

# Aspectuals in Tamil and Sinhala: Contrasts and Similarities

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## Introduction

An attempt is made herein to present a contrastive analysis of the aspectuals of Tamil and Sinhala on a structural basis with particular emphasis on the areas of difficulties faced by the learners of Tamil and Sinhala as observed by a second language teacher. The facts presented in this article are contributive and helpful in the preparation of teaching materials for meaningful teaching and learning of a second language effectively as done in developed countries.

Sinhala, a member of the Indo-Aryan family of languages, is spoken only in Sri Lanka. Most Sinhala migrants in other countries like Great Britain, U. S. A and Australia continue to speak Sinhala. In day today life Sinhala is spoken through out the island except in the greater part of the Northern province and the coastal areas of the Eastern province. Modern Sinhala has two standards the literary and the colloquial. The latter has a variety of dialects both regional and social.

Tamil language belongs to the Dravidian family of languages and is mainly spoken in Tamil Nadu in south India, apart from other countries such as Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma., Indonesia, East and South Africa, Fiji islands Mauritius and the Malagasy Republic. Tamil has a great number of dialects both regional and social in countries where it is spoken.

In a description of the morphological structures of the auxiliary verbs in the spoken Jaffna Tamil and spoken Sinhala, we find two major groups namely,

1. Modals
2. Aspectuals

In both languages, the first verb element of the compound verb construction has a lexical function that denotes an action event or state and is therefore called the main verb. The second member of the verb element, however does not have any lexical function. Instead it expresses grammatical categories such as aspect mood, passive etc and for this reason, the second verb is referred to as the auxiliary verb.

Among the auxiliaries identified with their preceding verbs, there are two types of structures. One type appears after verbal participle or perfect tense of the main verbs, and another type after the infinitive of the main verbs. The auxiliary that comes after the infinitive does not equally attain the auxiliary status like the auxiliaries which come after verbal participle or perfect tense.

In this paper the Colombo variety of Sinhala is being compared with the Jaffna variety of Tamil with emphasis on aspectuals.

**Aspectuals in Tamil and Sinhala :**

<b>Aspectuals</b>	<b>Tamil auxiliary forms and meanings conveyed</b>	<b>Sinhala auxiliary forms and meanings conveyed</b>
1. Perfect/ Supposition	Iru (be)	tiyēṇḁva innḁva (be)
2. Perfective completive definitive	viTu (leave / give up)	daaṇḁva (drop/leave/give up)
3. Reflexive	koL (to have)	gaaṇḁva (get)
4. Trial/ Experimental	paar (see)	baḁṇḁva (see)
5. Benefactive	kuTu / taa (give)	deṇḁva ( give)
6. Future utility	vay (keep)	tiyḁṇḁva (keep) (completion of an action / fully finishing)

Aspectuals	Tamil auxiliary forms and meanings conveyed	Sinhala auxiliary forms and meanings conveyed
7. Progressive / Durative	koNTiru (have)	innðva/ tiyenðva/ enðva/ yanðva (continuous progressive action)
8. Full completion	pooTu (drop) (completion/impatience)	daanðva (drop) (completion/ rashness/ impatience)
9. Realization/ Potentiality	-	enðva ( come) yanð va (go)
10. Finality	aaku (become)	-
11. Disgust	tulay (lose)	-
12. Riddance	taLLu (push)	-
13. Completive	-	kðmðva (do)
14. Etc and such	-	kiyðnðva (tell)
15. Completion	-	arinðva (open)
16. Trial/get ready	-	hadðnðva (do)
17. Inceptive / Internationality	-	ævidinðva (walk)

The above table shows a comparison of the verbal forms with aspectual auxiliaries in Tamil and Sinhala.

No two languages are identical in structures verb patterns and other grammatical categories. Certain linguistic items in one language need not necessarily denote the same in another. So also with auxiliaries. There are formal, syntactic, semantic similarities and differences between Tamil and Sinhala.

Tamil has a total set of twelve aspectual auxiliaries whereas Sinhala presents a total set of nineteen aspectuals. Comparison of the verbal forms with auxiliaries in Tamil and Sinhala will reveal certain similarities and differences.

## **Formal Contrasts and Similarities of Aspectuals in Tamil and Sinhala.**

Let us now compare the structures and functions of the aspectual auxiliaries in Tamil and Sinhala and bring out their similarities and differences.

The first striking formal contrast is that the Tamil aspects are expressed through the verbal participle whereas in Sinhala the aspects are expressed through the perfect tense.

Example :

TL    ava iTli cappiTtirukkiraa.  
      'She has eaten idli'

SL    api iTli kxæmð kaala tiyenðva.  
      'We have eaten idli'

The other formal contrast is that in Tamil the verbal forms (having auxiliaries or not) are denoted by PNG markers and they are very regular. Hence, sometimes the aspectuals are called tense taking auxiliaries, as opposed to the modals that do not take tense.

Auxiliaries show only the aspects that are followed by PNG markers as in the formation of the simple tense. And it is so regular.

### **Syntactic Features**

Tamil and Sinhala, whether modals or aspectuals, always mark the finishing of the complex verb phrase in a sentence. In Tamil the subject pronoun is optional whereas in Sinhala the subject pronoun is obligatory in isolated sentences. However, within a given discourse context the subject can be deleted. It can be omitted in Tamil since the finite verb itself indicates all grammatical meanings. But the modal verb phrase should have the subject pronoun.

Examples :

TL    naan paTikka veeNum  
      'I should study'

SL    mamð paadðK kðrðnnð oonð.  
      'I must study'

TL (avar) peepar vaaciccirukkiRaar.  
'He has read the paper'

SL eyaa pattðree kiyðvð laa tiyendva.  
'He has read the paper'

On the other hand, in Sinhala the verbs do not take the PNG markers. As a result of this, the subject pronoun is obligatory in Sinhala to show the proper subject of the action.

Example :

SL (a) oyaa kiyðvðla tiyendva.  
'You have read'

(b) mamð kiyðvðla tiyendva.  
'I have read'

(c) api kiyðvðla tiyendva.  
'We have read'

(d) eyaa kiyðvðla tiyendva.  
He / She has read'

### **Co - occurrence of Modals and Aspectuals**

In Tamil and Sinhala, the main verb always occurs first in its infinitival form / simple tensed form if followed by a modal and in its participial form / simple tensed form if followed by an aspectual. When the aspects and modals are present the pattern is,

MV + aspect + modal.

Sometimes the main verb is followed by two aspectuals and then followed by a modal. Thus the Tamil non minimal verb phrases display four patterns :

Examples :

TL  
Pattern I - infinitive + modal.

naan paLam caappiTalaam.  
'I can eat fruit'.

**Pattern II –MV (participle) + aspect.**

maamaa miin caapiTTirukkiRaar.

'Uncle has eaten fish'

**Pattern III –MV (participle) + aspect + modal.**

appaa kaacu KuTuttirukkalaam.

'Father might have given money'

**Pattern IV –MV (participle) + aspect + aspect + aspect + modal**

tampi kaacu kuTuttukkonTiruntirukkalaam.

'Younger brother might have been giving money'

From these examples, it is clear that when there are two aspectuals in a verb phrase, the progressive occurs first, followed by the perfective. But there is a complete reversal of the order of modals, aspectuals and main verbs in Sinhala.

Examples :

SL

**Pattern I – infinitive + modal.**

maTð film balðnnð puluvaṇ.

'I can see film'

**Pattern II –MV (perfect) + aspects**

dæṇ kantooruvð vahðla tiyenðva.

'The office is closed now'

(They have closed the office now)

**Pattern III – MV (infinitive) + modal + modal.**

mahattðyTð ee væddð kððnn bæruv æti.

'The gentle man might be unable to do that work'

**Pattern IV – MV (infinitive) + modal + aspect**

(a) varusaavð nisaa meloo deak kðrðnnð bæruv tibuna.

'Because of the rain, one wasn't able to do a thing'

(b) ee guruvðṛḍya oheTð sinhðlð akuru liyannð puluvaṇ kðraavi.

'The teacher will make you able to write Sinhala scripts'

- (c) maTð yannð oonð keruva.  
'It became necessary for me to do'

In Tamil any number of main verbs can occur together. Then they occur in their participial forms and the last verb (main verb or aspectual) takes the tense and the appropriate PNG suffixes.

Example :

TL tampi ooTi vantu eTuttucaapiTTan.

In this sentence ooTi – 'having run', vantu – 'having come', eTuttu – 'having taken', are all main verbs indicating a sequence. They are in the participial forms and the final verb caappiTTaan takes past tense and the PNG suffixes.

The same pattern (structure) will have to be rendered in Sinhala without the PNG suffixes.

Examples :

SL oyð redd kapðla kðrðla gannð oonð.

'You have to get this cloth cut etc'

## **Semantic Features**

### **Benefactive**

The aspectual auxiliary taa – and kuTu – follow the past participle of the main verb, and indicate the benefactive aspect. These two aspects mean 'give' in Jaffna Tamil. In Tamil taa – actually means benefactive to the first and the second person. kuTu – is benefactive to the third person.

Examples :

TL naan unakkup paaTam collitaaRen.

'I teach you the lessons'

naan piLLayaLukkup paaTam collikkuTukkiRen.

'I teach the children'

Whereas in Sinhala, the benefactive aspect denðva occurs with perfect tense of the main verb. It actually means benefactive to the first, second and the third persons.

Examples :

- SL nan̄gi redi mædd̄la den̄va.  
'Younger sister presses clothes for some one else.
- eyaa maT̄ð pot̄ð liȳðla den̄va.  
'He writes the book for me'
- ee mahatt̄ðya apiT̄ð ugann̄la den̄va  
'That gentle man teaches for our sake'

## **Perfective**

iru – is an auxiliary verb that expresses the perfective meaning in Tamil. This is added to the past participle of a main verb and gives the perfective meaning of the action, whereas in Sinhala there are two aspects *tiyen̄va* and *inn̄va* (be) that are added to the perfect tense of a main verb, and these forms give the perfective, definitive meaning. In the simple sentence structures the single verb 'tiyen̄va' takes inanimate subject and 'inn̄va' takes animate subject.

Examples :

- SL amma ged̄ðr̄ð inn̄va.  
'Mother is at home'
- appe vatte amb̄ð gahak tiyen̄va.  
'The mango tree is in our garden'

But in the compound sentence structures the above two aspectuals do not have the above distinctions.

In Tamil, the *iru* – is pluperfect or present perfect or future perfect. But in Sinhala, it is plu perfect or past perfect.

Examples :

- TL naaKkaL munnamee kooyilukkup pooyiruntam.  
'We had already gone to the temple.'
- maLay peytirukku.  
'It had rained'



avar cootinay paas paNNiyiruppar.

'He might have passed the examination'

Examples :

SL add malli ævilla tiyendva.

'Today the younger brother has come'

mamð sinhadlð ugðnnðla tiyendva.

I have taught Sinhala'

The perfect emphatic form of tiyendva is tiyenne, innðva is inne. But this type of emphatic form is absent in Tamil.

### **Trial / Experimental**

The verb paar – occurs after the past participle and the infinitive of the main verb. It means 'attempt' or 'trial', whereas in Sinhala the corresponding verb balðndva also expresses the idea of 'try to do something' (the implication is experimental).

Example :

TL tampi kaNakkuc ceytupaataan.

'Younger brother tried to do Maths'

Example :

SL mee beet biila balðnnð.

'You try this medicine'

### **Completive**

The aspectual auxiliaries pooTu – in Tamil and daandua in Sinhala convey the meaning of 'completive', 'malevolence', 'rashness', 'impatience', etc. This aspectual form more or less has the same sense of viTu – in Tamil.

Examples :

TL iNTaykku intak kaTitattay eLutippooTunkoo.

'Finish writing this letter today'

SL add mee liyumð liyðla daannð.

'Finish writing this letter today'

TL    *anta manusan maraKkaL ellaattayum veTTippooTTaar.*  
      ‘That guy has cut down all the trees’

SL    *ee miniha gas okkomð kapðla daala.*  
      ‘That guy has cut down all the threes’

## **Reflexive**

koL– represents the of meaning reflexive in Tamil. When koL – follows a past participle, it will have the sense ‘to do for one self’, whereas in Sinhala *gannðva* – represents the reflexive meaning. In both languages, the reflexive forms function as same.

Examples :

TL    *aakkaL atayppaRRi katayccuk koLLinam.*  
      ‘People are talking about that among themselves’

SL    *minissu ee gænð kataakðrð gannðva.*  
      ‘People are talking about that among themselves’

## **Future Utility**

In Tamil *vey* means ‘put’ / ‘place’ / ‘set aside’. Aspectually it means ‘keep in reserve’, whereas in Sinhala *tiyðnðva* – ‘put’ / ‘place’ gives the meaning of completion of an action. It contrasts with the perfect plus *daanðva* construction and it does not imply rashness and impatience etc.

Examples :

TL    *naan naaLaykku kaTitam eLuti veykkiRen.*  
      ‘I will finish writing this letter tomorrow’

*mamð heT mee liyumð liyðla tiyðnnaK.*  
      ‘I will finish writing this letter tomorrow’

## **Conclusion**

At present Sinhala and Tamil languages are the official language. If the ministry of education in this country is really pragmatic as far as the official language is

concerned priority should be given in preparing effective materials for teaching and learning Sinhala and Tamil with modern methods and innovations. Secondary schools and Universities should disseminate the idea 'learn more languages and earn more friends'. In view of this a contrastive and similarities study examined in this paper will contribute new knowledge and better understanding for the purpose of preparing teaching materials in Sinhala and Tamil language.

It will be more appreciable in the search for peace in this country if three language formula is implemented to break the language barrier among the different ethnic communities in habiting Sri Lanka.

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