

Tamil Pedagogical Dictionary cum Grammar in Net

Dr. S. Jean Lawrence,

Professor, International Institute of Tamil Studies,
C.P.T. Campus, Tharamani, Chennai – 600 113, India.
E.mail lawrencesj@yahoo.com

Learning a language is a complex phenomenon. Mother Tongue learning, which starts from the childhood, is a free flow. But learning a second language, which deviates from the mother tongue or the first language, meets many complexities. The complexities can be minimized when there are well-planned instructional materials and teaching technology. In the classroom teaching, students can interact with the teacher to solve the problems they come across. But such interactions are minimized in the auto-instructional situation where the learning / teaching takes place through multimedia / net, which differs from classroom teaching / learning. The learners have to depend upon what is available in the CD / Net. The inadequacies in the course materials will reflect on learning and the decoding of what is learnt will be imperfect. So, it is the responsibility of the material producers to take much care to design the instructional / learning materials, which is the sole source to get the communicative competence in the target language.

Tamil is being learnt by non-Tamils and also by Tamils settled far away from the motherland, as a second language through multimedia / net at different levels with different motivations. There are a number of learning materials to cater to the needs. The shape similarity method of instructions to learn the Tamil scripts and the simple to complex presentation of the grammatical categories through situation oriented conversational lessons and the narrative lessons make learning easier. The user friendly, innovative and interactive presentation makes learning interesting and effective.

The course materials available are presented with different motivations / purposes and they are in different grades. Tamil being a diglossic language, the course materials are available both in the literal / written Tamil and in the spoken / colloquial Tamil. They provide the phonological, orthographic, morphological, syntactical and lexical information pertaining to the course materials / lessons, which are helpful to get sound knowledge in what is being taught. The structure of the grammatical categories and the sentence patterns, which take part in the course material, are presented neatly and the exercises and language games are provided for decoding what is learned in the target language.

The grammatical explanations provided in these course materials are mostly descriptive with the text boundary. For example, the occurrence of the present tense markers – kiR-, -kkiR-, -kinR- and –kkinR- are well explained, i.e. their occurrence with weak or strong verbs and the personal endings which follow them in the conjugation of the finite verbs etc. are presented. But there are constructions like,

Naan naaLai varukiReen.
'I will come tomorrow.'

where the present tense markers are used in future action denoting contexts. Such information i.e., the usage of the present tense marker in future action situations are not explained in most of the course materials since such situations are not presented in the text passages. But such information must also be provided so that the learners can thoroughly understand the grammatical functions of each grammatical category to get perfect communicative competence.

The material producers know the formations, functions etc. of the grammatical categories. But, when the course text materials lack such instances as mentioned above, they fail to present the details. It is quite difficult to provide all the grammatical categories, their occurrences, functions etc. since the course materials have different grades and motivations. To overcome this situation and to feed all the grammatical features a good pedagogical grammar is necessary.

The pedagogical grammar differs from the general grammar in its presentation and motivation. Following the descriptive grammar, it adds more information and explanations about the grammatical categories, their occurrences, usages etc. so that the learners can easily understand them. The presentation of different situations, both functional and cultural, and the domains of the usage will help the learners to produce grammatical, acceptable sentences for proper communication. The pedagogical statements of the grammatical categories of the language makes learning perfect and the linguistic output will be grammatical and acceptable.

The communicative system will stand still if there is lexical deficiency. The learner is expected to familiarize with both functional and cultural vocabularies of the target language. For learning Tamil, a dictionary with pedagogical information is very useful for the formation of the grammatical categories. The pedagogical dictionary differs from the conventional dictionary in providing information for the entries. It gives grammatical clues and also the cultural clues wherever necessary. This helps the learner to conjugate/decline any word he likes to use without any difficulty. For example in Tamil the addition of the tense markers will give much problem when there is no grammatical clue. There are different past tense markers in Tamil. It is quite difficult to identify the verb that takes a particular past tense marker.

To avoid this situation the verbs are grouped into different classes on the basis of the tense markers they take so that the learners can conjugate different grammatical categories by using appropriate tense markers. When adding the past tense markers sandhi changes may take place. If the sandhi rule is not in memory the conjugation will halt or ungrammatical conjugation will take place. To overcome these problems the verbs can be presented in the pedagogical dictionary with their verbal participial forms, which are derived by the addition of the past tense marker. In addition to this, the pedagogical dictionary will have the strong verb, weak verb, transitive and intransitive markings which are helpful for morphological and syntactical presentation.

To conclude, it is to be noted here that learning Tamil as a second language through the

net/multimedia and with the help of a pedagogical grammar cum dictionary will be easier. It will help learners for easy conjugation/declension and effective communication by using appropriate grammatical and lexical items.