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**Aspects of Linguistic Variability in Tamil
Short Fiction**

**Aspekty jazykové variability v tamilské krátké
próze**

Disertační práce

vedoucí práce – Prof. PhDr. Jaroslav Vacek, CSc.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

V Praze dne...

podpis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the linguistic variability of contemporary Tamil short fiction. Based on the concept of markedness, it explores the distribution, structure, and function of standard, substandard, and superstandard linguistic varieties used in current Tamil writings. It concentrates on both individual and collective aspects of the use of this diglossic language in literature.

The source-base for the analysis are short stories of seven Tamil authors of different social dialectal background. Authors and their texts recruit from the Brahmin, non-Brahmin and Dalit milieu. Historical perspective is brought into attention in the analysis of writings of Pudumaippittan, one of the first distinguished short-story writers. I observe the shift in the semantic markedness of literary and spoken Tamil use in his work, the introduction of the Pillai dialect into literature and its infiltration to the literary language, same as the impact of the outside sources, i.e., English and Sanskrit, on his writing.

In the works of another non-Brahmin writer, Baskar Sakti, I examine the use and structure of spoken Tamil in contemporary fiction, as well as the functionally marked varieties he uses – the special use of literary Tamil, Tamil language mixed with another Dravidian language, i.e., Malayalam, and Anglicized Tamil of the educated speakers.

In a comparison of three authors' writings – Jeyakandan, Ambai, and Ashokamitran, I pay attention to the differing measures of dialectal markedness in their language. The analyzed Brahmin dialect is compared between the works of an author of a non-Brahmin background who employs it primarily for characterization in his stories, a Brahmin writer who does not identify herself as Brahmin through the language she uses and a Brahmin author who, through his language, identifies himself in his writings with the Brahmin community.

The analysis of language in Dalit literature emphasizes the need of alternate aesthetic and linguistic paradigms in the texts of Dalit writers. In the

stories of Imaiyam, I observe a successful preservation of diglossia in a language which corresponds to the experience of brutality and aggression faced by the marginalized and disrespected community. Another Dalit writer, Puhai, exceptionally employs a non-diglossic colloquial language throughout his stories. I relate his seemingly radically innovative use of language to the traditional aspects of his writing.

Key words

Tamil, short story, variability, diglossia, dialects, markedness

Abstrakt

Tato práce zkoumá projevy jazykové variability v současné tamilské krátké próze. Z pohledu učení o příznakovosti se zabývá distribucí, strukturou a funkcí jednotlivých standardních, substandardních a nadstandardních jazykových variant používaných v současné tamilské literatuře. Pozornost je věnována jak individuálním, tak také kolektivním aspektům používání tohoto diglosického jazyka v literatuře.

Zdrojem pro analýzu jsou povídky sedmi tamilských autorů rozdílného sociálně dialektového původu. Autoři a jejich texty pocházejí z prostředí bráhmanského, nebráhmanského i dalitského. V rozboru textů Pudumaippittana, jednoho z prvních výrazných autorů krátké prózy v tamilštině, se zaměřuji na historické souvislosti a posuny v používání jazyka. Sleduji posun významové příznakovosti literární a mluvené tamilštiny, uvedení dialektu tirunelvélských pillaijů do literatury a jeho proniknutí do literárního jazyka, jakož i vliv vnějších jazykových zdrojů, angličtiny a sanskrtu, na jazyk jeho textů.

V díle rovněž nebráhmanského autora Báskara Šaktiho se zabývám použitím a strukturou mluvené tamilštiny v současné krásné literatuře v její fonetice, morfologii a syntaxi. Rozebírám také funkčně specifické příznakové použití literární tamilštiny, tamilštiny zkombinované s jiným drávidským jazykem – malajálámštinou, a používání anglicizované tamilštiny formálně vzdělaných mluvčích.

V rozboru textů tří spisovatelů – Džejakándana, Ambai a Ašókamitrana – věnuji pozornost rozdílné míře dialektové příznakovosti jazyka. Sledovaný bráhmanský dialekt porovnávám v textech autora nebráhmanského původu, jenž používá dialekt primárně k charakterizaci, bráhmanské spisovatelky, která se svým jazykem jako bráhmanka neidentifikuje a bráhmanského spisovatele, který se prostřednictvím jazyka svých textů identifikuje s bráhmanskou komunitou.

V analýze jazyka dalitské literatury zdůrazňuji nezbytnost použití alternativních estetických a jazykových paradigmat v textech dalitských autorů. V

povídkách Imaijama sledují úspěšné zachování diglosie při použití jazyka, který zobrazuje životní zkušenost surovosti a násilí opovrhované dalitské komunity. Další z dalitských autorů, Puhal, ve svých povídkách nekonvenčně uplatňuje hovorový, dialektový jazyk bez zachování diglosie. Jeho zdánlivě radikálně inovativní používání jazyka vztahují k přehlíženým tradičním aspektům jeho jazykového projevu.

Klíčová slova

Tamilština, povídka, variabilita, diglosie, dialekty, příznakovost

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List of Abbreviations

Br	Brahmin
nBr	non-Brahmin
D	Dialect
LT	Literary Tamil
ST	Spoken Tamil
A	Ambai (writer)
AM	Ashokamitran (writer)
BS	Baskar Shakti (writer)
I	Imaiyam (writer)
J	Jeyakandan (writer)
P	Pudumaippittan (writer)
Pu	Puhal (writer)
acc.	accusative
fem.	feminine (gender)
fut.	future
inf.	infinitive
masc.	masculine (gender)
neg.	negative
neutr.	neuter (gender)
pers.	person
pl.	plural
PNG	person-number-gender
sg.	singular
Skt.	Sanskrit

1. Introduction

1.1 Theme

Since the birth of modern sociolinguistics in the second half of the 20th century it has been widely accepted that there is no such thing as a fully homogeneous language. All languages, no matter how standardized and "purified" they may seem, show a certain degree of variability in their expression. The *parole* of each of us is determined both in horizontal (e.g. geographical) and vertical (e.g. social) dimension, while at the same time any situation in which we use a language requires a choice of register corresponding to its functional context.

Some languages achieve this differentiation only by subtle nuances in grammar, lexicon, or style. Some do so much more clearly and distinctively. If we sorted all languages on an imaginary line drawn from supposed linguistic homogeneity to well pronounced heterogeneous complexity, Tamil, a diglossic language with rich social and regional variability, would most likely stand towards its upper end.

This thesis examines how the extraordinary diversity of Tamil language is mirrored and used in its contemporary literary fiction. As a linguistic study of code-variation and code-switching in contemporary literary texts, it stands on the border of two disciplines, sociolinguistics and literary stylistics. It concentrates on literature of a diglossic language, a language that rather strictly employs clearly distinguishable, functionally determined registers in appropriate linguistic situations.

In a diglossic language, the basic distinction lies between the formal vs. informal, written vs. spoken, or high vs. low. Writing and literature in such a language traditionally belong to the formal-written-high sphere and require the use of a corresponding highly standardized, codified language. On the other

hand, contemporary fiction with its everyday subject matter inspires the use of the less formal, spoken, or low registers. The transfer of spoken discourse to literature, a foremost domain of Tamil high, sets a challenge for creation of a new balance in the diglossic system. A question arises here: how does the diglossic language react in this situation? Or, more precisely, how do individual writers deal with this situation? This is the primary question my work attempts to answer.

Modern linguistics, sociolinguistics in particular, concentrates on everyday speech and is little interested in the written language, which had previously been held in so high an esteem that it was the only aspect studied. Nevertheless, I found it especially appealing to focus on the area of frictions that emerge at the meeting point of language used not simply for communication, but also as an artistic medium. I observe how individual writers creatively carve the vast material of a language into an aesthetic literary expression.

In this thesis, I apply both descriptive and functional analysis to the texts. I pay attention not only to mere description of linguistic repertoire of Tamil writers, i.e., to the identification of both individual and collective patterns of language use, but also to the functional significance of linguistic choices for the interpretation of the text.

1.2 Theoretical Approach

The theoretical approach prevailing in this work is the application of the concept of markedness to semantic study of language use in literature. The notion of markedness was first introduced by the Prague School of Linguistics. In the 1920s, the linguists of the Prague Circle postulated their original findings that all categories in language can be divided into sets of binary oppositions. Each member of such opposition is defined by a presence or absence of a defining feature. Members in whom a given feature is present are designated as marked members. Members in whom a feature is absent are identified as unmarked members. While the unmarked member of an opposition does not attest anything about the marked member, the marked member is typically subordinated to the unmarked member¹ (Mišecka Tomić, 1989).

This concept was first applied in the field of phonology (Nikolai Trubetskoi), and later was extended to morphology (Roman Jakobson) and other spheres of language structure and use. In semantics, the unmarked member is characterized by neutral meaning. The marked member of the opposition has a specific meaning. When applying the concept of markedness to the study of meaning, grammatical categories are analyzed in terms of their marked and unmarked features, in terms of the contextual specific and neutral meanings they carry.

By choosing this approach, I am not dividing the complex net of linguistic relations into prefabricated sets of oppositions. The concept of markedness, as I understand it, is very context dependent. Nothing is marked or unmarked on its own, all is marked or unmarked only in relation to something else. The same unit

¹ E.g. in the gender opposition *man* vs. *woman*, the masculine gender is unmarked, the feminine gender is marked and subordinated to the dominant masculine member. The identifying marked feature here is the feminine gender. While *man* means both 1. an adult human male and 2. a human being of either sex, the marked member of this opposition, *woman*, has only one meaning -- an adult human female.

may be seen as marked in one context and as unmarked in another. A new binary opposition has to be identified in each particular setting in order to specify its neutral (unmarked) and specific (marked) members.

For the study of linguistic variability, the concept of markedness is very well suited. As Myers-Scotton (1998, p. 5) postulates in her *Codes and Consequences: Choosing Linguistic Varieties*, "all linguistic codes or varieties come to have social and psychological associations in the speech communities in which they are used. Given these associations, the use of a particular code is viewed in terms of the unmarked versus marked opposition in reference to the extent its use 'matches' community expectations for the interaction type or genre where it is used: What community norms would predict is unmarked; what is not predicted is marked."

The notion of markedness can easily be extended to stylistics and accompanying studies of language use in literature. Jan Mukařovský (1989) notices that the language of literature – especially of poetry – makes extensive use of marked stylistic devices in both vocabulary and syntax. When related to unmarked communicative use of language, he recognizes poetry as a distinctively marked instance of language. A. F. Amiram (1998, p. 121), when explaining his understanding of the special meaning that literary texts carry, further extends this notion: "literary texts, including poems, have the function of delivering surprise, provided that the reader can recognize the appropriate contexts as the unmarked conditions against which the texts' features are marked."

This theoretical framework is thoroughly applied in this thesis. Throughout the text, binary oppositions of marked and unmarked instances of language use are identified, brought into comparison, and analyzed.

1.3 Method

This thesis is based mainly on direct textual analysis and interpretation of language use in concrete works by writers of contemporary Tamil short fiction. The method chosen as best suited for this purpose is qualitative research, with the strategy of maximum variation sampling.

The goal of this work is not to give statistically relevant quantitative information on language use in fiction. I do not see this approach, although applied by some researchers of language use in literary fiction (see Beyerl 1971 for language use in Arabic short stories, Deiva Sundaram 1981 and Muttaiyā 1980 for Tamil literature), as best suited and relevant for description of language of fiction. Bearing in mind the highly individual process and value of creative writing, I would be very hesitant to synthesize statistic-based rules that would be generally applicable to all works of fiction alike.

Instead, I focus on the qualitative side of information obtained from the literary texts. My question is primarily *how* and *why* a particular language variable is applied in a concrete text of a specific writer, not just the more general question of *what* is used and *where*. This is achieved through looking closely at the work of a small number of individual writers.

The results of such individual qualitative analysis might obviously seem disproportionate and merely aspectual in the context of contemporary Tamil literature as a whole. Partially, the bias caused by the applied method is offset by a careful choice of sample strategy. The sample of writers chosen for the present analysis follows the standards of maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling (see Patton 2002, pp. 234–235).

This form of purposeful qualitative research sampling suggests that by choosing a small number of samples with highly variable aspects of the studied phenomena, same or even better results are achieved reflecting the phenomena as a whole than when choosing big random samples. As Patton states (ibid., p. 235), "when selecting a small sample of great diversity, the data collection and

analysis will yield two kinds of findings: (1) high quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniqueness and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity. Both are important findings in qualitative inquiry." Both are also important findings of the present work.

The diversified selection of writers included in this work is based on the pattern of dialectal diversity. The main distinction is made in three clearly identifiable dialectal groups: Brahmin, non-Brahmin, and Dalit. This division is seen as socio-regional, the underlying regional affiliation is not brought into independent comparison.

Short stories of seven writers are analyzed in this thesis – Ambai (A), Ashokamitran (AM), Baskar Shakti (BS), Imaiyam (I), Jeyakandan (J), Pudumaippittan (P), and Puhai (Pu).

Three of them belong to the non-Brahmin dialectal group (BS, J, P), two belong to the Brahmin group (A, AM), two are Dalit writers (I, Pu). There is no exact correlation between the dialectal origin of the writer and the dialectal use in his/her texts:

	the writer			the texts			
	Br	nBr	Dalit	Br	nBr	Dalit	
A	X				x		
AM	X			x			
BS		x			x		
I			x			x	
J		x		x	x	x	
P		x			x		
Pu			x			x	

The chosen authors live in and write about both villages or small towns (BS, I, J, P, Pu) and cities (A, AM, J, P). They belong, albeit some only by birth,

to the central (BS, I, J, Pu), Northern (AM), Western (A), and Southern regions (P). Both genders are represented, though somewhat unequally (Ambai is the only female writer). So is the phenomenon of English usage, ranging from quite common (BS, P) to almost absent (I, Pu). By choosing writers from older (P), middle (A, AM, J), and younger generation (BS, I, Pu), historical perspective is also brought to attention.

The choice of the sample of authors included in my analysis represents clearly Tamil literature in its variability, even if it cannot claim to represent contemporary Tamil literature as a complete whole. A different or larger sample could bring more emphasis on some other aspects of linguistic variability in writing, such as the differentiation of regional dialects, subordinated here to social differentiation, differentiation based on religion, or gender distinction in Tamil writing. These themes, although partly included, are not crucial in this work. When the approach is primarily not *what* is used, but rather *how* and *why*, the enlargement of the sample to encompass all possible dialects of Tamil is not only seen as impossible, but also as quite redundant and unnecessary.

2. The Context

2.1 Linguistic repertoire of Tamil

The following chapter outlines the varieties within and without the Tamil language that find their place in contemporary Tamil writing. It gives a short summary of the origin, function, and status of both standard and substandard (dialectal), as well as superstandard varieties. Outside sources influencing the Tamil language – English, Sanskrit, and other languages – are also described. The main purpose of this chapter is to provide orientation in the often impenetrable territory of Tamil dialects and varieties.

2.1.1 Literary Tamil

Literary Tamil (LT), or Tamil high, is the more codified, standardized variety of Tamil language used mainly in writing and formal talks. The formation of Tamil literary language is not well documented, but it is most likely based on the dialect spoken in the city of Madurai, the seat of the ruling Pandya dynasty around the first centuries of our era. The prestigious language of Madurai court, cultivated at *Sangam* literary academies, together with the most productive units of other dialects, likely became the core of the norm of the literary language (Zvelebil 1992, pp. 136–137). This language, refined by generations of artists, commentators, and grammarians, developed towards the present literary language.

The first detailed normative description of this language is given in the *Tolkāppiyam* grammar.² Already in this early work we find the Tamil language separated into *centamiḷ* ("correct" Tamil), the classical register used almost exclusively in literature, and *koṭuntamiḷ* ("crooked" Tamil), the colloquial registers. The grammatical description deals almost exclusively with the *centamiḷ* dialect.

Tolkāppiyam is highly respected even today, and together with the early 13th century *Naṇṇūḷ* ("good book") grammar, which extends and modifies its findings, creates the normative basis of modern Tamil literary language. Apart from later minor changes in spelling, *Naṇṇūḷ* practically ended the period of standardization of Tamil grammar.

That does not mean that modern Tamil literary language stopped to develop in the 13th century. Rather than through following virtually non-existent up-to-date prescriptive rules, it has been changing continually through gradual acceptance of new features along with their spreading use.³ Current trends in language use are recorded in isolated manuals such as *tamiḷ naṭai-k kaiyēṭu* ("Tamil Style Manual", Cuppiramaṇiyaṅ et al. 2001) or *col vaḷakku-k kaiyēṭu* ("A Usage Manual for Contemporary Tamil Words", Cuppiramaṇiyaṅ et al. 2005).

Obviously not all features of Tamil grammar described in *Naṇṇūḷ* and other Tamil grammars are applicable to contemporary language use. As Britto (1986, p. 236) notes, "if Tamils spoke and wrote in all domains of language use precisely as the grammarians dictate, they would make fools of themselves." Although the traditional belief prevails among some Tamils that there is just one timeless literary language, this assumption is far from being true.

² The dating of *tolkāppiyam* ("old book") is quite uncertain, as is common with many ancient Indian works. It was possibly written by several authors during a prolonged period of time, with the core dating to 2.–1. century B.C. (Zvelebil 1973, p. 137).

³ This is a very different situation when compared e.g. with Czech language with its *Ústav pro jazyk český*, "Institute for Czech Language", publishing new normative "Rules of Czech Orthography and Grammar" in no more than 20 years span. The last version was published electronically and is continually updated.

The most widely used variety of literary Tamil, common also in contemporary fiction, is far from the 13th century prescriptive rules. Nevertheless, the fossilized, archaic variety of Tamil literary language is not allowed to rest in peace as it is still the language taught at schools and universities. This superstandard *Pandit Tamil* ("Scholarly Tamil"), replete with archaic words and constructions, is an "artificial style" (Shanmugam Pillai 1960) in all spheres of contemporary Tamil life.

2.1.2 Spoken Tamil

Unlike literary Tamil, spoken Tamil (ST), the common colloquial language also called the standard spoken Tamil, has in fact no codified, standardized, or fixed written norm, and debates arise as to what actually constitutes it. It is the language used by Tamil speakers of diverse backgrounds when interacting together informally. As such it has a broad field of usage. The area of usage of spoken Tamil has recently even broadened with the spread of mass media and through the film industry.

The origin of this language probably reflects the shift of economical and cultural centre in the Cola period (9–13th century) to Trichy, Tanjore, and later Chennai, and is thus based on the language of educated urban middle class in central and northern Tamil regions (Zvelebil 1959b). As a result of multiple processes of language change, it represents a later stage of language development than the more conservative literary Tamil.

While there is no normative consensus regarding what the common colloquial exactly is, it is more evident what it is obviously not. In the highly stratified and parceled Tamil society, when one wants to be identified merely as "Tamil" rather than "Tamil Brahmin from Chennai" or "Tamil agricultural labourer from the South", one would try to minimize all dialectally marked features of one's community or area that he is aware of and thus strive for the common colloquial.

If we used the terminology of the Prague School of Linguistics, the common colloquial carries the connotation of *unmarkedness* as opposed to the social and regional *markedness* of dialect speech. This approach was taken already by E. Annamalai in 1975, who criticized Zvelebil's theory of territorial emergence of standard spoken Tamil and suggested that standard spoken Tamil resulted from eliminating the stigmatized stereotyped or marked features of any caste or regional dialect (Annamalai 2011, pp. 70–75).

Although one of the main features of standard spoken Tamil is its dialectal *unmarkedness*, regional and social dialects interfere into its sphere, most often unwillingly. This can be noted even in books made for spoken Tamil learners, where regional or social background of the author is occasionally clearly revealed.⁴

⁴ E.g. in Renganathan's *Workbook – Spoken Tamil (Tamil – An Autoinstructional Course)* (Renganathan 2002, p. 43) a student has to make sentences with dative construction + the verb *pōka* ("to go"), as in *eṇakku vīṭṭukku vare pōkaṇum* ("I have to go home"), which is a dialectal construction revealing the dialectal affiliation of the author, the southern Kanyakumari dialect. Another author, Kausalya Hart in her *Tamil for Beginners* (Hart 1999) for learning both literary and colloquial Tamil, presents without notification and without giving alternate options some of the vocabulary and phrases that belong distinctively to the Brahmin dialect (e.g. How are you? – *nīṅkaḷ caukkiyamā?*, friend – *ciṇēkitāṇ*).

2.1.3 Substandard Varieties

Substandard varieties, the dialects (D), are still widely used in Tamil. They represent the local, inter-group speech used at home by family members and the speech used outside home among members of the same group or community.

The substandard varieties can roughly be divided into social and regional dialects to cover both horizontal and vertical stratification of the language. While such a distinction is useful for descriptive purposes and classification, we have to be aware that it is rather artificial. Most dialects are socio-regional, the dialect of a community is often enclosed in the dialect of a particular area. The approach taken in this work is to see the substandard varieties as socio-regional units. In no part of it, the dialect affiliation of the authors and their work is divided into separate treatment of regional and social variability.

The classification of regional dialects reflects the geographic and historical boundaries of distinctive Tamil regions. It was Kamil Zvelebil who first started the analysis and classification of regional variation in modern Tamil. Most widely used classification (Zvelebil 1964) recognizes four main regions of continental Tamil dialects⁵ – the Northern dialect, Central (or Eastern) dialect, Southern dialect, and Western dialect.⁶

⁵ Dialects of Sri Lankan Tamil and other forms of Tamil language used outside of Indian subcontinent (e.g. in eastern and southern Africa or southeast Asia) with significantly differently conditioned development are not included in this classification nor am I describing them anywhere in this study.

⁶ Northern dialect, with its main centre Chennai, has been widely influenced by Telugu and Kannada, the neighbouring Dravidian languages. From the closest central dialectal region, it is separated mainly by political and historical boundaries rather than through natural geographical barriers. A number of features are shared by these two regions. Central (eastern) dialects cover the region of the former Colanadu with main centres Trichy and Tanjore. Of all the substandard varieties, central dialect is the closest to common colloquial Tamil. Western dialect, separated from central and southern areas by

Regional differences in language use are accompanied by differences in social stratification. Social dialects reflect the social hierarchy of Tamil society. The main trichotomy of social variability, noted already in the pioneer work of Tamil dialectology *Castes et dialectes en Tamoul* by Jules Bloch in 1910 (Caillat 1985), lies in the distinction between Brahmin, non-Brahmin, and Dalit (low caste or low class, formerly called "harijan" or "untouchable") speech. While non-Brahmin and Dalit speech is mostly geographically conditioned, earth-tied, Brahmin dialects tend to preserve many of their features irrespective of the area. Zvelebil (1964, p. 240) opposes this tripartite distinction in caste dialects, proposing instead that the binary Brahmin vs. non-Brahmin division is crucial in Tamil society. He suggests that lowest category of dialects is rather a style associated with disadvantaged speakers of whatever caste.

Not arguing with Zvelebil's observation, in this work, I am still keeping to the standard ternary division. It suits my purpose of description of language use in literature better. In literature, there is an observable distinction between the Brahmin, non-Brahmin and Dalit writing, no matter if we consider its basis caste, class or just style.

It would be impossible and little rewarding to try to describe the substandard varieties in all detail. In the present analysis of language use in literature, I find it more suited to focus on the category of dialectal markedness and present the exclusive forms of distinctive dialects, their "tags", "diagnostic," or "non-parallel features".

While there is a lot that distinctive varieties of Tamil share, there is also a little that is particular for each of them. These immutable features do not alone

gross natural barriers – the mountain-range of Nilgiris and Western Ghats – is one of the most distinctive Tamil dialects. In the south, its main centres are Coimbatore and Dindigul, in the north it is Salem and Erode.

Southern dialects are naturally separated from other regions by mountains and rivers. This group has three main centers which differ locally – Madurai, Ramnad (south-west) and Tirunelveli (south-east).

constitute a certain dialect, nor does a user of a given dialect use all of them consistently. Some of these features may even be regarded as clichés and although clearly recognizable by others as particular dialect markers, they may not be so often employed by actual dialect speakers.

Nevertheless, while the category of markedness used in the above described sense would be of doubtful relevance to those who study actual dialectal speech, it is quite useful and profitable for the study of use of substandard varieties in literature. Literary sources tend to overuse stereotypical markers. In the conscious process of writing, dialectal characterization can profit substantially from the use of "tags" or "markers". And analysis of such writing can in turn profit substantially from their identification.

2.1.4 Outside sources – English, Sanskrit, and Other Languages

Partly outside of this system of Tamil variables stands English and other languages which are in close contact with Tamil.

English, as an independent language, stands officially out of the Tamil system. As a language of education, language of conversation among educated speakers, and often also language of pan-Indian communication, it is not only in close touch with the Tamil language, but it also often influences the structure of Tamil. It is impossible to ignore the existence of "Tanglish", a mixture of English and Tamil with prevalence of English vocabulary planted freely into Tamil grammatical system. This mixed language, together with English-Tamil code switching, is an important communication tool especially for younger generation in Tamil cities. As such it also found its place in contemporary Tamil literature.

Historically, the role of Sanskrit was very strong in the formation of Tamil language. Since the time of struggle for independence in India and growth of Tamil nationalism with anti-Aryan and anti-Brahmin feelings in the first half of the

20th century,⁷ the use of Sanskrit words and overall use of the sanskritized Brahmin dialect has been widely unfavoured. The non-Brahmin, nationalistic Tamil purists have tried to "purify" the language of all outside Indo-Aryan impacts. They coined new Tamil words, searched for equivalents in old Tamil literature, and introduced them to the public. While such efforts could never have been fully successful, in comparison with other Dravidian literary languages, Tamil has the lowest percentage of Indo-Aryan loan words. This is true mainly of formal literary Tamil and some forms of the spoken language. The city language of young educated Tamils more than makes up for the replacement of Sanskrit words with unregulated excessive use of English.

Other languages that influence Tamil are mainly those of Indian linguistic area both from Dravidian (mainly Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada) and Indo-Aryan families (Hindi, Gujarati) that are in contact with Tamil. These languages impact especially the local, substandard varieties of Tamil and have mostly a minor role in Tamil literature. They have become an integral part of writing only for a handful of Tamil writers in intensive contact with these languages.

⁷ For a detailed analysis of Tamil nationalism and anti-Brahmin movement see Irschick 1969 and 1986. For historical perspective of Tamil anti-Aryan identity, see Samuel 1998.

2.2 Diglossia and Language Use in Contemporary Creative Writing

Diglossia⁸ reflects the basic distinction recognized by linguists and speakers of Tamil alike between Tamil high (or literary, *eḷuttu vaḷakku* – the "written variety") and Tamil low (or spoken, *pēccu vaḷakku*, the "spoken variety"). These two registers, or diasystems (term coined by Francis Britto in his Diglossia, see Britto 1986), consist of several subregisters with hierarchic and spatial relation.

In a diglossic language, the two language registers have complementary functional distribution. In speech, the domain of high register is formal public speeches, news and public announcements, conversation of historical characters in movies and plays, academic, intellectual and career-related speech, and all other sorts of speech used in similar formal situations. The domain of the low register in speech is informal interpersonal communication, conversation, folk entertainments, conversation of contemporary characters in movies and plays, informal interviews and all other sorts of speech used in similar informal situations (for detailed description, see Britto 1986, p. 142).

In writing, almost all situations are the domain of the high register – career related writing, invitation cards, letters, journalistic writing – all belong rather to the register of literary Tamil. Creative writing is in some ways an exception to the prevalence of the high register in writing. Britto gives the following description of

⁸ The classic definition of diglossia by Charles A. Ferguson (Britto 1986, p. 307) is as follows: "Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include the standard or regional dialects), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation."

the use of the high (H) and low (L) registers in spheres related to creative writing (Britto 1986, abridged table from pp.142–143):

Context of use:	Variety used:	
	H	L
Editorials, essays and narrations in novels	1	0
Anecdotes, gossip columns, and humorous pieces	X1	X2
Conversation of historical/ literary characters in novels	X1	X2
Conversation of contemporary characters and jokes	X2	X1

Key: 1= almost always, 0= almost never, X1= more frequently and more commonly, X2= less frequently and less commonly

For Britto, the diglossic distribution in fiction lies in the application of literary language to narration and most likely also to conversation of historical characters with complementary low variety used most likely in conversation of contemporary characters.

Deiva Sundaram in his *Tamil Diglossia* (Deiva Sundaram 1981, p. 25) observes that "for writing purposes, only the literary variety is always being used. The exceptions to this are:

1. the conversation in some novels, short stories
2. some works of modern poetry

3. the personal letters written by somebody who has no formal education but has a knowledge of Tamil orthography."

Similarly, E. Annamalai (2011, p. 46) states that "creative prose in Tamil... is divided into narrative prose and conversational prose and colloquial language is permitted in the latter. Colloquial Tamil has thus expanded the domains of its use by entering into the domains of literary Tamil, and the medium of writing is no longer a criterion for distinguishing one from the other."

To add further comparison, Zvelebil describes the functional diglossic distribution of literary and spoken Tamil in writing (excerpted from Zvelebil 1964), including also the function of the subregister of Tamil low, the dialects, as follows:

Distribution of Tamil registers in writing (Zvelebil 1964):

	The functional field in writing	Based on (the past)	Develops into (the future)
LT	Modern creative and technical literature	<i>centamiḷ</i>	Dead language studied by scientists and specialists ⁹

⁹ A somewhat similar diglossic situation in Bengali, where the colloquial language *calit bhāṣā* has gradually replaced the traditional literary *sādhu bhāṣā* in most of its domains, led some respected Tamilians (Andronov 1962, Zvelebil 1964, Shanmugam Pillai 1965) to the belief that literary Tamil is heading towards extinction and common colloquial Tamil is on its way to become the primary language of both literature and speech.

This has so far not happened. In Bengali, Rabindranath Tagore and other writers made conscious efforts to spread the use of *calit bhāṣā* to writing. The literary language was rarely spoken, in a formal situation, "*sādhu bhāṣā* vocabulary with predominantly colloquial pronunciation and grammar"(Dimock 1960, p.44) was used. Moreover, it did not carry the pride and devotion that *centamiḷ*, as the language of long literary heritage, still carries for Tamils.

ST	Sporadic in modern creative writing	The speech of urban non-Brahmin middle class in central and northern Tamilnadu	Standard national language
D	Occasionally in creative writing for comic effect and characterization	Dialectal division of the past	Unification (with possible simultaneous appearance of new dialects)

All quoted authors present similar attitudes towards diglossic language use in contemporary Tamil literature: The language of literature remains primarily the literary Tamil. In contemporary prose it is [for some only *sporadically* (Zvelebil 1964)] *permitted* (Annamalai 2011) in the conversation *in some* novels and short stories (Deiva Sundaram 1981) to use the colloquial language. Zvelebil further implies that *for comic effect and characterization*, dialectal speech may *occasionally* be represented in writing. Similarly Shanmugam Pillai (Shanmugam Pillai 1965, p. 101) observes that in movies where the hero and heroine are serving as role models, they would speak in unmarked colloquial Tamil, whereas comedians and subordinate characters would speak in dialects.

These observations are the point of departure for the following analysis of language use in contemporary Tamil fiction. To this departure point, our own observations and findings will be related.

2.3 Tamil Short Story – Its Origin and Linguistic Transformation

Short story as a literary form was adopted in Tamil towards the end of the 19th century, following its older sibling, the novel. Birthparents of both these forms belonged to the "Western culture" which equalled to "English" in colonial India. Through English, Indian writers and readers got acquainted with works of leading British, American, Russian, and French writers of fiction. Through English translations, Tamil writers got to know works written in other Indian languages, mainly Bengali.

Irrespective of the influence of English, the local tradition has developed its own art of story telling. Although their domain was predominantly orality, stories of diverse origin got incorporated into Tamil narrative epics and became often part of written literature. Even the oldest preserved Tamil literary work, the Sangam poetry from two thousand years ago, hides elements of stories in its refined verses – here and there, there is a vivid love story compressed in four lines, a story of a king fighting for his glory in a war, or a story of his wife's lonely waiting. In spite of that, they are all poems in first place. From the Sangam period, Tamil literary tradition continued to nourish a strong poetic, elevated style.

The narrative Puranas, which started to emerge about a thousand years later, got a little closer to oral story-telling. These compendiums of stories and myths stitched together in a very loose way could even be considered the first short-story collections in Tamil. Although they preserve the form of poems – the only form considered then suitable for writing – they head towards the use of prosaic style. Their language is not so strictly tied to high literary norms. But still, even the Puranas are poems. They stay in line with the lyric poems, the epic poems, the devotional poems, and all other types of poetry that flourished in Tamil literature.

Poetry, preserved traditionally on palm leaves, remained the major form of written literature until the beginning of the 19th century. Prose stayed in the oral territory and was seen as something low and not suitable for written expression.

Only the commentaries to poems, introductory parts of some poetic works, and notes to poems were sometimes written in prose. One of the first distinguished short-story writers Pudumaippitan laments about the disgust of writers to prosaic style (Holmström 2002, p. 227): "Everything, starting from a letter to a patron, was turned into rhyming and mechanical verse. And prose, in Tamil, remained an undevelopped tool."

In this state of things, the first independent prosaic work in Tamil was probably written by a foreigner. The Italian Jesuit Constantius Beschi wrote his *Paramārta kuruvīṅ katai* ("Adventures of the Gooroo Paramartan") in the first half of the 18th century. His work was published only in 1822. In its eight tale-like stories, Beschi creates a satire on a Brahmin guru and his disciples. The stories are written in a prosaic language close to the colloquial style, which was very unusual for its time. Some words are even presented in their spoken spelling, such as *vēṇum* as opposed to LT *vēṇṭum* ("it is necessary"). The author was not deeply rooted in Tamil literary tradition, a fact that allowed him to use the language more freely.

Beschi's book was not considered of special importance as a work of literature during his time. Stories are good just for amusement – this was an opinion shared not only by Tamil scholars, as the introduction to the English edition reveals: "The story of the Gooroo Paramartan is one of the lighter productions of that profound scholar and rare genius, father Beschi; and, if it had any higher aim than the mere amusement which its author might derive from thus satirizing the Indian Priesthood, it was probably intended as a pleasant vehicle of instruction to those Jesuits whose labours required a knowledge of the Tamul language". (Babington 1822, pp. iii-iv)

Several years had passed before Beschi's prosaic work was followed by Tamil successors. One of the main reasons for this delay, apart from the traditional preference for versified language in writing, was the regulation of press by British authorities. Although the Portuguese introduced press to India already in 1556, it remained in the hands of the missionaries and later the British. Only in

1835 the British Government lifted a ban on ownership of press and publication by Indians (Annamalai 2000, p. 9).

Following this impulse, modern prosaic Tamil started to evolve, reaching a wider audience and slowly entering an area previously reserved only for English. In 1855, the first weekly magazine in Tamil, under a somewhat misleading title *tiṇavarttamāṇi* "Daily magazine" – appeared in Chennai. Its founder was a British missionary, Peter Percival. In this magazine, essays and stories were published together with journalist informative writing (Cuntararājan 1989, pp. 16–17).

In the second half of the 19th century, hand in hand with the spread of literacy, Tamil oral tradition entered literature through the new medium of press. Several prosaic books with the word *katai* – "story" in the title appeared. Tales, fables, stories of famous kings, heroes and men with wit, didactic stories, heroic stories about the earliest days of the Dravidian nation – all these appeared in numerous forms and editions. These stories of the past were slowly replaced by stories of the presence. It was a lengthy process, with several stopovers. The fiction was searching its new form and shape, and the same was happening with its language, which was trying to get rid of the heavy burden of the past.

The short story form was preceded by novel in this process. A. Madhaviah (1872–1925), one of the earliest fiction writers in Tamil, wrote his first novels in English, the language then reserved for modern prose. From English, he switched to novels written in Tamil. Only then he started to write in Tamil also in the short story form (ibid., p. 28). This is the traditional chronological "ladder" of early Tamil prose, expressed in the work of one writer.

The first novel in Tamil, and the first work of modern Tamil prosaic fiction after Beschi's stories, was the "*Piratāpa Mutaliyār carittiram* – The life and adventures in Tamil of Prathapa Mudaliar" written by Vedanayagam Pillai in 1879.¹⁰ This first novel, as Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi states in her short survey of the

¹⁰ The novel was republished in 1948 by the Saiva Siddhanta Publishing Society after excising Sanskrit words and replacing them with Tamil equivalents. This practice of the

use of spoken Tamil in literature, "contains no colloquial" (Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi 1990, p. 172). It is true that the whole novel is written in the literary language. On the other hand, just four years before "Prathapa Mudaliar" was published, D. V. Seshaiyengar released his "*Ātiyūr avatāṇi caritam* – Adhiyuravadhani, or the self made man – An original Tamil novel delineating pictures of modern Hindu life". This "novel" follows the technique of Tamil folk-narratives and is written in verse (Zvelebil 1990, p. 146).

When compared to this versified language, it is evident that the "Prathapa Mudaliar" with its popular form of literary language and other early literary works which contain "no colloquial" have indeed done a big step towards colloquiality in literature.

The early stories are usually written in first person narration in simple prosaic literary style, but without any overly expressed colloquiality. *nāṇ oru pirāmaṇa-k kaimpeṇ* – "I am a Brahmin widow"¹¹ – is an almost typical opening of a socially engaged story from the turn of the 19th and 20th century. What follows is a portrait of the unpleasant conditions in which Brahmin widows were forced to live.

"*eṇṇaṭi, nēramāyirru, pacikkiratu, camaiyal āyirrō illaiyō?*" – "What, dear, it is time, I am hungry, is the food ready or not?", asks the impatient story-man his story-wife in 1899.¹² The forms he uses belong to the register of literary Tamil and are normally not used in conversational speech. Above all, the preservation of *-rr-* in *āyirru* ("it happened") is not expected even in narrative parts in some of today's fiction. *pacikkiratu*, "I am hungry", would turn to colloquial *pacikkutu* in most contemporary works. But we should be appreciative – the husband is not conveying his rushing request to his wife in verse. We also have to see that he calls her *-ṭi* (intimate fem. address form), very informally. For the time being,

purist movement, although planned to be, was not widespread and only very few modern books were rewritten in this fashion in their later editions. (Annamalai 2011, p. 29).

¹¹ A. Mātavayyā: *tiraupati kaṇavu* ("Draupadi's dream", Cuntararājan 1989, p. 29).

¹² Pālacuppiramaniyam: *cuntaram* ("Sundaram", *ibid.*, p. 19).

these minor changes should satisfy our hunger for a representation of dynamic, living language in literature.

The early works are almost uniform in their representation of language, same as in their socially and politically engaged topics. What is outlined here in one short paragraph, occupies hundreds of pages of pioneer Tamil literary magazines. Slowly, prosaic style started to establish and diversify.

One of the first major changes came with Subramaniya Bharati (1882–1921), who is more appreciated as a poet than a prose writer. Bharati, for the first time, introduces code-switching between Tamil and English into his short stories (Cuntararājan 1989, p. 43). Code-switching was common in conversation among English-educated Tamils long before Bharati. Bharati was first to have the courage to break established norms and use such language in his writing. What would become a common practice, had once been part of a conscious effort to bring the written language closer to speech.

In 1925, a provocative story was published in the last issue of the *Pañcāmirtam* ("Five nectars") magazine run by A. Madhaviah. The story is called *kaṇṇaṇ peruntūtu* ("The Kannan Song", Cuntararājan 1989, pp. 35–36) and its author is not mentioned anywhere in the magazine. The whole story, apart from a short introductory note, is written as a direct conversation. Five Brahmin women walk home from a river-bank and gossip. In between, one of them repeatedly starts singing an old song about Kṛṣṇa in an elevated archaic language – "o lady, please listen to the Kannan song".¹³ Immediately she stops and switches again to gossip with other women in her casual Brahmin dialect.¹⁴ Suddenly, an untouchable – who was not introduced among other characters at the beginning of the story – appears on the road. He is not allowed to enter this road, the high-status women try to force him out of the way and continue in their walk and talk.

¹³ *kaṇṇaṇ peruntūtu kēḷāy nī kārikaiyē*. The address form *kārikai* (<- *kārikā*) belongs to the traditional address forms for women in Tamil versified literature.

¹⁴ *ēṇṭi ammālu, unīkāttukkārar (D) allikkulaṭtukku-p pōyiruntār inṇayē, vantuttārā?* -- "Why dear Ammalu, your husband went to the Lotus pond today, did he return?".

They reach the village, say good byes to each other and decide to finish the Kannan song next time when they meet.

This is an exceptional story in its choice of language, and not only for its time. The form is very different from other early prosaic literary works. The whole story is for the first time written as a dialogue. In this dialogue, the cliches about the social system are not repeated. The cruelty and superficiality of the system is revealed by refined linguistic choices. The innovatively used language poignantly switches between the high style of the godly song and the low colloquial language of the real characters of supposedly high status. The marked, unusual style of this story is in accordance with the surprise it delivers. It presents what Amittai F. Amiram would call "the markedness of good literature" (Amiram 1998).

The style of *kaṇṇaṇ peruntūtu* has not set a pattern for the time that followed. In the 1920s, Kalki Krishnamurti (1899–1955) became the chief representative of Tamil short stories. Kalki was a skilled and successful writer of socially engaged stories and historical novels. He did not venture into the richness of Tamil vernaculars. All of his characters speak in a monotone literary voice. "I am a paryah!"¹⁵ shouts a character out in his conversation with an officer, to let us know who he is. Otherwise we would be left in doubt, because between his and the officer's language there is no difference.

In the 1930s, Pudumaippittan steps in and brings out the concert of different voices again. And this is where I start the analysis of language use in contemporary Tamil short fiction.

¹⁵ *maṇṇikka vēṇṭum. nāṇ oru paṛaiyaṇ.* -- "Please forgive. I am a Paryah." (Cuntararājan 1989, p. 67)

3. Pudumaippittan – The Historical Perspective

3.0 Introduction

"If we are to give prose the status that it deserves, then we must put away our rusted modes of thinking. It is a huge mistake to think that a distance ought to be maintained between literary Tamil and spoken Tamil. If that situation should continue, there is no doubt at all that slowly and gradually, Tamil will die. Between literary Tamil and spoken Tamil there is only one difference. Literary Tamil is the handiwork of the creative writer, polished by his aesthetic sense. Spoken Tamil is the uncut diamond which reflects the very heartbeat just as it is. It is spoken Tamil that is the life force, the creative writer's storehouse. If we raise a wall between these two, Tamil's fate will be the very same as that of Greek, Latin and Sanskrit."¹⁶

These are the words of Co. Viruttācalam (1906–1948), who emerged in public under the pen name Pudumaippittan, "One who is crazy for the new". True to this name, Pudumaippittan always stood on the side of originality, freshness, and novelty over the conventional, binding literary tradition. He chose a recently established form for his writing – the short story – and tried to make it the medium of literary innovation. His struggle was met with quite a triumphant success. He was recognized as a "serious" writer and gradually became so widely accepted that he himself was swallowed up by the new body of tradition. The new, crazy Pudumaippittan became the good, old Pudumaippittan, the angry young man turned into a respected father of the short story form.

In regard to language, it is quite surprising to see how much was already present in the Tamil short story at Pudumaippittan's time, and, at the same time,

¹⁶ Pudumaippittan: About Tamil, 1934. In: Holmström 2002, p. 227.

how much was different. Pudumaippittan uses dialects in his writings, colloquial Tamil, literary Tamil, English – same as most writers today, but at the same time in quite a different way. I shall look now how exactly the "uncut diamond" of Tamil is polished and shaped in the hands of this writer. A thorough examination of the layers and varieties of Tamil that appear in his stories should provide understanding of his particular pattern of language use.

The source base for the analysis is the complete collection of Pudumaippittan's stories, *Putumaippittan kataika!* (Vēñkaṭācalapaṭi 2002).

3.1 The Shift in Markedness in Time

3.1.1 Pillai Literary Tamil

Starting in the most upper layer of Putumaippittan's language, we can turn our attention to the language of narration in some of the stories. *Cariku-t Tēvaṇiṇ tarmam* ("The Dharma of Sangu Devan", pp. 61–65) is one of the earliest Pudumaippittan's works. While all three village characters in the story speak in a low colloquial language, the narration is contrastingly high. The author uses high style lexicon and grammar, including some forms common more in old than modern Tamil – negative personal forms like *paṇakkāriyalla!* ("the one who is not rich", p. 62), or simply *alla!* ("one who is not", p. 63) are old forms not present in today's spoken register neither in the register of casual, close-to-speech literary Tamil, which is the core choice for narrative parts in fiction. Pudumaippittan also occasionally replaces the emphatic *tāṇ* with its hypercorrected version *tām* (*ēḷaikaḷtām*, "the poor ones", p. 61), probably inspired by the reflexive pronoun which appears in three forms *tāṇ – tām – tāṅka!* (singular, polite and plural). The same impression of very high style is given by the old-fashioned use of negative forms of strong verbs. E.g. *naṭavāta* ("not walking", p. 61) is an old Tamil form, where strong verbs may be expressed same as weak verbs in negatives. The commonly accepted form in contemporary Tamil is *naṭakkāta*.

Surprisingly, these old negative forms appear also in the colloquial dialogue parts, there also with appropriate spoken spelling, e.g. *kuṭiyāme* ("without drinking", p. 63, LT *kuṭikkāma*) or *kuṭāma* ("without giving", p. 63, LT *koṭukkāma*). From the abundant use of these forms among clearly colloquial expressions, it is evident that these old literary forms, although they disappeared from the register of spoken Tamil and even of contemporary literary Tamil, are still retained in the dialectal usage. What appeared to be part of hyperbolization of language – extremely high style of narration and extremely low language of

conversation – can be seen as the opposite. The use of some old varieties in the literary language may be at least to some extent considered as merging of low dialectal varieties with the high literary style.

A similar feature is represented by the usage of personal pronouns, especially the second person pronouns. While old Tamil preserves three forms – singular, polite, and plural, the standard spoken and even the standard literary Tamil preserve only two forms, singular and plural, where the plural form is also used as polite. The use of the middle form has been preserved in some dialects, and it has become almost a *marker* of south Tirunelveli dialect. Pudumaippittan, himself a member of Tirunelveli Pillai caste, introduces this dialect to writing. He gives voice to the Tirunelveli Pillais, who often address each other with this form. But not just the Pillais. In Pudumaippittan's work, the middle *nīr* form is equally employed in narration and dialogue parts of characters who converse in literary Tamil. In *Ārraṅkarai-p Pillaiyār* ("The Pillaiyār on the river bank", pp. 55–60), the Pillaiyār addresses the Buddha and Jina in literary Tamil. When he talks to both of them, he uses the form *nīṅkaḷ* ("you" – pl.). When he talks to one of them, he still uses the respectful plural *nīṅkaḷ* and its declined form *uṅkaḷ*:

*"eṅṅai munpiṅ ariyāta nīṅkaḷ ceyta utavikku, uṅkaḷ
iruvarukkum ... nāṅ eṅṅa koṭukka muṭiyum? uṅkaḷ
peyaṅṅa, uṅkaḷ nanpar peyar eṅṅa" eṅṅār.*

"What can I give you both ... for the help you did for me, unknown to you. What is your name, what is your friend's name?' he said."(56)

But when they talk to him, or when he later addresses them in anger, he chooses the simple respectful form *nīr/ um*, common in old Tamil and in Tirunelveli dialect:

'nalla vēlai ceṅkiṅṅi! pōtum umatu utavi' eṅṅu kōpittu, ...

"'you are doing (really) good work! enough of your help' he said angrily..." (56)

Although this form may seem appropriate in the historical context of the story, *nīr* and the corresponding 2nd person verbal ending is used also in all contemporary conversations that are represented in literary language. The school principal uses this form to address a police inspector, whom he throws out of the school building:

*...nīr eṇ [mārpait taṭṭikkoṇṭu] māṇavarai cantēkittatu
eṇṇai-c cantēkittatu mātiri...pōm*

"(that) you [clapping the chest] suspected my student is as if you had suspected me... get out (76).

All other characters who may not necessarily be Tirunelveli Pillais also share the *nīr form*. A hospital cot, otherwise using literary Tamil, is calling the young patient who lies on it *nīr* (pp. 77–79). The author uses *nīr* also to address the reader of his story, as part of narration:

*aṅku nīr oru nāḷ iruntāl umakku aṭivayirriliruntu
varum ataṇ arttam.*

"If you were there for a day you would understand from the bottom of your stomach what it meant. (67)

The Pillai dialect is in some of its features inseparable part of Pudumaippittan's literary language. It is those features of the dialect that were preserved from old Tamil that found their way to LT discourse – negative personal forms, hypercorrected emphatic *tām*, weak negative forms of strong verbs, or the use of the simple respectful forms *nīr / um*.

Not preserved in contemporary LT, these forms constitute the marked

core of the Pillai Literary Tamil, a unique Pudumaippittan's language variety standing high in the language hierarchy. These observations are in sharp contrast with Shanmugam Pillai's finding that a speaker's caste and region cannot be identified by the variety of literary Tamil that he uses, as opposed to his colloquial speech (Shanmugam Pillai 1960). At least in Pudumaippittan's case, the Pillai dialect found a way how to infiltrate into the literary language.

3.1.2 The Extended Function of Literary Tamil

Part of Pudumaippittan's work form stories inspired by tradition. P strived for novelty, but he never completely dismissed the whole body of traditional literature. Tradition remained a source of inspiration for him. Some of his stories are direct retellings of old myths and tales. *Akalyai* ("Ahalyā", pp. 131–135) is P's version of an ancient myth, where Ahalyā, a saint's wife, is seduced by god Indra and subsequently turned to a stone by her angry husband. In P's story, Ahalyā's husband is so far in his sainthood that he is not angry neither with Ahalyā, nor with Indra. *Intirā! pōy vā* – "Indra, good bye!" (literally "having gone come back!"), he tells him friendly at the end. The whole story is written in literary Tamil, including all the conversation between the three characters.

Āraṅkarai-p piḷḷaiyār ("The Piḷḷaiyār on the river bank", pp. 55–60) is another story of this type. The narrative begins in remote history and stretches over a long period of time. Its characters are mostly saints, gods and old thinkers. They do not say much, most of the story happens in narration, but when they talk, it is always in a high literary language.

There are also stories which fully imitate the traditional genres, while the old form is filled with a new content. *Putiya kanta purāṇam* ("New Skanda Purāṇa", pp. 197–200) preserves the traditional division into chapters called *paṭalams*, characteristic of epic or Puranic works. It is narrated in complex long sentences in a high literary language and there is no direct speech. The final

triple blessing *cupam! cupam! cupam!* (Skt. *śubha*) also evokes Puranic form.

The use of literary Tamil in conversation of the above mentioned historical or mythological characters is of no surprise to the reader of Tamil fiction. LT is an appropriate rendering of their "high", "distant," or "unauthentic" (Britto 1986) speech. What is more noticeable is the use of LT in the conversations not set in old times or evolving from the old traditional forms.

In *Kaṭṭil pēcukīratu* ("The cot talks", pp. 77–79), a hospital cot talks to a young patient lying on it. In a literary language, it narrates to him stories of those who lied and died on it before he came. Not only the cot, even the nurse and the doctors speak in a literary language.

A young newly married couple in *Uṇarcciyiṅ aṭimaika!* ("Slaves of the sentiments", pp. 89–91), as if they did not overcome the distance yet, chirps about their love in literary Tamil. Another couple, a Brahmin boy and a Christian girl (*Putiya kūṇṭu* – "A New Cage", pp. 337–353), have many problems related to their different backgrounds, but are uniform where language is concerned – they converse in literary Tamil.

In the same way, a waiter uses literary language when talking to his guests (p. 111) and two men who meet in public also stick to literary conversation (p. 117). In *Tirukkuraḷ ceyta tirukkūttu* ("The Street Performance done by Tirukkural", pp. 69–76) students, teachers, and police inspector alike speak in literary language.

Analysing the use of literary Tamil throughout Pudumaippittan's work, I have observed a remarkably extended functional domain of LT in his writings. Compared to contemporary LT usage, there is an evident shift in the semantic markedness of LT in his work. In the above mentioned conversations, the first choice of a contemporary writer would most likely be a representation of ST. The choice of LT in these conversational situations would be considered rather as something special and thus semantically marked. In today's writing, literary Tamil is used mainly for narration. Consistent use of literary language in conversation is not very common and when it is present, it usually carries some specific function.

In Pudumaippittan's work, literary Tamil remains the language of narration, the language of the character's thoughts, the language of conversation among historical characters or inanimate objects and to a great extent also the conversational language of modern and contemporary characters. In his writing, the field occupied by the literary language is much greater than today.

3.1.3 Unmarked Spoken Tamil

The use of spoken Tamil without dialectal affiliation is quite limited in P's work. What is now considered standard spoken Tamil, or unmarked spoken Tamil, is not very clearly represented in his stories. Literary Tamil is mostly used in its position.

In casual conversations, only some limited lexical and morphological forms are used which give the literary language a non-pedantic feel. These are forms like *pōccu* ("it went", LT *pōyirru*), *āccu* ("it happened", LT *āyirru*), *irukku* ("it is", LT *irukkīratu*), (*vē*)*num* ("it is necessary", LT *vēṇṭum*) or *rompa* ("many", instead of LT *niṛaiya*), used already by Bharati in his poetry. Other parts of the statement are mostly preserved in literary Tamil, spelling is not changed. Very often, these colloquial forms are alternately used with the literary equivalents.

As a pioneer, Pudumaippittan introduced some of the spoken forms into the narration parts. Only some of the stories, where also the narration should give a more casual, colloquial feel, are written with the use of these colloquial features. LT and ST forms alternate in the narration of these stories, often within a few lines:

paṭikka, vīṭṭu pāṭam eluta nēram eṅkē irukkīratu?

"Where is [LT *irukkīratu*] the time for studying,
writing homework?"(80/10)

avarukku enta vāttiyār irukkār?

"What teacher is [ST *irukkār*] there for him? (i.e. "What teacher does he have?") (80/12)

Apart from these minor touches to the feel of the literary language, dialectally unmarked spoken Tamil seems to be expressed to a greater extent only in a few emotionally stronger situations. In *Mōṭcam* ("Salvation", pp. 80–82), a child talks to his teacher in literary language, while he replies in colloquial Tamil. The teacher is scolding the boy for coming late and giving the wrong answers to his questions. The more angry the teacher gets, the more colloquial his speech is. Similarly in *Nikumpalai* ("The Nikumbhilā Grove", pp. 92–98) students preparing for examinations talk sometimes in literary language, sometimes in colloquial. They turn to colloquial when they get engaged in a lively discussion. The teacher addresses them in colloquial when he sees them at a place where he would not expect them before the examinations. In most other situations they all speak in literary language. A judge in *Niyāyam* ("Justice", pp. 99–101), looking down at a man who came to the court, addresses him in a disrespectful colloquial language.

Characters switch to spoken Tamil in very emotional and often in degrading situations. The *unmarked* speech remains mostly represented by literary Tamil, with only occasional hints of a spoken style. Even for Pudumaippittan, who became the symbol of realism in literature and who is known for bringing dialectal and colloquial language into writing, the dialectally unmarked colloquial is still something special and functionally *marked*. On the other end, there is a broad usage of dialectal forms and dialectally marked colloquial language in his work.

3.1.4 The Use of Dialectal Colloquial and Code-Switching to Literary Language

When the language is colloquial in P's stories, it is mostly also dialectal. The dialect which finds most place is the Tirunelveli Pillai dialect – the mother tongue of the author. There are several features of this dialect represented in P's work, certainly more than standard spoken language features. The most pronounced are the morphological features, now considered typical for the Pillai dialect:¹⁷

1. Personal pronouns

– use of three forms in 2nd person

nī on – sg. (used to address women, children or persons of lower status)

nīr – specific dialectal middle form

nīrka – polite and plural form

nī enna jāti? – nānka vellām pulleka (vēlālārka!). nīru?

"What caste you belong to? – We are all Pillais (Vellalars). What about you?"

(conversation of a village woman and a robber, p. 64)

nīrka eppa vantiya?

"When did you come?"

(Cellamal to her husband, p. 523)

¹⁷The Pillai caste dialect is regionally connected with the southern region of Tamilnadu and many of its features are not just "Pillai features", but correspond to shared dialectal features of the southern Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts.

– Specific 3rd person plural personal pronouns with corresponding verbal endings *aviyal avuka* (of which *aviya* is of lower status) or *avā(!)*¹⁸

avuka oru vali paṇṇuvāka!

"They will find a way!" (521)

ivā! reṇṭu pērum

"both of them"(574)

2. plural morpheme (LT *-ka!*) turns to *-ka* or *-ya*

nīnka eṇṇa cāppiṭṭiya?

"What did you eat? (526)

3. present tense morphemes

strong verbs: pres. tense morpheme missing

nānka pākkam

"we can see" (100)

weak verbs: pres. morpheme *-t-* :

(nīnka) tētutiya

"you are looking for" (238)

nāṇē varutēṇ

"I am myself coming" (527)

¹⁸ This form is also shared by the Aiyar Bramins, and typically is connected with the Brahmin dialect.

appā ... kūppiṭutā

"dad .. is calling" (569)

4. address form *vē*

collumēvē

"just say" (2nd pers. middle form, p. 100)

In *Kaṭavuḷum Kantacāmi-p Pillaiyum* ("God and Kandasami Pillai", pp. 559–577), Kandasami Pillai meets a man in the street of Chennai who asks for directions in the city. The man turns out to be God, but Kandasami Pillai does not know it first. The men start their conversation in literary Tamil. Then Pillai takes the God home – now he knows who he is – and introduces him to his wife and little daughter. Pillai's wife starts her conversation in a Tirunelveli dialect, in a village speech which reveals where the family came from to the city. Also the little girl speaks in colloquial language and mixes her dialect to it. God – when he talks to her and her mother, immediately also switches to the village dialect of Tirunelveli Pillais. When he talks to Kandasami, and later to Kandasami's friend and customer, he again uses literary Tamil. Kandasami himself is also fluent in many speech styles – he addresses a rikshaw puller in his slang, his wife and child in Tirunelveli Pillai colloquial and his benefactor in literary Tamil with a hint of spoken style and Brahmin dialect.

These characters change their language according to the situation. There are other protagonists who never change their colloquial speech – in the above mentioned story *Kaṭavuḷum Kantacāmi-p Pillaiyum* the rikshaw puller, Kandasami Pillai's wife and his daughter remain dialectal colloquial throughout the story. In *Caṅku-t Tēvaṇiṅ tarmam* ("The Dharma of Sangu Devan", pp. 61– 65) a poor old Pillai woman talks to a village goldsmith and then to a robber in the forest. All conversations happen in low colloquial with dialectal features. *Cellammā!* (pp. 517– 534) is a poor dying village woman from the Pillai caste, who moved with

her husband from the Tirunelveli district to Chennai. She speaks in dialectal colloquial to her husband, while he speaks in dialect to her and in literary Tamil to the doctor who comes to cure her. In *Putiya kūṇṭu*, of all the characters it is only the widowed Brahmin mother and an agraharam elder who consistently speak in their dialect. Others, including the widow's sons, converse in literary Tamil.

From those who are consistently literal (saints and heroes of stories set in remote past) we got to those who are consistently dialectal – poor, sick or widowed women and mothers, small pre-school children and impoverished rikshaw pullers. This is a pattern seen already in ancient Sanskrit dramas – the poor, the funny, women and children speak in Prakrit, the main heroes in Sanskrit. In this way, Pudumaippittan only revives the traditional use of dialects in literature. Dialectal colloquial speech remains reserved for those who are of lower status or those who are strongly tied to the tradition. The main shift in P's writing is that these characters start to become the main heroes and their voice is well pronounced.

Moreover, in P's writing, dialects are not strictly reserved only to the poor and uneducated characters. Others may switch to dialects too, surprisingly from their LT discourse, P's unmarked choice for conversation. With a partner who is a dialect speaker, they adopt the dialectal colloquial. Kandasami Pillai encourages the rikshaw puller with the words *istukkiṇu pō* ("pull and go", LT *iluttukkoṇṭu pō*, p. 564) in the quintessential Madras rikṣākkāran bāṣai. Kandasami himself adapts the rikshaw puller's speech. This adaptation to dialectal speech is most prevalent in husband-wife conversations, where the woman presumably speaks only the dialect. But the Grand master in this is God in Kandasami Pillai's story, who fluently adopts the speech of whoever he speaks to. We should not forget that it was the author who equipped him with these talents.

3.2 The Language at the Rise of the Nationalist Purist Movement

The Tamil language was in quite an uncertain stage of development at the turbulent times of struggle for independence when Pudumaippittan wrote his stories. In P's own words, Tamil was imprisoned between two sets of pundits. The old ones were digging dead words and rules out of dictionaries and stringing them together. "The new pundits, riding the crest of the recent flood of popularity of English... quite outdo the old pundits." (Holmström 2002, pp. 228-229). For Pudumaippittan, the right inspiration lied in between the two, in "the beauty of familiar words" (quoting the Tamil poetess Avvai).

3.2.1 The Introduction of English and Unfamiliar Dialectal Expressions into Writing

Although P disliked the overuse of English, he accepted its potential and did not refuse to use it in his writing. He did not share the purist view and was not against enriching the language with new expressions from different sources. In his time, the domain of English was mostly the spoken register. P was among the first authors who introduced English to Tamil writing.

At the beginning, he found it necessary to accustom the reader to the appearance of English or other uncommon words in the text. For this purpose, he found different ways how to highlight the foreign, local, or uncommon expressions.

Sometimes the English word was written in Latin script in brackets, after being written in the Tamil script,¹⁹ sometimes the Tamil equivalent of the English

¹⁹ *viṇṭil* (Windle) (p. 61).

word was given in brackets after the English word in parenthesis.²⁰ The English word could also appear in brackets as a simple external qualification of a broader Tamil expression:

*jīviyattil paṭṭa kaṣṭaṅkaḷai-p paṭam (graph) pōṭṭu-k kāṭṭuvatu
pōl kōṭukaḷ niṟainta mukam*

"a face filled with wrinkles as if showing the hardships
undergone in life drawn in a picture (graph) (61).

Another way to clarify special words, presumably not known to the reader – this time not English, but local Tamil – was to explain them directly in a footnote:

pāmpaṭamillātu puṭalaṅkāy-t tuṇṭukaḷ māṭiri-t torikum
kāṭukaḷ, ... !*pāmpaṭam eṇpatu tirunelvēli jillāvil peṅkaḷ kāṭil
aṇiyum ōr āparaṇam.*

"Ears without *pāmpaṭam** hanging like pieces of snake-gourd,...
*!*pāmpaṭam* is an ornament women in the Tirunelveli district
wear in their ears. (61)

The most common way for Pudumaippittan to highlight the words that deviated from the norm was the use of a single parenthesis. He used them with some English expressions,²¹ expressions from the spoken register,²² and also with idioms.²³ This external highlighting and explanation is more abundant in early P's stories, when he was still searching for an acceptable style. In the later

²⁰ *miṇcāra 'spiṇṭilai'p (katir)...* "the electric spindle" -- acc., (p. 67).

²¹ *atu tāṇ aṅku 'meyin' rastā-* "That indeed is the main road (to get) there" (p. 66).

²² *'taṇṇi pōṭṭu'viṭṭu* -- "having drunk spirits" (literally "throwing water", p.67).

²³ *ammāluviṇ mēl rompa nālāka-k 'kaṇ' vaittiruntavaṇ.* "He was 'placing his eye' on the lady for many days (p. 68).

stories more expressions become fully incorporated into the text.

Where P's use of English is concerned, the main difference from most contemporary writers, apart from the need to explain and mark the English forms, is that he does not often use longer English statements. He is still rather timid in the use of English. Where the character says something in English, he prefers to give the neutral version in literary Tamil and state that it was said in English:

*"miṣṭar rāmacāmi! inta mātiri kuṛumpuceyyum oru kōlai
eṇṇu taṅkaḷai nāṇ niṇaikkavillai" eṇṇu āṅkilattil conṇā.*

"'Mr. Ramasami! I did not consider you such a mischievous coward' said she in English." (342)

In later stories from the 1940s, Pudumaippittan's uncertainty about how to mark and explain unknown expressions in the text is calmed and replaced by another uncertainty. Under the bombardment of English and in the absence of clear rules and conventions, P searches for what the right Tamil expression and grammatical form is.

When Kandasami Pillai orders a coffee in a restaurant, he wants *cūṭā, sṭrāṅkā iraṇṭu kap kāppi*. (word for word: "hot, strong two cup coffee"). The purist God corrects him: "Don't forget about Tamil. Say *iraṇṭu kap kāppikaḷ*", adding the plural to the coffee. Kandasami Pillai retorts, "raising the Tamil flag": "No, that's not right. I should say *iraṇṭu kapkaḷ kāppi*",²⁴ shifting the unnecessary plural ending to the cups. The overpowering English leaves nothing but a few grammatical morphemes to Tamil and even those are not used with certainty.

²⁴ "Tamiḷai maṇantuviṭātē. iraṇṭu kap kāppikaḷ eṇṇu col" eṇṇār kaṭavuḷ. "appaṭi alla; iraṇṭu kapkaḷ kāppi eṇṇu colla vēṇṭum" eṇṇu tamiḷ-kaḷ koṭi niṭṭiṇār piḷḷai (p. 561).

3.2.2 The Prestige of Sanskrit and the Brahmin Dialect

Sanskrit lies on the other side of the spectrum of outside influences on Tamil language. Pudumaippittan saw the rise of purist movement, which was fervently striving to clean the language from the alien, Sanskrit words, connected with the then disliked Brahmin community accused of unjustified accumulation of power.

P was not supporting the claims of the purist movement and refused to isolate the language in its "pure" form: "Tamil is not an insolvent language. The addition of new words is not going to destroy her individuality... In Kamban's poetry, new words – resonating, mouth-filling Sanskrit words – are like ornaments to the Goddess of Beauty" (Holmström 2002, p. 226).

To judge P's statement about his refusal to forsake Sanskrit words in Tamil, we could take a few lines of almost any story as an illustrative example. In the first few lines of *kālaṇum kiḷaviyum* ("The God of Death and the Old Woman", pp. 401-406) we could find a number of Sanskrit words:

401/2 *kirāmam* <Skt. *grāma* – "village" (*ciṟṟūr*)

401/3 *campiramam* <*sam-bhrama* – "splendour", "pomp" (*ciṟṟappu*)

401/6 *vācikaḷ* <*vācin* – "residents"

401/7 *viyākkīyāṇam* <*vyākhyāna* – "explanation" (*viḷakkam*)

401/8 *tiṇacari* <*dina-caryā* – "daily" (*nāṭōrum*)

401/9 *kaṣṭam* <*kaṣṭa* – "suffering" (*tuṇṇam, varuttam*)

401/14 *piratēcam* <*pra-dēśa* – "place" (*iṭam*)

401/17 *camācāram* <*sam-ā-cāra* – "news" (*ceyti*)

Most of these words can be found in purist manuals such as *eppaṭi nalla tamil eḷutuvatu* ("How to write good Tamil", Vaḷḷimaṇāḷaṇ 2002) which also offer the desired Tamil versions of such words (given in brackets for the above examples).

Pudumaippittan did not try to avoid these Sanskrit words, which are out of fashion now. He still shows Tamil how it was used before the national anti-Brahmin, anti-Sanskrit, anti-alien boom. In the written language, an estimate of the use of Sanskrit words in Tamil given by A. Chidambaranathan (Annamalai 2011, p. 30) is that the Sanskrit words have come down from 50% at the time before the origin of the purist movement (1900) to 20% after its climax (1950).

Not only did P not disfavour Sanskrit words, his stories also show slight hints of the high prestige of the Brahmin dialect. Where literary language stands for conversation among characters of higher status, the Brahmin dialect occasionally appears. In a sketch story about an evolving marital relationship, a woman calls her husband *vāruṅkō* ("come", p. 90), which is a purely Brahmin form. The woman might be a Brahmin herself, or at least her husband – but that is not supported anywhere in the story. The couple otherwise converses in literary Tamil and the topic has nothing to do with the Brahmin community in particular. And there are other characters who use the Brahmin forms who are clearly not Brahmins. Kandasami Pillai addresses his visitor, God, with the same Brahmin form *pāruṅkō* ("look", p. 565), although later he keeps the literary *uṭkāruṅka!* ("sit down", p. 569), same as in most of his conversation. The plural personal pronoun *avā(ḷ)*, used in the conversation, is also typically connected with the Brahmin dialect.

The Brahmin forms could hardly be found in contemporary writings, unless the author or character are clearly Brahmin themselves. The high status and prestige of Brahmin dialect, still present in Pudumaippittan's writings, decreased radically after the purification and anti-Brahmin movement raised national feelings against the "foreign" Brahmin community. Brahmin "markers" are, along with replaceable Sanskrit words, now omitted from both literary and standard spoken discourse.

In P's writing, contrary to the current situation, a limited number of Brahmin dialect features are part of the spoken discourse among socially advanced characters. Our observation seems to be supported by the research of

V. Balasubramaniam (Balasubramaniam 1980), who reports that the exclusive features attributed to Brahmin dialect are found also in some non Brahmin dialects, particularly in the Vellala and Mudaliyar dialects. There was a period before the Non-Brahmin movement prevailed, he states, when the Vellalas and Mudaliyars considered the Brahmin Tamil prestigious and imitated it. Balasubramaniam suggests a possible impact of this period on the diffusion of these features into the non-Brahmin dialects of these communities.

3.2.3 Satire on Pristine Old Tamil

As is common with national idealists, the purist movement sang praises to the glorious history of Tamil nation and its language, the *kaṇṇi-t tamil* ("pristine Tamil"), the forever contemporary language evolving continuously from old tradition dating from the Sangam age up to the present day. In *Tirukkural ceyta tirukkūttu* (pp. 69–76), P satirically ridicules this attitude:

A police inspector finds a suspicious piece of paper in the street – torn out from a notebook, with the following words written in red ink:

tuppārkkku-t tuppāya tuppākki
tuppārkkku tuppāya tū maḷai (70)

From these, the inspector understands only *tuppākki* – "pistol", and *tū maḷai* – "Faugh, rain!" Slowly he comes to conclusion that the person who wrote this must have been a crazy revolutionary striving hard to write the word *tuppākki*, getting it right only once. Rain must have interrupted his efforts, which he also recorded on the paper and ran away to hide.

The inspector starts unfolding a highly suspicious 'case' and with his skills finally reaches the author of the two red ink lines, a student who practised writing verses from the celebrated Tirukkural:

tuppārkkku-t tuppāya tuppākki-t

tuppārkkku-t tuppāya tūum maḷai

"The rain makes pleasant food for eaters rise

As food itself, thirst-quenching drought supplies"²⁵

Tirukkural, written in the old Tamil, is unintelligible to today's readers without explanation. Not only the police inspector, also the student had problems with the meaning of the words – in the original, *tūum maḷai* stands for what he shortened as *tū maḷai*. Disappointed, the inspector "never forgave the Tirukkural and the one who wrote it for cheating him and spoiling his 'case'" (p. 76).

The humorous plot of the whole story is based on the complete misunderstanding of a text which by those who favour the idea of a timeless, unchanging pristine language is conceived as part of the "forever contemporary" tradition. The story points out to the huge distance that, despite many claims, lies between the old and new Tamil language. A similar distance, although not yet so well pronounced, lies between the language as it was used by Pudumaippittan and the language as it is used now.

3.3 The (Un)conscious Process of Writing

The above story is all written in LT, including dialogues between the characters (the policeman, students, and teachers). Languagewise, the main attention is given to the contrast between old Tamil and contemporary Tamil, here represented by the neutral literary variety. Even in situations which could be considered more colloquial, more emotional, the literary language is phonetically

²⁵ Translation by Rev. Dr. G. U. Pope, 1886, accessible at the online database of Tamil texts at <http://www.tamilnet/projectmadurai>

and morphologically preserved. The author probably did not feel the need to further diversify the language of the story and bring the attention of the reader to the mode of speaking of its characters. The emphasis of the story lies elsewhere, contrary e.g. to *Kaṭavuḷum Kantacāmi-p Piḷḷaiyum*, which is full of language shifts.

Kayirraravu ("Mistaking a Rope for a Snake", pp. 674–680) is one of Pudumaippittan's last stories. It is a string of one man's thoughts at the dusk of his life. Most of the story is narrated in LT. The man is thinking in literary Tamil. When he addresses his caregivers, he does so in literary Tamil. Only in a few instances spoken Tamil is explicitly used – once when the man replays a dialogue between himself and his father when he was a small child, another time when a voice interrupts the man's thinking to warn him that a snake is at his feet. The casual *pōccu* ("it went") is used in between the literary forms.

Pudumaippittan was praised for this story, mainly for its form, which was considered a great example of the "stream of consciousness" technique in Tamil. After the unexpected success, the author related to his admirers that at the time of writing, he was not aware of this technique. He just wrote a story – in the way it appeared to him it should be written.²⁶

Elsewhere he says: "There is a music in sentences and their rhythm, in prose as in poetry. Yet it is more subtle. It comes out of the artistry of the words and the beauty of sentence structure. It is impossible to explain how this comes about." (Holmström 2002, p. 228).

From both quotes it appears that for Pudumaippittan, writing was to a great extent a process governed more by feelings for what is the right literary expression rather than by evident rules and rational choices. Maybe this is the way one should look at language use in his stories also. Although some predisposing statements could be made about where which language form would

²⁶ *Puthumaippiththan – His Contribution to Modern Tamil Literature*. E. Sa. Visswanathan at Second International Tamil Conference Seminar, January 1968, Madras, Tamil Nadu, accessible at www.Tamilnation.org.

be expected, the choice lies always with the author who is not always guided by a conscious decision. He himself might not have known why he used what he did in each particular place, or he might have had particular reasons why he used something else than what could be expected. It is also crucial to distinguish each story as an independent unit with specific conditions – what is right for one might not be applicable to another.

In spite of these conditions, we can still summarize the prevailing tendencies in P's writing as follows:

- 1) LT is the neutral variety of speech, ST is rather marked, mostly emotionally,
- 2) LT is often "casualized" by a limited number of ST features,
- 3) D speech is reserved mostly for traditional and uneducated characters (as opposed to advanced, educated, modern) and for those who interact with them
- 4) D interferes into the literary language (mainly features of old Tamil still preserved in D) and
- 5) a limited number of Brahmin D features form part of the spoken discourse among socially advanced characters.

4. Functional Markedness in the Stories of Baskar Sakti

4.0 Introduction

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the specific functions of three linguistic varieties that appear in the stories of Baskar Sakti (BS). It concentrates on literary Tamil in its marked high and low form (4.1), Tamil influenced by the neighbouring Malayalam language (4.2), and Anglicized Tamil of educated speakers (4.2.3). The source base of the analysis is the collection of stories *paḷuppu nira-p pukaippaṭam* ("The Yellowed Photograph", Pāskar Cakti 2002).

The main protagonist of this and the following chapter, Baskar Sakti, is a popular contemporary Tamil writer, born in 1967 in the *Vaṭaputu-p paṭṭi* village in the Teni region in central Tamilnadu. The world of his stories is inhabited by first-generation graduates, dying grandmothers, curious little girls, diligent partymen, municipal officers – possibly by all who make their way through life in a small Tamil town or village. Characters of his stories seem to occupy a space somewhere close to the imaginary middle point in between the extremes. They are not the poorest of the poor nor are they extremely rich, they are not the wisest but many of them are influenced by education. They belong to the so called middle class, some of them to the lower-middle, some to the upper-middle, but never to the top and never to the very bottom.

Their language speaks for them. When the author describes them and their action, he does so in a flexible literary language, appearing once to be close to speech, once to the high-style language of literary tradition. Their up-to-date speech is often peppered with English expressions, entering freely into the Tamil discourse. *pōṇasāka*,²⁷ in some of the stories, a Malayali speaker appears to confuse the seemingly clear and smooth conversation of everyone involved.

²⁷ "As a bonus", an expression from Anglicized Tamil.

4.1 The Marked Use of Literary Tamil

In BS's use of LT, it is possible to distinguish its different levels, starting from high formal to almost colloquial. While most of the narration is written in the "neutral" contemporary, commonly used variety of LT, there are also abundant examples of the use of a more formal, traditional variety. It is this *marked* variety I am paying attention to here, studying its function and meaning, leaving aside the more expected and thus *unmarked*, commonly used contemporary LT. A short section that follows concentrates on the marked variety from the opposite side of the spectrum, the low LT influenced by colloquial language.

4.1.1 LT High in Narration

In the introductory paragraph of the story *Vīrāccāmi pi.kām*. ("Vīrāccāmi, B. Com.", pp. 108-115) the author gives a description of its main character Vīrāccāmi, who has lost common sense due to his pride of holding a university degree. In a sequence of characterizing nominal clauses the author describes him as follows:

maṇṇācai, peṇṇācai, poṇṇācai immūṇruminriyē
vīṇtupaṭṭa eṇatu periyappā makaṇ.

"(He is) the son of my uncle, who has fallen (strangely enough)
not because of (his) lust for land, women and wealth." (108)

The three traditional causes of one's decline (*maṇṇācai, peṇṇācai, poṇṇācai*) accompanied by the high-style word *vīṇ* ("to fall", as in "fallen hero"), the choice of the negative *iṇri*, a remnant from Old Tamil, above the more casual *illāmal* and the LT genitive suffix *-atu* place this sentence to a high rank in the language

hierarchy. At the same time, the negation of the traditional concept of three main causes of one's fall brings a suggestion of detachment from this high style. The author preserves the traditional forms, but implies an unexpected meaning.

In *kaṭcikkāraṇ* ("Party man", pp.49-55), BS describes preparations for a political meeting:

*(...) ēleṭṭu kilō miṭṭarukku aṇivakuttirukkum
ṭiyūplaiṭṭuka!*

"(There were) streetlamps on parade in (some) seven-eight kilometre distance". (49)

The verb *aṇivaku*, "to be on parade" is very appropriate for this occasion. The *ṭiyūplaiṭṭuka!*, streetlights, are also expected to appear in a festive public event. But we would expect marching bands or soldiers to be on a parade and streetlights to light the event, quietly standing in a row. The streetlights are not in the category of representatively marching subjects. The high-style event is ridiculed here by an unexpected shift in the language. The language remains formal and literal, but descends from its expected cliché.

The story named *tīrṭa yāṭṭirai* ("Pilgrimage to Water Sources", pp. 101-107) opens in the following words:

*kulāyil mūṇrāvatu nālāka-t taṇṇīr varavillai eṇṇa ceyṭiyai, kāy
aṇuttukkoṇṭē vēṇi olipparappiyapōtu tāmu ṭi.vi ulaka-c ceyṭikaḷil
kavanamāka iruntāṇ.*

"'It has been three days since water stopped coming from the faucet' – while Veni, cutting the vegetables, broadcasted (these) news, Tamu was absorbed in the World News on television." (101)

The wife's complaint is represented here in the literary language, which is

appropriate for indirect speech used in narration. It is also an appropriate rendering of the high-style language of public broadcast. It is quite an unusual broadcast – the reporter is hidden in the kitchen and disturbs the importance of the words reaching the public by sounds of cutting vegetables. More strangely, there is only one listener, and he is not even listening – he is paying attention to the "real" news on television. The broadcast event is turned upside down. Again, the linguistic forms do not violate the accepted norms, but their unusual semantic combination does.

We can also add the title of this story to our understanding of BS's play with literary language. *tīrtta yāttirai* is a borrowing from Sanskrit. It is a high-style ritual term which denotes a religious pilgrimage to sacred places where water sources are found. In this story, there is nothing about religious piety, and no pilgrimage, in the narrow sense of the word, is undertaken. The plot turns around one man's effort to get a few buckets of water in a town suffering from prolonged water shortage. This "Journey to the water sources" is written in a very casual style, placing the chosen title to a very contrasting position.

4.1.2 LT High in Conversations

In contemporary fiction, LT is generally the language of narration, and ST is the language of conversation. Following oral language use, there are a few occasions when the literary norm is used to represent the speech carried out in a formal language.

In *ceṇpaka-p pāṇṭiyaṅ kātalka!* ("The loves of *Ceṇpakappāṇṭiyaṅ!*", pp. 125–132), a college student is having a discussion with his Tamil teacher Samson. He is defending a new interpretation of the classic Tirukkural, the implication of the concept of dharma, artha, and kāma to sorting out the attractiveness of girls. He almost argues with the teacher and offends him, but he does not fail to use the high literary style, appropriate for teacher-student

conversation in the classroom environment:

*"nānkaḷ vaḷḷuvarai matikkirōm. nīnkaḷtān mēnāṭṭār kūṭa-p
pāraṭṭukirārkaḷ eṇru veḷināṭṭu cipāricai-t tēṭukirārkaḷ. cāmcāṇ eṇpatu
tamiḷ-p peyarā? ataṇāḷ nīnkaḷ tamiḷpparru illātavar eṇru kūra
muṭiyumā? taviravum, tirukkuṛaḷai iṇpaṭiyellām payaṇpaṭuttuvatan
mūlam nānkaḷ ataṇ kālaṇkaṭantu nirkum payaṇpāṭṭai nirūpikkirōm
aiyā."*

"We are respecting Valluvar. It is you who says that even the Westerners pay homage to him and thus (you) search for recognition in foreign lands. Is Samson a Tamil name? Hence could it (not) be said that you are not loyal to Tamil? Moreover, through using Tirukkural in this (new) way, we are demonstrating its timeless nature, Sir." (126)

Similarly, as in the above examples from narration, the formal language here carries a special function – it is not just a formal language used in a formal environment. It is taken out from its expected milieu, transported to an unknown territory, and ridiculed.

This ridiculing attitude toward the high literary language is escalating in the *kaṭcikkāraṇ*, where Muttucāmi, a poor and diligent party man, falls asleep in a meeting of his beloved political party. In his dream, he hears the voice of the party leader. (When Muttucāmi wakes up, the leader is gone):

*ḷṭariṇ kuraḷ kēṭṭatu. "eṇkaḷatu cāṭaṇaikāḷai-p paṭṭiyaliṭa vēṇṭumenṇrāl
eṇṇi māḷātu eṇru rōsmilk pākkeṭṭukaḷ āṇaiyāka uṛuti kūrukirēṇ."*

"(He) heard the voice of the leader. 'It is without our capacity to itemize all of our achievements even if we strive to enumerate those. Hence I strongly promise (to supply free) packets of rose-scent milk (to you).'" (54)

The leader uses a high style hyperbolic language, which, on the basis of a play (*Memorandum*) by the late Czech playwright and president Václav Havel, would be called "ptydepe." It is a language used by bureaucrats and politicians, a language which at first sight appears to use the words that everyone understands, but somehow manages to lose their meaning. It is a language emptied of its content, a tool which helps to exercise power and control.

4.1.3 The Function of LT High in BS's Writing

Literary language in its higher, more formal appearance is an important constituent of BS's very contemporary writing. It is used quite frequently both in narration and conversation. At the same time, it is not a fully integral part of the linguistic repertoire of this writer and its use is always very marked. For BS, the formal language is a component from outside, from the world of tradition and order, which is not part of the experience he is sharing. It is ridiculed, its message is turned upside down, it is brought into contrast with the actual, contemporary situation. The language of today's fiction, at least as presented in BS's writing, has moved quite far away from the traditional Tamil mode represented by the high literary style.

4.1.4 LT Low as Influenced by Colloquial Language

In contrast to the high style depicted in the preceding section, BS sometimes uses a variety of LT which is quite close to the spoken language. This can happen when a narrating passage is intertwined with conversation, or is very close to it:

*caṭṭeṇṇu failai viciṛi mūñci mēlē aṭippāṇ. kōpam poṅka,
"intiyāviṇ talainakaram kōyamputtūrṭā. ṭelliṇṇu conṇāpla
vēlai kuṭuttiruvīṅkaḷā?"*

"Suddenly, he threw the file into the (interviewer's) freaking face.
Bursting with anger, (he said:) 'The capital of India is Coimbatore,
dude! As if I said Delhi, you would give me the job!'" (108)

The "narrating part" of this passage, preceding an angry colloquial reaction of a job interviewee, includes a very colloquial, derogative word *mūñci* – "freaking face". The sentence is already in tune with the following direct speech. The neutral narrator is almost absent here, he is passing the torch to the utterer of the angry words. The choice of the word *mūñci* belongs already to the interviewee.

In this sense, the degree of colloquiality in narration parts is based on the difference lying between a concrete "I" narrating the story versus a hidden, neutral author. This opposition is further emphasized in the work of Puhā (chapter 7.2), where the whole narration is conducted in a colloquial voice.

4.2 Malayalam as a Tool of Confusion and Misunderstanding

4.2.1 The Ambivalent Relationship of Tamil and Malayalam

A special position in BS's writing is occupied by Malayalam, the language spoken in the Kerala state neighbouring with Tamilnadu on the West. BS belongs to the Teni region in central Tamilnadu bordering with Kerala. He lives in intensive contact with this language. This has certainly helped him to incorporate Malayalam into his language registry not only in real life, but also in writing, where it carries a special function.

Same as Tamil, Malayalam is a South Dravidian language. The two languages shared their early history, but from about the 9th century AD, Malayalam and Tamil started to develop as two independent languages. Due to their common roots, they display many similarities. On the other hand, the long time of separate development has brought some important distinctions. The most striking and always emphasized difference is the *Aryanization* of Malayalam. Tamil, with the help of the purification efforts, contains much less Sanskrit words and structures than Malayalam. The differences between the two languages are big enough for Malayalam not to be fully comprehensible for most speakers of Tamil. The following analysis should demonstrate the possible discrepancies between the two languages.

In *aracaṇiṇ maraṇam* ("The Death of a King", pp. 74-80), two circus men come begging to a house where a grandfather lives with his family. One of the circus men speaks in a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam. Before he says a word, it is explicitly mentioned in the text that he is going to speak Malayalam mixed with Tamil. He introduces himself and then explains what has put him to begging (words belonging more to Malayalam than Tamil underlined):

nālaiñcu kollam munṇē aṭlāṇṭik sarkkasṇu parañjāl ṭikkeṭ kiṭṭātu.

atu ellām kaliñju pōya kālam... mhūm.. (...) sarkkas mēla valiya mutalālikku oru prēmai. avaru maricca piñṇē mōṇukku sarkkas naṭatta iṣṭamilla. piñṇa ṅāñkaḷ eviṭa pōkum. (...)

"Four-five years ago if (you) said Atlantic Circus, (you) couldn't get tickets. That time is all gone... mhm.. The old owner loved the circus. After he died, his son does not want to run the circus. Then where are we to go." (77)

In this statement, Malayalam is foregrounded by distinctive spelling, grammatical differences and vocabulary. Some Malayalam words which are presented here are similar to Tamil, only their phonetic shape is different: *ṅāñkaḷ* ("we") corresponds to Tamil *nāñkaḷ*, *mōṇ* ("son") is *makaṇ* in Tamil. The word *muñṇē* ("before") is mostly used as "muñṇālē" in ST.

Some other words are present in Tamil, but have different usage: the word of Indo-European origin *mari* ("to die") is known to the lexicon of Tamil, but *cā* / *cettu* or *ira* are more commonly used. *prēmai* ("love") is a Sanskrit word (Skt. *prema*-) which Tamil also does possess, but its usage has become rare and obsolete. Moreover, the conventional Tamil spelling of this word is *pirēmai*. Here, also the difference in spelling indicates that the word does belong to a different language.

Where *valiya* is used in the text, Tamils would use *periya* ("big", "superior" – also in age). *vali* denotes strength in Tamil and *valiya* has the meaning of doing something "in a forced way".

eviṭa ("where") does not exist in Tamil as a distinctive word, but the system knows the interrogative *e-* and can deconstruct the second part of the word as resulting from *iṭam* ("place"). Otherwise Tamil would use *erikē* in the place of this form.

There are some other words here – *kollam* ("year") and *para* ("say") which are not present in the vocabulary of contemporary Tamil in any form. Tamil would translate them as *varuṣam* / *āṇṭu* and *col* / *kūru*.

The grammatical features captured in this short statement show mostly differences in verbal forms: *kiṭṭātu* stands against *kiṭaikkātu* (infinitive neg. form "it is not available"), *pōya* against *pōṇa* (relative participle of the verb "to go"), *naṭatta* – *naṭakka* (inf. "to walk", "to run sth."). Tamil might also use a dative construction in the first sentence – *varuṣattukku muṇṇālē* ("a year ago") instead of the nominative *kollam muṇṇē*.

The last sentence shows another feature of Malayalam – contrary to Tamil, it does not use personal endings with finite verbs, the tense marker alone (a frozen neuter form) is added to the verb stem. Here, it is *-um*, the future tense marker, used with the verb *pō*. The subject is *ṅaṅka!* ("we"): *ṅaṅka! eviṭa pōkum* ("where are we to go"). In Tamil, *-um* is used only as future neuter ending. In ST, it is often used with other than neuter subjects, but it remains a specific neuter form and other personal forms are also used.

I hope that this rather lengthy analysis of a few sentences has shown some of the ambivalent relationship between Tamil and Malayalam. There are words which sound familiar, but have different meaning. This is the case of many closely related languages – many things seem known to us, but we are inclined to insert meanings of our own language where they do not belong.

There is a lot that can be understood clearly between Tamil and Malayalam, but there is also enough ground for confusion. That is what happened when Vargis, the circus man, finished his long talk:

tāttāvukku koṅcam kuḷappamāyiruntatu

"The grandfather was a little confused."(77)

4.2.2 The Confusion and Misunderstanding Caused by Malayalam

The confusion caused by Malayalam is even more clearly expressed in the story *tīrtta yāttirai*. Tāmu comes to a pub, where a "typical Malayali bearded"²⁸ who came to sell cardamom spices is having his drinks. He talks about heavy rains that flooded his hometown. Tāmu understands – and gets angry, because his town is suffering with extreme heat. He asks the man to be quiet.

"*entā cārē?*"²⁹

"What (are you saying) sir?",

asks the Malayali in his language. Tāmu angrily repeats his plead. The Malayali still does not understand why Tāmu is shouting at him:

"*cāru entā koḷappamāyittu paṛayunnatu. maṇacillāyilla*"³⁰

"Sir, what (how) confusingly you talk. I do not understand." (106)

Tāmu continues to blame him and his fellow Kerali citizens for all the problems, and the Malayali continues with his questions, trying to understand what is going on. Finally, he tries to find solace in pronouncing the name of a local Kerali god, Guruvayurappa. This time it is Tāmu who adds to the confusion by referring to Bangarappa, the Karnataka prime minister who was responsible for construction of water barriers in the Karnataka state. Bangarappa is in no way connected to the Kerali god, nor does he have anything to do with the Malayalis, not to mention this particular Malayali spice seller. The misunderstanding is complete

²⁸ *paripūrṇa malaiyāla tāṭikkāraṇ* (p. 105).

²⁹ In Tamil: *eṇṇa cār?*

³⁰ ST equivalent: *cār eṇṇa koḷappamāyittu coṇṇīnka? puriyalla.*

now and Tāmu is forced to leave by his companion.³¹

This "confusing effect" seems to be one of the major roles of Malayalam in BS's writing. This language does not appear in all the stories, only in a few of them. Where it does appear, there is usually just one speaker of Malayalam in the whole story. He is conceived of as an outsider by others and his language is not clearly understood by all. The other characters have difficulty in understanding him, and he may have difficulties in understanding them. This mutual misunderstanding and inability to communicate is not based just on language problems. There may be more than languages involved – cultural, personal or context dependent misunderstandings may evolve. But the language is always there to underlie them and help the confusion to develop. From this perspective, we can view the incorporation of Malayalam in BS's writing as a use of a powerful tool and technique, here specifically the "tool producing confusion and misunderstanding" which strengthens the already present communicational barrier among some of the characters.

³¹ "kuruvāyūrappā.."

"pēra māttāta. paṅkārapā tāṅṅā meyiṅ kāraṅamē, maṅanturuvaṅā nāṅu, eṅṅā mūrṭṭi?"

"tāmu ippaṅi velīla vā colrēṅ."

"nāṅ eppaṅi viṅṅuṅṅuvarratu mūrṭṭi?"

"ippaṅittāṅ vā." tōlōṅṅu cērttu velīnaṅṅatti vantāṅ mūrṭṭi. (106)

"Guruvayurappa.."

"Don't change the name. Bangarappa is the main reason, will I forget, what, Murti?"

"Tāmu (let's) just go out (of here), I tell (you)"

"How can I leave (it) like this and go?"

"Just come." Mūrṭi walked (him) out supporting (his) shoulder.

4.3 Anglicized Tamil

4.3.1 Loan Words – the Incorporation of English into Tamil

Most of the characters in BS's stories represent the educated middle class, which freely incorporates English into its speech. We can therefore find abundant examples of the use of English in BS's stories.

While college students are featured as main representatives of mixing and switching to English, no characters, including the narrator, are completely free of the influence of English. Even an old village woman, probably uneducated, does not manage without a few English loan words – she might talk about a *fōfō* and even has an *eksrē* of her husband's lungs affected with tuberculosis (103). English has influenced Tamil – and other Indian languages – to such an extent that it is often not even recognized as something "out" of the Tamil system. We can return to the example from the *aracaṇiṇ maraṇam* used in the previous section (4.2.1) to illustrate this point. Before the Malayali circus man presents himself on the scene, the narrator warns the reader that he speaks in a mixture of Tamil and Malayalam.³² In fact, part of what he is saying, at least on the vocabulary level, belongs to English. He uses words like *sarkkas* ("circus"), *ṣō* ("show"), *sārē* ("sir"), *ṭicket* ("ticket"), *eṣṭēṭṭuka!* ("estates"), *leṭṭar* ("letter") or the expression "*help ceytirukkum*" ("to help" – fut. sg. neutr., p. 77). These words catch the attention of any reader who does not belong to a milieu so strongly influenced by English. Such reader may consider the speech to be a mixture of Tamil, Malayalam *and* English.

But while Tamil, in most cases, has its own equivalents to most of the English expressions, we can still treat English, at least sometimes, as a source base incorporated into the Tamil language, not distinctive any longer as a

³² *avaṇ tamilum malaiyālamum kalantu kalantu pēciṇāṇ* (77).

separate language. It is then appropriate to say that someone speaks a mixture of "Tamil and Malayalam", and present a statement full of English words – these words do not belong to English anymore, they are part of Tamil, and the statement is then an example of Tamil rich in English loanwords, not an example of Tamil-English code-switching.

4.3.2 Tamil-English Code Switching

Not only isolated English words or expressions find their way into BS's writing. There are also situations of obvious code-switching when the character switches completely to English. In these instances, it is evident even to the speakers themselves that English is used, not just Tamil mixed with English. In the above mentioned story, Vīrāccāmi defends his father who got beaten by an officer. He rushes to punish the man who humiliated him and starts with verbal assaults in colloquial Tamil. Then the officer interrupts his talk in bad English. For being recognized as someone who is educated in English, Vīrāccāmi is ready to give up all of what he initially stands for. The whole story is told by Vīrāccāmi's friend, who also expresses his opinion about what happened:

"campaṭi piṭ yuvar fātar. vī vil sī. vī vil tēk ākcaṇ. tōṇṭ orri. oy ār yū ṭākkiṅ aṅṅesassarili? yū ār ejikēṭṭaṭ piṭṭi!" vētaṅai! itai oru inkiṭṭi eṅa matittu vīrāccāmi, "sāri sār. paṭ mai fātar is oḷṭmēṅ. yū elakṛi pōṭṭ piṭṭiṭṭi respekt oḷṭ piṭṭiṭṭi" eṅṅu āṅkila ākkiramippukku iraiyāki camātāṅa-k koṭi kāṭṭiṅṅaṅ. eṅṅāl tāṅka muṭiyavillai. āṅṅāl vīrāccāmiyē vipīṣaṅaṅāka māriṅṅaṅ piṅṅu nāṅ maṭṭum kataṅi āvatēṅṅa.

(word-for-word): "Somebody beat your father. We will see. We will take action. Don't worry. Why are you talking unnecessarily? You are educated people. "Helas! Viraccami, valuing this as English, said (word-for-word:)"Sorry, sir. But my father is old man. You electri(city)

board people respect old people". Surrendering to the English aggression he showed the flag of peace. I could not stand it. But what is there to shout alone after Viraccami changed to Vibishanan (Ravana's brother). (110)

English in India goes hand in hand with education. BS presents it not only as a language of educated people but also as the language of those who just want to show off their education and high manners. Although BS himself freely introduces English into Tamil in his work, he ridicules the overly expressed use of English and at least in this story, also the prestige and meaning of formal education in general.

There is a difference in BS's attitude between the use of English loan-words and Tamil-English code-switching. Loan-words, even abundant, are accepted as an unmarked part of the language and not commented upon. On the other hand code-switching, when overly expressed, is noted and criticized.

4.3.3 Markedness of English Usage in Narration and Conversation

There is a distinct difference in the use of English in different parts of the text. In *Vīrāccāmi pi.kām.* (pp. 108-115), BS consistently uses the English word *kālēj* ("college") in dialogues, but in narration he alternates the English form with the Tamil word *kallūri*.³³ In the same way, *vanki tērvu* alternates with *pēṅk iṅṅarvyū*, the "bank interview", in the narration within one paragraph (112). In dialogue, bank is always *pēṅk* and never becomes *vāṅki*. BS consistently represents the speech which does not prefer Tamil neologisms over the common English words. In narration, he sometimes deviates from the "appropriate"

³³ E.g. *kallūriyil paṭitta kālam* ("time spent studying at the college", p. 110) x *kālējil paṭippatu parriya avaṅatu perumitam* ("his pride about studying in the college, p. 109).

literary style and comes nearer to the spoken style with the merging of English words.

In narration, the unmarked choices are the Tamil equivalents or at least the English words accommodated as loan words in traditional Tamil spelling. Fully English expressions are more frequent and common in conversational parts. This partly reveals the tendency to preserve "pure" Tamil in writing, more so in the parts which belong to the register of literary Tamil. Within the register of spoken Tamil, English influence is more pronounced.

4.3.4 The (In)compatibility of Tamil Script with English

English, just like colloquial Tamil, does not "fit" the Tamil phonetic and writing system. It is sometimes difficult to find out what the written form stands for. If we look at the transcription of what the officer is saying to Vīraccāmi (4.3.2), we might need a little time to recognize the proper English words:

campaṭi pīṭ yuvar fātar. vī vil sī. vī vil ṭēk ākcaṇ. ṭōṇṭ orri. oy ār yū tākkiṅ aṅṅesassarili? yū ār ejikēṭṭaṭ pīppiḷ. (110)

First of all, it may be hard even to think of the English origin of a statement. English appears in the text usually without any warning, and it is up to the reader to identify it. There are situations when only the context dependency can help us to decipher the proper meaning of an English word written in the syllabic Tamil script. In *kaṭcikkāraṇ*, the word *pākkeṭ* is used several times. Although one word in Tamil script, it can have at least three different meanings – "packet" (52), "bucket," or "pocket" (55).

In the story *ceṅpaka-p pāṅṭiyaṅ kātalka!* ("The loves of *Ceṅpakappāṅṭiyaṅ*", pp. 125–132), Abinaya, a college girl, writes a "love letter" to one of her schoolmates. Love between college students is often taboo in Tamil

and therefore predominantly a domain of English. Abinaya mixes in her letter Tamil and English as well as their respective scripts. She uses the Latin alphabet for English words, causing them to stand out in their proper original spelling in between Tamil words.³⁴

Abinaya is not overly consistent in her writing. She writes the Indian name Selvi and her own name in Latin letters, while there are two other names written in Tamil. The "blue colour shirt" has its colour written in Latin with the English spelling, while 'the shirt' itself remains in the Tamil script (*ṣarttē*). Also the word "friend" is written in the Tamil script once (*freṇṭu*), while twice it appears in Latin script as *friend*. In the use of English, she goes beyond the lexical level by using the conjunction *and* (*mālā and Selvi iraṇṭu pēr* <- LT *mālāvum celviyum*, "both Mala and Selvi"), influencing the Tamil syntax. She also manages to insert a word from spoken Tamil, *pāttāccā* (LT *pārttīrkaḷā*), "have you seen", with a neuter ending used commonly in speech, right after using a respectful LT form *pōṭukiṛkaḷ* ("you are wearing" – 2nd person pl.)

"What is it?" Asks her friend when he reads what she has written.

³⁴ Dear லோகநாதன் B. Com,

உங்கள் letter பார்த்தேன். ரொம்பவும் சங்கடமாக இருந்தது. ஒரு நல்ல friend என்று தான் உங்களை நினைத்திருந்தேன். மற்றவர்கள் நம்மை cheap ஆக நினைத்துவிடமாட்டார்களா? என் friends ஸிடம் காட்டினேன். மாலா and Selvi இரண்டு பேர் மட்டும்தான் உங்களை bad fellow என்றார்கள். நீங்கள் டாட்டா காட்டினீர்களாம். எனக்கு இப்படி habit எல்லாம் பிடிக்காது. நீங்கள் நிறைய smoke பண்ணுவீர்களாமே. Boys எல்லாருமே இப்படித்தானா?

ஏன் எப்போது பார்த்தாலும் Blue color ஷர்ட்டே போடுகிறீர்கள்? 'ரங்கீலா' பாத்தாச்சா?

உங்கள் ஃப்ரெண்டு செண்பகப்பாண்டியனும் உங்களை மாதிரி type தானா?

Yours lovingly,
Abinaya. (130)

"*lav leṭṭar. kātal kaṭitam. prēm maṭal³⁵ māṭṭē.*"

"A love letter, boy." (131)

She repeats the words "love letter" in English, Tamil, and high Pandit Tamil, going from the bottom to the top in the language hierarchy, all of these registers having been used in her writing.

The code switching and mixing between Tamil and English, so common among young educated Tamils, is in this laughable caricature of a love letter emphasized even more by the use of double script. Using the Latin alphabet is one of the possible solutions to the problem of accommodating English to the constraints of Tamil script.

³⁵ *maṭal* is a flat leaf of palmyra palm, used traditionally for writing. In the ancient Sangam poetry, the word also denotes a horse of palmyra stems on which an unsuccessful lover mounts to proclaim his grief and win his love.

5. BS – The Prototypical Use of Spoken Tamil in Contemporary Fiction

5.0 Introduction

The increased use of spoken Tamil in writing has been most likely the major linguistic innovation of contemporary Tamil fiction. The functional field of spoken Tamil in literature is quite large now. As the language of conversation among the characters, it found its way to most works of writers of fiction.

In this chapter, direct attention is not given to the functional role of ST in writing. The unmarked, conversational use of ST is not part of this discussion. Instead, the representation of spoken Tamil in contemporary fiction is considered in the three most important structural aspects of a language – phonetics (5.1), morphology (5.2), and syntax (5.3).

The source base of the analysis of the use of ST in writing is mostly again BS's collection *paluppu nira-p pukaippaṭam ("The Yellowed Photograph", Pāskar Cakti 2002), in sections 5.1 and 5.2 the first story of this collection. BS's stories, following latest trends in language usage and practice, serve us as a model example of the use of ST in contemporary short fiction. The focus of the following analysis lies in the discussion of the *prototypical* features of ST use in writing. Therefore where appropriate, the discussion is complemented with examples of other writers' work with language.*

A short subchapter that follows the analysis of structural aspects of ST use in writing concentrates on the few important exceptions in BS's representation of unmarked spoken Tamil, the marked dialectal features (5.4).

5.1 Phonetics of ST in Writing

5.1.1 Emerging Conventions of ST Representation in Writing

ST in writing is not the same as ST in speech. Spoken language represented in literature is an evocation of speech, not the speech itself. The written representation of ST is in closer touch with the literary language and it is tied with binding conditions of the syllabic script. The newly emerging conventions and rules of usage of ST in writing are far from being identical with the rules of usage of ST in speech. In writing, phonetic features of spoken Tamil are always expressed only to a certain extent. There is no strict barrier between literary and spoken Tamil in the text.

In writing, ST phonetic features are largely interchangeable with their LT counterparts. When the written text is then reproduced, i.e. read, or, brought into oral territory, the reader can convert some of the phonetic features belonging to LT, when they appear in the conversational context, to features of ST. This process, readily attestable by any reader of Tamil fiction, is well documented by audio recordings of Tamil writers reading their own work aloud.³⁶

As spoken Tamil, compared to literary Tamil, represents a newer variety of language in its development in time, we can trace phonetic features present in ST as changes from LT to ST. Although we do not have to necessarily agree that LT is the direct predecessor of ST, there is, beyond doubt, a certain pattern of

³⁶ The South Asian Literary Recordings Project, Library of Congress New Delhi Office, accessible at <http://www.loc.gov/acq/ovop/delhi/salrp/tamil.html>.

E.g. the writer Ambai, reading from her story *Mañjai mīṇ* ("Yellow fish", Ampai 1995, pp. 141–143), consistently preserves ST monophthongization in conversational parts where she chose to use LT diphthongs in the accusatives in the script (LT *atai* "it" read as ST *ate*, *vāyai* "mouth" read as *vāye*).

relations between the two, with phonetic change being one of the major ones. These relations generate rules of ST accepted by common consent. It is important to contrast ST to LT especially in writing, where both systems correlate to a great extent.

The following table shows major phonetic changes between literary and spoken Tamil and their written representation in BS's story *paḷuppu niṛa-p pukaippaṭam*, the first story of a collection of the same name (pp. 9–17). Although many of the examples given in the table preserve LT phonetic features, all examples are taken from the conversational parts and should thus represent colloquial speech. Some of the changes are then discussed in more detail, same as the optionality of their use.

LT → ST phonetic changes and their realization in conversational parts of *paḷuppu niṛa-p pukaippaṭam* (Pāskar Cakti 2002, pp.9-17)

Phonetic change	ST <- LT	ST phonetic feature presented in the text	LT phonetic feature preserved in the text
Vowel shifting (1st syllable)	<i>e <- i</i> <i>o <- e <- i</i> <i>o <- e</i> <i>o <- u</i>	<i>keḷavikku</i> <i>poḷappu</i> <i>poṭṭikkulla</i> <i>oṭampu</i>	<i>kiḷavi</i> <i>uṭampu</i>
Vocalic assimilation	<i>i – i</i> <i>u – u</i>	<i>iṇṇakki³⁷</i> <i>kuṭuttārilla</i>	<i>iṇṇaikku</i> <i>koṭu</i>
Monophthongization	<i>a <- ai</i>	<i>illa</i>	<i>illai</i>
Palatalisation	<i>c <- t</i> <i>ñj <- nt</i>	<i>maṇacillāma</i> <i>niṛaṇca</i>	
Simplified pronunciation	<i>ḷ <- ḷ</i> <i>ṇṇ, ṇṇ <- ṇṛ</i>	<i>kiḷavi</i> <i>uṭaccuṭuṇṇu</i> <i>oṇṇu</i>	<i>kiḷavi</i>

³⁷ See section 5.1.1c

	<i>tt <- rr</i>	<i>cuttiyē</i>	
Intervocalic change	<i>v <- p</i> <i>v <- k</i>	<i>rūvā</i> <i>mava</i>	<i>maka</i>
Shortening long final vowels and centralizing		<i>aṅka</i> <i>appa</i> <i>taṅṅi</i>	<i>aṅkē</i> <i>appō</i>
Vocalic reduction – consonant clusters		<i>eṭṭi</i>	<i>ippaṭṭi</i>
Cons. cluster assimilation and reduction	<i>kk <- tk</i> <i>nt <- rnt</i>	<i>ukkāntāccu</i>	<i>cēṅntu</i>
Nasal assimilation and loss, disappearing word boundary	<i>-ñc <- -m c</i> <i>-nt <- -m t</i> <i>-p <- -m p</i> <i>-mp <- -ṅ p</i> <i>-mp <- -ṅ p</i>	<i>vēṅāñ cāmi</i> <i>koṭaṅ taṅṅi</i> <i>vēṅā-p pāru</i> <i>puruśam poṅṭāṭṭi</i> <i>pompaḷaikaḷum</i>	<i>eṅ pēccil</i>
Initial vowel drop		<i>ntā</i>	<i>intā</i>
Final consonant drop		<i>oru nā</i> <i>taṅṅi</i>	<i>teriñca nāḷ</i>
Final vowel insertion		<i>kumāru</i> <i>pōyi</i>	<i>kumār</i> <i>pōy</i>

5.1.1a Final Vowels

In the phonetic system of spoken Tamil, all words end in vowels, often nasalized. This is achieved by either dropping the final consonant or adding a vowel, most commonly *-u*, less commonly *-i* (after *-y*, such as in LT *pōy* – ST *pōyi*, "having gone"). Generally, short monosyllabic words do not drop the final

consonant and rather add *-u* (LT *ā!*– ST *ā!u*, "person"). Longer words may vary, with *-u* sometimes belonging to the standard spoken (LT *cēval* – ST *cēvalu*, "rooster", "cock"), and consonant drop to more colloquial or dialectal speech (D *cēva*). In composites, even ST tends to drop the final consonant of the polysyllabic word (LT *kāval kāraṇ* – ST *kāva-k kārō*, "watchman").

There is only one exception to this convention. Some tamilized loanwords, such as *lāyaku*³⁸ ("being fit for sth.", from Arabic *lāiaq*), appear only in the *-u* form in both LT and ST.

In writing, words belonging to ST which do not end in vowels can often be found. Conventional spelling does not express the final *-u* in the rendering of speech. A convention is not as binding as a prescribed rule, therefore, in a conversational text, we can find both *kumāru* and *kumār*, although the second variety is perhaps more common and rather unmarked. Depending on the context, this second form could be read as spoken with final *-u*.

5.1.1b Nasalized Vowels

Where LT has a vowel followed by a final nasal, ST rounds and nasalizes the final vowel (LT *makaṇ* – ST *makō*, "son"). When written, ST generally does not express the final nasalized rounded vowels. The syllabic script does not have adequate tools for this. It preserves the final nasals and unrounded vowels and lets the reader do the work for himself where appropriate.

Even though nasalized vowels are not depictable by syllabic script, when an author writes *nūttai~~pa~~tu* for what is accepted as */nūttaim~~pa~~du/* in ST, we are left in doubt. Is it because of his dialect that he is omitting the *-m*? Is it the author's attempt to deal with the impossibility of expressing nasalized vowels in Tamil script and is he expecting the reader to add the nasal for himself? Or could this possibly be a printing error, a feature not uncommon in many Tamil

³⁸ *nī atukku-t tāṇ lāyaku*. -- "You are fit just for that." (p. 10).

publications? All of these have to be considered when we are judging author's representation of spoken style. There are no clear rules and therefore there are often also no straightforward answers.

5.1.1c Syllabic C+a Characters

The syllabic character of Tamil script is very conditioning as far as vowels are concerned. When we read அங்க-அப்ப-மகன் ("there"- "then"- "son") as part of a ST conversation, we do not read it as we would if these were words of LT, for which the script is highly appropriate. The basic character of Tamil script, consonant + /a/, is pronounced in various ways when speech is reproduced. What would be /ga/, /pa/, /ha/ in LT, turns to /gæ/, /po/ or /hæ/ in ST, and there are more forms possible. What is "hiding" behind the C+a character is much more varied in ST than LT. Basically, any vowel can hide behind the basic C+a syllabic character. In writing, instead of a combination of a consonant with a specific vowel, this basic syllabic C+a character is often conventionally used in representation of speech. For example, the word "today", represented as இன்னக்கி , would actually not be pronounced *innakki*, but rather *innekki* or even *innikki*, assimilating the vowels to the same position.

Similarly, in the case of some PNG endings, several forms can be used in writing which correspond to what is one form in speech – e.g. *conṇa / connē* "you said" for 2nd pers. sg. While the second form is probably closer to actual pronunciation, the first one, using the all hiding C+a character (here /na/) could be pronounced just the same.

5.1.1d Final Consonants

There is a lot of words with "hidden final consonants" in spoken Tamil.

These are consonants that are materialized only when the word is followed by a bound vowel. When written, these consonants are often left in their place even when the word stays on its own. The reader can drop them for himself – he can read *ava!* ("she") as ST *ava* when this word appears in a conversational context and the word may retain its conventional LT spelling. Or, these consonants may also be omitted in progressive writing and appear only when followed by another bound vowel, same as in speech – as in *ava |ava|ā?* ("she"/"she?"- interrogative).

5.1.1e Consonants in Medial Position

Apart from the features of ST which are not depicted in writing, be it because of convention or because of the restrictive script, there is a number of spoken language features that seem to be more "fixed" in the script than others. These are more often changes in consonant representation. As the vocal quality is more variable and depending on the surroundings, it cannot be captured by the syllabic script to a full extent.

Changes which are almost always reflected in the script include the generally accepted palatalisation (*t* → *c*) and simplified pronunciation of difficult -*ṅṅ*- and -*ṅṅ*- clusters (as -*ṅṅ*- or -*ṅṅ*- and -*tṅ*- respectively). Only borrowings from the formal language, such as *maṅṅram* ("hall", "auditorium"), generally keep their literary form of transcription even in what is meant to be representation of spoken usage. The spoken forms are so widely accepted in these cases that they can occasionally appear in the narration parts also.

By common consent, -*ṅṅ*-, which is somewhere between retroflex and alveolar in actual pronunciation, is being transcribed as alveolar -*ṅṅ*- in the quotative -(*ṅ*)*ṅu* (LT *eṅṅu*, quotative particle) by most writers, but retroflexive -*ṅṅ*- in words like *oṅṅu* (LT *oṅṅu*, "one"). The distinction is made in writing, but not in speech.

5.1.2 Optionality in Representation of Phonetic Features of ST in Writing

In many cases, LT features are preserved in a word while elsewhere in the same conversation the same word is used with ST phonetic features. The following discussion concentrates on this optionality in representation of ST in writing. This optionality is presented here as the basic component of the system of spoken language use in literature.

The idea of the optionality of some linguistic rules in Tamil has received limited attention among Tamil scholars. Schiffman (Shapiro and Schiffman 1980, p. 165) criticizes Shanmugam Pillai for relying on Bloomfieldian structuralist theory in his treatment of phonology of spoken Tamil. This reliance enables Pillai to provide systematic descriptions and rules of spoken Tamil but prevents him from showing the optionality of these rules. While Shanmugam Pillai's article (Shanmugam Pillai 1960) concentrates on actual speech, our focus here lies elsewhere.

In representing spoken discourse in literature, the optionality of use of ST phonetic features is considerably greater. This aspect was entirely omitted by another scholar of Tamil diglossia, Deiva Sundaram. In his *Tamil Diglossia* (1981), he presents descriptive rules of phonetic changes from literary to spoken Tamil. In part of his work, Deiva Sundaram pays explicit attention to spoken language use in writing. His analysis of one short story from Jeyakandan (Ibid., pp. 54-63) observes the *errors* that the author has made in his rendering of spoken Tamil. Deiva Sundaram calculated that Jeyakandan "has used 30.6% words in the conversation improperly" and thus the writer "has failed to understand the system of the spoken variety" (Ibid., p. 57).

Deiva Sundaram gives a thorough description of what he sees as *errors* – all instances where LT forms are used in conversation, e.g. the use of LT adverbial markers *-āy* instead of the corresponding spoken Tamil form *-ā*, words ending in consonants or unrealized reductions of consonant clusters. He further criticizes Jeyakandan, one of the most linguistically conscious writers, for

inconsistency and uncertainty in the use of spoken Tamil.

Deiva Sundaram's categorical judgement of what is *right* and what is *wrong* in the author's language does not correspond to our observation of how ST behaves in writing.

To give an example, considering the phonetic representation of the word *kiḷavi* "old woman" as it appears in the first story of BS's collection *paḷuppu nira-pukaippaṭam*, we can see the word represented in various forms. In narration the word appears invariably in its literary form, *kiḷavi*. In dialogue we can find four different forms: *kiḷavi* – *kiḷavi* – *keḷavi* – *keḷavi*, gradually developing from LT towards more colloquial pronunciation. These forms seem to be distributed completely arbitrarily throughout the text. In similar situations the same character uses any of them without any obvious preference.

We can try to trace some regularity or intention in the use of these forms: the less careful or more colloquial representations appear towards the end of the story, while at the beginning the literary form tends to be used. In a story about a grandmother who takes too long to die we may consider this a part of literary intention – we might take the development towards the "low variety" as a result of irritability and impatience with the old woman among the relatives who take care of her. The word appears in the text so many times that we might as well think that the writer uses the literary form first and only later descends to the colloquial, when no one can mistake its meaning. Or, we may think that the author wanted to avoid using the same form of the word again and again and decided to diversify the monotonous repetitions by changing its appearance.

In one sense, *kiḷavi* and *kiḷavi* might even both be just two graphic representations of the same. In most spoken varieties of Tamil, including the standard spoken language, *ḷ* has merged with *ḷ*. What appears to be a real phonetic difference might as well just be a difference in spelling of what is phonetically the same.

In other cases, the opposite can happen – it is possible to apply alternative readings to one form present in the text. The reader has the freedom to read the

word கிழவி as 'kiḷavi', 'kiḷavi', 'keḷavi' or 'keḷavi' for himself at the right place, depending on his judgment of the surrounding conditions. He may decide for himself where the right place to convert to the colloquial is and where he should follow the author's intention to express a more elevated discourse and keep the pronunciation closer to the literary form.

I find it nearly impossible to judge all the nuances to determine why exactly HERE the word looks as it does. Despite this, I would not jump to the conclusion that the distribution of individual phonetic features is completely arbitrary, or that it is an *error* to use, or not use, a particular phonetic trait of ST in writing. An individual phonetic change may or may not appear in the text – depending on the context, on how much colloquial flavour is already in the statement as a whole, on the degree of colloquiality the author wants to confer on his text, and on possible effects on understanding. Units bigger than individual phonemes, individual words, or sets of words are taken into consideration. The resulting form is then a mixture of combined expressed and unexpressed phonetic changes which take place in the speech.

As far as the statement as a whole "feels like" a spoken statement, the writer has certain freedom to distribute individual phonetic features. He has to find his own balance between what is said and what can be written. What appears as chaotic mixture of spoken and written language is in fact quite balanced system in which the two varieties, LT and ST, coexist.

5.2 Morphology of ST in Writing – Morphological Markers

In terms of morphology, if the writer wants to create an atmosphere of a spoken discourse, he cannot substitute the two varieties, the spoken and the literary language, as freely as in phonology. If he does so, he loses the feeling of the spoken much easier than when only individual phonetic features are kept closer to the written norm. BS can write *kiḷavi pōyiruccu pōlrukku* ("it seems that the old lady had died"), using *ḷ* not commonly used in spoken Tamil, and the statement still seems to represent speech adequately. If he were to write *keḷavi pōyiṭṭatā pōlrukkiṛatu*, using phonetics of spoken Tamil but morphology belonging more to the written register, the sentence would be hybridized, belonging neither to ST nor LT. Although morphological changes are largely underlined by phonetic shifts, where morphology is concerned, the written text does not allow the almost automatic transfer in between the varieties.

For this reason, some morphological categories are highly distinctive when defining varieties of Tamil. The morphological features, which are not easily interchangeable with other varieties (unlike the phonetic features) and which at the same time are easily and clearly definable (unlike the syntactic features) are most suited to serve as *markers* of distinctive varieties. For us, the function of these markers is to *identify* distinctive varieties, not to *define* them. By choosing this approach, we do not confuse what is most different in each variety with what is most characteristic and defining.

The following discussion is in no way trying to present an overall survey of morphology of spoken Tamil.³⁹ It is focused on a limited number of morphological categories with a rather clear and easily observable variability within the

³⁹ Several good handbooks are now available for spoken Tamil, including e.g. Schiffman 1999, Asher & Annamalai 2002 or Sethupathy & Nagapattinam 2002.

registers of Tamil.⁴⁰ I chose the category of personal pronouns and the category of verbs (finite verbs PNG and auxiliary verbs) for this purpose.

All examples are taken from BS's first story of the collection *paḷuppu nira-pukaippaṭam* ("The Yellowed Photograph", Pāskar Cakti 2002, pp. 9-17) and belong to the register of unmarked spoken Tamil. They represent the neutral base of contemporary spoken language, to which dialectal markers may be referred to for identification.

5.2.1 The Present Tense morphemes

Of the three verbal tenses, the present tense morphemes best show dialectal variability. While the future tense morphemes *-pp-* and *-v-* for strong and weak verbs respectively are rather homogenous in their representation throughout the repertoire of Tamil, the diverse past tense morphemes for strong (*-tt-*, *-cc-*, *-ṭṭ-*, *-nt-*) and weak verbs (*-t-*, *-ṭ-*, *-ṭṭ-*, *-nt-*, *-ñṭ-*, *-ṇṇ-*, *-ṇ-*) vary more according to the class to which the particular verbs belong than according to the register of Tamil they represent. On the contrary, the present tense morphemes are often markers of dialectal/varietal affiliation.

BS present tense morphemes, corresponding to ST

	Strong verbs		Weak verbs	
All PNG	<i>-kk(i)ṭ-</i> / <i>-kkuṭ-</i>	<i>kēkkurēṇ</i> ("I ask")	<i>-ṭ-</i>	<i>ōṭṭrāṇ</i> ("he runs")
3rd person sg. neutr.	<i>-kk-</i>	<i>kēkkutu</i> ("it asks")	Not expressed	<i>allāṭutu</i> ("it struggles")

⁴⁰ The presented morphological markers are governed by basic phonological rules of ST and their representation in writing, as explained above in section 5.1.

5.2.2 PNG Endings

The combined person-number-gender (PNG) category of finite verbs together with corresponding personal pronouns belongs to distinguishable markers in all its forms, but it is clearly variable particularly in the second and third person plural. This is partly because of hard distinction, especially in writing, of vocal quality changes in the first person and the second person singular. The third person masculine and feminine singular is rather homogenous in most varieties.

In verbal morphology we can also see the contextual variation in certain phonological environments where vowels are connected to the PNG forms as part of interrogative or emphatic statements.

BS – ST verbal morphology – PNG

1st sg.	-aṅ -ēṅ	pāṭṭaṅ paṅrēṅ	"I saw / I do"
2nd sg.	-a -ē -i[-y-V]	paṅra kattuṛē cāṭṭiyā?	"you do / you shout" "did you eat?"
3rd sg. m	-āṅ	ōṭṭrāṅ	"he runs"
f	-ā -ā[-V]	cērntuṭṭā vantuṭṭālā	"she joined" "did she come"
honorific	-ār[u]	kaṣṭamṇuṭṭār vaivāru	"he had troubles" "he will scold"
1st pl.	-am - ōm	ceyvam coṅṅōm	"we will do / we said"
2nd pl.	-īṅka -īṅka[-V]	māṭṭirukkīṅka pāṭṭīṅkaḷā	"you will transfer" "did you see?"
3rd pl.	-āṅka	eṭṭutuṭṭāṅka	"they took"

A special category in verbal morphology is represented by the 3rd sg. neuter, which is widely used in spoken Tamil (see chapter 5.3.4) and has somewhat specific formation:

BS – ST 3rd neuter

	Tense marker	Personal ending			
Present weak	—	- <i>utu</i>	<i>allāṭutu</i>	"it struggles"	
strong	- <i>kk-</i>	- <i>utu</i>	<i>kēkkutu</i>	"it asks"	
Future weak	—	- <i>um</i>	<i>muṭiñcurum</i>	"it will finish"	
strong	- <i>kk-</i>	- <i>um</i>	<i>palakkumā?</i>	"will it succeed?"	
Past	- <i>n-</i>	—	-(<i>u</i>) <i>ccu</i>	<i>colluccu</i>	"it said"
other	-past tense marker-	-(<i>u</i>) <i>tu/</i> -(<i>u</i>) <i>ccu</i>	<i>uṭaccutu</i> <i>naṭantuccu</i>	"it broke" "it happened"	

5.2.3 Auxiliaries *koḷ*, *viṭu*, and *iru*

Of the three most common auxiliary verbs *koḷ* (reflexive), *viṭu* (completive), and *iru* (perfective), it is mainly the past stem of *koḷ* which carries dialectal affiliation, together with the widely used 3rd sg. neuter forms of *viṭu* and *iru*.

BS – ST Auxiliaries *koḷ*, *viṭu* and *iru* corresponding to ST

	LT <i>koḷ</i> ST <i>kku</i>	LT <i>viṭu</i> ST (i)ṭulru	LT <i>iru</i> ST (i)ru
Past	<i>niṇaiccukkittēyiruntēṇ</i> "I was thinking"	<i>tolaiccutṭār</i> "he lost"	
3rd sg. neutr. past pres fut		<i>vayacāyiruccu</i> "it got old" <i>muṭiñcurum</i> "it will finish"	<i>vantirukku</i> "it has come"

5.3 Syntax of ST in Writing

When the writer represents speech, he does not do that only through the phonological and morphological shift in the spoken language. Although the syntax of spoken Tamil is considered to be less distant from the literary norm than the two other language levels (i.e., phonetics and morphology), it is still possible to find its characterizing features. Attention is given here to some of the syntactic features which are typical for speech and do appear also in its written representation.

Paradigms typical for speech, such as unfinished statements, mixed word order, uncertainty statements, or greater variation in the subject-predicate relation, all stem from one single assumption – the oral and the written language behave differently in many ways. While the written language is the more coherent, complete, certain, and codified one, the actual speech is far more incoherent, incomplete, uncertain, and variable. These differing syntactic features can be captured only to a very limited extent in the medium of writing.

5.3.1 Unfinished Statements

Unfinished statements are often part of spoken discourse. The missing part can be guessed from the context, it is based on what was said before. In these cases, a nonfinite verb form may appear at the end of a sentence and the final finite verb is absent:

iva mātiriyā? pāru nāttam eṭuttu-p pōyi.

"Someone like her? Look how she started to smell." (14)

The full statement would require a finite verb to be added, e.g. *irukku*, with resulting *pōyirukku*, a present perfect form of 3rd neuter sg. used with 3rd feminine sg. subject. While nominal clauses with optionally deleted verb *iru* ("to be") are common in modern LT, these clauses are consisting of nominal subject and nominal predicate, not of non-finite verb forms like here.

Sometimes, the unfinished statement is followed by an external sign of "beware, something is missing here", the three dots:

colli viṭuravuṅka koṅcam nelamaya nallā-p pāttu-c colliviṭāma...

"If only the announcers observed the state a little better before announcing..." (14)

This type of unfinished statement, with final negative verb in the form of infinitive + *āmal*, is not uncommon in speech. It implies the wish for something not to happen, or a wish for the contrary of what has already happened. Here, the finite verb is not missing as such, the meaning of the sentence is complete even without the finite verb.⁴¹

5.3.2 Mixed Word Order

Mixed word order is used in speech to emphasize one part of a statement or to attract the attention of the listener. In the following example, the object is preceded by a finite verb, with *pāru*, the single imperative "look", seeking for attention, intertwined between them. This is a common technique used when narrating a story. In BS's text, it is used by a grandfather who is telling a story

⁴¹ If we wanted to add the finite verb here, the resulting form could be e.g. *colli viṭuravuṅka koṅcam nelamaya nallā-p pāttu-c colliviṭāma pōṅāṅka*. ("The announcers went without announcing the state, observing it a little better").

about forest animals to his granddaughter:

...(cīṅkam)... cāṭṭruvēṅṅ natum, anta kāṭṭaruntu anta yāṅaika
ellām eṭuttuccu pāru oṭṭam...

"...(the lion)... as soon as he said 'I'll eat you up!', all those
elephants look how they ran away from the jungle" (74)

The regular, unemphasized word order would place *pāru*, "look", if at all, at the beginning or at the end of the statement, and the accusative object before the finite verb, preserving the common Tamil subject-object-predicate structure (*anta yāṅaika ellām oṭṭam eṭuttuccu*).

5.3.3 Uncertainty Statements

Uncertainty statements are also a domain of speech, and spoken Tamil offers different ways to express the uncertainty or hope of something to happen. Syntactic uncertainty can be expressed by a reduplicative construction consisting of a verb in the concessive followed by the same verb with the modal *-lām*. This construction is used for a higher degree of uncertainty, when the chances of something happening are less than even. The degree of certainty underlying this form could be said to be approximately 40% (Schiffman 1999, p.169). When chances are estimated as more than even, a similar construction with the reduplicated verb in the future tense is used:

oru vēlai muṭiñcālum muṭiñcurum

"Hopefully it will finish." (13)

5.3.4 Subject-predicate relation

While in LT, the subject is most often in agreement with the predicate, ST shows more varieties in the subject-predicate relation. In BS, the most evident shift in this respect is the preference of singular neuter forms in the 3rd person above the number-gender specified verb endings. These forms are attached to different subjects. Another form of subject-predicate variation is the use of nominal predicate.

5.3.4a Neuter Verb Endings

Spoken Tamil does not express plural in verbal neuter forms, even when plural is expressed in the noun. Thus sg. neuter is used with both sg. and pl. neutral nouns:

sg.: *vayacāyiruccu*
"(she) got old" (9)

pl.: *yāṇaika ellām (ōṭṭam) eṭuttuccu*
"all elephants ran". (74)

Sg. neuter is often preferably used with 3rd person feminine nouns, both plural and singular. In this case, this form may suggest intimacy or closeness:

sg.: *periyammā māttippōṭa-c colluccu*
"the aunt said to change (it)" (13)

pl.: *ellā pompaḷaikaḷum ukkāntāccu*
"all women sat down". (9)

Sg. neuter is also used in dative constructions:

pericukaḷukkē pōraṭiccu-p pōccuṭōy
"hey, the elders got bored" (15)

and with unexpressed subjects:

m ... pāttāccu evaṇṭā poṭṭiyai uṭaccutuṇṇu
"hmmm...(missing subject: "we" or "I") have
seen who broke open the box" (15)

5.3.4b Nominal Predicate

Predicate in ST often also becomes nominal. Verbal nouns in the form of predicates can be used in the imperative meaning ("why don't you..."):

yammōv anta īyai viratṭaratutāṇē
"lady (D), why don't you chase that fly away?" (10)

Verbal nouns also form rhetorical questions:

nāma eṇṇa paṇṇatu?
"what are we to do?" (11)

As a substitute, the infinitive can be used instead of a verbal noun to form a rhetorical question:

appa vēreṇṇā ceyya?
"then what(D) else (shall we) do?" (11)

The infinitive form is accepted in both LT and CT, although the prototypical formal variety would be subject-predicate agreement:

nāḥ eḥḥa ceyvēḥ?

"what will I do?"

5.4 Dialectal Features in BS's ST

BS's spoken language is not overly dialectal. Still, the characters of his stories sometimes disclose a very small amount of local flavour in their words. One of these dialectal features, used commonly in the texts, are the on-glides, *y-* inserted before the initial *a-*, in some forms of address:

yappā ("dad", "man", ST *appā*),
yaṇṇē! ("older brother", "friend", ST *aṇṇā*, *aṇṇē*),
yammō ("mother", "lady", ST *ammā*).

At one point, BS explicitly mentions the use of this not so common form:

*"yammōv, anta īyai virattarātutāṇē. collappaṭṭa 'yammō'
tanatu puṭavai-t talaippāl īyai viratti kiḷaviyiṇ kaṇ ṓraṅkaḷai-t tuṭaittāl.*

"lady (*yammō*), why don't you chase that fly away? The mentioned *yammō*, with the end of her sari, chased the fly away and wiped the old woman's eye corners. (10)

The explicit mention of this dialectal form of address reveals the author's intention to add "local colouring" to his text.

Subtle dialectal features are preserved in the emphatic *tāṇ* changed to *tēṇ* or the prolongation of the interrogative *eṇṇa* ("what") to *eṇṇā*. In rare cases, the substandard features are more pronounced. The pronoun *etāvatu* ("whatever") turns often to the non-standard *etāccu* in different places in the text.

In an argument between Veni and her husband, both use dialectal forms in their speech. They are at home and their "conversation" is very informal (dialectal forms underlined>):

"*āmā. katturēn. kavarmēṇṭu uttiyōkamṇukaṭṭi veccu ippaṭi-t taṇṇikki eṇṇaiya cīraliya viṭṭuttākaḷē*" *eṇṇāḷ taṇ ūr-p pakkam kaikāṭṭi. "āmaṭi... paṭṭikkāḷḷa kāpikkaṭai veccirukka viṭṭula porantavaḷukku, kavarmēṇṭ vēlai tuccamā-t teriyutō unḱūrlayē evaṇāccum vaṭai cūṭura carakku māstarā-p pāttu-k kaṭṭīrukka vēṇṭiyatutāṇa?"*

"Yes. I am shouting. They have married me off, saying (he has) a government position, (not knowing that) they left me (here) to suffer like this for water," she said and pointed towards her hometown. "Yes dear... to someone who was born in the house of the owner of a coffee shop in a remote village government job may seem nothing. They should have given you to some expert in the vadais frying business in that village of yours!" (104)

Although quite limited in number, these morphological markers are enough to recognize their dialogue as dialectal:

- The double accusative of the personal pronoun "me" *eṇṇaiya* (LT *eṇṇai*, ST *eṇṇe*).
- 3rd pl. suffix *-āka(!)* in *viṭṭuttākaḷē* ("they have left", emphatic) for the ST *viṭṭuttāṅkaḷē*.
- the concessive *evaṇāccum* for the standard spoken *evaṇālum* ("whoever").

BS is not a "dialectal writer". Most of the conversational parts of his stories are renderings of spoken Tamil as used by middle-class characters without clear dialectal background. BS does not focus on regional or social writing. In spite of that, the above analysis shows that it is still possible to find features of local substandard varieties in his text. Some of them might have been used intentionally – certainly those explicitly mentioned. Some were used appropriately in private situations of closeness, such as intimate quarrels. There are also subtle dialectal features that appear throughout the text with no obvious connotation.

BS and his characters recruit from the central Tamil region. They represent the Tamil middle-class, which is supposedly the stronghold of standard spoken Tamil users. Their speech is presumably as close to the unmarked spoken Tamil speech as it could be. Still, their speech is slightly dialectal. The standard spoken Tamil, the lingua franca of Tamil speakers of all dialects, is in its pure, regionally and socially unmarked form, still more of an abstract model than a real, consistently used norm.

6. The Brahmin Dialect – Varying Degree of Dialectal Markedness

6.0 Introduction

The Brahmin dialect occupies a significant position in Tamil literature. Brahmins were traditionally literates and intellectuals and even today, a substantial share of Tamil writers are of Brahmin background. At the time of formation of modern Tamil prosaic literature (see chapter 2.3), Brahmin voice was well pronounced. Although some of the Brahmin writers detached themselves from their Brahmin identity (Subramaniya Bharati), and others chose not to disclose their dialect openly by choosing LT to accommodate the speech of their characters (A. Madhaviah, Kalki Krishnamurti), the Brahmin community was well in the centre of literary attention, ever since the time of Beschi's sarcastic tales about Brahmin gurus and their disciples. After all, the readers of such works also largely belonged to the Brahmin community with traditionally high literacy rate.

The following chapter is an analysis of language use in the works of three more recent writers connected with Brahmin writing, each of them in a different way. The first of the analyzed writers, Jeyakandan (6.1), is not a member of the Brahmin community himself, but employs the Brahmin dialect extensively in his work. The second one, Ambai (6.2) is a female writer of Brahmin origin who rarely uses the Brahmin dialect in her writing. The third writer, Ashokamitran (6.3) is a city-based Brahmin author who employs the Brahmin dialect to share the adventures of middle-class urban Brahmins.

The texts of these three chosen authors are analyzed and then brought into comparison. The aspect emphasized most in the analysis and the following comparison is the varying degree of dialectal markedness in their "Brahmin writing".

6.1 Jeyakandan – the Brahmin Writings of a Non-Brahmin Writer

Jeyakandan started his literary career in the early fifties, forming a new generation of writers fathered by the works of Pudumaippittan. In the introduction to his collection of stories (Jeyakāntaṅ 2001, Vol.1, p.11), Jeyakandan even states that he started writing in the year of Pudumaippittan's death, in 1948, thus turning his own work into a direct continuation of Pudumaippittan's writing.

While maybe strongly inspired by his literary predecessor, Jeyakandan's work is distinctively different, shaped by his own unique life experience. Jeyakandan was born in 1934 to an agricultural Vellala family in the Northeastern part of Tamilnadu, the Cuddalore district (former South Arcot). The father abandoned the family shortly after his son was born. Consequently Jeyakandan was brought up by his mother and other relatives. At the age of twelve, he launched on a journey through different places and beliefs. He left school and home behind and went to live with his uncle, an active member of the Communist party of India.

From the Communist party follower Jeyakandan later turned to the supporter of Indian Congress and in time even to an advocate of traditional, orthodox Brahmin culture and beliefs. All of these were minority choices at times when most Tamils supported Tamil nationalists and delighted in anti-Brahmin feelings.

Jeyakandan moved around the country, lived both in Brahmin agraharams and slums of the untouchables, in villages as well as in cities all over the Tamilnadu state. In his nomadic life he ventured into lives and attitudes of many. He did not carry his own tribe around, but accepted and sympathized with the beliefs of others. He developed a multi-dimensional personality, which is strongly expressed in the language of his writing.

Jeyakandan's writing is very rich in the use of speech styles and dialects. Most writers who introduce dialects to their novels or stories bring in a language

which is close to them and their own community. Jeyakandan, not belonging fully to any community, tells a story from the point of view of a Brahmin, an untouchable, a businessman – all in their respective languages.

In the following analysis, I will focus on the use of Brahmin dialect in some of the many Jeyakandan's stories. Although Jeyakandan himself is not Brahmin by birth, the Brahmin community gets an important share of attention both in his work and life. In the present discussion, three different stories from Jeyakandan's collection *Jeyakāntaṅ cīrukataikaḷ* (Jeyakāntaṅ 2001), where Brahmin speech is represented extensively, are analyzed and brought into comparison.

The first story, *aṅpukku naṅṅi* ("Thanks for Love") is set in a Brahmin middle-class urban setting and shows the use of the Brahmin dialect among quite socially advanced, modern members of the community. The second one, *nāṅ eṅṅa ceyyaṅṅum colluṅṅō* ("Tell me what I shall do") gives voice to a more traditional Brahmin woman, strongly tied to the long established beliefs and norms, including those that concern language use. The third one, *lav paṅṅuṅṅō sār* ("Do love, sir"), narrated in first person by a Brahmin chef in a restaurant, reveals the language stereotypes evolving around the Palakkad community of Aiyar Brahmins.

6.1.1 The Urban Brahmins

The main protagonists of the story *aṅpukku naṅṅi* ("Thanks for Love", Vol. 2, pp. 170–175) are an office clerk, his young wife, and their neighbour – a student. The story takes place in an urban environment, in the city of Chennai. The story opens at a bus stop. The office clerk watches the student as he moves out of his apartment. Ramani Aiyar, the clerk, was personally responsible for the student's departure, as he suspected him of having an affair with his wife. As he talks to him, he finds out that he was probably wrong. From joy he turns to regret for what he did to this young man.

The clerk *Ramaṇi Aiyar*, as already his name indicates, is a Brahmin of the Aiyar caste. He approaches the student at the bus stop in a Brahmin dialect.⁴² The man's reply also carries the marked features of Brahmin speech⁴³ and later the wife, as one would expect, also addresses her husband in the same dialect.⁴⁴

The Brahmin dialect in this story is revealed by few lexical and, more strongly, by morphological features. First of all, the name of the protagonist shows that he is a Brahmin. Otherwise lexically, the choice of only a few words seems to be representing Brahmins – e.g., the student refers to his friend as *eṇ ciṇēkitaṇ* (172), preferring the Sanskrit word over the Tamil equivalent. Other than that, the characters do not always use the marked Brahmin words – Aiyar's wife is *eṇ 'ōyp'* ("my wife", 174), *vīṭu* ("house") doesn't change to Brahmin *āttu*,⁴⁵ morning is the unmarked *kālai*, not the Brahmin *kārttāl*.⁴⁶

The morphological features are more distinguishable as Brahmin, especially in the category of person-number-gender and formation of some commonly used auxiliary verbs.

In the PNG category, the distinctive 2nd pers. plural ends in the Brahmin – *ē*, instead of the standard spoken – *īnka*:

kāli paṇṇiṭṭēlā – "did you vacate", p.170;

kēkkaṛēlē – "you are asking" – emph., p. 171;

vantuṭṭē! – "you came", p.173.

⁴² *eṇ? anta iṭattaik kāli paṇṇiṭṭēlā?* "Why? Are you vacating that place?" (170)

⁴³ *eṇ pollāta viti, nāṇ poranta nēramṇu oṇṇu irukku pāruṅkō* "Look, it (the cause) is my unfortunate fate, the time when I was born" (170)

⁴⁴ *eṇṇa iṇṇikki cīkkiram vantuttē!* "Why did you come early today?" (173)

⁴⁵ *patiṇēlām nempar vīṭilē* -- "in house number seventeen", p.170.

⁴⁶ *iṇṇikki-k kālaiyilē*, "this morning", p. 170.

3rd person plural ending is –ā for both verbs and verbal nouns (while standard spoken has –āṅka in verbs, –aṅka in verbal nouns):

ceyyaṅavā ("those that are doing", verbal noun),
irukkā ("they are", p. 172).

The 3rd neutral sg. past of the completive *viṭu* is represented in the Brahmin form -*ṭuttu* in *vantuṭuttu* ("it came", p. 172), although the ST form -*ṭṭutu* as in *eriṅjuṭṭutu*, ("it burned", p. 170), is present at another instance.

The plural imperative ends in –*ṅkō* (ST –*ṅka*) as in *pāruṅkō* ("look", p. 170, 174), although the landlord Sundaralingam once uses the ST form *pōṅka*:

cari sār, nīṅka pōṅka... nāṅ pārttukkaṅ ...
"ok, sir, go ... I will take care of it". (174)

The past stem of the reflexive *kiṭu* is without exception changed to *iṅṭu* (*uṅṭu*), where unmarked spoken has (*k*)*iṭṭu*.

vēlai pāttuṅṭu cāppiṭalām
"after we finish work, we can eat" (171),

kūppiṭṭuṅṭē irukkāṅ
"he keeps calling" (172),

laiṭṭai-p pōṭṭuṅṭu ...
"switching on the light..." (173)

On the basis of all these features, it is possible to qualify the characters of the story as Brahmins talking in the Brahmin dialect. The next question is why

are they Brahmins. Why does a non-Brahmin author choose a dialect that is not his own to write a story which could happen to any clerk, any wife, or any student, not just to Brahmins? The answer has most likely to do with the intended audience. In the 1960s, when most of Jeyakandan's Brahmin-based stories were written, most readers of popular Tamil magazines that published Jeyakandan's stories were still Brahmin. By writing about and for the Brahmin middle class, Jeyakandan was reaching the Tamil community in general.

Although recognizable as belonging to the Brahmin dialect, the forms which the characters use are not always distinctively Brahmin. Spoken Tamil without dialectal traits is equally employed in many cases – part of the lexicon and morphology belong fully to unmarked spoken Tamil.

6.1.2 The Voice of a Traditional Brahmin Woman

A different language is applied in *nāṇ eṇṇa ceyyaṭṭum colluṅkō* ("Tell me what shall I do", Vol.2, pp. 502–514). This story is told by a woman who never says what her social background is. But already the title (*colluṅkō*) and the first few lines, both in the use of linguistic forms and their semantic content, openly show that she is a Brahmin woman from a traditional family (distinctive Brahmin forms underlined):

*nāṛpatu varuṣam āccu... intāttukku māṭṭu-p poṇṇā vantu... kai neraiya
 oru kūṭai-c coppai vaccuṇṭu... appā tūkkiṇṭu vantu viṭṭālē... appō ammā, –
 avartāṇ eṅka māmiyār iruntār... māmiyārukku māmiyārā ammāvukku
 ammāvā... petta tāykkku makaḷāyiruntatu aṅcu varuṣa kālantāṇē!... micca
 kālattukkum māmiyārukku... māṭṭu-p poṇṭāṇē... kūṭattulē eṇṇai irakki
 viṭṭuṭṭu mēl tuṇṭālē mukattai mūṭiṇṭu appā eṇṇattukku alutārṇu ippavum
nēkku-p puriyalai...*

"It's been forty years... since I came to this house as a daughter-in-law... hands filled with a toy-container... dad brought me in his arms... then mom – that was my mother-in-law, indeed... a mother-in-law for mother-in-law things and a mother for motherly stuff... to my birth-mother, I was a daughter just for five years.... for the remaining time, to my mother-in-law... a daughter-in-law... dad put me down in the main hall, covered his face with the towel he wore over the shoulder... why was he crying? I don't understand that to this day." (502)

The whole story is a rushing stream of thoughts and memories of a woman in her forties who got married at the age of five. She has a profound respect for her husband, and accepts all his views. As if she had not developed a personality of her own, she is dispersed in a small private world of her community, a characteristic conveyed by her dialect.

The lexical forms in this story consist more often of "marked Brahmin" forms than in the previous one – *vītu* (house) changes to *āttu*⁴⁷ and with it all its inhabitants – first of all the Brahmin *māṭṭu-p poṇṇu*, daughter in law (502) and her *āttukkārar* (502,503), husband. She is a *cakatarmiṇi* (503) – "co-dharmic" wife to him. But there is still room for the overall accepted *appā* (502), not only for the Brahmin father *tōppaṇ* (513).

Other words descending from the unmarked spoken language include the adverbial "good" – *naṇṇā* (ST *nallā*), *pōtum* changed to *pōrum* (513) and its negative *pōrātu* (503), or some of the lesser used words such as *aliccāṭṭiyam* ("stubborn behavior", "obstinacy", LT *muraṇṭu*, *piṭivātam*, p. 502) or *catru*, the Sanskrit word for "enemy" (p. 510).

Occasionally, grammatical changes occur, such as double causative – *uṭkārtti vaccuṇṭu* ("having placed to sit", p. 503), but most of the represented dialectal features are morphologic or morpho-phonemic.

⁴⁷ *intāttukku* (502), *intāttulē* (503), although *inta vīttukku* (510).

Among these, the dative of personal pronoun "me" is the dialectal *nēkku* (502, 503), as opposed to the standard *eṇakku*. The temporal LT *pōtu*, "when" is realized as *-cca* in the present tense:

varaccatāṇē – "exactly when he comes",
kēkkaṛaccē – "when he asks" – emph.,
colṛaccē – "when he says" – emph. (p.502),

although the ST *-ppa* forms are also occasionally employed.⁴⁸

The 3rd sg. neuter preserves the *-r-* morpheme in the present tense,⁴⁹ unlike the standard spoken, and the 3rd person plural is realized with the *-ā/* morpheme in verbs as well as in verbal nouns and pronouns.⁵⁰

Same as in the previous story, the completive *viṭu* in 3rd neuter past turns into *-(u)ṭuttu*,⁵¹ the reflexive auxiliary *kiṭṭu* turns to *-iṇṭu*⁵² and the plural imperative ends in *-ṛkō*.⁵³

Corresponding to the content, marked Brahmin forms are more common in this story than in *aṇpukku naṇṇi* (6.1.1). Dialect is used in the stereotypical way here – it serves for the characterization of the uneducated, traditional, home-based woman, this time Brahmin.

⁴⁸ *pākkaṛappavē* – "when I see" – emph. (507), *irukkaṛappa* – "when it is" (508).

⁴⁹ *tōṇṇatu* (ST *tōṇutu*, "it seems", p.502).

⁵⁰ *vantu viṭṭāḷē* – "they left" – emph. (502), *colṛā* – "they say" (503), *paṭṭicavāḷ* – "those who studied", *ceṇjavāḷ* – "those who did" (503), *avāḷellām* – "all of them" (502).

⁵¹ *vantuṭuttē* – "it came" – emph. (502), *vantuṭuttu* – "it came" (503).

⁵² *vaccuṇṭu* "having placed", *tūkkiṇṭu* "having lifted", *mūṭiṇṭu* – "having closed", *maṇuṣaṇai-k kaṭṭiṇṭu* – "marrying a man"(502).

⁵³ *colluṛkō* – "say" (502).

6.1.3 The Palakkad Aiyar Stereotypes

The third J's story from Brahmin circles, *lav paṇṇurīkō sār* ("Do love, sir", Vol. 1, pp. 784–793) is also narrated by one person, a rich chef in a hotel restaurant talking to a guest. The chef speaks in one breath from the beginning to the end, to the guest, to the waiter boy, to his nephew and to himself, and reveals part of his sad life story. The words he uses, in their dialectal affiliation, reveal more about his background than their actual content. The story starts as follows:

ōy... miṣṭar! uṅkaḷaittāṇ, iṅkē vāṅkō sār ...

"Oh, mister! You indeed, come here, sir ..." (784)

This opening line of the story discloses the speaker's association not only with the Brahmin community (*vāṅkō*), but also with one of its particular subcastes. The first short word of the story, *ōy*, is not just an exclamation for a Tamil reader.

It is a strong marker of speech of Palakkad Aiyars, Tamil Brahmins of the Aiyar caste from the Palakkad district in Kerala. The dialect of these Aiyars (also called Kerala Aiyars) is influenced by the Malayalam language and is easily recognizable for Tamils. A stereotype holds that a Palakkad Aiyar can be easily identified the moment he starts speaking, because he prefixes most sentences with an 'Oh...':

No matter if a Palakkad Aiyar prefixes his speech with this utterance or not, it has become an accepted and well known marker of this community speech and as such entered literature and Tamil cinema. A naive cook from Palakkad⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Tamil Aiyars, who moved to Kerala mostly during Muslim invasions to India, were initially not allowed to perform services in temples in Palakkad and worked instead often as cooks or traditional singers.

with a funny speech – that is the Palakkad Aiyar stereotype. The most popular among these stereotyped, laughable caricatures of Palakkad Aiyars is the role of the admired actor Kamal Hasan in the popular comedy *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*,⁵⁵ directed in 1990 by Sangeetam Srinivasa Rao.

Palakkad Aiyar Tamil is modified to a large extent by the interaction with Malayalam. Malayalam adds to the pronunciation a presumable "nasal twang", shortens some vowels and lengthens others, which all contribute to this language being considered soft and musical.⁵⁶

Where standard Tamil has a nasal followed by a stop, Palakkad Aiyar Brahmin dialect doubles the nasal.⁵⁷ It emphasizes the final vowels in some forms of address,⁵⁸ while deleting initial stops of others⁵⁹ and shortening the final vowels in some verbal forms.⁶⁰

Malayalam has influenced the Palakkad Aiyar Tamil more than by subtle changes in pronunciation. On the lexical and morphological level, it is expressions like *paṇi eḍukkaṇum* (ST *vēlai ceyyaṇum*, "we have to work") or *maṇacilē āccā?* (ST *puriyitā?*, "did you understand?", p. 786) that belong more to Malayalam than to Tamil register.

⁵⁵ The title of the movie *maikkēl mataṇa kāma rājaṇ* are names of quadruplets who were brought up in different surroundings. They all look the same, but are recognizable by their speech style – the first one has a hoarse voice, the second speaks with an English accent, the third one speaks Palakkad Aiyar Tamil and the fourth one uses Madras dialect.

⁵⁶ <http://www.keralaAiyars.com/lingua.html>

⁵⁷ *aṇṇaṇṇa pōṭā...* – "go to that side man" (Northern D *antāṇṇa*, ST *anta pakkam*, p.784).

⁵⁸ *eṇṇa sārē* – "what, sir?" (787).

⁵⁹ *ampi, āttukkārikku-p puṭavai ava kēṭṭā nī vāṅki-t taratu?* (ST *tampi*) – "boy, would you buy a saree for your wife if she asked for it?" (786).

⁶⁰ *ceyvan* – "he will do" (784), *iruppan* – "he will be" (785).

Apart from distinctive features, confirming the dialect's close contact with Malayalam language, Palakkad Aiyar Tamil preserves the features and lexicon shared throughout the Brahmin dialect. Father is *tōppaṇār* (785), he lives in *āttu* ("house", 786) with his is *āttukkāri* ("wife", 784), and they want to lead a *naṇṇā* ("good", 784) life. The 2nd person plural typically ends in *-ē*, the 3rd person plural in *-ā*, the imperative ends in the distinctive Brahmin *-nikō*, and reflexive auxiliary is expressed as *-iṇṭu*.

More is common than different from the shared Brahmin dialectal forms. Nevertheless, one "oh..." at the beginning of an utterance is enough to attribute to the character a whole world of presumptions and stereotypes. In J's story, the "funny speech of a Palakkad Aiyar" turns out not to be so funny at the end. The talkative man's light monologue turns to a confession of a father who lost his only daughter because of his inability to surpass the limits of his traditional worldview. The strong dialectal speech is again used to portray a traditional character locked in the small world of beliefs and prejudices.

6.2 Ambai – the Non-Brahmin Writings of a Brahmin Writer

C.S. Lakshmi (*1944) writes fiction in Tamil under her nom de plume Ambai and non-fictional essays and articles in English under her civil name C.S. Lakshmi. As Ambai, she has so far been steadily contributing to the literary world with one short story collection per decade, starting in the late seventies. As C.S. Lakshmi, she is known as a researcher in Women's Studies and author of a critical study focused on Tamil women writers *The Face Behind the Mask – Women in Tamil Literature*, published in 1984. She is also a founder and director of SPARROW (Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women), a Mumbai based organization which builds archives of the unrecorded history and lives of Indian women.

6.2.1 Writing in Tamil as a Dialectal Choice

Ambai spent a considerable part of her life outside of Tamilnadu – in Bangalore, Delhi or currently Mumbai, surrounded by English, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, and other Indian languages. In spite of these surroundings, she remains attached to her mother tongue and never writes her fiction in English or any other language. She credits her self-taught grandmother from Coimbatore, mother singing Tamil songs to her, and the time spent reading Tamil magazines for developing her attachment to this language. For Ambai, writing fiction in English, as many Indian writers do, was not an option: "I find stories set in the Indian context written in English difficult to read when it comes to dialogues. Also I find that the moment you begin to write in English you begin to describe things which you would normally not do in the Indian language (...) There is a constant urge to explain and detail things to an unknown reader who cannot understand

and whose interest you have to hold."⁶¹ Despite of that, she feels that writing in Indian languages is not valued as highly as writing in English and although her work is available in translation, her opting for Tamil has resulted in a sizeable reduction in terms of audience. Which, on the other hand, gives her more freedom of expression: "When I am writing I am not particularly thinking of a reader or readers. Considering I have so few readers, these are not things I am particularly bothered about."⁶²

In a way, Ambai has chosen to write her stories in a dialect. In the context of contemporary Indian literature, Tamil is in the position of a local dialect and English stands for the nationwide standard. The use of Tamil has all the advantages and disadvantages of dialectal writing. It allows the writer to express her inner self to the close, intimate world of her dialect speakers. To those, who are more likely to identify with the author's life experience and who do not constantly seek explanations. It preserves the intimacy and ease of expression most strongly tied to one's own thinking. Unfortunately, something is lost when the writer keeps this privilege – the words will not easily reach beyond the small community to which the writer belongs.

6.2.2 The Voice of a Tamil Woman

Ambai's stories, narrated often from a female perspective, have not escaped the "feminist" label. There is a woman at a focal position in many of her stories. Often, this woman is simply *a woman* – someone not clearly defined, of uncertain age, background or other characteristics. *Mañjaḷ mīṇ* ("Yellow fish", Ampai 1995, pp. 141–143) is in its opening a description of a sea shore with a jostle of fishermen coming from a fishing expedition.

⁶¹ An Interview with Ambai by Subasree Krishnaswamy at www.womenswriting.com

⁶² Ibid.

The narration is neutral, impersonal. Someone is present, observing the whole scene while walking along the shore – the eyes turn towards the ocean,⁶³ then if the pace is hurried, these eyes can see fish caught in the nets.⁶⁴ There are boats swinging to the shore in a swan mode,⁶⁵ colours, buckets, fish – and there is an observer behind. There is also a fish gasping for water, its mouth sucking like Jalaja's.⁶⁶ Who is Jalaja? A short explanatory note comes – "Jalaja was the rushed and hasty one. She kicked and kicked and hurried her way out".⁶⁷ Then we find Jalaja in an incubator, and for the first and last time, the observer comes out from the neuter, impersonal forms – "I watched her many times, standing outside of the room".⁶⁸ Then Arun comes from a crematorium with a small urn, and a dialogue in colloquial Tamil follows:

"vāy ēṇ mūṭiyirukku?" – "eṇṇa vāy?" – "anta kuṭuvaiyōṭa vāy. atai torantuṭu." – "aṇu, atukkulla verum cāmpal." – "eṇakku-p pārkkāṇum vāyai-t torantuṭu." – "aṇu..." – "vāyai-t torantuṭu... vāy... anta vāy..."

"Why is the mouth closed?" – "What mouth?" – "The mouth of the urn. Open it." – "Anu. It contains only ashes." – "I want to see. Open it" – "Anu." – "Open its mouth. That mouth..."⁶⁹ (142)

⁶³ *pārvai kaṭal pakkamē oṭukiraṭu.*

⁶⁴ *naṭaiyai eṭṭippōṭṭāl (...) valai mīnkaḷai pārkkalām.*

⁶⁵ *mitantu varukiraṭu aṇṇam mātiri cāyntu cāyntu.*

⁶⁶ *kuvintu kuvintu tirantu nīrukku-t tavitta vāy. Jalajāviṇ vāy mātiri.*

⁶⁷ *avacarakuṭukkai Jalajā. muṭṭi muṭṭi veliyē vantu viṭṭāl.*

⁶⁸ *aṛaiyiṇ veliyē niṇṇu pala muṛai avaḷai-p pārttēṇ.*

⁶⁹ Lakshmi Holmström's translation (Holmström 2004, pp. 228-229). All turns around *vāy* here – a word for the opening in the lower part of a human face as well as for an opening of a vessel. Although the English word "mouth" can also mean the two, the English translation is inevitably pushing the language to preserve the ambivalent meaning of the original.

Then there is a cry, and an unusually straightforward information – it is this very ocean where her ashes are dispersed. The impersonal forms are back, the fish is lifted and falls back on the sand, a boy is called in Marathi: *ikkaṭa ē!* ("come here!"). Now we know it is Anu calling and trying to lift the fish. Then, in written representation of colloquial Tamil: "Could you throw this yellow fish back into the ocean?"⁷⁰ A smile, and the fish ends up back in the water, swimming away, its bright colour shining through the water for a long time, until it disappears. And that's THE END.

A poetic literary language full of strong images, rolling like a silent movie, suddenly interrupted by a colloquial voice. The literary language of the narration has the quality of being imaginative and sensitively emotional. It actively employs Tamil words over their English equivalents without sounding unnatural or traditional in an orthodox way. Ambai develops a very specific literary style. The voice of a Tamil woman that she presents is neither the formal, traditional variety, nor the strongly dialectal variety as the radical subaltern ideology would dictate.

6.2.3 The Language of Pigs and Squirrels

A similar pattern of evocative literary language interrupted by colloquial conversation is observed in *Aṇi!* ("The squirrel", Ampai 1995, pp. 131–140). There she is, a female, presumably a student, regularly coming to a remote library with 19th century collections, reading books and magazines, daydreaming and talking to a squirrel in LT – the only visitor to the library apart from her:

*vēṇṭāmē, eṇṇēṇ. atu cintāmaṇi. pālaṃmāḷ naṭattiya peṅkaḷ pattirikai.
piṇṇāl, maṅkalāka oṇpatu kaja-p puṭavaiyuṭaṇ, atu tāṇ avar.*

⁷⁰ *inta maṅjaḷ mīṇai-t tiruppi camuttirattil pōṭariyā?*

"Don't do that (don't lick that book), I told (her). That is Cindamani, a magazine for women run by Balammal. At the back, the faded (figure) in a (traditional) nine-yard sari, that's her." (132)

Their conversation is interrupted by voices of library employees, who are grounded totally outside of the world of the books, in their everyday colloquial reality:

kaṛiyāṭi iṇṇikku? vācanai varutē.

Did you bring meat today (for lunch)? Nice smell. (134)

The employees converse in colloquial Tamil, with occasional dialectal features:

allārum pōyāccu (ST *ellārum*)

"all are gone", p. 132),

marattula reṇṭuvāṭṭi ēru (ST *reṇṭu taṭavai*)

"climb twice on the tree", p. 135).

Oru kaṭṭukkatai ("pure imagination", "myth" or "concocted tale", Ampai 1995, pp.12–16) has two main protagonists – a narrator of an unspecified gender and a pig – pregnant, thus distinctively female. The pig came to *campāṣikka* (12) with the narrator, converse in a high style. Their conversation takes place in the literary language and its main topic is death. The pig insists that she has nothing to do with wisdom, as people would expect from speaking animals, resists to bring any notion of poetry to the topic and finally, when dying, refuses to complete this "fable" with the expected noble truth.

This somewhat unrealistic conversation is all carried out in LT in a rather elevated style. Although both the speech and the narration of the story belong to

the register of literary Tamil, the speech does not employ the same grammatical choices as the narration. Compare the different use of negation for conversational and narrated discourse:

iyarkaiyāṇa cāvuparri-c collamāṭṭēṇ enkirāyē?

"Are you not going to talk (literally: are you saying I will not talk) about natural death?" (15)

*āṭcēpaṇai kāṭṭakkūṭiya atikāram uḷḷa nilaiyil tāṇ illai eṇṇu **pēca**
maruttuvittatu*

"She refused to talk, with the notion that she was not in a state when she could raise objections." (14)

The literary conversational language is brought back to ST reality when the narrator recalls her encounter with the "pig hunters":

*etukku, etukkuppā aṭikkirāṅka? – etukku aṭippāṅka? cāppiṭattāṇ.
navantukittē iruṅka.*

"Why are they beating (them)? – Why do they beat them?
To eat them, of course. Keep going." (13)

Where "unreal" characters come to speak, we may expect them to use the literary discourse. Literary Tamil is an adequate tool for a conversation with a squirrel. Literary language stands also for the unreal world of philosophical (although the pig would refuse to call it so) conversations with pigs.

Literary Tamil in Ambai's writing, be it in the conversation or narrational part, carries the notion of poetry and daydreaming. A contrasting position is occupied by the down-to-earth colloquial language, the voice of the "real" world.

6.2.4 Hints of the Brahmin dialect

Ambai, although herself Brahmin by birth, does not overly express the Brahmin dialect in her writing. The colloquial language she uses is mostly spoken Tamil without dialectal affiliation. Very rarely the Brahmin dialect soaks into the unmarked forms.

Puṇar ("Again", Ampai 1995, pp. 111–130) is again a story about *a woman*, and this time also about *a man*, whose relationship results in an unexpected pregnancy. The characters converse mostly in colloquial language without any obvious marked dialectal features (distinctive dialectally unmarked ST forms underlined):

iṇṇikku nī ṣēv paṇṇikkaṇumṇu tōṇutu

"it seems that you should shave today" (113)

eṇṇa pēciṭṭiruntē cītākiṭṭa?

"what do you keep saying to Sītā?" (116)

nallāyirukku

"that's good" (122),

but once in a while, although the presence of dialectal expressions is quite minimal, these universal human beings get restricted to Brahmins through their speech (D forms underlined):

puri nannāyillaiyā? (ST *nallā*)

"Isn't the puri good?" (114)

mūccai nannā viṭaṇum

"you have to breathe properly" (130)

Piḷāṣṭik ṭappāvil parācakti mutaliyōr... ("Parvadi and Other Godly Figures in a Plastic Box", Ampai 2000, pp. 52– 59) is a story from a middle class household, this time very cosmopolitan. Very few features that characterize a Brahmin background behind the story are included, among these the form *collarē* (ST *colrē*, "you say", p. 56) or *ceytuppāṇ* ("will do for himself", p. 58). Otherwise no clearly marked forms are used, including for example the choice of *cōru* ("rice") over the traditional Brahmin *cātam*. Dialogues are also largely in unmarked colloquial. Ambai's characters are not defined as "Brahmin women" – they are, in the first place, "women", or, "Tamil women."

Ambai's choice of language is "dialectal" in the sense that she has chosen Tamil over English as a language in which to write her stories. Within Tamil, she doesn't go much further in using the dialects – most of her characters' conversations are represented in a colloquial speech which is not very strongly marked dialectally.

Brahmin dialect is not something Ambai identifies herself with, same as it is not the language of choice for *the woman* she writes about. Nevertheless, Ambai's characters are not totally devoid of their social caste background. Subtle features of Brahmin dialect are still occasionally part of their cosmopolitan discourse.

6.2.5 Dialectal versus unmarked speech

Ambai uses dialects to further specify her characters very rarely. One of the exceptions is the story *Velippātu* ("Manifestation", Ampai 1995, pp. 1–11). This story takes place in Tirunelveli, as is indicated not only by the language of the characters, but also by the explicit notion of the Tamiravaruni River of this

southern region. The local characters – mostly women – speak in the local Pillai dialect:

ōṭṭal etukku nampa vītu irukka-c colla?

(ST *irukkappa*) *uḷḷāra* (ST *uḷḷē*) *vāñka*

"Why a hotel when we have a house? Come in." (3)

kūccappaṭurikaḷō? (ST – *paṭurīñkaḷā*) *pompaḷaikaḷukkuḷḷa eṇṇa kūccam?*

"Are you embarrassed? Why to be embarrassed among women?"

pulla perutōm. ākki-p pōṭutōm. (ST *perurōm, pōṭurōm*)

"We birth a kid. We raise him. (5)

Their visitor, a female researcher, speaks in a colloquial mostly without dialectal markers:

atāvatu avañka eppaṭi vāḷarāñka eṇṇellām vēlai ceyyarāñka avañka

tañkaḷōṭa vāḷkkaiyai-p patti eṇṇa neṇakkirāñka...

"That is how they live, what kind of work they do, what they think about their lives..." (5)

The Standard spoken language and its speaker, an educated woman from the city, is brought into contrast with the world of traditional, home-based women. This is one of the very few instances where Ambai has used overly marked dialectal speech – to look at the life of "a woman" again, now from two distant perspectives.

One perspective shows a woman whose life and language is limited to her house, her children, the food that she makes. For this woman, dialect is reserved. It is not the dialect shared by the author, but the local Pillai dialect,

from the time of Pudumaippittan commonly used in literature and intelligible to the reader.

The other perspective shows a woman from outside, an individual without association to any local group, looking and observing the private world of dialect speakers. The standard, unmarked spoken language that this woman uses allows her to keep distance from their small world. At the same time, this language – which is the core choice of the author in most of her conversational writing – deprives her of the security and closeness the community of the small dialectal world has to offer.

6.3 Ashokamitran – the Brahmin Writings of a Brahmin Writer

Ashokamitran (Jagadisa Thyagarajan) is one of the more widely known and recognized Tamil writers. He was born in 1931 in Secunderabad, the twin city of Hyderabad, to Tamil Brahmin parents. Ashokamitran's father brought his family – wife and eight children – to the capital of Andhra Pradesh to work here as an employee of the State Railways. Twenty years later, after graduating from college and father's death, Ashokamitran moved to Chennai. He first worked in the Chennai film industry but in the middle of the sixties turned to a full-time writer. He received several awards and fellowships giving recognition to his work, including the all-Indian Delhi based Sahitya Akademi Award in 1996. His stories, appearing first in numerous magazines, were collectively published in 1500 pages of a two-volume book under the title *acōkamittiraṅ kataikaḷ* ("Ashokamitran's Stories", Acōkamittiraṅ 2003), which is the source base for the following analysis.

AM is a representative of the so called *tayir cātam* ("curd-rice") literature – literature of the taste of rice mixed with yoghurt, a spiceless meal, easy to digest, not harmful, not special, ordinary. AM writes about the world he knows. His stories are set in cities, either Hyderabad or Chennai, and his characters are mostly middle class people who deal with small problems of everyday urban life. He often pays attention to, on the surface, uneventful moments, he zooms them in for a close look at the human mind.

The language of AM's characters reveals that, apart from belonging to the urban middle class, they can also be identified as Brahmins. Nearly every story brings in some features of the distinctively Brahmin dialect. At the same time, however, each story also exhibits some of the features of standard, dialectally unmarked spoken Tamil.

6.3.1 The Private Use of the Brahmin Dialect

In *oru tikkeṭ rattu* ("Cancellation of a ticket", Vol. 2, pp. 1396–1400), a son, using the Brahmin verbal forms, asks his father to cancel his wife's reservation of a train ticket:

*appā, paṅkajam tikkeṭtai-k koṅjam nīnka kāṅcalpaṇṇiṅṭu
vantuṭarēlā?"*

"Dad, could you please cancel Pangajam's ticket?" (1396),

Later, at the reservation centre, the father informs an unknown person queuing in front of him that he is going to fetch a form for himself:

itō oru fārm eṭuttuṅṭu vantuṭarēṅ

"just a moment, I will get a form and come back" (1397),

again using the Brahmin dialectal verbal forms. But when he is talking to the person behind the reservation counter, he addresses him in the standard spoken and the man behind the counter expectedly also replies in ST:

koṅjam appaṭiyē tiruttiṅṅka – nīnkatāṅ ceyyaṅum. intānka.

"Please correct it as it should be. – You yourself have to do it.

Here you are." (1398)

The use of dialectal forms is determined by situation, similarly to interactions in the real world. Inside the family, or when referring to one's own activity, the character uses the Brahmin dialect. When addressing a person outside the community in a formal situation, standard spoken language is used.

In a short conversation in *eḷi* ("A Rat", Vol. 1, pp. 375–379), Ganeshan talks to his wife about setting up a trap for a rat disturbing their household. As

expected in an intimate situation like this, their speech is represented as dialectal, in this case again Brahmin-dialectal. When Ganeshan walks out to buy some vadais for the rat, he addresses the snack seller:

vaṭai pōṭuyyā inta-t taṭavai

"Make a vadai this time"(377),

not showing any dialectal background. The seller replies:

itukku aṭutta vāṭṭi pōṭṭetukkarēṇ

"I will make it next time, after this one" (378),

using the northern-dialectal *vāṭṭi*, revealing the loci of the story.

Ashokamitran's Brahmin characters stick to their caste dialect in private situations, or when talking to other close members of their community. When addressing others, they switch to the unmarked spoken style. This is a substantial shift compared to the use of Brahmin dialect prior to the rise of anti-brahmin movement. In Pudumaippittan's writing, we can see even non-Brahmins publicly using Brahmin forms.

Over time, as the value of being recognized as a Brahmin decreased, Tamil Brahmins gradually changed the manner in which they speak so as not to be identified as Brahmins in the public sphere. Talking publicly in the Brahmin dialect is now seen as boasting and perceived negatively. Ashokamitran is well aware of this change in attitudes. He complains of Brahmin-bashing in the political, cultural and literary worlds, in which Brahmins are caricatured and ridiculed. He even goes as far in the defense of his community as to compare the current situation of Tamil Brahmins to the situation of Jews in pre-war Europe.⁷¹

⁷¹ *We Are Like the Jews*. An article by Ashokamitran at *Outlook India* magazine, April 11, 2005. Accesible online at <http://www.outlookindia.com>.

6.3.2 The Mixture of Brahmin and Dialectally Unmarked Language

The shift between Brahmin and standard forms is not always determined by the setting of the conversation. Janaki ammā, when talking to her neighbour, says:

ētō iṅṅi-k kālaiyilē nīnka vīṭṭukku vantatu rompa nallatā-p pōccu

"As it is, it was really good that you came home this morning (707),

using the Brahmin form *iṅṅi* ("today"), accompanied by ST forms. A few lines later, she uses the standard spoken word represented as "*iṅṅikku*". Her guest does not use many marked Brahmin forms and his speech often appears standard:

*atāṅ colrēṅ. nīnka uṅka vīṭṭilē tāṅ pēciṭṭiruntālum ippaṭi mattavaṅka
kātu kēkka-p pēcāṭiṅka.*

"That's what I'm saying. Even if you talk (like this) in your house, don't talk (like this) so that others can hear you." (710).

But occasionally, he also slips to the Brahmin dialectal forms:

ivakiṭṭē appaṭi yārāvatu pēcinā iva kēṭṭuṅṭu iruppālā?

"If somebody talked to her that way, would she listen?" (711)

In a different story, *18-A* (pp. 977–981), the male character talking to his friends uses the standard spoken language forms as *ukkāntiṭṭiruntēṅ* ("I was

sitting") or *pākkirīṅkaḷā?* ("do you see?", p.977), together with the Brahmin *pōyiṭuttā?* ("did it leave?") or *pākkarēṇ*⁷² ("I can see").

There is no strict dividing line between standard Tamil and dialect. Ashokamitran's characters freely interchange Brahmin and non-Brahmin forms, wavering on the edge of dialectal and standard language use.

On the other hand, the characters (or their creator) never entirely remove their Brahmin identity. They never completely merge with possibly any urban, middle class person whom they seem to represent. No matter how much a dialogue may seem unmarked, close to the standard spoken, there is always at least one characteristic *-iṅtu* or other Brahmin form in the text.

⁷² Some features are hard to be distinguished in writing as typical for the Brahmin dialect. This is the case e.g. of vowel changes, where the vocal quality is not clearly expressed through the syllabic script. If we take into consideration forms as *pākkirīṅkaḷā?* ("do you see?") x *pākkarēṇ* ("I see", 977), *vaikkiratu* ("it puts") x *vaikkaṛatā?* ("does it put?", 376), *colrēṇ* x *collarēṇ* (both "I say", 710, 711), *paṅratu* x *paṅṅratu* (both "it does", 1388), the second form with the present tense marker *-ar-* / *-kkaṛ-* is closer to the Brahmin dialect, while *-r-* / *-kkir-* is closer to the standard spoken. That said, the use of the form *-kkaṛ-* in writing is not distinctively Brahmin. In the non-existing norms for transcription of the spoken language, this form may indicate a fast pronunciation of the present tense marker in the standard speech where the syllabic *ṛ* (*ka*) hides a weakened vowel, either *ki* or *ku* in this case (see 5.1.1c).

Among these forms, a clearer distinction can be made only in the 3rd person neuter, where the non-Brahmin speech does not preserve the present tense marker. Thus *vaikkutu* would be a standard spoken form, as opposed to both *vaikkiratu* and *vaikkaṛatu*.

6.3.3 The Use of LT for Multilingual Speech

An exception to the prevalent conversations representing the spoken language with Brahmin dialect features are some of the stories that take place in Secunderabad, the town where Ashokamitran spent his childhood. Dialogues of these stories are kept in the literary language.

In *cilviyā* ("Sylvia", pp. 1225–1231), most of the characters are children, five Christian siblings and their Hindu friend. A part of their speech is first presented in Urdu and then translated to Tamil:

"jā, jā cālē," eṅrēṅ. tamiḷil colvatānāl, "pōṭā pōṭā maccāṅē," inta 'maccāṅē' eppōtum aṅpai-t terivippatillai.

"I said: 'jā, jā cālē'. In Tamil it means 'go away *maccāṅē*'. This '*maccāṅē*' never expressed love." (1225).

At another place, the narrator mentions that one of the girls overused the English word *man* in her speech:

'nōmēṅ, vāṭmēṅ, kōmēṅ, kēṭ avuṭ mēṅ' eṅru 'mēṅ' pōṭṭu-p pēcuvāḷ.

"'No man, what man, go man, get out man' – that's how she talked, using 'man'" (1226).

When one of the boys makes fun of his friends Candran and Silvia, he writes their names together on a wall in three languages – English, Urdu and Tamil.⁷³

⁷³ *aṭutta nālē eṅkaḷ matil cuvaril āṅkilam, tamiḷ, urutuvil cilviyā – canturu eṅru kariyāl peritāka eḷutapaṭṭiruntatu.*

A big inscription Silvia-Candru in English, Tamil and Urdu (drawn) with charcoal appeared on our compound wall the very next day (1231).

No matter if the children spoke Urdu, Tamil or English, or a mixture of the three, they definitely did not speak in literary Tamil, as their dialogue is represented.⁷⁴ The writer chose literary Tamil as a safe field into which he can accommodate speech of characters with different backgrounds. A similar approach was seen in Pudumaippittan's story *Putiya kūṇṭu* (3.1.2), where LT was chosen to accommodate the conversation between a Brahmin man and his Christian wife.

⁷⁴ "nīnkaḷ jātakam pārttīrkaḷā?" – "eṇṇa?" – "jātakam." – "appaṭi eṇṇāl?" – "curiyaṇ, cantiraṇ ellām uṅkaḷukku eṅkē eppaṭi irukkīratu eṇṇu kāṭṭum ōr aṭṭavaṇai." – "ellārukkuṁ orē cūriyaṇ orē cantiraṇṭāṇē?"

"Did you see the horoscope? – What? – Horoscope. – What is it? – A table showing where and how positioned is your sun, moon and others. – Don't we all have the same sun and moon? (1229)

6.4 The Brahmin Writings Compared

The comparison of three different authors who belong to or write about the Brahmin community leads to some surprising results. To begin with, the author with the strongest representation of Brahmin dialect features is surprisingly the one who is not a member of this community. Jeyakandan's Brahmin characters, and not only the traditional ones, tend to use more Brahmin specific features than the characters of writers who themselves are Brahmin.

Comparing Jeyakandan's middle class Brahmins from *an̄pukku nan̄ri* with Ashokamitran's urban Brahmins, it is evident that in Jeyakandan's writings the Brahmin dialect is more pronounced. Although he limits the use of exclusively Brahmin lexicon here, he still quite extensively uses marked morphological forms of the Brahmin dialect. Ashokamitran's stories show much less Brahmin-specific morphology and a greater variation toward the unmarked spoken language. The Brahmin characters of his stories are somewhere in the middle between Jeyakandan's traditional and Ambai's cosmopolitan characters, perhaps in the best position to represent the middle class to which the narration relates.

Jeyakandan, although using the Brahmin dialect quite effectively, emphasizes the "brahminness" of his characters more than the actual Brahmin writer. This somewhat stereotypical inclination towards the pronounced features of the Brahmin dialect is even more obvious in the two analyzed Jeyakandan's stories, which bring in the portrayal of a traditional Brahmin woman and a caricature of a Brahmin cook from Palakkad. Jeyakandan uses the dialect mostly as a profitable literary tool for stereotypical *characterization*. For this purpose, the marked dialectal features are understandably over emphasized. Ashokamitran's use of the Brahmin dialect is substantially different – he identifies himself with the Brahmin community and this *identification* is the main reason why he employs the Brahmin forms in his writings. For this purpose, over emphasis on the use of dialectal forms is not necessary.

On the other side of the spectrum we can see the characters of Ambai, who went quite far on her way to being identified as "Tamil" as opposed to "Tamil Brahmin". In her stories, there is as little openly expressed 'brahminness' in the language as possible. The author, shaped by Brahmin beliefs and ideas, transforms her Brahmin intellectual background not to dialectal speech, but to universal human experience.

While it is possible to determine the marked features of the Brahmin dialect, it is not so much possible to determine one such dialect, the "standard Brahmin speech". Stereotypical application of known Brahmin markers wherever possible would not yield a trustworthy result. Writers are using the Brahmin dialectal forms in different measures, combined with standard language or possibly local dialect features, and their characters still remain distinctively Brahmin.

7. Dalit Writing – Marked Language as a Norm

7.0 Introduction

Dalits,⁷⁵ the former outcastes and untouchables of India, did not until recently have major impact on literature. The caste system denied education to the untouchables, leaving the long history of their lives mostly undocumented. The Dalit voice in Tamil literature became more soundly pronounced only in late 1980s and early 1990s, together with the rise of social and political organization of the Dalits. Dalit writing, up to now, is in its core form still strongly politically and socially engaged.

The first noticeable Dalit prose writers were women. In 1989, P. Sivakami, a female Dalit writer, wrote a strongly autobiographic novel *paḷaiyaṇa kaḷitalum*,⁷⁶ which she herself later translated into English as "The Grip of Change".⁷⁷ In 1992, the first recognized Dalit autobiography in Tamil was published, written by a Dalit Christian writer, Bama, under the name *Karukku*, "Two-edged Palmyra Leaf" (Pāmā 2001). Both works bring attention to the oppression Dalits face from other communities. Moreover, as writings of women, they question the aggressive

⁷⁵ The word *dalit* is the self denomination of the oppressed outcaste communities throughout India. *Dala*, in Marathi, means "that which is rooted in the earth", "crushed to the earth" or "ground down". It became widely used in the 1970s with the rise of a radical political movement *Dalit Panthers*, inspired by the *Black Panthers* of America. The movement, founded in Mumbai in 1972, was established by Marathi Dalit writers Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale and Arun Kamble. Marathi Dalit literature was the first among modern Indian Dalit literatures.

⁷⁶ Title emerged from the saying *paḷaiyaṇa kaḷitalum, putiyaṇa pukutalum* – "the old things pass, the new things enter their way".

⁷⁷ Published by Orient Longman (Orient BlackSwan) in 2006 with extensive author's autobiographic notes.

domination of men, Dalit as well as of other castes, over Dalit women. Bama's contribution to Dalit literature is innovative also in terms of language use. For her autobiographic description of Dalit life, she chose to employ the Dalit dialectal speech.

Autobiographies, although maybe not so valued for their literary merits, form quite important part of Dalit introductory writing. Through them, the authors satiated their thirst to share their life experience as oppressed Dalits. From the 1990s, Dalit writers moved on from autobiographies to more fictional writing. Short stories of diverse authors were published in literary magazines and later in books.

In my analysis of language use in Dalit literature I concentrate on the works of two significant Dalit writers, Imaiyam and Puhā, who both offer challenge to traditional linguistic and aesthetic norms of literature. Imaiyam's writings (7.1, source base Imaiyam 2004) depict the unromanticized village life of landless agricultural labourers with adequately poignant and disrespectful language. In Puhā's *Mutti* (7.2, Puhā 2002), the author-narrator and the characters of his harsh stories unconventionally use the same marked dialectal language throughout the text, including the narrational parts.

7.1 Imaiyam's Agricultural Labourers

Imaiyam, as most Dalit authors, belongs to the younger generation of Tamil writers. He was born in 1967 into a family of agricultural labourers in the Cuddalore district of north-central Tamilnadu. He himself did not join the agricultural profession which surrounded him throughout his childhood and became a primary school teacher of Tamil. Currently he works in a school hostel ward, writes fiction, and compiles a dictionary of the local language of his villagefolk.

In the library catalogues, Imaiyam's writing would belong to the category of "Dalit literature". Dalit literature is primarily the literature of protest and disagreement with the established oppressive social norms. Its primary goal is the liberation of the oppressed – the Dalits. Imaiyam's writing does not entirely fit this description. He does not see the world through the grille of the oppressing caste system. He does not overstate the "dalitness" of his characters – he writes about people who live life of village agricultural labourers, and it is this life experience, the *krāmattu vivacāya kūli vālkai*, which connects them. Imaiyam does not openly protest against the society, against oppression, against humiliating life conditions. He does not fight for liberation. He describes and observes what life means to these people, without passing any judgement. Instead of seeing them primarily as Dalits, he enables the reader to see them rather as humans, and thus to form a connection with their experience.

7.1.1 The Contrasting Structure of Narrational and Conversational Language

Imaiyam is very successful in bringing the reader inside an alien world. To a great extent, this success has to do with the way he masters the language of

his prose – oscillating between the predominantly urban reader and the subaltern subject, the standard written language and the dialectally marked actual speech.

7.1.1a Dialogue

In dialogues, Imai introduces a language which, although written, creates the illusion of real, uncensored speech. The language of the characters brings in the language Dalits speak in their everyday life, a language through which they transform their life experience into words. The writer, himself withdrawn from the stories, preserves the vitality of the spoken word. Not only the phonetical and morphological features and lexical choices he makes create this feeling – it is also the structuring of thoughts and their semantic content which add to the "reality" of the speech of his characters.

In the following dialogue, a cow-boy speaks with a senior man who gave him this job:

"yāṇṭā iṇṇikki nērattiliyē vantuṭṭa." – "vēccaṭalā iruntuccu, atāṇ vantuṭṭaṇ." – "cōru eṭukkaliyā?" – "ille." – "yāṇām?" – "eṇakku cōru vāṇām." – "rāttiri poyitula reṇṭu vā cōru tiṅkāṭṭi pavalla māṭṭukkālula eppiṭṭācutta muṭiyum?" – "eṇakku iṇṇikki cōru vāṇām." – "iṇṇikki oṇakku eṇṇaṭā ācci? yārāccum aṭiccāṅkalā, vaṅjāṅkaṭā?" – "atellāmilla." – "piṇṇa eṇṇa, māṭu kiṭu kāṇāmappōyiṭuccā?" – "ille." – "piṇṇa eṇṇā kāraṇattāla cōru vāṇāṅkiṭavaṇ?"

"Why, you came early today." – "the sun was burning, that's why I came" – "You didn't eat rice?" – "No." – "Why is that?" – "I don't want rice." – "If you don't eat two mouthfuls of rice in the evening, how can you wander among the cows (the next) day?" – "I don't want rice today." – "What's wrong with you today? Did someone beat you, treat you cruelly?" – "Nothing like that." – "Then what, did you lose the cows?" – "No." – "Then why won't you eat?" (p.260)

The dialogue is a question – answer session between the man and the boy. There are several distinctive substandard phonetic, morphological and lexical features in the dialogue revealing the local and social background of the characters in phonetics, morphology, and lexicon.

In phonetics, it is the shifting of initial vowels, as in $\bar{e} \rightarrow \bar{a}$:

LT $y\bar{e}\eta \rightarrow y\bar{a}\eta$ ("why")

LT $v\bar{e}\eta\bar{t}\bar{a}m \rightarrow v\bar{a}\eta\bar{t}\bar{a}m$ ("it is not wanted"),

changes in pronunciation of some consonants as in $l \rightarrow y$, or intervocalic $k \rightarrow v$:

LT $po\bar{l}u\bar{t}i\bar{l} \rightarrow po\bar{y}i\bar{t}u\bar{l}a$ ("at the time")

ST $pa\bar{k}a\bar{l}l\bar{a} \rightarrow pa\bar{v}a\bar{l}l\bar{a}$ ("during the day")

and reduction in consonant clusters:

LT $v\bar{e}\eta\bar{t}\bar{a}m \rightarrow v\bar{a}\eta\bar{a}m$ ("it is not wanted")

In morphology, particular PNG features appear in the 1st person sg., where the vowel is shortened:

ST $v\bar{a}n\bar{t}u\bar{t}\bar{t}\bar{a}\eta \rightarrow v\bar{a}n\bar{t}u\bar{t}\bar{t}\bar{a}\eta$ "I came",

and in the very special formation of the 2nd person sg., where gender distinction is applied:

ST $v\bar{a}\eta\bar{a}n\bar{k}i\bar{r}\bar{a} \rightarrow v\bar{a}\eta\bar{a}n\bar{k}i\bar{r}\bar{a}v\bar{a}\eta$ "You say you don't want".

The negative conditional form ST $t\bar{i}n\bar{k}\bar{a}\bar{t}\bar{t}\bar{a} \rightarrow D\ t\bar{i}n\bar{k}\bar{a}\bar{t}\bar{t}\bar{i}$ "without eating"

and the indefinite referential pronoun clitic ST *yārāvatu* -> D *yārāccum*

"whoever", "somebody" also belong among dialectal choices.

Among the lexical items, *vēccaṭalā* is a dialectal word not belonging to the register of most Tamil speakers. Most other features belong to the common representation of speech in writing and do not differ from standard spoken forms. Interestingly, even in the short paragraph we can see variation in the use of spoken forms – the same character says *vāṇām* and *vāṇṭām*, the dialectal gender distinctive 2nd pers. sg form *vāṇāṅkiṟavaṅ* is used along with the more common non-distinctive form (as in *vantuṭṭa* – "you came"). This variation shows one of the attributes of a variable spoken style, where the author does not adhere to one standardized form as strongly as in standardized writing.

Morphology, phonology, and lexicon of this short paragraph clearly correspond with dialectal colloquial speech. The syntax underlies this "colloquial feeling". The sentences are short, not overly structured and carry straightforward information. In the whole paragraph, there is only one complex conditional sentence⁷⁸ and one simple compound sentence.⁷⁹ The rest are simple, often just one word statements. The semantic content also corresponds to the milieu the writer creates – food, hunger, everyday manual work, beating and scolding are all basic concerns in life of Imaiyan's characters.

⁷⁸ "*rāttiri poyitula reṅṅu vā cōru tirūkāṭṭi pavalla māṭṭukkālula eppiṭṭācutta muṭiyum?*" – "If you don't eat two mouthfuls of rice in the evening, how can you wander among the cows (the next) day?"

⁷⁹ *yārāccum aṭiccāṅkaḷā, vāṅṅāṅkaḷā?* – "did someone beat you, treat you cruelly?"

7.1.1b Narration

Contrary to the syntactically simple dialogue parts, the narrative and descriptive passages can be wrapped to long strings of phrases revealing a whole scene of events within one complex sentence:

"pōratunnā veyilu ēṛuratukkullāra pōyan" enru colliviṭṭu-p paḷaiya kañji-t taṇṇīrai oru kuṇṭānil ūṛri, atil oru kuttu taviṭṭai allippōṭṭu, koṇjam uppaiyum oru kaṭṭi-c cōlaccōṛru uruṇṭaiyaiyum pōṭṭu-k karaittu eṭuttukkoṇṭu, talaiyai-c cīvikkōṇṭirunta celviyai-t tāṇṭi veliyē vantāḷ ciṇṇammā!

"If (you are) to go, why don't you go before the sun rises" having said this, having poured the old kañji water in a pot, scooping a handful of bram and throwing it into it, putting in a little salt and a roll of hardened millet-rice, dissolving it and taking it, going past Celvi combing her hair out came Cinnammal." (p.241)

Within this one sentence, while her daughter Celvi was combing her hair, Cinnammal managed to complete seven different actions. While addressing her daughter in dialectal speech,⁸⁰ her activity is described in standard literary Tamil. Syntactically, this sentence belongs fully to the written register.

Although this long chained sentence, in comparison with the simple utterances of the dialogue, seems to belong to a distinctively different category of language, it is almost impossible to draw a clear division line between the two.

The writer often uses dialectal lexical items in his narration parts – here it is *kuttu*, "handful" corresponding to *kaippiṭi aḷavu* in the standard language. Elsewhere in the narration, the writer says:

⁸⁰ D locative *ullāra* – ST *ulle*, ST *pōyēṇ* -> D *pōyan* "go", "why don't you go"; other features corresponding to unmarked colloquial speech.

nāy-k kuntalil uṭkārntu taviṭṭai viralāl kiṇṭiviṭṭāṇ

"while sitting in a squat position he stirred the bram
with his finger" (p. 121),

using the South Arcot dialectal form *nāy-k kuntal* ("the dog's squat") where the standard language would use *kuttukkālīṭu uṭkār* ("sitting in a squat position").

There is no strict division line between the registers of the written, spoken, and dialectal language, namely on the lexical level. The writer himself states that he is often not aware of how the language shaped itself in his writing. In his novel *kōvēru kaḷutaika!* ("The Beasts of Burden"), Ārōkkiyam, one of the characters, uses the Sanskrit word *lipi* ("letter", "script"). To this, Imaiyan comments:

"*Lipi* is a Sanskrit word. How the character named Ārōkkiyam got to know this word I don't know. And I don't know how this word got to my novel. It came on its own and settled down. Should we state that it is a Sanskrit word, or could we say that it is a dialectal word? (...) Where is the division line between the spoken and the written language, where lies the division between the standard spoken and the substandard dialectal?"⁸¹

No matter how uncertain the writer may feel about the affiliation of individual words or features to marked and unmarked spheres of the language, there still remains a clearly recognizable functional field of the two. For Imaiyan, in spite of a few lexical interferences, the language of narration and the language of conversation remain contrastingly structurally different. Imaiyan fully preserves and successfully employs the diglossic nature of Tamil language, creating sharp contrast between the language of conversational and narrational parts.

⁸¹ Imaiyan: *vaṭṭāra vaḷakkum eḷuttāḷarkaḷum* ("The dialect and the writers"), paper presented at a conference about Tamil dialects at French Institute of Pondicherry, 13.8.2006.

7.1.2 The Vulgarity of Imaiyam's language

The language of Imaiyam's characters often appears to be rough and almost brutal. Vulgar, obscene curses find their way into each story. Often these are colloquial expressions related to incest or loose sexual behavior, as e.g. *okkāla ōyi* – "sister–fucker", *tēviṭiyā kuṭṭi* – "son of a bitch" (p. 258) or *rōṭṭula pōṛavaṇukku–p porantavaṇ* – "one born to a passer-by" (p. 251) – to name just a few from the story *ūrkāli māṭukaḷ* (literally "cattle left to an appointed person for grazing", pp. 251–263) which starts with a street fight and a quarrel.

These abusive words serve mostly to accompany a quarrel among the characters. Occasionally, they can also express mere frustration in otherwise quiet conversation:

"emmāṇṇu vāṅkuṇa?" – "periya paṭi paṇṇeṇṭu rūvā" – "yārukiṭṭe immām kāciya–k koṭṭi vāṅkuṇava?" – "anta maṇṇāppōṇa oṇṭaṅkai oṭayāru ūṭṭulatāṇ." – "avantāṇ kolakāraṇāccē, avaṇ ūṭṭula–p pōyi etukku vāṅkuṇava?" – "eṇṇā paṇṇratu, namba vanta vayyi avaṇ ūṭṭu–t talakkaṭayila pōyitāṇa nikkumpaṭiyā irukku."

"For how much did you buy (the seeds)?" – "Twelve rupees for a big measurement" – "From whom did you buy it, pouring so much money?" – "In the house of that close-fisted (curse) Udaiyar (member of a rich caste of cultivators) turned to earth (curse, "better dead")" – "Oh that unscrupulous murderous fellow (curse), why did you go to his house and buy it there?" – "What to do, it is our path to come and stand in front of the entrance of his house." (p.23)

Life at the bottom of society, ever present hunger, dependence on sources outside one's capacity – all these bring enough occasion for the feelings of frustration and anger to arise. Where anger is present, a curse word may help to achieve a feeling of relief. Even children in Imaiyam's stories use abusive words

to relieve their tension – *pōṭā*, *macurāṇ* (abuse term originating from ?*mayir* – "hair", p. 113), says a small boy to his older brother in the frustration of not finding anything suitable in the house to buy a much desired ice-cream. A grandmother, after a quarrel with her daughter over a stolen broomstick, refuses to allow her little grandson to climb on her lap uttering the words *pōṭā*, *caṇṇaṇakki mavaṇa* – "go, son of the one-who-licks-female-urine" (245).

The vulgar expressions that Imaiyan uses often belong to the register of substandard Tamil and are hard to decipher to outside readers. Although a few dictionaries of substandard Tamil dialects were published recently, it is much easier to find various dialectal words describing parts of a plough in them than the terms of abuse. In this respect, the distance between the language of those who were an inspiration for the fictional characters and those who come in touch with them through the written word as readers becomes strongly apparent.

Imaiyan relates to the struggle of his English translator, a Tamil but not Dalit: "When the novel *Ārumukam* was being translated, she did not know how to translate *cāṇṇe kuṭiccavaṇ*. *cāṇṇu* means 'female urine'. The translator argued that Tamil Lexicon stated that it was 'menses', 'dirt', or 'garbage' (*mātaṇṇāy*, *aḷukku*, *kaḷivu*)."⁸² The authority of the six-volume Tamil lexicon had to give way here to the authority and experience of the author.

The abusive component of Imaiyan's language appears to be very strong and striking to the reader who is not accustomed to frequent vulgarisms. When reading Imaiyan's stories, we have to be aware that there is quite a strong difference in semantic interpretation of these words in the speech of agricultural labourers which he represents. For someone who grows up surrounded by curses, a vulgar curse term becomes primarily an expression of anger. It loses further connotations. Used almost constantly, these words lose the pungent

⁸² Imaiyan: *vaṭṭāra vaḷakkum eḷuttāḷarkaḷum* ("The dialect and the writers"), paper presented at a conference at French Institute of Pondicherry, 13.8.2006

strength they carry. Same as the people portrayed in Imaiyam's stories are used and accustomed to life in conditions which appear striking to the outside observer, they are used and accustomed to a similarly striking language.

This observation is not limited to Imaiyam, but extends to Dalit writing in general. Vulgarisms are extremely common in Dalit literature. They are an integral part of a language which relates a rough, unromanticized life experience, in which all *alamkāras* ("ornaments") seem artificial. Curses are the true poetic metaphors of this language. They suit the surrounding milieu much better than the traditional, classic style metaphors, which seem artificial when dressed in a colloquial outfit.

As a comparison, we can look at a classical metaphorical expression in the autobiographic work of the female Dalit writer Bama, *Karukku*.

*oṭikkappaṭṭa cerakukaḷ tirumpavum vaḷantu valuppettu, nānum
nālupērappōla eṇṇaikkū-p paṛakka ārampippēṇō teriyala.*

"I don't know when my broken wings will grow again and gain strength so that I also, like other people, will start to fly"
(Pāmā 2001, p. 111).

Given the colloquial transcription Bama uses, a few bitter curse words would maybe describe the helpless situation she finds herself in more adequately.

7.2 Puhai

Puhai (*pukaḷ* meaning "fame" or "glory"), one of the most distinctive writers of contemporary Tamil short fiction, was born as *Pukaḷēnti* in 1968 in the *Ceṭṭikkulam* village of the Trichy district in central Tamilnadu. Despite his family's agricultural background, he managed to pursue the studies valued most in his country, i.e., science, and got a degree in Chemistry. Nevertheless, his career took him away from the world of immutable chemical formulae. Shortly after graduation he started to work as an assistant director in the film studios in Chennai and since the late 1990's he writes his short story reflections on his experience of village life. In 1999, Puhai's story *Mutti* ("Liberation") was awarded the *Katā* price for the best Tamil short story of the year. In 2002, Puhai's stories, so far appearing in various literary magazines, were published collectively under the same name – *Mutti* (Pukaḷ 2002).

7.2.1 Experimentation with Linguistic Paradigms

Puhai's writing caught the attention of critics and perhaps also of readers for two reasons: for his non-standard use of language and for his depiction of unusual, non-standard themes.

In *Mutti*, Puhai's debut collection, each story is an example of deviation from norm, both linguistically and thematically. Puhai does not write from the perspective of an urban, educated author. Life of his stories lies where his own life started, in a village whose dwellers do not share their linguistic norms with those of most readers. "What's that?" said Mrs. Nalini from Chennai in disgust, when I showed her a piece of Puhai's writing. "What uneducated person wrote this? How could someone write this way?" Her profound disapproval of the language in which the story was written did not allow her to continue reading –

and she thus protected herself from further disappointment that would arise from the stories' dubious content.

Not too many members of Tamil urban middle class, which is the stronghold of the (albeit small) readership base, are ready for open descriptions of prostitution, alcohol abuse, and violence, written in a language considered to be low and inferior. Puhai's writings highlight the inseparability of form and content in language.

The stories are all written in a close-to-phonetic transcription of the spoken language used by the village folk. Not only the conversations, as is common with most contemporary writers, but also the narration parts are written in what appears to be the transcription of a local spoken style.

This unusual feature is the main base of attractiveness of Puhai's stories for linguists and literary critics. While it is increasingly common to introduce local, dialectal language into writing, Puhai is far more advanced than other writers in narrowing the diglossic gap between the conversational and narrational parts while keeping the text in local style as a whole.

This new paradigm puts special strains not only on the readers, but also on the publishers and editors of such texts. S. Ramakrishnan from Cre-A Publishers, who worked on the redaction of Puhai's stories, related long lasting disputes over extensive corrections pursued to guarantee some degree of readability and consistency to the text. The final published version is a long fought-for compromise between the author's original "untidied" version and the editor's requirements.

E. Annamalai (Annamalai 2004, pp. 149–155) points out that despite the use of colloquial phonetic transcription and colloquial vocabulary throughout the text, it is still possible to clearly differentiate between the narration and conversational parts of Puhai's writing. This differentiation is made possible mainly by Puhai's preservation of differing syntactic qualities of written and spoken styles.

In narration, he often wraps the scenes into long strings of subordinate clauses, with explicit descriptions, whereas in conversation the sentences are short and with frequent deletions, as corresponds to the spoken style. We observed the same syntactic differentiation between narration and conversation in the writing of Imaiyam, with the support of diglossic pattern of language use. Puhai goes further in his innovative use of dialectal language. A fully functional language is successfully employed without the preservation of diglossic features.

7.2.2 Traditional Subaltern Folk Tales

The excitement over the radically innovative use of language in Puhai's writing may lead one to believe that something completely fresh and new is emerging here, a language used as never before. It may be useful to look at the text closer to comment upon this impression.

Apart from being colloquial, the text has other peculiar qualities. In a text that is unusually written in the colloquial style as a whole, it takes a while to realize that there is disproportionately more space given to the narration than to the conversation. There are also frequent hints in the text that some of the events described are based on second-hand information. This is achieved by adding the reportive particle *-ām*, or the extrapolative auxiliary *-iru* to the verb, or *pōla*, "as if", at the end of the sentence. All these can be translated as "it looks like...", "it seems that..." or even "I have heard that...". These particles are used when describing an action hidden to the general public, as opposed to personal or scene descriptions or descriptions of public events:

1.) The reportive particle *-ām*

*...vēra-c cātikkāraṇuṅka evaṇum pōyi-k kaṇakku-p paṇṇi-p
pōṭuṛatu teriṅjā-p pōtum, reṅṅu mūṇu nālu avaṇa rāvum pakalumā-k
kātturuntu kaiyumkaḷavumā-p puṭiccuppuṭuvāṇuṅka. atukku anta-p*

*pompaḷaiṅkaḷum utaviyāruppāḷuṅkaḷām. iṅṅikku āttuppakkamā pōram,
nāḷaikku kōyilukku-p pōramṅṅu cātamāṭayā vūṭṭula collippuṭṭu
pōvāḷuṅkaḷām.*

"...if they found out that someone from the other castes opened an account (with their wives) that would be it, they would be preparing to get him day and night for a few days and then catch him red-handed. And it looks like their wives themselves are helping them out with that. Perhaps they would say indirectly at home (to their husbands) 'today we're going to the river, tomorrow to the temple' and they will go." (p.98)

The first sentence, describing a public action, uses simple habitual future (*puṭiccuppuṭuvāṅuṅka* – "they will catch"), the other two sentences, describing private actions which (probably) take place at home, use the distancing – *ām* (*utaviyāruppāḷuṅkaḷām* – "it looks like they will help", *pōvāḷuṅkaḷām* – "it seems that they will go").

2.) extrapolative *iru*

*purucaṅkāraṅum puli nakam ceyiṅ pōṭṭu, vāṭcu, mōtiramṅṅu
vacatiyāttāṅ iruntāru.*

"The husband also was well of, wearing tiger-nail chain, watch and a ring" (p.74)

In the above sentence, as part of a description of a person, the simple past *iruntāru* – "he was" – is used, contrary to the following example:

apṭi ipṭiṅṅu nōṭṭu vanta kataya-p pēcikiṭṭiruntirukkāru

"It seems that he was telling the story of how he got the note" (p.75)

In this sentence, describing a man's private conversation with a prostitute where only the two of them were present, auxiliary *-iru* is turning the information to a received or supposed one.

3.) *pōla*

Placing the comparative *pōla*, "as if" or "as though" at the end of sentence again turns the whole statement into a received one:

vevaramāṇa cila pacāṅka paṇattukku patilā paḷaiya lāṭṭari-c cīṭṭa-k kuṭuttu ēmāttiṭṭu-p pōyiruppāṇuka pōla.

"It seems that some smart youngsters cheated (her) by giving (her) old lottery tickets instead of money." (p.78)

Occasionally, the reader is directly addressed in the text or asked for reassurance, either by tag questions, use of enclitic particles, or by the use of the imperative *pāru* – "look":

"aiyā cāmi, kaṭṭātuṅkaḷē"⁸³ṇṇu matta cāṭikkāraṇ vuluntu kumpuṭa muṭiyātu pāru. ataṇāla, appa cērikku eṇṇa celavu irukkuṭō anta-t tokaitān pañcāyattula colluvāṅka.

"Look (reader), that other caste fellow can't just fall (on the ground) and plead 'oh sir, I can't pay it'. Hence whatever expense there is at the time to the slum, the pancayat will say that amount exactly (and ask him to pay it as a fine)" (p.98)

There is one conclusion which I derive from these observations – Puhali's stories have one prominent protagonist, present in all of them. This protagonist

⁸³ Note the honorific particle (*u*)*ṅka*(*!*) in this sentence. The common use of this particle when addressing others shows the subordinated character of Dalit speech.

uses the same language as all the other characters, and occasionally addresses the readers. He has the major voice in the stories and is heard more than the others. Yet he is neither omnipotent nor omnipresent; he relies heavily on others in what he knows and what he is saying.

It is not an author speaking through the stories in a voice equal to his characters – it is a narrator telling a story to his audience. An author of fiction creates his characters himself and is almost omnipotent in his knowledge about them. A narrator, on the contrary, sees the characters only from the outside and relies substantially on received information. He addresses the listeners (readers) often and calls for attention.

I would argue that Puhā's stories, although seemingly innovative in their use of language and introduction of new themes, are very traditional in a way. Their form strongly corresponds to the *pāṭṭi katas* – "grandma stories", traditional folk tales related (narrated) mostly by elders to their young listeners. If we look at Puhā's stories in this light, their language does not seem so very innovative. These stories were (and still are) always told in the colloquial language – the "new" here is the transformation of this form to modern, written fiction. It is a transposition of a traditional genre, a merger of modern short story and oral story telling tradition. In this sense, Puhā's writing does not imply that the days of Tamil diglossia are counted. The colloquial narration parts in his writing are not the neutral, descriptive narrative components. They are rather marked, first person renderings of diverse events, directly and intimately addressing the reader. For neutral narration, even in progressive fiction represented for example by writings of Puhā's contemporary and fellow Dalit writer Imaiyam, colloquial language is still not suited to be used, and literary language remains the first choice.

7.2.3 The Absence of Norms

There is one presumption inherent to the traditional *pāṭṭi katais* – there should be a moral value in them. This seems not to be true of Puhai's stories. A literary critic in India Today (Oct 23, 2002) argues how readers of Puhai might be shaken by the lack of norms in his stories. E. Annamalai (2004, p. 153) further implies that "Pugazh, as the author of the stories, does not articulate or imply any norms because there are none". This is very true, if what we mean by *norms* are the middle-class norms, shared by Mrs. Nalini who refused to read through Puhai's substandard text (7.2.1).

But I would suggest that there are norms and moral values existing in the world of Puhai – the prostitute refuses to accept father and son from the same family as her customers, older men are given privileged access above youngsters to the services of whores, bribed voters hold their word and give their votes to their "benefactors" in elections... the norms are different from those of most of the readers, but they are still valid norms among those concerned.

The stories show how the generally accepted norms seem to be pretentious, defective, and non-functional in the context of unromantic village life. The same is true of the dialectal colloquial language – although different from the approved one, it is still a functional language with valid norms, definitely more functional in the given context than the language considered "standard" by others.

The world and the language in Puhai's stories are perfectly in accordance. Puhai's harsh grandma-stories open a possibility of drawing together two distant worlds. But for this drawing together to have a chance of success, the first step would need to be to suppress the initial revulsion and read through the first few immoral, substandard lines.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Uniqueness

There are no prescribed rules and norms of how language should be represented in creative writing. Each author, shaped by the writings of his predecessors and contemporaries, adds his share to the formation of the language of literature. In this thesis, I have analyzed texts of seven individual Tamil writers. Each of them reacts differently to the challenge of diglossic language use in fiction and reflects in his own ways the trends of exposure of spoken language into the written domain.

We have observed the strategy of complete escape from the diglossic pattern by employing the substandard dialectal language throughout the text (Puhal, 7.2), as well as successful preservation of diglossia in writing by adhering to neutral LT narrational discourse and substandard dialectal conversation of the characters (Imaiyam, 7.1). We have seen a writer who found a way to profit from the multidialectal milieu of Tamil language (Jeyakandan, 6.1), as well as an author who chose not to voice dialectal differences in her evocative writing (Ambai, 6.2). One writer may employ a conversational language close to the unmarked colloquial speech (Baskar Shakti, 5), while another author may choose to reflect the marked speech of his own dialectal community (Ashokamitran, 6.3). Specific varieties, such as LT mixed with a dialect (Pudumaippittan, 3.1.1), or spoken Tamil mixed with another Dravidian language (Baskar Shakti, 4.2) find their way into language of fiction.

Unique life experiences, conditions, and talents shape the linguistic choice of each of the discussed authors in each of the discussed texts and in each particular part of these texts. The Tamil language, in its scale of variations, offers a wide range of linguistic choices and combinations for Tamil writers. The writers have a lot to choose from when creating their own writing style. The diglossic

system with its many subregisters and varieties is not just an unfunctional remnant from the old past. It does not implement a disadvantage for creative writers of Tamil. I see it rather as a functional system which allows the writers to supply their creations with rich colours, shades and contrasts according to their individual aesthetic, stylistic and other likes and aims.

While all of the discussed authors employ a unique combination of tones and voices, all share the same language in the first place. From the great variation they represent, common patterns emerge.

8.2 Shared Patterns

8.2.1 The Spoken Language as Used in Writing

The language used in fictional writing behaves differently from language used in actual speech. Tradition and shared expectations, together with the conditioning script, impose limits not only on the use of spoken Tamil, but also on the use of dialects, English, and other systems unaccustomed to writing in Tamil.

We have observed how the spoken language in literature is depicted in its different levels. In phonetics (5.1), attention was brought to the dimension of optionality in the representation of the spoken language. Some features of ST – or dialect, or any other variety unaccustomed to writing – are not depictable by the script, some are not depicted because of conventions, others are more widely used in the written system. This optionality in presentation of ST features is not seen as inconsistent or erroneous but as the basic component of ST behaviour in writing.

In morphology, marked features that reveal a particular variety of Tamil were defined. Throughout the text, morphological markers were the key indicators of linguistic varieties. The category of PNG in verbs and corresponding

personal pronouns was rightfully identified as a key marker of dialectal variability in Tamil.

In syntax (BS, 5.3; I, 7.1.1), the differing qualities of spoken and written discourse were compared, highlighting the differences in coherence, completion, certainty, and variability of expression.

It has been acknowledged that the text exists between its author, its publisher, and its reader(s), and their approach may not always be the same. The author's combined conscious and unconscious choices, the publisher's efforts to present a readable, coherent volume, the reader's predisposing attitudes and experience all contribute to the resulting interpretation of the text.

8.2.2 The Ideal Unmarked Language

Applying the theory of markedness to the analysis, I have identified instances of the use of a dialectally or stylistically marked language throughout the text of this thesis. This approach has brought noteworthy results. In the field of literary Tamil, dialect infiltrations were observed on the lexical (I, 7.1.1b) and morphological (P, 3.1.1) level, contrary to the prevailing assumption that LT does not reveal dialectal background (Shanmugam Pillai 1960). Similarly, but more soundly, marked dialectal features were identified in the field of spoken Tamil in the texts of all discussed writers. None of the authors presents ST in its completely pure, dialectally unmarked form. The observed difference between writers and their texts is not in the category of a dialectally marked vs. unmarked language, but rather in the category of a less vs. more marked language.

Every instance of language use is seen as dialectally marked when examined closely. Nothing like purely standard language with dialectally unmarked features was identified. The unmarked member of the opposition is the ideal, unrealized member. Even writers who represent an almost unmarked conversational language sporadically apply the dialectal features (A, 6.2.4; BS 5.4), and vice versa, dialectal texts always employ choices from the unmarked,

standard language (J, 6.1; AM 6.3.2). It is the degree of dialectal markedness that matters in the actual language use, not its presence or absence.

8.2.3 Functional Transformations

The functional markedness of individual varieties changes both in time and among individual authors. In the oldest discussed texts, LT was the language of both narration and conversation not only of historical, but also of modern, educated characters (P, 3.1.2), while ST was almost absent or emotionally marked (P, 3.1.3). In the more recent texts, LT remains the language of narration for most of the authors, but has specific marked function when used in conversation. Instances of LT use in conversation include formal speech (BS, 4.1.2), speech of inanimate objects and animals (A, 6.2.3), or multilingual speech (AM, 6.3.3).

Among the subregisters of LT, LT high was identified as a functionally marked instance of language use in contemporary fiction. It is ridiculed and placed into contrast with contemporary casual language use (BS, 4.1). LT high in its most obsolete form, the old Tamil, is not only ridiculed, but also not understood (P, 3.2.3) and thus causes confusion similar to the effects of foreign language use (BS, 4.2).

The degree of colloquial markedness at the opposite end of the spectrum of literary Tamil, LT low close to the spoken language, seems to depend on the presence of a hidden, neutral author (BS, 4.1.4; I, 7.1) vs. a concrete "I" narrating a story (Pu, 7.2).

Conversation in the contemporary literary texts is carried in a representation of ST with a varying degree of dialectal markedness. The dialectal component of ST is used in two complementary ways among the authors. It either serves primarily for characterization, often stereotypical, of marginal characters - women, elders, children, traditional, uneducated, and home-based characters (P, 3.1.4; J, 6.1.2, 6.1.3.; A, 6.2.5) or its main purpose is the

expression of linguistic identity of the characters (AM, 6.3.1; I 7.1; Pu, 7.2). The stereotypical characterization is expressed most strongly by an author who employs a dialect of a community which is not his own (J, 6.1). The identity-based dialectal writing is most strongly pronounced among the members of marginalized, oppressed groups, the Dalits.

Among the dialects, historical shift changed the attitude towards the Brahmin dialect, whose features were imitated by the socially advanced characters of diverse background in the oldest texts (P, 3.2.2), but are used only privately by group members in the writings of a later author (AM 6.3.1). On the contrary, the dialectal writings of the Dalits (I, Pu, 7) are steadily growing in strength and represent the most progressive component of contemporary Tamil literature.

Of the outside sources, Sanskrit was deprived of its prestige (P, 3.2.2) and was replaced by English. English, first slowly introduced as a marked instance of language use (P, 3.2.1), gradually gained acceptance, and among the educated middle-class was adopted as part of the Tamil system (BS, 4.3.1), although its overuse is still occasionally criticized and ridiculed (BS, 4.3.2).

8.2.4 Departure Point Revisited

The departure point of our analysis of language use in contemporary Tamil literature was expressed in the introduction of this thesis (2.2, p. 23) as follows:

The language of literature remains primarily the literary Tamil. In contemporary prose, it is [for some only *sporadically* (Zvelebil 1964)] *permitted* (Annamalai 2011) in the conversation in *some* novels and short stories (Deiva Sundaram 1981) to use the colloquial language. Zvelebil further implies that *for comic effect and characterization*, dialectal speech may *occasionally* be represented in writing.

Our observations depart from this assumption in several points. I would be hesitant to state that the language of literature remains primarily the literary Tamil. Although present in the works of most discussed writers as a language of narration, LT is accompanied by ST, outside linguistic sources, and dialects in contemporary fictional writing to such an extent, that the latter get at least an equally important share. Colloquial language is not sporadic in the conversation and does not appear only in some contemporary novels and stories, but in most if not all of them. Dialectal speech is not represented only occasionally, but forms an integral part of the colloquial (and to a much lesser degree also of the literal) discourse. It is definitely not used primarily for comic effect, and although characterization is an important aspect of dialectal writing, linguistic identification of the character (and author) with a given dialect is equally if not more important.

Bearing in mind that the above summarized assumptions were stated by researchers of Tamil language mostly several decades ago, this thesis attests the evolution of language use in contemporary Tamil short fiction. Starting from a few timid hints of colloquial language in the pioneer works of Tamil fiction, the language of fiction now employs the repertoire of Tamil in all its variability.

8.3 Possibilities for Future Research

If we should pick up one sphere of Tamil literature which is the fastest growing and most progressive, it would most likely be the literature of and about the Dalits. Dalit literature introduces new marginalized themes and employs new, marginalized and marked language.

I have touched upon some of the aspects of Dalit writing. As a language of a subaltern group, it requires alternate aesthetic paradigm, different from the mainstream aesthetics. The aggression and violence that is perceived in every part of Dalit life transforms itself into the vulgarity of the language. Vulgarisms and curses, I argue, are the true poetic metaphores of Dalit writing (I, 7.1.2).

Dalit writing is mostly perceived as radical, departing from the tradition, highly innovative, and unconventional. It aims to transcend all boundaries, same as Dalits themselves aim to break all barriers imposed on them. The writer Puhall, in his efforts to display Dalit experience without the use of dialectally unmarked, "non-Dalit" language, shakes off the cage of Tamil diglossia.

Although new and fresh in the field of the short-story genre, I have observed the very traditional aspect of his writing. The narrator-perspective present in his stories, as opposed to an author-based perspective, places his writings to the traditional genre of oral story telling, in which colloquial language is well at home (Pu, 7.2).

Nevertheless, Puhall's attempt to write solely in dialectal Tamil will most likely not remain isolated. In the future, it will be worth seeing which approach will prevail. Imaiya's distant look at the scene from outside the periphery or Puhall's emotional narration from inside? Puhall's approach brings innovation to the use of Tamil language, but at the same time inflicts certain deprivation. It deprives the language of its literary history, which in Imaiya's equally vivid writing is still present.

The Dalit literature offers sound possibilities for future research. Two monographies of Tamil Dalit writing, which I did not have a chance to consult before the completion of this thesis, have been published recently.⁸⁴ Apparently, the dialectal writing is shifting from the periphery to the centre of attention of linguists, literary researchers, and, quite possibly, general readers as well.

⁸⁴ Tamil Dalit Literature: My Own Experience. Ed. and Transl. by David C. Buck, Kannan M. IFP, Pondicherry 2011 and The Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing. Ed. by Ravikumar and R. Azhagarasan, Oxford University Press 2012.

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