

Metaphony,¹ or height harmony, in written Tamil and Malayalam

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எழுத்துத் தமிழ் மற்றும் மலையாளத்தில் உள்ள ஒலித்திரிபுகளைக் குறித்து இக்கட்டுரை அலசுகிறது. உயிரெழுத்துக்கள், காலம்தோறும் ஒலிமாற்றம் பெற்றுள்ளன. ஆதி திராவிட மொழியிலும், பிற்பாடு வந்த ஆதி தென்திராவிட மொழியிலும் பின்னர், சங்கத் தமிழிலும் இன்றைய எழுத்துத் தமிழிலும் மற்றும் மலையாளத்திலும் உயிரெழுத்துக்கள் ஒலிமாற்றம் பெறுவதைக் காணலாம். சங்க இலக்கியத்திலும் கல்வெட்டுக்களிலும் இதற்கான சான்றுகள் உள்ளன. இந்த மாற்றங்கள் நிகழ்ந்த விதம் குறித்தும், அதை மீட்டெடுக்கும் வழிமுறைகள் குறித்தும் இக்கட்டுரை அலசுகிறது. இறுதியில், பழந்தமிழுக்கும் மலையாளத்திற்கும் இடையிலான ஒலிமாற்றத்தையும் விளக்குகிறது.

The first thing anyone familiar with modern written Tamil as well as with classical Tamil will notice when he or she starts to learn spoken Tamil is that under certain circumstances the root vowels *i* and *u* are lowered to *e* and *o*. This change takes place before the derivational suffix *-a/ai* and when the radical vowels are followed by a single consonant only. Thus, for instance, *nilam* "earth" is pronounced *nelam* and *kuṭai* "parasol" is pronounced *koṭai*. The same situation is found in written and spoken Malayalam. As a result of this development, spoken Tamil and Malayalam seem to go back to the situation which existed in Proto-South-Dravidian (PSDr). That is to say, in Proto-South-Dravidian Proto-Dravidian (PDr) *i/uCa(i)* had become *e/oCa(i)*. In classical Tamil, and consequently in written Tamil as well as written Malayalam, *e/oCa(i)* changed back into *i/uCa(i)*. As a result we find PDr *iṭ-* > PSDr *eṭ-aju* "stumble", Kannada *eḍavu*, *eḍapu*, Tulu *eṭṭuni* but Tamil *iṭaju* and Malayalam *iṭajuka* and PDr *pur-* > PSDr *por-ay* "layer", Kannada *pore*, Telugu *pora* but Tamil *purai*. In modern spoken Tamil and Malayalam this *i/uCa(i)* thus changed back into *e/oCa(i)* yet again, as a result of which the situation of Proto-South-Dravidian was, as it were, restored.

At first it was assumed (or claimed) that with *i/uCa(i)* written Tamil and Malayalam represented the pre-Proto-South-Dravidian situation (For the earlier literature, see Krishnamurti 1958: 461, esp. note 7). Subsequently, however, Krishnamurti has convincingly shown that we are dealing with an

¹ In Tamil and Dravidian studies the phenomenon discussed in this article is known as metaphony. The term height harmony has been borrowed from Germanic philology.

1. The evidence from literary texts and inscriptions

As indicated, in classical and modern written Tamil *e* and *o* do not occur before *Ca(i)*-. Beside the long vowels *ā* (*āṭai* “dress”), *ī* (*īkai* “gift”), *ū* (*kūkai* “owl”), *ē* (*ēval* “command”) and *ō* (*ōlai* “palm-leaf”) in this context only *i* and *u* are found, as well as *a* (*akam* “interior”), though this is not relevant here. However, there are a few exceptions to this in classical Tamil, in particular in Caṅkam poetry (usually dated some time between the second century BC and the fourth century AD). Interestingly, most of the words concerned are found in modern written Tamil as well. The words in question may be divided into the following two categories. The first category consists of verbal nouns ending in *-ai* or *-al*, like *koṭai* “the act of giving” from *koṭu* “to give” and *ceyal* “the act of doing or making” from *cey* “to do or make”. Other words belonging to this category are *eṭai* “weight” (not found in Caṅkam poetry), *kolai* “the act of killing”, *noṭai* “price” and *poṭai* “forbearance”. A word of a slightly different make-up which might be included here is *celavu* “expenses” from *cel* “to go away”. Another word to be included here is the verb *tolai* “to waste”. This verb has probably been based on the verbal noun *tolai* from *tol* “old, ancient” as in the title of *Tol-kāppiyam* “the old poem”. The second category consists of the following words: *peyar* “name”, *peyar* “to go”, *peṭai* “female of animal”, *koṭar* “to bring”, *toṭaṅku* “to begin” and *toṭar* “to follow”.

Instances of *e/oCa* in Caṅkam Tamil and modern written Tamil

1) Verbal nouns

ceyal, *celavu*, (*eṭai*), *koṭai*, *ceyal*, *kolai*, *noṭai*, *poṭai*, *tolai* etc.

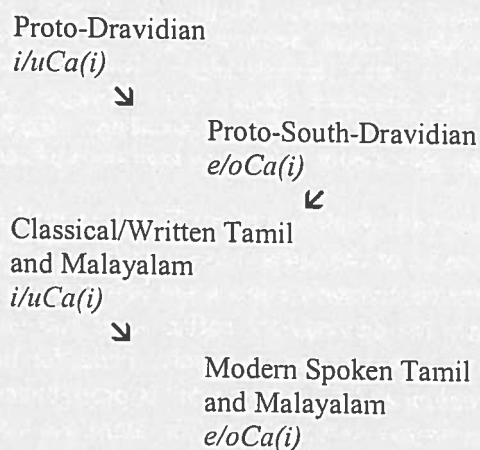
2) A limited group of words

peyar, *peṭai*, *koṭar*, *toṭaṅku*, *toṭar*.

The survival of these two groups of exceptions in modern written Tamil has not been explicitly discussed anywhere so far. Apparently, it is something that is taken for granted. Modern written Tamil is indeed an artificial language, of which classical Tamil was one of the main sources. However, if in the strictly literary tradition, for instance, *toṭaṅku* “to begin” has remained unchanged from the period of Caṅkam poetry down to modern written Tamil, this is not the case in inscriptions. In inscriptions, as we shall see, *tuṭaṅku* is occasionally found as well.

The earliest Tamil inscriptions are the so-called Tamil-Brahmī inscriptions (Mahadevan 2003, Tieken forthc.^a). These are short texts, mostly

independent sound change in which *e/oCa(i)* from *i/uCa(i)* become *i/uCa(i)* again (Krishnamurti 1958). According to Bright (1966: 312) it is not impossible that the mid vowels in the modern spoken languages are actually survivals from the Proto-South-Dravidian period. However, Bright restricts the phenomenon to only some spoken varieties of Tamil, while it is actually widespread in Tamilnadu (Tamil) as well as in Kerala (Malayalam). Generally, the state of affairs in the modern spoken languages is presented as the outcome of a series of discrete, consecutive steps (Krishnamurti 2003: 101-105), which may be presented in the following schematic way:



What calls for particular comment in this going back and forth from *e/o* to *i/u* to *e/o* again is the fact that classical and written Tamil and Malayalam separate, like a wedge, modern spoken Tamil and Malayalam from Proto-South-Dravidian. In this connection it should also be noted that as far as written Tamil is concerned only part of the available material has been taken into account so far. Thus, the evidence provided by inscriptions has not been considered at all. In fact, the picture emerging from the inscriptions appears to be less regular than that from the literary texts which have been used so far. I will therefore take a closer look at the situation in the written language, classical as well as modern. In so doing I will focus, in the first place on Tamil, which was the first of the two languages concerned to develop a written variety. Only at the end will I come back to Malayalam. In what follows I intend to show that with the forms with the raised vowels we might well have to do with learned forms introduced in the literary language, which are supposed to correct a presumably careless pronunciation in the spoken language.

1. The evidence

As indicated, in classical Tamil the vowel *e* occurs before *Ca(i)-*. Before *Ca(i)-* the vowel *e* is found in *kūkai* "owl", *ē* (only *i* and *u* are relevant here). However, in particular in Classical Tamil (5th century BC and onwards) the vowels concerned are found in a number of verbal nouns e.g. *cey* "to give" and *cey* "forbearance". Other words belong to the *Ca(i)-* class (Caṅkam poetry) "forbearance". A number of words are included here is *peyar* "to bring" based on the verbal noun *kāppiyam* "the act of bringing": *peyar* "to bring", *tuṭaṅku* "to bring"

Instances of

1) Verbal

ceyal, *cey*

2) A limit

peyar, *p*

The survival of *e* in Classical Tamil has not been taken into account in something that is an artificial language. However, if in the spoken language *e* has remained uncorrected in written Tamil, then we can see, *tuṭaṅku* is o

The early inscriptions (Me

found outside or inside natural caves in Tamilnadu which served as retreats for monks. A majority of the inscriptions mention simply the monks' patron who was responsible for making the cave fit for habitation during the rainy season. Often this involved cutting a rim in the overhanging rock which served as a dripping ledge, thus preventing the water from flowing down the rock into the cave. In addition, beds were cut in the floor of some of the caves for the monks to rest on. The Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions are dated between the second century BC and the fourth century AD and are thus approximately contemporaneous with Caṅkam poetry. The linguistic material of the inscriptions is restricted, consisting mainly of names and titles. Interestingly, as far as *i/uCa-* and *e/oCa-* is concerned, there are traces of what may be interpreted as hesitation on the part of the scribes or engravers about the orthography of the words in question. Thus, while in some inscriptions one may find *īla-* "young" (in *īlaṅkaṭṭiṅkō* "name of a prince of the Irumporai dynasty", *īlaṅkāyipaṇ* "name of a Jaina monk", *īlaṅkō* "prince, heir apparent", *īlaṅcaṭṭikaṇ*, "name of the son of Caṭṭikaṇ" and *īlaṅātaṇ* "name of a donor") and *īlayar* "young person, title of a member of a martial clan" (Mahadevan 2003: 645, 662), in others we find *eḷa* (in *eḷacantaṇ*, *eḷamakaṇ* and *eḷa-a aṭaṇ*). The equation of *eḷai* in *eḷai-y-ūr* with *ītai* "middle or the herdsman caste" is uncertain. Mahadevan 2003: 663). Similarly we find *pokal(ḷ)* "fame" beside *pukal(ḷ)* (Mahadevan 2003: 668). The vocabulary of the inscriptions includes one of the words of the above list of exceptions, namely *poṭṭai* in the royal title *perumpoṭṭai*. However, beside *perumpoṭṭai* in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions from Pugalur and on some copper coins of the same dynasty, *perumpuṭṭai* is found as well (Mahadevan 2003: 669).

The picture emerging from inscriptions dating from the sixth to eighth centuries, mainly inscriptions of the Pallava dynasty, is similar. Thus, beside *peyar* "name" occasionally *piyar* is found, beside *celavu* "expense" *cilavu*, beside *koṇarntu* "having brought" *kuṇarntu* and beside *kolai* "killing", in *kolaikkaḷiṇu* "murderous elephant", *kulai* (Velu Pillai 1976: 3, 6). In inscriptions from the ninth century *piyar*, *iṅakku* ("for me"), *tuṭaṅki(y)*, *kuṇa(r)ntu* and *kuṇarnta* are found alongside the forms with the mid vowels (Velu Pillai 1976: 140, 143); for the tenth century *piyar*, *cilavu*, *iṅakku*, *kuṇa(r)ntu*, *tuṭaṅkiṇa*, *tuṭara* are found alongside *peyar* etc. (Velu Pillai 1976: 358, 361-362); for the eleventh century *piyar*, *cilavu*, *tuṭaṅki(ya)*, *tuṭar* and *tuṭai* ("thigh") alongside *peyar* etc. (Velu Pillai 1976: 594, 599-601); and for the twelfth century, beside most of the words already quoted above, *kulaitara* (*kolaitara* "to disperse"), *tulaiyāta* (*tolaiyāta* "which is not coming

to an end") and *tu* (857). A study of 1 yielded the follow *tukay/tokay*, *tuṭa* Shanmugam 1970:

Instances of written Tamil have

6th to 8th ce
piyar, *cila*

9th century
piyar, *celu*

10th centu
piyar, *cila*

11th centu
piyar, *cila*

12th centu
piyar, *cil*
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1250 to 1
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to an end”) and *tuṭai* (*toṭai* “continuity”) (Velu Pillai 1976: 850, 852, 856-857). A study of the Tamil inscriptions from the period 1250 to 1350 has yielded the following instances: *cilavu/celavu*, *iṅakku/enakku*, *iṭay/eṭay*, *tukay/tokay*, *tuṭaṅku/toṭaṅku* and *tuṭar/toṭar* (Agesthalingom and Shanmugam 1970: 25-26).

Instances of *i/uCa* in the inscriptions where Caṅkam and modern written Tamil have *e/oCa*

6th to 8th century (Velu Pillai 1976: 3, 6)

piyar, *cilavu*, *kuṇarntu*, *kulaikkaḷiṇu*

9th century (Velu Pillai 1976: 140, 143)

piyar, *celavu*, *iṅakku*, *kuṇa(r)ntu*, *kuṇa(r)nta*, *tuṭaṅki(y)*

10th century (Velu Pillai 1976: 358, 361-362)

piyar, *cilavu*, *iṅakku*, *kuṇarntu*, *tuṭaṅkiṇa*, *tuṭara*

11th century (Velu Pillai 1976: 594, 599-601)

piyar, *cilavu*, *tuṭaṅkiya*, *tuṭaṅki*, *tuṭar*, *tuṭarvōm*, *tuṭai*

12th century (Velu Pillai 1976: 850, 852, 856-857)

piyar, *cilavu*, *iṅakku*, *iṭai*, *kuṇa(r)ntu*, *tuṭara*, *tuṭarntu*, *tuṭaṅki*, *tuṭai*, *kulaitara*, *tulaiyāta*

1250 to 1350 (Agesthalingom and Shanmugam 1970: 25-26)

cilavu, *iṅakku*, *iṭay*, *tukay*, *tuṭaṅku*, *tuṭar*

It is to be noted that in inscriptions instances of the reverse development, namely of *e/o* for *i/u*, are also found. Thus, beside *eḷa* and *pokal(ḷ)* in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions (for which, see above), *eṭattu* (for *iṭattu*) has been attested, as well as *oṭaṅ* (*uṭaṅ*) and *ponal* (*punaḷ*) (Velu Pillai 1976: 140, 143). The latter three forms are found in inscriptions from the sixth to eighth centuries.

The inscriptions, in which *cilavu* and *tuṭaṅku* are found side by side with *celavu* and *toṭaṅku*, differ in this respect from the literary tradition, from which such variation seems to be almost completely absent. This is curious, as the inscriptions were most likely written by the same scribes who wrote literary texts (Tieken 2006). In this connection, however, we should take into account the nature of the various sources. Thus, an inscription is available in the form in which it was written down by scribe X on, for instance, 1st May, 876. By contrast, literary texts have come down to us

through an endless series of copies of copies. Each new copy provided ample occasion for corrections or for adaptation to what was considered the norm within the literary tradition. At the same time it should be noted that the situation in the literary tradition might not have been as uniform as all that. For instance, in later texts, like Kampan's *Irāmāvatāram*, one may come across *tuṭaṅku* beside *toṭaṅku*. Unfortunately, the situation in medieval Tamil texts has not as yet been studied in this respect. The same applies to inscriptions which date from after the middle of the fourteenth century.

2. Reconsidering the sequence of developments

Krishnamurti (1958: 465-466) considered the so-called exceptions found in Caṅkam poetry as fossils from Proto-South Dravidian. However, this explanation does not seem to account for the occurrence in the same poetry of the verb *tuṭakku* "to tie, bind, bring together". This verb most likely goes back, through *tuṭa<r>kku*, to the verb *toṭar*, found in Caṅkam poetry as well. In addition, Krishnamurti's explanation is based on the dating of Caṅkam poetry between the second century BC and the fourth century AD. However, in recent publications, I have questioned this early date and tried to show that Caṅkam poetry most probably originated only from the eighth or ninth century AD (Tieken 2001, 2003, 2004 and forthc.^b). Old Tamil Caṅkam poetry is generally dated in the period described in the poems, which is an early bardic society. I have tried to show that Caṅkam poetry should be dated not in the period it describes but in a period after that, the poems evoking a society which at the time already belonged to the past. My dating of the poems in the eighth or ninth century is based on the use of the Tamil language in the poems for the depiction of, among other things, local history as against all-Indian mythological history. A similar use of Tamil is also met with in the inscriptions of the Pandyas of the eighth or ninth century, and only in the inscriptions of that particular dynasty. Thus, these inscriptions contain two genealogical accounts of the Pandyas, one in Sanskrit tracing them back to a mythological past, the other in Tamil which by contrast provides concrete, local history. If Caṅkam poetry does indeed belong only to the eighth or ninth century, this would mean that after a period of variation in the inscriptions between, for instance, the spellings *peyar* and *piyar* and *toṭar* and *tuṭar* in Caṅkam poetry, the matter was settled in favour of the former spellings. Subsequently such "exceptions" as *peyar* and *toṭar* have come to be considered as typical of the literary idiom.

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In section 3, I will come back to the ideas which might have played a role in the option of, for instance, *koṭai* "the act of giving" instead of *kuṭai* in Caṅkam poetry. First I would like to discuss another matter. From the material described above (section 1) it becomes evident that in the written sources the tendency was clearly and strongly towards the raising of *e/o* before *Ca(i)*. Nevertheless, over a period of more than a thousand years, the variants with the mid vowels kept on appearing, such as *pokal(ḷ)* in the Tamil-Brahmī inscriptions, *eṭattu*, *oṭaṇ* and *poṇal* in eighth-century inscriptions (Velu Pillai 1976: 138-139) (and *toṭar* in Caṅkam poetry). It would seem that in the latter cases we are dealing with isolated interferences in a fairly stable situation. All this time the two forms, namely those with the high (e.g. *utavi* "help") and mid vowels (*otavi*), seem to have existed side by side. In any case, the scribes appear to have been conscious of the fact that *i/u* in *i/uCa(y)* could represent *e/o* and *vice versa*. The length of the period during which this situation applied, from the beginning of our era if not earlier, to the middle of the fourteenth century, is striking. Despite the lack of information on the interchange of *i/uCa(i)* and *e/ocCa(i)* in texts and inscriptions of the period from the fourteenth century to the present time, it is tempting to conclude that from the beginning of the written tradition onwards the situation has never been very different from that of modern Tamil, in which we find *utavi* in the written language and *otavi* in the spoken variety.

3. An attempt at a reconstruction of the situation

Rather than with two consecutive situations we seem to be dealing with two developments existing side by side. The question then arises in which domain each of the two variants has to be situated. In this connection it is to be noted that it is not very likely that we are dealing with forms of different dialects as this would assume that the relation between the dialects concerned had remained the same for more than a millennium. This is unlikely as during this period the political situation changed repeatedly, different regions becoming prominent with each change. To ascribe the forms with the vowels *i/u* to the spoken language would not really make sense either. In any case, the forms with *i/u* did not belong there in the beginning of the development (during the formation of Proto-South Dravidian) or at the end (modern spoken Tamil). In fact, in the light of the present-day situation it is tempting to take the raised forms as typical of the written language and the ones with the low vowels as interferences from the spoken language.

The forms with the high vowels may have been introduced as learned formations in the fabrication of which etymology or derivation could have played a role. Thus, *iṭam* “place” rather than *eṭam* as it was derived from *itū* “to place” and, *vice versa*, *eṭai* “weight” and not *iṭai* as it was derived from *eṭu* “to take up”. In this way, forms like *eṭam* could have come to be considered as the careless pronunciations of illiterate speakers unfamiliar with grammatical concepts which, in such forms, were not considered fit to be used in the written language.

As to the supposed role of etymology or derivation in the fabrication of the written forms such as *iṭam*, it should be noted that the beginning of written Tamil was accompanied by sophisticated linguistic speculation. This becomes clear from the orthography, which takes into account the rule in Tamil known as the “convertibility of surds and sonants” (Burrow 1939, Krishnamurti 2003: 144-150). This rule implies that for the Tamil plosives the distinction between voiced (sonants) and voiceless (surds) is not phonemic. The voiced and voiceless plosives are in complementary distribution. Thus, /k/ occurs initially (*kātal* “love”) and doubled (*akkā* “elder sister, elderly female”); /g/ occurs only after a nasal (*taṅgai* “younger sister”) and between vowels, when it was actually pronounced /ɣ/. Typically, when in the second century BC the North-Indian Brāhmī alphabet was adopted for Tamil, the letters for the voiced plosives (e.g. *g* in *gihatha* “householder”) were ignored. Thus, (*taṅgai*) was written as *taṅkai* and (*aḡam*) “interior” as *akam*. While, only recently, this situation in the Tamil-Brāhmī inscriptions was taken as an indication that there were no voiced plosives in Old Tamil (Mahadevan 2003: 247-251), comparative evidence clearly suggests that there were. If so, the orthographic practice of Tamil testifies to an advanced knowledge of the grammar of Tamil on the part of the first scribes who developed the written form of that language. We may therefore assume that these scribes were also familiar with a process like derivation and knew how this worked in the case of Tamil.

While in the case of words like *koṭai* “the act of giving” instead of *kuṭai* it might not be hard to imagine the role of derivation, it is admittedly less clear in the other category of words, namely *peṭai*, *peyar*, *toṭar*, *toṭaiṅku* and *koṇar*. The influence of derivation is in retrospect difficult to establish without a certain degree of arbitrariness. Thus, in the case of *peṭai* “female of animal” (modern Tamil *peṭṭai*) its relation with *peṇ* “female, daughter” might have played a role, which would have been lost with the spelling *piṭai*.

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4. Malayalam

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The word *peyar* “name” may have been retained in the written language to maintain a connection with *pēr* “person” (for the development of the meaning, compare Sanskrit *nāma* “name” in *nāmarūpa* “name and form, individual”) and the verb *peyar* “to go” to maintain a connection with *pēr* “to move”. However, in that case it is not clear why next to *vēr* “sweat” we do not have **veyar* instead of *viyar*. In the case of *toṭar* and *toṭaṅku* the idea that both words are somehow related to *toṭu* “to touch, come into contact with, begin” might also have played a role and in the case of *koṇar* the supposed derivation of the word from the combination *koṇṭu* + *var*.

4. Malayalam

The discussion has so far been restricted to Tamil. As noted above, the same situation that is found in Tamil, with *i/uCa(i)* in the written language and *e/oCa(i)* in the spoken language, is found in Malayalam as well. Tamil and Malayalam are offshoots of Proto-Tamil-Malayalam and the division of the two languages may go back to prehistoric times (Govindankutty 1972). Written Malayalam, however, goes back only to the ninth century AD (the Vāzappaḷli inscription). The first literary work, the *Rāmacaritam*, dates from approximately the twelfth century (Krishnamurti 2003: 22). As to the agreement of written classical Malayalam with Tamil on the point of the adoption of *i/uCa(i)* instead of *e/oCa(i)* it should be noted that Kerala developed writing and a written literature only under the influence of the east-coast culture of Tamilnadu. This process of acculturation is referred to in inscriptions and is the topic of literary legend and literary texts. Thus, an inscription by the west-coast Āy king Karunaṭakkan (ninth century) refers to the endowment of a college for Vedic students. The students were admitted only after they had passed an entrance test in subjects like the “laws and custom of the land of the three kingdoms”. The “land of the three kingdoms” is Tamilnadu (Tieken 2001: 134); in a commentary on the poetical treatise *Akapporuḷ* an account is given of the transmission of the commentary. Composed by Nakkīrār in Madurai in Tamilnadu the commentary was handed down from teacher to pupil, to arrive finally in Muciṛi, a harbour town in Kerala (Tieken 2001: 202); and the topic of the epic *Cilappatikāram* is the adoption by the west-coast rulers of the cult of Pattiṇi, a goddess who had proved her efficacy in Tamilnadu (Tieken 2001: 202-208).

5. Conclusion

The above is an attempt to account for the curious state of affairs in written Tamil and Malayalam. In the written varieties the development of *i/ucCa(i)* to *e/oCa(i)*, which took place in Proto-South-Dravidian and which seems to have survived in the modern spoken languages has been, as it were, reversed. So far, the various forms have been placed one after the other as a result of subsequent, historical developments: Proto-Dravidian *i/ucCa(i)* > Proto-South-Dravidian *e/oCa(i)* > (classical) written Tamil/Malayalam *i/ucCa(i)* > Modern Spoken Tamil/Malayalam *e/oCa(i)*. However, this explanation does not properly account for the existence during almost the entire period of the two forms side by side, *i/ucCa(i)* and *e/oCa(i)*. By way of alternative it has been argued that the forms with the high vowels present an artificial spelling introduced into the written language. Etymological speculation may have played a role in their fabrication in combination with notions of correct, careful pronunciation. In this connection it should be noted that written Tamil (and Malayalam) had to vie with Sanskrit, a learned and in many ways artificial language, which had become completely detached from the spoken languages and was carefully kept apart from them. Sanskrit was the language par excellence of the textual tradition in India. It was only at the end of the first millennium that the so-called vernaculars came to be used as written languages as well. For this they had to be fitted out with grammars and ancient literary traditions, just like Sanskrit. A case in point of such an ancient literary tradition is Cankam poetry, which evokes a society in which wandering bards sang the kings' praises in Tamil. Subsequently these new literary languages were preserved just as carefully as Sanskrit, and kept apart from the spoken languages. This may account for the conservative appearance of modern written Tamil with which, leaving aside the problems of technical vocabulary, it is indeed possible to read eighth-century inscriptions.

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