

Material Production for Multimedia Package

Dr. S. Jean Lawrence

Professor, International Institute of Tamil Studies
C.P.T. Campus, Tharamani, Chennai - 600 113, India

Tamil is being taught/learned as a second language/foreign language in different parts of the world. It is learned by (i) Tamils who have a little or no knowledge in Tamil, (2) by the children of the Tamils settled outside Tamilnadu/India. (iii) by the Non-Tamils / Foreigners who are interested to learn Tamil. (iv) by those who are interested in tamilology studies and (v) by those who stay in Tamilnadu due to official or business purpose. There are a number of teaching/learning materials in the form of books and audio cassettes to fulfill their need. Now these materials are losing their importance because of Computer. Computer has penetrated into all fields and language teaching/learning is not an exception to this though it is not equal to a teacher.

In order to teach / learn Tamil through Computer, multimedia package which is a amalgamation of the previous teaching / learning materials i.e., books and cassettes are being prepared. Scholars who involved in the preparation of materials for the multimedia package must give much care to the grammatical system of the language. Also the packages must give room for interaction and it must motivate the learner for the active participation in the learning process. Then the learning will be faster and effective. But everyone know that unlike the teacher, the computer has its own limitations. The teacher can react or respond and clarify a new or unmarked enquiry while the computer is dull to respond in such situations since it can act only according to the preplanned or framed set of rules. So the learning /teaching materials must be skillfully produced according to its limitations so that it can be used successfully and truthfully to the maximum.

Learning a language means to get the competence in the four skills viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing in the target language. For this all the levels of the language i.e. Phonology, Morphology, Syntax and Semantics of the language must be taken care of without violating or breaking the linguistic system of the language.

It is to be noted here that in certain instances while teaching the consonants of Tamil they are introduced as /ka/, /ca/, /da/, /ta/. /pa/, /Ra/ etc. But these are the syllabic consonants or vowel consonants i.e., the combination of pure consonants and a vowel. Here the learners are given a wrong information. So instead of this it is better to introduce the pure consonants /k/, /c/, /d/ etc. It is stated that the consonants with the vowel /a/ is introduced for easy pronunciation practice. But, for a stranger to whom Tamil is unfamiliar, pronunciation of /ka/ and /ik/ (pure consonants are usually pronounced with a little /i/ sound) may have the same situation. That is when he/she is asked to pronounce with /a/ he will do so; and when he is asked to do it with /i/ he will pronounce with /i/ since both may be new to him/her and he/she will do according to the instruction. So it is better to introduce the consonants with the dot on it (pure consonants) instead of consonants with /a/.

Some of the Tamil sounds are new to the learners, So there must be ample chance to practice of pronunciation of Tamil sounds. The phonemes /k/, /c/, /d/, /t/, /p/ and /R/ have different pronunciation according to the contexts. For example in the pronunciation of /k/

1. It is pronounced as /k/ in the initial position of a word and medially when doubled.

/kappal/

/pakkam/

2. It is pronounced as /g/ when it occurs after the nasal sound.

/tangam/

/pangu/

3. It is pronounced as /h/ when it comes in between vowels.

/mahan/

/pahavati/

Such sound differences must be explained with examples. Also it will be well and good if the pronunciation process is informed to the learner.

In script learning/teaching, the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore introduced the system of learning/teaching them from simple to complex pattern i.e., they start with /da/, /pa/ and so on with the impression that it will make script learning easy. Once at IITS, one group was taught the traditional way i.e. starting with /a/ and another group, simple to complex method i.e. starting with /d/ and it was found both of them took the same duration to learn the script. Hence the traditional method is followed even today. If one feels that the simple to complex method is easy to learn the traditional system should not be left out for the sake of easy learning/teaching. Studying the language according to the regular pattern is always better as long as it doesn't affect the learning process. It must be noted here that we are learning English script starting from /A/ and ending with /Z/. /I/ is not introduced first.

In the formation of syllabic consonants, first the pure consonants appear in the screen and when the vowel is added to it, the expected syllabic consonants appear. While writing the syllabic consonants one does not do like this. The consonant and the vowel and then the syllabic consonant may be presented in the initial stage while learning the syllabic consonant. But when one completes the learning of writing the syllabic consonant this method should be dropped. It must be shown as we write i.e., the syllabic consonant alone must appear on the screen when it is needed and there must not be the visual presence of the pure consonant before the appearance of the syllabic consonant.

The script writing practice can be given by using the mouse after explaining the way of writing by animation. Then they must be instructed to practice in paper also.

(In Tamil all the vowels except /u/ and /uu/ have each one secondary symbol. But the vowel /u/ has four secondary symbols and /uu/ has five. Scholars put forward the idea to change the secondary symbol for /u/ and /uu/. It is better to avoid using different secondary symbols for one vowel so that learning may be made easy.)

In the teaching materials, the formation of the negatives of Imperative, Conditional,

Relative participle, Verbal participle, Verbal noun are explained in two ways.

1. By adding the negative suffix to the Infinitive form of the verb.

ooda - aata > oodaate
ooda - aavittaaal > oodaavittaaal
ooda - aamal > oodaamal
etc.,

2. By adding the negative suffix to the verb directly. (The link morph /kk/ has to be added with

the strong verbs before adding the negative suffix.)

oodu + aate > oodaate
oodu + aavittaaal > oodaavittaaal
oodu + aamal > oodaamal
etc.,

In the first category one has to convert the verb into its infinitive form before adding the negative suffix and then the infinitive marker /a/ is dropped while the negative marker is suffixed. In the second category one can add the negative suffix directly to the weak verb and if it is a strong verb, the link morph /kk/ has to be added with the verb before adding the negative suffix. Though the output is one, the inputs are different. Such different structural explanations should be avoided since it will confuse the learners. (It is better to derive the negatives by adding the negative suffixes to the verb base directly instead of adding them to the infinitive form.)

Tamil is an agglutinative language. Different grammatical categories are formed by attaching the relevant grammatical suffixes to the noun or verb. A number of suitable exercises/games must be presented for learning, practising the formation of the different grammatical categories for strengthening their knowledge, efficiency in the said area.

Interesting games or exercises may also be presented for the formation / creation of sentences.

When one makes a wrong sentence, for example if the subject predicate concord is wrong, the wrong area must be marked and it must be explained after giving one or two chances to correct themselves.

Provision must be there for the oral practice of small sentences in addition to words. It can be done by repeating the heard voice and also answering certain questions connected with the lesson learned etc.

The dictionaries must carry the cultural explanations also wherever necessary (with visual details if possible). This will help the learner to understand the word with its social settings. The verbs must be marked as strong or weak and it will help the learners to form the grammatical categories without any mistake since certain suffixes can occur with strong verbs and some with weak verbs only. It is better to provide the past tense markers also with the verbs

since there are different past tense markers in Tamil and memorizing the phonological condition of their occurrence is a tiresome process for the learners.

Tamil is a diglossic language and it has literal or written variety and spoken variety which are used in fixed situations. In the spoken variety there are different social and regional variations. It is difficult to teach all the spoken varieties since we do not have a detailed dialect dictionary. So it is better to teach a standard spoken variety which is free from social and regional features which can be used in normal situation. The lexical items of the social or regional dialects can be used when lessons related to them are presented.

Instead of presenting the literal variety and spoken variety side by side it is better to present the conversion rules which explain the formation of the spoken variety from the written variety so that the learners can get the knowledge of the formation of the spoken form. If they know the conversion rules which are regular and systematic, they can form the spoken form for a new word which is not presented to them. For example the word which ends with /ai/ in literal variety is changed to /e/ in the spoken form. If one knows this, he/she can automatically do it i.e. he/she can form the spoken form without any problem.

To conclude, a few institutions have already prepared multimedia packages and a few are now preparing it to teach Tamil through computer. Tamilnadu government has started Tamil virtual university to teach Tamil through internet. In this venture the material producers have a vital role and their contribution is the foundation for the success of the Tamil learners.

Bibliography

1. Jean Lawrence, S. & Renganathan, D., 1988, Hand Book - Tamil, An Auto-Instructional Course, IITS, Chennai.
2. Nataraja Pillai, N., 1986, A Guide for Advanced Learners of Tamil, CIIL, Mysore.
3. Rajaram, S., 1979, An Intensive Course in Tamil, CIIL, Mysore.
4. Sankaranarayanan, G., 1994, A Programmed Course in Tamil, CIIL, Mysore.
5. Shanmugam Pillai, M., 1971, Spoken Tamil - Part I, Published by N. Muthammal, Madurai.
6. Shanmugam Pillai, M., 1968, Spoken Tamil - Part II, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar.