Why did Tamil need to borrow a term like upamā when it already had resources of its own?

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1. Three Northern terms inside an orphan list from the lost Tamil "Chapter on Ornaments" (Aṇiyiyal)

Section 1 (1)

Classical Tamil, or rather செந்தமிழ் [centami_l], henceforth **CT**, is a language variety which has been cultivated for many centuries in South India, in the region which comprises today the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The remaining traces of that cultivation are several treatises, among which the most ancient is the *Tolkāppiyam* (T), and a number of literary compositions, too numerous to name all in a short article. The assiduous cultivation of CT is no longer taking place in today's Kerala, but it remains an important component of the Tamil identity in Tamil Nadu, although most of its inhabitants cannot easily understand the greater part of CT literature.

Section 1 (2)

[…] although most of its inhabitants cannot easily understand the greater part of CT literature. They need for that the help of a commentary composed in modern Formal Tamil (henceforth FT), which is one the two components of the well-known Tamil diglossia (*iraṭṭai vaḻakku*), the other one being Spontaneously Spoken Tamil (henceforth SST). The latter expression should be seen as a cover term for the many constituents in a huge catalogue of dialects, although it can also be used for referring to the "standard spoken Tamil" promoted by Television, Cinema and Radio. The coexistence of FT with CT on the one hand and of FT with SST on the other hand results in what I have referred to elsewhere as the "Tamil Triglossia" (see Chevillard [2024]).

Section 1 (3)

Figure 1: Tamil Triglossia (SST-FT-CT),

either as a circle,

or as a bird with an FT body

and TWO dissymetrical wings,

called CT-FT and FT-SST,

or as a bird (an albatros) carrying two different burdens on the two sides,

the CT-FT wing carrying an ஓலைச் சுவடி,

and the FT-SST wing carrying a cinema leaflet)].

« Le Poète est semblable au prince des nuées
Qui hante la tempête et se rit de l'archer ;
Exilé sur le sol au milieu des huées,
Ses ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher »
(Baudelaire, L'albatros)
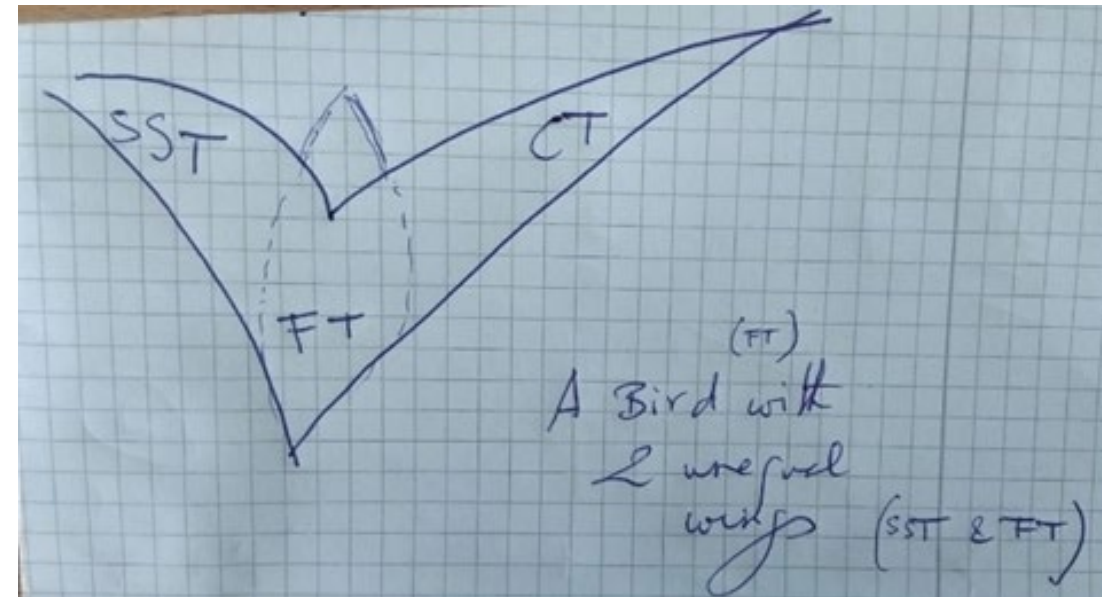
Section 1 (4)

[…] surrounded here by an audience comprising a sizeable number of readers very familiar with a language —or a group of languages—which several CT poets have referred to as vaṭa moḻi "Northern language", meaning either Sanskrit, or Prakrit, or both, it has seemed natural to me to present here, in what is a brief article, a snippet view of the slow progress, among successive generations of CT scholars, of the use of several terms borrowed from those Northern Languages, sometimes under several successive forms, as we shall when we examine the partly inconsistent coexistence of the early borrowing uvamam with the later normalized form uvamai, both being used to refer either to the figure called "simile" or to the "object of comparison".

Section 1 (5)

As will be shown in Section 4, Modern Tamil dictionaries are closely aligned with Sanskrit and carefully distinguish *uvamai* (skt. *upamā*) "simile", *uvamēyam* (skt. *upameya*) "subject of comparison" and *uvamāṉam* (skt. *upamāna*) "object of comparison", but during the first half of the first millenium, it was already quite a significant act to borrow one sanskrit term, and it would most probably not have been feasable to borrow a triplet of terms.

Section 1 (6)

The Northern terms under examination in this article — they include *uvamai*, although more mentions will be found of its predecessor *uvamam*— are all taken from a reconstructed list of 28 ornaments which I am currently researching in a piecemeal fashion because examining all the 28 in a single article is unrealistic. That list seems to have been initially contained in a lost treatise called *Aṇiyiyal* (AI) "Chapter on ornaments", but is now known only in an indirect manner, [...]

That list seems to have been initially contained in a lost treatise called Aṇiyiyal (AI) "Chapter on ornaments", but is now known only in an indirect manner, first because it is cited in the *Yāpparuṅkalavirutti* (YV) and secondly because it seems to have belonged to a corpus of texts which were part of the basis for the compilation of Tamil poetical vocabularies, nowadays referred to as *nikaṇṭu*-s, among which the oldest one is the *Tivākaram (Fnote3)*. On the basis of that evidence, it appears possible to postulate that the AI was composed in the 9th century or before.

Section 1 (7)

(Fnote3). The 9th cent. *Tivākaram*, most ancient preserved Tamil *nikaṇṭu* (or *kōṣa*), contains a list of 28 *alaṅkāram*-s "ornaments". The 10th century commentary to the 10th century *Yāpparuṅkalam*, a metrical treatise, contains a list of ornaments which is almost identical to the *Tivākaram* list, and says that it was composed by Aṇiyiyal-uṭaiyār "He who possesses the *Aṇiyiyal*". I have examined in detail the variant forms of that list of 28 ornaments inside those two texts, and inside two other Tamil *nikaṇṭu*-s in a forthcoming article which is due to appear in the Future in a Festschrift in honour of Professor G. Vijayavenugopal.

Section 1 (8)

Inside that AI list, 6 items are (phonetically) adapted from Sanskrit whereas the remaining 22 are Tamil terms or expressions. These six items, and their positions in the list of 28, are the following: *uruvakam* (1st) [skt. *rūpaka*], *uvamai* (2nd) [skt. *upamā*], *vārttai* (8th) [skt. *vārttā*], *cilēṭai* (12th) [skt. *śleṣa*], *uvamāṉamuruvakam* <mark>*(Fnote 4)*</mark> (19th), *nitaricaṉam* (22nd) [skt. *nidarśanā*].

Although the term is clearly a direct combination of *uvamāṉam* (skt *upamāna*) and *uruvakam* (skt. *rūpaka*), it has not yet been possible for me determinely which Sanskrit expression should be considered as the source of the borrowing. I have noted however that Gerow remarks on p.145, in his 1971 *Glossary* that "Daṇḍin objects to figures which are peculiar to Bhāmaha (*upamārūpaka*, […]) in 2.358-59."

It should be added that the AI list can usefully be distinguished from — and compared with— another list, containing 35 terms, which is found in two distinct forms inside the two Tamil adaptations of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* (DK). More precisely, inside the first adaptation, contained in the fifth chapter of the 11th cent. *Vīracōḻiyam* (VC), we find a list containing 21 Tamil terms and 14 Northern terms. Additionally, inside the second adaptation, contained in the 12th cent. *Taṇṭi-y-Alaṅkāram* (TA), we find a list containing 17 Tamil terms and 18 Northern terms. The decreasing proportion of Tamil vocabulary in those three lists of technical terms, going from 79% (AI) to 60% (VC) and finally to 49% (TA) is certainly telling.

However, this being a short article, our current examination will be limited to the first three Northern terms in the AI list. That is to say that we shall only discuss *uruvakam*, *uvamai* and *vārttai*, although we shall not examine them in the order of their appearance in the AI list, but on the basis of their date of entry in the Tamil vocabulary. This means that we shall first examine *uvamam* (and the sporadic presence of *uvamai*), in the *Tolkāppiyam*. We should have then continued, if time had permitted, with an examination of a larger corpus of Ancient Tamil literature (as described by the IMLTA), in which *vārttai* is found, although not as a technical term.

Instead of that, we shall have a look at the terminology, as seen from the point of view of 21st century FT (Formal Tamil), by means of what will be called an interlude, in section 4. We shall then move back in time to the 18th cent. examining the terminology with the eyes of Beschi. We shall then finally return to the world of Tamil CT scholarship, examining the occurrences of *uruvakam*, as a technical term, inside Parimēlaḻakar's commentary on the *Kuṟaḷ*, a text which probably predates the adoption of the term *uruvakam* into the Tamil scholarly vocabulary. But, we cannot forget of course that the use of ornaments is a literary practice, propagating by imitation, before being a school subject, studied by would-be poets, who then have to name it.

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2. What we find and do not find in the Tolkāppiyam: uvamam vs. uvamai

Section 2 (1)

Because the AI list can only be understood in the global context of the history of the Tamil scholarly and poetical tradition, we shall now look for occurrences of our three terms inside ancient Tamil texts, starting with *Tolkāppiyam*, because it is the most ancient Tamil scholarly text. The result of our search is as follows:

1. no occurrence of *uruvakam* or of *vārttai* is found in the *Tolkāppiyam*

2. some occurrences of *uvamai* are found in the *Tolkāppiyam* —see IMLTA, vol. I, p. 286— but [...]

Section 2 (2)

1. no occurrence of *uruvakam* or of *vārttai* is found in the *Tolkāppiyam*

2. some occurrences of *uvamai* are found in the *Tolkāppiyam*—see IMLTA, vol. I, p. 286— but […] this is only the case when it is transmitted with the commentary composed by Iḷampūraṇar, but there is much variation from one edition to the other. In any case, the term which is massively visible is in fact *uvamam*, and the general opinion of Tamil scholars seems to be that *uvamai* and *uvamam* mean the same. ((Fnote5))

((Fnote5)) The most likely reason for the erratic appearance of the *uvamai* "orthography" is that its presence results from the normalizing desire to apply the "orthographic" conventions defined by medieval Tamil scholars for representing Northern words in Tamil. A set of such conventions can be seen in the commentary to Naṉṉūl. Regarding Sanskrit feminine words ending in -ā, see the statement « *vēlai cālai mālai uvamai vaṉitai eṉa ākāra-v-īṟu aikāra-v-īṟ-āyiṟṟu* » inside the *Viruttiyurai* commentary to the *Naṉṉūl* sūtra N147v. It is noteworthy however that the author of Naṉṉūl himself uses the form *uvamam* both in N366v (*uvama vurupila tuvamat tokaiyē*) and N367v (*pōla puraiya oppa uṟāḻa [...] piṟavum uvamat turupē*), seemingly defying in advance his own future commentators ...

Section 2 (3)

Regarding the occurrences of *uvamai* just mentionned, it should be immediately explained that when we examine the corresponding passages inside the text of *Tolkāppiyam* as transmitted with the commentary of Pērāciriyar what we find is not the form *uvamai* but the form *uvamam*. To this must be added that Iḷampūraṇar himself uses massively the form *uvamam*. This can be seen for instance when providing comparative statistics for the 25th chapter of T, part of its third book, called *Poruḷatikāram* (TP). That 25th chapter is called *Uvamaviyal* "Chapter on Simile" (UI) and has been commented upon both by Iḷampūraṇar and Pērāciriyar.

Section 2 (4)

More precisely, we can say that, inside UI

- the *Tolkāppiyam* text provided by Pērāciriyar contains 16 times *uvamam*, including in the places where the reading provided by Iḷampūraṇar is *uvamai*.
- the *Tolkāppiyam* text provided by Iḷampūraṇar contains in those 16 positions most of the time *uvamam* and a few times *uvamai*, but the place where *uvamai* is found is not the same in every edition.

Section 2 (5)

More generally, if we examine the other components of the T, we can say that:

- inside the 9 chapters of the first book of T, called *Eḻuttatikāram* (TE), which deals with phonetics and phonology, there are 2 occurrences of *uvamam*

- inside the 9 chapters of the second book of T, called *Collatikāram* (TC), which deals with morphology and syntax, there are 3 occurrences of *uvamam*

- leaving aside the UI, inside the remaining 8 chapters of TP, i.e. *Poruḷatikāram*, third book of T, there are 8 occurrences of *uvamam*

Section 2 (6)

Altogether, since Iḷampūraṇar has commented on all the chapters of T, this means that the text transmitted by him contains (29-x) occurrences of *uvamam* and x occurrences of *uvamai.*, where x is a small integer. But the other commentators, which are not the same for all the sections of T, all make use of *uvamam*.

I shall now briefly give a sample from the 29 occurrences of *uvamam* (or *uvamai*) in the T, because they will provide flesh to what would otherwise be a dry succession of numbers.

A) inside the sūtra TE205i (alias TE204n), which describes the type of sandhi applicable to an enumeration of five terms (or groups of terms) which all end with the vowel a, we find the expression *uvamak kiḷavi* "the word for comparison/simile" and both TE commentators —they are Iḷampūraṇar and Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar— give an example containing the word *pōla* "like", the example being *puli pōlak koṉṟāṉ* "like a tiger, he killed". In his paraphrase of the sūtra, Nacciṉārkkiṉiyar even tells us that *pōla* "like" is an *uvama-v-urupu* "comparison morpheme".

(B) inside the sūtra TE211i (alias TE210n), which describes another type of sandhi applicable to a different enumeration (of 8 terms), we have the expression *aṉṉa-v-eṉṉum uvama-k-kiḷavi* "the word of comparison *aṉṉa*", and the example given is *poṉ aṉṉa kutirai* "horse which-is-similar-to gold", where *kutirai* is "horse", *poṉ* is "gold" and *aṉṉa* "which-is-similar-to" is also an *uvama-v-urupu* "comparison morpheme".used for connecting the two.

(C) inside the TC, the three occurrences of *uvamam* all have to do with the characterization of what is called *uvama-t-tokai* "comparative compound", which is one of the six types of compounds recognized by the Tamil grammatical tradition. The sūtra TC414c —as per the numbering in Cēṉāvaraiyar's commentary— states that *uvama-t-tokai-y-ē y-uvama-v-iyala* "a comparative compound has the nature of an explicit simile" and Cēṉāvaraiyar explains this by saying that in a comparative compound the *uvama-v-urupu* "comparison morpheme" has been elided, after which he illustrates the sūtra with four comparative compounds given as examples [...]

(C) inside the TC, [...] he illustrates the sūtra with four comparative compounds given as examples. They are *puli-p-pāyttuḷ* "tiger-(like) leap", *maḻai vaṇ-kai* "rain-(like) generous-hand", *tuṭi-naṭuvu* "tuṭi-drum-(like) waist" and *poṉ-mēṉi* "gold complexion". The equivalent phrases, in which the *uvama-v-urupu* has not been elided, are then said by him to be: *puli-p-pāyttuḷ aṉṉa pāyttuḷ* "leap which is similar to the leap of a tiger", *maḻai aṉṉa vaṇ-kai* "generous hand which is similar to rain", *tuṭi-y-aṉṉa-naṭuvu* "waist which is similar to a tuṭi-drum" and *poṉ-ṉ-aṉṉa mēṉi* "complexion which is like gold". We recognize in them the item aṉṉa "which-is-similar-to" already mentionned above, when presenting sūtra TE211i.

(D) *aṉṉa*, however is not the only "comparison morpheme", and inside the sūtra TC250c, found at the beginning of the Chapter on Particles, which enumerates seven types of particles, the last type is *oppu* il vaḻiyāṉ+ poruḷ ceykuna* (*Fnote6*), which can be rendered into English as "those which in the absence of *oppu* "resembling, similarity" produce the value [of *oppu*]." The commentator however tells us that those particles will only be explained in TP, inside section UI.

(*Fnote6*) I have undone the sandhi. The metrical form is *opp-il-vaḻiyāṟ-poruḷ-ceykuna*.

(E) leaving aside other occurrences of *uvamam* which would take too much time for an explanation in such a brief article <mark>(Fnote7)</mark>, we now move to UI in order to explain briefly a short portion of its content.

<mark>(Fnote7)</mark> The very important element which I must unfortunately leave out of this presentation is the very famous *uḷḷuṟai uvamam* "embedded simile", which is one of the most subtil device used by Tamil poets.

(F) the initial sūtra in the UI, namely TP272i, tells us that a simile (*uvamam* or *uvamai*, depending on the edition) can have its origin in four elements, which are *viṉai* "action", *payaṉ* "result/usefulness", *mey* "body/truth" and *uru* "colour/form". The four examples given by Cēṉāvaraiyar for comparative compounds which are reproduced in (C), above, can be see as an illustration of that fourfold semantic classification of similes, based on the type of the common property between the two items which are compared (Fnote 8)

(Fnote 8) It should be added that later treatises, adapted from Daṇḍin, have a subdivision into three types of simile, respectively based on *paṇpu* "quality", *toḻil* "action" and *payaṉ* "result/usefulness".

(G) Coming back to the point discussed in (D), namely "comparison morpheme" (*uvama-v-urupu*), it is a notable fact that TP282i provides us with a list of six times six items, starting with "aṉṉa, ēyppa, uṟaḻa oppa, …", inside which the term pōla —mentionned in (A)— comes in 28th position. The sutra adds that these 36 terms are not the only possible

H) That sūtra TP282i is followed by four more sūtras, each of them enumerating eight comparison morphemes, which are said to be respectively specially adapted for *viṉaippāl-uvamam* "simile concerning action" (TP283i), *payaṉilai-y-uvamam* "simile concerning usefulness" (TP285i), *meyppāluvamam* "simile concerning shape/body" (TP286i) and *uruviṉuvamam* "simile concerning colour" (TP287i).

(I) To that must be added that *aṉṉa* appears in TP283i but then is the topic of a specific sūtra (TP284i) saying that it can also be used in the three other types of simile, in addition to being found in similes of action.

At this stage, before elaborating on the translation which I have just provided for the term *oppu* "resembling, similarity", it appears necessary to ask one difficult question and since that question is very important, I shall make it into the title of the next section.

3. Why was it necessary for Tamil theoreticians to borrow from the North a term such as *uvamam*?

Section 3 (1)

A possible answer to that question is that there might have existed a suitable term but that this term may have been ambiguous. Tamil scholars may have felt that it might be easier to simply borrow a technical term, because that term would not have any semantic "bagage" from the point of view of Tamil speakers. However, any term which is borrowed needs at least some minimal explanation or gloss in order to be understood and accepted by those who are going to graft the new term into their linguistic practice. The term *oppu* "resembling" —which is a verbal noun and part of the paradigm of the verb ottal "to resemble"— can certainly, along with a few other terms, play a role in constructing an efficient Tamil explanation of what *uvamam* means.

Section 3 (2)

In his introduction to the *Uvamaiyiyal* (or *Uvamaviyal*, depending on the edition used), which precedes TP272i, Iḷampūraṇar explains that since *uvamai* is based on "one-sided" (*oru-puṭai*) *oppumai* ("resemblance"), two useful effects (*payaṉ*) can be obtained through its use, **(A)** one of them being to obtain a "perception" (*pulaṉ*) of "those [things] which are not perceived" (pulaṉ-allātaṉa) and **(B)** the other one being the "pleasure" (*iṉpam*) deriving from ornamentation (*alaṅkāram*).

Section 3 (3)

Concerning point (A), we see, in a similar manner, in the 27th Canto of the *Maṇimēkalai,* a long Tamil Buddhist poem, possibly dating back to the 6th century, an occurrence of *uvamam*, as the third item inside a list of ten possible *aḷavai* "means of acquiring correct knowledge"(Fn9)—the Sanskrit equivalent is *pramāṇa*. That list, where *uvamam* is preceded by the Tamil term for direct perception —kāṇṭal "lit. to see"— and by the Tamil term used for inference — *karutal* "to ponder"—, is provided as preliminary information, being followed later in the chapter by a list philosophical schools, concerning which we are told which *aḷavai* they accept. Before that however [...]

(Fn9) The term *aḷavai* is also used for referring to various methods of measurement: counting, weighing, volume-measuring, length-measuring.

==Before that however== individual explanations are given concerning each *aḷavai*. In the case of *uvamam*, the explanation occupies two metrical lines (*Maṇi*, XXVII, 41-42) and we are told that *uvamam āvatu oppumai aḷavai* (XII, 41) "That which is *uvamam* is the means of knowledge (*aḷavai*) based on similarity (*oppumai*)." After that we are provided with the example of someone recognizing a bison (*kavaya mā*), because of being previously told that it resembles a cow (*ā*), the line XII-42 being *kavaya mā ā-p pōlum eṉa-k karutal* "pondering that a bison resembles (*pōlum*) a cow".

Section 3 (4)

We cannot of course speculate on what would have happened if a Tamil term had been adopted, i.e. if a Tamil term had become the official Tamil translation for upamā. Some expressions found here and there inside the T seem to almost do the job (Fn10), but becoming part of a large scholarly pan-indian network certainly had its attraction.

(Fn10) See for instance *oppaloppurai*, in TC74c.