The use of polysemy for word-play in ancient Tamil literature and the traditional tools available for dealing with it.

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HAL Id: halshs-00933495
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00933495v1

Submitted on 20 Jan 2014

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This presentation will serve a double purpose. On the one hand, I shall present excerpts from ancient Tamil literature, illustrating the use of polysemy (and homophony), in combination with "dignified puns"[1] in a poem which came to be called *Tiruviyamaka* "sacred *yamaka*" by posterity, after the name of an ornamental figure (*aṇi*) which that poem seems (perhaps anachronistically) to illustrate, that figure belonging to a type called *yamaka* (in Sanskrit) or *maṭakku* (in Tamil) by later theoreticians. On the other hand, I shall briefly discuss some lexical tools created in the course of the twin histories of Tamil "classical"[2] literature(s) and Tamil śāstric literature(s), and transmitted up to the present time by many successive generations of teachers and students, the transmission process itself being probably responsible for the progressive growth and multiplication of those tools, often referred to as kōśa-s "thesauri", the two most ancient Tamil kōśa-s being the *Tivākaram* and the *Piṅkalam*, which certainly played an important role in codifying and mapping literary Tamil.

A 20th-century performance of an ancient hymn

The main item to be examined here is a stanza from the *Tēvāram*, a collection of hymns to Śiva, still highly valued by Tamil Śaivites today, both in Tamil Nadu and in the Tamil diaspora.

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[1] Should one use the word "paronomasia"? Unlike the French "pun" or "calembour" (found in the Canard Enchainé), the intention of our poet-cum-saint (Campantar) does not seem to have been to ridicule but rather to bring a smile or to strike the imagination through contrasts. It may of course also have been apparent mild self-mocking, as a form of *captatio benevolentiae*.

[2] The quotation-marks point to the fact that in certain Indian political contexts, the term "classical" has a special meaning: restrictions are pronounced on the basis of the supposed date of composition ["is the work more than 1500 years old?" etc.]. I voluntarily ignore such distinctions because they seem completely to miss the mark concerning the reality of (and the role played by) Classical literatures in the societies which have them.
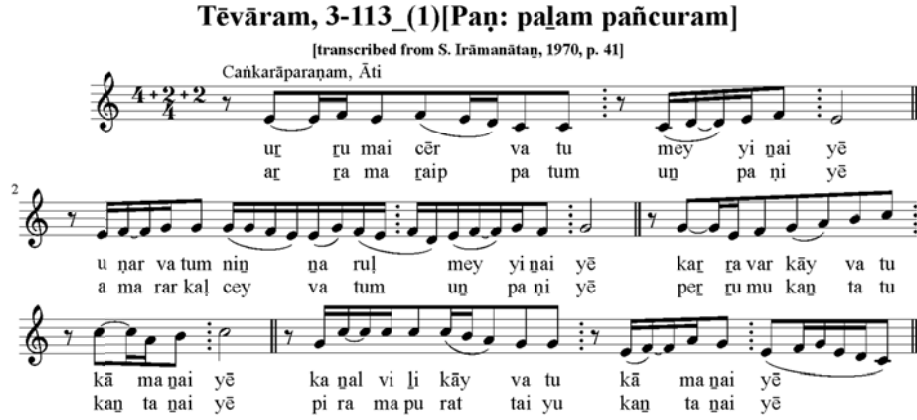
Tēvāram, 3-113_(1)[Paṇ: paḷam pañcuram]

[transcribed from S. Irāmanātaṉ, 1970, p. 41]

Caṅkarāparaṇam, Āti

ur   ru mai cēr   va tu   mey yi ṇai yē
ar   ra ma raip   pa tum   uṇ   pa ṇi yē

u ṇar va tum niṉ   ṇa ruḷ   mey yi ṇai yē   kaṟ ṟa var kāy va tu
a ma rar kaḷ cey   va tum   uṇ   pa ṇi yē   peṟ ṟu mu kaṇ ta tu

kā ma ṇai yē   ka ṇal vi ḷi kāy va tu   kā   ma ṇai yē
kaṇ ta ṇai yē   pi ra ma pu rat tai yu   kaṇ ta ṇai yē

Figure 1

Those hymns are sung till now[3] to melodies (or *paṇ*-s) which are considered ancient[4] and are said to belong to a variety of (Classical) Tamil called *icait tamiḻ* "musical Tamil". Although I have myself made audio recordings of a number of hymns, a few years ago,[5] it has appeared more convenient to provide here (see **Figure 1**) a conversion (to staff notation) of a transcription (in Tamil script) of a recommendation for singing the *Tēvāram* hymn 3-113 which is found (along with 36 other transcriptions) inside a book published in 1970, by a well-known Tamil musicologist, Es. Irāmanātaṉ (S. Ramanathan).[6] I wish to emphasize, by this mode of presentation, which is not purely textual, that a text can be transmitted as part of a complex object (comprising a melody and a succession of syllables), in a context of ritual practice and in a manner which does not necessarily depend on a perfect understanding of the text by everyone.[7] A learner may consider that he (or she) is successful if he (or she) has memorized the melody and the lyrics, and taken part in a collective performance. Fully understanding the text can, under those circumstances, come at a later stage. Such a possibility should be kept in mind when we discuss the interpretation of the hymn under examination, especially when scrutinizing its most difficult passages. And it should thus be possible to consider the full meaning of the hymn as not LOST for those performers who do not understand every word to its full extent when they first hear the hymn and repeat it, but as potentially available to them, in a

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[3] See Elisabeth Barnoud-Sethupathy's thesis (1994).

[4] According to some, the collection of hymns was put together with explicit *paṇ* (and *kaṭṭaḷai*) specifications in the 10th century. The composition of the hymns themselves is supposed to have taken place a few centuries earlier. All this is of course debated. For a panorama of the debates, see F.Gros[1984] "Towards reading the *Tēvāram*".

[5] The *Digital Tēvāram* CD-ROM (see Subramanya Aiyar et alii, 2007) contains three distinct audio recordings of the Tēvāram hymn 3-113, two of them being by individual performers and one of them by a group of students, who were studying in Dharmapuram in order to become *ōtuvar*-s. These three recordings are part of the more than one hundred recordings (totalling ca. 6 hours, in MP3 format) found in that CD-ROM.

[6] It should be made clear that this is not the transcription of a live performance, which would be available for direct examination, which is why I call it a "recommendation for singing". As far as published written musical transcriptions of *Tēvāram* hymns are concerned, the earliest available one seems to have been printed in 1928, by I. Appācāmi Ōtuvamūrtti, in his *Tēvārap paṇ cura amaippu* ([1928] 2005). Before that date, the transmission of melodies seems to have been left solely to traditional oral-aural immersion methods, based on practice. The lyrics of those hymns were of course available in printed form earlier than that, starting in the 19th century (See Gros[1984, p.xxiii and p.lxv]).

[7] Singing in a language which one does not master or even understand perfectly is a practice found both in India and in Europe.

delayed manner, thanks to the assistance they could receive from more experienced practitioners belonging to their religious community. And they might also be satisfied with the idea that an even fuller explanation of *Tēvāram* 3-113 is available inside T.V. Gopal Iyer[1991], on pp. 127-131 (*paḻaiya urai* "ancient commentary") and on pp. 146-151 (*iṉṟaiya urai* "modern commentary"), which they could study if they felt so disposed.[8]

How the syllables stand in the hymn

We now come to an examination of the structure of this stanza and of the play with words which it illustrates. As may be already clear to those who have examined Figure 1, some segments occur several times in the four lines of this stanza (as would also be the case in the other stanzas of that same hymn). These segments are indicated in boldface in the transcription which is now given:[9]

> **(1A)** *uṟ ṟu mai cēr va tu* **mey yi ṉai yē** --- *u ṇar va tum niṉ ṉa ruḷ* **mey yi ṉai yē** (Line 1)

> **(1B)** *kaṟ ṟa var* **kāy va tu kā ma ṉai yē** --- *ka ṉal vi ḷi* **kāy va tu kā ma ṉai yē** (Line 2)

> **(1C)** *aṟ ṟa ma ṟaip p**a tum uṉ pa ṇi yē** --- *a ma rar kaḷ cey v**a tum uṉ pa ṇi yē** (Line 3)

> **(1D)** *peṟ ṟu mu kaṇ ta t**u kaṇ ta ṉai yē** --- *pi ra ma pu rat tai yu kaṇ ta ṉai yē** (Line 4)

The preliminary transcription given here, copied from Figure 1, uses blank spaces between the syllables,[10] as if the words were not distinctly perceptible.[11] Another possible transcription, undoing the sandhi and separating the words,[12] including the clitics, would show that the principle underlying the play with words is not the same in lines 1, 2 & 3 on the one hand and line 4 on the other hand:

> **(2A)** uṟṟu* umai cērvatu **meyyiṉai ~ē** --- uṇarvatu* um niṉ= aruḷ **meyyiṉai ~ē** (Line 1)

> **(2B)** kaṟṟavar **kāyvatu kāmaṉai ~ē** --- kaṉal viḷi **kāyvatu kāmaṉai ~ē** (Line 2)

> **(2C)** aṟṟam* maṟaipp**atu* um uṉ paṇi ~ē** --- amararkaḷ ceyv**atu* um uṉ paṇi ~ē** (Line 3)

> **(2D)** peṟṟu mukaṇtat**u kaṇtaṉai ~ē** --- piramapurattai ~**ukaṇtaṉai ~ē** (Line 4)

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[8] A full French translation of *Tēvāram* 3-113 is available in Uthaya Veluppillai's 2013 Ph.D. thesis (pp. 117-121).

[9] The text given here is not totally identical with the text contained in S.Ramanathan's 1970 book, but is based on the *Tēvāram* edition by T.V. Gopal Iyer (1984). The (small) differences have to do with the ambiguities one may face while dissolving sandhi. I have given here preference to the readings by T.V. Gopal Iyer because he has edited the whole of the *Tēvāram*, after examining many MSS and ancient editions.

[10] There are a few exceptions to this principle in this transcription, because line 3 should in fact have been written : "*aṟ ṟa ma ṟaip p**a tu muṉ pa ṇi yē** --- a ma rar kaḷ cey v**a tu muṉ pa ṇi yē**" but the coordinative particle –*um* would have been less visible in that case.

[11] I also wish thereby to signal the hypnotizing rhythm, where the first half of each line consists of 10 syllables, following a pattern which some Sanskritists would characterize as GLLGLLGLLG [where G stands for *guru* "heavy" and L for *laghu* "light"], although they would find that at least one of the LL is in fact an LG (or rather an LX, where X is indifferently L or G), which fact may explain itself naturally if the LX is called a "*nirai*", which is one of the basic constituents of normal Tamil metrics. And as far as the second half of each line is concerned, its 11 syllables follow the pattern LXLLGLLGLLG, almost echoing the first half, but with a small change at the beginning, where a *nirai* has replaced a *nēr* (For a traditional definition of nēr and *nirai*, see Niklas [1993: pp.40-47]).

[12] The signification of the signs * (deletion of preceding item), ~ (glide insertion) and = (doubling of final C in CV̆C words) is explained in Chevillard [1996: 19].

The difference lies in the fact that inside lines 1, 2 and 3, we seem to have exact repetition of the same items (in final position) in the two half-lines (the items being "meyyinai", "kāmaṉai" and "paṇi"), whereas inside line 4, each of the two half lines ends with a different item, although the two items, which are "kantaṉai" and "ukantaṉai", share their three final syllables, and therefore, from a purely phonetic point of view, if we also take into account the surrounding particles, we can say that in each of the four lines, the first half-line has at least a four-syllable common final rhyme[13] with the second half (as was visible in 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D).

Structure of the seven short statements contained in the stanza

I have so far shown the material/phonetic side of the repetition found in the stanza, but where is the word-play? In order to answer this question, we have to translate the stanza but this requires us to first provide information on its syntax. The initial part of the stanza, comprising three and a half lines, appears to be divided into seven short segments (S1 to S7), which all might belong to the type called "Cleft sentence" by Lindholm[1972]. These seven short segments are followed by a final segment (S8) which can be interpreted either as a simple declarative statement "You rejoice to be in [the city of] Piramapuram" or as a vocative "O you who rejoice to be in [the city of] Piramapuram". At this stage, it is useful to explain that the one who is thus addressed is the god Śiva and that the city referred to is the modern Cīrkāḻi, for which Piramapuram is one among twelve possible names, in the hymns composed by this poet.[14] And it is this same Śiva who is addressed in the seven short cleft sentences, where we find two forms of the second person possessive: *niṉ* "your" (line 1) and *uṉ* "your" (line 3, twice).[15] The core syntactic elements in those seven cleft sentences are seven forms ending with the third person neuter suffix *–tu*, namely c*ērvatu, uṇarvatu, kāyvatu* (Bis), *maṟaippatu, ceyvatu* and *mukantatu*. Those forms, which possess both verbal and nominal features have been handled with great care by grammarians, as can be seen from the great number of technical designations which they have received, both from indigenous and from foreign grammarians of Tamil, whose task was all the more difficult because Tamil is a strongly diglossic language (see Britto 1986), which fact is however not acknowledged by all the descriptors. For instance, the 1976 edition of *A Progressive Grammar of the Tamil Language* (Arden, revised by Clayton), treats those forms ending in *–tu* inside two sections, which are:

- Participial nouns (§ 448 to § 460)
- Verbal nouns (§ 461 to § 469)

but inside those sections, a number of cross-references (see paragraphs §456 and §469) make it very clear that those forms are problematic because they are sometimes used as participial nouns and sometimes used as "verbal nouns showing tense" (Arden/Clayton, p.224, fn.1, commenting on Lazarus [1878]). Leaving the grammarians and coming back to our stanza, the difficulty hinted at

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[13] Final rhymes (called *iyaipu* by the *Tolkāppiyam* and characterized in TP401i) are very rare in Tamil poetry. This makes these very long final rhymes all the more conspicuous). The normal type of rhyme in Tamil poetry is alliterative initial rhyme, of which there are two types: *etukai* (TP398i), rhyme of the second syllable [*dvitīya-anuprāsa*], which becomes ubiquitous when Tamil Bhakti develops (See Chevillard, 2014 [forthcoming]) and *mōṉai* (TP397i), rhyme of the first syllable, which is less frequent than *etukai*. The stanza under examination contains, of course, both *etukai* (between u*ṟṟu,* ka*ṟṟavar,* a*ṟṟam* and pe*ṟṟu*) and *mōṉai* (between **u**ṟṟu and **u**ṇarvatu, **ka**ṟṟavar and **ka**ṉal, **a**ṟṟam and **a**marar, **pe**ṟṟu and **pi**ramapurattai).

[14] See Uthaya Veluppillai's 2013 Ph.D. thesis, Chapitre 3, pp.72-132.

[15] It is unclear to me why the poet has used both the archaic *niṉ* and the modern *uṉ* in the same stanza.

means that when we translate the form *maṟaippatu*, in line 3 (see 2A, supra), we have to choose (because of the context) between two possibilities:

(3a) *[aṟṟam] maṟaippatu* "that which hides [your *pudendum*]"[16]

(3b) *[aṟṟam] maṟaippatu* "the [fact that there is the action of] hiding [your *pudendum*]"

The context helps us to limit the choice to these two possibilities because the presence of an explicit object *aṟṟam* "pudendum" for the action of hiding prevents the (otherwise possible) alternate interpretation of *maṟaippatu* as "that which is hidden". As a contrast, in line 2 for instance, the choice for translating the form *kāyvatu* is between:

(4a) *[kaṇal viḻi] kāyvatu* "that which is burnt [by the eye of fire]" (or "that which [the eye of fire] burns"

(4b) *[kaṇal viḻi] kāyvatu* "the fact that [the eye of fire] burns" (or "the burning [by the eye of fire]")

Otherwise, without the presence in the context of *kaṇal viḻi* "eye of fire" (which is the third eye of Śiva), we could also understand *kāyvatu* as meaning (in other contexts) "that which burns". And those explanations are a simplification because the choice is not only between the agent and the object.

   Those preliminary explanations being given, we can now try to translate (partially) the half lines containing the syntagmata which we have just examined, leaving out for the time being the explanation of the word-play performed by the means of the word *paṇi*.

(5) *aṟṟam maṟaippatu* -um uṉ paṇi –y-ē* (line 3, first half)
   {pudendum that-which-hides COORDINATIVE_particle your PAṆI expletive_particle}
   "That also which hides your *pudendum* is your PAṆI"

This may appear as a reasonable translation of what looks like an equative statement between two nominal syntagmata. However, when we come to the other item and tentatively translate it as:

(6) *kaṇal viḻi kāyvatu kāmaṉ-ai -y-ē* (line 2, second half)
   {fire eye that-which-burns/is-burnt KĀMAṈ-ACC expletive_particle}
   "That which [your] fire eye burns is KĀMAṈ"

we must face a situation where we apparently have an equative statement between two nominal syntagmata, of which the second one is in the accusative case, as indicated by the presence of the *-ai* suffix on the noun *kāmaṉ*, which stands as *kāmaṉai*.

An uneasiness with the notion that we can have an equative statement between a syntagm in the nominative and a syntagm in the accusative is probably what induced James M. Lindhom (1972) to

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[16] Although this would certainly require a longer discussion, because of the polysemy of *aṟṟam*, for which the Madras Tamil Lexicon lists (on p. 172) eleven distinct meanings, the fifth one being "That which should be covered" and the fourth one being "Shame", I have decided to translate *aṟṟam* by *pudendum* (and not by "genitals", which could only be an inferred meaning) in order to try to convey the sense of strong taboo which seems to be present here.

make the following declaration, while facing examples which are similar[17] to the ones we have examined.

(7)   « What are those verbal forms ending in –tu? The purpose of this short paper is to show that these are neither participial nouns nor verbal nouns in the ordinary sense. Rather there are reasons to believe that they are the result of a rule, which with your permission I will call a "transformation", that operates on simple verb-final sentences. I will call the sentences which result from the operation of this transformation "cleft sentences", since this is the term used for a similar process in English. » (Lindholm, 1972, p. 298)

He was later followed by others, such as Gair[1985/1998], who in an article called "Sinhala Focused Sentences: Naturalization of a Calque" (1998, pp. 155-169) compares sentences found in Jaffna Tamil[18] with "a focusing construction that plays a highly visible role" in the grammar of Sinhala.

Use of homophony/polysemy in parallel statements

I cannot however elaborate here on the importance of "cleft sentences". Let us tentatively accept that this characterization could apply to the variety of Tamil found in the *Tēvāram*, all the more since, as explained at the beginning of this article, the text of those hymns is transmitted in a highly ritualized context where normal linguistic functions are partly in a state of semantic stasis. I shall therefore now try to provide a global translation of the stanza, leaving however the elucidation of the word-play for the steps which will follow the translation.

(8)   "That of which (your wife) Umā partakes by contact is (your) MEY
-- That also which is perceived/understood (by devotees) is the MEY of your grace (*aruḷ*)"
That which those who have studied burn is KĀMAṈ
--That which [your] fire eye burns is KĀMAṈ
That also which hides your pudendum is your PAṆI
– That also which celestials perform is your PAṆI
That which you obtained and embraced is KANTAṈ
-- You who rejoiced (U**KANTAṈ**AI) in the city of Piramapuram. (*Tēvāram*, 3-113, 1)

Admitting that the syntax of the seven short statements is now relatively clear, what remains now to be done is to explain how the play on words in this stanza (and in similar ones) may have been perceived (or intended to be perceived), in the original context of its composition. And since it would be anachronistic to use a 20th-century dictionary for explaining the polysemy (or the homophony) which is at play here, I shall draw from two ancient *kōśa*-s, the *Tivākaram* (T) and the *Piṅkalam* (P), which are probably later than the *Tēvāram*, but which seem to illustrate some of the semantic conceptions found in the *Tolkāppiyam*, the most ancient Tamil śāstric text, which is probably older than the *Tēvāram*, and in which some of the roots of Tamil lexicography are found (see Chevillard[2010b]).

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[17] Among the examples given by Lindholm (p.298), we can mention: "(2) naaṉ neeṭṭu paarttatu maaranai 'the one I saw yesterday is Maaran", "(4) naan piṟantatu maturaiyil" 'I was born in Madurai'", "(5) naaṉ vaaZvatu eṉ makaLukkaaka 'it is for my daughter that I live'".
[18] The first Tamil example given by Gair (1998, p.156) is « (T1) *naan poonatu yaaLppaaNattukku*. {I go-PAST-NOM Jaffna-DAT} 'It was to Jaffna that I went' ».

Very briefly described, the T and the P are both collections of lists of words, those lists falling mainly[19] under two main categories:

- The **first type** of list enumerates words which we can best describe as being quasi-synonyms (see Chevillard [2010a]) of one word which is considered as the main entry or the head-word.
- The **second type** of list mostly deals with words which have appeared in several lists of the first type, where they were declared to be quasi-synonymous with several head-words which are not considered as synonymous between themselves. We can therefore consider that the second type of list deals with polysemic items (or with homophones, depending on the point of view which we adopt)

Taking as examples some of the items which we have capitalized in (8), we see for instance that, in the *Tivākaram*, the word MEY appears (along with the expletive particle –ē) in T1774, a sūtra which reads:

(9)   *caṭṭakam MEYYĒ tāparam pūṭci*
      aṅkam kāyam putai y-uṟuppu yākkai
      ātā rattiṉoṭu uruvam paṭivam eṉṟu
      ōtiṉar nūlōr UṬALIṈ peyarē (T_342)

   "The designations for UṬAL "body" are: caṭṭakam,[20] MEY, tāparam, ..., paṭivam"

This list belongs to the **first type** and provides us with twelve quasi-synonyms for the common word UṬAL. It is of course not an easy task to evaluate such statements and to find out how they are confirmed by literary usages[21] or by inscriptions[22]. We can now mention one more list of the first type , which is:

(10)   *vāymaiyum caratamum paramum vāyum*
      āṇaiyum tiṭamum, MEY eṉa aṟaivar. (T_1774)
      "they declare that *vāymai* "truthfulness", *caratam* "truth", *param* "pre-eminent", *vāy* "true", *āṇai* "injunction" and *tiṭam* "certainty" can be expressed by 'MEY'."

We could similarly mention other lists of the first type (such as T_1857) containing MEY in the *Tivākaram*, but in this preliminary exploration, it seems more appropriate to mention a list of the second type, namely T_2232, which reads:

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[19] Time does not permit here a discussion of the content of chapter XII in *Tivākaram* and of Chapter III in *Piṅkalam*. Both contain enumerations of lists of a **third type**, where specific items are mnemonically associated with specific numbers, like for instance "the three fires", "the seven infernos", "the nine gems", etc. in a manner which reminds one of the *bhūtasaṃkhyā*-s (See Gerschheimer[2007] for references to Sanskrit texts containing lists of such items).

[20] Limiting ourselves to the first item in the list, we can easily verify that the Madras Tamil Lexicon (MTL), p.1236, gives five values for *caṭṭakam*: 1. Frame, framework; 2. Bed, couch; 3. Shape, figure, image; 4. cf. *jaḍa*. Body; 5. Corpse.

[21] It is on the basis of several such attempts that I prefer to talk about "quasi-synonyms" (rather than calling those items "synonyms").

[22] The modern descriptive linguist must remember that we cannot interview people who lived in the first millennium AD, which is the period when the texts we are dealing with were composed.

(11) *MEYYĒ uṭampum coṟpoṟuḷum meyyeḻuttum*

"MEY means "body" (*uṭampu*), "[true/real(?)] meaning" (*coṟpoṟuḷ*) and "consonant" (*meyyeḻuttu*).

Like every other list of the second type (there are 382 of them), this list is contained in the eleventh chapter of the *Tivākaram*, which is reserved for them, whereas the lists of the first type (there are almost 1900 of them) are contained in chapters I to X, where their distribution is by broad topics, which are:

1. names of the gods (158 lists)
2. names of human beings (250 lists)
3. names of animals (216 lists)
4. names of plants (216 lists)
5. names of places (179 lists)
6. names of various natural substances and objects (113 lists)
7. names of man-made items (205 lists)
8. names of qualities (212 lists)
9. names of actions (213 lists)
10. names pertaining to sound (129 lists)

Space does not permit me to provide the reader here with the thematic organization of the *Piṅkalam*, which differs from the *Tivākaram*, although the same two main types of list are present. The chapter devoted to lists of the second type in the *Piṅkalam* is the 10th chapter, and one of the innovations in its presentation is that it organized according to phonetic principles,[23] in the MSS in which it is available.[24] In the case of the item MEY which we have examined so far in (9), (10) and (11), the list expressing its polysemy (i.e. P_3992) contains only two items, and reads:

(12) *yākkaiyum vāymaiyu MEYyeṉa lākum* (P_3992)
"[one can express] yākkai "body" and vāymai "truth" by saying "MEY".

If we want truly to reconcile the explanation given in (11) by the *Tivākaram* with the shorter summary given here in (12) by the *Piṅkalam*, which is in agreement with what we had seen in (10), we can postulate that "meaning" (*coṟpoṟuḷ*) in (11) is "[true/real] meaning". However, the truth is that those traditional kōśa-s are nowadays insufficiently studied.[25] They should be examined with modern tools (including those of Graph theory).[26] Nevertheless, the neat result of our examination of the T and the P is that a possible translation of the first line in our stanza is:

(13) "That of which (your wife) Umā partakes by contact is (your) **body (MEY)**; that also which is understood/ perceived (by devotees) is the **truth/reality (MEY)** of your grace (*aruḷ*)".

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[23] There are ten sections : items starting with a vowel (akara varukkam), items starting with K, C, Ñ, T, N, P, M, Y and V.

[24] It is of course impossible to say whether it was an original feature. Dominic Goodall points out to me that a similar feature is found in the Viśvakośa of 1111 AD. Leaving India, historical observations on the use of sorting in several civilizations are found in Knuth[1998: 420-421]. How such inventions have circulated on the planet is of course not easy to determine.

[25] A full-fledged study would be necessary, on the model of what W. Hüllen[2004] did for Roget's Thesaurus.

[26] See the preliminary exploration of Roget's thesaurus by D. E. Knuth[1993].

The image evoked here, in the first half-line, is the composite male-female form of Śiva, called *ardhanārīśvara*. As for the word-play based on *mey*, between the two half-lines, I have not found an English noun which could express it, although a less literal translation could probably play on the verbal component on both sides because the comparison points to two forms of cognition: bodily cognition[27] and mental cognition.

Can one choose between polysemy and homophony?

We shall now examine the third line, skipping an examination of the word-play involved in the second line.[28] The term on which we have an instance of word-play is PAṆI, and we are informed of its values by *Piṅkalam* P_3764 (6 values):

(14)   *toḻilun toḻilpaṭu karuviyuñ collum*
       paṇitalum pāmpu maṇiyum paṇiyē
       " 'work' (*toḻil*), 'instrument for work' (*toḻilpaṭu karuvi*), 'word' (*col*), 'adoration' (*paṇital*), 'snake' (*pāmpu*) and 'ornament' (*aṇi*) [are the meanings of] PAṆI"

No equivalent verse is found in the 11th chapter of the *Tivākaram*, but we do find PAṆI given as a quasi-synonym of *pāmpu* "snake" both in T_534 (along with 10 other items, starting with *aravu*) and in P_2601 (along with 20 other items, also starting with *aravu*). This is the meaning which is traditionally given for PAṆI in the first half of our line. As for the second half, the meaning traditionally given is "adoration", and this fits with T_1637, where *paṇital*[29] is given as a quasi-synonym of *toḻutal* "to adore", inside a list of seven items starting by *vaṇaṅkal* "to bow to". The *Piṅkalam* has an analogous list in P_1973, where *paṇital* is in second position: it contains ten items, starting with *vantaṉai* and ending with *pōṟṟal*: those ten are said to be equivalent to *vaṇaṅkal*, which appears as the head word. A possible translation for our third line is therefore:

(15)   "That also which hides your pudendum is your snake (PAṆI); that also which celestials perform is your adoration/service (PAṆI)"

But is the word-play in this line of the same nature as the word playwe saw above in (13)? We are informed by the MTL (p. 2458, entry *paṇi*[6]) that the word *paṇi*, when it means "snake", is derived from Sanskrit /phaṇin/, and therefore, for us who live in the 21st century, the historical truth seems to be that it might be useful to distinguish between homophony (as seen in 15) and polysemy as in (13). However, if we do that, we are entering the description of a field where the tools developed will rapidly go beyond the capacity of an individual brain, as can be seen if we compare the right half of p. 2457 in the MTL (containing entries *paṇi*[1]-*tal*, *paṇi*[2]-*ttal*, *paṇi*[3], *paṇi*[4]-*ttal*, *paṇi*[5]) with the pioneer

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[27] In its enumerative description of living beings (in TP571i), the *Tolkāppiyam* mentions first the beings which have only the sense of touch (*uṟṟ-aṟital* "cognition by [bodily] contact"), ascending up to those which have six senses.

[28] That line is probably one of the easiest to understand outside India. Because of the fame of the *Kāmasūtra*, almost everyone guesses approximately what Kāmaṉ may refer to, as far as the first half-line is concerned. And the episode in which Śiva burnt with his third eye the God of Love, who had attempted to distract him, is probably also well known. Besides, we do not have real polysemy in "That which those who have studied burn is the Love God (KĀMAṈ); that which [your] fire eye burns is the Love God (KĀMAṈ).

[29] *Paṇital* is the citation form of the verb, as seen for instance in the MTL, whereas *paṇi* is either the verbal root or one of the nouns belonging to the same semantic domain.

lexicographical attempt available in (14), in which we could see the *Piṅkalam* surpassing the early *Tivākaram* in mapping the complexity of literary Tamil.

However, if we do not try to compete with the lexicographers for modern languages,[30] another field of study is also possible. We can try to confront ourselves with the following question: how was it possible, **in practice**, for human beings to have inside their personal memory (and not on a bookshelf or in an online database) huge chunks of texts (often accompanied by a metrical or a musical "carrier wave") such as the *Tēvāram* or the *Piṅkalam*. How were they taught? We are told for instance by the anonymous scholars who wrote the preface of the 1968 Kaḻakam edition of the *Piṅkalam* that, in ancient days, those who wanted to study grammatical or literary works would not be accepted as students by teachers unless they had memorized the traditional kōśas.[31] We might not be capable of such feats ourselves nowadays, because of the global changes in the organization of human societies. However, if we really want to understand this past which is not after all so very distant from us, we have to find a way to model the shape that knowledge took in those days. Further explorations of ancient texts, technical and non-technical, will be required for that. The future does not abolish the past.

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[30] This might in any case be a partly impossible task, given the elusive nature of our data.

[31] "*ilakkaṇa ilakkiya nūlkaḷaik kaṟṟup pulamait tiṟamaṭaiya virumpuvōr mutaṟkaṇ nikaṇṭu nūlkaḷai aiyantiripaṟak kaṟṟu nalla payiṟciyaip peṟṟirukka vēṇṭum eṉṉum kaṭṭāyat tiṭṭam paṇṭaikkālak kaṇakkāyarkaḷiṭattilē iruntu vantatu.*" (Piṅkala Nikaṇṭu, 1968 edition, p. 5).

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