

A Comparative Study of the Usage of the Tamil Locative Case (*Uddēśa Vibhakti*) in Sinhala

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ABSTRACT

The term *vibhakti* originates from the root *bhaj* (to divide), prefixed with *vi-* and suffixed with the *krut -ktin* (or *-ti*), forming a feminine participle (*Kṛudanta*). Case or *Vibhakti* refers to the suffixes that divide the meaning of a base form of a noun into various semantic roles such as Nominative Case (Subject of sentence), Accusative Case (Object of action), Instrumental Case (Means by which action is done), etc. In contemporary Sri Lanka, bilingual practices fostering ethnic coexistence are highly valuable and should be appreciated. However, over an extended period, several drawbacks can be observed in the systematic guidance required for effective language education in this domain, both in terms of human resources and physical resources. Sinhala native speakers learning Tamil as a second language frequently encounter significant difficulties, particularly with the application of case markers (*Vibhakti Prayōga*). Accordingly, the primary objective of this research is to examine and compare how the Tamil locative case (*Uddēśa Vibhakti*) is employed in Sinhala. This research further attempts to stimulate innovative ideas among scholars in the field and to enable students to learn the Tamil language as a second language with greater ease and motivation. A qualitative research approach is employed in this study and primary data are collected by examining and analyzing Sinhala and Tamil grammatical books, discussing and consulting with native Tamil-speaking teachers, and through insights derived from practical experience in teaching Tamil as a second language. Secondary data are collected through internet sources and related articles. Findings of the study reveal that the Tamil language uses a specific number of suffixes that directly attach to nouns to form locative case, while Sinhala language heavily relies on postpositions that follow a noun in the accusative case to express the same nuanced spatial and relational meanings.

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Locative Case (*Uddēśa Vibhakti*), Second Language, Suffix, *Vibhakti*

INTRODUCTION

The term *vibhakti* originates from the root *bhaj* (to divide), prefixed with *vi-* and suffixed with the *krut -ktin* (or *-ti*), forming a feminine participle (*Kṛudanta*). In Pāli, it appears as *vibhatti*, while in Sinhala it is known as *vibat*. The phrase “*vibhajīyanti vibhattiyō*” means that *vibhakti* denotes the meaning ‘division’. As explained in the *Sidat Saṅgarāva*, “*namin para vā bedanu labanuyē vibath nam*”, *vibhakti* refers to the suffixes that divide the meaning of a base form of a noun into various semantic roles such as Nominative Case (Subject of sentence), Accusative Case (Object of action), Instrumental Case (Means by which action is done), etc. In other words, *vibhakti* represents the grammatical function that alters the role of nouns within a sentence. Particularly, grammatical function means the syntactic and semantic relationship between the noun and the verb in a sentence. (In Tamil, that linguistic term is known as இலக்கணத் தொழிற்பாடு, the grammatical operation indicating the sentence-level relation between a noun and a verb).

In contemporary Sri Lanka, bilingual practices fostering ethnic coexistence are highly valuable and should be appreciated. Numerous programs and initiatives, operating from grassroots to national levels, actively promote this bilingual tradition. However, over an extended period, several drawbacks can be observed in the

systematic, structured, and formalized guidance required for effective language education in this domain, both in terms of human resources and physical resources.

Sinhala native speakers learning Tamil as a second language frequently encounter significant difficulties, particularly with the application of case markers (*Vibhakti Prayōga*). When a Sinhala native speaker is directly translating their thoughts from Sinhala into Tamil, a clear understanding of Tamil case usage becomes crucial.

Research Objective

The study aims to comparatively examine the Locative Case (*Uddeśa Vibhakti*) in Tamil and its usage patterns in Sinhala, with the primary aim of substantially resolving many of the difficulties encountered in learning Tamil as a second language. Moreover, this research aims to provide new insights to the academicians and help the students to learn Tamil as a second language in a better and creative way.

Research Problem

The challenges faced by Sinhala native speakers for learning Tamil as a second language are quite many in number. A major problem in language is the use of the case markers (*Vibhakti Prayōga*) which are very crucial in Tamil grammar. These grammatical forms are often confused by second language learners, particularly because the case structure of Tamil is different from Sinhala in both structure and function. One of these case markers is a locative case (*Uddeśa Vibhakti*) which presents problems for Sinhala learners. These challenges often result in mistakes involving expressing location, position or spatial relationships in Tamil sentences. The purpose of this study is to analyze and contrast the locative case patterns of Tamil and Sinhalese and also attempt to find the reasons behind these problems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses a qualitative method to analyse and compare the pattern of locative case use in Sinhala and Tamil. The research methodology primarily involves the examination and analysis of grammatical texts related to both the Sinhala language and Tamil Language to understand the structural differences between the two languages. Moreover, discussions and consultations were conducted with native Tamil-speaking teachers to obtain expert opinions on common errors made by Sinhala learners. Further, insights were drawn from the researcher's practical experience in teaching Tamil as a second language to Sinhala native speakers in a State University of Sri Lanka, which provided valuable observations regarding the challenges encountered by learners in the use of the locative case.

Significance of the study

This study will help students overcome the complexities of learning Tamil case and make it easier not only in forming Tamil case but also with their usages.

Analysis of the Locative Case (இட வேற்றுமை / *Iṭa Vērrumai*) in Sinhala and Tamil

This is referred to in Tamil grammatical texts as the seventh case (ஏழாம் வேற்றுமை / *ēlām vērrumai*)¹. The *Nannūl*, a classical Tamil grammatical text, mentions twenty-eight (28) suffixes (*urupu*) associated with this case. In contemporary Tamil usage, only the suffixes இல் (*il* / -il, often realized as -இல் or -ல் in *sandhi*), இடம் (*iṭam*), and உள் (*uḷ* / -uḷ) are employed as markers for this case.

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However, in the grammatical work *Ilakkana Ccurekkam* (இலக்கணச் சுருக்கம்) by *Ārumuka Nāvalar*² (ஆறுமுகநாவலர்), the suffixes of the locative case are listed as கண் (*kaṇ*), இல் (*il*), உள் (*uḷ*), and இடம் (*iṭam*).

According to Tamil grammar, this case (the locative or seventh vibhakti) is applied in the following six semantic categories of nominal meanings:

1. பொருள் (*Poruḷ*) – substance / material / thing
2. இடம் (*Iṭam*) – place / location
3. காலம் (*Kālam*) – time
4. சினை (*Cinai*) – part / limb / component
5. குணம் (*Kuṇam*) – quality / attribute / property
6. தொழில் (*Toḷil*)³ – action / function / occupation / activity

These six elements constitute the primary semantic scope of the locative case, traditionally termed "place-meaning" or "locative sense" (இடப்பொருள் / *Iṭapporuḷ*).

This text extensively elucidates the ways in which the locative case (here called "Uddeśa Vibhakti" in Sinhala and "இட வேற்றுமை / *Iṭa Vēṭṭumai*" in Tamil) is expressed in the two languages. The analysis shows that there are two ways of distinguishing the two languages – Tamil is using the structural difference in the use of case markers and in Sinhala language postpositional phrase with the accusative case as the base is the distinguishing factor. Tamil Case Markers: The primary suffixes used in modern Tamil to express the locative case are:

1. இல் (*il*): A general locative marker.
2. இடம் (*iṭam*): Literally meaning "place," this suffix is frequently used, particularly with animate nouns (people, living beings).
3. உள் (*uḷ*): Meaning "inside," this suffix is often used for abstract concepts like qualities or emotions, or to mean "among."

Sinhala Equivalents: Sinhala lacks specific locative case suffixes as in the Tamil language. Instead, it uses a combination of the accusative case followed by various postpositions to convey the same meanings. The primary Sinhala postpositions discussed are:

1. ලඟා (*laṅga*), ගාලි (*gāva*): Nearby, with (a person).
2. ගෙනි (*gen*): From (a person).
3. ටා (*ṭa*), වෙත (*weta*), කරා (*karā*): To, towards.
4. මත (*mata*), මතේ (*piṭa*): On, upon.

² ஆறுமுகநாவலர், 2003 > பக்கம்-76

³ ஆறுமுகநாவலர் > 2003 > பக்கம்-76



5. තුළ (tuḷa): Inside, within.

6. අතර (atara), අතුරින් (aturin): Among, between.

Detailed Usage and Examples

The text systematically compares the usage of Tamil locative markers with their Sinhala equivalents through various examples.

1. Expressing Proximity or "To/At a Person" (Sinhala: වෙත/වෙතට/ලඟ/කරා weta/wetaṭa/laṅga/karā)

In Tamil, the suffix 'இடம்' (*iṭam*) is used to convey the idea of 'going to', 'being at', or 'being with' a person.

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
අප මාමා වෙත/වෙතට/ලඟට/කරා යා යුතුයි. (apa māmā weta/wetaṭa/laṅgaṭa/karā yā yutuya.)	We must go to (the place of) uncle.	நாங்கள் மாமாவிடம் போக வேண்டும்.
		(nāṅkaḷ māmāviṭam pōka vēṇṭum.)

2. Expressing Possession or Association ("With a Person")

The suffix இடம் (*iṭam*) is used to indicate that something is with a person (e.g., possession) or that a quality exists in them.

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
මගේ අම්මා ලඟ මුදල් නැත. (magē ammā laṅga mudal næta.)	My mother does not have money (Literal meaning: Money is not near my mother).	எனது அம்மாவிடம் பணம் இல்லை. (eṇatu ammāviṭam paṇam illai.)
මිතුරා ලඟ ලස්සන කාර් එකක් තිබේ. (miturā laṅga lassana kār ekak tibē.)	My friend has a beautiful car.	நண்பரிடம் ஓர் அழகான வாகணம் இருக்கின்றது. nanpariṭam ōr aḷakāṇa kār irukkīratu.

3. Expressing "Inside" or Abstract Location (Sinhala: තුළ - tuḷa)

The suffix உள்ள (*uḷ*) is preferred when referring to abstract qualities or emotions residing "within" a person, though இடம் (*iṭam*) is also common.

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
අම්මා තුළ කරුණාව නැත. (ammā tuḷa karuṇāwa næta.)	Mother doesn't have any compassion.	அம்மாவுள் கருணை இல்லை. (ammāvuḷ karuṇai illai.)

4. Expressing "From a Person" (Sinhala: ගෙන - gen)



The suffix இடம் (*iṭam*) is used to mean "from" a person, especially with verbs of asking, receiving, or buying.

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
මේ ගැන අම්මගෙන් අහන්න. (<i>mē gæna ammagen ahanna.</i>)	Ask mother about/for this.	இதைப் பற்றி அம்மாவிடம் கேளுங்கள். (<i>iṭaip parri ammāviṭam kēḷuṅkaḷ.</i>)

5. Expressing "Among" (Sinhala: අතුරින් - *aturin*)

The suffix உள் (*uḷ*) is used to mean "among" a group.

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
මේ පොත් අතුරින් හොඳ එක කුමක් ද? (<i>mē pot aturin honda eka kumak da?</i>)	Among these books, which is the good one?	இந்தப் புத்தகங்களுள் நல்லது எது? (<i>intap puttakaṅkaḷuḷ nallatu etu?</i>)

6. Expressing the Purpose of a Visit

The suffix இடம் (*iṭam*) is used for the person one intends to meet.

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
දමයන්ති හෙට අම්මා ලගා/වෙතට යන්නීය. (<i>Damayanti heṭa ammā laḡaṭa/wetaṭa yannīya.</i>)	Damayanti will go to her mother tomorrow.	தமயந்தி நாளை அம்மாவிடம் போவாள். (<i>Tamayanti nāḷai ammāviṭam pōvāḷ.</i>)

7. Expressing the Agent in Transactions (Sinhala: කරණ විභක්තිය / Instrumental Case)

For verbs like "take," "buy," or "receive," Tamil uses இடம் (*iṭam*) with or without the postposition இருந்து (*iruntu*) meaning "from." This corresponds to the Sinhala instrumental case suffix - ගෙන් (*-gen*).

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
මම හෙට ඔහුගෙන් මුදල් ලබා ගන්නෙමි. (<i>Mama heṭa ohugen mudal labā gannemi.</i>)	I will receive money from him tomorrow.	நான் நாளை அவரிடமிருந்து பணம் வாங்குவேன். (<i>nāṇ nāḷai avariṭamiruntu paṇam vāṅkuvēṇ.</i>)

⁴ This has likewise been shown to occur with the accusative case (*karmavibhakti*).

⁵ In Sinhala, the meanings conveyed by අතර / අතුරින් are primarily expressed in Tamil through the affix உள், although in certain environments the postposition இல் can also be found performing an analogous role.

Ex-

Among them, many will come today.

8. Expressing the Indirect Object (Sinhala: සම්ප්‍රදාන විභක්තිය / Dative Case)

When telling someone to do something for another person, the recipient is often in the locative case (இடம் / *iṭam*) in Tamil, corresponding to the Sinhala dative case suffix -ට (-*ta*).

Sinhala Sentence	English Meaning	Tamil Sentence
දුව මල්ලිට එන්න කියන්න. (<i>duva malliṭa enna kiyanna.</i>)	Tell (your) younger brother to come.	மகள் தம்பியிடம் வரச் சொல்லுங்கள். (<i>makaḷ tampiyiṭam varac colluṅkaḷ.</i>)

Summary of Sinhala -Tamil Locative Equivalents

Sinhala Postposition / Meaning	Tamil Case Marker(s)	Example Context
ලඟ (laṅga), වෙත (weta) - "at/near/to (a person)"	இடம் (<i>iṭam</i>)	Going to someone, being with someone.
ගෙන් (gen) - "from (a person)"	இடம் (<i>iṭam</i>) + (இருந்து <i>iruntu</i>)	Asking, receiving, buying from someone.
තුළ (tuḷa) - "inside (abstract)"	உள் (<i>uḷ</i>)	Qualities or emotions within a person.
අතුරින් (aturin) - "among"	உள் (<i>uḷ</i>)	Selecting from a group.
මත/පිට (mata/piṭa) - "on/upon"	இல் (<i>il</i>), இடம் (<i>iṭam</i>)	Responsibility resting on someone.
ට (<i>ta</i>), වෙත (weta) - "to (indirect object)"	இடம் (<i>iṭam</i>)	Telling or instructing someone.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the text demonstrates a basic difference in typology between Sinhala and Tamil. Tamil is a highly inflected Dravidian language, in which locative relationships are expressed by a set of locative case suffixes, which are simply appended to the noun word. The language Sinhala is a Indo-Aryan language and its grammar is very distinct, it uses a system of postpositions to express nuanced spatial and relational meanings that follow a noun in the accusative case. This comparison gives a deep understanding of the different morphological solutions adopted by the two languages to express comparable semantic notions.

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