tense form. As forms like *ilan* exist as independent finite defective verbs, it seems that forms like *natant-u, perr-u,* and *natakkinr-u* can be interpreted as independent adverbial participles. The argument that expressions like *natant-iilan, perr-ilan* and *natakkinr-ilan* look like one-word expressions cannot be conclusive as it can be replied that the occurrence of regular sandhi forms had so transformed these expressions. Such an explanation for present tense expressions like *natakkinr-ilan* present a problem here as there is no present tense adverbial participle form *natakkinru* in either Classical or Modern Tamil. But historical grammar will solve this difficulty. At one stage in the early Medieval Tamil literature, this pattern of verbal forms seems to have been prevalent. M. Raghava Ayyangar has pointed out to the prevalance of forms like *paykinru* and *vilkinru* (*Kalaviyal Urai*); *vakukkinru, vaykkinru, arccikkinru* and *meykkinru* (*Tiruvaymoli*); *katakinru* and *ulakinru* (*Tiruviruttam*); *mukkinru* (*Periyatirumatal*); and *ekinru* (*Kailaipati Kalatti pati antati*).[1] Therefore, the past and the present negative expressions formed with il can be explained as composite negative expressions in which negative defective verbs follow adverbial participles. Regarding the controversy over nomenclature between *itainilai* and *vikuti*, it should have been considered by some scholars as *vikuti* because it occurs after tense marker and by some scholars as *itainilai* because it occurs before PNG marker.

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1. M. Raghavaiyangar has actually cited more forms:—*alukinru, celkinru, pirikinru* (*Kalaviyal Urai*): *nannukinru* (*Perunkatai*) and *kuraikkinru* (*Cuntaramurtti Nayanar*). The form in Perunkatai could not be traced as he had not given the exact reference in that voluminous work. The form cited from *Cuntaramurtti Nayanar* could be a mistake as it could not be traced. As for his forms in *Kalaviyal Urai*, Raghavaiyangar himself says in his article that he collected all these forms from the first edition of *Kalaviyal Urai* by C. V. Damodarampillai, the pioneer Sri Lanka editor of Tamil classical works and that in the later editions of the same work, many of these forms were 'corrected' as those editors felt that these forms must have been scribal errors. It should be noted here that Raghava Ayyangar's article appeared first in print in 1937.

Details of exact references for forms cited in the paper:—

paykinru (p. 60), *vilkinru* (p. 60) in *Kalaviyal Urai* or *Iraiyanar Akapporul*, Kalakam, Publication, First edition, Madras, 1953.

vakukkinru (p. 482), *vaykkinru* (p. 541), *arccikkinru* (p. 629), *meykkinru* (p. 631), *katakinru* (p. 434), *ulakinru* (p. 435) and *mukkinru* (p. 470) in *Nalayira Divyaprabandham*, Mayilai Madhavadasan edition, Madras, 1950, *ekinru* (p. 82) in *Patinoran tirumurai*, Arumuka Navalar edition, Fourth edition, Madras, 1951.

The author of this paper noted two additional forms in *Kalaviyal Urai*:—*takkinru* (pp. 37, 50) and *niklakinru* (p. 117).

These forms appear to mark an important feature of the then Tamil dialect of Pandya kingdom as the references cited above except for *Periyatirumatal* are found in works composed in the Pandya kingdom. Tirumankai Alvar, the author of *Periyatirumatal*, also spent the last phase of his life there.

The particle *il* and *al* occur in verbs as *naṭakkalaṉ* and *naṭakkalaṉ*. The *-kk-* occurring in the middle part of these verbs represents *cāriyai* or inflexional increment *ku*. According to Ārumuka Nāvalar, these verbs denote the future. Forms like these with the increment *ku*, occur in early Tamil literature where only past/non-past tense differences were clearly marked. In usage, these forms seem to denote more of the present tense than of the future tense.

The particle *a/ā* and al occur in *terinilaiviṉai* forms which have no tense suffix, i.e., *naṭavāṉ* 'will not walk(he)' and *uṇṇalaṉ* 'will not eat(he).' The particle *al*, following the verbal base, generates other verbal forms. For example, second person imperative negative plural forms are *naṭavaṉmiṉ* 'don't walk (you. pl.)' and *ceyyaṉmiṉ* 'don't do (you.pl.).' Also negative optative forms are *maṟavaṟka* 'may (you) not forget' and *uṇṇaṟka* 'may (you) not eat.' In the optative example, *akaṉeṉal* 'may (you) not call (him) man,' the negative particle *al* is followed by zero optative marker but optative significance is provided by the context. In the optative example *mariyatorāl*, 'may (you) not leave out those which are close,' the vowel *a* of *al* had been elongated probably as a compensation for the lack of any specific optative marker.

There are a number of composite negative verbs which are formed by negative appellative verbs following positive finite verbs. The negative appellative verbs are formed from both *al* and *il*. But there is a difference in the formation of the negative appellative verbs used in the context. The negative appellative verbs formed from *al* always have the required PNG markers:— *uṇṭāṉ-allaṉ*, literally 'he ate-not he;' *uṇṭēṉ-allēṉ* 'I ate-not me;' *uṇṭāy-allai*, 'you ate-not you,' etc. The negative appellative verb formed from *il* has only one form *illai*. The form *illai* might be related in origin to *ila*, negative plural form. But the verb *illai* occurs with all persons, genders and numbers as *vantāṉ-illai*, literally 'he came-not', *vantēṉ-llai*, 'I came not' and *vantāy-illai* 'you came-not,' etc.

There are a number of negative adverbial participles, corresponding to different positive adverbial participles. The form *ceyyātu* 'having not done' is said to be the negative of *ceytu, ceypu, ceyyā,* and *ceyyū*. Nāvalar should have stated so as Naṉṉūlār had earlier classified all the above patterns of positive adverbial participles as belonging to the past tense. So, it could be said that *ceyyātu* is the negative of *ceytu* 'having done' the pattern of past adverbial participle in Modern Tamil. The negative adverbial patterns *ceykalātu* 'without doing' and *ceykilātu* 'without doing' are also used as negative counterparts of the same positive adverbial participles mentioned above. The negative adverbial participles like *ceyyāmai ceyyāmaikku, ceyyāmē,* and *ceyyāmal* are the negative forms for positive adverbial participles like *ceyarku, ceyyiya* and *ceyyiyar*. The last three forms can be termed purposive participles. Naṉṉūlār had classified these forms as belonging to the future tense. Therefore, the negative adverbial participles, indicated just above, should have also future significance. The verb *ceyyāmai* is identical with negative verbal noun *ceyyāmai* 'not doing.' The forms *ceyyāmaikku* and *ceyyāmē* are clearly its variations. Applying this analogy to the negative participial form *ceyyātu*, this form also can be considered a negative verbal noun, the modern equivalent of which is *ceyyātatu*. It should be noted here that *ceyyātu/ceyyātatu* is very similar to *ōtā kkutirai/oṭāta kutirai*, which had already been discussed. The form *ceyyāmal* is said to be negative of the positive adverbial participle *ceya* both in its present tense and future tense usages. Along with *-mai* and *-tu, -al* is also a termination of verbal nouns. Probably this is a double verbal noun form. Therefore, in

these instances, it can be stated that negative verbal nouns become negative adverbial participles in contexts in which they modify verbs.

There is a peculiarity in the formation of the appellative adjective participle. The negative adverbial participial form *ceyyātu* becomes the negative adjectivial participial form *ceyyāta* by the addition of the adjectival participial marker *-ā*. It is worth noting here that the negative verbal noun *ceyyātu* becomes *ceyyātē*, negative imperative second person singular by the addition of second person imperative singular suffix *-ē*. The negative adverbial participle forms *ceykalātu* and *ceykilātu* become *ceykalāta* and *ceykilāta* by the addition of the suffix *-ā*. There are also negative adjectival participles. These forms, both in their adverbial and adjectival usage, are double negatives in form as *al* and *ā* are found in the earlier form and *il* and *a* are found in the latter form. As Jesperson has pointed out (page 331) unlike in Mathematics, two negatives in language do not cancel each other and provide positive significance. The effort in pronouncing two negatives probably softens the negative force of these expressions, compared to the negative form *ceyyāta*. Another thing to note here is that adverbial participle forms like *ceyyātu*, *ceykalātu* and *ceykilātu* are referred to as the negative counterparts of past positive adverbial participles but adjectival participle forms like *ceyyāta*, *ceykalāta* and *ceykilāta*, derived from the above negative participial forms, are referred to as common to all tense forms. The negative adjective appellative participles like *allāta* and *illāta* are formed on the same pattern as *ceykalāta* and *ceykilāta*.

Of the terminations of negative adverbial participle forms, the termination *-ri* is peculiar. The forms *aṉri* and *iṉri* occur in examples like *aram aṉri cceytāṉ* 'He did (things) other than virtuous' and *aruḷ iṉri cceytaṉ* 'He did without grace.' According to the traditional grammarians, *aṉri* and *iṉri* have become *aṉru* and *iṉru* in poetry. It should be remembered here that forms *aṉru* and *iṉru* occur as neuter singular appellative finite verbs. The suffix *i* is a past tense marker and well known termination of some past adverbial participles like *ōṭi* 'having run' and *āri* 'having been cooled'. The forms *aṉri* and *iṉri* can only be analysed as *aṉru -i* and *inru -i*. If *i* is taken as termination of adverbial participle, it becomes difficult to explain the structure of forms like *aṉru* and *iṉru*. In this context, they cannot be explained as neuter singular finite verbs. These forms have to be segmented as *an-ru* (*al-tu*) and *in-ru* (*il-tu*). So, *-i* should have been a later addition in false analogy. Here too, the truth must have been the reverse of the view of traditional grammarians, i.e. *aṉru* and *iṉru*, preserved in early Tamil literature should have been the earlier forms from which *aṉri* and *iṉrr* have been derived later.

As for negative forms in Jaffna dialect of Sri Lanka Tamil, these do not differ much from those in spoken Tamil in South India. There are differences in phonological realisations between Sri Lanka Tamil and South Indian Tamil but they are not considered here. The present writer will make a few observations on the treatment of negatives in *A Generative Grammar of Tamil* by Dr. S. Agesthialingam and in *Reader for Advanced spoken Tamil*, Part II, Grammar and Glossary by Harold Schiffman.

According to Dr. Agesthialingam, forms like ceyya *māṭṭān*, 'will not do (he),' indicate future and denote habituality also. In Jaffna dialect, in addition this form indicates incapability also. For example, *avan pās paṇṇa māṭṭāṉ* 'He is incapable of passing;' *eli viṭṭukkuḷḷay vara māṭṭutu* 'The rat is incapable of entering the house.'

According to Harold Schiffman, "In the case of the verb *iru* 'be, stay and reside,' the negative is simply *ille*. The form involving the infinitive, i.e., *irukkalle* is found only when *iru* is suffixed to another verb, i.e., as an aspect marker." The form involving the infinitive, which in Jaffna Tamil is *irukkellay*, is used without being suffixed to another verb. For example, *nān uṉṟai viṭṭukku viraikkay nī irukkēllay* 'When I came to your house, you were not there'. Schiffman himself had given an example in his book for this type of construction *eṉakku paṇam irrukkalle* 'I have no money' but apparently *iru* in that context had some meaning other than 'be, stay, reside', according to him.

Schiffman also says 'There is in the modern language an archaic tenseless negative which is a remnant from old Tamil where PNG markers are added directly to the stem with no tense marker intervening. This form is preserved mainly in certain idiomatic expressions.' In Jaffna Tamil, expressions like *avaṉ varāṉ* 'he will not come' and *aval pōkāḷ* 'she will not go' are quite common in usage.

Jaffna dialect of Tamil has a negative form which is not in use in South India. The form *kāṇātu* 'not enough' is the counterpart of the positive *kāṇum* 'enough'. For example, *ilayilai pōṭṭa cōṟu kāṇum; kaṟi kāṇātu* 'Rice served on the leaf is enough; curry is not enough'; *kūṭṭattukku ākkaḷ kāṇātu* (There are) not enough people for the meeting'.

A. VELUPPILLAI

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