

# Tamil Language and Culture Guide



Indian Temple Complex, Tamil Nadu

From [http://www.audleyblog.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/rsinsouth-indian-temple-complex-tamil-nadu0000235010\\_resized.JPG](http://www.audleyblog.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/rsinsouth-indian-temple-complex-tamil-nadu0000235010_resized.JPG)

**Developed by:**

**Danielle Devore**

**Kathryn Jones**

**Genee Kim**

**Jessie Mailhes**

**Supervised by:**

**Dr. Rahul Chakraborty**

*This manual is a collection of information from a variety of sources in order to provide a resource for professionals working with Tamil speakers. It is not all inclusive.*

**Any question can be directed to Genee Kim at [gk1023@txstate.edu](mailto:gk1023@txstate.edu).**

## The Tamil Language

Tamil is a language with a long and ancient literary tradition that has been spoken in southern India for several millennia. The Tamil language is a member of the Dravidian language family, including about thirty languages. The Dravidian language family is distinct from the Indo-European language family, including Hindi and many other Indian languages, Farsi, and the Germanic and Romance languages. The Tamil language is spoken in a wide range of countries, including India, Northern Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, South Africa, and parts of East Africa, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, Trinidad, Guyana, and Mauritius. It is an official language in India, Sri Lanka, and Singapore. The number of second language speakers in Tamil may number in the millions. In northern Sri Lanka about 20 percent of the population speaks Tamil, around 4 million people.



Tamil is a diglossic language, which means there is a large difference between the written form of the language and the spoken form. These differences include grammatical, vocabulary, and pronunciation differences. The literary form is considered prestigious, while the spoken form is used in informal settings by all social classes.

There are six regional dialects of Tamil which are classified as, East, West, North, South, Central, and Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Tamil has retained older features while continental dialects have lost them or changed in different directions.

Tamil has been influenced by other languages. Sanskrit, an Indo-European language and a parent language of Hindi, Bengali, and other northern Indian languages has influenced

Tamil significantly. However, since colonial times increased cultural interaction with the British, English has become the most influential language on the Tamil language.

Above information was taken from <http://www.thetamilanguage.com/abo.html> & <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=99&menu=004>

## **Demographics:**

### **Tamil Nadu demographic information**

According to the 2001 Census conducted by the Tamil Nadu government, the total population stood at 62,405,679, with 31,400,909 males, 31,004,770 females, a sex ratio of 987 females per 1000 males, literacy rate of 73.45%, 13.11% of the population below seven years and a population density of 479.83.

Above information is taken from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Tamil_Nadu)

### **Sri Lanka demographic information**

Sinhalese make up 73.8% of the population (according to 1981 census) and are concentrated in the densely populated southwest region. Sri Lanka Tamils, citizens whose ancestors have lived on the island for centuries, total about 12.6% (according to 1981 census) and live primarily in the north and east. Indian Tamils are considered a distinct ethnic group and they make up 5.1% of the population.

Above information is taken from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Sri\\_Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Sri_Lanka)

### **United States demographic information**

There are approximately 84,000 Tamil speakers in the United States. Tamil is spoken in 260 counties and 49 states. It is among the ten most spoken languages in ten counties but it is not among the ten most common languages in any one state. The highest percentage of Tamil speakers are located in New Jersey and the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. In the United States, 1 of every 3,125 people age five and older speaks Tamil at home. In New Jersey, this figure is 1 in 991 people, while in Maryland, 1 in 1,531 residents is a Tamil speaker.

The link below provides a breakdown of the number of Tamil speakers in different counties in the United State:

[Tamil demographics in the United States](#)

Above information is taken from:

<http://www.usefoundation.org/userdata/file/Research/Languages/tamil.pdf>

## Culture:

### Religion

Of the Tamil Nadu population 88% are Hindus, 6 % are Muslims, and 5.5 % are Christians. The Christians are mostly Roman Catholics and the majority of the Muslims in Tamil Nadu speak Tamil. In Sri Lanka, the majority of Tamil speakers are Hindu while the rest are Roman Catholic. However, Buddhism is the majority religion in Sri Lanka.

The most popular deity is Murugan, the son of Siva. The worship of Amman, is thought to derive from an ancient mother goddess, is also very common. Kannagi, the heroine, is worshipped as Pattini by many Tamils, particularly in Sri Lanka. There are also many followers of Ayyavazhi in Tamil Nadu, mainly in the southern districts. In addition, there are many temples and devotees of Vishnu, Siva, Ganapathi, and the other Hindu deities.

### Hindu

“Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of Hindu religion.” (Bal Gangadhar Tilak's statement of Hinduism's defining features)

The roots of Hinduism in southern India, and amongst tribal and indigenous communities, are fundamentally contributive to the foundations of the religious and philosophical Hindu system.

Above information was taken from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu>

### Dress

Veshti is the traditional men's garment in Tamil Nadu. It is a rectangular piece of unstitched cloth, usually around 7 yards long, wrapped around the waist and the legs, and knotted at the waist. This is the traditional men's garment in India.



A **sari** is a female garment in the Indian subcontinent. A sari is a strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine meters in length that is draped over the body in various styles. The **Madisar** is the style in which the sari is worn by communities in Tamil Nadu, India. In ancient days, this was the mandatory style in which the sari was supposed to be worn by a woman after her marriage, but today, to suit modern trends, yet accommodate traditions, the madisar is worn by women on

selected festive occasions and while witnessing ceremonies. Normally saris are six yards in length, but since the madisar is worn in a different style, one requires a nine-yard sari to wear it.

Above information is taken from:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhoti>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/> and <http://forums.sulekha.com/forums/wo-men/Madisar.htm>

## Music

Tamil folk music tends to be vivacious and is best experienced at a live performance. Recent efforts have revived interest in folk music and good recordings are starting to be available.

*Listening Sample:* [http://www.geocities.com/dr\\_sidd\\_r/tamilnadu/MUSIC/folk.au](http://www.geocities.com/dr_sidd_r/tamilnadu/MUSIC/folk.au)

Songs in praise of religious deities are commonplace in Tamil Nadu. Although the polytheistic Hindu religion inspires much of this music, the Muslims and Christians have their share of songs too.

Carnatic music, referred to as "classical music" in South India, is a very old tradition. One of its greatest composers was Thyagaraja, who is regarded by many as a saint. Most of these songs are Hindu devotional in nature, but are enjoyed by almost anybody with taste.

*Listening Sample:* [http://www.geocities.com/dr\\_sidd\\_r/tamilnadu/MUSIC/gaja.au](http://www.geocities.com/dr_sidd_r/tamilnadu/MUSIC/gaja.au)

Above information is taken from:

<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~siddhart/tamilnadu/MUSIC/index.html>  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu>

## Food

Each geographical area where Tamils live has developed its own distinct variant of the common dishes plus a few dishes distinctly native to itself. The Chettinad region, comprising of Karaikudi and adjoining areas, is known for both traditional vegetarian dishes, like appam, uthappam, paal paniyaram, and non-vegetarian dishes, made primarily using chicken.

Rice, the major staple food in most of Tamil, is usually steamed and served with about two to six accompanying items, which typically include sambar, dry curry, rasam, kootu, and thayir (curd) or moru (whey or buttermilk). Ghee Clarified butter called neyyi in Tamil, is used to flavor the rice when eaten with dhal or sambar, but not with curds or buttermilk. Morkulambu, a dish which can be spiced with moru, is also popular with steamed rice.



Above information is taken from:

<http://www.neivedyam.com/2007/10/making-of-ghee-clarified-butter.html> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people)

## **Family Life**

Among the Tamil people, the nuclear family is one of the most important social unit-- husband, wife, and unmarried children. When economic need causes several families (Tamil-kudumbam) or generations to live together, each wife will maintain her own cooking place and prepare food for her own husband as a sign of the individuality of the nuclear family.

Ethnic groups in Sri Lanka preserve clear distinctions in the roles of the sexes. The women are responsible for cooking, raising children, taking care of housework, weeding and help with the harvest. Among poor families women also perform full-time work for the more well-to-do. The man's job is to protect women and children and provide for them. In this role men dominate all aspects of business and public life. At the center of the system are children, who mix freely until puberty and receive a great deal of affection from both sexes. As they enter their teens, children begin to adopt the adult roles that will keep them in separate worlds: girls help with household chores and boys work outside the home. Among the middle- and upper-income groups, however, education of children may last into their early twenties, and women may mix with males or even take on jobs that were in the past reserved for men. There has been a tendency to view the educational qualifications of women as a means for obtaining favorable marriage alliances, and many middle-class women withdraw from the workplace after marriage.

Above information is taken from:

Above information is taken from:

<http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/41.htm>

## **Education**

Tamil Nadu has a history that dates back to a thousand years or more. The state's reputation lies with the fact that one of the first three universities established by British East India is located here in Chennai – the University of Madras. Having made great strides in the field of Higher Education, Tamil Nadu is a frontline state in India imparting quality education in the field of science and technology.

The State Government has undertaken several schemes and programs to overcome the problem of rural illiteracy and has provided free elementary education to the masses. The state's literacy rate has increased significantly from 62.66% in 1991 to 73.47% in 2001 which is well above the national average. About 99% of the population has access to primary education. Tamil Nadu has: 40 Universities, 350 engineering colleges and 1150 Arts Colleges

Sri Lanka's population has a literacy rate of 92%, higher than that expected for a third world country. Sri Lanka has the highest literacy rate in South Asia and overall, one of the highest literacy rates in Asia. An example of two schools found in Sri Lanka are:

*National Schools*

National Schools come under the direct control of the Ministry of Education therefore has direct funding from the ministry. These few are referred to as famous schools or elite schools since they have a rich history and well-maintained facilities than the average public school. 323

### *Provincial Schools*

Provincial Schools consists of the vast majority of schools in Sri Lanka. Funded and controlled by the local governments many suffer from poor facilities and a shortage of teachers.

Above information is taken from:

<http://www.tamilnadueducation.net/Facts/>



### **Dance**

The dominant classical dance amongst Tamils is Bharatanatyam. Bharatanatyam is performative, rather than participative. The dance is an exposition of the story contained in a song, and is usually performed by one performer on stage, with an orchestra of drums, a drone, and one or more singers backstage.

The most notable of Tamil folk dances is karakattam. In its religious form, the dance is performed in front of an image of the goddess Mariamma. The dancer bears, on his or her head, a brass pot filled with uncooked rice, decorated with flowers and surrounded by a bamboo frame, and tumbles and leaps to

the rhythm of a song without spilling a grain.

Above information is taken from:

Above information is taken from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people)

### **Holidays**

The most important Tamil festivals are Pongal, a harvest festival that occurs in mid-January, and Varudapirappu, the Tamil New Year, which occurs around mid-April. Both are celebrated by almost all Tamils, regardless of religion. The Hindu festival Deepavali is celebrated with fanfare; other local Hindu festivals include Thaipusam, Panguni Uttiram, and Adiperukku.



Above information is taken from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people)

### **Political Information:**

#### **Tamil**

Dravidian languages, such as Tamil, are distinct from Indo-Aryan, languages, such as Hindi. Increased awareness of linguistic and other racial and regional differences

produced a mindset in which Indians began to see themselves in terms of their ancestry and began to classify themselves into distinct Aryan and Dravidian races. This mindset affected thinking in India about racial and regional differences and had an impact on aspects of Tamil nationalism. Tamil speakers believed themselves to be some of the earliest inhabitants of India, and perceived the Aryan population as oppressors from whom they should liberate themselves. A movement toward the establishment of an independent Tamil state began. Calls for independence were somewhat quelled by naming Tamil one of the official languages of India and by reorganizing Indian states along linguistic and ethnic lines. However, there is still some support in Tamil Nadu for the establishment of an independent state. In fact, the fight for independence in Sri Lanka by the Tamil Tigers receives significant support from Tamils of Tamil Nadu.

Above information is from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Tamil_Nadu)

### **Sri Lanka**

A civil war has been fought in Sri Lanka on and off since July of 1983. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have fought a guerilla war against the government to create an independent Tamil state. The root of the conflict goes back to British colonial rule. After independence was granted by the British in 1948, disagreements between the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic communities flared up when drawing up the country's first post-independence constitution. The Tamil minority felt they were being oppressed by the Sinhalese majority. Incidents, such as passage of the Sinhala Only Act, which mandated Sinhala as the only official language of Sri Lanka, angered the Tamil people. The act became a symbol of oppression and justification for their fight for independence. On May of 2009 the government forces defeated the Tamil Tigers, killing their leader, and ending the conflict after decades of civil war.

Above information if from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala\\_Only\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala_Only_Act) and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lankan\\_Civil\\_War#Origin\\_and\\_evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Civil_War#Origin_and_evolution)



## Linguistic Features: Phonology

### Comparison of English and Tamil Consonants

Information taken from:

#### English Consonants

CONSONANTS  
(PULMONIC)

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retrolflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d				k g				
Nasal	m		n				ŋ				
Trill											
Tap or Flap											
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ						h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ						
Lateral fricative											
Approximant				ɹ			j				
Lateral approximant				l							

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

#### Tamil consonants

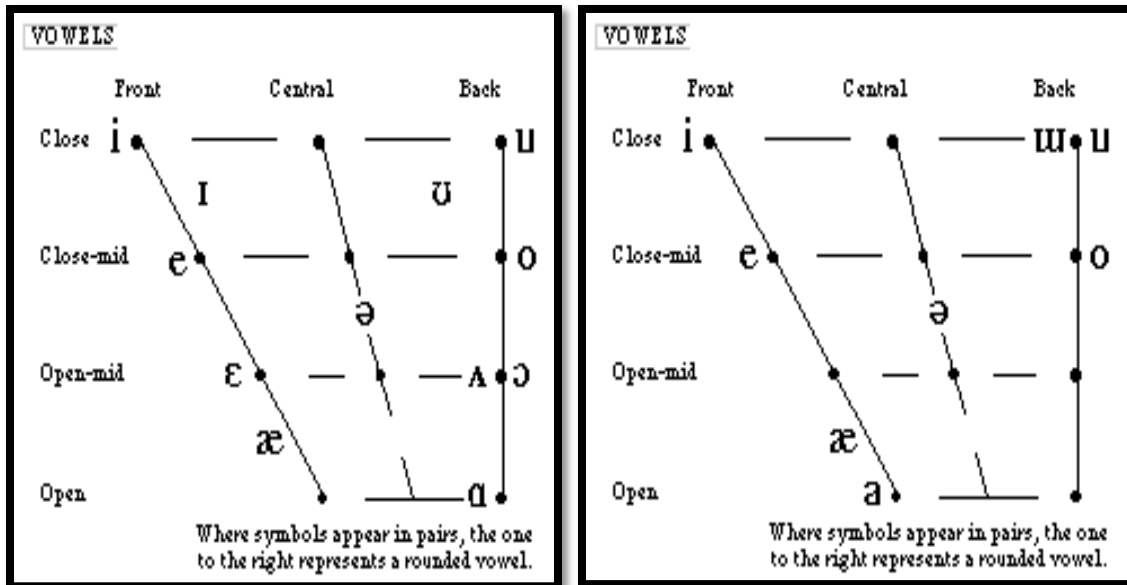
CONSONANTS  
(PULMONIC)

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retrolflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d			ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ			ʔ
Nasal	m		n			ɳ	ɲ	ŋ			
Trill											
Tap or Flap			ɾ								
Fricative											
Affricate											
Lateral fricative											
Approximant		ʋ					j				
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ					

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

## Side by side Comparison of vowels in English and Tamil Nadu

Information taken from:



The Tamil language distinguished 18 consonants and 12 vowels. Together these combine to form 216 compound characters. There is a special character (*aaytha ezutthu*), giving a total of 247 character. Vowels are classified into short and long (five of each) and two diphthongs. Consonants are classified into three categories with six in each category: *vallinam* - hard, *mellinam* - soft or nasal and *idayinam* - medium.

Unlike most other Indian languages, Tamil does not have aspirated consonants. The Tamil script does not have distinct letters for voiced and unvoiced plosives, although both are present in the spoken language as allophones--i.e., they are in complementary distribution and the places they can occur do not intersect. For example, the unvoiced plosive 'p' occurs at the beginning of the words and the voiced plosive 'b' cannot. In the middle of words, unvoiced plosives commonly occur as a geminated pair like -pp-, while voiced plosives do not usually come in pairs. Only the voiced plosives occur after a vowel, or after a corresponding nasal. Thus both the voiced and unvoiced plosives can be represented by the same script in Tamil without ambiguity, the script denoting only the place and broad manner of articulation (plosive, nasal, etc.).

Phonologists are divided in their opinion over why written Tamil did not distinguish between voiced and unvoiced characters. One point of view is that Tamil never had conjunct consonants or voiced stops - voice was rather the result of elision or sandhi. Consequently, unlike Indo-European languages and other Dravidian languages, Tamil did not need separate characters for voiced consonants. A slightly different theory holds that

voiced consonants were at one stage allophones of unvoiced consonants, and the lack of distinction between the two in the modern script merely reflects that.

Above information is taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_phonology)

## **Morphology**

Tamil nouns (and pronouns) are classified into two super-classes (*tiai*): "rational" (*uyartiai*), Humans and deities; masculine singular, feminine singular and rational plural classes "irrational" (*aiyai*), all other nouns that include animals, objects and abstract nouns; irrational singular and irrational plural class.

Classes are indicated through suffixes which perform as cases or postpositions. Tamil nouns can take one of four prefixes, *i*, *a*, *u* and *e* which are functionally equivalent to the demonstratives in English.

Verbs: also use suffixes to show person, number, mood, tense, and voice.

- Person and number are indicated by suffixing the oblique case of the relevant pronoun. The suffixes to indicate tenses and voice are formed from grammatical particles, which are added to the stem.
- There are two voices in the Tamil language. The first indicates that the subject of the sentence *undergoes* or *is the object of* the action named by the verb stem, and the second indicates that the subject of the sentence *directs* the action referred to by the verb stem.
- Tamil has three simple tenses—past, present, and future—indicated by the suffixes, as well as a series of perfects indicated by compound suffixes. Mood is implicit in Tamil, and is normally reflected by the same morphemes which mark tense categories. Tamil verbs also mark evidentially.

Grammars of Tamil do not distinguish between adjectives and adverbs. Tamil has a large number of *idiophones* that act as adverbs indicating the way the object in a given state "says" or "sounds".

Tamil does not have articles. In the first person plural, Tamil makes a distinction between inclusive pronouns *we* and *our* that include the addressee and exclusive pronouns that do not.

Above information is taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language)

## **Syntax**

The basic order of constituents in a simple Tamil sentence is Subject-Object-Verb. Other orders can be found, but they range from simple stylistic variation to unusual "afterthought" word order, where the speaker has not formed the sentence well and adds things after the basic order has been established (usually after the verb has been made finite). Compared to English, Tamil syntax is often the mirror-image of the order in an English sentence, particularly when there are relative clauses, quotations, adjectival and adverbial clauses, conjoined verbal constructions, aspectual and modal auxiliaries, and other complexities.

### *Nouns*

The simplest Tamil sentence consists of two Noun Phrases, with no verb present in the surface structure:

*idu pustaham* `This (is a) book.'

Nouns which are the subject of a sentence are usually in the nominative case, except in certain constructions involving stative and/or defective verbs, and in constructions involving *iru* when it means `have'.

Noun phrases which are the subject of a sentence are generally the first constituent in the sentence. Adjectives and other members of the Noun Phrase precede the Noun. Case markers, plural markers, and certain quantifiers follow the Noun, as in:

- *avan-ukku* `to him'
- *koandenga* `children'
- *paal-ellaam* `all the milk'

### *Verbal syntax*

As mentioned above, verb phrases containing finite verbs are generally the last constituent in the surface structure of a Tamil sentence.

That is, a Verb Phrase consists of a verb-stem plus tense, plus optional infinitive plus optional aspect and optional modal and person-number-gender. If a conditional mode is chosen, it is attached to tense; negation must be attached to infinitive, in which case there is no person-number-gender. When aspect is present, the past-marked verb stem must be used; aspectual verbs have their own tense markers as well, or modal/negative; person-number-gender is present if modal and negative are not.

### *Adjectival syntax*

Within the Noun Phrase, adjectives **always** precede a noun. If there is no nominal form present, there can be no adjective. That is, a sentence like English `this is good' is not possible in Tamil; rather a Tamil sentence must have the form `this thing is a good thing' or `this one is a good one.'

*idu nalladu* `This thing is (a) good thing.'

### *Adverbs*

There are no true adverbs in Tamil, i.e. none that one could list in the dictionary. They are all formed by the addition of *aa(y)* to nouns or NOMINALIZED adjectives, with one exception: *nalla* `good' + *aa* equals *nallaa* `well', although *nalladaa* also occurs. In Brahmin dialect this item is regular, i.e. *nallaa* does not occur, but the nominalization of *nalla* is *nannaa*; *nallataa* also occurs. Adverbial forms of adjectives occur in identity statements with copula *iru*.

With certain noun phrases marked with *aa iru* the meaning may be `temporarily serving as, functioning as', e.g. *idu vahuppu saale, aanaa ippa aaffiisaa irukku* `This is (usually) a classroom, but now it's (serving as) an office.'

### *Interrogatives*

Interrogatives, or question sentences, are formed in Tamil in a number of ways, the most common being by the addition of suffixes or prefixes, rather than by subject-verb inversion as in some languages.

### *Conditional*

Conditional sentences ( `If'-type sentences in English) are formed by adding, in the place where person-number gender would normally occur, the suffix *-aa(l)*. This is added to the PAST stem of the verb only, and thus tense and person-number gender are neutralized, i.e., the conditional of a verb gives us no information about tense or person-number gender.

- *paattaa ...`If (some)one sees ...'*
- *avaru vandaa`If he/she came/comes'*
- *nii saappittaa`If you eat/ate'*

If the verb is aspectually marked, such as with *iru* or (*v*)*idu*, the suffix *-aa* is added in past tense context:

- *avan vandirundaa`If he had come...'*
- *poost vantittaa`If the mail definitely came...'*
- *nii pooyirundaa ade paattiruppee`If you had gone, you would have seen.'*

### *Consecutive action*

Tamil has a number of ways to express one action following another. Most of these constructions differ slightly in how they express the IMMEDIACY of the action that follows. That is, one can express whether the action is almost simultaneous, follows on the heels of another action, or merely follows it sometime afterward.

Above information is taken from:

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/plc/tamilweb/book/chapter6/node1.html>

## **Semantics**

Tamil is a Dravidian language that is more than 2,000 years old. Speakers of Tamil take great pride in their language and have a strong desire to maintain the linguistic purity of their language. Though classical and modern Tamil has borrowed words from other languages (i.e. Munda, Malay, Chinese, Teluge, Kannade, English, Arabic, etc.), there is great opposition to use of foreign loan-words. The strongest impact of purism in Tamil has been on loan-words from Sanskrit. During its history, Tamil, along with other Dravidian languages like Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam etc., was influenced by Sanskrit in terms of vocabulary, grammar and literary styles, reflecting the increased trend of Sanskritisation in the Tamil country. Tamil vocabulary never became quite as heavily Sanskritised as most of the other Dravidian languages, and unlike in those languages, it was and remains possible to express complex ideas, including in science, art, religion and law - without the use of Sanskrit loan words. Tamil in formal documents, literature and public speeches has seen a marked decline in the use Sanskrit loan words in the past few

decades. There has also been an effort made to replace modern English words with new words derived from Tamil roots.

Above information is taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language)

## **Pragmatics**

- A non-confrontational communication style is used, and information or requests may not be stated directly.
- Indirect style of communication is preferred over direct, so Indians or Sri Lankans may say what they think a partner wants to here to be polite
- Telling someone “no” is considered rude and unkind.
- In order to be polite and prevent from losing face, most Indians will never tell you "No". If they say "Yes" to one of your questions while bobbling their head (a mixture between a shake and a nod), that "Yes" generally means "No".
- Tamils greet each other by saying “vanakkam,” which means, “May you be blessed with a long life.”
- When Tamils meet a person of superior rank they join their hands and lift them to thir forehead or breast and say, “Tambiran Nanmei Taratum,” which means “God confer on you good.”
- The Sri Lankans will want to feel at ease with you and at least have a small bit of background about you before they will feel comfortable doing business or discussing business with you.
- Hindus generally maintain a personal space of 3 to 3.5 feet during conversation.
- Touching is generally not a part of communication, however among close friends holding hands or putting arms around each other is a way of expressing friendship.
- Touching between men and women is not appropriate and displays of physical affection in public are rarely seen.
- Sustained eye contact is not generally the norm, especially a woman looking at a man.
- When communicating with elders it is common to use indirect eye contact.
- In India, the head wobble, which is very common throughout the country can mean "yes" and not "no". It depends on the angle and expression and the speed to determine which is which.
- Grasping the ears signifies sincerity or repentance, since ears are considered sacred, pulling or boxing ones ears is a grave insult.
- When a person meets a person of equal rank, some simply bow to each other and some raise their joined hands to their breasts.
- When walking with a person of superior rank or caste, it is improper to walk sidelong or before him.
- Tamils show great reverence for elders by rising form their seats when they see them and giving them precedence during all public and private meetings.
- There are many different kinds of civility offered to superiors, such as giving a seat, giving water for the hands or feet, and furnishing food.
- On formal occasions, a son salutes his parents by falling down and grasping the feet.

- Rules of etiquette when one has a visitor include addressing the visitor with pleasing language, rising on his approach, and accompanying him for a distance when he departs.

The above information is from:

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=21&CID=96](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=21&CID=96)

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/srilanka.html>

<http://www.stylusinc.com/business/india/communicating.htm>

[http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/India/State\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu/Local\\_Customs-State\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu-BR-1.html](http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/India/State_of_Tamil_Nadu/Local_Customs-State_of_Tamil_Nadu-BR-1.html)

Chitty, C. (1988). The castes, customs, manners and literature of the Tamils. New Dehli: Asian Educational Services.

## **Cultural and Language Considerations with Tamil speakers**

### **Do's and Don'ts**

- Dress in this culture is very conservative, so when meeting with individuals from this culture dress professionally, preferably with shoulders and knees covered
- In this culture individuals are very conscious of social order and status. In families the father or oldest male is general considered the leader of the family. Consulting with the father and showing deference to the father as the head of the family may be important when working with individuals of this culture.
- Face, which can be described as honor or personal dignity, is extremely important; publicly reprimanding or criticizing someone could lead to a loss of face and should be avoided.
- Answering questions with "no" to people from Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu seems blunt or rude, so be tactful when answering questions so you do not offend and be aware that in response to your questions they may provide vague or uncommitted answers
- To make your client feel comfortable you may want to greet them in their native tongue by saying "vanakkam."
- Women from Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu often refrain from physical contact with a man outside their family, so always wait to see if a woman extends her hand or not if you are male. Male to male and female to female handshakes are ok.
- In that culture you pick up objects and eat only with the right hand because the left hand is considered unclean, so when handing things to your client try to use right hand
- Both cultures are hierarchical and titles are very important. So when you introduce yourself give your professional title, and when addressing a client and his/her family always use the appropriate title followed by the surname. If one does not have a professional title, use the honorific title "Sir" or "Madam".
- If you are presented with a business card treat it with respect, and always present your business card with two hands.

- Do not put people in awkward positions or under pressure. Never openly criticize people.
- Sri Lankans are very non-confrontational in their communication style, so when interacting do not put the client in an awkward position or under pressure
- Use your first meeting with a client to build rapport, jumping straight to business is considered rude
- Possess a polychronic attitude toward time, particularly during social situations, so be respectful and aware of this when working with individuals of these cultures.
- India and Sri Lanka are very hierarchical societies, so generally it is best to defer to the most senior person in the room.
- Avoid topics or materials that could insult client's religions, such as leather, alcohol, pigskin or dog.

The above information is from:

[http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=21&CID=96](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=21&CID=96)

<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/srilanka.html>

<http://www.stylusinc.com/business/india/communicating.htm>

[http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/India/State\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu/Local\\_Customs-State\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu-BR-1.html](http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/India/State_of_Tamil_Nadu/Local_Customs-State_of_Tamil_Nadu-BR-1.html)

Chitty, C. (1988). The castes, customs, manners and literature of the Tamils. New Dehli: Asian Educational Services.

### **Possible error patterns**

The below lists contains aspects of the Tamil language that differ from English. Be conscious of these characteristics as possible errors that a speaker of Tamil may produce when speaking English:

#### *Phonology*

- Fricatives and affricates are not produced in Tamil, be aware of this possible influence on English
- Consonant clusters are not produced in the word initial position
- No aspirated consonants
- No distinct letters for voiced and unvoiced plosives (/p/ and /b/)

Above information is taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_phonology)

#### *Syntax*

- Most common sentence structure order is Subject-Object-Verb (verbs must conclude the sentences)
- Not all Tamil sentences have subjects (“null subject language”)
- Tamil lacks relative pronouns, though speakers convey their meanings by using relative participle constructions For example, the English sentence "Call the boy who learnt the lesson" will be said in Tamil roughly as "That-lesson-learnt-boy call".

Above information is taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_grammar)



### *Morphology*

- Showing appropriate person markers are done by adding suffixes to the stem word (Tamil language does not have specific person words to use)
- No distinction between adjective and adverbs
- No articles
- There is no limit on the number of suffixes that can be added to a word in Tamil (can lead to very long words that would be equivalent to long sentences in English)

Above information is taken from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_grammar)

### *Semantics*

- Terms used in one language that are not used in the other.

The above information is from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language)

### **Assessments for speakers of Tamil**

- Few assessments are available that have specifically been prepared for speakers of the Tamil language. However, the **Bilingual Aphasia Test (BAT)** does have a version for the Tamil language.
- See the recourses listed below to obtain assessment and therapy materials for this population.

### **Extra Resources:**

#### **Websites**

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (n.d.). Find a Professional: Online Directory of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from <http://www.asha.org/proserv/>.

Audley Blog Com.(n.d.) Retrieved on May 23, 2009 from [http://www.audleyblog.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/rsinsouth-indian-temple-complex-tamil-nadu0000235010\\_resized.JPG](http://www.audleyblog.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2008/02/rsinsouth-indian-temple-complex-tamil-nadu0000235010_resized.JPG)

Culture crossing. (n.d.) *A community built guide to cross cultural etiquette and understanding*. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from [http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics\\_business\\_student\\_details.php?Id=21&CID=96](http://www.culturecrossing.net/basics_business_student_details.php?Id=21&CID=96)

Kwintessential. (n.d.) *Sri lanka –language, culture, customs, and etiquette*. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/srilanka.html>

Neivedyam Innovation in Cooking. (n.d.) Making of Ghee. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://www.neivedyam.com/2007/10/making-of-ghee-clarified-butter.html>

Official Website of the Development Corporation and Department of Tourism of Tamil Nadu. (n.d.) Retrieved on May 23, 2009 from <http://www.tamilnadutourism.org/>

Online Language Translators: Certified Translation of Your Documents. (n.d.) *Tamil language*. Retrieved May, 23, 2009, from [http://www.online-languagetranslators.com/tamil\\_language.htm](http://www.online-languagetranslators.com/tamil_language.htm)

Stylusinc. (n.d.) *Communicating cross-culturally in india*. Retrieved May 24, 2009, from <http://www.stylusinc.com/business/india/communicating.htm>

Suleka.com. (n.d.) *Madisar*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://forums.sulekha.com/forums/wo-men/Madisar.htm>

Tamil Language in Context. (n.d.) Retrieved on June 1, 2009 from <http://www.thetamilanguage.com/abo.html>

Tamil Nadu Education. (n.d.) Provincial Schools. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://www.tamilnadueducation.net/Facts/>

Tamil Nadu Homepage. (n.d.) *Music in tamil*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://www.cs.utk.edu/~siddhart/tamilnadu/MUSIC/index.html>

The Texas Speech-Language and Hearing Association. (n.d.) *Linguistically diverse populations: Considerations and resources for intervention*. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from [http://www.txsha.org/Diversity\\_Issues/cld\\_document.asp#language](http://www.txsha.org/Diversity_Issues/cld_document.asp#language)

The University of Congress. (n.d.) *Family*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/41.htm>

The University of Leeds. (n.d.) *Tamil*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/plc/tamilweb/book/chapter6/node1.html>

UCLA Language Materials Project: Teaching Resources for Less Commonly Taught Languages. (n.d.) *Tamil*. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=99&menu=004>

Virtual Tourist. (n.d.) *State of tamil nadu local customs*. Retrieved May, 23, 2009, from [http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/India/State\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu/Local\\_Customs-State\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu-BR-1.html](http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Asia/India/State_of_Tamil_Nadu/Local_Customs-State_of_Tamil_Nadu-BR-1.html)

Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Demographics of Sri Lanka*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Sri\\_Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Sri_Lanka)

Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Demographics of Tamil Nadu*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Tamil_Nadu)

- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Dhoti*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhot>
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Hinduism*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu>
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Politics of Tamil Nadu*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics\\_of\\_Tamil\\_Nadu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politics_of_Tamil_Nadu)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Sinhala Only Act*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala\\_Only\\_Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinhala_Only_Act)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Sri lanka*. Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lanka](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia (n.d.) *Sri Lankan Civil War*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri\\_Lankan\\_Civil\\_War#Origin\\_and\\_evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lankan_Civil_War#Origin_and_evolution)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Tamil grammar*. Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_grammar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_grammar)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Tamil language*. Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_language)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Tamil people*. Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Tamil people*. Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_people#Language\\_and\\_literature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_people#Language_and_literature)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Tamil phonology*. Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_phonology)
- Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. (n.d.) *Women in sari*. Retrieved on June 1, 2009, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

## **Books**

- Chitty, C. (1988). *The castes, customs, manners and literature of the Tamils*. New Dehli: Asian Educational Services.

## Online Journals

**Language in India** - A monthly online journal devoted to the study of the languages spoken in the Indian sub-continent which provides scholarly research findings, linguistic descriptions, interdisciplinary research and current issues of importance relating to Indian languages.

Language in India: Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow, 9. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from <http://www.languageinindia.com/>

## Research Articles

Cheng, L. L. (1993). Asian-American cultures. In D. E. Battle (Ed.), *Communication disorders in multicultural populations* (pp. 38–77). Boston: Andover Medical Publishers.

Cheng, L. L. (1999). Moving beyond accent: Social and cultural realities of living with many tongues. *Topics in Language Disorders, 19*(4), 1–10.

Lian, C., & Abdullah, S. (2001). The education and practice of speech-language pathologists in malaysia. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 10*, 3-9.

Shah, A. (2007). Cultural Issues in Clinical Context with Asian Indian Patients. In Uzzell, B., Ponton, M. et al. (Eds.), *International Handbook of Cross-cultural Clinical Neuropsychology (IHCCN)*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

van Kleeck, A. (1994). Potential cultural bias in training parents as conversational partners with their children who have delays in language development. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 3*, 67-78.

Williamson, S. (1979). *Tamil baby talk: A cross-cultural study*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

## Video Clips

[Tamil Language Video](#)

[Tamil Accent](#)

[Meeting and Introductions in Tamil](#)

[Mother and Son Interaction](#)

## **Resources for Acquiring Materials or Information for Assessment or Intervention**

May be able to acquire materials or information needed assessment and/or intervention from the following sources:

- **The ALL India Institute of Speech and Hearing in Mysore, India is an institute established to** train professionals and conducts research in speech-language pathology, audiology, speech sciences, and hearing sciences. Some of the research conducted focuses on development of assessment materials for Indian languages, and speech speaker recognition. Normative data for speech and language acquisition in children for various Indian languages have been developed.

The All India Institute of Speech and Hearing. (n.d.) retrieved May 23, 2009 from <http://www.aiishmysore.com/>

- **The Asian Indian Caucus (AIC)** is one of six multicultural constituency groups within the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. It was formed in 1994 by a group of professionals committed to representing the unique needs and interests of speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and individuals with communication disorders of Asian-Indian origin.

Asian Indian Caucus: A Multicultural Constituency Group of ASHA. (n.d.) retrieved May 23, 2009 from <http://www.asianindiancaucus.org/>

- **The UCLA Language Materials Project (LMP)** is an on-line bibliographic database of teaching and learning materials for over 150 Less Commonly Taught Languages

UCLA Language Materials Project: Teaching Resources for Less Commonly Taught Languages. (n.d.) *Tamil*. Retrieved May 23, 2009, from <http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?LangID=99&menu=004>

## **SLP's with Tamil language background**

Unfortunately no bilingual SLP's knowledgeable in the Tamil language could be located. The ASHA and TSHA websites on linguistically diverse populations as of May of 2009, did not contain information or resources for the Tamil language.

- Interpreter and Translator services in the Tamil language are available and one provider of these services in the Texas area is listed below:

## **Texas Interpreter and Translator Services**

Texas interpreter and Translator. (n.d.) Retrieved on May 23, 2009 from <http://www.interpretersunlimited.com/texas-interpreter-translator.php>

- Tamil Cultural Association at The University of Texas at Austin is an organization from which individuals with knowledge of Tamil could be recruited and trained to act as interpreters.

Tamil Cultural Association at the University of Texas at Austin. (n.d.) Retrieved on May 23, 2009, from <http://studentorgs.utexas.edu/tamilsa/>

# Multicultural Case History Form for Adults

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Instructions: Please fill out the questions below. The information will be used to design appropriate assessment tools.

In what countries, cities, and states have you lived? For how long?

Do you have any food preferences that may affect swallowing?

Do you any religious and or spiritual beliefs that may affect the assessment?

Who lives in your home with you (parents, siblings, friends)?

Do you have use different communication patterns/styles with different family members or friends?

What is the predominant language you speak at home? Other settings (e.g., work, social settings, gym, church)?

Why are you concerned about your speech and language?

How difficult is it for you to learn new skills?

Are there any other family members you would like to have present during the evaluation?