
RESEARCH PAPER

The Pesky Ablative: Early European Missionaries' Treatment of Tamil 'Ablatives'

Gregory James

Formerly of Language Centre, University of Exeter, GB
gjames@netvigator.com

In their efforts to create accessible pedagogical grammars of Tamil, early missionaries applied the reference model of Latin and Portuguese grammars and other missionaries' works to the nominal and verbal paradigms they constructed of the language. In so doing, they met with difficulties in formulating the terminology to express the phenomena they encountered. For example, the early missionary grammarians regularly classed several distinct Tamil terminations as 'ablatives', because the various senses of these are subsumed in Latin within one ablative case (itself historically derived from three Proto-Indo-European cases: separative ablative, comitative/instrumental, and inessive locative). Different configurations were proposed over the centuries, but, despite the emerging knowledge of the native Tamil grammatical tradition, which had long been influenced by Sanskrit declensional standards, always with a Latinate foundation. The missionaries' grammars created among Europeans a perception of Tamil that its declensional patterning was akin to that of Latin, and that morphologically realised divergent senses are related because their equivalents in Latin are, readings which persist in many modern didactic descriptions.

Keywords: Missionary grammars; Tamil grammar; India; Tamil cases; ablative

1. Introduction

In their preface to the *Cartilha* (1554), a Portuguese/Tamil primer of Christian prayers and doctrinal principles, the translators, Vicente de Nazareth, Jorge Carvalho and Thome de Cruz, all native-speakers of Tamil, remarked on the structural differences between their language and Portuguese: “algũas vezes começa dõde os portugueses acabã & acaba dõde elles començã: & outras vezes polo cotrairo” [‘sometimes it begins where the Portuguese end, and ends where they begin, and sometimes vice versa’].¹ They also wrote of Tamil as “tã pobre de vocabolos q̃ nã pode explicar alũgas cousas por sues proprios nomes” [‘so lacking in words that it cannot express certain things by their appropriate names’].

¹ This work represents a focused extension and expansion of some ideas I presented at the Third International Conference on Missionary Linguistics, in Macao in March 2005 (James 2007); and at the World Classical Tamil Conference in Coimbatore in June 2010 (James 2011). English translations and glosses are mine throughout, except where otherwise indicated. With respect to the contrasting structure of Tamil, cf. *Propagation* (1714: 30–31), whose author, in discussing translating the Bible into Tamil, wrote of “the particular Genius and *Idiom*, whereby this Language is distinguish’d from all the rest. The Construction requireth often, that some [biblical] Verses be transpos’d, and that some Words come in at the End, which, in other Languages, stand in the Front. ... If these *Proprieties* of Speech be neglected, and Things transfus’d at random, no *Malabarian* will be able to apprehend the Sense or meaning of what he readeth.” Tamil is an SOV-type language, and as Shulman (2016: 8) shows, left-branching, that is, in which “modifiers, including entire clauses, generally *precede* the modified ... Since English, like most Indo-European languages ... is mostly ‘right-branching,’ Tamil sentences often follow an order that appears as a precise inversion of the English sentence.” See also Zwartjes (2011: 39–40). *Mutatis mutandis*, this also applies to Tamil with respect to Portuguese and German.

What they meant was that it lacked the vocabulary for some Christian concepts – in the *Cartilha*, words such as *baptismo* [‘baptism’], *comunham* [‘communion’], *ordem sacerdotal* [‘holy orders’] and *sacramentu* [‘sacrament’] are left in the Tamil translations just as they are (see James 2000: 101–103). That Portuguese was equally lacking in terms to express concepts in, for example, Hinduism or Buddhism, was conveniently overlooked.

The translators added that Tamil was “*tã barbara ã algumas dições cõ nenhũs carateres latinos se podẽ pronũciar*” [‘so outlandish that some words cannot be pronounced with Latin letters’]. The situation was rather the opposite, however – the Latin alphabet was inadequate to represent the sounds of Tamil. Similarly, in his posthumously published *Vocabulario tamvlico com a significaçam portvgveza* [Tamil vocabulary with the Portuguese meaning] (1679), the Jesuit Antão de Proença (1625–1666) described the characters of the Tamil syllabary as “*tam cõtrarias, e barbaras a nossa pronuçia*”, which Knowlton & Thani Nayagam (1966: 14) translate as ‘so contrary and barbarous to our pronunciation’; Proença also wrote of “*a uariedade, é barbaria de letra dos tamuis*”, translated by Knowlton & Thani Nayagam (1966: 15) as ‘the variety and barbarity of the Tamils’ letters’.

Barbaro derives from a Greek onomatopoeic form, with the sense of ‘someone who says *bar-bar*’, that is, who speaks no Greek. In Homer’s *Iliad* (2.867), we find, for example, the term *βαρβαρόφωνος* <*barbaróphōnos*>, to mean ‘(one) speaking a foreign language’.² For the Romans, the Latin form *barbarus* meant ‘neither Latin nor Greek’, from which developed the senses, ‘outlandish, wild’, later ‘uncivilized, uncultured’, and generally ‘savage, inhuman’. In the Romance languages of the sixteenth century, the primary connotation of the forms derived from *βαρβαρ-/barbar-* was ‘strange’ rather than ‘savage’.

Some missionaries, even as late as in the nineteenth century, described dialectal variations of a standard language as ‘barbarous’: for example, Eliza Caldwell (1860: 225) – wife of Bishop Robert Caldwell (1814–1891), who authored *A comparative grammar of the Dravidian or South-Indian family of languages* (1856), recognizing the Dravidian languages as a distinct language family – commented on “the Tamil spoken about here³ being very barbarous”, referring specifically to the local pronunciation.⁴

Županov (2003: 132) has it that the translators of the *Cartilha*, by their use of *tã barbara*, “consigned Tamil language (and culture)” to a “barbarian” state. I feel, however, that translating or interpreting *barbar-* as ‘barbarous’/‘barbarity’/‘barbarian’ nowadays may likely offer an inappropriate impression; ‘outlandish’ or ‘alien’, sometimes ‘uncultivated’, or even ‘exotic’, would perhaps more often better convey the intended connotation.

2. The ablative case as described by missionaries

Although Tamil is morphologically agglutinative, its patternings were perceived by early missionaries as conforming more or less to the mould of Greek or Latin – at least for didactic purposes. The important paradigmatic similarities between Tamil, and Latin and Greek could thus be readily analyzed, and taught to Europeans, using the traditional Latinate terminology with which they were conversant. Undoubtedly, a key motivation in the formulation of Tamil grammar by the early missionaries was

² For views on the meaning of *βαρβαρόφωνος*, see Mac Sweeney (2013: 64).

³ That is, at Idaiyangudi, an agricultural town in Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu, where Robert Caldwell spent most of his missionary life. His wife, Eliza, née Mault (1822–1899), was born into a missionary family in Nagarkovil (Nagercoil), and spoke Tamil with native fluency.

⁴ In early European references to Tamil, *barbar-* was used with respect to descriptions of morphology as well as pronunciation, e.g., in the 1670s, the Portuguese Jesuit, Balthasar da Costa (Panaji, MS M34, f.15, left col., ll.19–20) referred to “*a barbaria desta lingoa taõ dissona e peregrina aos Europeos*” [‘the outlandishness of this language, so discordant and alien to Europeans’].

pedagogical, to teach an unfamiliar language by funnelling it through learners' existing linguistic knowledge:

Tamil was 'harnessed' by and 'reorganized' into the rules of conjugation and declension defined by the Latin grammarians. Every single verbal form was assigned its Latin or Portuguese analogue, whether it fitted perfectly and seamlessly or not. Even today, some of these verbal forms are considered as 'defying' the grammatical classification applied to Indo-European languages. (Županov 1999)⁵

The tendency was indeed to go further, to read into Tamil not only the inflectional structure of Latin, but also the scope of the declensions.

2.1. Early missionary descriptions of the Tamil ablative case

In *Arte da lingua Malabar* [Grammar of the Malabar language] (Hein & Rajam 2013), the first pedagogical grammar of Tamil, generally accepted to have been compiled in c.1549 by Henrique Henriques (1520–1600), a native of Vila Viçosa in the archdiocese of Évora, Tamil is said to have five nominal declensions, as has Latin. Henriques, reputed to be the first European to make a scholarly study of an Indian language (Shaw 1987: 5), largely followed the traditional Latin-based terminology used by João de Barros (1496–1570) in *Grammatica da lingua portuguesa* [Grammar of the Portuguese language] (1540), although, as Zwartjes (2011: 43) shows, he did occasionally make use of novel denominative or explanatory metalanguage for some Tamil syntactic features which did not find parallels in Portuguese or Latin grammar. Whether Henriques explicitly sought five declensions in Tamil is open to speculation, but since within these he did identify several variants, it does appear that he wished to constrain his principal number to five. His Tamil declensions are:

- 1st names and descriptors of males in *-an*, and females in *-i*
- 2nd (2a) words ending in *-e*, *-i*, *-ai*; (2b) words ending in *-l*, *-n*, *-r*
- 3rd words in *-m* with oblique stems in *-tt-*
- 4th words in *-a* with euphonic increment *-v-* before singular endings
- 5th words in *-u*: (5a) accusative > *-ai*; (5b) accusative > *-uvai*; (5c) words in *-tu/-ru* doubling the consonant in oblique stems

Henriques also identified a five-case paradigm in Tamil, to which he gave the Latinate names: nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative. Barros (1540: ff.11r–12v) had included in his *Grammatica* an ablative and an instrumental (not morphologically marked in Portuguese):

Do sexto caso a que chamam Ablatiuo, se usa, tirãdo ou apartando a cousa dalgũ lugar per este exemplo, eu tiro muita doutrina dos liuros. E se disser, eu tiro muita doutrina dos liuros com meu trabálho, fica este nome trabálho, em otro caso seitimo, a que os Latinos chamam effectiuo. Este caso se rege desta proposiçam, com, e nelle está o instrumento com que obrámos algũa cousa per o exemplo decima.

[‘The sixth case, which they call the ablative, is used when taking or separating something from a place, as in this example: *I take much learning from books*. And

⁵ Cf. de la Lane (1728: 10): “La difference des cas dans les noms, s’exprime par les differentes terminaisons ou les differentes inflexions du meme nom comme chez les latins” [‘The different cases in the nouns are expressed by different endings or inflections on the same noun, as with the Romans’].

if one says, *I take much learning from books with my effort*, this noun *effort*, is in another, seventh, case, which the Romans call ‘effectivus’ (productive). This case is governed by the preposition *with*, and it embodies the instrument with which we perform something, as in the example above.}]

Henriques did not include an ablative in his Tamil paradigm, though he mentioned such in his discussion: “the ablative ends in *-ile* or *-il*, with the vowel or consonant preceding according to the respective declension” (c.1549 [1982]: f.24r). Its use is explained as having a locative function (1982: f.151v):

Pedro esta ã cassa, pedro vithile jRuquiRan [‘Pedro is at home,
Pedro house-in be-PRES.-3RD
PERS. SING. MASC.’]

O capitão esta em Punicale,⁶ capitam punicaylile jRuquiRan [‘The officer is in Punicale,
officer Punicale-in be-PRES.-3RD
PERS. SING. MASC.’]

Henriques availed himself of the ‘services’ of a local teacher to help him learn Tamil, but what is not known is the formal linguistic nature of the teacher’s tuition. Later missionaries also acknowledged help from local teachers of Tamil or other native speakers with recognised expertise in the language (what their reaction might have been to the Europeans branding Tamil as ‘barbarous’ is unknown). Tamil scholars had been studying the grammar of their own language for several centuries, but it seems that Henriques was unaware of their analyses, and he modelled his own version on a Graeco-Latin prototype. Indeed, it is not known to what extent any of the missionaries’ informants drew their tyros’ attention to the various analyses in their own grammatical tradition.

The earliest extant indigenous grammar of Tamil is *Tolkāppiyam*, written in the form of 1,604 short formulaic verses (see e.g., Chevillard 2000; Murugan & Samuel 2001).⁷ According to *Tolkāppiyam*, Book 2 (*collatikāram*, on words), Chapter 2 (*vērrumaiyiyal*, on cases), sutras 62–83, there are eight cases in Tamil, identified in sutra 64 by the common case marker suffixes (and case names in respect of the first, *peyar* ‘name’, and last, *viḷi* ‘calling’):

avai tām
peyar ai oṭu ku
iṅ atu kaṅ viḷi eṇṇum iṅṅa
[‘These (are): the name, ai, oṭu, ku, iṅ, atu, kaṅ and finally the calling case’].

⁶ Punnaikayal, the main Portuguese settlement on the southern coast of India during the second half of the sixteenth century.

⁷ See Županov (1999): “Sophisticated, speculative Tamil-language treatises such as *Tolkāppiyam* ... and its numerous commentaries were neither accessible to Henriques nor are they useful for teaching or learning the elementary spoken Tamil.” Scholars are not agreed on the age of *Tolkāppiyam*: Zvelebil (1973: 137), for example, dates its “core” to the pre-Christian era, but theorizes that it may comprise several layers, some much earlier than others; Županov (1999), on the other hand, dates it to “ca. first century AD”, whereas Chevillard (1996) places it even in the second century AD. Among Indian scholars, Sesha Iyengar (1995 [1925]: 156) dates its composition to “before the commencement of the Christian era”; Vaiyapuri Pillai (1956) has it not earlier than the fifth-sixth centuries AD; and Mahadevan (1970: 6), citing epigraphical evidence, places it in the sixth-seventh centuries AD.

Adopting the Latin-based terminology used by Zvelebil (1982: 9), we may explicate these as:

1st case	<i>peyar</i>	the name, nominative
2nd case	<i>-ai</i>	the <i>-ai</i> case, accusative
3rd case	<i>-oṭu</i>	the <i>-oṭu</i> case, sociative
4th case	<i>-ku</i>	the <i>-ku</i> case, dative
5th case	<i>-iṅ</i>	the <i>-iṅ</i> case, ablative
6th case	<i>-atu</i>	the <i>-atu</i> case, genitive
7th case	<i>-kaṅ</i>	the <i>-kaṅ</i> case, locative
8th case	<i>vīli</i>	the calling case, vocative

However, the clustering of the various nominal suffixes of Tamil, a Dravidian language, into eight cases was provenanced from the cases of the unrelated Indo-European language, Sanskrit (nominative, vocative, accusative, instrumental, dative, ablative, genitive, locative):

Because Tamil grammatical tradition was influenced from the beginning by Sanskrit grammatical theory, Tamil, even in its earliest grammar (*Tolkaappiyam*), borrows the idea that Tamil had to have seven cases plus vocative. Because Sanskrit associative and instrumental cases are identical in form, Tamil has both forms under one rubric, even though the earliest grammarians were uncomfortable with this. (Schiffman 1999: 34; see also Schiffman 2005: 295)

Schiffman is echoing Caldwell's (1856: 203, 223) construal:

The imitation of Sanscrit in this particular was certainly an error; for whilst in Sanscrit there are eight cases only, the number of cases in Tamil, Telugu, &c., is indefinite. Every post-position annexed to a noun constitutes, properly speaking, a new case. ... Notwithstanding this, the usage of Drâvidian grammarians has restricted the number of cases to eight. ... Drâvidian grammarians have arranged the case system of their nouns in the Sanscrit order, and in doing so have done violence to the genius of their own grammar. It is very doubtful whether the Drâvidian 'ablative of motion' and the 'locative' are not one and the same case, though represented as different by grammarians, in deference to Sanscrit precedents; and the Drâvidian 'social ablative,' as some have called it, or rather, as it should be termed, 'the conjunctive case,' has been omitted in each dialect from the list of cases, or added on to the instrumental, simply because it is a case of which the Sanscrit knows nothing. The only reason why the case-signs of the conjunctive are classed in Tamil with that of the instrumental is that the fact of their being destitute of a proper place of their own is less obvious in that position than it would be in any other.

Thus, what is certainly an artificial paradigm with respect to Tamil predated early missionary descriptions by many centuries.

Zvelebil notes (1982: 13) that for the 3rd case,

the marker *-oṭu* was used, in Old Tamil, to denote three semantic-syntactic relationships: agent[,] instrument and association.

And on the 5th case, he observes that *Tolkāppiyam* sutra 77, which he translates as, 'It denotes the nature of a thing in relation to another', is a "beautiful abstraction", a definition:

broad enough ... to account for a broad range of semantic possibilities covered by a case which is only very approximatively termed ‘ablative’. According to the commentators ... the basic relationship this case expresses are the following ...: comparison (*porūporuḷ*), separation ..., limitation ... and cause. The *poru* (comparison) is twofold, of similarity, and of contrast. (Zvelebil 1982: 14)

In *Arte Tamulica* (Panaji, MS M34 f.15, left col., ll.25–29), Balthasar da Costa (1610–1673), a native of Aldea Nova in the diocese of Guarda, and superior of the Jesuit mission in Madurai from 1649, gave a six-case noun paradigm for Tamil: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative and ablative, with the ablative having three functions even though these are morphologically distinct: stative (*-iṭattil*), instrumental (*-āl*) and sociative (*-oṭe*):

Abl. quietis	<i>iṭattil(e)</i>
Abl. instrum[entalis]	<i>āl(e)</i>
Abl. social[is]	<i>oṭe</i>

And he added “Outros casos ou modos de fal[ar]” [‘other cases or forms of expression’]:

kartaṅai.p pāttu ou *kuṛiccu* a respeito do Senhor⁸ [‘with respect to the Lord’]
kartaṅ-ukkāka por amor do Senhor [‘for the love of the Lord’]
kartaṅ-ai.k-koṅṭu pello, por meyo do Senhor [‘through, by the Lord’]

The (compound) terminations *-kuṛiccu*, *-ukkāka* and *-ai.k-koṅṭu* are unnamed, presumably because in Latin their senses are expressed by prepositional or adverbial phrases, not case inflections alone.

Declensions in Latin are traditionally classified according to the different patterns of nominal suffixation; the surface stem alterations within them are sometimes predictable, sometimes variable. In Tamil, the endings are stable, and stem changes for the most part predictable. Costa recognised this, and suggested that Tamil could thus be said to have just one declension, with four major varieties based on the types of stem changes occurring in the oblique cases. His four subtypes are:

1. no stem change (Henriques: 1st, 2nd, 4th, 5th a, b)
2. *-am*, with *-tt-* in oblique cases (Henriques: 3rd)
3. *-tu*, with *-ṭṭ-* in oblique cases (Henriques: 5th c)
4. *-ru*, with *-ṛru-* in oblique cases (Henriques: 5th c).

Costa acknowledged a debt to his predecessors’ work on Tamil, in particular that of Gaspar de Aguilar (1588–16??), a native of Figueira de Castelo Rodrigo in the diocese of Guarda, who had served in the Jaffna area of Sri Lanka and Kochi (Cochin) in India between 1619 and 1645, and who was renowned for his mastery of Tamil and his expertise in teaching it (Muru 2014: 355).⁹ In the extant parts of his *Arte Tamul* [Tamil grammar],¹⁰ explicitly a grammar of the spoken language, Aguilar distinguishes four declensions for Tamil, according to a morphophonemic classification – but not that of Henriques – and “partly following the Latin model” (Muru 2014: 370). He delineated an eight-case system, based explicitly on the Sanskrit paradigm, but with subdivisions of the ablative to accommodate

⁸ Cf. Proença’s (1679) Latin gloss, *propter* [‘on account of’]: “*kuṛiccu*. Propter cō ac[usa]tiao” [‘*kuṛiccu*. Propter with the accusative’].

⁹ Aguilar was dismissed from the Society of Jesus in 1645, accused of various felonious activities including womanizing and incurring debts (see Muru 2014: 355–359).

¹⁰ I have not seen this grammar, and the details given here are taken from Muru (2014).

the realities of Tamil. Muru (2014: 374–375) has it that Aguilar’s study “goes far beyond the earlier analysis of the Tamil grammar by Henrique Henriques ... and of da Costa”, and indeed represents the first extant declensional analysis by a European of the Tamil ‘ablative’ to diverge greatly from the Latin standard.

This is a clear evidence that the model missionaries used to follow when compiling their grammatical explanations was Latin. However, it also shows that missionaries, even when restrained by their basic model, were able to recognize the differences from their mother tongue or language model. Aguilar shows that he knows indigenous grammatical traditions,¹¹ but he chooses to provide a hybrid classification which combines Latin criteria with the local grammatical terminology. Furthermore, Aguilar differentiates the *ṣaṣṭhi*¹² into local, causative, social and comparative. By doing this, he shows how sensitive he was to the usage of the language. Indeed, he goes beyond the Indian grammatical tradition. In fact, he identifies not only the locative and instrumental case, but he also recognizes: 1) the comitative case which he calls *xaxti social*, 2) the usage of the locative case in comparative constructions (*xaxti comparativo*) in Tamil and 3) the ablative used to mark separation which he defines as *abl^o partitivo ou separativo*. (Muru 2014: 373–374)

For the first century of missionary activity, then, we witness a progressive maturity of approach to Tamil declensional description. As the missionaries became aware of the indigenous works of grammar, often through the intermediary of a local scholar, they strove to incorporate this knowledge into their own studies. At the same time, since the native grammars¹³ were themselves premised on an Indo-European (Sanskrit) model, the Europeans felt that they needed only to expand what they were familiar with in Latin, to embrace the linguistics of Tamil. This was all the more apt, since the missions included clergy from a number of different language backgrounds, but all with a solid grounding in Latin, and the exploitation of this common denominator was an expedient teaching and learning tool for the missionaries. However, as reliance solely on a Latin model gradually came to be felt inadequate to account for the facts of the language, more sophisticated analyses began to creep into the grammars. With respect to the cases, this was particularly apparent in the ablative.

2.2. Later missionary descriptions of the Tamil ablative case

When the Protestant churches began to send missionaries to South Asia, the personnel were able to capitalize on the linguistic efforts of their Portuguese Catholic predecessors. Philippus Baldaeus (Baelde) (1632–1671), a native of Delft in the then Dutch Republic, and a pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka, in his *Short introduction to the Malabar language* (1703 [1672]: 664–665), for example, who noted that “the *Malabar* Language is very difficult to be learn’d; especially by reason of the vast number of words whereof it consists” and that “the *Indians* are not so unpolish’d as some *Europeans* represent them”,¹⁴

¹¹ In *Arte Tamul*, there is evidence that Aguilar was aware of the terminology used in native Tamil grammars, as well as that of the Sanskrit tradition.

¹² The 6th case, according to the Latin order, viz., ablative. In Sanskrit, the 6th case is the genitive.

¹³ In addition to *Tolkāppiyam*, the other major influential grammar of Tamil is *Nannūl* (12th or 13th century AD). This grammar recognised changes which Tamil had undergone since *Tolkāppiyam*. The early missionary grammarians relied on native scholars for instruction, but which indigenous grammar was given prominence in individual cases is not known. *Nannūl* was translated into English in the early nineteenth century (see e.g., Bower 1876, A Tamil graduate 1878), *Tolkāppiyam* not until the early twentieth.

¹⁴ Van Buitenen & Ganeshsundaram (1952: 177) translate: “the *Malabaric* language is ... a difficult language (... this may ... be shown clearly by the quantity of their words)” and “with what lack of experience many

cited six cases for Tamil: nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, vocative, which he glossed with their Sanskrit-derived Tamil names, and “four sorts of Ablative Cases”:

localis	[‘of place’] = Henriques/Costa, stative
causalis	[‘of cause’] = Henriques/Costa, instrumental
socialis	[‘of association’] = Henriques/Costa, sociative
comparationis	[‘of comparison’] not identified by Henriques or Costa.

Baldaeus’s quadripartite classification of the ablative reflected the analysis elaborated by Aguilar, whom he referenced as a source of his own work (Baldaeus 1672: 191).¹⁵ Indeed, Baldaeus (1672) is a partial version of Aguilar’s *Arte*. However, as Muru (2014: 363) notes, we do not know how far this sole extant copy of the *Arte* is representative of Aguilar’s work, and what Baldaeus may have changed when he copied or used it.¹⁶

The first Protestant missionaries in India were the German Pietists, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) and Heinrich Plütschau (1677–1752), who, under the patronage of King Frederick IV of Denmark, arrived in the Danish colony of Tranquebar (now Tharangambadi), on the coast of Tamil Nadu, in 1706. Within two years, Ziegenbalg had begun the task of translating the New Testament into Tamil, an undertaking he completed in 1711. On Tamil, he wrote:

[Die Malarabische Sprache] ist eine gantz eigene Sprache ... und zwar eine recht *gravitætische* und *oratorische* Sprache/die sehr angenehm zu hören ist/wenn man sie langsam redet/und deutlich ausspricht. Sie ist dabey eine sehr nette und Wortreiche Sprache/eben als etwan die teutsche und Lateinische Sprache seyn mag. Ihre Wörter sind schwer zu behalten und auszusprechen; aber nach den *grammaticalischen præceptis* ist sie gantz leichte. (Ziegenbalg 1713 [1709]: 116–117)

[Tamil is] a *peculiar* Language ... full of Gravity and pathos: It touches the Ear agreeably, particularly if a Man has a good knack of Delivery, and takes time to pronounce it with Deliberation. It is also very exact and copious, as the *German* or *Latin* are. Its Words are somewhat difficult to remember and to pronounce; yet very easily to be learned by the help of Grammar Rules. (Ziegenbalg 1717: 9)¹⁷

We may note that *peculiar* (as a translation of *eigen* ‘distinctive, particular’) here has the sense of ‘distinguished in nature or attributes; particular, special’, and in no way connotes ‘strange, odd’. Gone is the epithet *barbar-*, Tamil pronunciation now “touches the Ear agreeably”; no longer, moreover, is the language deficient in vocabulary (*Cartilha* 1554: “pobre de vocabolos”). For Ziegenbalg, Tamil was explicitly on a par with both his mother tongue, German, and the quintessential European classical language, Latin. And by *grammaticalischen præcepta* (“Grammar Rules”), he was no doubt alluding to the regularity of the declensional and conjugational paradigms in Tamil – in this, he echoed Henriques (Županov 2003: 124–125).

distinguished Gentlemen often talk, as though the People of *Malabar* and other *Indians* were savages.”

¹⁵ See also Van Buitenen & Ganeshsundaram (1952: 169). This mention does not appear in the 1703 English translation: cf. Aguilar (Hamburg, Cod. Orient. 283, f.17v, ll.1–9).

¹⁶ Muru (2014: 363) cites in translation part of Baldaeus’s note on the reverse of the first folio of the manuscript: “Father Gaspar de Aguillar of the Company of Jesus wrote an extensive and in depth *Arte* of the Tamil language. It seems to be the most exhaustive, methodical and well organized among various others written. We have taken most of the grammar rules from this edition but above all it is the declension of nouns that are the most studied [...] It is true that all that Father G. de Aguilar wrote in this *Arte* and what is left in this grammar book is secundum Arthem et Methodum.”

¹⁷ Cf. *Propagation* (1714: 6): “[Tamil] it self is exceeding *pathetical*, enrich’d with Abundance of Rhetorical Flowers and Graces, which wonderfully affect the Ear, especially if they be accompanied with some Gravity in the Speaker.”

In his *Grammatica Damulica* [Tamil grammar] (1716: 15),¹⁸ Ziegenbalg identified four declensions, unequivocally related to those of Latin: “Omnia Nomina substantiva in hac lingua æque declinantur & flectuntur, ac in lingua latine” [‘All nouns in this language are declined and inflected just as in Latin’].¹⁹ His declensions were determined exclusively on phonetic criteria, *viz.*,

1st	- <i>n</i> , - <i>l</i> , - <i>l</i> , - <i>r</i>	= Henriques: 1st, 2nd b
2nd	- <i>am</i> , with - <i>tt</i> - in oblique cases	= Henriques: 3rd
3rd	- <i>tu</i> , with - <i>tt</i> - in oblique cases	= Henriques: 5th c
4th	- <i>ai</i> , - <i>i</i>	= Henriques: 2nd a.

He divided the ablative into three: locative (*ablativus loci*), instrumental (*ablativus instrumentalis*) and sociative (*ablativus sociativus*), but his paradigms included several subdivisions of each, identified by suffixes: for the locative ablative he cited -*e*, -*il*, -*ile*, -*iṭattile*, -*uḷle* (inessive); for the instrumental ablative, -*āl* and -*āle*; and for the sociative ablative, -*ote*, -*uṭane*, -*aippāttu*, -*aikkuriccu*, -*ukkāka*, -*aikkoṇṭu*. His analysis echoed that of his Jesuit predecessors, but he included -*il(e)* both as an illative and prosecutive (‘in’) and elative (‘from’) locative, and expanded the sociative to incorporate those forms which Costa had acknowledged as “outros casos” but did not name. Ziegenbalg was aware of *Tolkāppiyam*, *Naṇṇūl*, and other Tamil grammatical works, but as he found them “hard beyond all measure” (Sweetman & Ilakkuvan 2012: 11), his main reference appears to have been Costa’s *Arte Tamulica*.²⁰

A contemporary – and outspoken religious adversary (see Hough 1845: 199–200) – of Ziegenbalg was the Madurai-based French Jesuit, Louis-Noël de Bourzes (1673–1735), who made a considerable study of the language and culture of the Tamils (see Selvi 2014; Xavier Raj 1996: 6–9). In his extensive *Essay du dictionnaire tamul françois* [Pilot Tamil French dictionary] (1724), which is a French–Tamil dictionary, he included at the headword *Cas de grammaire* [‘Grammatical case’], identifications of the case suffixes which “Les poetes expriment ... par les particules suivantes” [‘poets express ... by the following particles’]:

aiya. C’est l’accusatif./*il*. l’instrumental. *kule* le datif./*iṇ*. le genitif. .../*atuve*. le possessif. .../*kaṇ* le mitoyen

[‘*aiya*. This is the accusative./*il*. the instrumental. *kule*. the dative./*iṇ*. the genitive. .../*atuve*. the possessive. .../*kaṇ* the contiguous (i.e., locative)’].

¹⁸ Cf. *Propagation* (1714: 8): “About the latter End of the Year 1707, Mr. Ziegenbalgh had so far overcome the most knotty Difficulties of this Tongue, that he himself drew up a *Compendium* of a *Malabarick Grammar*, for the Use of such as might perhaps come after him ... And it were to be wished, that this and other Languages ... might be learned before any Person was actually sent on the Mission to such remote Countries.”

¹⁹ See also Jeyaraj (2010: 51–63).

²⁰ Sweetman & Ilakkuvan (2012: 8). See also *Propagation* (1714: 6–9): “What render’d this Language most difficult to the Missionaries [i.e., Ziegenbalg and Plütschau], was the great Want of *Grammar-Rules*, and other such Helps as are necessary for learning the Fundamentals of a Language. It hath hardly ever been digested into a Method, and is, besides, very variable and luxuriant in its Expressions. The Missionaries therefore contrived all manner of Ways to compass it. ... After they had thus grappled a while with many Difficulties, they did light at last on some *Rudiments* of a *Malabarian Grammar*, drawn up by a *Popish Missionary* sent thither by the *French king*.” This grammar was probably one written up by a priest of the Carnatic Mission founded in 1702 by some of the fifteen Jesuits who had been sent by Louis XIV to the court of Siam (Thailand) in 1687. The following year, however, they had to leave the country after a palace coup, and they escaped to India: “When it became clear that they would not be able to return to Siam, it was decided to start a mission in the region to the north-west of Pondicherry, along the lines of the Madurai mission ... Initially, the mission consisted of ... Jean Venant Bouchet (1655–1732), Jean-Baptiste de la Fontaine (1669–1718), and Pierre Mauduit (1664–1711), under the authority of Guy Tachard (1651–1712) in Pondicherry” (Sweetman 2014: 157–158). None of these missionaries, nor any of the others of the Siam group (see Besse 1918), is known to have written a grammar of Tamil. But Bouchet himself learnt Tamil well, and the grammar referred to was possibly his synopsis of Costa’s work.

Evidently, then, he was aware of the formal usage of these suffixes.

It was, however, the Italian Jesuit, Costanzo Beschi (1680–1742), who first made explicit in a printed work how Tamil grammarians traditionally analyzed their language, and adapted this knowledge to his own description of Tamil. In so doing, however, he faced a dilemma:

Beschi était confronté à un double problème: il devait d’une part fournir une description du tamoul utilisable facilement par d’autres missionnaires européens, ce qui l’amenait à conserver un plan de grammaire latine. Il voulait aussi, semble-t-il, donner directement accès à la tradition grammaticale tamoule elle-même, ce qui lui posait de difficiles problèmes terminologiques.

[‘Beschi was faced with a twofold problem: on the one hand, he had to provide a description of Tamil which other European missionaries could use easily, which led him to keep to a Latin grammatical schema. But it appears that he also wanted to offer direct access to the Tamil grammatical tradition itself, something which caused him difficult problems of terminology.’] (Chevillard 1992: 85)

In his *Grammatica Latino-Tamulica* [Latin–Tamil grammar] (1738, written in c.1728), he observed that in the native grammars there were no distinctions of declension, and thus what were considered by Europeans to be declensions were rather morphophonological modifications on a single paradigm (as indeed Costa had already recognized).²¹ Beschi (1738: 31) therefore suggested a single-declension model with eight cases, based on *Nannūl*: nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive, dative, stative (ablative), instrumental (ablative) and sociative (ablative):

Propriè non est in hâc linguâ nisi unius declinationis: omnium quippe nominum casus unico declinantur modo. Numerant ipsi octo casus ... et eos nominant ex formâ terminationis, v. g. accusativus, cùm desinat in *ai*, vocatur *aiyennumvēr̥rumai*, casus *ai dictus*; et sic de ceteris: excepto tamen nominativo, quem *peyar*, id est, *nomen* vocant; et vocativo, quem dicunt *vīlivēr̥rumai*, id est, *casus vocandi*, à verbo *vīlikkiratu*, *vocare*.

[‘In this language, there is in a proper sense just one declension: indeed all the cases of nouns are declined in a single way. They themselves count eight cases ... which they name from the form of the ending, e.g., the accusative, which ends in *ai*, is called *aiyennumvēr̥rumai*, ‘the *ai* case’, and so on for the rest, except for the nominative, however, which they call *peyar* ‘name’, and the vocative, which they term *vīlivēr̥rumai*, that is, ‘the calling case’, from the verb *vīlikkiratu* ‘to call’.’]

He noted that two of the eight cases “ad ablativum reduci possunt” [‘may be reduced to the ablative’: Beschi, tr. Horst 1806: 28], thus giving three ‘ablatives’:²²

²¹ Cf. English missionaries of Madras (1778: 11): “All the Nouns are declined in one and the same Manner. You have only to observe how of the Nouns of different Terminations the oblique Cases in the Singular, and the Nominatives in the Plural are formed ... [T]here are three Ablatives in the Malabar language ... and every one of the three Ablatives, can be formed in several Ways.” Also Caldwell (1856: 203): “There is only one declension, properly so called, in the Drâvidian languages ... Those varieties of inflexional increments which have been called ‘declensions’ by some European scholars ... are considered by native grammarians to constitute but one declension; and in truth they do constitute but one, for there is no difference between one so called declension and another with respect to the signs of case.”

²² See *Nannūl*, §297 (Pope 1857: 119); *A Tamil graduate* (1878: 29, II.I.40): “THE CAUSAL-CONJUNCTIVE. The Signs of the 3rd Case are *âl* and *ân*, and *ôdu* and *odu*; and its meanings are *instrumentality*, *agency* and *sociality*.”

Ablativus quietis vel existentiae [‘stative or existential ablative’]	<i>il, itattil</i>
Ablativus instrumenti seu causae [‘instrumental or causal ablative’]	<i>āl, ināl</i>
Ablativus societatis et aliquando instrumenti [‘sociative and sometimes instrumental ablative’] ²³	<i>ōtu, inōtu.</i>

Beschi (1738: 32) analyzed as verbal suffixes three further terminations which other European missionaries had considered to be separate case-endings (e.g., Costa’s “outros casos”, or Ziegenbalg’s subtypes):

Addunt aliqui tres alios casus, quos ablativos vocant: scilicet *malaikkāka*, *malaiyaikkurittu*, *malaiyaikkoṇtu*. Attamen omninò impropriè istae phrases adnumerantur ablativo, quod certè Tamulenses in suâ Grammaticâ non faciunt.

[‘Some add three further cases, which they call ablatives: thus, *mountain-ABLATIVE_{kkāka}* *mountain-ABLATIVE_{aikkurittu}* *mountain-ABLATIVE_{aikkoṇtu}*. However, it is altogether inappropriate that these phrases should be counted as ablatives, and certainly the Tamils do not do so in their Grammar.’]

(His reference is to *Naṅṅūl*.) His analysis of these endings is:

- <i>kkāka</i>	dative (- <i>kku</i>) + infinitive <i>āka</i> <to become>
- <i>aikkurittu</i>	accusative (- <i>ai</i>) + gerund of <i>kuṛi</i> <to relate to> ²⁴
- <i>aikkoṇtu</i>	accusative (- <i>ai</i>) + gerund of <i>koḷ</i> <to hold> ²⁵

Beschi (1822: 11–13) had added what is effectively a ninth case, although he rejected this term as an analysis:

In the declensions of nouns ... both in the common and in the superior dialect ... [b]eside the nominative form proper to each noun, and beside the terminations of cases in both numbers, common to all nouns, there is yet another termination of forms, which I shall denominate *the oblique*. This is not the uninflected noun, neither is it any case of it; for it differs from the nominative form, and is frequently used by itself, without any casual termination. The form of the oblique is not the same in all nouns, but varies ... All nouns, except those in *am*, and some of those in *u* ... form their oblique by adding *in* to the nominative. ... the termination *in* is by no means a form of the genitive; for, in the higher dialect, this case ends in *atu* ... [T]he oblique ... is very frequently employed in this dialect, it’s [*sic*] uses are: First, in declining nouns ... Secondly. In forming adjectives from nouns ... Thirdly. To denote possession ... Fourthly. In expressing the qualities of the mind, or the members of the body ... Fifthly. In expressing the time in which any person

²³ In many languages, the sociative, or comitative, case is often indistinguishable from the instrumental: see e.g., Stolz et al. (2006).

²⁴ Cf. English Missionaries of Madras (1779): “*kuṛikkīratu*, to appoint, determinate. ... *ataikkurittuc conṇān*, he spoke with regard to it, or concerning it”; Rottler (1836–37: 137): “*kuṛikkīratu* ... “to appoint, to design ... The Gerund *kurittu* is well expressed by *for this reason or sake, with regard to ... ataikkurittuppēciṇān*; he spoke with regard to it, or concerning it.”

²⁵ Beschi, tr. Horst (1806: 29): “*Malaikkāka* is nothing else than the Dative of Convenience, *malaikku* with the Infinitive *āka*, from the verb *ākiratu*, to become; which Infinitive ... signifies besides other Meanings, *that it may prove, succeed, or profit*: hence *enakkaka*, is, *on my Account, for my Sake, for me*. The second Phrase, *malaiyaikkurittu*, is the Accusative Case with the Gerund *kurittu*, from the Verb *kuṛikkīratu*, to intend: so that this Phrase means, *intending the Mount, with Regard to the Mount*. ... The third Phrase, *malaiyaikkoṇtu*, is the Accusative with the Gerund *koṇtu* from the verb *koḷukkīratu*, which amongst others signifies, *to assume*; wherefore this Phrase is well explained by the instrumental Ablative, *by: vicuvācattaikkoṇukaraiyēriṇan*, is translated, assuming the Means of Faith, or by Means of Faith he was saved, *by Faith he was saved*.”

or thing exists or has existed, or in which any thing is or was done ... Sixthly. In expressing the place of abode ... Seventhly. The oblique in *ttu* is used for the ablative in *il* ... It is used also in comparison ... [T]he oblique has sometimes the same form as the nominative.

In his chapter on syntax, Beschi added that the stative in *-il* was also used to express comparison.²⁶ This was echoed by Dominique de Valence (1696–1778), superior of the French Capuchin mission in Puducherry in the 1730s, in *Dictionnaire et grammaire françois tamovl* [French–Tamil dictionary and grammar] (c.1734),²⁷ where the suffix *-il* is cited as an ablative with three uses:

1^{er} ... qui correspond proprement a notre ablatif dans ... *malaiyil irukkam pulikaḷ les Tigres sont dans les montagnes*

[‘1st ... which corresponds to our ablative in ... *mountain-in be-PRES.-3RD PERS. SING. NEUTER tiger-PLUR. The tigers are in the mountains*’]

2^e cet ablatif exprime le mouvement de lieu ... *marattil viḷunta paḷam le fruit qui est tombe de l’arbre*

[‘2nd This ablative expresses motion from a place ... *tree-from fall-PAST REL. PART. fruit the fruit which fell from the tree*’]

3^e cet ablatif se prend dans la comparaison quand on dit qu’une chose est meilleure qu’une autre; car alors ce qui est moindre, se met a l’ablatif en *il* ... *atileyitu nallatu ceci est meilleur que cela.*

[‘3rd This ablative is used in comparison when one says that something is better than another; since what is the lesser is put into the ablative in *il* ... *that-than-this good-3RD PERS. SING. NEUTER this is better than that*’]

De Valence’s second ablative is Beschi’s “Ablativus instrumenti seu causæ” in *-āl*,

... d’ou il est pris particulièrement pour expliquer la cause ou efficient, ou materiel, ou instrumentelle, ou même conditionnelle ... *ivaṇāl ketten par luy ou a cause de luy je suis perdu* ou je suis **malheureux**. ... de la cause materielle *mamarattār ceyata cilai statue faite de bois* &c. de la cause instrumentelle *āṇiyāl aṇinatāṇ il a attaché avec* des cloux.

[‘which is taken to express the cause or efficient, or material, or instrumental, or even conditional; *he-by bad-1ST PERS. SING. through him* or **because of him I am lost** or I am **unhappy** ... the material cause *wood-by do-PAST REL. PART. statue statue made of wood* etc.; instrumental cause *nail-with hit-PAST-3RD PERS. SING. MASC. he fastened with* nails.’]

Beschi’s third ablative, “Ablativus societatis et aliquando instrumenti”, de Valence explained thus:

Le 3^e ablatif. *oṭu* vaut proprement notre ablatif de société avec *ex. avaṇoṭu vantaṇ* je suis venu avec *luy* &c. on explique aussi la cause par cet ablatif, et on s’en sert

²⁶ Cf. the 5th Case in *Nannūl* §299 (Pope 1857: 120); A Tamil graduate (1878: 29, II.I.42): “THE 5TH CASE. The Signs of the 5th Case are *il* and *iṇ*; it signifies *separation, comparison, limit* and *reason*.”

²⁷ The authorship of this dictionary is disputed by Xavier Raj (1996: 135–138), who attributes it to the Jesuit Pierre de la Lane (1669–1746), who “aurait abrégé, retranché, ajouté et ainsi remanié l’oeuvre de Bourzes” [‘would have shortened, subtracted from and added to, and thus recast, de Bourzes’ work’] (1996: 136–137).

quasi indifferemment avec l’ablatif en *āl* p. ex. ... *āṇiyāl* ou *āṇiyotu araintāṇ il a attache avec des cloux*. outre cela cet ablatif explique la profession ... *āstiyotu iruntāṇ il fut riche*; ou *avec des richesses*...

[‘The 3rd ablative, *otu* is rightly our sociative ablative *with*, e.g., *he-with come-PAST-1ST PERS. SING. I came with him* etc. The cause is also expressed by this ablative, and it is used interchangeably with the ablative in *āl*, e.g., ... *nail-with_{āl}* or *with_{otu} hit-PAST-3RD PERS. SING. MASC. he fastened with nails*. Apart from that, this ablative expresses the profession ... *wealth-with be-PAST-3RD PERS. SING. MASC. he was rich*; or *with riches* ...’]

Pierre de la Lane, on the other hand, seemingly rather strangely, noted in his attributed work, *Grammaire pour apprendre la langue tamoul* [Grammar for learning the Tamil language] (1728: 11),

L’ablatif ne se distingue gueres que par une preposition, hors de la il nya gueres d’ablatif quj aît une inflexion particuliere et sans preposition.

[‘The ablative is hardly ever distinguished except by a preposition, otherwise there are hardly any ablatives with a specific inflection and no preposition.’]

Yet in his examples of the five morphosemantically defined six-case nominal declensions which he identified, he cited the ablative as the 6th case, with three terminations:

āle de/par [‘by’], i.e., instrumental
oḍé avec [‘with’], i.e., sociative
ilé en/dans [‘in’], i.e., locative

Clarity is achieved by his later statement (1728: 47–48):

Tous les noms de Royaume, de ville, village, et appellatifs quj appartiennent a la question – Ubi se mettent a l’ablatif avec la Preposition *-ile*. Ex. Il est a la maison, a la ville, dans le País *vīṭaṭle. paṭṭaṇattile. cimaiyile. irukkirān*. ... Tous les mêmes noms encore quj répondent a la question – Unde se mettent a l’ablatif avec les 2 prepositions – *yile* – *iruntu* jointes ensemble. Ex. Il vient de la maison de la ville du Royaume de . . *vīṭaṭleyiruntu, paṭṭaṇattile yiruntu . . cimaiyile yiruntu. vantāṇ*.

[‘All the names of kingdoms, towns and villages, as well as appellatives, which answer the question Whither? are put into the ablative with the preposition *-ile*. E.g., He is at home, in town, in the country *house-in, town-in, country-in be-PRES. 3RD PERS. SING. MASC.* ... And all the same nouns which answer the question Whence? are put into the ablative with the two prepositions *yile* and *iruntu* joined together. E.g., He has come from the house, from the town, from the kingdom of – *house-in-be-PAST PART., town-in-be-PAST PART., country-in-be-PAST PART. come-PAST-3RD PERS. SING. MASC.*’]

De la Lane, then, identified the endings of the Tamil ablative not as inflections, but derivational *postpositions* (which he termed “prepositions”).

In *A grammar of the Tamil language* (1836), Carl Rhenius (1790–1838), from Graudenz (then in Prussia, now Grudziądz in Poland), who served as a Protestant pastor in Tirunelveli district, at first with the Church Missionary Society, and later with the German Evangelical Mission, continued the convention, from *Nannūl*, of eight cases, including three ablatives, with the mention of *iruntu* (de la Lane’s “preposition”) as a particle:

The third case is our *ablative* and is (1.) instrumental, by adding to the nominative *āl* ... and (2.) social, by adding *oṭu* or *uṭaṇē* ... The fifth case is an *ablative of separation*, or *motion*, and adds *il* or *in* ... very often the particle *iruntu* or *ninru* is added to this case ... The seventh case is an *ablative of place*, and is expressed in poetry by 28 terminations;²⁸ but in common Tamil only *il*, *iṭattil* are in use ... (Rhenius, *Abridgement*, 1845: 16–17)

This analysis of three ablatives was widespread, and is found in a range of non-linguistic sources of the period: e.g., *Voyage dans l'Indostan* [Journey in Hindustan] (1807: 299), by Jean-Charles Perrin (1754–1851) of the Société des Missions étrangères:

Je connus aussi que les Tamouls ... avoient trois ablatifs sans préposition: l'un de lieu, un autre de causalité, et un troisième de compagnie.

[‘I learnt also that the Tamils ... had three ablatives without prepositions: one of place, another of cause, and a third of association.’]

La Mission du Maduré [The Madurai Mission] (1847: 108), by Joseph Bertrand (1801–1884), superior of the Madurai mission in the early 1840s:

Les déclinaisons renferment huit cas, distingués entre eux par les terminaisons (comme en latin); outre l’ablatif désinant en *il*, qui est l’ablatif de lieu, le tamoul a un deuxième ablatif en *âl*, qui répond à l’ablatif de cause ou d’instrument (*a* ou *ab* en latin), et l’ablatif en *ôdhou*, qui répond à l’ablatif de compagnie (*cum* en latin), ce qui délivre la phrase tamoule de cette infinité de particules qui gênent et embarrassent notre style français.

[‘The declensions contain eight cases, distinguished one from the other by endings (as in Latin); apart from the ablative in *il*, which is the locative ablative, Tamil has a second ablative in *âl*, which equates to the ablative of cause or instrument (Latin *a* or *ab*), and the ablative in *ôdhou* which equates to the sociative ablative (Latin *cum*), thus relieving the Tamil sentence of that infinity of particles which cramp and embranch our style in French.’]

And *The Bible of every land* (1848: 114), by the London publisher, Samuel Bagster (1772–1851):

Tamil nouns have eight cases, three of which are ablatives, and are distinguished as local, causal, and social ablatives.

Following Beschi, Rhenius (1845: 20–21) added an oblique, which he referred to as a case:

Besides the eight cases already mentioned there is a case, called the general oblique case. It is used either as the 6th [genitive] or the 7th [locative] case. It is variously formed. One form of it is made by adding, *in*, as: *pullinvaṇṇam*, *the colour of the grass*²⁹ ... The nominative is sometimes used for this oblique case, as: *parkaṭal*, *the sea of milk*.

The French missionaries Louis-Marie Mousset (1808–1888) and Louis-Savinien Dupuis (1806–1874), in their *Dictionnaire tamoul-français* [Tamil–French dictionary] (1855), also

²⁸ See *Nannūl* §302 (Pope 1857: 122); A Tamil graduate (1878: 30, II.1.45).

²⁹ Cf. Beschi, tr. Horst (1806: 93): “The oblique case ... *in*, must not be confounded with [the] fifth case.”

explained that the oblique *-in* is a marker of the locative (7th case), comparative (ablative, 5th case) and genitive (6th case: in the spoken language: recall that Beschi had noted that *-in* was in no way a genitive in the “higher dialect”), and a generalized oblique:

in; ... 2^e terminaison de l’ablatif de lieu et de comparaison, qui signifie de, dans, que, comme; *Ex. malaiyinvīlaruvi*, ruisseau qui tombe de la montagne. 3^e particule ... qui forme le génitif vulgaire et l’oblique, et s’insère entre le nom et sa terminaison dans tous les cas. *Ex. pūvinmaṇam* l’odeur de fleur; *malaiṇai* pour *malaiyai*.

[‘*in*; ... 2. ending of the locative and comparative ablative, which denotes of, from, than, as; e.g., *mountain-from*... 3. Particule ... which forms the lower-register genitive and the oblique, and always occurs between the noun and its ending in all the cases, e.g., *flower-of scent* ...; *mountain-OBLIQUE-ACCUS.* for *mountain-ACCUS.*’]

They also cited *-il* as a locative (7th case) and comparative (5th case):

il; ... 2^e terminaison de l’ablatif de lieu et de comparaison. *Ex. ūriliruntān* il était dans la ville; *aḷalīpīraḷmaṇi* pierrerie qui brille comme le feu; *pāmpinīrkaṭitutēl* l’aiguillon du scorpion est plus sensible que la dent du serpent.

[‘*il*; ... 2. ending of the locative and comparative ablative, e.g., *town-in be-PAST-3RD PERS. SING. MASC. he was in the town; fire-as sparkle precious-stone – precious stone which sparkles like fire; snake-OBLIQUE-than greatly scorpion – the scorpion’s sting is sharper than the serpent’s tooth.*’]

Another lexicographer of the period, the Lutheran, Johann Peter Rottler (1749–1836), in *Dictionary of the Tamil and English languages* (1834: 184), also quoting *-il* as polysemous, gave precedence to the comparative and relative (5th case) over the locative (7th) case:

il; *sub.* 1. *the same as iṭam*, a place ... 4. the fifth case in Nouns: *aintanurupu*; *pāmpinīrkaṭitutēl*, the sting of a scorpion is more severe than the bite of a snake. *malaiyivīlaruvi*, the river falls from the hill ... 5. the seventh case in Nouns: *ēlanurupu*: *ūriliruntān*, he was in town

Julien Vinson (1843–1926), born into a French family living in Puducherry,³⁰ author of *Manuel de la langue tamoule* [Manual of the Tamil language] (1903), the first Tamil grammar in French, with extensive examples from Tamil texts, identified *-il* and *-in* as comparatives, with *-il* also as locative and *-in* instrumental and oblique (1903: 76–77):

Les grammairiens tamouls qui ont copié servilement ceux du nord ont attribué à leur langue un ablatif en ... *il* ou ... *in*. Mais ... *il* est proprement le locatif et ... *in* l’oblique ou la forme adjective. L’ablatif « de, *ex* » se rend par une périphrase, à l’aide des gérondifs *nin’d’u* « s’étant tenu, se tenant » ou ... *iruntu* « ayant été, s’étant placé, étant »: « je viens de la maison » se dira ... *vīṭṭil iruntu varugir’ēn* ... Parmi les acceptions particulières que peuvent prendre certains suffixes, l’oblique en ... *in* et le locatif en ... *il* servent certainement pour l’ablatif: ... *taleiyin’ ijinta mayir* « cheveu tombé de la tête » et nous ajouterons qu’ils s’emploient aussi pour remplacer le *que* comparatif: ... *adan’it’ pērid’ itu* « ceci est grand par rapport à cela, est plus grand que cela »; que le ... *in* joue aussi le rôle d’instrumental: ...

³⁰ Vinson was not a missionary. He began his working life as a civil servant, later becoming a teacher of Hindustani and Tamil at the École nationale des langues orientales vivantes in Paris.

pon'n'in'âyakuḍam «un vase fait d'or »; enfin que le même ... *in'* prend le sens du « comme » comparatif.

[‘The Tamil grammarians who slavishly copied those of the North,³¹ attributed to their language an ablative in ... *il* or ... *in'*. But ... *il* is more correctly the locative and ... *in'* the oblique or adjectival form. The ablative ‘from’ is expressed by periphrasis, through the gerunds *nin'd'u* ‘having been held, holding’ or ... *iruntu* ‘having been, standing, being’: ‘I am coming from the house’ will be ... *v̄ṭṭil iruntu varugir'ên'* (*house-from be-PAST PART. come-PRES.-1ST PERS. SING.*) ... Among the particular senses which certain suffixes can have, the oblique ... *in'* and the locative ... *il* do indeed mark the ablative: ... *taleiyin' ijinta mayir* (*head-from fall-PAST REL PART. hair*) ‘hair fallen from the head’, and we would add that they are also used for the comparative *than*: ... *adan'it' pērid' itu* (*that-than big this*) ‘this is bigger with respect to that, is bigger than that’; that ... *in'* also represents the instrumental: ... *pon'n'in'âyakuḍam* (*gold-by pot*) ‘a pot made of gold’; and that the same ... *in'* has the sense of the comparative *as*.’]

In *English and Tamil dictionary* (1852) by Levi Spaulding (1791–1873), a Presbyterian evangelist in Sri Lanka of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, we find these headwords and entries:

Cāse, s., ... in grammar, *v̄ṭṭumaiyurubu*, *v̄ṭṭumai*
 Nom'in-a-tive, s., ... *peyarv̄ṭṭumai*
 Ac-cūs'a-tive, (case,) s., *aiv̄ṭṭumai*; *iṛaṇḍāmv̄ṭṭumai*
 Dā'tive (*a case*), s., *nāṅgāmv̄ṭṭumaiyurubu*; *ku-urubu*; *ku-v̄ṭṭumai*
 Lōc'a-tive (*case*), s., *idav̄ṭṭumai*
 Ablative, (*cases*), a., *il*; *âl*; *odu*; *ôdu*; *udan*; *idam*; *uḷ*

Here, at the headword *Ablative*, the term is indicated as ‘cases’ not ‘case’, and is not translated (as are *nominative*, *accusative*, *dative* and *locative*), but is glossed by a selection of unannotated suffixes, which, notably, do not include *-in*. Similarly, G. U. Pope (1820–1908), an Anglican missionary, later lecturer in Tamil and Telugu at the University of Oxford, in *A handbook of the ordinary dialect of the Tamil language* (1904 [1855]: 32) omitted *-in* as an ablative marker:

III	Ablative of connexion	(i) by means of	<i>āl</i>
		(ii) together with	<i>oṭu</i>
V	Ablative of place from whence		<i>il</i> , <i>iruntu</i> , <i>niṇru</i>
VII	Locative or Ablative of place wherein or whither: at, in, with		<i>il</i> , <i>iṭṭil</i>

3. Concluding remarks

European missionaries often described the languages they met in different parts of the world as ‘imperfect’ or ‘deficient’ because they did not fit into the familiar morphosyntactic mould of the Graeco-Latin patterns with which they were familiar. Despite the many different schemata that have been suggested over the past four hundred years, the representations made on the basis of Latin by the Portuguese in the mid-sixteenth century

³¹ From the north of India, thus referring to grammarians of Sanskrit.

for Tamil – the “most vigorous” of the languages of India (Scudder 1861: 723) – provided the foundation for all subsequent European analyses and descriptions of the language and were still used until well into the twentieth century. From the initial applications of the Latin reference model, thinking evolved, with the missionary grammarians gradually disengaging themselves from the strictly Latin framework, to favour one which more accurately reflected the facts of Tamil, although still very ‘European’ in style, adapting it, as in the example of the ‘ablatives’, to match the morphosyntactic phenomena they encountered.

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