

## TA:N – A REFLEXIVE PRONOUN?

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In his book, 'A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South – Indian Family of Languages', Caldwell introduces the pronoun, *ta:n*, as the reflexive pronoun 'self', and proceeds thus: "The Dravidian pronouns of the third person are, properly speaking, demonstratives, not personal pronouns; and they will, therefore, be investigated under a subsequent and separate head. The pronoun which is now under consideration is entitled to a place amongst personal pronouns, because it possesses all their characteristics, and is declined precisely in the same manner. It corresponds in meaning to the Sanskrit *svayam*, to the defective Greek  $\epsilon\grave{\iota}$  (*he*) and the Latin *sui, sibi, se*; with a range of application which is more extensive than theirs. It may almost, indeed, be regarded as a pronoun of the third person, seeing that, when it stands alone as the nominative of a verb, the verb with which it agrees must always be in third person" (1974: 395). Though Caldwell notices the qualities of a third person pronoun in *ta:n* he calls it a reflexive pronoun. In fact the Western grammarians have been responsible for projecting *ta:n* as a reflexive pronoun, and this in turn has led scholars to consider reflexivization in terms of the occurrence of *ta:n* or its oblique form *tan* in a sentence. Before considering whether it is proper to recognise reflexivization in terms of the presence of the pronoun, *ta:n/tan*, in a sentence the appropriateness of naming *ta:n* as a reflexive pronoun should be questioned.

Though the traditional grammars like *Tolka:ppiyam* (659), *Ne:minatam* (59), *Muttuvi:riyam* (496 & 497), *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* (183) and *Nannu:l* (282) have mentioned the forms *ta:n* and *ta:m* they have just listed them as the nouns common to both rationalities. After giving a brief list of all such nouns, these books take them in groups and mention their specific characteristics. *Tolka:ppiyam* (669, 670) and *Muttuvi:riyam* (496, 497), just say that *ta:n* is singular and *ta:m* is plural. *Nannu:l* and *Ilakkaṇa Viḷakkam* say thus:

*tanmai ya:n na:n ya:m na:m munṇilai*

*elli:r ni:yir ni:vir ni:r ni:*

*allaṇa paṭarkkai ella:m enal potu (NAN: 285; IV: 187)*

*ta:n ya:n na:n ni: orumai paṇmai ta:m*

*ya:m na:m ela:m eli:r ni:yir ni:r ni:vir (NAN: 287; IV: 189)*

The term, *allana* in the first cu:tra: denotes *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* as can be inferred from *Nannu:l* cu:tra: 282 and *Ilakkana Viḷakkam* cu:tra: 183. *Nannu:l* and *Ilakkana Viḷakkam* say that *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* are third person pronouns and are singular and plural respectively.

None of these works state explicitly whether *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* are normal third person pronoun like the other first and second person pronouns, viz: *ya:n̄*, *na:n̄*, *ya:m*, *na:m*, *ni:yir*, *ni:vir*, *ni:r* and *ni:*, or not; neither do these call these pronouns 'reflexive' pronouns or with some other name which would come to mean it; but treating *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* together with the first and second person pronoun makes one suspect whether *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* would have been the original third person pronouns. The quotation from Caldwell which is given in the beginning of this work is to be remembered at this point. He says that the third person pronouns (like *avan̄*, *avaḷ*, *atu*, etc.) are actually demonstrative pronoun, and that there is no pronoun to fill the third person slot in the personal pronouns paradigm. This sort of a statement further instigates one to think that *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* were the third person pronouns at one stage and later the demonstrative forms like *avan̄/avaḷ/atu*, etc. would have taken the place of the third person pronouns.

This supposition is not altogether new. There are other scholars who recognise *ta:n̄* as the third person pronoun. Prof. S.V. Shanmugam (1971) has listed *ta:n̄* and *ta:m* as third person singular and plural nouns respectively (p:191). He further says thus: "There is no serious problem in the reconstruction of *\*ta:n̄* (sg.nom.), *\*taṇ* – (sg. obl.) *\*ta:m* (pl.nom) and *\*tam* (pl.obl) to the PDr. These forms are used not only as the third person but also as reflexive pronouns in many languages and so both the meanings might have developed in PDr also. The usage of the third person and reflexive can be illustrated from OTa" (p:192). The reflexive function of *ta:n̄* is under question; moreover *Kuruntokai* verse 25 acts as a good example where *ta:n̄* is used as a third person pronoun in the nominative case:

1. *ya:rum illai ta:n̄e kaḷavan̄*  
*ta:n̄atu poyppin̄ ya:n̄evan̄ ceyko:*  
*tiṇaitta:ḷ anna cirupacuṇ ka:la*  
*oḷukuni:r a:ral pa:rkkum*  
*kurukum un̄tu ta:n̄ mananta ña:n̄re:*

In this verse, there is no noun, which can be said to be referred to by these pronouns, that can be posited even at the deep level. Hence *ta:ṅ* occurs in the nominative case in just the same way as the first and second person pronouns can occur. In this verse, even if, *ta:ṅ* is replaced by *avan* in the three places there is no change in the meanings.

Therefore it can be quite safely suggested that *ta:ṅ* was originally used in the same manner as the pronouns *avan*, *avaḷ*, *atu*, etc. except that the former was not distinguished as regards gender and distance (like remoteness and proximity) like the latter. Later *ta:ṅ* must have lost its nominative status to the demonstrative pronouns and more than that, instead of being recognised as a third person pronoun, it has become identified as a reflexive pronoun.

One more place where *ya:–/e–*, *ni:–/nu–/ṅa:–* and *ta:–/ta–* is seen to occur consistently as first, second and third person roots is the case of contracted genitive phrases that indicate ‘one’s so and so’: *entai*, *nuntai*, and *tantai*: *ya:y*, *ṅa:y* and *ta:y*; *emar*, *numar*, and *tamar*. Instances from Old Tamil are:

2. *ta:maraiṭ pu:vinuḷ piranto:ṅum ta:taiyum*

‘(Brahma) the one who was born in lotus and his father’

(*Paripa:ṭal* 3-13).

3. *ti:mperum poykai ya:mai yiḷampa:rpput*

*ta:ymuka no:kki valarntici ṅa:ṅku*

‘Like how the young of a tortoise grows by looking towards (its) mothers face’.

(*Aiṅkurunu:ru*:44)

It may be said that in *ta:tai* and *ta:y*, the third person possessive meaning is guessed from the context, (i.e.) the pronoun, *taṅ*, may be a deleted one, then the same argument will apply for the terms like *ya:y*, *entai*, etc. It may also be argued that the terms like *ta:y* do occur with possessive nouns/pronouns like *viṭalai ta:y* (youth’s mother; *Aiṅkurunu:ru*, 373) and hence the root, *ta:–* cannot be assigned the third person pronoun meaning, then the same problem would arise in assigning the first person pronoun meaning to the root, *ya:*, because the term, *ya:y* also occurs with the first person possessive pronoun:

4. *ahtu en ya:ykku uraittanen alleno:*

'I told that to my mother already'

(*Aiñkurunu:ru:* 280)

Therefore it seems justifiable to accept *ya:—/e—*, *ni:—/ nu:—/ñā:—* and *ta:—/ta—* as the first, second and third person pronoun roots respectively.

Is it proper to say that *ta:n* performs the reflexive function in sentences? If the reflexive sentences concerning the three persons are noted, it will become quite clear why it is not proper to consider *ta:n* as a reflexive pronoun:

5. *na:n ennai aittukkoṅṅe:n*

'I beat myself'

6. *ni: unnai aittukkoṅṅa:y*

'You beat yourself'

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|----|--|----------------------|--|
| 7. | <i>avan</i><br><i>aval</i><br><i>atu</i> | <i>tannai aittuk</i> | <i>koṅṅa:n</i><br><i>koṅṅa:!</i><br><i>koṅṅatu</i> |
|    | He<br>She<br>It                          | beat                 | himself<br>herself<br>itself                       |

In all these sentences, it can be seen that the respective personal 'oblique forms + ai' are used to refer to the subject; but all the sentences are obviously reflexive sentences. If this is the case, how could it be justified if the oblique pronominal form, *tan*, alone is called as the reflexive pronoun? It is just that *tannai* occurs as a referential pronoun just as how *ennai* and *unnai* occur as referential pronouns for the first and second person pronouns respectively.

This can be further noted in the following examples also:

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|----|---|-------------------------------|--|
| 8. | <i>na:n</i><br><i>ni:</i><br><i>avan/aval</i> | <i>'na:n varukire:n' enru</i> | <i>conne:n</i><br><i>conna:y</i><br><i>conna:n</i><br><i>conna:!</i> |
|----|---|-------------------------------|--|

9.  $\begin{bmatrix} na:n \\ ni: \\ avan \\ aval \end{bmatrix}$   $\begin{bmatrix} na:n \\ ni: \\ ta:n \\ ta:n \end{bmatrix}$  *varuvata:kac*  $\begin{bmatrix} conne:n \\ conna:y \\ conna:n \\ conna:l \end{bmatrix}$

Hence it can be seen that *ta:n* is just a third person referential pronoun. The only difference is that, in Modern Tamil *ta:n* does not occur in the nominative case in an independent sentence just as how *na:n*, *ni:* and *avan* occur; but it occurs in almost all the other places where *avan*, *aval* and *atu* occur with one more exception: it does not occur unless the antecedent functions as the subject of the sentence:

10. *ira:man manai viyo:tu*  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} avan \\ *tan \end{array} \right\}$  *kulantaikaalum*  
*po:na:rka:l.*

'Raman's children also went along with his wife'.

Besides this, the use of *ta:n* and *tan* avoids ambiguity in sentences:

11. *ra:man avanatu annan vi:ttukkuppo:y*  
*avanatu puttakaikalai vaitta:n*

'Raman went to his elder brother's house and kept his books'.

Both the referential pronouns are ambiguous in this example: *avanatu annan* can mean either 'Raman's elder brother' or 'Someone's (other than Raman's) elder brother', while *avanatu puttakaikal* can mean either 'Raman's, Raman's elder brother's or someone's books'. If *tan* is placed instead of *avanatu* there will be no ambiguity; *tan* will only denote 'Raman' and nobody else. This too further indicates that *ta:n* is a subject oriented referential noun.

At this point, it is clear that *ta:n* is not a reflexive pronoun. It is just a referential pronoun; but there are two or three differences between *avan* and *ta:n*, the main one being that *ta:n* does not occur in the nominative case in an independent sentence while *avan* does. Due to this difference, Dr. Kumaraswami Raja calls the process of replacing a particular noun with *ta:n* as *tanization* and replacing a noun with other pronouns as *pronominalization*.

Once it is clear that it is not proper to call *ta:n* as a reflexive pronoun, it automatically becomes clear that it is not proper to recognise reflexivization in terms of the presence of *ta:n/tan* in a sentence. It would be suitable to recollect the definition of reflexivization that has been used in an earlier article of the present author: "A Reflexive voice is one in which the agent undergoes the effect of his own action; this necessitates that the agent and the patient must be coreferential; moreover the agent and the patient must be in the same simple sentence and the verb of the sentence must be transitive,

*ra:tai ra:taiyai tiṭṭina:!* ⇒  
*ra:tai tannait tiṭṭikkonṭa:!*

In Tamil, when a sentence is in the reflexive voice, two transformations are applied to the deep sentence: (1) the coreferential patient is replaced by the corresponding pronominal form; (2) the auxiliary, *ko!*, is added to the verb". (cf. Thilagawathi, 1981: 114). The auxiliary, *ko!*, should be added before introducing the referential pronoun.

It can be seen that this definition gives prime importance to the semantic aspect of reflexivization, i.e., if the Agent and Patient are coreferential then the corresponding sentence would be in the reflexive voice. The replacement of the second equip-NP by the corresponding oblique form and the introduction of *ko!* are surface manifestations of reflexivization.

It is to be noted that this definition does not give the reflexive status to sentences such as:

12. *avan ko:pattil tan kaiyaik kaṭittuk konṭa:n*  
'He bit his own hands in anger'.
13. *na:n enakku oru caṭṭai va:nṅkik konṭe:n*  
'I bought a dress for myself'.

In the first instance, the exact coreferential requirement between the Agent and Patient is not met; moreover the referential pronoun occurs as an attributive to the object and hence it occurs in a different sentence:

14. *avan tan kaiyaik kaṭittuk konṭa:n*  
*avan kaiyaik kaṭitta:n: kai avanuṭaiyatu.*

(cf. *ibid*:115-116)

In the second case, the agent is not directly affected by the action of buying; the agent is the indirect beneficiary.

To sum up, one would do justice to the term reflexivization if it is strictly used for those instances where the one directly affected by an action is the doer of the action himself/herself/itself. It will be misleading to identify reflexive sentences by the presence of the pronoun *ta:n* or *tan* in them; this fact will be well understood if the theme of this article is borne in mind: *ta:n* is just a third person singular referential, and not a reflexive, pronoun.

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