

PATTERNS OF BASIC SENTENCES IN TAMIL AND SOME SEMANTIC OBSERVATIONS

A. Veluppillai

The sentence is a basic unit of language. Grammarians and linguists have defined the sentence in a great variety of ways, the criterion being that it must express a complete thought. There are some constructions, where some parts of the sentence may be missing. They are called utterances. Sentences are of three kinds according to form; *tanī* (simple), *kūttu* (compound) and *kalappu* (complex). The simple sentences are also called minimal sentences while the other two types are called non-minimal sentences because of their complex nature. Sentences may also be classified according to function as *ceyti vākkīyam* (affirmative or assertive sentences), *ēval vākkīyam* (imperative sentences), *vinā vākkīyam* (interrogative sentences), *etimarai vākkīyam* (negative sentences) and *unarcci vākkīyam* (exclamatory sentences). The present study is confined to the sentence patterns according to function. Semantic observations here owe much to John Lyons.

I. Assertive Sentence :

The five elements of the Tamil assertive sentence are *eluvāy* (subject), *payanilai* (predicate), *eluvāy atai* (attribute to subject), *payanilai viri* (extension of predicate) and *itaiccol* (particles). There are equative and non-equative types of minimal sentences.

The equative type has simply two noun phrases placed one after the other without the linking verb. It may be shown as $S \rightarrow NP + NP / Adj./ Adv.$

1. *aval oru tāti,*
'She is a nurse'.
2. *Kural katumai,*
'The voice is harsh'.
3. *aval inkē ullāl,*
'She is here'.

4. arul oru ācīriyar ānār,
'Arul became a teacher'.

5. Umai ēlaiyāka iruntāl,
'Umai remained poor'.

The non-equative type contains one or more noun phrases followed by the verb phrase. $S \rightarrow NP + VP$.

6. āmai tavalkiratu,
'Tortoise crawls'.

$S \rightarrow NP + NP + VP$.

7. Cuppu mānkāy tinrān,
'Suppu ate mango.'

$S \rightarrow NP + NP + NP + VP$.

8. aval enakku oru puttakam kotuttāl,
'She gave me a book'.

$S \rightarrow NP + NP + V$ iru.

9. arccunanukku pala manāiviyar iruntanar,
'Arjuna had many wives'.

$S \rightarrow NP + NP + VP$.

10. Tamilar karuṇānitiyai talaivarāka tterṅtetuttanar,
'The Tamils have elected Karunanithi as leader'.

The typical statement will have the form of a declarative sentence. Assertion as an illocutionary act which when combined with a propositional act, makes the utterance into a statement.

II. Imperative Sentence.

In Tamil,⁴ the imperatives may have a root of the verb or a complex verb base. *po* 'go' for example is the root verb signifying the imperative sense. Auxiliary verbs in Tamil as *viṭu*, *koḷ*, *potu*, etc. are used in the complex verbs of imperatives, as for example, *poṅ viṭu* 'get away', *iruntukoḷ* 'sit', *natattippotu* 'conduct', etc.

The imperative sentences are associated with *ēval* 'command'. In traditional grammar, 'command' is generally taken to cover requests and entreaties, as well as commands in the narrower sense. In order to avoid confusing the more general and the more specific senses of 'command', Lyons recommends Skinner's term *mand* as a general term to refer to commands, demands, requests, entreaties, etc. Mands are a sub-class of what might be called directives (C. F. Ross, 1968); that is to say, utterances

which impose, or propose, some course of action or pattern of behaviour and indicate that it should be carried out. Mandas differ from other subclasses of directives, such as warnings, recommendations and exhortations in that they are governed by the particular speaker-based felicity-condition that the person issuing the mand must want the proposed course of action to be carried out. One cannot appropriately command, request, entreat, advise, or exhort someone to perform an action, or demand that he perform an action, which one knows or believes he is incapable of performing.

In Tamil, the difference between mandas and statements is grammaticalized in the form of the main verb of the sentences that are characteristically used to perform such acts. They are respectively referred to as *munnilai* *eval vinai*, 'second person imperative verb' and *munnilai vinai murru*, 'second person (indicative) finite verb'. The second person singular imperative in Tamil carries no overt indication of person or tense just as the vocative in Tamil has no case-sign as such. It has often been suggested that the reason for this is that the imperative, as reflecting will and desire, is ontogenetically more basic than the indicative. Whether this explanation is correct or not, it is important to realize that commands and requests, of their very nature, are necessarily restricted with respect to the semantic distinctions that are grammaticalized, in many languages, in the categories of tense and person. One cannot rationally command or request some other person to carry out some course of action in the past; the only tense distinctions that one might expect to find grammaticalized in the imperative, are distinctions of more immediate and more remote futurity. For similar reasons, the imperative is intimately connected with the second person or vocative. It is implicit in the very notion of commanding and requesting that the command or request is addressed to the person who is expected to carry it out. But the subject of a command or request need not be a second-person pronoun. A command or request can be transmitted through an intermediary.

11, *avan nāluikku ennai vantu parkkattum*,

'Let him come and see me tomorrow'.

It has often been suggested that the difference between commands and requests is one of politeness or deference (Cf. Gordon & Lakoff, 1971; Heringer, 1972). But this suggestion is unconvincing. It is true that politeness cannot be associated with commands. But one can be either polite or impolite in the way in which one makes a request. An impolite request cannot be equated to a command. The crucial difference between a command and a request can be pinpointed as a request leaves to the addressee the option of refusal to comply with the mand, whereas a command does not.

Demands are like commands and requests in that they are inherently restricted with respect to tense. One cannot rationally demand another to do something in the past. But demands differ from commands and requests in that they are not necessarily addressed to those upon whom the obligation

of fulfilment is imposed. Giving commands is something that we associate with institutionalized authority, but issuing demands is not. It may well be that the difference between commands and demands is not one of illocutionary force, but something that derives solely from the nature of social interaction and communication.

12. vantu vitu,
'come definitely'.

13. itai niruttu,
'Stop it'.

-14. tayavu ceutu katavai ttira,
'Please open the door'.

15. innum koncam etuttukkol,
'Do take some more'.

According to form, the imperatives may be classified as singular imperative, plural imperative and honorific imperative.

16. pāttu pātu,
'Sing a song'

17. nīnkal cāppitunkal,
'You (Plural) eat.'

18. nīr vārum,
'You (honorific plural) come'.

According to meaning, the imperatives may be used to denote politeness, contempt, questions and negative.

The meaning of politeness is conveyed by adding the verbal terminations like -um and ē.

19. nī tinnavēntum,
'You must eat'.

20. nīnkal vārunkalē,
'You (plural honorific) come'.

The sense of contempt is expressed by adding the auxiliaries as pō and tolai.

21. ōtī ppō,
'Run away'.

22. pēci ttolai,

‘Speak (contempt)’.

The question and negative imperatives are formed by adding the respective question morphemes or question words and negative morphemes and negative words.

23. (nī) pōkirāyā illaiyā?,

‘Are you going or not?’

24. evvalavu nēramāy vārāy?,

‘How long (you take) to come?’

25. nī kutiyātē,

‘Do not drink.’

Mands differ from statements in that their topic is to be interpreted as “so be it”, rather than “it is so”. While a statement tells the addressee that something is so, a mand tells the addressee that something is to be made so. Both categorical assertions and commands contain the same unqualified I-say-so component, indicating that the speaker commits himself fully to the factuality or desirability of what is described by the phrastic.

III, Interrogative Sentence:

Tamil has two kinds of question sentences. Both the tone of the voice and question order of the sentence with the question mark at the end determine the nature of an interrogative sentence. An example for the sentence with the question intonation:

26. murukan Kulikkirān?,

‘Is Murukan bathing,’

The first kind of interrogative sentence is a “Yes / no” type question sentence. Tamil, being an agglutinative language, uses interrogative particles as *-ā*, *-ō* and *-ē* in the first type. These particles may be used with any element of the sentence for questioning. These sentence can be of NP + NP + Q type.

27. aval oru Kilārkkā?,

‘Is she a clerk?’

28. patippu kaṭumaiyānata?,

‘Is learning difficult?’

29. aval inku iruntāla?,

‘Was she here?’

30. avarkal inku varuvarkalā?,

‘Will they come here?’

31. nām ippōtu ulle varalāmā?,

‘Shall we come in now?’

These sentences can also be of NP + VP (V + Auxiliary) + Q type.

32. avan kättiliruntu veli vara mutiyumā?,

‘Can he come out of the Jungle?’

33. nī avalukkākā ala vēntumā?,

‘Must you cry for her?’

34. nī enakku kittā vara tunivu irukkiratā?,

‘Dare you come close to me?’

35. nān kacai etuttukkollattumā?,

‘May I take the money?’

36. avarkal vittukku poyvittarkalā?,

‘Had they gone home?’

According to Natanam, (1987 : 30) the interrogative suffix - \bar{O} is added to the verbs to ask a question implying doubt and uncertainty.

37. atu unmaiyaḱa irukkumō?

‘Will that be true?’

In Sri Lanka spoken Tamil, - \bar{O} is very productive. It can replace -ā in almost all the contexts cited above.

According to Natanam, (1987 : 30) the suffix - \bar{e} is rare in modern Tamil. In Sri Lanka spoken Tamil, - \bar{e} can be added to the nouns to ask a question implying emphasis:

38. avalē itai ceytatu?

‘Was it she who did this?’

39. aval itaiyē ceytatu?,

‘Was it this which she did?’

The second kind of question is similar to the “Wh-questions” in English. They are introduced by interrogative pronouns, adjectives or adverbs. Since the word order is flexible, the question words can be introduced anywhere in the sentence.

The interrogative pronouns yār, evan, eval and evar correspond to the English 'who'; the Tamil etu and enna correspond respectively to 'which' and 'what'; Tamil evai, ettanai and evvalavu correspond to English 'which', 'how' and how (many, much) and lastly eppati and enku are similar to 'how' and 'where'. All the Tamil question words have e or yā as the root so that they can be referred to as e-question words.

40. yār anku pōkirār?
'Who goes there?'
41. yār avanukku vēntum?
'Whom does he want?'
42. yārutaiya puttakam itu?
'Whose book is this?'
43. eval unnōtu varuvāl?
'Who will come with you?'
44. enna ceyyappōkirāy?
'What are you going to do?'
45. etu ennutaiya ceruppu?
'Which is my sandal?'
46. evai kalivu porutkal?
'Which are refuse things?'
47. pattum aintum ettanai?
'How much is ten and five?'
48. evvalavu pēr vantanar?
'How many persons did come?'
49. avan eppati veli naṭu pōnān?
'How did he go abroad?'
50. ēn ilankai tamilarkal porāta vēntum?
'Why should the Sri Lanka Tamils fight?'
51. enku ulakam pōykkontirukkīratu?
'Where does the world move forward?'

It has been argued that questions can be analysed satisfactorily as sub-types of mands (cf. Hare, 1949; Lewis, 1969; 186). According to this argument who is at the door? might be analysed as an instruction to the addressee to name or otherwise identify the person at the door and Is he married? as an instruction to assert one of the component simple propositions

of the disjunction 'He is married or he is not married'. The same proposal has been recently made within the framework of generative grammar. The advantage of this analysis of questions is that it would facilitate the handling of the illocutionary force of the three main classes of utterances in terms of the two primitive notions of asserting and issuing mands. But a number of objections have been raised against this proposal. The first objection is that the grammatical structure of the yes-no question sentences is similar to that of declarative sentences. Sometimes, the difference between the two types of sentences is associated with an intonation pattern. This fact would suggest that the difference between declarative sentences and interrogative sentences results from the grammaticalization of the feature of doubt. It would be generally agreed that one of the felicity-conditions for appropriate utterance of questions is that the speaker should not know the answer to his question.

The second point to be made is that, if yes-no questions were a subclass of mands, one might expect that the response No would indicate the addressee's refusal to comply with the mand. He should have been refusing to state whether something is or is not so. But this is not the case. If the addressee says No in response to the question of the form Is the door open?, he is answering the question. But if he says No in response to what is clearly a mand, such as Open the door, he is refusing to do what he is being commanded or requested to do. Still a more important point, it does not seem to be essential to the nature of questions that they should always require or expect an answer from the addressee. In normal everyday conversation, we generally expect the questions that we ask to be answered by the addressee. But this is readily explained in terms of the general conventions and assumptions which govern conversation. In principle, this association is independent of the illocutionary force of questions. It is necessary to distinguish between asking a question of someone and simply posing the question, without addressing it to anyone. The indication that the addressee is expected to give an answer is not part of the question itself. The advantage of this analysis of questions is that it is more general than their analysis as mands. It covers not only information seeking questions, but various kinds of rhetorical and didactic questions. It has the further advantage that it puts factual questions into more direct correspondence with statements and what are traditionally described as deliberate questions with mands and other kinds of directives.

One of the inadequacies of the analysis of questions as mands is its failure to account satisfactorily for the difference between wondering whether something is so and asking oneself whether something is so. Wondering, like entertaining a proposition, is first and foremost a mental act. In order for wondering to be converted into an illocutionary act by means of utterance, it must be the speaker's intention to tell the addressee that he has a particular proposition in mind and that he is entertaining it in what we may refer to as the dubitative mode. Otherwise the utterance is at most informative, rather than communicative. Illocutionary acts are necessarily communicative.

All the questions that have been discussed so far have been of the yes-no type. Following Jespersen (1933 : 305), the other class of questions can be called x - questions. Jespersen's term has been explained as "We have an unknown quantity x, exactly as in an algebraic equation" and "the linguistic expression for this x is an interrogative pronoun or pronominal adverb". Since the interrogative pronouns and adverbs in English are words which typically begin with wh-, x-questions are commonly referred to in the literature as wh - questions. Not only x - questions, but also yes - no questions, can be treated as functions which contain a variable or "unknown quantity", to use Jespersen's phrase. When we ask a question of our addressee, what we are doing, is inviting him to supply a value for this variable. A yes-no question, like Is the door open?, contains a two-valued variable. An x-question is a many-valued function, which presupposes the disjunction of a set of propositions.

IV. Negative Sentence:

Tamil has a number of Sanskrit loans in which negative sense is created by the addition of prefixes to the nouns:— anīti, 'injustice'; aniyāyam, 'unfair', acattiyam, 'impossible', etc. Suffixes convey negative sense in Tamil:— nīyāyamarra, 'unfair', ātāramarra, 'baseless', etc.

In an emphatic negative statement in Tamil, the stress is laid on the question word or the initial negative signifying word:—

52. evarum avalai utaittatillai,
'No one did ever hit her'.
53. orupōtūm avan̄ anta katciyilē cēramāttān̄,
'Never will he join that party'.

The present investigation restricts itself to morphological negation and syntactical negation. In morphological negation, various kinds of morphemes are used:—

D) by adding -ā, -āt, -al and an empty morph to verb roots:—

54. cattappati innilattu vilaiyum orriyum cellā,
'In law, sale and mortgage of this land are invalid.'
55. cōmpal verri taiātu,
'Laziness will not bring success'.
56. ivai enakkuriyavai alla,
'These do not belong to me'.

57. avan inkē parān (pār + an),
'He will not look here'.

II) by personal termination - en to the verbal roots:

58. nān patam patiyēn,
'I will not learn the lesson'.

III) by adding interrogative pronouns to the verb:-

59. avana katan vānkinān?,
'Did he take the loan?'

The interrogative particle -ā is used negatively. In syntactical negation, the morphemes illai, maṭṭu and kitai serve the purpose.

60. ēlaikku unavu illai,
'There is no food for the poor'.

61. nān unnai marakkamattēn,
'I will not forget you.'

62. turōkikalukku itam kitaiyātu,
'There is no place for traitors'.

Negative sentences can be transformed into negative questions by applying Question - morpheme Introduction Transformation.

63. avarkalitam cey nanri irukkātā?,
'Will they not have gratitude?'

64. piriyai enkē pōkal?,
'Where does not Piriyaī go?'

The assertion of a negative proposition ("it is the case that not -p") and the denial of the positive proposition ("it is not the case that p") are not the same even though both of these are symbolized in the propositional calculus as -p. As soon as we start considering propositions containing a modal operator of possibility, it becomes clear that a distinction needs to be drawn between the negation of the modal operator and the negation of a simple proposition within the scope of the modal operator. There is also a clear difference of meaning in utterances which result from the negation of a performative verb and the negation of the main verb:

65. nān etiriyai atippēn enru vākkū tarēn,
'I don't promise to hit my enemy.'

66. nān etiriyai atikken enru vāḱku tarukiren,
'I promise not to hit my enemy.'

It is only (66) that can be said in the performance of the illocutionary act of promising and in this case, it would be a promise to refrain from doing something. Utterance (65) might be a statement with which speaker explicitly refuses to make, or denies that he is making, a promise.

67. katavu tirakka illai,
'The door is not open', differs from

68. katavu tirant - irukku - enru nān colla illai,
'I do not say that the door is open.'

There is no way of representing this difference in the propositional calculus, which does not allow for negation of the assertion-sign. In modal logic, the difference between the negation of the modal operator and the negation of the proposition within the scope of the modal operator is commonly referred to in terms of a difference between external and internal negation. The difference between (65) and (66) or between (67) and (68), has been described in the same terms (cf. Hare, 1971 : 82). It is possible of course to negate both the performative verb and the main verb:

69. nān etiriyai atikken enru vāḱku taren,
'I do not promise not to hit my enemy.'

70. katavu tirakka illai enru nān colla illai,
'I do not say that the door is not open'.

(69) and (70) are not equivalent to nān etiriyai atippen enru vāḱku tarukiren and katavu tirantirukkīratu. If one negative is external and the other internal, two negatives do not make a positive.

The theory of speech acts does not seem to allow for acts of non-commitment. They are nonetheless of frequent occurrence in the everyday use of language and their perlocutionary effect is characteristically different from that of statements. It seems reasonable to draw a distinction between context-bound and context-free statements. Denials and confirmations are two major sub-classes of context-bound statements. Just as a negative sentence may be uttered to deny a positive proposition, so a positive sentence may be uttered to deny a negative proposition. There are two kinds of propositional negation: one of which converts the proposition into its contradictory and the other into its contrary. Tamil has grammaticalized them as il negative and al negative.

71. avalai kolai ceyatu avan alla,
'It was not he who killed her.'

72. avalai avan kolai cēyya illai,
'He didn't murder her'.

While (72) is contradictory in denying the murder charge, (71) is contrary in exonerating only the particular accused in the murder charge.

The notion of negation is far from being straightforward as it might appear to be at first sight. Much of the research in the recent study of negation has taken as its starting point propositional negation. In many languages, there are several different kinds of negative sentences, often with different negative particles. If it were not for a prior commitment to the belief that propositional negation is basic, these several kinds of negation might not have been treated under the same rubric. What is nor what is not basic is a thorny question. If we interpret 'basic' to mean "acquired earlier by children and serving as the basis for further development", it is clear that propositional negation is not basic.

The following four kinds of negation have been identified by scholars working in the field of language-acquisition (cf. Brown, 1973: 17) : (i) non-existence; (ii) rejection; (iii) refusal to comply; (iv) denial. What is called non-existence can be described as absence or disappearance. This fits the data and it is less suggestive of propositional negation. As for the other three kinds of negation, they can be much for satisfactorily accounted for in terms of the more general notion of rejection than they can be in terms of the logician's notion of negation, definable with reference to truth and falsity.

V. Exclamatory Sentence:

The exclamatory sentences convey the emotion of the speaker. Usually the question words like enna, evvalavu, ettanai, eppati, etc. are used before the qualifying adjectives or adverbs to form exclamation. They are very much like the wh- words, 'what' and 'how', doing duty for exclamation in English.

First, exclamation with question words can be taken up. The presence of adjectives or adverbs clearly distinguish it from the interrogative sentence.

73. enna aticayamāna cātanai atu!,
'What a wonderful achievement that is!'

74. evvalavu panakkāran avan!,
'How rich he is!'

75. ettanai kurūramāna kolai itu!,
'What a horrible murder this is!'

76. evvalavu kanniyamāna natattai avalutaiyatu!
'How honourable her conduct has been!'

Secondly, exclamations are elliptical in nature. They consist of a noun, an adjective or sometimes just one word only.

77. cna inimaiyāna kanavu!

'What a sweet dream!'

78. enna aticayam!

'What a wonder!'

79. (enna tavippu) oru vay corrukkāka!

'O for a mouthful of rice!'

Thirdly, exclamations are marked by interjections.

80. aiyo, aval makan cettupponān!

'Alas, her son is dead!'

Fourthly, some words may be suffixed to a noun as in:

81. pāvam tān!

'A sin, indeed!'

Finally, the Tamil optative takes suffixes—ka,—ya and —r. It expresses a wish commonly formed by these suffixes. The following may be considered as examples for exclamation:

82. vālka manna!

'May you prosper, O king!'

83. nītu vāliya Tamil!

'May Tamil live long!'

84. nīr vālvīr pukaloṭu!

'May you live with fame!'

As traditional Tamil literature up to the nineteenth century consisted mainly of verses, traditional Tamil grammar confined its attention to verse forms. Sentence, as such, was not mentioned directly in early and medieval grammatical texts. Verbs were of course mentioned and classified. The optative was mentioned in Tolkāppiyam. It has not mentioned imperative by name but there are clues that Tolkāppiyam was aware of its existence. There are negative forms in the sūtras of Tolkāppiyam where negative formation is also referred to. But he has not referred to etirmarai vinai. Because he has not classified the sentences, he has not mentioned the affirmative verb, the basis of assertive sentences.

References

- Agesthalingam, S. — etirmarai, *Moliyiyal*, 5-2, 1981.
- Austin, J. L. — *How to do things with words*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1962.
- Boyd, J. & Thorne, J. P. — The Semantics of Modal Verbs, *Journal of Linguistics*, 5, 1969.
- Brown, R. — *A First Language*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass; 1969.
- Gordon, D. Lakoff, G. — 'Conversational postulates', in *Papers from the Seventh Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Circle*, Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1971.
- Hare, R. M. — 'Imperative Sentences', *Mind*, 58, 1949; Reprinted in *Practical Inferences*, Macmillan, London, 1971.
- Heringer, J. — 'Some grammatical correlates of felicity conditions' *Working Papers in Linguistics*, 11, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1972.
- Jespersen, Otto. — *Essentials of English Grammar*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1933.
- Lewis, D. — *Convention*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1969.
- Lyons, John — *Semantics - 2*, Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Natanam, G. — *A Contrastive Study of Sentence Patterns in English and Tamil*, Unpublished Ph. D. thesis of Bharathidasan University, Thiruchirappalli, 1987.
- Ross, A. — *Directives and Norms*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968.
- Veluppillai, A. — 'Sentence Connection in Tamil', *Journal of Tamil Studies*, 30, 1986.
- 'Coordination in Tamil', *Journal of Tamil Studies*, 23, 1983.
- 'Cleft Sentences in Tamil', *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, VII, 1 & 2, 1981.
- 'Some Observations on Negatives in Tamil', *The Sri Lanka Journal of the Humanities*, II, 2, 1976.