



## ROLE OF MORPHEMES IN TAMIL FOR BETTER COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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### Abstract:

It is almost an impossible task to learn any foreign language without the influences of the first language. If one exposes oneself to the situations where some habitual strictness is maintained and importance is given to the four skills of the foreign language, it is possible for him or her to avert the influences significantly. However, when the first language occupies the remaining hours of the day, the second language learning process is quite a challenging task. Some grammarians consider the influences of the first language as obstacles in the learning processes of the second language. This perception may be denied on the grounds that the first language could not be an impediment for any second language learner. In fact, it facilitates the learner to analyze the second language effectively unless the learner tries to learn the new language through the first one. Comparing the rules of the first language with that of the second language is a good practice but applying the rules of the former with that of the latter creates lapses in the learning process of the second language. Indeed, it is this wrong approach which is an obstacle in the acquisition of any second language. This paper highlights the changes made out of those preoccupations, especially in the case of Tamil students who aspire to learn English.

**Key Words:** Bilingual, Morphemes, Morphological Inflections & Thinai

The paper is based on a study which has been made in a bilingual environment where English and Tamil coexist with different levels of use and importance. The interference of Tamil in the learning of English is very conspicuous. The bilingual situation causes several problems in the second language learning. Tamil is a more inflected language than English. Special morphemes are used for each grammatical category. Sometimes three or four morphemes fuse together in a word, in which one morpheme denotes the gender of the subject, another morpheme denotes the tense of its corresponding verb. Such a combination is rarely found in English. Instead of the preposition in English, there are morphological inflections in the Tamil nouns. In contrast, except for the genitive case, the morphemes disappear in English and the syntactic position denotes the cases. According to the concepts expressed by means of morphemes, the Tamil grammatical categories are: *Thinai* (Human/Non-human), Gender, Number, Case, Tense, Aspects, Modal verbs, Voice, Interrogation and Negation.

### Category 1: Thinai (Human / Non-Human)

In English there is no grammatical distinction between the human and the non-human except in the pronouns *he, she, it*. The third person plural *they* is common for both the human and the non-human. When an English speaker refers to a group of dogs as well as a group of men by *they*, a Tamil speaker uses the term *avarhal* for the human and the term *avai* for the non-human.

### Category 2: Gender

As pointed out by Frank Palmer and other grammarians English has no gender. For example, it uses the same verb for both *he* and *she*. The formation of the feminine of the nouns by the addition of the suffixes is a matter of derivation and it is a lexical feature.

But, in Tamil, the gender division is grammatical and it is based on the biological division of sex. In Tamil the male or female division is at once biological and grammatical but in English it is seen only in the singular number. There are specific verb endings for the male and the female. For instance,

<i>avan vanthan</i>	<i>He came</i>
<i>aval vanthal</i>	<i>She came</i>
<i>avan varuhiran</i>	<i>He comes</i>
<i>aval varuhiral</i>	<i>She Comes</i>
<i>avan varuvan</i>	<i>He will come</i>
<i>aval varuval</i>	<i>She will come</i>

### Category 3: Number

In English number is grammatical only in the case of third person singular for the present tense, and in other tenses the number division is not taken into account. For example,

<i>He goes</i>	<i>She goes</i>	<i>It goes</i>	
<i>They goes</i>	<i>I go</i>	<i>You go</i>	<i>We go</i>

In Tamil the number division is seen in all divisions of persons and tenses. For example,

Present	Past	Future
<i>He sees</i>	<i>She saw</i>	<i>He will see</i>
<i>avan parkiraan</i>	<i>aval parthaal</i>	<i>avan parppaan</i>

**Singular Number:**

<i>They see</i>	<i>They saw</i>	<i>They will see</i>
<i>avarkal parkirarkal</i>	<i>avarkal partharkal</i>	<i>avarkal parpparkal</i>

**Plural Number:**

So, a Tamil learner who is used to practicing the grammatical number finds it difficult to note the English number that operates only in the case of third person singular in the present tense. It is common to see this problem even in higher classes. The subject and verb agreement – ‘concord’ – is a major issue to be dealt with in the teaching of English as a second language.

**Category 5: Case**

The case system in English is a clear instance of a superimposition of Latin Grammar on English. While the Latin language has several inflections for case, English has one inflectional change for case. For example, *king* – (nominative, accusative), *king’s* – (genitive). So, strictly speaking English has only two cases. On the other hand, Tamil, like Sanskrit and Latin, uses several inflections.

The bilingual learners of English trying to find English equivalent for Tamil sentences will encounter serious problems in the case system. The inflectional case suffixes facilitate easy mobility of position in Tamil structures. When he moves on to the English language, he is offered structures that are rigid in the position of words. For example, Tamil language offers the following several possibilities for the same sentences,

<i>raman ravananai kontaan</i>	<i>Raman killed Ramanan</i>
<i>ravananai raman kontaan</i>	<i>Raman killed Ramanan</i>
<i>kontaan raman ravananai</i>	<i>Raman killed Ramanan</i>
<i>kontaan ravananai raman</i>	<i>Raman killed Ramanan</i>

For the rigid English structures *Raman killed Ramanan*, a change in the position of the words in the sentence changes the meaning. So, Tamil learners have been given special attention to the position of the word in English structures.

This understanding of the distinctive nature of Tamil, rather than being an obstacle in the learning process of English, strengthens and deepens the comprehension of the functioning of English and helps the Tamil Learners of English avert the mistakes that occur due to the absence of the knowledge of the morphological inflections.

For instance, while the absence of the grammatical distinction between animate and inanimate causes the improper usage of pronouns, the gender division based on the biological division of sex baffles the Tamil learners towards the subject-verb agreement errors in English. This may be looked at another perspective. Many Indian languages, including Tamil, reflect the nature of Indian culture, which is known for divisions and differences. It is appropriate to state that a language is to be learned from its own cultural values, which would be the background and origin of the language. The values keep reflecting on the language which is shaped and refined by the various aspects of the culture at different times in different places.

Similarly, the plural number division in Tamil is exhibited along with the categories of *Thinai* and gender and it is quite a challenging task to the Tamil learners of English as there is no such combination existing in English structures. Thus, the Tamil learners of English should first take stock of their knowledge of Tamil and analyze the distinctive nature of Tamil and the influence of the Tamil culture on the language. If they know well about how the Tamil language functions and why it functions in these ways, then they can easily differentiate the rules of the second language like English which is totally different from the first. A paradigm shift from Tamil to English can be sensible through the comprehension of the background and genesis of the language one already has and the language he or she has to learn. The rest is much easier. As Sufi’s philosophy goes, perfect mastering in one thing leads to the mastering of the next with ease. The philosophy is true to any learning.

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