

P.R. Subramanian (Chief Editor). *Kriyāvīṇ Tarkālat Tamīl Akarāti (Tamiḷ-Tamiḷ-Āṅkilam) (Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil (Tamil-Tamil-English))*, 1992, reprint 1997, xxxvi + 980 pp. ISBN 81-85602-57-3. Chennai: Cre-A Publishers. E-mail: crea@vsnl.com. Price Rs. 270,00.

In the informative introduction the compilers highlight the reasons for compiling a dictionary of present-day Tamil. Over the years changes have taken place in the Tamil language (words and meanings). These changes, occurring speedily and constantly, have caused a difference between the spoken and written languages, necessitating such a dictionary. Hindu, Islamic and Christian traditional usage of Tamil words has been considered, taking into account that grammatical rules were not ignored.

Structure

This dictionary is well structured:

- The headword is in bold print and this is followed by the part of speech e.g. noun, verb, adverb or adjective.
- Words are numbered to bring out different senses.
- Information about form change e.g. with regard to verbs, besides the root verbs, verbal participles, are also given.
- Two words that are commonly used with slight changes in form and meaning are only given once and for the second word the user is referred to the meaning given for the first word.
- Immediately after the required Tamil word the meaning or definition of this word is given in Tamil before the English meaning is given.
- With abstract nouns the termination particles for the formation of adverbs and adjectives are given.
- Words commonly used in Sri Lankan Tamil are stipulated.
- Words are used in sentences for greater clarity.

An adequate list of abbreviations used in the dictionary is included.

Explanatory Notes

Useful explanatory notes are given to assist the user. These include the explanation of grammatical information or terms given with the headwords.

Other explanatory notes include those on:

- the reason for numbering certain words,
- word changes,

- the variety of word usage e.g. honorific and ordinary forms, words unique to particular communities, to particular regions or countries, or to particular religions,
- the different ways in which meanings may be given in Tamil including the numbering of the different meanings of one word,
- the English meaning,
- the pronunciation of the initial letters of certain Tamilised Sanskrit words (given in English within brackets), and
- the purpose of sentence examples and pictures.

Unique Features

This is the first Tamil dictionary to give sentences and/or phrases to assist the user to understand the words better. Obsolete words and many words from ancient Tamil literature are omitted.

This is also the first dictionary giving modern changes in the Tamil language with regard to new words and meanings are concerned. According to Tamil grammar, all the letters of the Tamil alphabet cannot be used as initial letters in words, i.e. certain phonemes will never appear at the beginning of words. However, since this dictionary caters for words used in modern Tamil, foreign words now commonly used in speech and writing have been included. This has resulted in the occurrence of initial sounds or letters beyond the normally accepted usage.

According to the authors this is the first Indian language dictionary to be compiled using a computer.

Assessment

This is a comprehensive dictionary which contains 15 875 words and 23 883 sentences or phrases. It deals with both simple and compound words. This being a contemporary dictionary, the authors have concentrated on words that are commonly used in present-day Tamil, i.e. words used by present-day speakers and by modern writers in novels, readers, magazines etc. Foreign words and newly "coined" words that form part of the present-day vocabulary are included. However, the spelling of foreign words creates slight distortions in pronunciation. Rare words or many words from ancient Tamil literature that are no longer in use and that are included in all other dictionaries, have been removed from this dictionary.

Among the foreign words in this dictionary are a large number of English words that form part of the vocabulary of the present-day Tamils in India. A few examples of words that use sounds or letters that are not used as initial letters according to Tamil grammar are: **tumbler, dozen, doctor, dollar, tin, tea, teacher, dupe, rail, rickshaw, ration, rubber, rowdy, levy, crop, club, carrier**

and gorilla. Other words include **amen, hurricane, hotel, sir, chill, cell, scent, cycle (bicycle), soda, soap, note, pen** and **pyjamas**. It is important to note that the pronunciation of these words differs slightly from the English pronunciation. This is due to the lack of correlation between the phonic sounds of Tamil and English. Another factor is the absence of certain English phonic sounds in Tamil. These English words are spelt as they are pronounced by the Tamils in India. An example is the pronunciation of **dozen**. Since the phonic sound [z] is not found in Tamil, this word is actually spelt and pronounced in Tamil as **dojen**.

From an early period in the history of Tamil many Sanskrit words crept into the language. These words contain five phonic sounds that do not belong to the Tamil language. From that early period Tamil grammar allowed for substitution of these sounds. While language purists may use the grammatically converted form, many speakers in India still use these words in their original form. A large number of these original words containing these five pure Sanskrit sounds are given in this dictionary.

Words are used in lucid sentences and phrases as examples to assist the user with a clear understanding of the meaning. These sentences and phrases are fairly simple. The dictionary also contains 209 clear pictures illustrating special words. This will definitely assist the user, especially the foreign user, to gain a clearer understanding of nouns encountered for the first time. While Tamil words can convey several meanings, the compilers of this dictionary have chosen the most commonly used meanings.

This is a bilingual dictionary, and will only be useful to bilingual speakers who can read the Tamil script. As transliterations are not given, it will serve no purpose to people wishing to learn Tamil without learning the Tamil script. However, besides in India, this dictionary is invaluable in countries such as South Africa where Tamil is used in speaking, reading and writing.

G. Murugan
Lecturer (Tamil)
Department of Indian Languages
University of Durban-Westville
Durban
Republic of South Africa