Tamil Verb Pattern

About Tamil and its Morphology

Tamil is a Dravidian language spoken primarily in southern India and northern Sri Lanka. Over seventy million people spread across the world claim it as their mother tongue. A language not only taught in schools in these two countries, as well as in Singapore, Malaysia and Mauritius, but also voluntarily learnt within the school systems of many more countries, Tamil has an unbroken history of literary production for more than two millennia. It is a diglossic language, whose high variety or formal style differs conspicuously from its low variety or informal style. The difference is substantially exhibited in phonology and, consequently, in morphology with regard to morphological forms rather than the morphological system. The diglossic division extends to the lexicon in that the formal style has additional or alternative words, which are historical retentions or motivated by the ideology of language purism. This is also reflected in the verbs and in the inflected verb forms that are less frequently used in modern Tamil.

Tamil is a morphologically rich language, syntagmatically as well as paradigmatically. Verbs have a long string of morphemes that express a range of meanings including time of the event or the state (tense), speaker perception (mood), and calibrations of the event (aspect), as well as negation, interrogation, and emphasis. There is some flexibility in the status of the morphemes as to their boundedness or fusion with the adjacent morphemes and in their sequential order. This flexibility allows the insertion of a morpheme, say an interrogative marker, at different places in the string and the scrambling of morphemes for pragmatic effects. The morphological richness of Tamil increases the number of possible verb forms phenomenally. It is in the realm of hundreds for each verb. The structural flexibility adds alternate verb forms and in addition, there are distinctive verb forms that are attributable to the diglossic difference and historical variability. The verb chart in this volume necessarily presents only a selection of verb forms used in the language. The maximum number of forms given for a verb is 252.

Exclusion of verb forms

The primary selection is the formal style of Tamil, which is used in text books, fictional narrative, and non-fictional expositive prose in essays, media stories, and government documents, as well as in public lectures. The verb forms in the chart represent the style and spelling of modern Tamil used formally. The chart does not include forms exclusively found in a pedantic style [செய்தனன் 'he did (it)', செய்யா 'they (neuter) will not do (it)', செய்மின் 'you (please) do (it)', செய்வன 'those (netuer) which will do', etc.], used in colloquial speech [ஆச்சு '(it's) done', இருக்கான் 'he is', விளையாண்டான் 'he played', even if found used in creative literature, பாயுது 'it flows'], nor used in the style reflecting a dialect speech [நீர் செய்யும் 'you do (it)', நீர் செய்கிறீர் 'you are doing (it)']. Among the forms whose variation is merely phonological, only the form that is frequently used is given: உட்கார்கிறான் vs உட்காருகிறான் 'he sits', உருள்வான் vs உருளுவான் 'he will roll', தின்பான் vs. தின்னுவான் 'he will eat'. Variations in the verb form are listed only if the variants are frequently used in modern Tamil. The variant forms are given on two sides of a slash (செய்கிறான்/செய்கின்றான் 'he is doing (it)', செய்தபோது/செய்தபொழுது 'when done', etc.). Variant forms that are infrequent are not listed. For example, the verbal noun form செய்கிறது 'doing' is listed, but not செய்கின்றது; the verbal noun, participial noun and finite verb form ஓடியது 'running, that which ran, it ran' is listed, but not ஓடினது. Absence of a variant form may, however, indicate its non-occurrence; while the neuter plural செய்கின்றன is possible, the putative *செய்கிறன is not. The variants may also be found in different boxes following the classificatory scheme of the verb forms (செய்கிற and செய்யும் 'which does'; செய்கிறவன் and செய்பவன் 'doer'; செய்கிறது and செய்வது 'doing'). The variants with a slash are not given in longer verb forms which typically have an auxiliary verb. The reason is that it saves space and the variation is predictable from their corresponding simple verb forms: செய்துகொள்கிறான்/செய்துகொள்கின்றான் 'he is doing (it) himself'.

There could be three interrogative forms for each verb form (other than the imperative and optative) and they are not included because they are formed by simple addition at the end of the verb form [செய்தானா 'did he do (it)?', செய்தானோ 'did he do (it), I wonder', செய்தானே 'he did (it), didn't he?']. By extension, the forms with the interrogative marker in a non-final position in the string are not included either [செய்தாவிட்டான் 'has he done (it)?', etc.]. This is the case when the emphatic forms (-உம், -ஏ, -தான்) and the conjunctive suffix (-உம்) are added to the verb forms. The emphatic -உம் can be added to any verb form other than the optative, finite verb and relative participle. This suffix adds a special meaning with some forms: செய்யவும் 'do (as in an instruction)', செய்தும் 'even though done', செய்தாலும் 'even if done', செய்ததும் 'as soon as done'. These forms are not listed. -ஆம், which means that the proposition is hearsay or has been reported by another person, can be added to finite verbs at the end of the sentence. Finite verbs with this form are not given in the chart.

Tamil verb morphology makes extensive use of auxiliary verbs, which are inflected in all ways that main verbs are. Each verb can be said to have a set with auxiliary verbs added to it. For reasons of their universality and the need to keep the number of verb forms within manageable limits, verb forms other than finite verbs are not given with auxiliary verbs. The set with auxiliary verbs constituting imperative forms (செய்துவிடு, செய்துகொள், படுத்திரு), infinitive forms (செய்துவிட, செய்துகொள்ள, செய்திருக்க) and the infinitive base in the negative and modal forms (செய்துவிடவில்லை, செய்துகொள்ளவில்லை, செய்திருக்கவில்லை, செய்துவிட வேண்டாம், செய்துகொள்ள வேண்டாம், செய்திருக்க வேண்டாம்), verbal participle forms (செய்துவிட்டு, செய்துகொண்டு, செய்திருந்து) and participial noun forms (செய்துவிட்டவன், செய்துகொண்டவன், செய்திருப்பவன்) are not given.

A verb form can be defined by the string of a verb followed by grammatical markers, which occurs between word boundaries (space in writing). Word boundary rules in Tamil, however, are not universally followed. Therefore, word boundary cannot be used as the defining criterion to identify verb forms. One may find in the verb chart structurally similar verb forms with or without spaces: செய்தபோது 'when done' and செய்த பிறகு 'after doing', செய்ய மாட்டான் 'he will not do' and செய்ய வேண்டாம் 'need not do'; the same is true of semantically similar verb forms: செய்யலாம் 'may do' and செய்ய முடியும் 'can do'. Writers may have different word boundaries in the same forms as in செய்திருக்கிறான் and செய்து இருக்கிறான் 'he has done (it)'. The verb form is defined for this chart as a string beginning with a verb and followed by grammatical markers which are not referentially meaningful. Forms like செய்தானல்லவா 'he did, didn't he' (whether there is a word boundary or not before அல்லவா, which is a negative verb meaning 'didn't he'), செய்யேன் 'why don't you do (it)', செய்வானேன் 'why should I do (it)', where -ஏன் 'why' is added to the imperative form and an archaic infinitive form of the verb, are not listed, as they may be treated as phrasal forms without a boundary between their components. Though verb forms of an infinitive followed by an auxiliary verb like செய்யப்போகிறான் 'he is going to do (it)', செய்யவிருந்தான் 'he was about to do (it)' may be taken to meet the criterion for a verb form without a boundary in between, they are not included as they could be taken to be periphrastic constructions.

The possibility of inserting a floating morpheme such as -ஏ, -தான் at some morphemic junctures of the verb form and the possibility of expanding morphemes, for example, by combining two modal forms and auxiliary verb forms, with attendant semantic shifts, multiply manifold the number of verb forms that can be generated. செய்யவில்லை 'did not do (it)' is given, but not செய்யவே இல்லை 'did not do (it) at all' nor செய்யத்தான் இல்லை 'did not indeed do (it)'. செய்யக் கூடாது 'should not do (it)' is given, but not செய்யவே கூடாது 'should not do (it) at all' nor செய்யத்தான் கூடாது 'should not indeed do (it)'. These are examples of insertion of a floating morpheme. செய்யலாம் 'may do' and செய்ய முடியும் 'can do' are given, but not செய்ய முடியலாம் 'may be possible to do'. செய்துவிட்டான் 'he certainly did (it)' and செய்திருக்கிறான் 'he has done (it)' are given, but not செய்துவிட்டிருக்கிறான் 'he has definitely done (it)'; செய்துகொண்டான் 'he did (it) (for) himself' and செய்துவிட்டான் 'he certainly did (it)' are given, but not செய்துகொண்டுவிட்டான் 'he definitely did (it) (for) himself'. These examples of expansion of one morpheme with the addition of another from the set of modal or auxiliary forms. The chart does not have forms that have floating morphemes or that have more than one morpheme of the same category.

Verb forms with an auxiliary verb whose sense is more than purely grammatical and is therefore more than an auxiliary are not included even in the finite verb forms, as they go beyond a strictly grammatical system of verbs. சொல்லிவிட்டான் 'he certainly said (it)' is given, but not the same form with another விடு which means 'he sent out the word'; எழுதிக்கொண்டான் 'he wrote (for) himself' is given, but not எழுதிக் கொடுத்தான் 'he wrote for (the benefit of) someone'. Similar auxiliary verbs like பார் 'try', அழு 'cry', தொலை 'get lost', etc., with finite verb forms are not given. Verb forms with a grammatical

auxiliary verb that is an alternant are not included. கெட்டுவிட்டது 'it is certainly spoiled' is given, but not கெட்டுப்போயிற்று in the same meaning with an extra nuance of indicating the process of change of state.

Thus, the list of verb forms in the chart is not exhaustive of all possible forms, but a basic list from which all other verb forms in Tamil can be recognized and produced by extension or application of the given pattern.

Non-existent Verb Forms

The verb forms in the chart were generated by native speakers of Tamil and randomly checked for their occurrence with a database of 7.5 million words from various texts representing fiction, non-fiction, government publications, writings for children, e-journals, etc. Some forms were not attested in the database, but this is not an indication of their absence in the language. Such gaps are accidental, giving information on frequency of use and not on the structural possibility of the form. The verb forms that fall into these accidental gaps in the database are still included in the chart. Some forms are not possible structurally and, as could be expected, they cannot be attested in the database. These verb forms are excluded from the chart; empty boxes in the chart indicate such structural gaps. There are, however, some empty boxes which do not indicate structural gaps because the reason for the absence is not semantic. These gaps are indicators of change taking place in the language. The empty boxes in the verb forms of participial nouns in future tense are an example of this. For example, போபவன்/போகுபவன் are not attested in the database and native speaker intuition attests to their oddity. The reason for the non-existence of such forms is probably phonological.

Semantically motivated non-existent verb forms include the following. Verbs expressing a mental or physical state, and not an action, are not used in the imperative and optative. Some examples are தெரி 'know', புரி 'understand', பிடி 'like', பசி 'be hungry', வலி 'be in pain', சுடு 'be hot', குளிர் 'be cold', இனி 'be sweet'. Such verbs in Tamil do not have a subject in the nominative, with which finite verbs agree, or have only the neuter subject. Hence the finite verb forms of these verbs have only the neuter gender forms and not the human gender forms: அவனுக்கு ரகசியம் தெரியும்/ரகசியங்கள் தெரிந்துவிட்டன 'the secret/s is/are known to him', கை குளிர்கிறது 'hand is cold'. The forms with human endings such as *குளிர்கிறாள் 'she is cold', *புரிந்தாள் 'she understood', *பசித்தாள் 'she was hungry' are non-existent. Verb forms with human endings such as (நல்லவனாக) தெரிகிறான் 'he appears (to be good)', (கண்ணுக்கு) தெரிகிறான் 'he is visible (to the eye), பிடிக்கிறாள் 'she catches', சுடுகிறாள் 'she fires, fries' exist, but in a different sense, as glossed. These verbs, which could be polysemous or homonymous, are not listed twice in the verb chart because, although they have different meanings, they conjugate in the same way. This means that verb forms like these given in the chart are well formed for some senses of a given verb but not for other senses. The fuller set of verb forms is given for such polysemous or homonymous verbs. A given form like பிடிக்கிறான் is well formed for the sense 'catch' but ill formed for the sense 'like'. The verb chart is about the grammatical forms of verbs, and so their semantic specifications are not made explicit.

Some of the verbs which do not take a human subject are used figuratively with human subjects. In நேற்றுவரை இனித்தாள், இன்று கசக்கிறாள் 'she was (found to be) sweet until yesterday, today she is (found to be) bitter', இனி and கச are used figuratively. The figurative use of verbs is open-ended and chances of such use coming up in the language are unpredictable. The verb chart is liberal in admitting verb forms with a figurative sense.

The neuter subject verbs, as would be expected, do not have finite verbs with human number and gender agreement markers. They could, however, have finite verb forms in first person singular, when their neuter subject is used anthropomorphically. Intransitive verbs like அவிழ் 'get loosened' take only neuter subjects, but finite verb forms in first person singular like முடிச்சு அவிழ்வேனா/அவிழ மாட்டேன் என்கிறது, which literarlly means 'the knot says, won't I get loose/won't get loose', is glossed to express the subjunctive sense as 'the knot wouldn't get loose'.

Some neuter subjects have a human subject when they occur with the auxiliary verb கொள், which adds volition to the verb. Then they have verb forms agreeing with all persons, genders, and numbers. For example, தெரிந்துகொண்டான் 'he came to know, learnt', புரிந்துகொண்டான் 'he came to understand, realized' are well formed. The auxiliary verb இரு 'be' added to the verbal participle is stative and it conveys the sense of end of an action staying on. Being stative, there is no verb form with this auxiliary verb that is imperative or optative in meaning, as in the finite verb செய்திருக்கிறான் 'he has done (it)': *தூங்கியிரு 'be in the state of after-sleep', *கிழிந்திரு 'be torn' are ill formed. Exceptions are verbs of body posture, which have the

imperative form with the auxiliary இரு, where it is possible to take the sense of இரு literally: உட்கார்ந்திரு 'be seated', படுத்திரு 'be lying down', சாய்ந்திரு 'be leaning', விழித்திரு 'be awake'. Similar forms in the imperative are possible if இரு after the verbal participle has its literal sense 'be': கற்றிரு 'read and stay (read)'.

The chart of verb forms does not mark all non-existent verb forms, as the explanation of their absence requires semantic facts. Anyone seeking such an explanation should go to a comprehensive grammar of modern Tamil. This reference tool of forms of verbs takes into account only generic semantic facts.

There are lexicalized compound verbs with an auxiliary verb added to a noun or to a verb form such as கண்ணடி 'wink', அள்ளிவிடு 'spin' which are not counted as verbs for the purpose of this chart. The auxiliary verbs like அடி 'hit' and, விடு 'let go' have corresponding independent verbs and their verb forms will extend to the auxiliary verbs also. There are, however, verbs that occur only with an auxiliary verb. Consequently, these verbs in their simple form do not have imperative and optative forms. The imperative and optative forms of non-existent bare verb[†] forms are not given in the chart. வில் is the base in விற்றாள் 'she sold', but it does not occur in the imperative or optative; the imperative form occurs with the auxiliary verb விடு, விற்றுவிடு 'sell'; சா is the base of the verb in அவன் செத்தான் 'he died', but its imperative form is with the auxiliary verb போ, செத்துப்போ 'die'. Some complex verb forms are not used in the imperative even with an auxiliary verb: வரவேல், which is the base in வரவேற்றாள் 'she welcomed' and கா which is the base of the verb in காவல் காத்தான் 'he guarded' are not used in the imperative with or without an auxiliary verb. Some verbs are not used in the imperative form and they have only a few of the possible verb forms: பய as in பயந்தாள் 'she was scared' does not have the imperative or optative form, the present and future finite verb forms, nor the infinitive form, as the non-existence of *பய 'be scared', *பயக்கிறான் 'he is scared' and *பயப்பான் 'he will be scared', and *பயக்க வேண்டாம் 'need not be scared' shows. Absence of forms like these is probably a result of historical developments in the language. Boxes for the verb forms above are empty in the chart, though the reason for their non-existence is not semantic.

Selection of Verbs

Cre-A: Dictionary of Contemporary Tamil (2008) has 4,042 verbs including compound verbs and idiomatic verb phrases. This is not the total number of verbs in modern Tamil because only auxiliary verbs are included in this dictionary with regard to productive compound verbs of the form noun plus auxiliary. அடை, -படு, -படுத்து, are given in the dictionary (and in this verb chart) in place of கோபமடை, கோபப்படு 'get angry' கோபப்படுத்து 'make one angry', etc. A productive compound verb formation is adding பண்ணு/செய் 'do' to nouns (and to foreign verbs that are mixed into speech) as in கல்யாணம் பண்ணு/செய் 'marry', அழகு பண்ணு/செய் 'beautify'. These auxiliary verbs in compound verbs are also independent main verbs and only the main verbs are included in the chart. All the verb forms for a main verb are possible when they are auxiliary verbs.

The verb chart contains a total of 369 verbs arrived at through a process of selection. The following methods were used to select verbs that a learner of Tamil is most likely to encounter.

a. Recall: Five informants were asked to recall 250 verbs without any external aid. These were persons of different levels of exposure to Tamil: a high school graduate, a college graduate, one with a Master's degree in English, a doctoral student in Tamil, and a trained linguist with a post-graduate research degree. The five lists were collated and a list of verbs common to the lists of at least three persons was made.

b. Children's vocabulary: A list of verbs was compiled from one hundred stories specifically written for children.

c. Basic vocabulary: A list was prepared from David W. McAlpin's *A Core Vocabulary for Tamil* (http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/mcalpin/) compiled in the context of teaching Tamil as a second language.

[†] Bare verb is used here to refer to the form of a verb with no inflection. This could be, in Tamil, the form of the singular imperative, such as வா 'come' or a phonological variant of it, which is not the imperative, such as வரு and வ. Either of these forms could be called a stem in that they are the base to which suffixes are added. These are inflected forms of verbs to which additional suffixes are also added, such as வரட்டும் 'let (one) come' from the infinitive வர 'to come', வந்துவிடு 'come definitely' from the verbal participle வந்து 'having come'. வா, வர, வந்து could be called verb bases or stems at different points in the progression of creating specific categories of verb forms.

All three lists were compared and a final list was compiled. This list was reviewed by the project team and advisors to the project. Some verbs were dropped and some, which were thought to be useful in the context of learning Tamil, were added during this reviewing process.

The final number of verbs in Tamil is larger than the number of verbs in the verb charts of many other languages in the series. The main reasons for this are the diglossic nature of Tamil with lexical doublets such as போ, செல் 'go' and the nature of expressing transitivity in homophonous verbs (தன்வினை and பிறவினை in the traditional Tamil grammar) through different conjugations. In addition, Tamil is a verbal language. This manifests, among other things, in the fact that verbs perform non-verbal grammatical functions, for instance, being noun modifiers while remaining verbs in their grammatical properties (வினைத்தொகை, பெயரெச்சம்), and in the fact that verbs are the base from which nouns of action (verbal nouns) and nouns of actors (participial nouns), which retain the grammatical properties of a verb as seen in their tense markers, verbal modifiers and in their governing cases, are produced. As a good knowledge of verbs helps learners of Tamil, more verbs and more verb forms become necessary.

Structure of Verb Forms

Verbs in Tamil are divided into two types: weak verbs and strong verbs. Strong verbs have -க்க்- added to their base, which is transparent in the verb form infinitives படுக்க 'to lie down', மறைக்க 'to hide (sth.).' Weak verbs, do not add -க்க்-: பாட 'to sing', மறைய 'to disappear'. This division also plays a role in the conjugation of verbs, though an explicit recognition of this division in grammatical descriptions of Tamil begins only during the colonial period. The verb forms in Tamil are traditionally divided into two broad categories: finite (முற்று) and non-finite (எச்சம்). This division begins from the earliest grammatical description of Tamil over 2,000 years ago. The verb forms of the latter category are dependant grammatical forms in the sense that they are governed by another form, verbal or nominal. The imperative, optative, and finite verbs (the verb forms marked for person–number–gender, i.e. the agreement marker) belong to the finite category and the rest (other than the verb-based nouns) in the chart belong to the non-finite category.

There are basically three kinds of bases from which other verb forms are constructed: bare verb (a few verbs have a different form as a stem to take suffixes), infinitive (bare verb +அ), and verbal participle (bare verb + past tense suffix). The imperative, optative, infinitive, finite verb and verbal participle are formed from the bare verb. Except in the non-polite positive imperative, these forms take suffixes, which, in the case of positive finite verbs, are tense suffixes and agreement suffixes and, in the case of positive verbal participles, are past tense suffixes. (The suggestive form with -ஏன் 'why' has the imperative as its base to which -ஏன் is added, as in செய்யேன் 'why don't (you) do (it)', செய்யாதேயேன் 'why don't (you) not do (it).' These forms are not included in the chart, as mentioned earlier).

The modals (the forms that indicate speaker perspective such as desirable, obligatory, permissible, probable, able (to perform) nature of action or state) are formed from the infinitive [செய்யட்டும் 'let (him) do (it)', செய்ய வேண்டும் '(one) must do it', செய்யக் கூடாது 'one must not do (it)'] as are the negatives [செய்யவில்லை 'did not do (it)', செய்யாதே 'don't do (it)', செய்யாமல் 'without doing']. (It is possible to take the bare verb as the base rather than the infinitive in the last two negative verb forms.) The infinitive is the base in the temporal verb form, செய்யவும் 'as/while one does (sth.),' and in the verb form of instruction, நீ இதைச் செய்யவும் 'you do this'. These are not included in the chart, as mentioned earlier. The counter-factual suggestive form, which is made from an archaic infinite form (verb +வான்/verb +பான்) as in செய்வானேன்/கிழிப்பானேன் 'why should (you) do (it)/why should (you) tear (it)', is not a productive process and this form is not included in the chart.

The verbs of subordinate clauses are formed from the verbal participle, as in செய்தால் 'if (one) does', செய்தும் 'even if (one) does', செய்துவிடு 'do it'. As mentioned earlier, forms with -உம் are not included in the chart. Extended verb forms with auxiliary verbs are also formed from the verbal participle.

There are two other bases to make verb forms. The noun derived from a verb is the base for the verb form in some subordinate clauses (செய்ததும் 'as soon (s.o.) does', செய்ததால் 'because (sth.) was done') and in some periphrastic verb forms (செய்வதுண்டு 'have the habit of doing', செய்ததில்லை 'never did'), which are not included in the chart, except for the causal form above. The temporal clauses have the relative participle as the base to which post-positions, most of which are nouns, are added as their head (செய்தபோது 'when doing', செய்த பிறகு 'after doing', செய்யும் முன்னால் 'before doing').

A defining property of verbs is that they are the forms that indicate time. Not every sentence in Tamil indicates time; some sentences with the noun as predicate do not bear time. Verbs in Tamil indicate time by tense suffixes, added to the bare verb. There are three sets of tense suffixes for the past, present, and future tenses. Tense suffixes have two variant forms each for the present and future tense and many variants for the past tense.

There are basically four past tense suffixes: -இன்-, -த்-, -த்த்-, -ந்த்- (பாடினான் 'he sang', அழுதான் 'he cried', படித்தான் 'he read' விழுந்தான் 'he fell down', நடந்தாள் 'she walked' respectively). They have phonological variants conditioned by the final consonant of the bare verb. -இன்- and -த்- go with weak verbs; -த்த்- with strong verbs; -ந்த்- with weak verbs and strong verbs. Beyond this, there is no way to predict which verb takes which past tense suffix. There are some cues based on the phonology of verbs, such as the final vowel -உ after the stop consonant in verbs that are not mono-syllabic with a short vowel (the suffix of verbs of this phonological form is -இன்-, பாடு: பாடினான் 'he sang'), or the final vowel is -அ (the suffix is -ந்த்-, நட: நடந்தாள் 'she walked'), etc., but they are neither sufficient (போடு: போட்டான் 'he dropped', not *போடினான்) nor necessary (இரு: இருந்தான் 'he was', not *இருத்தான்). The phonological variant in weak verbs of -த்- is -ட்- with verbs ending in கெடு (கெடு: கெட்டான் 'he got spoiled'), -ற்- with verbs ending in -று (பெறு: பெற்றான் 'he got'), -ட்- with verbs ending in -ண்- (உண்: உண்டான் 'he ate'), and -ற்- in verbs ending in -ன் (தின்: தின்றான் 'he ate'). Variants in weak verbs of -ந்த்- are -ண்ட் with verbs ending in -ள் (உருள்: உருண்டான் 'he rolled'), and -ன்ற்- with verbs ending in -ல் (கொல்: கொன்றாள் 'she killed'). Variants in strong verbs of -த்த்- are -ட்ட்- with verbs ending in -ள் (கேள்: கேட்டான் 'he asked') and -ற்ற்- with verbs ending in -ல் (வில்: விற்றான் 'he sold'). The particular verbs inflected for these past tense markers can be seen in the verb chart.

The present tense suffixes are -கிறு-/-கின்று- (செய்கிறான்/செய்கின்றான் 'he does (it)') and -க்கிறு-/-க்கின்று- (படிக்கிறான்/படிக்கின்றான் 'he reads'); the future tense suffixes are -வ் - (செய்வான் 'he will (it)') (which becomes -ப் - in weak verbs ending in a nasal consonant: தின்பான் 'he will eat') and -ப்ப் - (படிப்பான் 'he will read'). The present and future tense suffixes do not differentiate present and future time in relative participles, participial nouns and verbal nouns. செய்கிற and செய்யும் 'which does', செய்கிறவன் and செய்பவன் 'doer', செய்கிறது and செய்வது 'doing' are variants of the same verb form, which relate to stylistic preference and not semantic difference.

The finite verb agrees with the person (first, second and third person), gender (masculine, feminine, polite and neuter in third person alone) and number (singular and plural for all the preceding except for the masculine, feminine and polite forms in the third person, which merge into one plural form in the pronoun and in the finite verb அவர்கள் செய்தார்கள் 'they did'), as do the two plural pronouns in first person finite verb (நாம்/நாங்கள் செய்தோம் 'we (incl./excl.) did'). The plural in the second person doubles as the polite singular. There are six singular forms and four plural forms in each finite verb. The finite verb in the negative does not differentiate between singular and plural in the neuter in modern Tamil. The participial nouns derived from verbs do not differentiate person.

The order of morphemes in the finite verb in the positive is bare verb + tense + agreement or bare verb + past tense + (one or more) auxiliary verb + tense + agreement or infinitive + auxiliary verb + tense + agreement. The syntagmatic pattern adds suffixes to the right in a fixed order in an isomorphic way for each added grammatical meaning. Bare verbs, except a handful of them (e.g. வா: வ/வரு/வார் 'come', சாகு: செ 'die'), remain constant in all verb forms without any phonologically unpredictable change. The morphological structure of the verb is linear and transparent. Some of the morphemes, like the negative, modal, and auxiliary verb, have a higher-than-suffix status and so the floating morphemes, interrogative and emphatic, can be inserted between them and their base or the morpheme following them.

There are a few verbs that do not have the full set of verb forms. Examples in finite verb form are உண்டு, இல்லை, அல்ல. There are relative participles derived from verbs, but they have lost their verbal property. Some examples are தகுந்த, வேண்டிய. These opaque verbs are not included in the chart.

Meaning of verb forms

To use the well-formed verb forms appropriately, one should know their meaning or the communicative intent of their use. The imperative form is used to make a request or issue a command to the listener. The optative form is used to enjoin the speaker's wish for something to happen, positive (like blessing) or negative (like cursing), to the listener or a third party. It comes close

to the imperative (see வருக vs வாருங்கள் 'come', எங்கிருந்தாலும் வாழ்க vs வாழுங்கள் 'live well wherever you are') when said to a listener, but the difference is that the optative is not directive.

The optative is not a typical use of the infinitive, used mostly to convey a negative wish (அவன் தலையில் இடி விழ 'let the thunder fall on his head', செல்வம் பெருகுக 'let wealth increase'); it is used like the imperative to give instruction, in which case -உம் is added to the infinitive form (உடனே வரவும் 'come immediately'). The typical use of the infinitive is to refer to an action to be done (படிக்க வா 'come to study', படிக்க நேரம் 'time to study'). It is also used for referring to the doing of an action, like a verbal noun (படிக்கப் பிடிக்கும் 'like to read/reading'), to the effect of an action (கண் சிவக்க அழுதாள் 'she cried to such extent that her eyes became red'), to the simultaneous or immediately preceding action (நான் அதைச் சொல்ல அவளுக்குக் கோபம் வந்தது 'as I said that, she got angry'). This last use is more common with -உம் added to the infinitive (சொல்லவும் in the above example).

As mentioned earlier, the infinitive is structurally the base for the verbal forms of mood and negation. The modal form வேண்டும் expresses the desire or need to do an action. The desire ordinarily is that of the speaker (அவன் படிக்க வேண்டும் 'I wish he reads/he needs to read'; it commonly translates into English as 'should/must read'). -லாம் expresses the probability/ possibility or permissibility of doing an action (படிக்கலாம் 'likely to read/permitted to read, மழை பெய்யலாம் 'likely to rain'; it commonly translates into English as 'may/can read, may rain'.). (It is possible to segment this verb form into an archaic verbal noun படிக்கல் + ஆம் and treat it as a periphrastic form.) -ட்டும் expresses permissibility or wishful thought specific to the speaker as the agent (படிக்கட்டும் 'permitted (by the speaker) to read', மழை பெய்யட்டும் 'wish it to rain'; it commonly translates into English as 'let (him) read/let it rain'). முடியும் expresses the capability or entitlement of the subject (படிக்க முடியும் 'be able to read', சொர்க்கத்துக்குப் போக முடியும்/கார் ஓட்ட முடியும் 'is possible to go to heaven/to drive a car'; it commonly translates into English as 'can').

There are three tenses in the finite verb: two in the relative participle and tensed nouns (verbal nouns and participial nouns) derived from verbs and one in the verbal participle. The verbal participle refers to an earlier action in a sequence of actions and so is expressed in the past tense. But it also refers to a simultaneous or descriptive action. The relative participle and the tensed noun differentiate past and non-past, as mentioned above. The non-past is expressed by the future tense suffix in formal Tamil and by the present tense suffix in informal Tamil. The present tense form, however, is used in formal Tamil, but less frequently. The finite verb expresses three tenses: past, the time prior to the time of the speech, present, the time of the speech, and future, the time after the time of the speech. But tense is not coterminous with time. The present tense could be used to describe a past event, as in historical present, or it could be used to describe a future event, as in definite future. Like in any language, tense suffixes express more than time in Tamil. Past and present tenses, besides times, add specificity to propositions. Future tense, on the other hand, can add timelessness, generalization, secondary knowledge and probability. A statement in future tense like அவன் குடிப்பான் 'he drinks' is true of all times; a statement like இந்தப் பழம் இனிக்கும் 'this fruit is sweet' is generalized based on previous experience or second-hand information as opposed to the statement in the present tense இந்தப் பழம் இனிக்கிறது 'this fruit is sweet', which describes a personal, real-time observation. This is also true of the statement இங்கே இருபது பேர் இருப்பார்கள் 'there are probably twenty people there' as opposed to இங்கே இருபது பேர் இருக்கிறார்கள் 'there are twenty people there, I know'.

Simple verbs in Tamil are unmarked in the sense that they are neutral as to accomplishment of the act, the effect of the act on the subject, relevance of the act to the time of the speech or to another act, observed or extrapolated status of the act, etc. These specifications are expressed by auxiliary verbs attached to the verbal participle form of simple verbs. There are three auxiliary verbs given in the verb chart and they are grammaticalized in the sense that they are equated with grammatical notions like completive aspect, reflexive mood, and stative aspect. விடு 'let' go' expresses the sense that the act was or will be accomplished; that is, the event incorporating the act did or will take place. This may be called completive aspect: படித்தாள் 'she read (it)' vs படித்துவிட்டாள் 'she has read (it)'.

கொள் 'have' expresses the sense that the act in some way affects the subject, the doer. This may be called affective mood, the reflexive mood being only one part of it when the subject and the object are same: அடித்தான் 'he hit (someone) vs அடித்துக்கொண்டான் 'he hit himself'. Other examples of the affective mood include transitive verbs as in வாங்கினாள் 'she bought (it) vs வாங்கிக்கொண்டாள் 'she bought (it) (for) her' and intransitive verbs as in மரத்தில் ஏறினான் 'he climbed on to the tree' vs மரத்தில் ஏறிக்கொண்டான் 'he climbed onto the tree (for his safety)'.

இரு 'be' is used to signify being in a specified state after the act is over. This may be called the aspect of resultive state: *படித்திருக்கிறாள்* 'she has read (for the exam)', *கிழிந்திருக்கிறது* '(it) is torn', *மழை பெய்திருக்கிறது* 'it has rained'. The resultive state could refer to an act performed some time in the past, but the fact remains true at the present time. The first verb form with இரு above could be used to mean 'he has read (this novel some time in the past)'; it could also refer to a past act inferred from a state/condition in the present. The third verb form with இரு above, for example, could be used to mean that the act of raining earlier is inferred from the state or condition of the wet ground now. The verb form with இரு in the future tense may have counter factual meaning: *படித்திருப்பான்* 'he would have read, (but)'.

Two auxiliary verbs can combine, but the combination of கொள் and இரு has a special grammatical meaning to indicate the duration of an action or state: *படித்துக்கொண்டிருக்கிறாள்* 'she is reading'. This is the fourth complex verb form with an auxiliary verb included in the chart. The grammatical meanings of the auxiliary verbs remain constant in finite as well as non-finite verb forms. The auxiliary verb கொள்is an exception, which indicates a simultaneity of action (besides its affective sense) with another verb in the verbal participle form: *புத்தகத்தை எடுத்துக்கொண்டு உட்கார்ந்தான்* 'he took the book (for) himself as he sat down'; *படித்துக்கொண்டு சாப்பிட்டாள்* 'she was reading while eating'.

When some other auxiliary verbs are added to the verbal participle they add specifics to the performance of the act including whether it was done as a trial or to help someone, or to be useful in future or to indicate a change from one state to another, or to specify whether the act was done in disgust, etc. They are not given in the verb chart because they are more semantic in nature than grammatical and they are not added to all verbs across the board like the four aspectual and modal auxiliary verbs above.

The verb forms–relative participle, conditional, causal, etc.–that are the heads of subordinate clauses, such as relative, temporal, conditional, and causal clauses, etc., do not, in their grammatical meanings in Tamil, differ significantly from their standard meanings in other languages. A point must be noted, however, about the grammatical meaning of the relative participle and conditional in Tamil. The head noun of the relative clause may have a case relationship (though the case suffix is absent) with its verb (*நடந்து வந்த பையன்* 'the boy who came walking', *நான் பணம் கொடுத்த பையன்* 'the boy to whom I gave money, etc.) or may have no case relationship (*நடந்து வந்த சத்தம்* 'noise of walking on foot'). The conditional may have the temporal sense of 'when' (*விடிந்தால் கல்யாணம்* 'marriage will take place when it dawns').

Endnote

The verb chart assumes a theory of grammar that is semantically motivated, as shown by the attention given to identifying non-existent verb forms. Nevertheless, it must be made clear that the verb chart does not explain minutely the semantic properties of forms, nor does it exhaust all possible verb forms in Tamil. It is meant to be a step towards getting there in both respects.

This introduction is longer than usual for handbooks as it draws attention to non-occurring verb forms and their complexities, keeping in mind researchers on Tamil verbs in addition to learners of Tamil. The analysis of verb forms given in the introduction is biased towards a semantically motivated grammar and a view that the grammar of verbs in modern Tamil has significant differences from the description of verbs in the traditional grammar of Tamil. It admits more verb forms than recognized in traditional grammars. Not every Tamil grammarian or linguist will agree with these two views of grammar. Any difference in viewpoints should encourage more empirical and theoretical studies of the grammar of verbs in Tamil, preferably using a database of actual use of verb forms in modern Tamil.

Any question on the information given or not given on verb forms is welcome from Tamil learners using this chart. Also welcome is any alternative analysis of verb forms, which meets the minimum empirical and descriptive adequacies.

E.Annamalai

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Abbreviations

esp.	especially
excl.	exclusive
fem.	feminine
hon.	honorific
hum.	human
incl.	inclusive
mas.	masculine
neu.	neuter
pl.	plural
sg.	singular
s.o.	someone
sth.	something
வி.	*வினை*