

Tamil, Step by Step, Root by Root

An etymology-driven curriculum, built one word at a time

Adhithya Rajasekaran

This edition compiled incrementally — new chapters added as they are written.

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Preface

This book teaches Tamil one word at a time, and it teaches each word by taking it apart. It is written for someone starting from zero — who may not read a single Tamil letter — so the script is taught *inside the word lessons themselves*: each word introduces exactly the letters it needs, so you learn to read **வணக்கம்** *and* learn that it means “greetings” in the same few minutes. There is no alphabet drill to sit through first.

Many readers will not be starting from zero at all. If you grew up speaking Tamil at home and never studied it — fluent in the language, hesitant with the letters, never once told *why* any of it works the way it does — this book is written for you as well. Skim the “letters in this word” notes for the handful of shapes you are unsure of, and read the rest for the grammar and the history nobody sat you down and explained.

Tamil rewards this depth more than most languages. It is the oldest-attested of the **Dravidian** tongues — a family entirely separate from the Indo-European one that gave us English, Latin, and Sanskrit — and it is famously protective of its own word-stock. Again and again you will find Tamil keeping a home-grown word (**வணக்கம்** *vaṇakkam*, “hello”; **நன்றி** *nanṇṛi*, “thanks”) where its sisters Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam reached for a Sanskrit one. So each lesson sets the word beside its cousins across the family — English always, and Sanskrit, Hindi, and the other Dravidian languages where they illuminate — every form supplied in full, so no prior knowledge of any of them is assumed.

How to use this book

Every numbered section is one word, or one small phrase, and takes a few minutes — the length of a queue, an errand, or the walk to the bus. Read them in order the first time through: each section stands on the ones before it, and nothing is used before it has been taught. After that the book becomes reference, and you can open it anywhere.

Say the Tamil out loud wherever you can. The prompts under *Your turn* are written to be spoken, and saying a word is most of what makes it stay. The questions under *Before you move on* carry their own answers in brackets: cover them, answer from memory, then look.

Nothing here is gated behind the alphabet. Each lesson introduces exactly the letters and sounds its own word needs, so you are reading real words from the first page rather than drilling a chart. The whole script is gathered in a reference at the back of the book — somewhere to look things up when you are curious, never a chapter to sit through first.

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Contents

Preface	iii
1 Greetings	1
1.1 vaṇakkam	1
1.2 va	3
1.3 vaṇakkam / namaskāram	3
1.4 ām	4
1.5 illai	6
1.6 nanri	7
1.7 nanri / nandi	8
1.8 sari	10
1.9 ām / illai / sari	11
1.10 Practice	12
2 Introducing Yourself	15
2.1 peyar	15
2.2 en	16
2.3 en peyar	17
2.4 nī / nīṅgaḷ	18
2.5 enna	19
2.6 uṅgaḷ peyar enna?	19
2.7 magilcci	20
2.8 Practice	21
3 How Are You?	23
3.1 eppaḍi	23
3.2 nīṅgaḷ eppaḍi irukkiṙṅgaḷ?	24
3.3 nān	25
3.4 nalam	26
3.5 paravāyillai	27

3.6	Practice	28
4	Farewells	31
4.1	pō	31
4.2	pōy varugirēn	32
4.3	nālai pārkkalām	33
4.4	mīṇḍum sandippōm	34
4.5	tamiḷ eluttu	35
4.6	Practice	36
5	The First Verbs	39
5.1	pēsu	39
5.2	nān tamiḷ pēsugirēn	40
5.3	va, ka	41
5.4	vāl	43
5.5	vēlai sey	43
5.6	Practice	45
6	Dative Case and Dative Subjects	47
6.1	-ukku	47
6.2	va	48
6.3	ma, ṇa	49
6.4	peyar + ukku	51
6.5	enakkut tamiḷ teriyum	52
6.6	enakku / nāku / nanage / enikku	54
6.7	ṇa	54
6.8	na, ṇa, ṇa	56
6.9	pa	57
7	Numbers One to Ten	59
7.1	onru irantu muunru naanku aintu	59
7.2	one, two, three	60
7.3	four, five	61
7.4	onru irantu muunru naanku aintu	61
7.5	one to five	62
7.6	one to five	62
7.7	one to five	63
7.8	iraṇṭu mūnru nānku aintu	63
7.9	aaru eezhu ettu onpatu pattu	64
7.10	six, seven, eight	65

7.11	nine, ten	66
7.12	aaru eezhu ettu onpatu pattu	66
7.13	six to ten	67
7.14	<u>na</u>	67
7.15	eezhu, seven	69
7.16	eezhu, seven	69
7.17	pulli	70
7.18	<u>ā</u> <u>r</u> <u>u</u> <u>ē</u> <u>l</u> <u>u</u> pattu	71
7.19	<u>ō</u>	72
7.20	Practice	73
8	Please	75
8.1	tayavu seytu	75
8.2	sollu <u>ṅ</u> al	77
8.3	so	77
8.4	sollu <u>ṅ</u> al	78
8.5	sollu <u>ṅ</u> al	78
8.6	sollu <u>ṅ</u> al	79
8.7	tayavu seytu / <u>u</u> <u>ṅ</u> al	79
8.8	na	80
8.9	vaṇakkam	82
8.10	e	83
8.11	u	84
9	Sorry	87
9.1	ma <u>ṇṇ</u> ikkavum	87
9.2	ma <u>ṇṇ</u> ikkavum / sorry	89
9.3	la	90
10	Days of the Week	93
10.1	thi <u>ṅ</u> al- <u>ṇā</u> y <u>ir</u> u	93
10.2	<u>ra</u>	95
10.3	na, <u>na</u> , <u>ra</u>	96
10.4	<u>ā</u>	98
11	Colours	101
11.1	karuppu vellai sivappu <u>nī</u> lam	101
11.2	lla	103

12	Family	105
12.1	appā ammā aṇṇan tambi akkā tangai	105
12.2	ca	107
13	Body Parts	109
13.1	talai kai	109
13.2	ka	110
13.3	i, nanri / nandri	112
13.4	ra	113
14	Seasons	115
14.1	vasantha kaalam kodai kaalam mazhai	115
14.2	tta	117
15	Water and Rice	119
15.1	taṇṇir arisi sātam	119
15.2	a	121
16	Tamil Months	123
16.1	Chithirai Vaikāsi Āṇi Āḍi Āvaṇi	123
16.2	ma	124
16.3	ām	126
16.4	ā	128
17	Noon and Midnight	131
17.1	naṇpakal naḷḷiravu	131
17.2	naṭuppakal, naṭu iravu	132
17.3	u	133
18	Telling Time	135
18.1	maṇi	135
18.2	pulli	136
18.3	illai	137
18.4	maṇi / maṇi	139
18.5	ta	140
19	Asking Someone's Age	143
19.1	unakku ettanai vayathu aakirathu?	143
19.2	un vayasū enna? / unakku ettanai	144
19.3	i sign	145
19.4	sari	146

19.5	ē	147
20	Numbers Eleven to Twenty and Weather	149
20.1	patin <u>ond</u> ru — irupathu	149
20.2	vā <u>n</u> ilai	151
20.3	ya	152
21	Dog and Cat	155
21.1	nāy, pūnai	155
21.2	e <u>n</u>	156
22	Green and Yellow	159
22.1	paccai mañ <u>ca</u> ḷ	159
23	Day	163
23.1	nā <u>ḷ</u>	163
23.2	nā <u>ḷ</u> / ti <u>ṇ</u> am	164
23.3	peyar	165
24	Night	169
24.1	iravu	169
24.2	iravu / rā <u>t</u> tiri / iru <u>ḷ</u>	170
25	Good Night	173
25.1	i <u>ṇ</u> iya iravu	173
25.2	nā <u>n</u>	174
25.3	nalla iravu / iravu vaṇ <u>a</u> kkam	176
26	Morning	179
26.1	kā <u>ḷ</u> ai	179
27	Evening	181
27.1	mā <u>ḷ</u> ai	181
27.2	nī <u>ṅ</u> gaḷ	183
28	Afternoon	185
28.1	pi <u>r</u> pakal	185
28.2	naṭ <u>u</u> ppakal / matiyam	186

29	Good Morning	189
29.1	kālai vaṇakkam	189
29.2	eppaḍi	191
30	Good Evening	193
30.1	mālai vaṇakkam	193
31	Good Afternoon	195
31.1	matiya vaṇakkam	195
31.2	matiya	196
31.3	irukkiṛgaḷ	197
32	The Core Verbs	201
32.1	iru	201
32.2	pō	203
32.3	vā	204
32.4	sāppiḍu	205
32.5	pār	207
32.6	teri	208
33	Four Verbs of the Mind	211
33.1	ninai	211
33.2	puri	213
33.3	paḍi	215
33.4	tamiḷ	217
33.5	eludu	218
34	Four Verbs Between People	221
34.1	eḍu	221
34.2	kēḷ	223
34.3	pēsu	225
34.4	udavu	226
34.5	piḍi	228
35	Arriving at a House	231
35.1	vīḍu	231
35.2	pō	233
35.3	kadavu	234
35.4	arai	236
35.5	nārkāli	238

36	What You Are Offered	241
36.1	tēnīr	241
36.2	pāl	243
36.3	uṇavu	245
36.4	uṇavu	246
36.5	tavaru	248
37	Your Town, Your Friend	251
37.1	ūr	251
37.2	naṇba <u>n</u>	253
37.3	ūr	255
37.4	ivar	256
37.5	avar	258
37.6	ivar en naṇbar	259
38	Keeping Well, and Leaving	263
38.1	uḍambu	263
38.2	sugam	265
38.3	viḍai	267
38.4	mūn <u>r</u> u	268
39	Asking for What You Want	271
39.1	vēṇḍum	271
39.2	evvaḷavu	273
39.3	oru	274
39.4	on <u>r</u> u	276
40	Pointing, and Asking	279
40.1	idu	279
40.2	adu	280
40.3	iṅgē	280
40.4	aṅgē	281
40.5	yār	282
40.6	eṅgē	283
40.7	i- / a- / e-	283
41	Describing Things	285
41.1	periya	285
41.2	siriya	286
41.3	nalla	286

41.4	pudiya	287
41.5	paḷaiya	288
41.6	before the noun, unchanged	289
42	More Everyday Verbs	291
42.1	vā	291
42.2	uṭkāṛ	292
42.3	paṭi	292
42.4	koṭu	293
43	The Household	295
43.1	kuḷandai	295
43.2	makaṇ	296
43.3	makaḷ	296
43.4	kuṭumbam	297
44	Things You Ask For	299
44.1	paḷam	299
44.2	tuṇi	300
44.3	viḷakku	301
44.4	uppu	302
44.5	puttakam	302
45	More of the Body	305
45.1	kaṇ	305
45.2	kādu	306
45.3	mūkku	307
45.4	pal	307
45.5	vayiru	308
46	Who Somebody Is	311
46.1	āsiriyar	311
46.2	māṇavaṇ	312
46.3	maruttuvar	313
46.4	vivasāyi	313
46.5	viruntāli	314
47	Short Replies	317
47.1	uṇmai	317
47.2	pōdum	318
47.3	niccayamāka	319

47.4	oruvēlai	319
47.5	appaḍiyē	320
48	Setting Out	323
48.1	ippōdu	323
48.2	nēram	324
48.3	payanam	325
48.4	piraku	325
48.5	purappaḍu	326
49	Courtesy	329
49.1	anbu	329
49.2	mariyāḍai	330
49.3	santōṣam	331
49.4	vālttu	331
49.5	mikka nanri	332
50	At the Doorway	335
50.1	vāsal	335
50.2	kōlam	336
50.3	malar	337
50.4	verrilai	337
50.5	varavērupu	338
51	Overhead	341
51.1	ākāyam	341
51.2	sūriyan	342
51.3	nilā	343
51.4	viṇmī	343
51.5	mēkam	344
52	A Tree	347
52.1	maram	347
52.2	kīlai	348
52.3	taḷir	349
52.4	vēr	349
52.5	vitai	350

53	The Land	353
53.1	nadi	353
53.2	malai	354
53.3	vayal	355
53.4	pātai	355
53.5	kirāmam	356
54	Things in the House	359
54.1	pāy	359
54.2	kūtai	360
54.3	katti	361
54.4	kiṇṇam	361
54.5	peṭṭi	362
55	The Rest of You	365
55.1	kaluttu	365
55.2	mutuku	366
55.3	utaṭu	367
55.4	nakam	367
55.5	elumbu	368
56	How Much	371
56.1	siritu	371
56.2	niraiya	372
56.3	kuraivu	373
56.4	tēvaiyillai	373
56.5	ākaṭṭum	374
57	Wind and Fire	377
57.1	kārru	377
57.2	maṇal	378
57.3	sēru	379
57.4	pukai	379
57.5	kanal	380
58	Around the Yard	383
58.1	pasu	383
58.2	āṭu	384
58.3	kōli	385
58.4	kākkai	385

58.5	paravai	386
59	In the Kitchen	389
59.1	tayir	389
59.2	ney	390
59.3	eṇṇey	391
59.4	vellam	391
59.5	sarkkarai	392
60	Things People Make	395
60.1	ūsi	395
60.2	kayiru	396
60.3	kuṭai	397
60.4	tuṭaippam	397
60.5	sīppu	398
61	How the Body Feels	401
61.1	pasi	401
61.2	tākam	402
61.3	tūkkam	403
61.4	kāyccal	403
61.5	vali	404
62	Only and Still	407
62.1	maṭṭum	407
62.2	iṇṇum	408
62.3	sīkkiram	409
62.4	uṭaṇē	409
62.5	mutalil	410
63	Asking Well	413
63.1	vēṇḍukōḷ	413
63.2	aṇumati	414
63.3	tayakkam	415
63.4	nambikkai	415
63.5	paṇivu	416
64	The Harvest	419
64.1	nel	419
64.2	pul	420
64.3	payir	421

64.4	kaḷam	421
64.5	aruvaṭai	422
65	Doing, and Undoing	425
65.1	kuḍi	425
65.2	naḍa	426
65.3	kuḍi	427
65.4	niruttu	428
65.5	tira	429
65.6	mūḍu	430
65.7	Practice	431
66	Which Way	433
66.1	mēlē	433
66.2	kīlē	434
66.3	mēlē	435
66.4	ullē	436
66.5	veḷiyē	437
66.6	valadu	438
66.7	iḍadu	439
66.8	Practice	440
67	What You Wear	443
67.1	saṭṭai	443
67.2	vēṭṭi	444
67.3	saṭṭai	445
67.4	puḍavai	446
67.5	seruppu	447
67.6	toppi	447
68	At the Shop	449
68.1	kaḍai	449
68.2	vilai	450
68.3	kaḍai	451
68.4	paṇam	452
68.5	vāṅgu	452
68.6	pai	453

69	Getting There	455
69.1	vaṇḍi	455
69.2	pērundu	456
69.3	vaṇḍi	457
69.4	rayil	458
69.5	sālai	458
69.6	nilaiyam	459
70	The Room You Are In	461
70.1	mēsai	461
70.2	kaṭṭil	462
70.3	mēsai	463
70.4	suvar	464
70.5	tarai	464
70.6	kūrai	465
71	Through the Day	467
71.1	e <u>l</u> u	467
71.2	tū <u>ṅ</u> gu	468
71.3	ō	469
71.4	ō <u>ḍ</u> u	470
71.5	ka <u>l</u> uvu	471
71.6	viḷaiyā <u>ḍ</u> u	471
72	How It Feels	473
72.1	kōpam	473
72.2	payam	474
72.3	payam	475
72.4	varuttam	476
72.5	siri	477
72.6	a <u>l</u> u	478
73	Today, Yesterday, and the Year	479
73.1	i <u>n</u> ru	479
73.2	nē <u>r</u> ru	480
73.3	i <u>n</u> ru	481
73.4	mu <u>n</u> bu	482
73.5	mādam	483
73.6	ā <u>n</u> ḍu	483

74	And, and Also	485
74.1	-um ... -um	485
74.2	-um	486
74.3	pālum	487
74.4	-um ... -um illai	488
75	Yes or No	491
75.1	-ā	491
75.2	ām / illai	492
75.3	sariyā	493
75.4	nān ullē varalāmā?	494
76	But, and Or	497
76.1	ānāl	497
76.2	alladu	498
76.3	ānāl	499
76.4	pāl vēṇḍumā, alladu tēnīr vēṇḍumā?	501
77	Saying, and Thinking	503
77.1	sol	503
77.2	enru	504
77.3	sol	505
77.4	... enru niṇaikkirēn	506
78	Why, and Because	509
78.1	ēn	509
78.2	ēnenrāl	510
78.3	ēn	512
78.4	adanāl	513
78.5	-kkāga	514
79	When	517
79.1	eppōdu	517
79.2	appōdu	518
79.3	eppōdu	519
79.4	-um pōdu	521
80	One, the Other, and the Price	523
80.1	marradu	523
80.2	onru ... marradu	524
80.3	marradu	525

80.4	vilai evvaḷavu?	527
81	Two Tamils	529
81.1	āṇāḷ / āṇā	529
81.2	enru / -nnu	530
82	Which One in the Line	533
82.1	mutal	533
82.2	iraṇḍāvadu	535
82.3	mutalāvadu	536
82.4	mūṇrāvadu	537
82.5	nāṇkāvadu	538
82.6	aiṇḍāvadu	538
83	All the Way Up, and On a Calendar	541
83.1	ārāvadu	541
83.2	ēlāvadu	542
83.3	eṭṭāvadu	543
83.4	onpadāvadu	543
83.5	pattāvadu	544
83.6	patinonrāvadu	545
83.7	tēdi	546
83.8	Practice	547
84	Reading — Words, Lines, and a First Passage	549
84.1	(reading)	549
84.2	(reading)	550
84.3	(reading)	551
85	The People Not Here	553
85.1	avaṇ / avaḷ	553
85.2	avarkaḷ	554
85.3	nām / nāṅgaḷ	556
85.4	avarkaḷ ninaivu	557
86	The One It Is Done To	559
86.1	-ai	559
86.2	ennai / unnai	561
86.3	tēṇir / tēṇirai	562
86.4	ai ninaivu	563

The Tamil script (reference)	565
Glossary	567
Review Questions	593
Answer Key	595
Index	597

Chapter 1

Greetings

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) ✍️ pen (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 10 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone, say yes, no and thank you, agree with sari, hold a short exchange out loud, and copy my first Tamil shape with a visible model.

Hold the whole exchange out loud, then copy வ once beside the visible model and compare only that shape.

1.1 வணக்கம் (vaṇakkam) — “greetings”

The first Tamil word, and the one you will use most. One word, one lesson. Say it, and you have greeted someone.

You’ll want to know: வணக்கம்

வணக்கம் — vaṇakkam — “greetings.”

Say it *va-ṇak-kam*, with the *kk* held a beat longer than a single *k*.

It is what you say walking into a room, answering a phone, or meeting anyone at all. It does not change for morning or evening, and it does not change for one person or many.

Its root is the verb *vaṇaṅku*, “to bow.” *Vaṇakkam* is the act of bowing, turned into a word — and it is native Tamil, not borrowed from Sanskrit.

The letters in this word

Say it *va-ṇak-kam*. The ṇ is a **retroflex** *n* — curl the tongue back to the roof of the mouth, further back than an English *n*. The *kk* is **held**, a beat longer than a single *k*, and that length is doing real work: Tamil distinguishes words by it.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

வணக்கம் (*vaṇakkam*) comes from the verb *vaṇaṅku*, “to bow, to pay homage.” Turned into a noun of the action, it means “a bowing, an act of reverence” — the idea of *namaste*, but from a **native Tamil** root, not a Sanskrit one. That is Tamil’s whole personality: an old language that keeps its home-grown words where its neighbours borrowed.

Why it’s said this way

Said with the palms pressed together and a small bow — the gesture *is* the word. It serves as both **hello and goodbye**, any time, to almost anyone, respectful without being stiff.

Writing — let your finger meet one shape

Keep **வணக்கம்** visible. Find only its first shape: **வ**. Follow that printed shape once with your finger while you say the whole greeting.

Do not write it yet, and do not try to remember the whole word. This first pass only lets your eye, voice, and hand notice the same greeting together. A later script lesson will teach how Tamil letters are formed; tracing a typeface here does not claim a handwriting stroke order.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vaṇakkam” — hold the *kk*
- it to someone arriving
- it to someone leaving — the same word does both

Before you move on

Say வணக்கம். Does it change between morning and evening? (No — one greeting, all day.) Does it change for one person or a crowd? (No.) Next: the same greeting across the Dravidian family.

1.2 வ (va) — copy one visible shape with help

Point to வணக்கம் and say *vaṇakkam* once. Keep the model on the page. Find the first shape, வ (*va*), which your finger just followed.

Writing — one supported copy

Copy வ once beside the model. Look back as often as you need. Your copy can be large and slow; it does not need to look like a font.

This is shape familiarity, not a stroke-order test. Do not hide the model, do not copy the rest of வணக்கம், and do not add a second new shape today. The later Tamil writing sequence will teach letter construction explicitly.

Before you move on

Compare your one copy with வ (*va*) while both remain visible. Repair one curve if you want, then stop. Say *vaṇakkam* once more: one known greeting, one tiny hand movement.

1.3 வணக்கம் — one bow, two lexical loyalties

Vaṇakkam names a bow. Neighboring languages name the same gesture with a different inherited or borrowed root.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Language	“Hello”	Source
Tamil	<i>vaṇakkam</i>	native Dravidian <i>vaṇaṅku</i>
Kannada	<i>namaskāra</i>	Sanskrit
Telugu	<i>namaskāram</i>	Sanskrit
Malayalam	<i>namaskāram</i>	Sanskrit
Hindi	<i>namaste</i>	Sanskrit
English	<i>hello</i>	Germanic hailing-call

Four tracks use Sanskrit *namas-*, “bow.” Tamil kept its own verb. The gesture and social meaning match; the lexical loyalty differs.

Why it’s said this way

Say *vaṇakkam* with pressed palms or a small head-bow: the gesture is the word. It works as **hello and goodbye**, at any time, to almost anyone. It is respectful without being stiff; cinema and formal speech can also use it as a ringing one-word salutation to a whole room.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “vaṇakkam” with a small bow
- *Contrast*: Tamil *vaṇaṅku* · neighbors Sanskrit *namas-*
- *Choose*: greeting or parting → வணக்கம் works

Before you move on

Which Dravidian language kept its native bow-word? (**Tamil**.)
What did the neighbors borrow? (Sanskrit **namas-**.) Can *vaṇakkam* greet and part? (**Yes** — it is an all-day respectful salutation.)

1.4 ஆம் (ām) — “yes”

The plain yes. One word, and then we will put these together.

You'll want to know: ஆம்

ஆம் — *ām* — “yes.”

One beat, with a long opening *aa*.

Stretch it and you get *āmām* — “yes, indeed; that’s right.” Tamil doubles words for warmth and certainty, the way *sari sari* does.

Ām is a worn-down form of *āgum*, “it becomes, it will be” — a yes that started life as a verb, which is a very Tamil way to agree.

The letters in this word

Say it *ām* — a **long** *a*, held about twice as long as the short one, closing on a plain *m*. Vowel length is meaningful in Tamil, so the length is not decoration.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ஆம் (*ām*) is the plain “yes.” Doubled for emphasis it becomes *āmām*, “yes, indeed.”

Grammar lens

Tamil often says “yes” by **echoing the verb**: asked *vandāyā?* (“did you come?”), a natural yes is *vandēn* (“I came”). Bank *ām* as the simple word, but expect a “yes” to come back as a whole verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ām” — one long *aa*, closed on the *m*
- “āmām” — the emphatic double
- “ām” then “sari” — yes, and alright

Before you move on

Say ஆம். What does *āmām* add? (**Emphasis** — “yes, indeed.”)
Next: the word for no.

1.5 இல்லை (illai) — “no”

The other half of the pair. One word, and then the lesson that puts all five together.

You’ll want to know: இல்லை

இல்லை — *illai* — “no.”

Two beats: *il-lai*, with the *l* held across the join.

On its own it is the everyday **no**. But it is not really the adjective “no” — it is a small statement meaning “**is not**.” That will matter when we put the five words together.

Its root is *il*, the idea of *not-being*. Its positive twin is *uṇḍu*, “there is.”

The letters in this word

Say it *il-lai*, with the *l* **held** across the join — the same doubling you met in *vaṇak-kam*. The ending is the diphthong *ai*, as in English “eye,” not two separate vowels.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

இல்லை (*illai*) is built on இல் (*il*), “not-being, absence” — so it is not really the adjective “no” but the statement “[it] **is not**, [there] **is not**.” Its positive twin is *uṇḍu*, “there is.”

Grammar lens

Tamil negates by *being*, not with a “not”-word. Where English inserts *not/no*, Tamil swaps in the negative verb of existence: *puttakam uṇḍu* (“there *is* a book”) → *puttakam illai* (“there *is not* a book”). So *illai* is both the everyday “no” and the word that makes a whole sentence negative — a deeply Dravidian habit, unlike English or Hindi.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “illai” — two beats, the *l* held across the join
- the pair — “ām” ... “illai”

- it alone, as a complete answer

Before you move on

Say இல்லை. Is it closer to English *no*, or to *is not*? (**Is not** — it is a statement, not a label.) Next: the word for thank you.

1.6 நன்றி (nanri) — “thank you”

One word again. This is the one you will reach for second-most, and Tamil says it with a noun rather than a verb.

You’ll want to know: நன்றி

நன்றி — *nanri* — “thank you.”

Two beats: *nan-ri*. The *n* and the *r* are both made further back than English *n* and *r*; copy the sound rather than the spelling.

It works on its own, with no verb around it. Someone hands you something; you say *nanri*, and that is a whole sentence.

Its root is *nal*, “good” — the same *nal*- inside *nalla* (“good”) and *nanmai* (“a good deed”). Saying *nanri* names the good someone did you.

The letters in this word

Say it *nan-ri*. Tamil hears **three** different *n* sounds and this word uses two of them: a **dental** *n* (tongue on the teeth) to open, then an **alveolar** *n* (on the ridge just behind them). The *r* is its own sound again, not the English *r*. English ears flatten all of this to “nandri,” which is close enough to be understood.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நன்றி (*nanri*) grows from the root *nal*, “good” — so it literally means “goodness.” To thank, in Tamil, is to name the good someone did you.

Grammar lens

Tamil hears three of every *n*, *l*, and *r*. You have now heard two of the three *ns* inside this one word: a dental *n* (tongue on the teeth) and an alveolar *n̪* (on the ridge behind them). There is a third, the retroflex *ɳ* you met in *vaṇakkam* — curled back. Tamil does the same for *l* (*l*, *l̪*, *ɭ*) and for *r* (*r*, *ɻ*). English fuses each set into one letter; Tamil keeps them apart, and the differences *change meaning*. Each of those sounds has its own letter, and you will meet the letters one at a time later, spelling words you already say. Learn the sounds word by word, not as a chart.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*nan̪ri*” — two beats, both consonants far back
- “*vaṇakkam*” then “*nan̪ri*” — greeting, then thanks
- it on its own, with nothing around it

Before you move on

Say நன்றி. Does it need a verb to be a complete reply? (No — it stands alone.) Next: how thanks travels across the family.

1.7 நன்றி — a native family word with a register edge

Nan̪ri literally names goodness. Its family distribution mirrors the greeting split you just saw.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Language	“Thanks”	Source
Tamil	<i>nanri</i>	native <i>nal</i> , “good”
Malayalam	<i>nandi</i>	the same Dravidian word
Kannada	<i>dhanyavāda</i>	Sanskrit
Telugu	<i>dhanyavādamulu</i>	Sanskrit
Hindi	<i>dhanyavād / shukriyā</i>	Sanskrit / Perso-Arabic

Tamil and its closest sister Malayalam kept the native word. Kannada and Telugu borrowed Sanskrit *dhanyavāda*, repeating the split seen with “hello.”

Why it’s said this way

Spoken *nanri* can feel a little formal. Everyday warmth may live in a smile or nod; among close family an explicit thank-you can sound oddly distant. Use **romba nanri**, “many thanks,” when you want to mark gratitude strongly.

This is a register tendency, not a ban: the relationship and moment determine whether naming the gratitude feels warm or ceremonious.

Your turn

- *Say it:* Tamil *nanri* · Malayalam *nandi*
- *Say it:* “romba nanri” — many thanks
- *Choose:* close-family routine favor → warmth may be nonverbal

Before you move on

Which sister shares Tamil’s native gratitude word? (**Malayalam.**)
 What did Kannada and Telugu borrow? (Sanskrit ***dhanyavāda***.)
 Why can explicit *nanri* sound marked? (Among intimates, gratitude may be assumed; the word can feel **formal**.)

1.8 சரி (sari) — “okay”

The most useful small word in the language, and the easiest to say.

You’ll want to know: சரி

சரி — *sari* — “okay, alright, correct.”

Two beats: *sa-ri*.

It is the verbal nod of Tamil. Someone proposes a plan and the whole reply is one warm *sari*. Doubled — *sari, sari* — it means “yes yes, fine, go on.”

It began as “correct, even, level,” and slid from *that is right* to *alright* the way English *right* did.

The letters in this word

Say it *sari*, two light syllables, stress even. The opening sound sits between English *s* and *ch*, and Tamil treats that whole range as one sound chosen by **position** in the word rather than by a separate spelling — the same economy that lets one *k*-sound also be heard as *g* or a soft *h*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

சரி (*sari*) is native Tamil for “correct, even, level,” and so “okay, agreed.” It is the verbal nod of the language: propose a plan, hear a warm *sari*; doubled, *sari sari* = “alright, alright.”

Grammar lens

One letter, several sounds. For its stop-consonants Tamil writes *one* letter per mouth-position and lets rules of position fill in the voicing (*k/g, s/ch*). The payoff is a strikingly *small* alphabet; the price is that the exact sound isn’t always predictable from the letter alone — you pick it up by ear, word by word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sari”

- “sari, sari” — the doubled, hurry-along version
- agree to something with nothing but this word

Before you move on

Say ஸரி. What does doubling it add? (**Hurry, or easy agreement** — “yes yes, fine.”) Next: putting the five words together.

1.9 Putting the five together — how Tamil answers

Five words, one at a time. Now they go into a conversation, and two habits show up that English does not have.

The exchange — built from the five words

A whole exchange, built only from the five words:

— *vaṇakkam.* — *vaṇakkam.* — *sari?* — *ām.* — *nanri.*
— *sari.*

— *Hello.* — *Hello.* — *Alright?* — *Yes.* — *Thank you.* —
Alright.

Every reply is one word. Tamil is comfortable with that in a way English is not.

Say the exchange, don’t read it. Each of these five words is printed in Tamil in its own lesson, and the letters arrive later, one at a time.

Grammar Lens: two habits behind the answers

One — Tamil often answers by echoing the verb.

Ām is correct, but a speaker will often say yes by **repeating the verb of the question**. Asked “did you come?”, a natural yes is *vandēn* — “I came.” Keep *ām* as your word, and expect a yes to come back as a whole verb.

Two — Tamil negates by *being*, not with a “not”-word.

English makes a sentence negative by inserting *not*. Tamil swaps in the negative verb of existence:

puttakam *uṇḍu*

“there **is** a book”

puttakam *illai*

“there **is not** a book”

So *illai* does double duty: alone it is the everyday **no**; inside a sentence it is what makes the whole thing negative. Learn it as *is not* and both uses fall out.

Your turn

- *Say it*: the exchange above, both parts
- *Hear*: “puttakam uṇḍu” ... “puttakam illai” — only the last word changed

Before you move on

Give a one-word reply to *sari?* and to *nanri*. (*ām* / **sari**.) Besides *ām*, what else is a natural yes? (**Repeating the verb**.) What does *illai* do inside a sentence? (**Makes it negative** — it is the “is not” verb.) Next: the chapter’s own recap, and then names.

1.10 Chapter 1 — a five-word recap

Five spoken words, plus the one visible shape your hand has copied. Let’s gather only what you have already learned and make it feel easy.

What you’ve built — say them back

Say each one before you check the meaning:

Say this	Meaning
<i>vaṇakkam</i>	hello / greetings
<i>nanri</i>	thank you
<i>ām</i>	yes
<i>illai</i>	no / there isn’t
<i>sari</i>	okay / correct

These are five spoken words, so the recap gives you the sound and nothing to decode. One shape is the exception, because it is the one

your hand has already met: **வணக்கம்**, whose opening **வ** you copied. Keep that model visible when you copy it again below. The other four are printed in Tamil in their own lessons, where you were shown them and asked to read nothing. Formal letter construction still begins later, one letter at a time, always spelling a word you already say.

Why it's said this way

Tamil does not like a blunt goodbye. A bare “I am leaving” sounds final in Tamil, even ill-omened, so the everyday farewell is built instead on going **and coming back** — a promise of return rather than an exit. That whole exchange is a chapter of its own: it needs two verbs you have not met, and you will learn them one at a time. Which is why **வணக்கம்** is the farewell you already own. It parts as well as it meets, it carries the same respect in both directions, and it commits you to nothing you cannot yet say. Use it when you leave, and the departure exchange will be waiting when its verbs are.

Your turn

- *Say it:* all five — vaṇakkam · nanri · ām · illai · sari
- *Say it:* greet and thank — “vaṇakkam!” ... “nanri.”
- *Copy:* **வ** once beside the visible model, large and slowly

Before you move on

Say all five words aloud. Which one works both to meet someone and to part from them? (**வணக்கம்**.) Compare your one copied **வ** with the model. Repair one curve if you want, then stop. Next chapter starts introducing yourself, one short possession form at a time.

Chapter 2

Introducing Yourself

Modes: 🗣️ voice (8) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can introduce myself in Tamil, give my name, and understand the other person’s name.

Hold the whole introduction out loud — give your name, ask for theirs, and answer that you are pleased to meet them — using only the possession forms this chapter built.

2.1 பெயர் (peyar) — “name,” where the family is *not* Indo-European

“Name” — and a word that shows Tamil at its most itself.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

பெயர் (*peyar*, “name”) is **native Dravidian**, from Proto-Dravidian ***peyar** / ***pēr** — and it is *not* related to Sanskrit *nāma* (Hindi *nām*, English *name*). Here the two great families part: Indo-European shares one word for “name” from Ireland to North India, but the Dravidian south kept its own.

Across the family:

Language	“Name”	Source
Tamil	<i>peyar</i>	native Dravidian (*peyar)
Malayalam	<i>pēr</i>	the <i>same</i> Dravidian root
Telugu	<i>pēru</i>	the <i>same</i> Dravidian root
Kannada	<i>hesaru</i>	Dravidian (*pesar, with $p \rightarrow h$)
Hindi	<i>nām</i>	Sanskrit <i>nāman</i> (Indo-European)
English	<i>name</i>	Indo-European

Four Dravidian tongues share *peyar/pēr/pēru*; only the Indo-European languages have *name/nām*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “peyar”
- the Dravidian cousins — *peyar* / *pēr* / *pēru*
- what it is *not* — not *nām*, not *name*

Before you move on

Is பெயர் related to English *name*? (No — it’s native Dravidian, **peyar*; *name/nām* are Indo-European.) Which languages share *peyar/pēr/pēru*? (Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu — and Kannada’s *hesaru*.)

2.2 என் (en) — “my”

“My” — and, like *peyar*, a word with no European cousin at all.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

என் (en) means “my.” It belongs to Tamil’s native Dravidian first-person family, not to the Indo-European family behind English *I*/

my. You will meet the related word for “I” in its own lesson; today you only need *en*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “en”
- *en* once with its meaning, “my”

Before you move on

What does என் mean? (“My.”) Does it share a root with English *my*? (No — it is native Dravidian.)

2.3 என் பெயர் ... (*en peyar* ...) — “my name is...,” with no “is”

Assemble the two atoms — *en* and *peyar* — and notice a whole word English needs that Tamil doesn’t.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

- *en* (my) + *peyar* (name) + your name.

என் பெயர் ... = “my name ...” → “**my name is...**”

En peyar Arun. → “My name is Arun.”

Grammar Lens: Tamil has no word for “is” here

Look at what’s missing: there is **no verb**. Tamil sets “my name” beside “Arun” — *en peyar Arun* — and the “is” is simply understood. This is the **zero copula**: for equational sentences (X is Y), Dravidian needs no “to be” at all — where English needs *is*, Hindi needs *hai*, Arabic (you’ll see) also drops it. Tamil says only “my name Arun.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*eṇ* peyar ...” with your name
- notice — no word for “is”

Before you move on

Give your name in Tamil. (*Eṇ peyar*) What does Tamil leave out that English requires? (The verb “is” — the zero copula.)

2.4 நீ / நீங்கள் (*nī* / *nīṅgaḷ*) — “you,” familiar and respectful

To ask a name you need “you” — and Tamil makes respect the same way French does.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நீ (*nī*, familiar “you”) ← Proto-Dravidian **nīn* — native, unrelated to the European “you” words (from **tū*). நீங்கள் (*nīṅgaḷ*) is *nī* + the plural ending **-kaḷ**.

Grammar Lens: respect by the plural — again

Tamil grades “you” in two: **nī** (familiar — friends, children) and **nīṅgaḷ** (respectful — and literally the **plural**, “you-all”). This is the *same* politeness-by-plural as French *vous*: address one respected person as “you all.” For a first meeting, always **nīṅgaḷ**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*nī*” (familiar), “*nīṅgaḷ*” (respectful)
- *nīṅgaḷ* = *nī* + plural **-kaḷ**

Before you move on

How does Tamil make “you” respectful, and which European language uses the same trick? (By the plural — *nīṅgal*; French *vous*.)

2.5 என்ன (enna) — “what”

The last piece of the question: “what.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

என்ன (*enna*, “what”) is native Dravidian, on the interrogative stem **yā-* / **e-* that heads Tamil’s whole question family: *enna* (what), *yār* (who), *eppo* (when), *enge* (where), *ēn* (why). Like Hindi’s *k-* words and English’s *wh-* words — but from a *different*, Dravidian root.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*enna*”
- the Tamil question family — *enna*, *yār*, *enge*

Before you move on

What stem heads Tamil’s question-words, and is it the same as English’s *wh-*? (**yā-*/**e-*; same *idea*, different — Dravidian — root.)

2.6 உங்கள் பெயர் என்ன? (*uṅgal peyar enna?*) — “what’s your name?”

Assemble the question — your + name + what — and note, again, no “is.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

- உங்கள் (*uṅgal*, “your”) = the possessive of *nīṅgal* (“you,” respectful).

உங்கள் பெயர் என்ன? = literally “**your name what?**” = “what’s your name?”

Three words, **no verb** — the zero copula holds for questions too. Tamil never adds an “is.”

Grammar Lens: answer, and the familiar version

Answer with the sentence you built: **En peyar Arun.** The familiar “your” swaps *uṅgal* for **un** (from *nī*): *un peyar enna?*

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “uṅgal peyar enna?”
- ask, then answer — “uṅgal peyar enna?” / “en peyar ...”

Before you move on

What does உங்கள் பெயர் என்ன? literally say, and what’s missing versus English? (“Your name what?”; no “is” — zero copula.)

2.7 மகிழ்ச்சி (magilcci) — “joy,” and “pleased to meet you”

The warm close — and a sound almost unique to Tamil.

You’ll want to know: மகிழ்ச்சி

The full form is *uṅgalai sandittatil magilcci* — “in having met you, joy.” Say it; the extra two words are longer than you need today, and மகிழ்ச்சி on its own already carries the whole meaning.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மகிழ்ச்சி (*magilcci*, “joy, gladness”) is native Dravidian, from **magil** (“to rejoice”). It carries the letter ழ (*l*) — a retroflex glide almost unique to Tamil, with no English equivalent (the same sound in the

name *Tam̩il* itself). In casual speech, a smile or the English “nice to meet you” also does the job.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mag̩lcci” — feel the **ழ** (*l*) glide
- the fuller form — “uṅgaḷai sandittatil mag̩lcci”

Before you move on

What does **மகிழ்ச்சி** mean and from what verb? (“Joy,” from *mag̩l*, “to rejoice.”) What rare Tamil sound does it contain? (**ழ**, *l* — also in *Tam̩il*.)

2.8 Chapter 2 — the introduction, whole

Every atom built, and every one of them native Dravidian.

The exchange — the whole introduction

Say this	English
<i>eṇ peyar Mira.</i>	My name is Mira.
<i>uṅgaḷ peyar eṇṇa?</i>	What’s your name?
<i>eṇ peyar Arun.</i>	My name is Arun.
<i>mag̩lcci.</i>	Pleased to meet you.

Every atom native and traced:

- **peyar** ← Dravidian **peyar* (not English *name*)
- **eṇ** ← *nāṇ* (“I”)
- **eṇṇa** ← Dravidian question-stem **yā-/e-*
- **mag̩lcci** ← *mag̩l* (“to rejoice”)

And the Tamil habit to keep: the **zero copula** — an equational sentence (“X is Y”) needs *no* word for “is” at all. Where Hindi added *hai* and English needs *is*, Tamil says only “my name Arun.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the whole exchange, both voices
- your own introduction — “*eṇ peyar ...*”
- ask it back — “*uṅgaḷ peyar enna?*”

Before you move on

Give your name, ask someone else’s, say you’re pleased. (*Eṇ peyar* / *Uṅgaḷ peyar enna?* / *Maḡilcci.*) What does Tamil leave out that English and Hindi require? (The verb “is” — zero copula.) Next chapter: *eppaḍi irukkṅgaḷ?* (“how are you?”) and answering with *nallā* — the responding cycle.

Chapter 3

How Are You?

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask how someone is in Tamil, answer naturally, and return the question.

Take the how-are-you exchange both ways out loud: ask it respectfully, answer that you are well, thank them, and wave the thanks away.

3.1 எப்படி (eppaḍi) — “how,” another of the e-questions

You met *enna* (“what”) in Chapter 2. Here is its sibling — and, like all of Tamil’s question-words, it begins with **e-**.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

எப்படி (*eppaḍi*, “how”) is native Dravidian, built on the interrogative base எ- (*e-*) + *paḍi* (“manner, way”) — literally “in what manner.” Notice the pattern: Tamil’s questions nearly all start with this **e-** — *enna* (what), *eppaḍi* (how), *eppōdu* (when), *eṅē* (where), *ēṇ* (why), and *yār* (who). Where Hindi and English gather their questions under *k-* / *wh-*, Tamil gathers its own under **e-** — a separate, older family, evolved on its own.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “eppaḍi”
- the e- question family — *enna*, *eppaḍi*, *eppōdu*, *eṅē*, *ēn*
- what it’s built from (*e-* “what” + *paḍi* “manner”)

Before you move on

What base do Tamil’s question-words share, and how is it different from Hindi’s? (The interrogative *e-*; it is native Dravidian, unrelated to Hindi’s *k-* / English’s *wh-*.)

3.2 நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்? (*nīṅgaḷ eppaḍi irukkiṛgaḷ?*)

The everyday “how are you?” — and the first time Tamil actually *needs* a verb “to be.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்? = நீங்கள் (*nīṅgaḷ*, “you,” respectful) + எப்படி (*eppaḍi*, “how”) + இருக்கிறீர்கள் (*irukkiṛgaḷ*, “are/exist”) — “you how are?” The verb comes **last**, as in every Tamil sentence.

The verb is இரு (*iru*), “to be, to exist, to stay” — native Dravidian. Inside *irukkiṛgaḷ* that stem carries two endings: *iru* + *-kkiṛ-* (present) + *-īrgaḷ* (“you,” respectful/plural) — the three run together exactly as written. A long word, but built of clean pieces, and you can hear all three.

Grammar Lens: now the copula returns

In Chapter 2 you learned Tamil drops “is” entirely: *eṇ peyar Arun* (“my name Arun”). That **zero copula** works for *equations* (X is Y). But “how are you?” is about a **state** — how you *exist* right now — and for that Tamil does use a verb: இரு (*iru*). So: no verb for “my name is Arun,” but a real verb for “how are you.” The verb ending *-īrgaḷ* already means “you (respectful),” so *nīṅgaḷ* can even be dropped.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the respectful question — *nīṅgal eppadi irukkiṟṅgal?*
- the verb and its meaning (*iru* — “to be / exist / stay”)
- why here Tamil needs a verb but “my name is Arun” doesn’t (state vs. equation)

Before you move on

What verb does “how are you?” use, and why does this sentence need one when “my name is Arun” didn’t? (*Iru*, “to be/exist”; because it describes a state, not an equation — the zero copula only covers X is Y.)

3.3 நாண் (*nāṇ*) — “I,” the Dravidian first person

To answer “how are you?” you first need “I.” In Chapter 2 you learned *eṇ* (“my”); here is its owner.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நாண் (*nāṇ*, “I”) ← Proto-Dravidian **yāṇ* / **nāṇ* — a native first-person word, and (unlike Hindi’s *maini*, cousin of English *me*) **not** related to the European “I/me” family at all. Its possessive is the *eṇ* (“my”) you already met: *nāṇ* “I,” *eṇ* “my” — the same root, one standing, one leaning on a noun. Tamil’s “I” is one of the clearest markers that Dravidian grew up entirely apart from the Indo-European world around it.

Grammar Lens: “I” you can drop

Tamil verbs carry the person in their ending — *irukk-irēṇ* already means “I am” — so *nāṇ* is often left out once it’s clear. You will still learn it first, because the answer to *eppadi irukkiṟṅgal?* begins with it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nān”
- the pair — *nān* (I), *en* (my)
- is it related to English *me*? (No — Dravidian, a separate family)

Before you move on

What is *nān*’s possessive, and is it cousin to English *me*? (*En*, “my”; no — it is native Dravidian, unrelated to the Indo-European pronouns.)

3.4 நலம் (*nam*) — “well,” and how to answer

The word that answers “how are you?” — and a whole family of Tamil “good” grows from it.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நலம் (*nam*, “wellness, good, welfare”) is native Dravidian, from the root *nal-* (“good”) — the same root behind *nalla* (“good,” an everyday adjective) and *nanri* (“thanks” — literally “goodness,” which you met in Chapter 1). So “thank you” and “I’m well” in Tamil share a root: both are *nal-*, “good.” A purely Dravidian word, with no Sanskrit or European cousin — Tamil answering in its own voice.

You’ll want to know: நலம்

Assemble it: *nān nalamāga irukkireṇ* — “I am well.” The piece *nam* + *-āga* (“in a ... way”) makes the adverb *nalamāga* (“well-ly”); *irukkireṇ* is “I am/exist” (the *iru* verb, first person). The whole exchange:

— *nīṅgaḷ eppaḍi irukkirīrgaḷ?* (“How are you?”) — *nān nalamāga irukkireṇ, nanri.* (“I’m well, thank you.”)

Casually, Tamils shorten it to *nallā irukkēṇ* (“I’m good”).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*na_lam*”
- the full reply — *nā_n na_lamāga irukkī_{rē_n}*
- the root it shares with “thanks” (*na_l-* “good,” as in *na_nri*)

Before you move on

Give the full reply to “how are you?”, and name the Chapter-1 word that shares *na_lam*’s root. (*Nā_n na_lamāga irukkī_{rē_n}*; *na_nri*, “thanks” — both from *na_l-*, “good.”)

3.5 பரவாயில்லை (*paravāyillai*) — “no problem”

When someone thanks you — or apologises — this is the easy, gracious reply, and it hides one of the most Tamil words there is.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

பரவாயில்லை literally means “**there is no harm**” — *paravāy* (“harm, trouble”) + *illai* (“is-not, there-is-not”). It serves as “it’s okay / no worries / never mind / you’re welcome.” The key atom, *illai*, you already met in Chapter 1 — the Tamil word for negation and non-existence, the mirror of *iru* (“to be”). Where *iru* says “it is,” *illai* says “it is not.” This one word is shared, in almost the same shape, across Tamil, Kannada, and Malayalam (*illa*) — one of the deep bonds of the Dravidian south. (Telugu alone breaks away, using *lēdu*.)

Grammar Lens: *illai*, the all-purpose “no”

Illai negates existence and equations alike: *nā_n illai* (“it’s not me”), *paṇam illai* (“there’s no money”). It is also, on its own, one way to say plain “no.” Learn *iru* / *illai* together — “is” and “is-not” — and you can already affirm or deny almost anything.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “paravāyillai”
- what it literally means (“there is no harm”)
- the *iru* / *illai* pair — “is” and “is-not”

Before you move on

What does *paravāyillai* literally say, and which Dravidian languages share its *illai*? (“There is no harm”; Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam — Telugu uses *lēdu* instead.)

3.6 Chapter 3 — The how-are-you exchange

No new words. The whole responding cycle, from atoms you now own.

The exchange

Say these aloud:

- “How are you?” (respectful) — *nīṅgal eppaḍi irukkīṅgal?*
- “I’m well, thank you.” — *nāṇ nalamāga irukkīṅēṇ, naṇri.*
- “No problem / you’re welcome.” — *paravāyillai.*
- the casual version — *nallā irukkēṇ.*

Your turn — the atoms

Say these aloud:

- the e- question-word for “how” (*eppaḍi*)
- “I” and the verb “to be” (*nāṇ, iru*)
- the “is / is-not” pair (*iru / illai*)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *eppaḍi* ← the interrogative *e-* (native Dravidian, not Hindi’s *k-*)

- *nān* ← Proto-Dravidian **nān* (unrelated to English *me*); possessive *en*
- *naḷam* ← *naḷ-* “good” — the same root as *naṇri* (“thanks”)
- *iru* / *illai* — “to be” and “to be-not”; *illai* shared with Kannada & Malayalam

Grammar lens — what you now hold

- *Say it:* when Tamil needs the verb *iru* and when it drops the copula (state vs. equation)

Before you move on

A stranger asks *nāṇḡaḷ eppaḍi irukkiṇṇḡaḷ?* — give a full, polite reply, and answer their thanks. (*Nān naḷamāga irukkiṇṇēn*, *naṇri* — and to thanks, *paravāyillai*.)

Chapter 4

Farewells

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 4 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can end a Tamil conversation politely and choose a farewell that fits the situation.

Close a conversation the Tamil way out loud: promise to go and come back, answer the same promise, and choose between tomorrow and next-time.

4.1 பஃ (pō) — “go,” and vā (come)

Two of the shortest, oldest verbs in Tamil — and together they make the Tamil goodbye.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

பஃ (pō, “to go”) and vā (“to come”) are native Dravidian verbs of the deepest layer — single syllables, unchanged for millennia. As bare commands they are already whole words: pō! (“go!”), vā! (“come!”). You need both for the next lesson, because Tamil does not say a plain “goodbye” — it says “I go, and I **come back**.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pō” (go) and “vā” (come)
- the commands — pō! / vā!

Before you move on

What do *pō* and *vā* mean, and why will you need them both to say goodbye? (“Go” and “come”; the Tamil farewell is “I go and come back,” not “I leave.”)

4.2 போய் வருகிறேன் (*pōy varugirēn*) — “I’ll go and come back”

The everyday Tamil goodbye — and it is, quite literally, a promise to return.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

போய் வருகிறேன் = போய் (*pōy*, “having gone”) + வருகிறேன் (*varugirēn*, “I come”) — literally “**having gone, I come**,” i.e. “**I’ll go and come back**.” A Tamil speaker never signs off with a bare “I’m leaving” — that sounds final, even ill-omened. Instead they promise return. The reply is warm: *pōy vā* (“go and come [back]”). The same promise, in each language’s own words:

Language	“go and come back” (goodbye)
Tamil	<i>pōy varugirēn</i>
Kannada	<i>hōgi baruttēne</i>
Telugu	<i>velli vastānu</i>
Malayalam	<i>pōyi varāni</i>
Bengali (Indo-Aryan)	<i>āshi</i> (“I come”)
Hindi (Indo-Aryan)	<i>phir milenge</i> (“we’ll meet again”)

The whole subcontinent, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan alike, prefers a promise of return to a blunt farewell.

Varugirēn itself is built in three parts: *varu* (“come”) + a present-tense marker + *-ēn* (“I”). Chapter 5 makes that stem-tense-person pattern explicit; here it is enough to hear the three pieces.

Grammar Lens: the “having ...d” participle

Pōy is Tamil’s way of chaining actions: “having gone, (then) I come.” Tamil strings verbs like beads — one in the participle “-y” form, the last one fully conjugated. You will see this chaining everywhere.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the goodbye — *pōy varugirēn*
- its literal meaning (“having gone, I come” → “I’ll come back”)
- the warm reply — *pōy vā*

Before you move on

What does the Tamil goodbye literally promise, and how do you answer it? (“I’ll go and come back”; reply *pōy vā*, “go and come [back]”).

4.3 நாளை பார்க்கலாம் (*nālai pārkkalām*) — “see you tomorrow”

A goodbye with a date on it — built on the Tamil word for “day.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நாளை (*nālai*, “tomorrow”) is native Dravidian, from நாள் (*nāl*, “day”) — the same *nāl* in *inru* / *nāl* counting and in *nal-vālttukkal* (“good [day]-wishes”). பார்க்கலாம் (*pārkkalām*) is “let’s see / we may see” — *pār* (“to see, to look”) plus the ending *-kkalām*, “let’s / we may” — so the whole phrase is “**tomorrow, let’s see [each other]**,” the Tamil “see you tomorrow.” Note the retroflex ள் (*l*) — a sound English lacks entirely, made with the tongue-tip curled up and back.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*nālai pārkkalām*”
- the word for “day” inside “tomorrow” (*nāl*)
- the verb “to see” (*pār*)

Before you move on

What does *nālai* come from, and what does *pārkkalām* add? (*Nāl*, “day”; “let’s see” — from *pār*, “to see” — so “tomorrow, let’s see each other.”)

4.4 மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் (*mīṇḍum sandippōm*) — “we’ll meet again”

A warmer, open-ended goodbye — and a chance to see Tamil’s two vocabularies side by side.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் = மீண்டும் (*mīṇḍum*, “again”) +
சந்திப்போம் (*sandippōm*, “we will meet”) — “we’ll meet again.”
Two vocabularies meet in these two words:

- மீண்டும் (*mīṇḍum*, “again”) is **native Dravidian**, from *mīl* (“to return”). Say it *mīṇ-ḍum*: the *ṇḍ* in the middle is a retroflex pair, both halves made with the tongue curled back, and it is one gesture rather than two.
- சந்தி (*sandi*, “to meet, a junction”) is a **Sanskrit** loan — from *sandhi* (“a joining, union”), the very word Sanskrit grammar uses for how sounds join at a word-boundary. The ending on it is *-ppōm*, “we will,” so *sandippōm* is “we will meet.”

So even a goodbye shows Tamil’s balance: an ancient Dravidian core (*mīṇḍum*) beside a Sanskrit borrowing (*sandi*) — the recurring thread of this whole track.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*mīṇḍum sandippōm*”
- which word is native Dravidian and which is Sanskrit (*mīṇḍum* / *sandi*)

Before you move on

What does the phrase mean, and which of its two words is the Sanskrit loan? (“We’ll meet again”; *sandi* “to meet” ← Sanskrit *sandhi* — while *m̐ṇḍum* “again” is native Dravidian.)

4.5 Tamil’s curves — the writing surface leaves a trace

Before the first letter, look at a line of Tamil and notice what isn’t there:

வணக்கம்

Nothing joins the letters together, and there are far fewer corners than in Devanagari — no hanging head-line, and a great deal of curve. (Straight strokes do exist: most of these letters have a flat bar across the top.) The roundness has a usual explanation, and it is the best story in this chapter.

Script you’ll notice: The script is the shape of its writing surface

Tamil was written for centuries on **palm leaves**, scratched with a metal stylus and then rubbed with soot to make the scratches show.

A palm leaf has a **grain**, like wood. Draw a long straight line along that grain and the stylus can **split the leaf**. The usual account is that scribes bent their strokes in response: a curve crosses the fibres at an angle instead of running with them.

Treat that as **the standard explanation rather than a settled fact**. The earliest Tamil writing — Tamil-Brahmi, cut into stone and pottery — is noticeably *angular*; the rounding came later, through the Vaṭṭeluttu (“round script”) stage. And Devanagari was written on the same leaves without going round. So the leaf is one pressure among several, not a complete answer.

It is still worth carrying, because it makes the right general point: **the tool leaves fingerprints on the letters**. Latin’s straight strokes suit a wax tablet and a chisel; Tamil’s curves suit a stylus and a leaf.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* a curve crossing the imagined grain of a palm leaf
- *Contrast:* angular Tamil-Brahmi · later rounded Vaṭṭeluttu
- *Say it:* the usual reason for the curves — “a straight line can **split the leaf**”

Before you move on

Why is Tamil round? (The **usual** explanation: it was incised on **palm leaves**, where a straight stroke along the grain can **split** them — though early Tamil-Brahmi was angular, so it is not the whole story.) What broader point does the account teach? (**Tools and surfaces leave fingerprints on scripts.**) Next: the chapter’s own recap of the farewells.

4.6 Chapter 4 — The farewells

No new words. Three ways to part — none of them a blunt “goodbye.”

Your turn — the farewells

Say these aloud:

- the everyday goodbye — *pōy varugirēn* (“I’ll go and come back”)
- the warm reply — *pōy vā* (“go and come back”)
- “see you tomorrow” — *nālai pārkkalām*
- “we’ll meet again” — *mīṇḍum sandippōm*

Your turn — the atoms

Say these aloud:

- the two oldest verbs (*pō* go, *vā* come)
- “day” hidden in “tomorrow” (*nāl*)
- which farewell-word is a Sanskrit loan (*sandi* ← *sandhi*)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *pōy varugirēn* — “having gone, I come”; the Dravidian promise-of-return goodbye
- *nālai* ← *nāl* “day”; *pār* “to see”
- *mīṇḍum* (native “again”) + *sandi* (Sanskrit “to meet”) — the two vocabularies

Before you move on

Why does Tamil never say a plain “I’m leaving,” and what does its everyday goodbye promise instead? (It sounds final/ill-omened; *pōy varugirēn* promises “I’ll go and come back.”)

Chapter 5

The First Verbs

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build short present-tense Tamil sentences with the chapter’s first verbs.

Build a short present-tense sentence about yourself out loud — speak, live, work — by putting the stem, the present marker and the person ending together.

5.1 பேசு (pēsu) — “to speak,” your first full verb

So far, “to be.” Here is a verb that *does* something — and it shows how Tamil builds “I do X.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

பேசு (*pēsu*, “to speak”) is native Dravidian. The bare stem *pēsu* is also the command “speak!” To say “**I speak**,” Tamil adds a two-part ending to the stem: **tense + person**:

pēsu- (speak) + *-gir-* (present) + *-ēn* (“I”) → ***pēsugirēn***,
“I speak.”

The **-ēn** ending is “I” — so, as with *irukkirēn*, you rarely need the word *nān*. Change the ending, change the person: *pēsugirān* (“he speaks”), *pēsugirāl* (“she speaks”), *pēsugirārgal* (“they/you-respectful speak”).

Grammar Lens: stem + tense + person

Every Tamil verb is built this way — a stem, a tense-marker, a person-ending, stacked in that order and glued together. Learn the pattern once and every verb follows it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pēsu” (speak!)
- “I speak” — *pēsugirēn*
- the three stacked pieces (stem *pēsu* + present *-gir-* + “I” *-ēn*)

Before you move on

Build “I speak” from *pēsu*, and name the three pieces of a Tamil verb. (*Pēsugirēn*; stem + tense + person.)

5.2 நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் (nān tamil pēsugirēn) — “I speak Tamil”

Your first full, moving sentence — and it names the language itself, with a sound almost no other language has.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் = நான் (*nān*, “I”) + தமிழ் (*tamil*, “Tamil,” the object) + பேசுகிறேன் (*pēsugirēn*, “speak”) — “**I Tamil speak**,” the verb last as always. The name தமிழ் (*tamil*) is native, of debated but clearly Dravidian origin (often linked to a sense of “sweetness / one’s own speech”); it names one of the oldest living literary languages in the world, with poetry two thousand years old still read today.

That final sound is worth dwelling on. The *l* of *tamil* is a curled retroflex sitting somewhere between an *r*, an *l* and a *zh* — rare enough among the world’s languages that Tamil is sometimes called “the *l* language.” Getting it approximately right matters more than getting it perfect; nobody will mistake what you mean.

Grammar Lens: no gender on “I speak”

Notice *pēsugirēn* is the same whether a man or a woman says it — Tamil marks **no gender in the first or second person** (only the third: *pēsugirān* he / *pēsugirāl* she). This is unlike Hindi, where even “I speak” changes for a male or female speaker (*boltā/boltī*). Tamil saves gender for “he/she/it.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*nān tamil pēsugirēn*”
- the special Tamil sound in *tamīl* (the retroflex *l*)
- does “I speak” change for a man vs. a woman? (No — Tamil marks no gender in the 1st person)

Before you move on

Say “I speak Tamil,” and name the rare sound in the word *tamīl*. (*Nān tamil pēsugirēn*; the retroflex *l* — ழ.)

5.3 வ and க — the vowel inside each consonant

Tamil’s letters do not join and they carry many curves. Now learn the sound that arrives for free inside every consonant.

Script you’ll notice: The vowel you get for free

Tamil is an **abugida**, like Devanagari: a consonant already contains a vowel.

க is not “k”. க is “ka”.

Every consonant carries a built-in **a** until a later mark removes or replaces it.

Script you’ll notice: வ — “va”

1. a near-closed loop on the left
2. a full-height arm across the top, ending in a descender on the right

Script you'll notice: க — “ka”

1. a straight horizontal top bar
2. a bowl hanging from its left end
3. a short right stroke that hooks left below

The letters in this word

Devanagari separates क, ख, ग, घ. Tamil uses க across that space: *k* at the start of a word and when doubled (க்க), *g* after a nasal (ங்க), and a softer *h*-like sound between vowels. **Position**, not a new spelling, selects the sound.

Tamil therefore needs only 18 consonant letters where Devanagari needs 33; its native words do not depend on those written distinctions.

Grammar lens

One letter, three sounds — now on the page. Chapter~1 said Tamil picks this sound by position rather than by spelling; here is the letter that does it. Devanagari spells *ka*, *kha*, *ga* and *gha* with four separate letters. Tamil writes க for all of them: *k* at the start of a word and when doubled (க்க), *g* after a nasal (ங்க), and a softer *h*-like sound between vowels. That is why Tamil needs only 18 consonant letters where Devanagari needs 33 — its native words do not depend on those written distinctions.

Your turn

- *Write it:* வ — “left loop, top arm, descender”
- *Write it:* க — “top bar, left bowl, hooking right stroke”
- *Say it:* “க is ka, not k”
- *Contrast:* initial *k* · after a nasal *g* · between vowels soft *h*

Before you move on

What does க say alone? (**Ka** — the vowel is inherent.) What kind of script is this? (An **abugida**.) Which sounds can க spell? (*k*, *g*, and a softer *h*-like sound, chosen by **position**.) Draw வ and க.

5.4 வாழ் (vāl) — “to live, to flourish”

A second verb — and one of the most beloved words in the language, the one Tamils use to bless.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

வாழ் (*vāl*, “to live, to flourish, to thrive”) is native Dravidian, and carries more warmth than a plain “to reside.” From it grow *vāḷkkai* (“life”) and the blessing *vāḷga* (“may you live / long live”), heard in *vāḷga tamīl* (“long live Tamil”). To say “I live,” add the familiar ending: *nān ... vāḷgīrēn*, stem + present *-gīr-* + “I” *-ēn*, exactly like *pēsugīrēn*.

Grammar Lens: same engine, new verb

You already know the machine: *vāl-* (stem) + *-gīr-* (present) + *-ēn* (“I”) → *vāḷgīrēn* (“I live”). Every verb you learn slots into the same three-part frame — that is the reward for learning *pēsu* carefully.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vāl” — feel the retroflex *l*
- “I live” — *nān vāḷgīrēn*
- the blessing — *vāḷga!* (“long live / may you flourish”)

Before you move on

Build “I live” from *vāl*, and give the blessing made from it.
(*Vāḷgīrēn*; *vāḷga!*, “may you live / long live.”)

5.5 வேலை செய் (vēlai sey) — “to work”

The last verb of the chapter — and, like Hindi’s *karnā*, it is a “do” verb that builds a hundred others.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

செய் (*sey*, “to do, to make”) is a core native Dravidian verb, and Tamil — like Hindi with *karnā* — builds compound verbs by putting a noun in front of it:

- வேலை செய் (*vēlai sey*) = “work-do” = “**to work**” (*vēlai*, “work”)
- சமையல் செய் (*samaiyal sey*) = “to cook”
- *udavi sey* = “to help”

So “I work” is *nān vēlai seygirēn* — *sey-* + *-gir-* + *-ēn*, “I do work.” Master *sey* and a whole grammar of “do-verbs” opens up.

Grammar Lens: noun + செய் = a new verb

This “noun + *sey*” pattern is the exact twin of Hindi’s “noun + *karnā*” (*kām karnā*, “to work”). Two unrelated language families — Dravidian and Indo-Aryan — landed on the same clever trick: make an all-purpose “do” verb, then bolt nouns onto it. Living side by side for millennia, Tamil and Hindi have quietly traded habits like this.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*vēlai sey*” (to work)
- “I work” — *nān vēlai seygirēn*
- the Hindi twin of this trick (noun + *karnā*)

Before you move on

How does Tamil turn “work” into “to work,” and what Hindi verb works the same way? (*Vēlai* + *sey* = “work-do”; Hindi’s *karnā*, as in *kām karnā*.)

5.6 Chapter 5 — The first verbs

No new words. Three verbs, one engine — build real sentences about yourself.

Your turn — build the sentences

Say these aloud:

- “I speak Tamil” — *nān tam̐l pēsugirēn*
- “I live in Chennai” — *nān Chennaiyil vālgirēn*
- “I work” — *nān vēlai seygirēn*
- “he speaks” vs. “she speaks” — *pēsugirān* / *pēsugirāl*

Grammar lens — the engine

Say these aloud:

- the three stacked pieces of every Tamil verb (stem + tense + person)
- the ending that means “I” (*-ēn*)
- where Tamil marks gender — and where it doesn’t (3rd person only)

What you’ve built — roots you now carry

- *pēsu* “to speak” (native Dravidian)
- *vāl* “to live/flourish” → *vāḷkkai* “life,” *vāḷga* “long live”
- *sey* “to do” → *vēlai sey* “to work” (the twin of Hindi’s *karnā*)
- *tam̐l* — the language, and its signature retroflex *ḷ*

Before you move on

In one breath, say your language and your work in Tamil, then bless someone with the *vāl* verb. (*Nān tam̐l pēsugirēn. Nān vēlai seygirēn. Vāḷga!*)

Chapter 6

Dative Case and Dative Subjects

Modes: 🗣 voice (4) ✍ pen (5) 🖐 Hands-free start: first 1 of 9 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can attach -உக்கு to a noun in either of its surface forms and say why “I know Tamil” puts the experiencer in the dative instead of giving the sentence a subject.

Line up எனக்கு, நாகு, நன்றி and എനിക്ക്, point to the experiencer in each, and paraphrase எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் as “the language is known to me.”

6.1 -உக்கு (-ukku) — “to, for”

Your first **case ending**. English says “**to** me” with a separate word in front. Tamil says it with a piece **stuck on the back** — and that small difference is the biggest structural fact about the language.

Grammar Lens: Adding it on

Take a noun you know and add -உக்கு:

word	+ the dative	meaning
peyar — name	peyarukku	to/for the name
vēlai — work	vēlaiukku	for work

The suffix has two shapes — -உக்கு -ukku and -க்கு -kku — chosen by the sound the noun ends in. One case, two forms; the seam still shows. And with “I” — this one is irregular and worth memorising, because you’ll use it constantly:

nān (“I”) → *enakku* (“to me”)

The pronoun changes its body (*nān* → *en-*) before the suffix lands.
Nouns don’t — they just take the ending.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*peyar ... peyarukku*”
- “*nān ... enakku*” — “I” ... “to me”
- “*vēlai*” — “for work,” from Ch. 5’s *vēlai*

Before you move on

What does **-உக்கு** mean? (“**To**” or “**for**.”) Where does it go? (**On the end** of the noun — Tamil adds, it doesn’t put a word in front.) What is “to me”? (***enakku*** — the pronoun’s body changes to *en-* first.) Why does the suffix show up as *-ukku* and *-kku*? (**One case, two shapes**, chosen by the noun’s ending.) Next: two more letters — **ம** and retroflex **ண**.

6.2 வ — one spiral, one motion

One letter this time. Just one.

It is the first letter of the first word you learned, and it is the easiest one in this book to write: the pen never leaves the paper.

Script you’ll notice: வ

வ — *va*.

What it is made of:

- a spiral loop on the left
- a bottom bar
- a tall right upright

வணக்கம் starts with it, and so does **வாழ்** — *to live*.

Writing: வ

- 1. start at the inner curl and spiral outward, climbing the left side
- 2. without lifting, arch over the top and descend on the right
- 3. without lifting, turn down to the baseline
- 4. without lifting, carry the bottom bar to the right
- 5. without lifting, rise up the right upright — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 0. The pen never leaves the paper.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 9, வ (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 194.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* வ once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “va” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

How many times does the pen lift while writing வ? (**None** — one unbroken motion.) What sound does it carry on its own? (**va.**)

6.3 ழ and ழா — a loop, and a curled tongue

Two more letters, and with them you’ll have every letter of this book’s first word. One is easy. The other is a sound you may not be able to hear yet.

Script you'll notice: ழ

1. a straight vertical stroke on the LEFT
2. a horizontal along the bottom
3. a rounded arch closing it on the RIGHT

Get the sides the right way round. The **upright is on the left** and the **curve on the right** — which is the reverse of what most people guess, and the reverse of the Devanagari habit of hanging a shape off a right-hand spine.

Script you'll notice: ழ

1. a straight top bar
2. a loop on the left
3. two arches
4. a straight vertical on the right, down to the baseline

The dot under the romanization — **ṇ**, not plain *n* — is doing real work.

The letters in this word

Say English **n**. Your tongue touches just behind your teeth. Now curl the tip of your tongue **up and back** toward the roof of your mouth, and say it again. That is **ṇ**, and it is a different letter in Tamil. English has no such sound and no way to write one, which is why an English speaker typically **cannot hear the difference at first**. That is expected. The ear learns it after the hand does, which is one good argument for writing the letters rather than only reading them. Retroflex sounds are a signature of the languages of India — they show up across Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam, Hindi and Sanskrit alike, in families that are otherwise unrelated to each other. It's one of the features that makes South Asia a *linguistic area*: neighbouring languages that borrowed a sound from each other rather than inheriting it.

Your turn

- *Write it:* ட — “left upright, bottom, **right** arch”
- *Write it:* ண — “top bar, left loop, **two** arches, straight vertical”
- *Say it:* plain *n*, then curl the tongue back — ன

Before you move on

Draw ட — which side is the upright on? (**The left**; the arch closes it on the right.) Draw ண — what makes it *not* ண? (**One extra arch**: ண has **two** arches where ண has one. Both end in the same straight vertical.) What does the dot in ன mean? (**Retroflex** — the tongue curls **back** to the roof of the mouth.) Why can’t you hear it yet? (**English has no such sound**; the ear learns it after the hand.) Next: stacking that dative suffix where Latin would fuse several meanings.

6.4 -உக்கு — one carriage in a suffix train

You can point to *peyar* and *-ukku* separately. That visible seam is the structural lesson.

Grammar Lens: Stacking versus fusion

	Tamil -ukku	Latin -īs
fixes the case?	dative , always	dative or ablative
carries number?	no; another suffix can	plural is baked in
carries declension?	no	first/second class is baked in
visible seam?	peyar + ukku	one fused ending
Tamil stacks . Each suffix contributes one meaning in a fixed order, like a train carriage. Latin fuses case, number, and class into an indivisible ending, and <i>-īs</i> does not even identify one case by itself. This is agglutinative structure: long words remain buildable because their pieces stay legible. The comparison is not about simplicity; it is about where the grammatical information lives.		

Your turn

- *Break apart:* *peyar + ukku*
- *Say it:* “one suffix, one meaning, visible seam”
- *Contrast:* Tamil stacks · Latin fuses

Before you move on

What does *-ukku* contribute? (**Dative to/for**, one meaning.) What does Latin *-īs* fuse? (**Case, plural number, and declension class**.) Which system leaves the seam visible? (**Tamil’s agglutinative stack**.)

6.5 எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் — “I know Tamil”

In Chapter 5 you said *nān tamīl pēsugirēn* — “I speak Tamil,” with *nān* as the subject. Now say “I **know** Tamil.” Tamil will not let you use *nān*.

You’ll want to know: The sentence

எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும். *enakku tamīl teriyum*. literally: “**to-me** Tamil is-known.”

Word by word:

piece

எனக்குத்(**த்**) *enakku(t)*

“to me” — the dative from the last lesson

தமிழ் *tamīl*

Tamil (Ch. 5)

தெரியும் *teriyum*

“is known / is apparent”

That extra **த்** on *enakku* is **sandhi** — a joining consonant Tamil inserts between certain words to smooth the seam. It belongs to neither word on its own; it exists only because they are next to each other. Nothing to learn yet, but worth noticing, because you will see it constantly.

You are not the subject. *Nān* is gone — the person has been moved into the dative. What’s left in the plain, unmarked form is *tamīl*: the sentence is now about **the language**, and you are merely the one it is known **to**.

(Grammarians call *enakku* the **dative subject**, because it behaves like the subject even though it isn't in the subject case. The odd feeling of the sentence is exactly that split.)

Grammar Lens: Why: things that happen *to* you

Tamil sorts verbs by whether you **do** something or something **happens to** you. Speaking is something you do — so Ch. 5 used *nān*. But knowing, liking, wanting, being hungry, being cold: these arrive at you. Tamil marks that by putting the person in the **dative**.

English frames it as

I **know** Tamil

I **like** it

I **am** cold

Tamil frames it as

Tamil is known **to me**

it is pleasing **to me**

cold is **to me**

English does this occasionally and archaically — “**methinks**” is exactly it (*me* is dative: “it seems **to me**”). Tamil made it a rule.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*enakku tamil teriyum*”
- the contrast — “*nān tamil pēsugirēn*” (I speak) ... “*enakku tamil teriyum*” (known to me)
- the literal — “to-me Tamil is-known”

Before you move on

What does எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் literally say? (“**To-me** Tamil **is-known**.”) Which word has English got that Tamil hasn't? (A nominative “**I**” — *nān* is replaced by the dative *enakku*.) Why does Tamil use the dative here? (Because knowing **happens to** you; you don't **do** it.) Which English word preserves the same idea? (**Methinks** — “it seems **to me**.”) Next: watch all four Dravidian sisters use the same experiencer shape.

6.6 -ukku, -ku, -ge, -ikku — the family shows its bones

Tamil says knowing happens **to** you. Its three closest sisters make the same grammatical choice.

Grammar Lens: Four sentences, one construction

language	“I know [the language]”	dative
Tamil	<i>enakku tamīl teriyum</i>	-ukku
Telugu	<i>nāku telugu vaccu</i>	-ku
Kannada	<i>nanage kannaḍa gottu</i>	-ge
Malayalam	<i>enikku malayālam ariyām</i>	-ikku

The verbs differ, but the experiencer sits in a dative whose forms visibly belong together: *-ukku* / *-ku* / *-ge* / *-ikku*. This is family evidence, just as *blanc/bianco/branco* exposes Romance kinship. The comparison also makes cross-language practice useful: once you recognize “to me,” you can search for the known or apparent thing rather than forcing an English subject onto the sentence.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “-ukku · -ku · -ge · -ikku”
- *Point to*: the experiencer in each sentence
- *Put it another way*: “the language is known to me”

Before you move on

Do the four sisters agree on dative experiencers? (**Yes.**) Which four suffix shapes reveal the relationship? (**-ukku, -ku, -ge, -ikku.**) What stays plain in the sentence? (The thing **known or experienced.**)

6.7 ഞ്ഞ — the first of three n’s

Before the new one: say the sound of ഞ.

One letter this time. Just one.

Tamil has three different letters for sounds English hears as one *n*. This is the first, and the dot under its romanization — **ṇ**, not plain *n* — is doing real work: the tongue curls back to the roof of the mouth. Words genuinely differ by it.

Script you'll notice: ண

ண — *ṇa*.

What it is made of:

- a spiral loop on the left
- TWO rounded inner arches
- a straight top bar
- a separate straight vertical on the right, down to the baseline

It is the second letter of வணக்கம்.

Writing: ண

- **1.** start in the lower-left curl and spiral outward, climbing the outer left side
- **2.** without lifting, arch over the top of the left loop to the first junction
- **3.** without lifting, descend around the outside of the first inner arch
- **4.** without lifting, turn through its bottom and climb the inside back to the first junction
- **5.** without lifting, sweep through the extra inner arch — over its top, around its outside and bottom, then up its inside to the right junction
- **6.** without lifting, carry the top bar to the right edge — then lift once
- **7.** set the pen at the top of the separate right upright and draw straight down — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 1. The pen comes up 1 time and no more.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 13, ணா (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 195.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* ணா once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “na” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

Where does the tongue go for ணா? (**Curled back**, to the roof of the mouth.) How many pen lifts? (**One** — the body, then the upright.)

6.8 ட, ண, ணா — three stops on one tongue-map

English writes one *n*. Tamil keeps three tongue positions apart.

Script you’ll notice: The backward walk

letter	sound	tongue
ட	<i>na</i>	against the teeth (dental)
ண	<i><u>na</u></i>	on the ridge behind the teeth (alveolar)
ணா	<i><u>na</u></i>	curled back to the roof (retroflex)

Move backward: teeth → ridge → curled roof. English spells all three with one letter and initially hears them as the same sound; Tamil uses separate letters because its words depend on the contrast.

You will draw ட and ண when *nandri* needs them. For now compare the last pair: ணா is ண with one extra arch. Both open with a top bar and

loop and finish with the same vertical. **ஶ** has one middle arch; **ஶ்** has two.

Retroflex sounds occur across unrelated South Asian language families. That shared geography makes the region a **linguistic area**: neighbors can borrow a sound pattern without inheriting it from one ancestor.

Your turn

- *Say it*: dental **ந** at the teeth
- *Say it*: alveolar **ன** at the ridge
- *Say it*: retroflex **ண** with the tongue curled back
- *Trace it*: one arch in **ஶ** · two arches in **ஶ்**

Before you move on

How many n-letters does Tamil have? (**Three.**) What separates them? (Tongue position: **dental, alveolar, retroflex.**) Which two differ by one arch? (**ஶ** has one; **ஶ்** has two.) Next: the numbers one to five.

6.9 ழ — one character, met inside words you already say

Curvy and loopy with flat top-bars on many letters, repeated arches, and no continuous head-line.

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: ழ

ழ — *pa*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *p*, it is **pa**.

You already say these, and every one of them has ழ somewhere inside it:

- பெயர் *peyar* — name

- என் பெயர் ... *en peyar* ... — my name is... (with no “is”)
- எப்படி *eppadi* — how
- பரவாயில்லை *paravāyillai* — it’s okay / no problem / you’re welcome

Writing: ூ — copy what you see

Put your pen on ூ and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ூ in the ones that have it
பெயர் · வணக்கம்
- *Trace it:* ூ three times, saying *pa* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ூ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ூ? What sound does it carry? (*pa*.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 7

Numbers One to Ten

Modes:  **voice** (3)  **eyes** (1)  **pen** (16)  **Hands-free start:** first 1 of 20 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can hear, say, read, and write representative numbers from one to ten in Tamil and recognize their Dravidian family history.

Count onru to pattu, read all ten Tamil numeral shapes out of order, write eezhu with its numeral from sound alone, and recall the pattu/hattu relationship.

7.1 One to five — voice first

Keep your pencil down. Hear five Tamil number words, attach each to a quantity, and say them before your eyes meet Tamil writing.

The letters in this word

quantity	said
1	<i>onru</i>
2	<i>irantu</i>
3	<i>muunru</i>
4	<i>naanku</i>
5	<i>aintu</i>

Raise one more finger for each word: *onru, irantu, muunru, naanku, aintu*. *Twice through:*

These are inherited Dravidian words, not borrowed Sanskrit number names. The family history can wait until the sounds and quantities feel secure.

Your turn

- *Hear: muunru*; YOU SHOW: 3
- *Hear: aintu*; YOU SHOW: 5
- *Say it: onru* through *aintu* while raising one more finger

Before you move on

Count from one to five without looking. Which word means two? (***Irantu.***) Are these forms borrowed from Sanskrit? (**No.**) Next, only three numeral shapes arrive.

7.2 ॑ · ॒ · ॒ — three numeral shapes

Say *onru*, *irantu*, *muunru*. The meanings and sounds are familiar; this lesson adds only their three numeral shapes.

Script

- ॑ means 1: *onru*.
- ॒ means 2: *irantu*.
- ॒ means 3: *muunru*.

Point in order, then out of order: ॒ ॑ ॒.

Writing — observe and trace

Keep the models visible. Finger-trace ॑, ॒, and ॒ once each. Say the number word only after your finger stops. Do not copy from memory yet.

Before you move on

Point to ॒ and say it. (***Irantu.***) Which shape means three? (॒.) How many new shapes arrived? (**Three.**)

7.3 ஸ · ஐ — finish the first five numerals

Read க உ ங. Two shapes remain in the first group.

Script

- ஸ means 4: *naanku*.
- ஐ means 5: *aintu*.

Point through க உ ங ஸ ஐ once.

Writing — observe and trace

Keep both models visible. Trace ஸ once and ஐ once. Then circle the one you hear: *Hear: aintu.* (ஐ.)

Before you move on

Which shape means four? (ஸ.) Read ஐ. (*Aintu.*) This lesson added two shapes, not five.

7.4 Five familiar words — now in Tamil script

Say one to five, then read க உ ங ஸ ஐ. No new numeral shape appears below.

Script

numeral	word	said
க	ஒன்று	<i>onru</i>
உ	இரண்டு	<i>irantu</i>
ங	மூன்று	<i>muunru</i>
ஸ	நான்கு	<i>naanku</i>
ஐ	ஐந்து	<i>aintu</i>

Follow each word with your finger while saying it. The letters have appeared earlier; this step only joins familiar pieces.

Writing — observe and trace

Trace ஒன்று — க once with the model visible. Read the other four rows; do not copy the whole table yet.

Before you move on

Read ந — மூன்று. (*Muunru, three.*) Which word belongs to ஐ? (ஐந்து, *aintu.*) No new shape was added.

7.5 க உ ந ஸ ஐ — one visible copy

Point through க உ ந ஸ ஐ and say the five words. Keep the row visible.

Writing — guided copy

Copy the row once beneath its model. Look back after every shape if needed. Say *onru* through *aintu* as you check. Repair only one shape.

Before you move on

Read ஸ. (*Naanku.*) No new shape was added here.

7.6 Five numerals — hide, then write

Study க உ ந ஸ ஐ for five seconds. Say each number, then cover the row.

Writing — delayed copy

Write the five numerals in order while the model is hidden. Peek once if one will not come, cover it again, and continue. Uncover and repair one place.

Before you move on

What changed from the previous lesson? (**The model was hidden before writing.**)

7.7 Three heard numbers — write their numerals

Cover the answer line. You will hear familiar words, never an untaught form.

Writing — dictation

Hear: *irantu* — *aintu* — *muunru*

Write the three numeral shapes from sound alone. Then uncover: ௨ ௫ ௭. Repair one shape if needed; do not rewrite the line.

Before you move on

Write the numeral for *naanku* from sound alone. (௭.) Now the Dravidian family lesson can deepen forms you can already hear and read.

7.8 Two to five — one family in four regional coats

Hindi's number forms are Sanskrit worn smooth. Tamil's are native Dravidian, so their sister-language shapes reveal the family directly.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

	Tamil	Kannada	Telugu	Malayalam
2	<i>iraṇṭu</i>	<i>eraḍu</i>	<i>reṇḍu</i>	<i>raṇṭu</i>
3	<i>mūṇru</i>	<i>mūru</i>	<i>mūḍu</i>	<i>mūnnu</i>
4	<i>nāṇku</i>	<i>nālku</i>	<i>nālugu</i>	<i>nālu</i>
5	<i>aintu</i>	<i>aidu</i>	<i>aidu</i>	<i>añcu</i>

Each row is one word in four regional coats. That shared skeleton is why one Dravidian language gives you a running start on another.

One is less tidy: Tamil *onru*, Kannada *ondu*, and Malayalam *onnu* share old *on-*, while Telugu uses the separate formation *okaṭi*. The family agrees more neatly on 2–5 than on 1.

The letters in this word

In *onru* and *mūnru*, ణ్ర is alveolar *n* running into hard *r*, almost one knock: *on-ru*, *muun-ru*. Pulli on ణ్ర removes its vowel before the cluster.

Your turn

- Say it: “iraṇṭu · eraḍu · reṇḍu · raṇṭu”
- Say it: *onru* and *mūnru*, holding ణ్ర together
- Identify: Telugu *okaṭi* as the different “one”

Before you move on

Are these forms borrowed? (**No**, native Dravidian.) Which numbers stay tidiest across the family? (**Two through five**.) Which language forms “one” differently? (**Telugu**, *okaṭi*.)

7.9 Six to ten — voice first

Count *onru* through *aintu*. Keep your pencil down: five new meanings and sounds come before their shapes.

The letters in this word

quantity	said
6	<i>aaru</i>
7	<i>eezhu</i>
8	<i>ettu</i>
9	<i>onpatu</i>
10	<i>pattu</i>

Say the row once slowly, then once at counting speed. [REPEAT x2]

Why it’s said this way

The middle of *eezhu*, seven, has Tamil’s characteristic curled *zh*. Practise the sound now; its letter waits.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Nine, *onpatu*, grew from one plus ten: one short of *pattu*. Say *on-patu*, then *onpatu*.

Your turn

- Say it: *aaru*, *eezhu*, *ettu*, *onpatu*, *pattu*
- Hear: *eezhu*; YOU SHOW: 7
- Hear: *onpatu*; YOU SHOW: 9

Before you move on

Count six to ten. Which word keeps the curled *zh*? (***Eezhu***.) Which word leans on ten? (***Onpatu***, *nine*.) Next, three numeral shapes.

7.10 ્ଁଁଁ · ્ଁଁ · ્ଁଁ — three more numeral shapes

Say *aaru*, *eezhu*, *ettu*. Only their shapes are new.

Script

- ્ଁଁଁ means 6: *aaru*.
- ્ଁଁଁ means 7: *eezhu*.
- ્ଁଁଁ means 8: *ettu*.

Point out of order: ્ଁଁଁ ્ଁଁ ્ଁଁ.

Writing — observe and trace

Trace ્ଁଁଁ, ્ଁଁଁ, and ્ଁଁଁ once each with the models visible. Say the word after each trace. Memory writing waits.

Before you move on

Which shape means seven? (ଁଁଁଁ.) Read ્ଁଁଁ. (***Ette***.) Three new shapes arrived.

7.11 கூ · டி — nine and ten

Read கூ எ அ. Two shapes finish the row.

Script

- கூ means 9: *onpatu*.
- டி means 10: *pattu*.

Point through கூ எ அ கூ டி once.

Writing — observe and trace

Trace கூ once and டி once with their models visible. Circle the one you hear: *Hear: onpatu.* (கூ.)

Before you move on

Which shape means ten? (டி.) Read கூ. (*Onpatu.*) Two new shapes arrived.

7.12 Six to ten — now in Tamil script

Say six to ten, then read கூ எ அ கூ டி. No new numeral shape appears below.

Script

numeral	word	said
கூ	ஆறு	<i>aaru</i>
எ	ஏழு	<i>eezhu</i>
அ	எட்டு	<i>ettu</i>
கூ	ஒன்பது	<i>onpatu</i>
டி	பத்து	<i>pattu</i>

The curled sound you heard in *eezhu* is ழ. Follow ஏழு with your finger while saying it; every shape has had earlier support.

Writing — observe and trace

Trace ஏழு — எ once with the model visible. Read the remaining rows without copying the whole table.

Before you move on

Which letter carries the curled sound? (ழு.) Read எ — ஏழு.
(*Eezhu*, *seven*.) No new shape was added.

7.13 கா எ அ கூ டி — one supported copy

Read கா எ அ கூ டி. Keep both models below visible.

Writing — guided copy

Copy கா எ அ கூ டி once. Then copy ஏழு — எ once. Look back whenever you need. Check only one place, then stop.

Before you move on

Read your copied word. (*Eezhu*, *seven*.) Which numeral belongs beside it? (எ.)

7.14 ண — the second n, and how to tell it from ண்

Before the new one: say the sound of ண்.

One letter this time. Just one.

Look at ண் and ண side by side. Same spiral loop, same top bar, same upright on the right. The whole difference is **how many arches sit inside**: ண் has two, ண has one. That is the entire distinction, and it is why these two are learned together rather than a chapter apart.

Script you'll notice: ண

ண — *na*.

What it is made of:

- a spiral loop on the left
- ONE rounded inner arch
- a straight top bar
- a separate straight vertical on the right, down to the baseline

It ends நான் — *I* — and நன்றி's second syllable.

Writing: னா

- **1.** start in the lower-left curl and spiral outward, climbing the outer left side
- **2.** without lifting, arch over the top of the left loop to the middle junction
- **3.** without lifting, descend around the outside of the single inner arch
- **4.** without lifting, turn through its bottom and climb the inside back to the top junction
- **5.** without lifting, carry the top bar to the right edge — then lift once
- **6.** set the pen at the top of the separate right upright and draw straight down — and only now lift

Pen lifts: **1.** The pen comes up 1 time and no more.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 13, னா (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 195.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* னா once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “na” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

What separates ூ from ூ? (**Two inner arches against one.**)
Which one is this? (ூ, one arch.)

7.15 ூ — hide, then write

Study ூ — ூ for five seconds. Say *eezhu*, then cover both forms.

Writing — delayed copy

Write the word and numeral while the model is hidden. Peek once if needed, cover again, and finish. Uncover and repair one shape.

Before you move on

Which letter carries the curled sound? (ழ.) What changed from guided copy? (**The model was hidden before writing.**)

7.16 Heard numbers — write without a model

Cover the answer line. Every sound and shape has had a supported turn.

Writing — dictation and transcription

Hear: *aaru* — *eezhu* — *onpatu*

Write the three numerals from sound alone. For *eezhu*, also write the word. Then uncover: ூ — ூ ூ — ூ. Repair one place.

Before you move on

Write the numeral for *pattu*. (௮.) Write seven. (௭.) Next, compare only forms you can already hear and read.

7.17 ் — the dot that leaves both letters visible

Every consonant carries a built-in **a**. So how do you write a consonant with **no** vowel — the *k* in *vaṇakkam*, or the *m* at the end?

One dot.

Script you’ll notice: The pulli

$\text{க} = ka \rightarrow \text{க்} = k$

புள்ளி (*pulli*) means simply “**the dot.**” Written above a letter, it removes the inherent vowel. That’s the whole rule.

A standing note for this whole track. These lessons quote real Tamil words and examples, and most of them contain letters the track has not taught you to draw yet — *pulli*’s own name uses ட, ண and the ூ sign, and the comparisons below reach for others again. **Read anything printed here; only draw the letters a lesson has actually broken into strokes.** The data file behind this track covers 11 letters so far and says so (`complete: false`) — it grows as the chapters need it.

Script you’ll notice: What Tamil does *not* do

If you have done the Devanagari track, this is the moment to notice a real divergence.

In Devanagari, killing the vowel makes the bare consonant **fuse** with the next one into a squeezed **conjunct** — स् + त becomes स्त, and the first letter loses its spine. The virama usually disappears into the ligature.

Tamil doesn’t do that. The dot stays visible, and both letters keep their full shape:

Devanagari	स् + त → स्त — a new fused shape
Tamil	க் + க → க்க — two letters, dot intact

The consequence is arithmetic. Tamil’s whole set is **247 characters**: 12 vowels + 18 consonants + the 216 consonant-vowel combinations + the **āytam** ூ. That is genuinely all of them. Devanagari’s conjuncts run to many hundreds of ligature shapes on top of its letters, each to be learned or at least recognised.

(One honest exception: Tamil does have a few **ligatures borrowed with Sanskrit words** — கஷ *kṣa* and ஸ்ரீ *śrī*. They sit outside the 18 native consonants and outside the 247.)

Your turn

Write these out:

- க் — “க, then the dot above”
- க்க — two full letters, dot intact, **no fusing**

Before you move on

What does the **pulli** do, and what does the word mean? (Removes the **inherent vowel**; *pulli* is simply “**the dot**”.) What does Devanagari do that Tamil doesn’t? (**Fuses** the letters into a **conjunct** — Tamil keeps both shapes and the dot.) What does Tamil get in exchange? (A **much smaller character set** — 247, with **almost** no ligatures: only the borrowed கஷ and ஸ்ரீ.) Next: six, seven and ten across the family.

7.18 Six to ten — family resemblances and one Kannada shift

The Tamil forms are learned. Now use their sister shapes as evidence for inheritance and regular sound change.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Six and seven remain close: Tamil *āru*, Kannada *āru*, Malayalam *āru*; Tamil *ēlu*, Kannada *ēlu*, Malayalam *ēlu*. Tamil and Malayalam also keep eight and nine nearly identical: *eṭṭu* and *onpatu/onpatu*. Telugu wanders on eight and nine with *enimidi* and *tommidi*, so those forms are less reliable as family-wide recognition anchors.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil and Malayalam say **pattu**, while Kannada says **hattu**. The initial *p* → *h* is a regular Kannada shift, not a random replacement. Compare Tamil *pāl*, “milk,” with Kannada *hālu*.

A correspondence lets differences prove relationship: repeated *p/h* pairs are stronger evidence than one accidental resemblance.

Your turn

- *Say it:* Tamil *pattu* · Kannada *hattu*
- *Say it:* Tamil *pāl* · Kannada *hālu*
- *Identify:* *ēlu* / *ēḷu* / *ēlu* as one inherited seven

Before you move on

What happens to Tamil *pattu* in Kannada? (*P* regularly softens to *h*: *hattu*.) Which second pair confirms the pattern? (*Pāl* / *hālu*, “milk.”) Which language diverges most on eight and nine? (Telugu.)

7.19 ோ — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ூ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ோ

ோ — *ō*.

It is a **vowel sign**. It is not a letter and never stands alone: it attaches to a consonant and **replaces** the *a* built into it with *ō*. Replaces, not adds — the *a* is gone.

You already say these, and every one of them has ோ somewhere inside it:

- போய் வருகிறேன் *pōy varugirēn* — goodbye (lit. “I’ll go and come back”)
- மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் *mīṇḍum sandippōm* — we’ll meet again

Writing: ோ — copy what you see

Put your pen on ோ and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ோ in the ones that have it
- *Trace it:* ோ three times, saying *ō* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ோ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ோ? What vowel does it put on the consonant it attaches to — and what does it take off? (**Puts *ō* on; takes the built-in *a* off.**) Name one word you already say that contains it.

7.20 One to ten — the cumulative payoff

Count from *onru* to *pattu* once without looking. No new word or shape appears in this lesson.

Your turn — read, not recite

Read these shuffled numerals:

- First row: எ உ ய று அ
- Second row: று கூ க கா ச

Now check against க உ று ச று கா எ அ கூ ய.

Why it's said this way

- Which forms are inherited rather than borrowed? (**The Tamil number words.**)
- Which word means one short of ten? (ஒன்பது, *onpatu*, nine.)
- Which Kannada shift links Tamil *pattu* to Kannada *hattu*? (**p to h.**)

Writing — independent dictation

Cover the answer. *Hear: eezhu* Write its numeral and word. Uncover: எ — ஏழு. Repair one shape if needed.

Before you move on

Count one to ten, then read கூ சூ எ out of order. You can now hear, say, read, and write a representative part of the sequence.

Chapter 8

Please

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (8) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 11 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can tell an emphatic தயவுசெய்து from the everyday courtesy that lives in the -உங்கள் verb ending, and I can write சொல்லுங்கள் from hearing.

Ask for something twice — தயவுசெய்து when the request needs weight, plain உட்காருங்கள் when it does not — read the join in செய்து, and write சொல்லுங்கள் from hearing.

8.1 தயவுசெய்து (tayavu seytu) — please (do the kindness)

Across a whole band of Asia, the word for *please* is really the word **compassion**, dressed as a small request. Tamil says it most literally of all: “do the kindness.”

You’ll want to know: The phrase

தயவுசெய்து = please, literally “do the kindness / grace.” It is two pieces snapped together:

- தயவு (tayavu) = kindness, compassion, grace — from Sanskrit daya “compassion.”
- செய்து (seytu) = “having done,” from the verb செய் (sey) “to do.”

So *tayavu seytu* is an invitation: *do me the kindness (of...)*. You place it in front of a request the way English puts “please” in front of one.

This is the same instinct as **Arabic** *min faḍlik* (“from your **grace**”) and **Hindi** *kṛpayā* (from *kṛpā*, “**compassion**”). Naming the kindness you hope for is one of the great strategies of politeness — different from French’s “if it **pleases** you,” and from Latin/German’s “I **ask**.”

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

All four Dravidian cousins build *please* the very same way — **daya** plus a light verb “do / place / become”:

- Tamil தயவுசெய்து *tayavu seytu* — kindness + **do**
- Kannada ದಯವಿಟ್ಟು *dayaviṭṭu* — compassion + **having placed**
- Telugu దయచేసి *dayacēsi* — compassion + **having done**
- Malayalam ദയവായി *dayavāyi* — compassion + **as / having become**

One idea, four scripts. Learn one and you can almost read the others.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*tayavu*” — the kindness — then “*seytu*,” having done
- the whole phrase — “*tayavu seytu*” = please, do the kindness

Before you move on

What is the Tamil phrase for please? (தயவுசெய்து *tayavu seytu*.) What do its two pieces mean? (“**Kindness**” *tayavu* + “**having done**” *seytu* — *do the kindness*.) Which languages ask the same way? (**Kannada**, **Telugu**, **Malayalam** with *daya*, and further off **Arabic** *faḍl* and **Hindi** *kṛpā*.) Next: decide when the standalone phrase is natural and when the verb carries the courtesy.

8.2 Solluṅaḷ — please tell me

You know *tayavu seytu*, the weightier “do me the kindness.” Now learn one ordinary respectful request by ear before meeting its written shape.

You’ll want to know: one useful request

Solluṅaḷ means **please tell me**. The ending *-uṅaḷ* makes the request respectful. For now, keep the whole expression together: one sound, one useful meaning.

Say it in three easy pulses: *sol · luṅ · gaḷ*. Then say it smoothly once: *solluṅaḷ*.

Your turn

- *Hear: solluṅaḷ* → YOU CHOOSE: “please tell me”
- *Say it: sol · luṅ · gaḷ* — then *solluṅaḷ*

Before you move on

How do you respectfully ask someone to tell you? (***Solluṅaḷ***.) Keep that sound and meaning in mind. Next you will uncover just one new written sign inside this already-familiar request.

8.3 சொ — one new sign in a familiar request

Say *solluṅaḷ*: **please tell me**. Its first sound is *so*. You already know the sound and meaning; today only its written vowel sign is new.

Script you’ll notice: சொ

The consonant ச begins with *ca*. Add the short-*o* sign சொ, and it reads *so*:

ச + சொ → சொ

The short-*o* sign reaches around its consonant. Part appears on the left and part on the right, but together they are one vowel sign. Read the whole joined shape as one syllable: சொ, *so*.

Do not invent a stroke order from the printed font. Follow the model as one shape today.

Writing — observe and trace

Trace சொ once with the model visible. Say *so* as your finger reaches the vowel sign. Then point to the first syllable in சொல்லுங்கள் and say the whole familiar request, *solluṅga!*.

Before you move on

Read சொ. (*So*.) What does the whole spoken request *solluṅga!* mean? (**Please tell me.**) One new sign is enough for today.

8.4 சொல்லுங்கள் — one visible copy

Point to சொ at the start of சொல்லுங்கள். Read *so*, then say the whole request: *solluṅga!*, **please tell me**.

Writing — guided copy

Copy சொல்லுங்கள் once beneath its visible model. Pause after சொ and check that the short-*o* sign reaches around ச. Look back after every piece if needed. Say the request once when you finish.

Before you move on

Point to the short-*o* syllable in சொல்லுங்கள். (சொ.) What does the word ask? (**Please tell me.**)

8.5 Solluṅga! — hide, then write

Study சொல்லுங்கள் for five seconds. Point to சொ, say *solluṅga!*, then cover the model.

Writing — delayed copy

Write சொ while the model is hidden. If that feels secure, continue and write the whole request. Peek once if needed, cover it again, and finish. Then uncover the model and repair only the short-*o* syllable.

Before you move on

What changed from the previous step? (**The model was hidden before writing.**) Say what your word means. (**Please tell me.**)

8.6 One heard request — write it

Cover every Tamil model. You will hear the same useful request you have already said, traced, copied, and retrieved.

Writing — dictation

Hear: *solluṅgaḷ* — please tell me

Write the request from sound alone. Then uncover சொல்லுங்கள். Check சொ first: the short-*o* sign should reach around ச. Repair one place if needed; do not rewrite the whole word.

Before you move on

Without looking, write only the opening syllable of *solluṅgaḷ*. (சொ.) You are ready to compare this ordinary respectful request with the weightier *tayavu seytu*.

8.7 தயவுசெய்து or -உங்கள்? — politeness in phrase or verb

Tamil has a phrase meaning “do the kindness,” but everyday courtesy often sits somewhere English speakers do not expect: inside the verb.

Why it’s said this way

A standalone தயவுசெய்து is more emphatic and formal than English “please.” Ordinary polite commands use respectful -உங்கள் (*-uṅgaḷ*):

- உட்காருங்கள் *uṭkāruṅgaḷ* — please sit
- சொல்லுங்கள் *soḷḷuṅgaḷ* — please tell me — the request you can now say, read, and write from hearing

Use *tayavu seytu* to mark “please, do me the kindness” warmly or formally. Let the verb ending carry routine courtesy.

Script you’ll notice: Read the join in செய்து

செ is *ca* with the ெ sign for *e*. ய் is *ya* shut off by *pulli*, a bare *y*, before து *tu*. The same dot that built numbers now makes the consonant seam in *seytu* visible.

Your turn

- *Choose*: emphatic request → தயவுசெய்து
- *Choose*: ordinary “please sit” → உட்காருங்கள்
- *Read it*: சொல்லுங்கள் — and point to சொ, the short-*o* syllable
- *Break apart*: செ + ய் + து → செய்து

Before you move on

What carries everyday “please”? (The respectful verb ending *-uṅgaḷ*.) When is *tayavu seytu* especially useful? (A **markedly polite or emphatic** request.) What silences *y* in ய்? (The **pulli**.)

8.8 ந — the third n, and the only one built from uprights

Before the new one: say the sound of ன.

One letter this time. Just one.

The third n, and the one that finally looks different: no spiral loop at all. ந is built from a top bar and two uprights, with a right stroke that curls below the baseline. If you can see that it has no loop, you can already tell it from the other two.

Script you'll notice: ந

ந — *na*.

What it is made of:

- a left upright joined to the top bar
- a separately started middle upright
- a separately started right bowl that curls below the baseline and sweeps left into a descender

நன்றி — *thank you* — opens with it, and so does நான்.

Writing: ந

1. start at the lower left and draw the left upright upward
2. without lifting, carry the top bar to the right — then lift once
3. set the pen at the top-right junction and make the short return left to the middle upright
4. without lifting, draw the middle upright straight down — then lift a second time
5. set the pen at the upper junction and descend around the outside of the right bowl
6. without lifting, turn through the bottom and sweep left into the below-baseline tail — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 2. The pen comes up 2 times and no more.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Module 5 notes that the extended final curve may be omitted. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 5, ந (University of Texas at Austin), p. 193.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* ந once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “na” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

Which of the three n’s has no spiral loop? (ந.) How many pen lifts does it take? (**Two**.)

8.9 வணக்கம் — the first whole written word

You know the four letter bodies and the vowel-killing dot. Assemble them left to right.

Script you’ll notice: Build the word

piece		
வ	<i>va</i>	Lesson 1
ண	<i>ṇa</i>	Lesson 2
க்	<i>k</i> — க with the dot	last lesson
க	<i>ka</i>	Lesson 1
ம்	<i>m</i> — ம with the dot	this lesson

வ • ண • க் • க • ம் → வணக்கம்

Hear two details. க் is a **doubled** consonant: hold it, *vaṇak-kam*, not *vaṇakam*. Tamil distinguishes single from double consonants. Final ம் is a bare *m*, so the word closes instead of trailing into *ma*.

That is the first word of this book, written by hand.

Your turn

- *Write it:* க் — க with the dot
- *Write it:* க் க — two full letters, dot intact
- *Write it:* வணக்கம் — five pieces, left to right
- *Say it:* “vaṇak-kam” — hold the middle

Before you move on

Write வணக்கம். What is special about க்க? (It is **doubled** and held.) Why does the word end in *m*, not *ma*? (Final ம் carries a **pulli**.) Next: the formal way to say *please forgive me*.

8.10 எ — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ே — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: எ

எ — *e*.

It is an **independent vowel** — the shape the vowel *e* takes when a word begins with it, rather than the sign it becomes inside a word.

You already say these, and every one of them has எ somewhere inside it:

- என் *en* — my
- என் பெயர் ... *en peyar* ... — my name is... (with no “is”)
- என்ன *enna* — what
- எப்படி *eppadi* — how

Writing: எ — copy what you see

Put your pen on எ and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find எ in the ones that have it

என் · வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* எ three times, saying *e* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find எ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — எ? What sound does it carry? (*e*)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

8.11 உ — the letter behind a sign you have used for chapters

Before the new one: எ — what sound does it carry?

One character again. This one closes a gap you have been walking past since Chapter 4.

Script you'll notice: உ

உ — *u*.

You already know its **sign**, ு, the little tail that hangs off a consonant inside a word. This is the other half of the same vowel: the **independent** shape, used when a word *begins* with the sound.

That is the whole Tamil pattern, met once more. Every vowel has two bodies — a free-standing letter for the front of a word, and a sign for inside one — and you have been using this vowel's sign for chapters without ever meeting the letter it belongs to.

Every one of these begins with it, and every other shape in them you can already read:

- உங்கள் *uṅgaḷ* — your, which you have been saying for a while
- உம் *um* — the “also / and” ending, which the next apology needs
- உண் *uṇ* — the old verb “to eat”, waiting in the verbs to come

Writing: உ — copy what you see

Put your pen on **உ** and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these two, and say which is the letter and which is the sign

உ · ு

- *Trace it:* உ three times, saying *u* as you finish each one
- *Read it:* உங்கள் — every shape in it is one you have met

Before you move on

Which character is this — உ? What sound does it carry? (**u**.)
Where does the letter go, and where does the sign ு go? (**Letter** at the start of a word; **sign** on a consonant inside one.)

Chapter 9

Sorry

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 👁️ eyes (1) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can apologise with மன்னிக்கவும் where its register fits, and say plainly where colloquial Tamil varies by region instead of pretending one form is standard.

Say man-ni-kkavum holding both doubled consonants, use it for a considered apology, and qualify the casual alternatives rather than asserting one.

9.1 மன்னிக்கவும் (mannikkavum) — please forgive

You already know தயவுசெய்து, “please.” Tamil’s “sorry” gives you something its Dravidian cousins don’t: a forgiveness-word that’s Tamil through and through, not borrowed from Sanskrit.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மன்னிக்கவும் is built from three pieces:

- மன்னி (*manni*) = “to forgive, excuse, pardon” — and unlike the words Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam reach for, this is Tamil’s **own** native verb, not borrowed from Sanskrit *kṣamā*.
- -க்க (*-kka*) = an infinitive-forming ending.

- **-உம்** (*-um*) = a formal, written-register particle used to make a soft, general request or permission — the same particle you’d see on a sign asking visitors to **வரவும்** (“please come” / “you may come”).

So **மன்னிக்கவும்** reads as something like “**may** [one] **forgive**” — a polite, slightly formal way of asking for forgiveness, more at home in writing or a considered apology than tossed off in passing.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Where Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam all reach for the Sanskrit noun **kṣamā** (“patience, forgiveness”) and turn it into a verb, **Tamil** uses its own root:

- Tamil **மன்னிக்கவும்** *mannikkavum* — from Tamil **மன்னி** *manni*
- Kannada **ಕ್ಷಮಿಸಿ** *kṣamisi* — from Sanskrit **kṣamā**
- Telugu **క్షమించండి** *kṣamiṇcaṇḍi* — from Sanskrit **kṣamā**
- Malayalam **ക്ഷമിക്കണം** *kṣamikkanaṁ* — from Sanskrit **kṣamā**

Where “please” showed the whole family sharing one Sanskrit-derived idea (*daya*), “sorry” shows the opposite: Tamil kept its own word while its cousins borrowed the same Sanskrit one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**manni**” — forgive — the Tamil root, not from Sanskrit
- the whole word — “**mannikkavum**” = please forgive
- contrast — Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam all use **kṣamā** instead

Before you move on

What does **மன்னிக்கவும்** mean, and what is it built from?
 (“**Please forgive**” — *manni* “to forgive” + *-kkavum*, a formal

request ending.) What’s different about Tamil’s forgiveness-word compared to Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam? (**It’s Tamil’s own native root** — the other three borrow Sanskrit *kṣamā* instead.) Next: place the word in its real register and read the doubled alveolar n.

9.2 மன்னிக்கவும் — formal forgiveness and a doubled n

The root is native Tamil. Its everyday conversational fit is less simple than a one-to-one dictionary entry suggests.

Why it’s said this way

மன்னிக்கவும் leans formal: a “please forgive” on a notice or in a considered apology. Spoken Tamil may use shorter regional forms or borrow English “sorry.” Colloquial variation is real, so treat formal/written as a reliable center, not a claim that one casual form covers every region.

Script you’ll notice: Read ன்னி

In ன்னி, alveolar ன is first silenced by pulli and then repeated before the vowel. The spelling holds the consonant across the syllable boundary:

ன் + னி → ன்னி — *n-ni*

This is the same gemination-by-repetition principle used elsewhere in Tamil; the sound is doubled without inventing a new ligature.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “man-ni-kkavum,” holding both doubled consonants
- *Choose*: considered/formal apology → மன்னிக்கவும்
- *Qualify*: casual alternatives vary by region

Before you move on

What is the reliable register center of *mannikkavum*? (**Formal/written or considered apology.**) Must every region use it casually? (**No.**) How does ன்னி show a doubled *n*? (Pulli stops the first ன், then full னி follows.)

9.3 ல — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ஂ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: ல

ல — *la*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *l*, it is **la**.

What it is made of:

- a spiral loop on the left
- a deep U-shaped turn
- an open rising tip on the right

You already say these, and every one of them has ல somewhere inside it:

- இல்லை *illai* — no / there isn't (illai — the negative)
- ஆம் / இல்லை / சரி *ām / illai / sari* — answering in Tamil
- நலம் *nalām* — well, wellness, good — and the reply ”நான் நலமாக இருக்கிறேன்
- பரவாயில்லை *paravāyillai* — it's okay / no problem / you're welcome

Writing: ல

- 1. start at the inner curl and spiral outward, climbing the left side
- 2. without lifting, arch over the top and descend through the middle
- 3. without lifting, turn around the deep right-hand curve
- 4. without lifting, rise to the open right tip — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 0. The pen never leaves the paper.

One unbroken stroke — four joined movements, no pen lift; cited to Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Frame 9, ல.

This is one attested teaching order and not a national standard — handwriting here is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 9, ல (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 194.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ல in the ones that have it

இல்லை · வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ல three times, saying *la* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ல once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ல? What sound does it carry? (*la*.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 10

Days of the Week

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) ✍️ pen (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the seven weekdays, take each apart as planet plus கிழமை, and say which are Tamil’s own words and which arrived from Sanskrit.

Run the week from thingal to ñāyiru, sorting the four native planet-words from the three Sanskrit ones as you go.

10.1 திங்கள்-ஞாயிறு — a home-grown and borrowed week

Hindi’s week is built entirely from Sanskrit deity-names plus वार (vār). Tamil’s week tells a richer story: it uses its **own** word for “day,” and **some** of its planet-names are Tamil’s own too — while others are borrowed, just like Hindi’s.

Grammar Lens: The pattern: [planet] + கிழமை, “day”

Every Tamil weekday ends in கிழமை (kizhamai), “day” — a native Dravidian word, not the Sanskrit வாரம் (vāram) that Hindi, Kannada, and Telugu build on (though Tamil also keeps a more formal, Sanskritic -vāram set alongside this everyday one):

Tamil weekday	planet-word, meaning, and source
திங்கள்கிழமை	<i>thingal</i> , “ Moon ” — Tamil’s own word
செவ்வாய்க்கிழமை	<i>cevvāy</i> , traditionally “ the red one ” — likely Tamil’s own descriptive name
புதன்கிழமை	<i>pudhan</i> , Mercury — borrowed from Sanskrit Budha
வியாழக்கிழமை	<i>viyāzhan</i> , Jupiter — likely from Sanskrit, via a name for Bṛhaspati
வெள்ளிக்கிழமை	<i>velli</i> , traditionally “ silver ” — likely Tamil’s own descriptive name
சனிக்கிழமை	<i>san̥i</i> , Saturn — borrowed from Sanskrit Śani
ஞாயிற்றுக்கிழமை	<i>ñāyiru</i> , “ Sun ” — Tamil’s own word

Why it’s said this way

Notice the pattern: **Moon**, **Mars**, **Venus**, and **Sun** all carry Tamil’s own descriptive or native words, while **Mercury**, **Jupiter**, and **Saturn** carry Sanskrit ones. This isn’t Tamil “failing” to have its own full week — it’s a genuine **blend**, native Dravidian vocabulary standing right alongside Sanskrit loans, in the same list. (Note for the Tamil-speaking reviewer: this lesson spells Monday திங்கள்கிழமை, the common form — the more traditional sandhi-shifted spelling திங்கட்கிழமை may be preferred and should be swapped in on review if so. The *cevvāy* “red one” and *viyāzhan* Jupiter-name derivations in particular are worth treating as the traditional, commonly-given account rather than settled certainty — exact planet-name histories this old are not always fully nailed down.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “thingal” — moon, Tamil’s own word — then “kizhamai,” day
- the borrowed ones — “pudhan, viyāzhan, sanī” — Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn from Sanskrit
- the native ones — “thingal, cevṡāy, velli, ṇāyiru” — moon, Mars, Venus, sun

Before you move on

What does every Tamil weekday end in, and where does that word come from? (கிழமை *kizhamai*, “day” — Tamil’s **own** word, not Sanskrit *vāra*.) Which four planet-names are Tamil’s own, and which three are Sanskrit borrowings? (**Moon, Mars, Venus, Sun are native; Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn are Sanskrit** — *Budha, Bṛhaspati, Śani*.)

10.2 ற — the last of the family, and the one that drops below the line

Before the new one: say the sound of ற.

One letter this time. Just one.

The fourth member of this top-bar family, and the one with a habit none of the others have: its right leg keeps going **below the baseline** and sweeps left into a long descender. Tamil letters mostly sit on the line. This one hangs off it.

Script you’ll notice: ற

ற — *ra*.

What it is made of:

- two arches side by side, giving three legs down to the baseline
- the right leg continues **BELOW** the baseline, sweeps left, and drops into a long descender

It is the r in றன்றி — and with it, every consonant of *thank you*.

Writing: ர

- **1.** start at the lower left, climb the left side, and arch to the middle
- **2.** without lifting, descend the first middle upright — then lift once
- **3.** set the pen at the adjacent middle upright and descend — then lift a second time
- **4.** set the pen at the middle top, arch over, and descend the right side
- **5.** without lifting again, sweep left below the baseline and drop into the long descender — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 2. The pen comes up 2 times and no more.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 10, ர (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 194.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* ர once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “ra” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

What does ர do that ண, ன and ந do not? (**Drops below the baseline.**) Which word have you now met all the consonants of? (நன்றி.)

10.3 ந, ன, ர — the letter bodies inside நன்றி

Lesson 2 showed you that Tamil has **three** n-letters and promised you’d draw the other two when a word needed them. Chapter 1’s *thank you* needs both.

Script you'll notice: The two remaining n's

ந — *na*, the **dental** n, tongue against the teeth:

1. a straight top bar
2. a vertical on the left
3. a second vertical in the middle
4. a right stroke that curls below the baseline and sweeps left into a descender

ண — *ṇa*, the **alveolar** n, tongue on the ridge behind the teeth:

1. a straight top bar
2. a loop on the left
3. one arch
4. a straight vertical on the right, down to the baseline

Compare it with Lesson 2's ண: same top bar, same loop, same closing vertical. ண **simply has a second arch inserted before that vertical**. So ண is ண **minus one arch** — one arch for ண, two for ண. That is the whole contrast, and it is the cheapest way to keep them apart.

With Lesson 2's ண (retroflex), that completes the set. Same consonant to an English ear; three letters, three tongue positions, in Tamil.

Script you'll notice: ர — “ra”, the hard r

1. two arches side by side — giving it three legs down to the baseline
2. the right leg keeps going below the baseline, sweeps left, and drops into a long descender

It is the tallest thing you have drawn: most Tamil letters sit on the baseline, and ர hangs well beneath it.

The dot under r marks it as the *hard* or trilled r, distinct from Tamil's other r. You'll meet the contrast properly later; for now, learn the shape.

Your turn

Write these out:

- ந — “top bar, **two** verticals, then the curl that sweeps left”
- ண — “top bar, left loop, **one** arch, straight vertical”
- ற — “two arches, then the leg that sweeps left and drops”

Before you move on

Name Tamil’s three n-letters and their tongue positions. (ந dental, ண alveolar, ண retroflex.) What are a consonant’s three possibilities so far? (Keep the built-in **a** or **remove** it with the pulli.) Which letter hangs below the baseline? (ற, the hard r.) Next: the colours — black, white, red and blue.

10.4 ா — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ஸ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ா

ா — $\bar{a}$.

It is a **vowel sign**. It is not a letter and never stands alone: it attaches to a consonant and **replaces** the *a* built into it with $\bar{a}$. Replaces, not adds — the *a* is gone.

Where it sits: a vertical stroke with a small top hook, written after the consonant.

Worked through: ம + ா = மா — $m\bar{a}$.

You already say these, and every one of them has ா somewhere inside it:

- வணக்கம் / நமஸ்காரம் *vaṇakkam / namaskāram* — Tamil kept a native bow-word where its neighbors borrowed Sanskrit
- நான் *nāṇ* — I

- பரவாயில்லை *paravāyillai* — it's okay / no problem / you're welcome
- நாளை பார்க்கலாம் *nālai pārkkalām* — see you tomorrow

Writing: ா — copy what you see

Put your pen on ா and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ா in the ones that have it
- நான் · வணக்கம்
- *Trace it:* ா three times, saying *ā* as you finish each one
 - *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ா once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ா? What vowel does it put on the consonant it attaches to — and what does it take off? (**Puts *ā* on; takes the built-in *a* off.**) Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 11

Colours

Modes: 👁 eyes (1) ✍ pen (1) 🔄 Hands-free start: none of the 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name black, white, red, and blue in Tamil and say which three are native and which one is the Sanskrit loan.

Say karuppu, vellai and sivappu as the native three, nīlam as the borrowed one, and hear vellai echo velli from last chapter.

11.1 கருப்பு, வெள்ளை, சிவப்பு, நீலம் — three of Tamil’s own, one borrowed

You’ve already seen Tamil mix native and Sanskrit words in its day-names. Colors tell a **cleaner** version of the same story: three colors are Tamil’s own, and the fourth is the one color that keeps showing up borrowed, in language after language.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

- கருப்பு (*karuppu*) = “**black**” — native Tamil/Dravidian.
- வெள்ளை (*vellai*) = “**white**” — native Tamil/Dravidian, and built on the very same வெள் (*vel-*, “bright, silvery”) root you already met in வெள்ளி (*veli*), “Venus/silver,” from the days-of-the-week lesson.
- சிவப்பு (*sivappu*) = “**red**” — native Tamil/Dravidian.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நீலம் (*nīlam*) = “blue” — from Sanskrit नील (*nīla*), “dark blue,” the very same root behind Hindi’s नीला (*nīlā*). This *nīla* is also the name of the indigo plant and its dye — part of why blue dye is so historically linked to India — but be careful: the English word **indigo** itself is a *separate*, Greek-derived word (describing where the dye was imported *from*, not descended from *nīla* by sound change; see the Hindi color lesson for that careful distinction).

Why it’s said this way

This isn’t random. “Blue” is, across many of the world’s languages, one of the **last** basic colors to settle into its own fixed word — often arriving late, or borrowed, compared to black, white, and red. Tamil’s colors look like exactly this pattern in miniature: three old, native words, and one — blue — reaching outside the language for a Sanskrit loan.

(Note for the Tamil-speaking reviewer: please confirm *karuppu*, *vellai*, *sivappu*, *nīlam* are the forms you’d teach first — regional/colloquial Tamil may prefer different everyday variants, and this lesson would benefit from your check the way the day-names lesson did.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three native ones — “karuppu, vellai, sivappu” — black, white, red
- the borrowed one — “nīlam” — blue, from Sanskrit
- the echo — “vellai” and “velli” share the same *vel-* root

Before you move on

Which three Tamil colors are native, and which one is borrowed? (**Karuppu, vellai, sivappu** (black/white/red) are native; **nīlam** (blue) is a **Sanskrit** loan.) What root does *vellai* share with a word you already know? (**Vel-** “bright/silvery” — the same root as *velli*, “Venus/silver.”) Why might blue be the one borrowed color? (**Blue is often one of the last basic colors** to settle into a fixed word

across many languages — the same pattern Latin’s *caeruleus* showed.)

11.2 ழ — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ஶ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ழ

ழ — *lla*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *ll*, it is *lla*.

You already say these, and every one of them has ழ somewhere inside it:

- தமிழ் எழுத்து *tamiḷ eluttu* — why Tamil writing is so round
- நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் *nāṇ tamiḷ pēsugirēṇ* — I speak Tamil
- வாழ் *vāḷ* — to live, to flourish
- எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் *enakkut tamiḷ teriyum* — ‘I know Tamil’

Writing: ழ — copy what you see

Put your pen on ழ and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ழ in the ones that have it

வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ழ three times, saying *lla* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ழ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ழ? What sound does it carry? (*lla*.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 12

Family

Modes:  voice (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 1 of 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use Tamil’s four sibling words correctly, settling relative age before gender — the question English never makes you answer.

Name appā and ammā, then place appan, tambi, akkā and tangai by asking “older, or younger?” before you can say “brother” at all.

12.1 அப்பா, அம்மா, and four sibling words

You’ve learned Spanish *hermano* and *hermana*, plus French *frère* and *sœur* — one word each for “brother” and “sister.” Tamil asks a question those languages never do: **is this sibling older or younger than you?**

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

- அப்பா (*appā*) = “**father**”
- அம்மா (*ammā*) = “**mother**”

Both are native Dravidian words, of the same simple, worldwide “baby-talk” shape (a repeated consonant plus a vowel) found across unrelated language families everywhere — not borrowed from Sanskrit, not a coincidence with any one language in particular, just how small children’s mouths tend to form their first words for parents.

You'll want to know: Siblings — split by age, not just gender

Here's the real lesson: Tamil doesn't have one word for “brother” and one for “sister.” It has **four**:

Tamil	meaning
அண்ணன் (<i>aṇṇan</i>)	older brother
தம்பி (<i>tambi</i>)	younger brother
அக்கா (<i>akkā</i>)	older sister
தங்கை (<i>tangai</i>)	younger sister

There is no single Tamil word that just means “brother” the way Spanish *hermano* does — you're expected to know, and say, **whether they're older or younger than you** every time you refer to a sibling. This isn't a small detail: it reflects how central **relative age and seniority** are in South Asian family structure and address — the same instinct that makes “older sibling” versus “younger sibling” a live, spoken distinction, not just something you *could* mention if you wanted to.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “appā, ammā” — father, mother
- the four siblings — “aṇṇan, tambi” (older/younger brother), “akkā, tangai” (older/younger sister)
- the key question — “older, or younger?” — before you can even say “brother” or “sister” in Tamil

Before you move on

How many Tamil words mean “brother” or “sister,” and why? (**Four** — அண்ணன்/தம்பி for older/younger brother, அக்கா/தங்கை for older/younger sister — Tamil requires knowing the sibling's **age relative to you**.) Are அப்பா and அம்மா borrowed from Sanskrit? (**No** — native Dravidian baby-talk-type words, of a shape found across unrelated languages worldwide.)

12.2 ஈ — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ழ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: ஈ

ஈ — *ca*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *c*, it is **ca**.

You already say these, and every one of them has ஈ somewhere inside it:

- சரி *sari* — okay / alright / correct (sari)
- ஆம் / இல்லை / சரி *ām / illai / sari* — answering in Tamil
- மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் *mīṇḍum sandippōm* — we'll meet again
- பேசு *pēsu* — to speak

Writing: ஈ — copy what you see

Put your pen on ஈ and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ஈ in the ones that have it
சரி · வணக்கம்
- *Trace it:* ஈ three times, saying *ca* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ஈ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — **ƒ**? What sound does it carry? (*ca.*)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 13

Body Parts

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ✍ pen (3) ⇄ Hands-free start: first 1 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say head and hand in Tamil, account for why both stayed native here where Hindi's pair came from Sanskrit, and write நன்றி from its pieces.

Say talai and kai, then state the contrast with Hindi's Sanskrit-descended pair.

13.1 தலை, கை — head and hand, both Tamil's own

You've seen Hindi's *sir* and *hāth* trace all the way back to Sanskrit. Tamil's words for the same two body parts tell a simpler story: **both are native**.

You'll want to know: The words

- தலை (*talai*) = “**head**” — native Dravidian.
- கை (*kai*) = “**hand**” — native Dravidian.

Neither is borrowed from Sanskrit, unlike Hindi's *sir* (< Sanskrit *śiras*) or *hāth* (< Sanskrit *hasta*). Tamil simply kept its own words for two of the most basic parts of the body.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “talai” — head
- “kai” — hand
- the contrast — Hindi borrowed these from Sanskrit; Tamil didn’t

Before you move on

What are Tamil’s words for head and hand? (தலை *talai*, கை *kai*.) Are either of these Sanskrit loans? (**No** — both native Dravidian, unlike Hindi’s Sanskrit-descended *sir* and *hāth*.)

13.2 க — the letter that is three bowls

Before the new one: say the sound of ற.

One letter this time. Just one.

The most-used consonant in Tamil, and the most built: a square frame on top, then two bowls hanging under it. Three pen-down runs. Take it slowly — nothing else in this book asks for as many separate pieces.

Script you’ll notice: க

க — *ka*.

What it is made of:

- an upper square frame
- a large lower-left bowl
- a lower-right bowl with an open foot

வணக்கம் has it twice, doubled in the middle.

Writing: க

- **1.** start at the middle left and climb the left upright
- **2.** without lifting, carry the top bar to the right and return along it to the inner corner
- **3.** without lifting, drop the inner upright and carry the middle bar left — then lift once
- **4.** set the pen at the inner crossing and curve down and around the lower-left bowl
- **5.** without lifting again, return up its outer left side — then lift a second time
- **6.** set the pen at the inner crossing and turn around the lower-right bowl — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 2. The pen comes up 2 times and no more.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 3, க (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 191.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* க once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “ka” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

How many pen lifts does க take? (**Two** — three separate runs.)
 What are the three parts? (**Upper frame, lower-left bowl, lower-right bowl.**)

13.3 ி and நன்றி — replace the vowel, then hear *ndr*

A consonant can keep *a* or lose it under a pulli. The third option is to replace it with a vowel sign.

Script you'll notice: The first vowel sign

ற = *ra* → றி = *ri*

ி is a hook above and to the right. The consonant keeps its shape; the sign hangs from it. Later, ை (ai) will appear before its consonant on the page but after it in speech, the same eye/ear trap as Devanagari ि.

Script you'll notice: Assemble நன்றி

ந · ன் · றி → நன்றி

piece

ந	<i>na</i> — dental	last lesson
ன்	<i>n</i> — alveolar, with pulli	Lessons 3–4
றி	<i>ri</i> — ற plus the i-sign	this lesson

The letters in this word

ன் + ற is pronounced close to **ndr**. This follows a broader Tamil rule: a **nasal voices the stop after it**.

ந் + த	<i>nd</i>	வந்து <i>vandu</i>
ண் + ட	<i>ṇḍ</i>	retroflex pair
ன் + ற	<i>ndr</i>	நன்றி

Each n-letter creates its own cluster. That payoff explains both the three spellings and the common English romanization **nandri**, whose *d* is heard but not separately written.

Your turn

- Write it: றி — ற plus the hook above right
- Write it: நன்றி — three pieces

- Say it: “ன் + ற = ndr”

Before you move on

What are a consonant’s three vowel choices? (Keep inherent **a**, **remove** it with pulli, or **replace** it with a vowel sign.) Where does ி attach? (**Above and right.**) Why is *nanri* often written *nandri*? (ன் + ற is pronounced *ndr* because a nasal voices the following stop.)

13.4 ர — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ஈ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ர

ர — *ra*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *r*, it is **ra**.

You already say these, and every one of them has ர somewhere inside it:

- வணக்கம் / நமஸ்காரம் *vaṇakkam / namaskāram* — Tamil kept a native bow-word where its neighbors borrowed Sanskrit
- சரி *sari* — okay / alright / correct (sari)
- ஆம் / இல்லை / சரி *ām / illai / sari* — answering in Tamil
- பெயர் *peyar* — name

Writing: ர — copy what you see

Put your pen on ர and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character** or **which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real

variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ர in the ones that have it

சுரி · வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ர three times, saying *ra* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ர once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ர? What sound does it carry? (*ra*.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 14

Seasons

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: first 1 of 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the four seasons in Tamil and say honestly which one is locally central instead of repeating a Western four-way split.

Build kodai/mazhai/kulir onto kaalam, name mazhai kaalam as the season that actually organises the year, and flag vasantha as the one loanword.

14.1 வசந்த காலம், கோடை, மழை, குளிர் — the four words, and the real season underneath

Tamil has words that line up with Spanish’s four seasons — but, just like Hindi’s ऋतु, forcing them into a clean four-way split hides what actually matters on the ground.

You'll want to know: The four words

Tamil	meaning	source
வசந்த காலம் (<i>vasantha kaalam</i>)	“spring”	<i>vasantham</i> is a Sanskrit loan
கோடைக் காலம் (<i>kodai kaalam</i>)	“summer”	கோடை <i>kodai</i> is native Tamil for “heat”
மழைக் காலம் (<i>mazhai kaalam</i>)	“rainy season”	மழை <i>mazhai</i> , native Tamil for “rain”
குளிர் காலம் (<i>kulir kaalam</i>)	“winter/cold season”	குளிர் <i>kulir</i> , native Tamil for “cold”

Every one of these is built the same way: a word for the **feel** of the season (heat, rain, cold — or the borrowed *vasantham*) plus காலம் (*kaalam*), “**time/season**.” Be honest about *kaalam* itself, too: it’s ultimately from Sanskrit काल (*kāla*, “time”) — but it was assimilated into Tamil so long ago and so thoroughly that it functions as completely ordinary vocabulary today, quite unlike a fresh, still-foreign-feeling loan like *vasantham*.

Why it’s said this way

Just as Hindi’s traditional calendar makes the monsoon (*varṣā*) its own central season rather than a footnote, Tamil Nadu’s actual climate is shaped far more by மழைக்காலம் (*mazhai kaalam*, “the rains”) than by any crisp four-way Western split. There’s no dramatic autumn leaf-fall in a tropical climate, and “spring” as a distinct, keenly-felt season is a much weaker idea here than in temperate Europe. The four words above are real and used — but the rains, not a European four-season year, are what actually organizes agricultural and everyday life across much of Tamil Nadu.

(Note for the Tamil-speaking reviewer: please check whether these are the words and register you’d teach first, and whether there’s more to say about how Tamil Nadu’s own seasonal year is actually divided in practice.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kodai” — heat/summer, native — then “kaalam,” time/season

- “mazhai kaalam” — the rains, the real central season
- “kulir kaalam” — the cold season
- the one loanword — “vasantha kaalam,” spring, from Sanskrit

Before you move on

Which of the four season-words is a Sanskrit loan, and which are native Tamil? (வசந்தம் *vasantham* is Sanskrit; கோடை, மழை, குளிர் are all native.) What season actually shapes life in Tamil Nadu the most, and why doesn’t the four-season frame capture that? (மழைக்காலம், the **rains** — Tamil Nadu’s tropical climate doesn’t have a sharp four-way split the way temperate Europe does.)

14.2 ட — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ட — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ட

ட — *tta*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *tt*, it is **tta**.

You already say these, and every one of them has ட somewhere inside it:

- எப்படி *eppaḍi* — how
- நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்? — how are you? (respectful)
- மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் *mīṇḍum sandippōm* — we’ll meet again
- இரண்டு மூன்று நான்கு ஐந்து *iraṇṭu mūṇru nāṇku aintu* — two through five remain visible cousins across the Dravidian family while one is less tidy

Writing: ட — copy what you see

Put your pen on ட and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ட in the ones that have it

எப்படி · வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ட three times, saying *tta* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ட once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ட? What sound does it carry? (*tta*.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 15

Water and Rice

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) ✍️ pen (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for water and keep raw அரிசி apart from cooked சாதம், and state how far the arisi-to-“rice” claim can honestly be pushed.

Assemble taṇ plus nīr into taṇṇīr, switch between arisi and sātam by whether it is cooked, and label the English “rice” link as contested.

15.1 தண்ணீர், அரிசி, சாதம் — water, and rice, the real staple

European languages teach “bread” as the staple food. Here, that would be **dishonest** — bread isn’t the everyday staple in Tamil food culture. **Rice** is, and it comes with one of the most famous (if contested) etymological journeys of any food-word.

You’ll want to know: தண்ணீர் — water, literally “cool water”

தண்ணீர் (*taṇṇīr*) = “**water**” — built from தண் (*taṇ*, “cool”) + நீர் (*nīr*, “**water**”). Everyday Tamil doesn’t just say “water” — it says, quite literally, “**cool water**.”

You’ll want to know: அரிசி and சாதம் — rice, raw and cooked

Tamil, like most of South India, distinguishes the **uncooked grain** from the **cooked dish** with two separate words, not one:

- அரிசி (*arisi*) = “**rice**” (the raw, husked grain) — native Dravidian.
- சாதம் (*sātam*) = “**cooked rice**” (the meal itself, what’s actually eaten) — likely Sanskrit-influenced. Tamil also keeps a native word for the same idea, சோறு (*cōru*) — the two sit side by side as everyday near-synonyms.

Why it’s said this way

Here’s the exciting part, held with appropriate care: many etymologists connect அரிசி (*arisi*) to the **English word “rice” itself** — the proposed chain runs Dravidian *arisi* → **Greek** *óryza* → Latin *oryza* → Old French *ris* → English **rice**. If true, English speakers have been saying a Dravidian word for centuries without knowing it. But be honest: standard etymological dictionaries mark Greek *óryza*’s origin as **genuinely uncertain** — a Dravidian source is one widely cited hypothesis among others (an Indo-Aryan *vrihi*-related source is also proposed), not a settled, universally agreed fact.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “taṇ” — cool — then “nīr,” water — then “taṇṇīr,” cool water
- “arisi” — raw rice — then “sātam,” cooked rice
- the famous (contested) link — “arisi” → possibly English “rice”

Before you move on

What does தண்ணீர் literally mean? (“**Cool water**” — taṇ “cool” + nīr “water.”) What two words does Tamil use for rice, and why two? (அரிசி *arisi*, raw grain; சாதம் *sātam*, cooked rice — the raw grain and the cooked meal get separate words.) Is it certain that English “rice” comes from Tamil *arisi*? (**Not certain** — it’s a widely cited hypothesis via Greek *óryza*, but that Greek word’s origin is genuinely disputed among etymologists.)

15.2 அ — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ட — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: அ

அ — *a*.

It is an **independent vowel** — the shape the vowel *a* takes when a word begins with it, rather than the sign it becomes inside a word.

What it is made of:

- a curl at the upper left
- a long horizontal stroke
- a straight vertical on the right

You already say these, and every one of them has அ somewhere inside it:

- அப்பா அம்மா அண்ணன் தம்பி அக்கா தங்கை — father, mother, and FOUR sibling words
- தண்ணீர் அரிசி சாதம் — water, and rice — the actual staple food here, not bread — with a widely-cited

Writing: அ

1. start inside the upper curl and sweep around it
2. without lifting, continue down the outer curve
3. without lifting, turn around the lower loop
4. without lifting, carry the horizontal to the right edge — then lift once
5. set the pen at the top of the separate right upright and draw straight down

Pen lifts: 1. The pen comes up 1 time and no more.

Two strokes — four joined movements, one pen lift, then the right upright; cited to Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Frame 4, அ.

This is one attested teaching order and not a national standard — handwriting here is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 4, அ (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 192.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find அ in the ones that have it

வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* அ three times, saying *a* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find அ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — அ? What sound does it carry? (*a*)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 16

Tamil Months

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) ✍️ pen (3) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the twelve months of the Tamil solar calendar and place Tamil New Year and Pongal inside it.

Recite Chithirai through Panguni, then date Tamil New Year to Chithirai 1 and Pongal to Thai 1.

16.1 சித்திரை to பங்குனி — Tamil’s own solar calendar

By now you’ve seen Arabic and Hindi each juggle two calendars. Tamil adds a **third distinct system** to the mix — one still actively used for Tamil New Year and Pongal, not a historical curiosity.

You’ll want to know: The twelve Tamil months

சித்திரை, வைகாசி, ஆனி, ஆடி, ஆவணி, புரட்டாசி, ஐப்பசி, கார்த்திகை, மார்கழி, தை, மாசி, பங்குனி (*Chithirai, Vaikāsi, Āni, Ādi, Āvaṇi, Purattāsi, Aippasi, Kārthigai, Mārgazhi, Thai, Māsi, Panguni*).

This is the **Tamil solar calendar** — a real, independent civil calendar, distinct from both the Gregorian calendar and the Hindu lunisolar (Vikram Samvat-style) calendar. Its months are traditionally tied to **nakshatras** (the 27 lunar-mansion star groups): each month is named for the nakshatra the **moon** sits near on the **full-moon (pournami) day** that falls within

that month — the moon’s position, not the sun’s, and tied to that month’s full moon specifically, not simply the month’s start.

Why it’s said this way

You’ve now met three genuinely separate calendar traditions: the Gregorian solar calendar (borrowed names, everyday civil use in most of the world), the pan-Indian Hindu lunisolar calendar (Chaitra, Vaishākh... tied to the six *ṛtu*), and now Tamil’s **own** solar calendar, following neither. சித்திரை 1 (the 1st of Chithirai) is **Tamil New Year**;தை 1 (the 1st of Thai) is **Pongal**, one of Tamil Nadu’s most important harvest festivals. These dates are fixed by the Tamil solar calendar, and only shift slightly against the Gregorian calendar (rather than drifting widely, the way lunar/lunisolar festival dates do) because it’s solar too — just a different solar calendar, starting its year at a different point and naming its months differently.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the twelve — “Chithirai, Vaikāsi, Āṇi, Āḍi, Āvaṇi, Puraṭṭāsi, Aippasi, Kārthigai, Mārgazhi, Thai, Māsi, Panguṇi”
- “Chithirai 1” — Tamil New Year
- “Thai 1” — Pongal

Before you move on

What kind of calendar is the Tamil month system — solar, lunar, or lunisolar? (**Solar** — a genuinely separate calendar from both Gregorian and Hindu lunisolar.) What are the twelve months traditionally named for? (**Nakshatras**, lunar-mansion star groups.) What two important occasions are dated by this calendar? (**Tamil New Year** (Chithirai 1) and **Pongal** (Thai 1).)

16.2 ழ — upright on the left, curve on the right

Before the new one: say the sound of ழ.

One letter this time. Just one.

One unbroken stroke again, like **வ**. The only thing to get right is which way round it goes: the **upright is on the LEFT** and the **curve on the right**. Most people guess the reverse, because that is the habit Devanagari teaches — hanging a shape off a right-hand spine.

Script you'll notice: **ம**

ம — *ma*.

What it is made of:

- a straight vertical stroke on the LEFT
- a horizontal along the bottom
- a rounded arch closing it on the RIGHT

It is the last consonant of **வணக்கம்**.

Writing: **ம**

- **1.** start at the top left and draw the left upright straight DOWN to the baseline
- **2.** without lifting, turn right and run along the bottom to the far right
- **3.** without lifting, turn up and rise up the right side
- **4.** without lifting, curve over the top and back towards the left
- **5.** without lifting, come down the middle to the bottom bar — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 0. The pen never leaves the paper.

Stroke order is one attested teaching order, not a national standard — Tamil handwriting is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 1 (Univ. of Texas at Austin).

Your turn

- *Trace it:* ழ once, slowly, following the steps above
- *Say it:* “ma” as you finish it
- *Trace it:* it twice more, without looking back at the steps

Before you move on

Which side is the upright on? (**The left.**) How many pen lifts?
(**None.**)

16.3 ஆம் — writing a word that starts with a vowel

Every vowel *sign* so far has hooked onto a consonant — the ி on ழ. This word has no consonant to hook onto.

Script you’ll notice: a vowel standing alone

Tamil writes a vowel two ways, and which one you use depends on **where it sits**:

inside a word, after a consonant	a small sign — ி in ழி
starting a word, with nothing before it	a full independent letter

ஆ is the independent letter for long *ā*. It is not a sign and never hangs off anything; it is a letter in its own right.

Long *ā* is short அ plus a tail, so அ is where it starts — and you have not been shown that one yet. Its parts, then the tail:

1. **a curl at the upper left**
2. **a long horizontal stroke**
3. **a straight vertical on the right** — that is அ
4. **a tail added on the right** — and now it is ஆ

Those are the parts in writing order. Where the pen lifts is not settled: Tamil handwriting varies by region and by school, and this book only claims a pen path where it has a sourced one.

That is a rule, not a special case: any Tamil word that opens on a vowel opens with a full vowel letter.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
ஆ	$\bar{a}$	this lesson — independent
ம்	m — ம with the pulli	the dot you already know

ஆ · ம் → ஆம்

Two pieces only. The pulli on ம் closes the word on a bare m , exactly as it did at the end of வணக்கம்.

Your turn

Write these out:

- அ — curl, horizontal, right vertical
- ஆ — the same three parts, then the right-hand tail
- ம் — ம with the dot
- ஆம் — two pieces, left to right

Before you move on

Write ஆம். When does a Tamil vowel get a full letter instead of a sign? (**When it starts a word** — nothing precedes it to hook onto.) What closes the word? (ம் — the pulli on ம.) Next: noon and midnight.

16.4 ஆ — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: அ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: ஆ

ஆ — $\bar{a}$.

It is an **independent vowel** — the shape the vowel $\bar{a}$ takes when a word begins with it, rather than the sign it becomes inside a word.

What it is made of:

- the whole of அ
- a tail added on the right

You already say these, and every one of them has ஆ somewhere inside it:

- ஆம் — yes ($\bar{a}m$)
- ஆம் / இல்லை / சரி $\bar{a}m$ / $illai$ / $sari$ — answering in Tamil
- ஆறு ஏழு பத்து $\bar{a}ru$ $\bar{e}lu$ $pattu$ — six, seven, and ten stay family cousins while Kannada regularly softens p to h
- ஆம் $\bar{a}m$ — a word that begins with a vowel gets a full vowel letter

Writing: ஆ

- 1. start inside the upper curl and sweep around it
- 2. without lifting, continue down the outer curve
- 3. without lifting, turn around the lower loop
- 4. without lifting, carry the horizontal to the right edge — then lift once
- 5. set the pen at the top of the separate right upright and draw straight down

- **6.** without lifting again, continue into the long-vowel loop, curve right and around the bottom, then finish inside — and only now lift

Pen lifts: 1. The pen comes up 1 time and no more.

Two strokes — four joined body movements, one pen lift, then the joined upright and long-vowel loop; cited to Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Frame 4, ஆ.

This is one attested teaching order and not a national standard — handwriting here is taught with school-to-school variation. Source: Sankaran Radhakrishnan, Tamil Script Learners Manual, Appendix I: Hand-movements, Frame 4, ஆ (Univ. of Texas at Austin), p. 192.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ஆ in the ones that have it

ஆம் · வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ஆ three times, saying ā as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ஆ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ஆ? What sound does it carry? (ā.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 17

Noon and Midnight

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use both the fused and the transparent Tamil words for noon and midnight, and point to the நடு “middle” that makes one pair readable on sight.

Say naṇpakal beside naṭuppakal and naḷḷiravu beside naṭu iravu, pointing at naṭu as the everyday “middle” still visible in the second of each pair.

17.1 நண்பகல், நள்ளிரவு — one old “middle” root, two survival stories

You’ve just watched Kannada and Telugu each reach for Sanskrit’s *madhya* to name noon. Tamil doesn’t reach for Sanskrit at all here — it reaches into its own, much older layer of vocabulary instead.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Both of today’s words trace back to the same root: நள் (*naḷ*), a **Proto-Dravidian** word for “**middle, centre**” — a genuine synonym of the everyday நடு (*naṭu*, “middle”) you already know, just from an older layer of the vocabulary. நள் didn’t disappear from Tamil; it survives today mainly in **literary/poetic** compounds — நள்ளிருள் (*naḷḷirul*, “thick darkness”) and நள்ளென் கங்குல் (*naḷḷen kaṅkul*, “deep night”) — rather than in everyday colloquial speech.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நள்ளிரவு (*nalliravu*) = “**midnight**” = நள் (*nal*, “middle”) + இரவு (*iravu*, “**night**,” a word every Tamil speaker still uses on its own) — நள் shows up here exactly as you’d expect. நண்பகல் (*naṇpakal*) = “**noon, midday**” traces to the **same** நள் root, fused with பகல் (*pakal*, “**daytime**”) — but here it surfaces as நண்- rather than நள்-, a sandhi-driven surface change before the following ப. Same root, two different faces, depending on what it’s fused to.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nal” — an old word for “middle” — then “nalliravu,” midnight
- “naṇpakal” — noon, the same nal root, resurfacing as naṇ-

Before you move on

What old Proto-Dravidian root do நண்பகல் and நள்ளிரவு both trace back to, and what does it mean? (நள் *nal*, “middle” — surviving mainly in literary compounds like *nallirul*, “thick darkness.”) Why does it surface as **naṇ-** in *naṇpakal*? (A sandhi change before following **p**.) Does Tamil reach for Sanskrit here? (**No.**) Next: meet the transparent *naṭu* synonyms Tamil kept beside these older compounds.

17.2 நடுப்பகல் and நடு இரவு — the transparent twins

Naṇpakal and *nalliravu* preserve an older middle-root in fused forms. Tamil also kept versions whose pieces remain obvious today.

You’ll want to know: The living synonyms

- நடுப்பகல் (*naṭuppakal*) — “middle-daytime,” a dictionary synonym of *naṇpakal*

- நடு இரவு (*naṭu iravu*) — “middle night,” the transparent synonym of *nalliravu*

Both use நடு (*naṭu*, “middle”), the everyday word still heard in *naṭuvē*, “in the middle.”

Latin daughter languages often inherit one fate for an old compound: eroded or transparent. Tamil kept **both fates inside one language**—old fused forms and fresh transparent synonyms side by side.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “naṇpakal · naṭuppakal” — two noon forms
- *Say it*: “nalliravu · naṭu iravu” — two midnight forms
- *Point to*: *naṭu* as the visible everyday “middle”

Before you move on

Which everyday word builds the transparent forms? (நடு, *naṭu*, “middle.”) What did Tamil keep simultaneously? (**Older fused compounds and transparent synonyms.**) Are any pieces Sanskrit loans? (**No.**)

17.3 ு — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ஆ — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ு

ு — *u*.

It is a **vowel sign**. It is not a letter and never stands alone: it attaches to a consonant and **replaces** the *a* built into it with *u*. Replaces, not adds — the *a* is gone.

You already say these, and every one of them has ு somewhere inside it:

- போய் வருகிறேன் *pōy varugirēṇ* — goodbye (lit. “I’ll go and come back”)
- மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் *mīṇḍum sandippōm* — we’ll meet again
- தமிழ் எழுத்து *tamiḷ eluttu* — why Tamil writing is so round
- பேசு *pēsu* — to speak

Writing: ூ — copy what you see

Put your pen on ூ and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ூ in the ones that have it

வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ூ three times, saying *u* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ூ once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ூ? What vowel does it put on the consonant it attaches to — and what does it take off? (**Puts *u* on; takes the built-in *a* off.**) Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 18

Telling Time

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (3) 📞 Hands-free start: first 1 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can tell the time on the hour in Tamil and keep the hour-word மணி apart from the unrelated Sanskrit gem-word spelled exactly the same way.

Say oru maṇi and iraṇṭu maṇi for one and two o'clock, then choose hour or gem by the context the word sits in.

18.1 மணி — Tamil’s native “bell,” and a real homophone trap

You’ve just watched Kannada and Telugu both borrow Sanskrit’s “bell” word for “hour,” matching Hindi exactly. Tamil goes its own way again here — with a genuinely tricky twist along the way.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மணி (*maṇi*) = “hour, o’clock” — and it also means “bell, gong,” the same double duty you’ve now seen several times. Wiktionary’s Tamil entry gives this *maṇi* its **own etymology**, separate from a Sanskrit-loan entry of the same spelling — most likely a **native Dravidian** word, not the Sanskrit घण्टा (*ghaṇṭā*) behind Kannada’s *gaṇṭe*, Telugu’s *gaṇṭa*, and Hindi’s *ghaṇṭā*. On this account, Tamil underwent the **same** “a bell announces the hour, so the bell-word becomes the hour-word” shift on its own, from a different starting point

— though even the comparative Dravidian dictionary (DEDR) flags a possible Sanskrit connection for this whole word-family as unresolved, so hold “native” as the best current account rather than a settled fact.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “maṇi” — hour, also “bell” — native, NOT from Sanskrit ghaṇṭā
- *Read it:* ன மணி — the numeral from chapter seven and the hour word you have met, side by side

Before you move on

Is Tamil’s மணி (“hour”) from the same Sanskrit root as Kannada/Telugu/Hindi’s hour-words? (**Most likely no** — it’s treated as a native Dravidian “bell” word that independently reached “hour” the same way, though even DEDR flags this as not fully settled.) What semantic path links the meanings? (A **bell announces the hour.**) Next: writing இல்லை — a second independent vowel, ல, and the ai sign.

18.2 ் — the dot that takes the vowel away

Not a letter this time — a mark that changes the letter under it.

Script you’ll notice: ்

Every Tamil consonant you have written so far carries a hidden *a*. வ is not *v*, it is **va**. ட is **ma**. That is what an abugida is: the vowel is built in.

The pulli is how you take it back. One dot above the letter, and வ becomes plain **v**.

Here is what Tamil does that Devanagari does not: **the dot stays visible and both letters keep their full shape**. Devanagari fuses two consonants into a single new conjunct you have to learn separately. Tamil just writes the dot. There is nothing extra to memorise.

Where it sits: a DOT written above the letter, removing the inherent vowel; unlike Devanagari’s virama it does not trigger a conjunct — both letters keep their full shape and the dot stays visible

Writing: ெ

With this you can write வணக்கம் — every letter, in order:

வ + ண + க + ெ + க + ம + ெ

Seven marks on the page, and you have written *hello*.

Your turn

- *Trace it:* the mark on a letter you already know
- *Say it:* the letter's sound with the mark, then without it
- *Write it:* the whole word above, one mark at a time

Before you move on

What does the pulli do? (**Removes the built-in vowel.**) What is வ with a pulli? (வ, not *va.*) What does Tamil NOT do that Devanagari does? (**Fuse the letters into a new shape.**)

18.3 இல்லை — a vowel in front, a vowel sign behind

Last lesson gave you the rule: a word opening on a vowel opens with a full letter. Here is the same rule with a different vowel, plus one new sign.

Script you'll notice: இ and ல

இ is the independent letter for short *i* — the same job ஆ did, one vowel over. Its parts, in writing order:

1. a crossing spiral on the left
2. a tall straight vertical on the right

ல is *la*, with its built-in *a* like every consonant:

1. a curl that turns back on itself

2. a stroke rising to the right

Put the pulli on it and you get ல், a bare *l*.

The new mark is ை, the sign for *ai*, and it does something ி did not. **It is written to the LEFT of its consonant, but pronounced after it.**

ல + ை → லை, and on the page the hook stands *before* the
ல — yet you say *lai*, not *ail*.

Your eye meets the vowel first and your mouth says it second. Devanagari does the same thing with ि, and it catches everyone once.

Tamil keeps **three** *l*-letters (ல ள ழ) and **two** *r*-letters (ர ற),
the same way it keeps three *n*'s. This is the first of the *l*'s.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
இ	<i>i</i>	independent — the word opens on a vowel
ல்	<i>l</i> — ல with the pulli	bare consonant
லை	<i>lai</i> — ல with the ai sign	this lesson

இ · ல் · லை → இல்லை

The ல் + லை is a doubled *l*, held like the க் of *vaṇakkam*: *il-lai*, not *ilai*.

Your turn

- *Write it:* இ — spiral, then the right-hand vertical
- *Write it:* ல — curl, then rising stroke
- *Write it:* லை — the ai hook goes on the LEFT
- *Write it:* இல்லை — three pieces
- *Say it:* “il-lai” — hold the doubled *l*

Before you move on

Write இல்லை. Why does it open with இ rather than a sign? (**The word starts on a vowel.**) Which side of its consonant does ை sit on? (**The left** — written first, spoken second.) Next: the gem-word homophone, and telling clock time.

18.4 மணி — hour or jewel? Context decides

The likely native bell/hour word shares its spelling and sound with a clear Sanskrit loan meaning something entirely different.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil dictionaries list a second மணி from Sanskrit मणि (*maṇi*), “gem, jewel.” On that analysis, bell/hour and gem are **homophones**: one likely native, one borrowed, identical on the page. Context separates clock time from a jewel or personal name.

Malayalam dictionaries analyze their cognate differently, treating bell/hour and gem as one Sanskrit-derived word. Closely related languages do not always settle the same etymological question in the same way.

Grammar Lens: Tell the time

ஒரு மணி. — one o’clock, literally “one hour/bell”

இரண்டு மணி. — two o’clock

The number comes first; *maṇi* supplies the clock unit.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “oru maṇi” — one o’clock
- *Say it*: “iraṇṭu maṇi” — two o’clock
- *Choose by context*: clock → hour · jewelry/name → gem

Before you move on

What is the homophone trap? (A likely separate Sanskrit-borrowed மணி means **gem**.) Does Malayalam analyze the same forms identically? (**No**.) How do you say two o'clock? (இரண்டு மணி, *iraṇṭu maṇi*.)

18.5 த — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ு — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you'll notice: த

த — *ta*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *t*, it is **ta**.

You already say these, and every one of them has த somewhere inside it:

- மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் *mīṇḍum sandippōm* — we'll meet again
- தமிழ் எழுத்து *tamiḷ eluttu* — why Tamil writing is so round
- நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் *nān tamiḷ pēsugirēn* — I speak Tamil
- எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் *enakkut tamiḷ teriyum* — 'I know Tamil'

Writing: த — copy what you see

Put your pen on த and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find த in the ones that have it

வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* த three times, saying *ta* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find த once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — த? What sound does it carry? (*ta.*)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 19

Asking Someone's Age

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (3) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask someone's age in both the casual possessive shape and the formal dative-plus-become shape, and answer with my own.

Ask “un vayas enna?” casually, ask “unakku ettanai vayathu aakirathu?” formally, and answer “enakku irupathu vayathu aakirathu.”

19.1 உனக்கு எத்தனை வயது ஆகிறது? (unakku ettanai vayathu aakirathu?) — Tamil actually has BOTH shapes

Same Sanskrit word one more time — but be careful here: Tamil isn't locked into just one of the two grammatical shapes you've now seen. It has both, in different registers.

You'll want to know: வயது — the same Sanskrit “vigor/age” word, a fourth time

வயது (*vayathu*) = “age” — the same Sanskrit वयस् (*vayas*, “age, vigor,” PIE cousin of Latin *vīs*) you've now met four times across Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Tamil. All four Dravidian languages borrowed this exact Sanskrit word for “age” — none of them built a native alternative for this particular concept, the way they did for so many others.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “vayathu” — age — then the whole formal question, “unakku ettanai vayathu aakirathu?”
- *Connect:* Sanskrit *vayas* · Tamil *vayathu* · Latin *vīs*

Before you move on

Is Tamil’s வயது the same Sanskrit word borrowed by all four Dravidian languages here? (**Yes** — none built a native alternative for this concept.) What did *vayas* originally include besides age? (**Vigor**.) Next: choose between Tamil’s casual possessive and formal dative-plus-become shapes.

19.2 Your age what? / To you how many years becomes?

Tamil did not choose one age construction. Register selects between two shapes already visible elsewhere in the family.

Grammar Lens: Casual possessive

உன் வயசு என்ன? — “your age what?”

Casual speech uses a plain possessive with no dative and no verb, like Kannada and Telugu.

Grammar Lens: Formal dative plus “become”

உனக்கு எத்தனை வயது ஆகிறது? — “to you how many years is becoming?”

எனக்கு இருபது வயது ஆகிறது. — “to me twenty years is becoming.”

Formal/written Tamil uses the dative experiencer plus ஆகிறது (*aakirathu*, “is becoming,” from *aaku*). Malayalam uses a similar dative shape but chooses “exists” instead.

Do not compress these into “Tamil’s one grammar.” Both live in the language; setting and register choose between them.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “un vayasu enna?” — casual
- *Say it*: “unakku ettanai vayathu aakirathu?” — formal
- *Answer*: “enakku irupathu vayathu aakirathu”

Before you move on

Which shape is casual? (**Possessive**: “your age what?”) Which is formal? (**Dative** + **aakirathu**, “become.”) Does Malayalam use the same verb? (**No** — it uses “exists.”)

19.3 ി — the first vowel sign

Not a letter this time — a mark that changes the letter under it.

Script you’ll notice: ി

A consonant carries *a*. To make it carry a different vowel you add a **sign** — and the sign replaces the built-in vowel rather than sitting beside it.

The i-sign is a hook written above and to the right. റ is ra; റി is ri.

Where it sits: a hook written above and to the right of the consonant

Writing: ി

And with that: நன்றി.

ந + ன + ூ + ர + ி

Thank you — the second word you can write.

Your turn

- *Trace it*: the mark on a letter you already know
- *Say it*: the letter’s sound with the mark, then without it
- *Write it*: the whole word above, one mark at a time

Before you move on

Does a vowel sign add a vowel or replace one? (**Replace** — the built-in *a* is gone.) What is ற with an i-sign? (**ri**.)

19.4 சரி — one letter, several sounds

You have seen க cover *k*, *g* and a soft *h* depending on where it sits. Here is the same economy on a second letter.

Script you'll notice: ச and ற

ச is written once and does the work English splits between **s**, **ch** and **j**. Position picks which:

where	sound
starting a word	<i>s</i> or <i>ch</i>
between vowels	softened
after a nasal, as in சூசு	<i>j</i>

That is exactly the pattern க showed — *k* at the start, *g* after a nasal, a soft *h* between vowels. One letter per position of the mouth, and context fills in the rest.

ற is *ra*, with its built-in *a*. It is the other of Tamil's **two** *r*-letters, alongside the று you met in நன்றி.

Read both letters here; do not draw them yet. This book gives a stroke order only where it has a sourced one, and ச and ற do not have one yet.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
ச	<i>sa</i> here	this lesson
ரி	<i>ri</i> — ற with the ி sign	the sign from நன்றி

ச · ரி → சரி

Two pieces, and both parts are things you already hold: a consonant, and the vowel sign you first hooked onto று.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ச — then சரி
- *Say it:* “sari”
- *Contrast:* ரி and லை — the ி sign follows its letter, the ை sign precedes it
- *Write it:* ஆம் and இல்லை again, from memory — yes and no, the two you will reach for most

Before you move on

Read சரி. Which English sounds does ச cover on its own? (*s* or *ch* at the start, softened between vowels, *j* after a nasal.) How many *r*-letters does Tamil keep? (**Two** — ர and ற.) In லை, which side of the ல does the ai sign sit on? (**The left.**) And why does இல்லை open with இ rather than a sign? (**It starts on a vowel.**) Next: the numbers eleven to twenty.

19.5 ே — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: த — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ே

ே — ē.

It is a **vowel sign**. It is not a letter and never stands alone: it attaches to a consonant and **replaces** the *a* built into it with ē. Replaces, not adds — the *a* is gone.

You already say these, and every one of them has ே somewhere inside it:

- போய் வருகிறேன் *pōy varugirēn* — goodbye (lit. “I’ll go and come back”)
- பேசு *pēsu* — to speak

- நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் *nān tamīl pēsugirēn* — I speak Tamil
- வேலை செய் *vēlai sey* — to work (lit. “work-do”)

Writing: ே — copy what you see

Put your pen on ே and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ே in the ones that have it
- பேசு · வணக்கம்
- *Trace it:* ே three times, saying ē as you finish each one
 - *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ே once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ே? What vowel does it put on the consonant it attaches to — and what does it take off? (**Puts ē on; takes the built-in a off.**) Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 20

Numbers Eleven to Twenty and Weather

Modes:  voice (2)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 2 of 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can count eleven to twenty as the transparent compounds they are, and say what the weather is doing.

Take vānilai apart into vānam plus nilai, then report the weather with mazhai peykiRathu.

20.1 பதினொன்று-இருபது — shared Dravidian patterns

Here's how this arc closes: four completely different approaches to “twenty” across Sanskrit, Latin, Arabic — and then all four Dravidian languages quietly agreeing on the exact same compositional idea.

You'll want to know: பதினொன்று-பத்தொன்பது — “ten” + digit

Tamil's teens echo பத்து (*pathu*, “ten”) plus each digit — பதினொன்று (*patinondru*, 11), பன்னிரண்டு (*pannirandu*, 12), and onward through பத்தொன்பது (*pattonbatu*, 19) — the same digit-plus- ten-echo compounding you've now seen across Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam.

You'll want to know: இருபது — transparently “two-tens”

இருபது (*irupathu*, “**twenty**”) = இரு (*iru*, an older word for “**two**,” alongside the everyday இரண்டு *iraṇḍu*) + பத்து (*pathu*, “**ten**”) — fully transparent as “**two-tens**,” matching Malayalam’s own *irupathu* almost letter-for-letter.

Why it’s said this way

This closes the numbers arc with a genuinely clean pattern. All four major Dravidian languages build “twenty” the **same** compositional way — some (Tamil, Malayalam) keeping it fully transparent on the surface today, some (Kannada) with the same compositional origin but no longer visibly matching the modern standalone words for “two” and “ten,” some (Telugu) worn down further but most likely from the same root. Compare that to the other three families you’ve met: Sanskrit’s विंशति (*vimshati*), Latin’s *vīgintī*, and Arabic’s عشرون (*‘ishrūn*) are each their **own** special, non-compositional word for twenty — none built transparently from “two” and “ten” the way Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam all do.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “patinondru, panniraṇḍu” — 11, 12
- “iru” — an older word for two, “pathu” — ten
- “irupathu” — twenty, “two-tens,” transparent

Before you move on

What two pieces build இருபது (twenty)? (இரு “two” + பத்து “ten” — “**two-tens**.”) Do all four major Dravidian languages build “twenty” the same compositional way? (**Yes** — Tamil and Malayalam keep it fully transparent today; Kannada shares the same compositional origin but its modern “two”/“ten” words no longer visibly match; Telugu’s is worn down further but most likely the same root.) Do Sanskrit, Latin, or Arabic build their word for twenty this way? (**No** — each has its own special, non-compositional standalone word instead.)

20.2 வானிலை — “the standing of the sky,” most likely all native

You’ve now seen a Persian+Sanskrit hybrid (Kannada), a pure Sanskrit compound (Telugu), and a Sanskrit compound echoing “time” (Malayalam). Tamil most likely breaks the pattern one more time — with a word built entirely from native pieces.

You’ll want to know: வானிலை — *vaanam* + *nilai*

வானிலை (*vāṇilai*) = “**weather**” — built from:

- வானம் (*vāṇam*, “**sky**”) — most likely a **native Dravidian** word, with confirmed cognates in **Kannada** ಬಾಸು (*bānu*, “sky”) and **Telugu** వాన (*vāna*, “rain,” from the same sky/rain-cloud root) — distinct from the Sanskrit sky word *ākāśa* that those same two languages use elsewhere.
- நிலை (*nilai*, “**state, standing, condition**”) — from நில் (*nil*, “**to stand**”), one of Tamil’s most basic native verb roots.

So *vāṇilai* literally means “**the standing of the sky**” or “**the sky’s state**” — and unlike its three Dravidian cousins, neither piece here is a Sanskrit or Persian/Arabic loan. (Treat “native” as the best current account rather than a fully settled fact, the same hedge every native-word claim here deserves — but both pieces are independently well-attested as old, native Dravidian vocabulary.)

You’ll want to know: மழை பெய்கிறது — “rain is falling”

மழை பெய்கிறது. — “It’s raining.” — literally “**rain is falling**.” (*mazhai peykiRathu* — from பெய் *pey*, “to fall/pour,” specifically used for rain.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vāṇilai” — weather, “the standing of the sky”
- “vāṇam” — sky, “nilai” — state, from “nil,” to stand
- “mazhai peykiRathu” — it’s raining, “rain is falling”

Before you move on

What are the two pieces of வானிலை, and what does the whole word literally mean? (வானம், “sky,” + நிலை, “state/standing” — “**the standing of the sky**.”) Is either piece a Sanskrit or Persian/Arabic loan, unlike Kannada, Telugu, or Malayalam’s weather words? (**Most likely not** — both pieces are native Dravidian.) What Tamil word does Malayalam’s *mazha* match for “rain”? (மழை, *mazhai*.)

20.3 ய — one character, met inside words you already say

Before the new one: ே — what does it do?

One character this time. Just one — and you have been saying it for pages without knowing which mark on the page it was.

Script you’ll notice: ய

ய — *ya*.

It is a **consonant**, and in this script a consonant is never bare: it comes with an *a* already in it. So it is not *y*, it is **ya**.

You already say these, and every one of them has ய somewhere inside it:

- பெயர் *peyar* — name
- என் பெயர் ... *en peyar* ... — my name is... (with no “is”)
- பரவாயில்லை *paravāyillai* — it’s okay / no problem / you’re welcome
- போய் வருகிறேன் *pōy varugirēn* — goodbye (lit. “I’ll go and come back”)

Writing: ய — copy what you see

Put your pen on ய and follow its line. Copy the shape you can see — slowly, and larger than it is printed.

This book does not yet tell you **where to start the character or which way to travel**. That is a real thing, taught with real variation from school to school, and it is not written down here until it can be written down with a source. Copying what is in front of you needs no such source, and it is how the shape gets into your hand in the meantime.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these words, and find ய in the ones that have it

பெயர் · வணக்கம்

- *Trace it:* ய three times, saying *ya* as you finish each one
- *Look:* back at any page of this chapter and find ய once more

Before you move on

Which character is this — ய? What sound does it carry? (*ya*.)
Name one word you already say that contains it.

Chapter 21

Dog and Cat

Modes: ⇐ voice (1) ✍ pen (1) ⇐ Hands-free start: first 1 of 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say dog and cat in Tamil and say which of the two rests on an undisputed Dravidian root and which sits inside a three-way family split.

Say nāy and pūnai, then place Kannada’s bekku and Telugu’s pilli as two other roots entirely rather than variants of the same word.

21.1 நாய், பூனை — solid ground to close the arc, and an honest three-way split

This whole ANIMALS arc kept finding mystery dog-words — Spanish’s *perro*, English’s *dog*, Hindi’s *kuttā*, each one an unsolved puzzle displacing an older, expected word. Tamil’s dog-word closes the arc on the complete opposite footing: total, undisputed solid ground.

You’ll want to know: நாய் — no mystery, anywhere

நாய் (*nāy*, “dog”) is a solid, native **Proto-Dravidian** root — the exact same one behind Kannada’s ನಾಯಿ (*nāyi*) and Malayalam’s നായ (*nāya*). There is no debate about its origin, no substrate mystery, nothing like the *perro/dog/kuttā* pattern that ran through Spanish, English, and Hindi. Three unrelated language families each lost their expected word for “dog” to an unexplained newcomer — and right here, in the Dravidian family, the expected word simply **survived**, plainly and solidly, across (at least) three of its languages.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

பூனை (*pūnai*, “cat”) is Tamil’s own everyday word, matching Malayalam’s പൂച്ച (*pūcha*) closely — but be honest that “cat” splits Dravidian in a way “dog” doesn’t. Kannada’s everyday word, ಬೆಕ್ಕು (*bekku*), comes from a **different** ancient root (related to the word for “wildcat”); Telugu’s, పిల్లి (*pilli*), comes from yet **another** separate Proto-Dravidian root, most likely the very source behind Sanskrit’s *bidāla* and Hindi’s *billi*. Tamil itself even keeps **rarer, alternate** cat-words — பில்லி and வெருகு — cognate with Telugu’s and Kannada’s everyday choices respectively, showing that all three roots were once available across the family; each language just settled on a different one as its everyday word.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nāy” — dog, solid native Dravidian, no mystery anywhere
- “pūnai” — cat, Tamil’s everyday word, matching Malayalam
- the honest split — Kannada’s *bekku* and Telugu’s *pilli* come from two other, separate ancient roots

Before you move on

Is நாய் a mystery word, like Spanish’s *perro*, English’s *dog*, or Hindi’s *kuttā*? (**No** — a solid, undisputed native Dravidian root, shared with Kannada and Malayalam.) Does பூனை share a root with Kannada’s *bekku* or Telugu’s *pilli*? (**No** — all three are genuinely separate ancient Dravidian roots; Tamil even keeps rarer alternate cat-words, *pilli* and *veruku*, echoing both of them.) Which Dravidian cat-word is most likely the source of Sanskrit’s *bidāla* and Hindi’s *billi*? (**Telugu’s pilli.**)

21.2 என் — the third vowel that opens a word

You know the rule already: a Tamil word that opens on a vowel opens with a **full vowel letter**, never a sign. You have seen it

twice — ஆ in *ām*, இ in *illai*. Here is the third, in a word you have been saying since chapter 2.

Script you’ll notice: எ

எ is the independent letter for short *e*. Same job as ஆ and இ, one more vowel along.

ஆ	opens <i>ām</i>
இ	opens <i>illai</i>
எ	opens <i>en</i>

Three words, three different vowels, one rule doing the work each time. That is what makes the rule worth having: you did not need to be told about எ separately, only that word-initial vowels get a full letter.

Read எ; do not draw it yet. This book gives a stroke order only where it has a sourced one, and எ does not have one yet.

Script you’ll notice: build the word

piece

எ	<i>e</i>	independent — the word opens on a vowel
ன்	bare <i>n</i> — ன under a pulli	the alveolar <i>n</i> , from நன்றி

எ • ன் → என்

Two pieces, and you have met both halves before: the alveolar ன is the middle one of Tamil’s three *n*’s, and the dot on top is the same pulli that closes வணக்கம்.

Your turn

- *Read it:* எ — then என்
- *Say it:* “en” — “my”
- *Contrast:* ஆம் • இல்லை • என் — three words, three opening vowels

Before you move on

Read என். Why does it open with a full எ rather than a sign? (**The word starts on a vowel** — there is no consonant to hook onto.) Which vowel opens இல்லை? (இ.) What is the dot doing on ன்? (**Removing the built-in a**, leaving a bare n.) Next: green and yellow, and a colour word the whole Dravidian family shares.

Chapter 22

Green and Yellow

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can say green and yellow in Tamil, recognise பச்சை as a rarer doublet, and keep the pan-Dravidian root separate from the independent one.

Say பச்சை as the pan-Dravidian green, மஞ்சள் as a separate native yellow, and பச்சை as the rarer doublet beside them.

22.1 பச்சை, மஞ்சள் — closing the Dravidian arc, holding both patterns at once

You’ve now seen three different Dravidian answers to “how do green and yellow relate”: Kannada split them apart, Telugu fused them into one root, Malayalam kept them as two separate native words. Tamil, it turns out, quietly contains a trace of **both** of the last two patterns.

You’ll want to know: பச்சை — the familiar pan-Dravidian green

பச்சை (paccai, “green”) ← Proto-Dravidian *pac- — the same root you’ve now met four times: Kannada’s *hasiru*, Telugu’s *pacca*, Malayalam’s *paccha*, and now Tamil’s own *paccai*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மஞ்சள் (*mañcaḷ*, “yellow, turmeric”) is Tamil’s actual, everyday word for yellow — and it comes from a **completely separate** native Dravidian root, matching Malayalam’s മഞ്ഞ/മഞ്ഞൾ (*mañña/maññaḷ*) closely. Like Malayalam’s pair, this root has no Sanskrit involvement — it sits alongside *paccai*, not descended from it.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The **Tamil Lexicon** also records பசுப்பு (*pacuppu*, “greenish yellow”) — a genuine **doublet** of *paccai* itself, from the same **pac-* root, matching Telugu’s *pasupu* closely. Unlike Telugu, though, this doublet is **not** Tamil’s everyday word for yellow — that job belongs to *mañcaḷ*; *pacuppu* survives mainly as a dictionary-recorded shade word. So Tamil alone holds a trace of **both** patterns at once: a *pac-* doublet sitting quietly in the dictionary (Telugu’s pattern), next to a separate, dominant root doing the everyday work (Malayalam’s pattern). (Note for the Tamil-speaking reviewer: *pacuppu*’s everyday currency is the part I’m least certain of — please confirm whether it’s a word you’d recognize as “greenish yellow,” or whether it reads as archaic/purely literary in the Tamil you’d teach first.)

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “பச்சை” — green, the pan-Dravidian *pac-* word
- “மஞ்சள்” — yellow, Tamil’s real everyday word, a separate root
- “பசுப்பு” — a rarer doublet of *paccai*, echoing Telugu’s pattern

Before you move on

What is Tamil’s everyday word for yellow, and is it related to **paccai**? (மஞ்சள், *mañcaḷ* — **no**, a completely separate native root, matching Malayalam’s *mañña/maññaḷ*.) What rarer Tamil word **IS** a doublet of *paccai*, from the same *pac-* root? (பசுப்பு, *pacuppu*, “greenish yellow” — echoing Telugu’s *pacca/pasupu* pattern.) Does any one pattern hold across all four major Dravidian

languages? (**No** — Kannada splits native/loan, Telugu fuses one root, Malayalam keeps two separate roots, and Tamil turns out to hold traces of both Telugu's and Malayalam's patterns at once.)

Chapter 23

Day

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use நாள் as the everyday word for day and keep தினம் for the formal compounds where it actually belongs.

Say mūnru nāl for three days and sutantira tinam for Independence Day, classifying each as everyday-native or formal-Sanskrit.

23.1 நாள் (nāl) — “day,” the one this arc’s Dravidian languages didn’t lose

You’ve now seen three Dravidian languages reach for a loanword — Sanskrit, twice, and Persian once — to name their everyday word for “day.” Tamil doesn’t. This lesson is about the one that didn’t.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நாள் (nāl) — “day” — is native **Dravidian**, from **Proto-Dravidian** **nāl*. You’ve already met it, hiding inside நாளை (nālai, “tomorrow,” Chapter 4). But here’s the honest headline of this lesson: நாள் isn’t a survivor clinging to one narrow sense the way some native Dravidian words are — it is simply Tamil’s **plain, everyday, unmarked** word for counting a day, as ordinary as மூன்று நாள் (mūnru nāl, “three days”).

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nāl̥” — “day,” native Dravidian, already met inside “tomorrow”
- “mūnru nāl̥” — three days

Before you move on

Where did you already meet நாள் before this lesson? (Inside நாளை, *nālai*, “tomorrow,” Chapter 4.) Is Tamil’s everyday day-word a loanword? (No — நாள் is native Dravidian.) Is it marginal or literary? (No — it is the plain everyday counting word.) Next: compare the other sisters’ borrowed day-words and Tamil’s formal *tinam*.

23.2 நாள் and தினம் — everyday native, formal borrowed

Nāl̥ is plainly native and everyday. Put that lexical choice beside the other Dravidian tracks.

You’ll want to know: Four everyday day-words

- Kannada **dina** — Sanskrit tatsama
- Telugu **rōju** — Persian loan
- Malayalam **divasam** — Sanskrit tatsama
- Tamil **nāl̥** — native Dravidian

Tamil is the only one here whose unmarked everyday counting word remains native.

You’ll want to know: Tamil still has தினம்

தினம் (*tinam*) is the same Sanskrit *dina* as Kannada/Malayalam, ultimately from PIE *dyew-*, “shine,” also behind Latin *diēs*. Tamil assigns it formal and compound work: சுதந்திர தினம், “Independence Day,” and தினசரி, “daily.” Casual counting remains *nāl̥*.

The language did not reject the loan; it gave native and borrowed forms different jobs.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “mūnru nāl” — three days
- *Say it*: “sutantira tinam” — Independence Day
- *Sort*: everyday native · formal/compound Sanskrit

Before you move on

Which track alone keeps a native everyday day-word? (**Tamil**.)
Where does *tinam* appear? (**Formal compounds**.) Is it unrelated to Kannada *dina*? (**No** — it is the same Sanskrit tatsama.)

23.3 ಂೞ — a sign that waits on the left

One vowel sign you have met does something strange: ು stands to the **left** of its consonant and is spoken **after** it. That was not a one-off. Here is a second sign with the same habit.

Script you’ll notice: ು and ೂ

Two consonants, each carrying its built-in *a* like every other:

ೞ	<i>pa</i>
ೞ	<i>ya</i>

Read both; do not draw them yet. Neither has a sourced stroke order in this book’s script data, so neither gets one here.

Script you’ll notice: the ೃ sign

ೃ is the sign for *e*, and it is written to the **LEFT** of its consonant and pronounced **after it** — exactly what ು does.

ೞ + ೃ → ೃೞ, and on the page the hook stands *before* the ೞ — yet you say *pe*, not *ep*.

So the left-standing signs are a family, not an exception you have to remember one member at a time. Compare the three vowel signs you now hold:

sign	sound	where it sits
ி	<i>i</i>	above and to the right
ை	<i>ai</i>	to the left , spoken after
ெ	<i>e</i>	to the left , spoken after

Be clear about how well attested each half of that is. The sourced description covers ை — “a double hook written *BEFORE* (to the left of) the consonant, though pronounced after it.” There is no such entry for ெ yet, so the claim that ெ sits on the left is stated from the pattern the two signs share, not from a source for ெ itself. It is reliable — this is ordinary Tamil orthography — but it is one step further from the page than the ை rule is.

Script you’ll notice: build the word

piece		
பெ	<i>pe</i> — ப with the ெ sign on its left	this lesson
ய	<i>ya</i>	this lesson
ர்	bare <i>r</i> — ர under a pulli	ர from சரி

பெ · ய · ர் → பெயர்

Three pieces for a word you have used since chapter 2 without once needing to read it. That is the point of the order: the word came first, and the letters are catching up to a word you already own.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ப · ய — then பெ — then பெயர்
- *Say it:* “peyar” — “name”
- *Read it:* என் பெயர் — “my name,” both words, straight off the page

- *Contrast:* றி and பெ — the ி sign follows, the ெ sign precedes

Before you move on

Read பெயர். Which side of its consonant does ெ sit on, and when is it spoken? (**The left**, and **after** — like ை.) Name the other left-standing sign you know. (ஈ, as in இல்லை.) Read என் பெயர் and say what it means. (“**My name**” — எ opens on a vowel, ர் closes on a bare *r*.) Next: the word for night.

Chapter 24

Night

Modes: ⇄ voice (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can use இரவு for night and இருள் for darkness without collapsing the two, and treat the claim that ராத்திரி is the more colloquial word as a claim still to be tested.

State the source’s rāttiri claim with its hedge intact, set it against native regional usage, and hold iravu and iruḷ apart.

24.1 இரவு (iravu) — “night,” and a register question worth a native speaker’s ear

Last lesson, Tamil’s native day-word had no real competition. This lesson’s honest twist, hedged carefully, is that “night” may not tell the same story — and this is exactly the kind of claim worth checking against your own ear, not just a dictionary’s.

You’ll want to know: இரவு — already standing on its own, inside “midnight”

இரவு (iravu) — “night” — is native **Dravidian**, from **Proto-Dravidian** **cira* (“darkness”). You’ve technically already met it standing fully on its own: Chapter 17, while explaining நள்ளிரவு (*nalliravu*, “midnight,” நள் + இரவு), noted directly that இரவு itself is a word every Tamil speaker still uses on its own. This lesson gives it its own full chapter.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil also keeps ராத்திரி (*rāttiri*), a Sanskrit **tatsama** from रात्रि (*rātri*) — the same word that surfaces, as a tatsama, in Kannada’s *ratri* and Telugu’s *ratri*. It traces to **Proto-Indo-European** **h₁reh₁-* (“to rest”), a **completely different** root from Latin *nox*’s **nók^wts* — the same specific comparison already drawn for Hindi’s *raat* and Malayalam’s *rāthri*, now a third confirmation, same false-cognate pattern, same honest non-relationship to *nox*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “iravu” — “night,” native, already met inside *naḷḷiravu*
- “rāttiri” — Sanskrit loan, same PIE *h₁reh₁-* already drawn for Hindi and Malayalam, *NOT* related to Latin *nox*

Before you move on

Where did you already meet இரவு before this lesson? (Inside நள்ளிரவு, *naḷḷiravu*, “midnight,” Chapter 17.) Does ராத்திரி’s PIE root match Latin *nox*’s? (No — **h₁reh₁-* “to rest,” the same false-cognate pattern already drawn for Hindi and Malayalam.) Next: treat the proposed register split as a hypothesis and keep “darkness” separate from “night.”

24.2 Night words — a register hypothesis and a semantic boundary

Iravu is native and *rāttiri* borrowed. That alone does not tell you which one conversational Tamil prefers.

Why it’s said this way

At least one dictionary says ராத்திரி is more common colloquially, implying native இரவு may lean literary/written. If accurate, this reverses the day story, where native *nāl* is uncontested everyday speech. But the evidence is limited and dictionary-level. Treat this as a

prompt for a native speaker’s ear, not settled fact. Register judgments require real usage, region, and setting—not a purity assumption about native versus borrowed words.

You’ll want to know: Darkness is a different word

இருள் (*irul*) means **darkness**, from Proto-Dravidian *cirVl* and cognate with Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam forms. It is not *iravu* “night as a time period” and comes from a different reconstructed root despite the similar sound.

Your turn

- *Qualify*: “one source says *rāttiri* is more colloquial”
- *Ask*: compare that claim with native regional usage
- *Contrast*: *iravu* night · *irul* darkness

Before you move on

Is the *rāttiri* register claim settled? (**No** — limited sourcing, worth checking against native usage.) Is இருள் interchangeable with இரவு? (**No** — darkness versus a time period, from different roots.)

Chapter 25

Good Night

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say good night in Tamil out of roots I already own, and trace every one of those forms back to நல்.

Say nalla iravu and iravu vaṇakkam, then run nal- forward into nalam, nan̄ri and nalla.

25.1 இனிய இரவு (iniya iravu) — “good night,” and Tamil breaking the pattern one more time

Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam all reached for the same Sanskrit phrase to say “good night.” This lesson closes the arc with the one that didn’t — and it’s a pattern you’ve actually seen from Tamil before, all the way back in Chapter 1.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

இனிய இரவு (iniya iravu) — “good night” — literally “sweet, pleasant night.” இனிய (iniya, “sweet, pleasant, dear”) is native Dravidian, from Proto-Dravidian **in-* (“sweet”) — the same root behind இனிப்பு (inippu, “sweet, dessert”). Paired with இரவு (iravu, “night,” already met last lesson), the whole phrase is built from Tamil’s own word-stock, start to finish.

Why it's said this way

Tamil's Dravidian sisters and Hindi all reached for the **same** Sanskrit phrase: Hindi's शुभ रात्रि, Kannada's ಶುಭ ರಾತ್ರಿ, Telugu's శుభ రాత్రి, Malayalam's ശുഭ രാത്രി — all four built from the identical tatsama pair, **śubh** (“to be beautiful”) + **rātri** (“night”). Tamil's standard phrase reaches for **none** of that — no śubha-descended “good night” turned up as a commonly used Tamil form in the phrasebook sources checked for this lesson. Instead, Tamil built its own phrase from its own vocabulary.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*iniya iravu*” — “good night,” literally “sweet night,” fully native
- the pattern it breaks — every other language this arc shares one Sanskrit śubh(a) rātri phrase; Tamil doesn't

Before you move on

What does இனிய இரவு literally mean, and what root does இனிய come from? (“**Sweet/pleasant night**” — Proto-Dravidian *in-*, “sweet.”) Does Tamil's “good night” share the same Sanskrit śubha rātri phrase as Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam? (**No** — no such form turned up in the sources checked for this lesson; Tamil's standard phrase is fully native, breaking the pattern shared by all four other languages.) Next: the ா sign, and reading நான் off the page.

25.2 நான் — the sign that stands after

Two places a vowel sign has sat so far: ீ goes above and to the right, ு and ூ go to the left. Here is the third place, and it is the one you would have guessed first.

Script you'll notice: the ா sign

ா is the sign for long *ā*, and this book's script data describes it plainly: **a vertical stroke with a small top hook, written after the consonant.**

ம + ா → மா, said *mā*.

That pairing is the example the data itself gives, on a letter you can already draw.

So the three positions, all seen now:

sign	sound	where it sits
ா	<i>ā</i>	after the consonant
ி	<i>i</i>	above and to the right
ை	<i>ai</i>	to the left, spoken after
ெ	<i>e</i>	to the left, spoken after

Notice also that ஆ, the independent long *ā* that opens a word, and ா, the sign, carry the same lengthening. One is a letter standing on its own; the other hangs off a consonant.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
நா	<i>nā</i> — ந with the ா sign after it	ந drawn in நன்றி
ன்	bare <i>n</i> — ன under a pulli	ன drawn there too, the alveolar <i>n</i>

நா · ன் → நான்

Two pieces and one new mark. நான் is “I,” and its possessive is the என் (“my”) you read in chapter 21 — so *nān* and *en* now both come off the page.

Your turn

- *Read it:* மா — then நா — then நான்
- *Say it:* “*nān*” — “I”
- *Contrast:* நா · றி · பெ — a sign after, a sign above-right, a sign before
- *Contrast:* ஆம் and நான் — the same long *ā*, once as a letter and once as a sign

Before you move on

Read நான். Where does ா sit relative to its consonant? (**After it** — a vertical stroke with a small top hook.) Which of Tamil’s three *n*-letters closes the word, and what is the dot doing? (ன, the alveolar one; the pulli **removes its built-in a.**) Next: good night, out of roots you already own.

25.3 நல்ல இரவு and இரவு வணக்கம் — old roots recombined

Tamil’s native “sweet night” repeats the lexical choice that opened this book: build greetings from its own roots rather than the shared Sanskrit formula.

You’ll want to know: The Chapter 1 echo

வணக்கம் comes from native *vaṇaṅku*, “bow,” while neighboring greetings use Sanskrit *namas-*. At the other end of the day, இனிய இரவு is native while the same neighbors share Sanskrit *śubha rātri*.

Tamil also keeps two transparent alternatives:

- நல்ல இரவு — “good night,” using *nalla*, from the **nal-** “good” root already inside *na_lam* and *na_nri*
- இரவு வணக்கம் — “night greetings,” especially for close friends/family, recombining two fully known words

The learner does not memorize isolated formulas; known roots generate options.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “nalla iravu” — good night
- *Say it*: “iravu vaṇakkam” — night greetings
- *Trace it*: *nal-* → *na_lam* / *na_nri* / *nalla*

Before you move on

Which root builds நல்ல? (**Nal-**, good.) What two known words make இரவு வணக்கம்? (**Night + greetings.**) What lexical pattern connects Chapter 1 and this chapter? (**Tamil keeps native greeting roots where neighbors share Sanskrit formulas.**)

Chapter 26

Morning

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can say காலை for morning and state accurately that its origin is uncertain, rather than asserting a Sanskrit source the dictionary itself only hedges at.

Say kālai, repeat the source’s own “possibly” instead of dropping it, and read atikaalai as a transparent ati- plus kālai compound.

26.1 காலை (kālai) — “morning,” an honestly uncertain etymology

Tamil’s neighbours each had a confidently-sourced story for their “morning” word — Sanskrit, or clearly native. Tamil’s own word for morning is different: even Wiktionary itself isn’t sure where it comes from.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

காலை (kālai) — “morning” — has an etymology that Wiktionary itself only hedges at: “possibly from Sanskrit काल्य (kālyā).” That’s a real hedge from the source itself, not one this lesson is adding for caution’s sake. Complicating things further: the related word கால் (kāl) carries **six** entirely distinct etymologies in Tamil — “leg/foot,” “irrigation channel,” “forest,” “wind,” a Sanskrit-derived “time” sense, and a conjunction meaning “if, when” — and காலை may be an accusative-type form built on the “time” sense specifically, or may not be. Be honest: this is genuinely **less settled** than Kannada’s

confidently-native morning word or Telugu’s confidently-Sanskrit one. Don’t manufacture certainty the primary source itself doesn’t have.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Wiktionary does confirm one solid fact: பகல் (already met, Chapter 17, “**daytime**”) is listed as காலை’s **coordinate term** — the two words sit side by side in the same semantic field, whatever காலை’s deeper root turns out to be. And அதிகாலை (“**early dawn**”) is confirmed, per the Tamil Lexicon, as a fully transparent compound: **ati-** (“excessive, very”) + காலை, glossed simply as “early dawn” by the Tamil Lexicon.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kālai” — “morning,” an honestly uncertain etymology
- the hedge itself — Wiktionary says “possibly” Sanskrit kālya, not a confident claim
- “atikaalai” — “early dawn,” a transparent ati- + kālai compound

Before you move on

Is காலை’s etymology as confidently sourced as Kannada’s or Telugu’s morning words? (**No** — Wiktionary itself only says “possibly” Sanskrit kālya; genuinely uncertain, not settled.) What coordinate term does Wiktionary list alongside காலை? (பகல், “daytime,” already met in Chapter 17.) What does அதிகாலை literally build on? (**ati-** (“very”) + காலை — a transparent compound for “early dawn.”)

Chapter 27

Evening

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 1 of 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say மாலை for evening and keep it apart from the identically spelled garland word, which is a separate etymology rather than a second sense.

Say mālai for evening, name the garland mālai as a distinct homonym, and mark the “darkness” link as plausible but not spelled out.

27.1 மாலை (mālai) — “evening,” and a garland that only looks like the same word

Last lesson’s morning word had an uncertain origin. This evening word is different — confidently native — but it comes with its own honest twist: it looks exactly like a completely unrelated word.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மாலை (mālai) — “evening” — happens to be spelled identically to another, completely **unrelated** Tamil word: மாலை meaning “garland, wreath, necklace.” Wiktionary treats these as **two separate etymologies**, not one word with two senses. The garland sense traces to Old Tamil and is compared to Sanskrit माला (mālā) — with a genuinely interesting note: it’s “**probably borrowed FROM Dravidian languages**” into Sanskrit, not the other way around. A rare reverse-direction loan, worth noticing against this whole project’s

usual Sanskrit-into-Dravidian pattern.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The **evening** sense of மாலை is a **separate** Old Tamil word entirely, compared instead to மால் (*māl*) — which Wiktionary traces to **Proto-Dravidian** **mā/*māl*, with senses including “கருமை” (“**blackness, darkness**”), plus archaic senses of “illusion, confusion” and, as a proper noun, the Hindu deity **Vishnu**. Be honest about the exact mechanism here: Wiktionary’s own etymology for “evening” only says “**compare māl**” — it does **not** explicitly state that “evening” derives specifically from the **darkness** sense rather than some other sense of this multi-meaning root. The connection (evening = the time it grows dark) is natural and plausible, but not nailed down with full certainty by the source itself. What IS certain: this is confidently **native** Dravidian vocabulary, a genuine contrast with TA-C26’s uncertain காலை.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mālai” — “evening,” confidently native Dravidian vocabulary
- the homonym twist — a completely separate word, mālai, means “garland,” probably borrowed INTO Sanskrit from Dravidian
- the honest hedge — “evening” plausibly connects to māl’s “darkness” sense, but Wiktionary doesn’t spell out that exact link

Before you move on

Are evening-mālai and garland-mālai the same word with two meanings? (**No** — Wiktionary treats them as two entirely separate etymologies; a genuine homonym, not one word stretched.) Which direction did the garland sense’s Sanskrit connection likely travel? (**Dravidian into Sanskrit** — a reverse-direction loan, per Wiktionary’s own “probably borrowed from Dravidian languages” note.) Is it fully certain that “evening” derives from māl’s “darkness” sense specifically? (**No** — plausible and natural, but Wiktionary only says “compare māl,” without spelling out that

exact mechanism.)

27.2 நீங்கள் — two old promises, paid

This book owes you two letters: the nasal in **ங்க**, printed before you knew what it was, and one of the three *l*-letters it promised. Both come due in one word.

Script you'll notice: **ங** and **ள**

ங	<i>ṅa</i> — the nasal made where க is made, the <i>ng</i> of “sing”
ள	<i>ḷa</i> — the retroflex <i>l</i>

ங is the reason **க** softens: in **ங்க** the nasal comes first — the “after a nasal” rule from your first writing lesson, with a face on it.

ள is the retroflex one of Tamil’s three *l*-letters — **ல ள ழ**. You met **ல** in **இல்லை**; **ழ** still lies ahead. Retroflex: the tongue curls back, as for **ண**.

Read both; do not draw them yet. Neither has an entry in this book’s script data, so neither gets a stroke order. **ள**’s description leans on **ண**’s sourced “tongue curled back”; **ங**’s is this lesson’s own, since the data says nothing about where **க** is made.

Script you'll notice: the **ீ** sign

ீ is the long partner of the **ி** you hooked onto **ற** in **நன்றி** — the same short/long pairing **அ** and **ஆ** have.

ந + **ீ** → **நீ**, said *nī*, the familiar “you.”

The data describes **ி** and has no entry for **ீ**, so the pairing is stated from the pattern, not from a source.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
நீ	<i>nī</i> — ந with the ī sign	“you,” familiar
ங்	bare <i>ṅ</i> — ங under a pulli	this lesson
க	<i>ka</i> , softened to <i>ga</i> by the nasal in front of it	from வணக்கம்
ள்	bare <i>ḷ</i> — ள under a pulli	this lesson

நீ · ங · க · ள → நீங்கள்

The middle two are the ங்க you were shown when க was new and ங unreadable. நீங்கள் is the respectful “you” — நீ plus a plural ending — so the shorter word sits inside the longer one.

Your turn

- *Read it:* நீ — then ங்க — then நீங்கள்
- *Say it:* “nī” ... “nīṅgaḷ” — familiar, then respectful
- *Contrast:* றி and நீ — the short *i* sign and the long *ī* sign
- *Contrast:* ல and ள — the first two of the three *l*-letters

Before you move on

Read நீங்கள், then find the shorter நீ inside it. Why does the க in the middle sound like *g*? (ங் stands in front of it — a nasal.) How many *l*-letters does Tamil keep, and which is ள? (**Three** — ல ள ழ; the **retroflex** one.) What are the two dots doing? (**Removing the built-in a** from ங and ள.) Next: the afternoon word.

Chapter 28

Afternoon

Modes: ⇄ voice (2) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say பிற்பகல் for afternoon, read it as “after” plus “daytime,” and name exactly where the dictionary’s own noon and afternoon labels overlap.

Show naṭuppakal straddling noon and afternoon, place matiyam as a Sanskrit noon-word, and label the unsourced moon claim unsupported.

28.1 பிற்பகல் (pirpakal) — “afternoon,” a similar sandhi trick to நண்பகல்

You already met a sandhi-driven surface change in Chapter 17 — நள் resurfacing as நண். This lesson’s afternoon word does a similar kind of trick, with a different word — though be honest that the two changes aren’t identical.

You’ll want to know: பிற்பகல் — பின் (after) + பகல் (daytime), a similar sandhi story

பிற்பகல் (pirpakal) — “afternoon” — is a transparent compound: பின் (pin, “after”) plus பகல் (pakal, “daytime,” already met inside நண்பகல், TA-C17 — though be aware the பிற்பகல் Wiktionary page itself glosses பகல் as “noon” in its own etymology line, a small inconsistency across Wiktionary’s own entries, not something this lesson introduces). Here’s the familiar pattern: பின் doesn’t stay பின் in this compound — it surfaces as பிற்ப- before the following ப — a **similar** kind of consonant

sandhi to the one already taught in Chapter 17, where நள் became நண் before its own following ட. Be honest, though: Wiktionary’s own etymology for பிற்பகல் doesn’t discuss this mechanism at all, and the two changes move in different phonetic directions (nasal→stop here, lateral→nasal there) — this is the lesson’s own observation, not a sourced equivalence. Wiktionary labels this word **formal register**.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*pirpakal*” — “afternoon,” *pin* (“after”) + *pakal* (“daytime”)
- the sandhi echo — *pin* surfaces as *pir-*, a similar kind of change to TA-C17’s *naḷ*→*naṇ*, though not phonetically identical

Before you move on

What does பிற்பகல் literally build from, and what sandhi change happens to the first piece? (பின் “after” + பகல் “daytime” — பின் surfaces as பிற-, a similar kind of sandhi to TA-C17’s *naḷ*→*naṇ*, though the two changes move in different phonetic directions, not identical mechanisms.) What register does the fetched page label? (**Formal**.) Next: inspect the real noon/afternoon boundary blur and the separate *matiyam* root.

28.2 Noon or afternoon? — let the sources keep their blur

Pirpakal transparently says after-daytime. Dictionaries still do not draw a perfectly hard semantic boundary around its synonyms.

You’ll want to know: நடுப்பகல் overlaps

Wiktionary’s *pirpakal* page lists நடுப்பகல் as an afternoon synonym, while the earlier noon lesson documents the same word as a synonym of நண்பகல், “noon.” This is genuine noon/afternoon boundary blur, not an inconsistency to erase. Time-period categories can widen differently across speakers and sources.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மதியம் (*matiyam*) is a Sanskrit tatsama from *madhya*, “middle,” the same root used by Kannada and Telugu. The fetched entry gives it **noon**, a synonym of *naṇpakal*, not a dedicated afternoon meaning. An initial search summary claimed *matiyam* once meant “moon,” but that claim is absent from the actual fetched page. It is therefore **not asserted**. Source inspection outranks a search snippet.

Your turn

- *Say it*: *naṇupakal* can overlap noon and afternoon
- *Say it*: *matiyam* — Sanskrit *madhya*, “middle,” listed as noon
- *Label*: the moon claim unsupported

Before you move on

Does the source draw a hard noon/afternoon line? (**No.**) What is *matiyam*’s sourced root and sense? (Sanskrit *madhya*, “middle,” and **noon**.) Is “originally moon” confirmed? (**No.**)

Chapter 29

Good Morning

Modes:  voice (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 1 of 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone with காலை வணக்கம் before mid-morning and see it as காலை plus the வணக்கம் I already had, with no borrowed blessing-word in it.

Greet with kālai vaṇakkam from sunrise to about 11, naming its two known pieces and the borrowed word that is absent.

29.1 காலை வணக்கம் — “morning greetings”

Tamil’s neighbours each built “good morning” on a word meaning “good” or “auspicious.” Tamil does something completely different: it just puts its everyday greeting word after its word for “morning.”

You’ll want to know: காலை வணக்கம் — literally, “morning greetings”

காலை வணக்கம் (kālai vaṇakkam) — “good morning” — is confirmed, by two independently-fetched sources, as Tamil’s standard greeting for this time of day, used “**from sunrise until around 11 AM.**” It’s built from two words you already have: காலை (already met, Chapter 26, “morning”) plus வணக்கம் (already met, Chapter 1, “reverence, homage” — Tamil’s everyday word for “hello”). Literally: “morning salutations.”

Why it's said this way

Here's the honest structural surprise: Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam each build their morning greeting on a **śubha**-equivalent word (“good, auspicious”) plus a time-word. Tamil does something genuinely **different** — there's no “good/auspicious” word here at all. It's simply **வணக்கம்**, Tamil's own general greeting, specified with **காலை** in front of it to mean “morning” greetings specifically. Also be honest about a claim that didn't hold up: an initial search summary suggested a Sanskrit-borrowed word, “suprabhatham,” serves as a casual alternative — but that claim appears on **neither** of the two pages actually fetched, so it's deliberately **not** asserted here.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “kālai vaṇakkam” — “good morning,” literally “morning greetings”
- [YOU SAY: the honest structural surprise — no śubha-equivalent word here at all, unlike Tamil's
neighbours]
- *Say it*: the two pieces you already know — kālai (Chapter 26) + vaṇakkam (Chapter 1)

Before you move on

- What two known words build **காலை வணக்கம்**? (**காலை**, “morning” + **வணக்கம்**, “reverence/hello.”)
- Does it follow the śubha-equivalent + time-word pattern used by Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam? (**No** — **காலை** simply specifies Tamil's own general greeting, **வணக்கம்**.)
- Is “suprabhatham” confirmed as a casual alternative? (**No** — neither fetched source supports that claim, so this lesson does not assert it.)

29.2 எப்படி — the retroflex stop

You can read the first word of the question you have been asking since chapter 3. Here is the second, and it needs one new consonant.

Script you'll notice: ட

ட is *ṭa*, the retroflex *t* — the tongue curled back to the roof of the mouth. That is the same curl that makes ண a retroflex *n*, so hold the pair together: ட is that position stopped, ண is that position hummed through the nose.

Between vowels it softens toward *d*, which is why டி in எப்படி is said *dī*. That is the position-picks-the-sound economy க and ச already showed you, now on a third letter.

Read it; do not draw it yet. ட has no entry in this book's script data, so it gets no stroke order — and both claims above are stated from sourced neighbours rather than from ட itself: the retroflex description leans on ண's, and the softening leans on the position-picks-the-sound note the data carries for க.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
எ	<i>e</i>	the question vowel, from என்
ப	bare <i>p</i> — ப under a pulli	ப from பெயர்
ப	<i>pa</i>	the same letter again
டி	<i>dī</i> — ட with the ி sign	this lesson

எ · ப · ப · டி → எப்படி

The doubled ப + ப is held, like the க்க of *vaṇakkam* and the ல் + லை of *illai*. Tamil marks a long consonant by writing it twice, with the pulli on the first.

Your turn

- *Read it:* டி — then எப்படி

- *Say it:* “eppaḍi” — “how”
- *Read it:* நீங்கள் எப்படி — two words of the question, straight off the page

Before you move on

Read எப்படி. Which letter you already knew shares ɽ’s tongue position? (ண — the same curl back, stopped rather than nasal.) How does Tamil write the doubled *p*? (ப் + ப — the letter twice, pulli on the first.) Read நீங்கள் again. Next: good evening.

Chapter 30

Good Evening

Modes: ⇄ voice (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 1 lesson.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone with மாலை வணக்கம் from late afternoon through nightfall, built on the same two-piece pattern as the morning greeting.

Greet with mālai vaṇakkam, assembling mālai plus vaṇakkam, and note the pattern was re-checked rather than assumed to carry over.

30.1 மாலை வணக்கம் — “evening greetings”

Last chapter’s morning greeting followed its own pattern. This lesson checks whether the evening greeting follows the same one — rather than assuming it automatically does.

You’ll want to know: மாலை வணக்கம் — the same compositional pattern, independently confirmed

மாலை வணக்கம் (mālai vaṇakkam) — “good evening” — is confirmed, by two independently-fetched sources, as a real, standard Tamil evening greeting, used roughly from **afternoon through nightfall** (the two sources give slightly different exact windows — “after noon through evening” versus “late afternoon until nightfall” — a small, unsurprising looseness, matching the noon/afternoon boundary-blur already seen in TA-C28). It’s built exactly the same way as TA-C29’s morning greeting: மாலை (already met, Chapter 27, “evening”) plus வணக்கம் (already met, Chapter 1, Tamil’s general greeting). Literally: “evening salutations.”

Why it's said this way

Here's the honest methodological point: just because TA-C29's morning greeting followed the “time-word + vaṇakkam” pattern doesn't mean this evening greeting was assumed to follow it automatically. This arc has repeatedly found that greeting formation doesn't reliably generalize, even within the very same language — Malayalam's own morning greeting broke from the śubha+time-word pattern its afternoon and evening greetings both share, so “the pattern probably repeats” was never a safe assumption on its own. So this greeting was independently verified via direct fetch before confirming the pattern really does repeat here — and it does, cleanly: no śubha-equivalent word appears in Tamil's evening greeting either, same as the morning one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “mālai vaṇakkam” — “good evening,” literally “evening greetings”
- the two pieces you already know — mālai (Chapter 27) + vaṇakkam (Chapter 1)
- the honest methodological point — this pattern was re-verified, not assumed to carry over automatically

Before you move on

What two already-known words does மாலை வணக்கம் build from? (மாலை, “evening” + வணக்கம், “greetings.”) Was it assumed that the evening greeting would follow the same pattern as the morning one, or was it independently checked? (**Independently checked** — via direct fetch, not assumed, since this arc has learned that greeting patterns don't reliably generalize.) Does மாலை வணக்கம் use a śubha-equivalent word, like Hindi/Kannada/Telugu/Malayalam's evening greetings do? (**No** — same as Tamil's morning greeting, no śubha-equivalent word appears here either.)

Chapter 31

Good Afternoon

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can greet someone with மதிய வணக்கம் around midday and say which word the மதிய inside it actually comes from — noon, not afternoon.

Greet with matiya vaṇakkam, trace matiyam back to madhya “middle,” and keep pirpakal as the separate after-plus-daytime word.

31.1 மதிய வணக்கம் (matiya vaṇakkam) — a sourced afternoon greeting

You already know that Tamil’s noon and afternoon boundaries can blur. Now learn one afternoon greeting without pretending that all speakers or teaching sources divide the day in exactly the same way.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

மதிய வணக்கம் (matiya vaṇakkam) — “good afternoon” — is confirmed, by two independently-fetched sources, as Tamil’s afternoon greeting, used roughly “noon to around 4 PM.” A third source, already used for the morning and evening greetings, doesn’t list a distinct afternoon greeting at all — it only covers “before noon” and “after noon through evening,” implicitly treating those two as bookending the whole day. This is an honest extension of TA-C28’s own noon/afternoon boundary-blur into the greeting layer, not a new

problem to worry about.

Use **மதிய வணக்கம்** when that afternoon slot fits the people and setting around you. Treat “noon to 4” as a useful learning window, not as a universal clock rule.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “**matiya vaṇakkam**” — “good afternoon,” confirmed real, used roughly noon to 4 PM
- the honest qualification — one source does not teach a separate afternoon greeting at all

Before you move on

What is one sourced Tamil greeting for “good afternoon”? (**மதிய வணக்கம், matiya vaṇakkam.**) Do all three fetched sources agree on a distinct “afternoon” greeting slot? (**No** — two confirm **மதிய வணக்கம்** directly; a third doesn’t list a separate afternoon greeting at all, treating morning and evening as bookending the day.) What clock window is a useful guide rather than a universal rule? (**Roughly noon to 4 PM.**)

31.2 மதிய — the greeting takes a different root

You can now say **மதிய வணக்கம்**. This final step explains why its first word is not the ordinary afternoon word **பிற்பகல்**.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The greeting begins with **மதிய (matiya)**. It is the adjectival form of **மதியம் (matiyam)**, “noon.” That noun entered Tamil from Sanskrit **madhya**, “middle”: noon is the middle of the day.

The adjective **மதிய** can be glossed “of or pertaining to afternoon.” That lets Tamil build **மதிய வணக்கம்** even though the dedicated word you learned for “afternoon” was **பிற்பகல்**, the native compound from **pin** (after) + **pakal** (daytime).

Keep the two paths separate:

- பிற்பகல்: after + daytime → afternoon
- மதிய வணக்கம்: middle/noon adjective + greeting → good afternoon

The time word and the greeting do not have to share a root. That is one more reason not to manufacture a greeting by translating its pieces from another language.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- matiyam — “noon,” ultimately from Sanskrit madhya, “middle”
- pirpakal — “afternoon,” built from “after” + “daytime”
- matiya vaṇakkam — the afternoon greeting, built on matiya

Before you move on

Does மதிய வணக்கம் begin with பிற்பகல்? (No.) What noun is மதிய related to? (மதியம், “noon.”) What older root lies behind it? (Sanskrit madhya, “middle.”) Why should you learn the whole greeting rather than construct it from the time word? (Tamil uses a different root in the greeting.)

31.3 இருக்கிறீர்கள் — the last sign, and the whole question

Two words of the question already come off the page. One vowel sign stands between you and the third.

Script you’ll notice: the ூ sign

ூ is the sign for short *u*. It is not left-standing — but it does not stand beside its letter the way ா does either: it joins on below and to the right, and the pair is usually drawn as one shape.

Careful with “after”: *every* vowel sign is **spoken** after its consonant, ூ and ெ included. The signs differ in where the mark sits, not when you say it.

ர + ூ → ரு, said *ru*.

The script data behind this book carries entries for ா, ி, ை and the pulli, and none for ூ — so everything here, the joined shape included, is this lesson’s own statement of ordinary Tamil, not something it can cite.

Script you’ll notice: build the word

Every piece is now yours:

piece		
இ	<i>i</i>	independent — the word opens on a vowel
ரு	<i>ru</i> — ர with the ூ sign	this lesson
க்	bare <i>k</i>	க under a pulli
கி	<i>ki</i> — க with the ி sign	
றீ	<i>rī</i> — ற with the ீ sign	ற from நன்றி
ர்	bare <i>r</i>	ர from சரி
க	<i>ka</i>	
ள்	bare <i>l</i>	from நீங்கள்

இ · ரு · க் · கி · றீ · ர் · க · ள் → இருக்கிறீர்கள்

And the whole question:

நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்?

Nothing in it is new to say. You have asked it since chapter 3; the letters took until now to catch up.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ரு — then இருக்கிறீர்கள்
- *Read it:* the whole question — நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்?
- *Say it:* “nīṅgaḷ eppaḍi irukkiṙīrgaḷ?” — “how are you?”
- *Contrast:* நான் and நீங்கள் — the *I* of the answer, the *you* of the question

Before you move on

Read நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்? aloud. Is ு written before its consonant or after? (**After** — ை and ெ are the ones written before.) When is a vowel sign *spoken*? (**Always after**, wherever it sits.) Which word did you learn to read first? (நீங்கள்.) Next: the verb இரு on its own.

Chapter 32

The Core Verbs

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can build a Tamil verb as stem plus tense plus person, swap the tense bead for past or future, tell a strong verb from a weak one by its doubled consonant, and say why தெரியும் carries no person at all.

Say எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும், name the three slots that built *irukkireṇ*, *pōgireṇ* and *pārkireṇ*, and explain which slot தெரியும் leaves empty and where its person went instead.

32.1 இரு (iru) — “to be,” and the machine inside every Tamil verb

Thirty-one chapters of words. Now the engine room. Tamil builds a verb the way you thread beads on a string, and this first verb carries the whole string.

You’ll want to know: இரு

இரு — *iru* — to be, to exist, to stay

It is native Dravidian, from an old root meaning “be, remain, stay put.” Kannada kept the very same word, ಇರು (*iru*), and Malayalam has ഇരിക്കുക (*irikkuka*); Telugu went its own way with ఉండు (*undu*).

Iru is about **existing** or **being somewhere**, not about linking two nouns. Tamil says “I am at home” with *iru*, and says “I am a teacher” with no verb at all, just the two words side by side.

Its everyday first-person form is இருக்கிறேன் (*irukkirēn*), “I am.” You have already heard it: the question *eppadi irukkirīrgaḷ?* — “how are you?” — is this verb wearing a different ending.

The letters in this word

இ (the standing vowel *i*) + ரு (*ru*) → இரு. Both shapes turned up in இரவு (*iravu*, “night”).

In *irukkirēn* the க்க is held long — *i-ruk-ki*, with a catch in the middle. That length is not decoration; a later lesson turns it into a rule.

Grammar Lens: stem, then tense, then person

English changes a verb by putting words **around** it: *I am, I was, I will be*. Tamil changes it by gluing pieces **onto the end** of it, always in the same order:

இரு + க்கிற + ஏன் → இருக்கிறேன்

iru (be) + *-kkir-* (happening now) + *-ēn* (I) → *irukkirēn*

Left to right, the word says **be** — **present** — **I**. Three slots, filled in that order, welded into one word. Languages built this way are called **agglutinative**, from Latin *glutinare*, “to glue.”

Two payoffs arrive at once. The last piece already means “I,” so *nān* is optional. And nothing here belongs to *iru* alone: every verb in this chapter is the same three slots with a new first bead.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “iru” — be, exist, stay
- “irukkirēn” — I am
- the three beads in order — “iru ... kkir ... ēn”

Before you move on

What are the three pieces of *irukkirēn*, in order? (**Stem, tense, person** — *iru*, *-kkir-*, *-ēn*.) Which piece carries “I”? (**The last one**, *-ēn* — which is why *nān* can be dropped.) Which sister

language kept the same verb? (**Kannada**, *iru*.) Next: the same machine, with the tense bead swapped.

32.2 ೂ (pō) — “to go,” and the bead that carries time

You have the three slots — stem, tense, person. Keep the first and last beads still, and swap only the middle one. That is the whole of Tamil tense.

You’ll want to know: ೂ

ೂ — *pō* — **to go**

Two letters, ೂ (*pa*) with the long-*ō* sign, and a word so old it has barely moved. It is native Dravidian: Telugu పోవు (*pōvu*) and Malayalam പോകുക (*pōkuka*) are the same verb.

Kannada’s everyday word for “go” is ಹೋಗು (*hōgu*) — and that *h* is not a different root. It is the same softening of an old *p* that turned Tamil *pattu* (“ten”) into Kannada *hattu*. One sound-law, met once with numbers, now paying off with a verb.

You met the bare stem in the farewell chapter, where *pō!* is already a whole command: “go!”

Grammar Lens: past, present, future — one bead each

Hold the stem *pō-* and the person-ending *-ēn* (“I”) fixed, and let the middle piece do the work:

when	Tamil	the middle bead
now	<i>pōgīrēn</i>	<i>-gīr-</i>
already	<i>pōnēn</i>	<i>-n-</i>
not yet	<i>pōvēn</i>	<i>-v-</i>

“I go,” “I went,” “I will go” — one syllable of difference, sitting between two pieces that never moved. English needs a new word (*will*) or a whole new shape (*went*); Tamil needs one bead.

The tense bead voices to *-gīr-* after a vowel, which is why it sounds like *pō-gī-rēn* here but *iruk-ki-rēn* after the doubled *k* of *iru*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pō” — go
- the three times — “pōgīrēn ... pōnēn ... pōvēn”
- the pair that shares one sound-law — “pattu ... hattu”, “pō ... hōgu”
- “irukkirēn” and “pōgīrēn” — one machine, two stems

Before you move on

Which of the three beads changes for tense? (**The middle one.**) Say “I will go.” (*Pōvēn*.) Is Kannada’s *hōgu* a different root from *pō*? (**No** — the same old *p* softened to *h*, exactly as in *pattu* and *hattu*.) Next: a verb whose stem refuses to sit still.

32.3 ವಾ (vā) — “to come,” and a stem with two shapes

Pō threads its beads on without a fuss. Its partner *vā* does not — and the farewell you learned long ago has been hiding the reason.

You’ll want to know: ವಾ

ವಾ — *vā* — to come

ವ (*va*) with the long-*ā* sign, and, like *pō*, a whole command on its own: *vā!*, “come!” Native Dravidian, and the family keeps it: Malayalam വരുക (*varuka*), Kannada ಬಾ (*bā*), Telugu రా (*rā*). Kannada’s *b* and Telugu’s *r* are two regular reshapings of the same old word, not three separate verbs.

Grammar Lens: the word you say it by is not the word you build on

Thread the beads onto *vā-* and you get nothing a Tamil speaker says. The suffixes attach to வரு- (*varu-*) instead:

varu- + *-gīr-* + *-ēn* → வருகிறேன் (*varugirēn*), “I come.”

Past: வந்தேன் (*vantēn*), “I came.” Future: வருவேன் (*varuvēn*). So a Tamil verb has a form you **call** it by — the bare command, the form a dictionary lists — and a form the beads actually **attach** to. For most verbs those are the same shape. For a handful of very common ones, of which *vā* is the commonest, they are not, and the pair simply has to be learned together: *vā*, *varu-*. You have said this word already. The farewell போய் வருகிறேன் (*pōy varugirēn*) — “I go and come back” — is *pō* and *varu-* standing side by side, and that *varugirēn* is the very form above.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the command — “*vā*!”
- the pair that must be learned together — “*vā* ... *varu-*”
- “*varugirēn* ... *vantēn* ... *varuvēn*”
- the farewell you now understand — “*pōy varugirēn*”

Before you move on

What shape do the beads attach to for “come”? (*வரு-*, *varu-*, not *vā-*.) Say “I come.” (*Varugirēn*.) Which two verbs are standing in *pōy varugirēn*? (*போ* and *வா* — go, and come back.) Are Kannada *bā* and Telugu *rā* different verbs? (**No** — the same Dravidian word, reshaped.) Next: a verb Tamil built for itself.

32.4 சாப்பிடு (*sāppiḍu*) — “to eat,” a verb built out of two words

Iru, *pō*, *vā* — three single syllables inherited whole from the oldest layer of Dravidian. The everyday word for “eat” is nothing of the kind. It was assembled.

You'll want to know: சாப்பிடு

சாப்பிடு — *sāppiḍu* — to eat

Four beats: *sāp-pi-ḍu*, with the ப் held long, the same doubling you heard in *irukkīrēn*. Threaded up, it is சாப்பிடுகிறேன் (*sāppiḍugirēn*), “I eat” — stem, then *-gir-*, then *-ēn*, with no surprises. Past: சாப்பிட்டேன் (*sāppiṭṭēn*).

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The word comes apart cleanly into two Tamil words:

- சாப்பு (*sāppu*) — food, a meal; the everyday சாப்பாடு (*sāppāḍu*, “a meal”) is built from it.
- இடு (*iḍu*) — to put, to place.

Put food. That is all *sāppiḍu* literally says. இடு is what grammarians call a **light verb**: a plain, hard-working verb that lends its endings to a noun so the pair can act as one verb. Tamil builds a great many verbs this way, so *iḍu* is worth knowing on its own. (Where *sāppu* itself came from is not settled; treat the compound as transparent and the deeper root as open.)

Then the honest part. The inherited Dravidian word for eating is ***tin-**, and it is thriving next door: Telugu తిను (*tinu*), Kannada ತಿನ್ನು (*tinnu*), Malayalam തിന്നുക (*tinnuka*). Tamil kept it too, as தின் (*tin*) — now narrowed to chewing and snacking — and kept the old literary உண் (*uṇ*), Malayalam’s ഉണ്ണുക (*uṇṇuka*), besides. So Tamil did not lose the ancient eat-verbs. It built a new one and let them keep their smaller jobs.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “sāppiḍu” — eat
- “sāppiḍugirēn” — I eat — then “sāppiṭṭēn”, I ate
- the two halves — “sāppu” (food) + “iḍu” (put)
- the inherited root next door — “tinu ... tinnu ... tinnuka”

Before you move on

What two words is *sāppiḍu* made of? (சாப்பிடு, food, and இடு, to put.) What is a light verb doing there? (**Lending its endings** to a noun so the pair works as one verb.) Did Tamil lose the inherited eat-root? (**No** — *tin* narrowed to chewing, *uṇ* stayed literary, and the cousins kept *tinu*, *tinnu*, *tinnuka*.) Next: the verb that splits Tamil’s verbs into two classes.

32.5 பார் (pār) — “to see,” and Tamil’s two kinds of verb

Four verbs in, one small thing has been inconsistent. *Pōgīrēṇ* has a single *k*. *Irukkīrēṇ* has a doubled one. That is not sloppiness — it is a sorting rule, and this verb is where it gets a name.

You’ll want to know: பார்

பார் — *pār* — to see, to watch

ப with the long-*ā* sign, then ர் with a pulli to strip its vowel: *pār*, one syllable ending on the *r*. From it comes the noun பார்வை (*pārvai*), “sight, vision.”

Each Dravidian sister settled on a different everyday word for seeing — Kannada ನೋಡು (*nōḍu*), Telugu చూడు (*cūḍu*), Malayalam കാണുക (*kāṇuka*) — so *pār* is Tamil’s own choice, not the family’s. But the family’s shared root is here too: Tamil keeps காண் (*kāṇ*), “to see,” for formal and literary use, and that is the same word as Malayalam’s *kāṇuka* and Kannada’s ಕಾಣು (*kāṇu*). Four sisters, one inherited root, four everyday preferences.

Grammar Lens: strong verbs and weak verbs

Every Tamil verb belongs to one of two camps, and the tense bead tells you which:

camp	present	past
weak — <i>pō</i>	<i>pōgīrēṇ</i>	<i>pōṇēṇ</i>
strong — <i>pār</i>	<i>pārkkīrēṇ</i>	<i>pārttēṇ</i>

Weak verbs take the tense bead lightly: a single *k*, softened to *g*.

Strong verbs double it — *-kkir-*, held long — and take a doubled *t* in the past. *Iru* is strong, which is why “I am” was *irukkirēn* and never *irugirēn*. *Sāppiḍu* is weak, like *pō*.

There is no rule you can hear in the bare stem that tells you which camp a verb is in, so it is learned with the verb, the way a noun’s gender is learned in other languages. Two camps, though — not twenty. Meet a verb once in its present form and it is settled forever.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pār” — see, watch
- the contrast, holding the long *kk* — “pōgirēn ... pārkirēn”
- the past pair — “pōnēn ... pārttēn”
- which camp each verb sits in — “*iru* strong, *pō* weak, *sāppiḍu* weak, *pār* strong”

Before you move on

What separates a strong verb from a weak one? (**The doubled consonant** in the tense bead — *pārkirēn* against *pōgirēn*.) Which camp is *iru* in, and how do you know? (**Strong** — *irukkirēn* holds the *kk*.) Which Tamil verb for “see” is shared with Malayalam and Kannada? (காண், *kāṇ* — kept for formal use beside everyday *pār*.) Next: a verb with no person on the end at all.

32.6 தெரி (teri) — “to know,” the verb that drops the person

Five verbs, and every one ended on *-ēn*, the bead that means “I.” The last verb of the chapter refuses that bead — and Chapter 6 already gave you the sentence it makes.

You’ll want to know: தெரி

தெரி — *teri* — to know; to be apparent, to be visible

த (ta) with the short-*e* sign, then ரி (ri). Its base sense is not “know” but “**show up, be clear**” — a thing *teri*-s to you the way a shape resolves out of fog. The everyday form is தெரியும் (*teriyum*): “it is known,” “it is apparent.”

Tamil keeps a second know-verb, அறி (*ari*), for knowing by learning — the same word as Kannada ಅರಿ (*ari*) and Malayalam അറിയുക (*ariyuka*). *Teri* has an exact cousin too: Telugu’s తెలుసు (*telusu*), from తెలియ (*teliyu*).

Grammar Lens: no person on the verb, so the person moves

எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும். — *enakkut tamīl teriyum* —
“I know Tamil.”

Chapter 6 gave you that sentence whole; here is the verb inside it. தெரியும் has no person bead, and stays the same shape no matter who knows:

- *enakku teriyum* — it is known **to me**
- *unakku teriyum* — it is known **to you**
- *avanukku teriyum* — it is known **to him**

Only the little dative word in front changes. Tamil treats knowing as something that **happens to** you rather than something you **do**, so the knower is not the subject and cannot climb into the verb’s last slot. That is the chapter’s closing symmetry. Five verbs carried the person in the ending, and *nān* could be dropped. Here the ending carries no person, so the dative word is the one thing you cannot drop. Telugu builds it identically: నాకు తెలుసు (*nāku telusu*), “to me it is known.”

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “teri” — be apparent — then “teriyum”, it is known
- “enakkut tamīl teriyum” — I know Tamil
- the three knowers, one verb — “enakku ... unakku ... avanukku teriyum”

- the five that carried the person — “irukkireṇ, pōgireṇ, varugireṇ, sāppiḍugireṇ, pārkkiṇ”

Before you move on

What does *teri* mean underneath “know”? (**To be apparent, to show up.**) Which bead is missing from *teriyum*? (**The person** — so the knower sits in the dative word instead.) Say “I know Tamil.” (*Enakkut tamil teriyum.*) Name the three slots one last time, with a strong verb in them. (**Stem, tense, person** — *pār* + *-kkir-* + *-ēṇ.*) Which sister builds the knowing-sentence the same way? (**Telugu**, *nāku telusu.*)

Chapter 33

Four Verbs of the Mind

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ✍ pen (1) 🖐 Hands-free start: first 3 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I think, I understand, I read and I write in Tamil with the same three slots, tell a strong verb from a weak one by its held consonant, explain why எனக்குப் பரிகிறது has no I in it, and make the ழ in எழுது.

Say நான் தமிழ் எழுதுகிறேன், run the chapter's four verbs in the present and sort them into strong and weak, produce ழ without letting the tongue touch, and name the one word here whose origin is unsettled.

33.1 நினை (ninai) — “to think,” which is also “to remember”

Teri refused to carry a person: *enakku teriyum*, “it is known to me.” Say *enakku tamil teriyum* once. This verb takes the person back.

You'll want to know: நினை

நினை — *ninai* — to think; to think of, to remember

Two light beats, *ni-nai*. Threaded up: நினைக்கிறேன் (*ninaikkirēn*), “I think” — stem, tense, person, with nothing new in the machine.

The letters in this word

நி is the **dental** ந with the *i* sign ி; னை is the **alveolar** ன with the *ai* sign ை. Two of Tamil’s three n-letters in one word, and not interchangeable: the first sits on the teeth, the second on the ridge behind them. Chapter 6’s three-n lesson mapped all three — ந, ன, ண.

Grammar Lens: it doubles, so it is strong

The **k** in *ninaikkirēn* is held long — *ninaik-ki* — as it was in *irukkirēn* and *pārkirēn*, and not as it was in *pōgirēn*. So நினை is **strong**, and its past is நினைத்தேன் (*ninaittēn*), with the strong verb’s doubled *t*. One held consonant answers a question you would otherwise ask of every new verb. You are not learning a machine per verb: you learn which of two camps a stem sits in, then reuse the same three slots forever.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நினை is native Dravidian and does two English jobs at once: *ninaikkirēn* is “I think” and equally “I remember.” The noun says so — நினைவு (*ninaivu*) is **memory**. Kannada agrees with ನೆನೆ (*nene*), “remember,” and ನೆನಪು (*nenapu*), “memory”; Malayalam has നിനയ്ക്കുക (*ninaykkuka*).

One honest note for this chapter and the next: English took real words from Tamil — *catamaran*, *mango*, *curry*, *pariah* — but **none from these verbs**. Inventing a cousin would be worse than having none.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “ninai” — think, remember — then “ninaikkirēn”
- the strong pair — “irukkirēn ... ninaikkirēn”
- the noun — “ninaivu”, memory — then Kannada “nenapu”
- the two shapes — “enakku teriyum ... nān ninaikkirēn”

Before you move on

What two English verbs does *ninai* cover, and which camp is it in? (**Think** and **remember**; **strong**, from the held *kk*.) What is *ninaivu*, and which sister keeps the root? (**Memory**; **Kannada**, *nene* / *nenapu*.) Which two n's does *ninai* use, in order? (**Dental** ந, then **alveolar** ன.) And why does *teriyum* carry no *-ēn*? (**Knowing happens to you** — its person sits in the dative instead.)

33.2 புரி (puri) — “to become clear,” and who it becomes clear to

Two shapes. *Nān ninaikkirēn* — I do the thinking. *Enakku teriyum* — the knowing happens to me. Say both.

You'll want to know: புரி

புரி — *puri* — to be understood; to become clear

The everyday form is பரிகிறது (*purigiradu*):

எனக்குத் தமிழ் பரிகிறது. — *enakku tamil purigiradu* —
“I understand Tamil.”

Word for word, “to me Tamil is becoming clear.” The verb is weak: the softened *-gir-* of *pōgirēn*, not the long *-kkir-* of *ninaikkirēn*.

The letters in this word

பு is ப carrying the *u* sign, which fuses into the letter's shape rather than hanging off it; ரி is ர with the *i* sign ி.

Grammar Lens: the last slot can say “it”

Teriyum had no person slot at all. *Purigiradu* fills it, with -அது (-*adu*), “it.”

புரி + கிற் + அது → பரிகிறது

So the thing becoming clear is *it*, and the understander is pushed out

of the verb into the dative word எனக்கு (*enakku*) that Chapter 6 built for this job. Change the understander and only that word moves:

- *enakku purigiradu* — I understand
- *unakku purigiradu* — you understand
- *avanukku purigiradu* — he understands

Two verbs, two mechanisms, one result: **the experiencer sits in the dative**. Not an exception — the ordinary way to report what happens inside a person.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil's dictionaries keep more than one புரி: an old literary one, “to do, to perform,” and this everyday one. Whether they are one root is **not settled**. Certain is the verbal noun in -தல்: புரிதல் (*puridal*), “understanding.”

The family evidence is stronger. Each sister chose a different verb, and every one puts the understander in the dative:

- Kannada ನನಗೆ ಅರ್ಥವಾಯಿತು — *nanage arthavāyitu*
- Telugu నాకు అర్థమైంది — *nāku arthamaindi*
- Malayalam എനിക്ക് മനസ്സിലായി — *enikku manassilāyi*, “it entered my mind”

Different words, one grammar. Chapter 6 showed the four dative endings were cousins; here they do the same job in the same sentence.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “enakkut tamil purigiradu” — I understand Tamil
- three understanders, one verb — “enakku ... unakku ... avanukku purigiradu”
- the pair that share a shape — “enakku teriyum ... enakku purigiradu”

- the sisters’ datives — “enakku ... nanage ... nāku ... enikku”

Before you move on

What does *puri* mean underneath “understand,” and what fills its person slot? (**To become clear**; -அது, “it”.) So where does the understander go? (**Into the dative** — *enakku*.) Name the other verb that puts you there. (**Teri** — *enakku teriyum*.) And which verb from this chapter keeps the person on the ending? (**Ninai** — *nān ninaikkirēn*.)

33.3 படி (paḍi) — “to read,” and the letter that is two sounds

Say *enakkut tamīl purigiradu* — Tamil becomes clear to me. Now the verb for the work that gets you there.

You’ll want to know: படி

படி — *paḍi* — to read; to study, to learn

படிக்கிறேன் (*paḍikkirēn*), “I read, I study.” The *kk* is held, so படி is strong, like *ninai* and *pār*; its past is படித்தேன் (*paḍittēn*).

நான் தமிழ் படிக்கிறேன். — *nān tamīl paḍikkirēn* — “I study Tamil.”

Tamil does not split reading from studying: படிப்பு (*paḍippu*) is both “reading” and “an education.”

The letters in this word

ப (*pa*) + டி, which is ட wearing the *i* sign ி.

Now a mystery worth clearing up. The letter is ட, named *ṭa*, yet the word is written here *paḍi*, with a **d**. Nothing is inconsistent: **Tamil marks no voicing**. One letter covers both sounds and **position decides** — hard word-initially or doubled, soft between vowels. That is Chapter 5’s rule for க, which spells *k*, *g* and a soft *h* without changing shape.

So ட is soft between the vowels of *paḍi* and hard in the doubled ட் of *paḍittēn*. It is why *pō* becomes *pōgirēn*, why *sāppiḍu* has a *ḍ*, and why every romanization here softens where a speaker softens.

ᱚ is also **retroflex**, made where ண is: tongue tip curled back to the roof of the mouth. That curl matters more than the *d*-versus-*t*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil's own dictionaries list படி as native. Others connect it to Sanskrit पठ् (*paṭh*), “to recite, to read aloud” — not a silly idea, because **Tamil has no aspirated consonants**, so a borrowed *paṭh* would arrive as *paṭi* automatically, with no letter to carry the puff of breath.

Next door the evidence is split. Malayalam says പഠിക്കുക (*paṭhikkuka*) and **keeps the aspirate**, in the Sanskrit-series letter ഓ; Kannada and Telugu use ಓದು (*ōdu*) and చదువు (*caduvu*), unrelated to either candidate.

Carry away the certain part: **an aspirate cannot survive into Tamil**, so a stripped-down look-alike is never by itself proof of borrowing.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nāṇ tamīl paḍikkirēṇ” — I study Tamil
- the soft and the hard ᱚ — “paḍi ... paḍittēṇ”
- the strong three — “ninaikkirēṇ, paḍikkirēṇ, pārkkirēṇ”
- the weak one beside them — “purigiradu”

Before you move on

Why is ᱚ written one way and heard two ways, and where is it made? (**Tamil marks no voicing** — position decides, as with க; and it is **retroflex**, made where ண is.) Is *paḍi* borrowed from Sanskrit *paṭh*, and what can Tamil never keep from a Sanskrit word? (**Unsettled; the aspiration.**) Say “I study Tamil.” (*Nāṇ tamīl paḍikkirēṇ.*)

33.4 தமிழ் — the letter the language is named for

This book has said more than once that Tamil keeps three *l*-letters, and the strand has shown you two: ல in இல்லை, ள in நீங்கள். The third has been outstanding since chapter 18. Here it is, in the word it matters most in.

Script you'll notice: த and ழ

த	<i>ta</i> — the dental <i>t</i> , tongue on the teeth
ழ	<i>l</i> — the third <i>l</i> -letter, curled far back

த is the dental partner of the retroflex ள you read in எப்படி: same kind of stop, different place in the mouth. Tamil keeps the pair apart in writing, so த and ள are never interchangeable.

ழ is the one Tamil is known for. It is made further back than ள, and its sound sits somewhere between an *r*, an *l* and a *zh* — rare enough in the world's languages that Tamil is sometimes called the l language. That is why the word for the language itself ends in it.

Read both; do not draw them yet. Neither த nor ழ has an entry in this book's script data, so neither gets a stroke order, and the mouth positions above are this lesson's own — the data is sourced for ண's retroflex curl and nothing else here.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
த	<i>ta</i>	this lesson
மி	<i>mi</i> — ம with the ி sign	ம from வணக்கம், ி from நன்றி
ழ்	bare <i>l</i> — ழ under a pulli	this lesson

த · மி · ழ் → தமிழ்

Three pieces, and you can now read the name of the language you have been speaking since page one. That was the plan: the word first, the letters when they can be earned.

Your turn

- *Read it:* த · ழ — then தமிழ்
- *Say it:* “tamiḷ” — and hold that last sound
- *Contrast:* த and ட — dental and retroflex, teeth and roof
- *Contrast:* ல · ள · ழ — all three *l*-letters, at last

Before you move on

Read தமிழ். Which letter is த’s retroflex partner? (ட, from எப்படி.) Which of the three *l*-letters ends the word, and what is the dot doing? (ழ; the pulli **removes its built-in a.**) Next: the verb for writing — spelled with the ழ you just met.

33.5 எழுது (eḷuḍu) — “to write,” and the sound Tamil is named for

Ninaikkirēn, *purigiradu*, *paḍikkirēn* — think, understand, read.
Say all three. The fourth is reading’s other half.

You’ll want to know: எழுது

எழுது — *eḷuḍu* — to write; to draw

எழுதுகிறேன் (*eḷuḍugirēn*), “I write.” The tense bead is the **single softened -gir-**, so எழுது is **weak**, like *pō* and *sāppiḍu*.

நான் தமிழ் எழுதுகிறேன். — *nān tamīḷ eḷuḍugirēn* — “I write Tamil.”

The letters in this word

எ is the standing vowel *e*; ழு is ழு with the *u* sign and து is த with the same sign.

The dot returns in the noun எழுத்து (*eluttu*), “a letter of the alphabet,” spelled எ ழு த் து: a **pulli** strips the vowel from the first த் and the second து stands whole beside it. Two full letters and a visible dot, never a fused shape: the pulli lesson’s bargain.

The letters in this word

ழ — written *l* — is the sound in தமிழ் (*tamil*) itself and in வாழ் (*vāl*), “to live,” and is reputed to be the language’s hardest. Curl the tongue tip back as for ழ or ண, then **do not let it touch**. Leave a gap and voice through it: what comes out sits between an American *r* and an *l*, and it is a **glide**, not a stop. Two honest notes. Many fluent speakers merge ழு with ள and are understood everywhere. And the family already voted — Chapter 7 gave you Tamil **ēlu** against Kannada **ēḷu**. Kannada and Telugu each had a letter for it and let it go; **Tamil and Malayalam kept it**.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The Dravidian etymological dictionary files எழுது under எழு (*elu*), “to rise” — a written line being a mark raised onto a surface. Standard rather than proven, but native, unlike the open question *paḍi* left you with. Beside it sits எழுத்தாளர் (*eluttālar*), a writer. The cousin is exact: Malayalam എഴുതുക (*elutuka*), same verb, same **ḷ**. Kannada and Telugu, having dropped the sound, dropped the verb.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three ழு words — “tamiḷ ... vāl ... eludu”
- “nāṇ tamiḷ eludugirēṇ” — I write Tamil
- the chapter — “ninaikkirēṇ, purigiradu, paḍikkirēṇ, eludugirēṇ”
- the split — “Tamil ēlu ... Kannada ēḷu”

Before you move on

Say the chapter's four verbs and name the two weak ones.

(*Ninaikkirēn*, *purigiradu*, *paḍikkirēn*, *eludugirēn*; ***puri*** and ***eludu***.)

How is **ḡ** made, and who kept it? (**Curled back, not touching**; **Malayalam** did, **Kannada** and **Telugu** dropped it.) What keeps the two **ḡ**'s of *eluttu* apart, and which word here has an unsettled origin? (**The *puḷḷi*; *paḍi***.)

Chapter 34

Four Verbs Between People

Modes: 🗣️ voice (1) 👁️ eyes (3) ✍️ pen (1) 🖐️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I take, I ask, I help and I like in Tamil, hear கேள் doing the work of both asking and hearing, choose between பிடிக்கும் and விரும்பு, and say எனக்குப் பிடிக்கும் knowing why the liker sits in the dative exactly as with தெரியும்.

Say எனக்குத் தமிழ் பிடிக்கும் and unpack it as “to me, Tamil catches”; name the three dative-experiencer verbs தெரியும் / புரிகிறது / பிடிக்கும், contrast விரும்பு’s ordinary subject, and place Kannada ಹಿಡಿ on the $p \rightarrow h$ shift met in Chapter 7.

34.1 எடு (eḍu) — “to take,” beside the “put” you already own

The last chapter’s verbs happened inside your head. These four happen between you and somebody else. Say *paḍikkirēn* and *eludugirēn* once more, then put your hands back in the world.

You’ll want to know: எடு

எடு — *eḍu* — to take; to pick up, to lift, to remove

எடுக்கிறேன் (*eḍukkirēn*), “I take.” The *kk* is held, so எடு is strong; past எடுத்தேன் (*eḍuttēn*). Two sentences you can already build in full:

நான் தண்ணீர் எடுக்கிறேன். — *nān taṇṇīr eḍukkirēn* —
“I take water.”

நான் அரிசி எடுக்கிறேன். — *nān arisi eḍukkirēn* — “I take
rice.”

The letters in this word

எ is the standing vowel *e*, from எழுது; டு is ட with the *u* sign, and ட came apart in படி. Nothing here is new — the first time in this book that has been true of a whole headword. The *ḍ* you hear is the same positional softening: ட goes soft between vowels and hard when doubled, as in *eḍuttēn*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

You have met this verb’s near-twin already, hiding inside a meal. சாப்பிடு (*sāppiḍu*), “to eat,” is *sāppu* (food) plus இடு (*iḍu*), “to put” — the light verb that lends its endings to a noun.

verb	what it does
இடு <i>iḍu</i>	put it down
எடு <i>eḍu</i>	pick it up

One standing vowel apart — இ against எ — pointing opposite ways. That is a gift to your memory and **not** an etymology: Tamil’s dictionaries keep them as **separate roots**, and a tidy pair of opposites is exactly the resemblance that fools people. Use it to remember; never as evidence.

What *is* inherited is *eḍu* itself. Malayalam has എടുക്കുക (*eṭukkuka*), the same verb; Kannada and Telugu say ಎತ್ತು / ఎత్తు (*ettu*), “to lift,” from the same old root with a doubled *t* where Tamil keeps its retroflex.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the opposed pair — “iḍu, put ... eḍu, take”
- “nān taṇṇīr eḍukkirēn” — I take water
- “nān arisi eḍukkirēn” — I take rice
- the cousins lifting — “eṭukkuka ... ettu ... ettu”

Before you move on

What does *edu* mean, and which camp is it in? (**To take; strong** — *eḍukkīrēn* holds the *kk*.) Which verb is one vowel away, and where did you meet it? (இடு, “to put” — inside சாப்பிடு.) Is that pair related? (**No** — the dictionaries keep them apart; it is a memory hook, not evidence.) Say “I take water,” then “I take rice.” (*Nān taṇṇīr eḍukkīrēn; nān arisi eḍukkīrēn*.)

34.2 கேள் (*kēḷ*) — one verb for asking and for hearing

Eḍukkīrēn — I take. Name the verb it is one vowel away from.
Now a verb doing two English jobs at once.

You’ll want to know: கேள்

கேள் — *kēḷ* — to ask; to hear, to listen

One syllable, ending on retroflex ள். The everyday form surprises:

நான் கேட்கிறேன். — *nān kēṭkīrēn* — “I ask.” (Also: “I hear.”)

The ள் has hardened to ழ — வா’s trick a second time: you say it *vā*, but the endings attach to *varu-*. Here they attach to கேட்- (*kēṭ-*), and the past is கேட்டேன் (*kēṭṭēn*), a strong verb’s doubled consonant. Two verbs with two stems apiece.

The letters in this word

கே is க with the long-*ē* sign ே; ள் is retroflex ள shut off by a **pulli** — the dot Chapter 8 pointed at inside செய்து. In கேட்கிறேன் the seam is ழ்க.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

English keeps *ask* and *hear* apart. Tamil does not, and neither does its noun: கேள்வி (*kēḷvi*) is “a question” and also “a hearing.” The family splits down the middle:

- Kannada ಕೇಳು (*kēlu*) does **both** jobs, as Tamil does.
- Malayalam கேൾക്കുക (*kēlkkuka*) kept only “hear.”
- Telugu splits them: విను (*vinu*), hear; అడుగు (*aḍugu*), ask.

The verb is inherited, but four languages cannot settle which arrangement came first; treat the fusion as Tamil’s and Kannada’s shared habit alone.

Why it’s said this way

Tamil is **diglossic**: its literary variety and the variety people speak have drifted far apart. This verb makes that impossible to ignore.

- கேள் is the dictionary and literary form.
- கேட்கிறேன் is standard spoken Tamil — **the register these lessons teach**, as every lesson’s variety line has said.
- Relaxed speech says கேக்கிறேன் (*kēkkirēn*) and கேக்க (*kēkka*). Recognise them; you need not say them.

For a polite request use Chapter 8’s respectful ending: கேளுங்கள் (*kēlungaḷ*), “please ask.” Keep தயவுசெய்து for emphasis.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two shifting stems — “vā ... varugirēn” then “kēl ... kēṭkirēn”
- “kēḷvi” — a question — then the polite “kēḷungaḷ”
- the family split — “Kannada kēlu, both ... Telugu vinu and aḍugu, two”

Before you move on

What two English verbs is *kēl*, and what happens to its ள் before an ending? (**Ask** and **hear**; it hardens to ழ.) Which verb taught you to expect a second stem, and what is *kēḷvi*? (வா, built on *varu*–; **a question**.) Which register do these lessons teach, and how do you

ask politely? (Standard spoken *kēṭkirēn*; *kēḷungaḷ*.)

34.3 பேசு — the long partner of ெ

Twice now a Tamil vowel has come in a short and a long version: அ and ஆ, ி and ீ. For அ/ஆ the script data even says the long one is the short one plus a tail; for ி/ீ it says nothing, and the pairing is the lesson's. Here is a third pair.

Script you'll notice: the ே sign

ே is the sign for long $\bar{e}$, and it is the long partner of the ெ you met in பெயர். Like ெ, it is written to the **left** of its consonant and spoken after it.

ப + ே → பே, said $p\bar{e}$.

sign	sound	where it is written
ெ	short e	to the left
ே	long $\bar{e}$	to the left
ை	ai	to the left

Three left-standing signs now. The evidence is the same as it was for ெ: the script data describes ை and has no entry for ெ or ே at all, so both the shared position **and** the short/long pairing are stated from the pattern these signs share, not from a source for either one.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
பே	$p\bar{e}$ — ப with the ே sign on its left	ப from பெயர்
சு	su — ச with the ு sign	ச from சரி, ு from இருக்கிறீர்கள்

பே + சு → பேசு

Two pieces, one new sign, and its two signs pull in opposite directions on the page: ே stands before its letter, ு joins after it. பேசு is “speak” — the verb every lesson so far has been in service of.

Your turn

- *Read it:* பே — then பேசு
- *Say it:* “pēsu” — “speak”
- *Contrast:* பெ and பே — the short sign and the long one, both on the left
- *Contrast:* பே and ச — a sign before, a sign after, inside one word
- *Read it:* தமிழ் பேசு — “speak Tamil,” both words off the page

Before you move on

Read பேசு. Which side of its consonant is ே written on? (**The left** — like ெ and ை.) Which sign is its short partner? (ெ, as in பெயர்.) What is the ச doing here — is it *s* or *ch*? (**Either**; one letter covers both, and position picks.) Next: the verb for helping.

34.4 உதவு (udavu) — “to help,” and a word Tamil did not borrow

Kēṭkirēn — I ask. *Kēḷungaḷ* — please ask. Say both, and keep that polite ending in your ear; it is about to arrive on a second verb unchanged.

You’ll want to know: உதவு

உதவு — *udavu* — to help; to be of use

உதவுகிறேன் (*udavugirēn*), “I help.” The single softened *-gir-* puts உதவு in the **weak** camp with *pō* and *eludu*, and the noun is one step away: உதவி (*udavi*), “help.”

நான் உங்களுக்கு உதவுகிறேன். — *nān ungaḷukku udavugirēn* — “I help you.”

The person helped takes the dative -உக்கு from Chapter 6, and the polite form needs nothing new: உதவுங்கள் (*udavungaḷ*), “please help” — the same respectful -உங்கள் you just put on *kēḷ*.

The letters in this word

உ is the standing vowel *u*, used when a word begins with it; then த and வ, which is வ with the *u* sign. The *d* you hear is த between two vowels, softening exactly as ட did in *paḍi* and க does in *pōḡirēṇ*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil turns verbs into nouns with a small ending, and you have collected three without being told to: புரி → புரிதல் (*puridal*), understanding; கேள் → கேள்வி (*kēlvi*), a question; உதவு → உதவி (*udavi*), help.

Now the part worth keeping. For “help,” the neighbours nearly all reach for Sanskrit सहाय (*sahāya*): Telugu సహాయం, Kannada ಸಹಾಯ, Malayalam സഹായം, Hindi सहायता. Tamil’s everyday word is உதவி, its own.

Hold that against Chapter 8, where *please* went the other way: all four sisters built it on Sanskrit दया (*daya*) plus a light verb — *tayavuseytu*, *dayaviṭṭu*, *dayacēsi*, *dayavāyi*. Same four languages, opposite outcome. So the rule is not “Tamil refuses to borrow”; it is that **borrowing happens word by word**, and the only way to know is to check each one.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “nāṇ ungaḷukku udavugirēṇ” — I help you
- the two polite forms — “kēḷungaḷ ... udavungaḷ”
- the three nouns — “puridal ... kēlvi ... udavi”
- the borrowed one and the kept one — “tayavuseytu ... udavi”

Before you move on

Which camp is *udavu* in, and what is *udavi*? (**Weak**, by the single softened bead; **help**, the noun.) Say “I help you,” then “please help.” (*Nāṇ ungaḷukku udavugirēṇ*; *udavungaḷ*.) Which word do the neighbours borrow from Sanskrit where Tamil keeps its own? (**Help** — *sahāya* against *udavi*.) And which word did all four sisters borrow together? (**Please** — *daya* plus a light verb.)

34.5 பிடி (pidi) — “to catch,” and therefore “to like”

Say this chapter’s three verbs — *edukkirēn*, *kētkirēn*, *udavugirēn* — then the two sentences with no *nān*: *enakku teriyum*, *enakku purigiradu*.

You’ll want to know: பிடி

பிடி — *pidi* — to catch, to seize, to hold

பிடிக்கிறேன் (*pidikkirēn*) is “I catch, I hold,” and the held *kk* puts it in the **strong** camp with *ninai*, *paḍi* and *edu*.

Grammar Lens: எனக்குப் பிடிக்கும்

எனக்குத் தமிழ் பிடிக்கும். — *enakku tamil pidikkum*
— “I like Tamil.”

Word for word: “to me, Tamil catches.” The Tamil does the catching; you are caught. பிடிக்கும் carries **no person at all** — the person-less ending of தெரியும் — so only the dative word changes: *enakku pidikkum*, *unakku pidikkum*, *avanukku pidikkum*.

That makes three: தெரியும், புரிகிறது, பிடிக்கும் — knowing, understanding, liking. Three endings; each puts the experiencer in the dative and the thing in the subject. Chapter 6’s **dative subject** was never an exception.

You’ll want to know: விரும்பு

விரும்பு — *virumbu* — to want, to like, to love

An ordinary verb with an ordinary subject: நான் விரும்புகிறேன் (*nān virumbugirēn*), “I want.” Weak; its noun is விருப்பம் (*viruppam*), a wish. Not a synonym: பிடிக்கும் is taste, which you had no say in; விரும்பு is choice.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The grasp-verb is old and shared: Malayalam പിടിക്കുക (*piṭikkuka*) and Telugu పట్టు (*paṭṭu*) both mean “catch, hold.” Kannada’s is ಹಿಡಿದು

(*hiḍi*) — not a different word: Old Kannada wrote *piḍi*, and the **p** → **h** shift behind *pattu* / *hattu* and *pāl* / *hālu* turned it into *hiḍi*. A third instance of a rule you have already met.

The wider point: Spanish says *me gusta*, Italian *mi piace*, Hindi *mujhe pasand hai* — each putting the liker in the dative and the liked thing in the subject, exactly as *enakkut tamil piḍikkum* does, and none of them related to Tamil. **Two unrelated families reached the same design independently.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three dative sentences — “enakku teriyum ... purigiradu ... piḍikkum”
- the other design — “nān virumbugiren”, I want
- the chapter — “eḍukkiren, kētkiren, udavugiren, piḍikkum”
- the Kannada shift — “piḍi ... hiḍi”, as “pattu ... hattu”

Before you move on

Say “I like Tamil” and name its subject. (*Enakkut tamil piḍikkum*, “to me, Tamil catches”; the subject is **Tamil**.) Name the three verbs built that way, and what *virumbu* does differently. (***Teriyum*, *purigiradu*, *piḍikkum***; *virumbu* takes an **ordinary subject**.) Why is Kannada’s *hiḍi* the same word as *piḍi*, and which unrelated language builds “I like” this way? (**The p → h shift**; Spanish *me gusta*.)

Chapter 35

Arriving at a House

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ✍ pen (1) 🗣 Hands-free start: first 1 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a Tamil house, its door, a room and a chair, take நாற்காலி apart into 'four' and 'leg', place வீடு against Kannada ಬೀಡು on the v-to-b shift, and say why கதவு stayed everyday while Sanskrit-derived கபாடம் stayed in books.

Walk a guest from வீடு through கதவு into அறை and offer a நாற்காலி; split the chair into நால் and கால் and hear ல் harden to ற at the join; hold the hard ற at the ridge rather than the roof; and name what the pulli does at ற்கா and what Tamil refuses to do there.

35.1 வீடு (vīḍu) — “house,” and the place the greeting happens

Three verbs from the chapter you have just finished: *pidi*, “to like”; *uḍavu*, “to help”; *kēḷ*, “to ask.” Say them. Now a noun, and the one a conversation usually starts inside.

You'll want to know: வீடு

வீடு — *vīḍu* — house; home

One word covers both. Tamil does not split the building from the belonging: என் வீடு (*en vīḍu*) is “my house” and “my home” at once, and choosing between them is the translator's problem.

With the dative you already own:

வீட்டுக்கு — *vīṭṭukku* — to the house

The soft *ḍ* hardens and doubles to *ṭṭ* — the படி / படித்தேன் rule.

The letters in this word

வீ is வ, the first letter you learned, wearing the long *ī* sign ீ. Then டு: ட with the *u* sign.

You are at a door about to say வணக்கம், so read that word while you are here: வ + ண + க் + க + ம். The வ that opens *vaṇakkam* is the வ that opens *vīḍu*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

வீடு is inherited, not borrowed:

the cousin	language and sense
வீட் <i>vīḍ</i>	Malayalam, “house”
வீడు <i>vīḍu</i>	Telugu, “town, camp”
ಬೀಡು <i>bīḍu</i>	Kannada, “abode, encampment”

Kannada has changed the front of the word: Tamil says **v**, Kannada says **b**. Not a slip — Kannada alone among its neighbours turned inherited word-initial *v*- into *b*-, and the inscriptions show it from about the seventh century. Store the correspondence — it keeps paying. The **sense** has drifted where the form has not: Telugu’s *vīḍu* is a town, Kannada’s *bīḍu* an encampment. Tamil and Malayalam kept it on the dwelling.

One more thing, not a coincidence to explain away. Tamil has a second வீடு meaning “**release, deliverance**,” as in வீடுபெறு. The Dravidian dictionary files house and release under **one entry**, headed by விடு (*viḍu*), “to let go.” A house is where you are let go.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “vīḍu” — house and home in one word
- “eṇ vīḍu,” then the hardening — “vīṭṭukku”
- the cousins, ending on the front-swap — “vīḍ ... vīḍu ... bīḍu”
- the root under the house — “viḍu, to let go”

Before you move on

Why does one Tamil word do two English jobs here, and which letter opens both *vīḍu* and *vaṇakkam*? (**H**ouse and **h**ome are not split; and ஶ.) What does Kannada put at the front instead of *v*, and is it a one-off? (**ḃ** — *bīḍu*; **regular**, from the seventh century on.) Is the Tamil word for “release” the same root as the house? (**Yes** — both under விடு, “to let go.”)

35.2 ேஶ — one sign, two marks

Every vowel sign so far has been one mark in one place: before the consonant, above it, or after it. This one is in two places at once, and you already own both halves.

Script you’ll notice: the ேஶ sign

ேஶ is the sign for long *ō*, and it **wraps** its consonant: a hook on the left, a stroke on the right, one vowel.

Those two halves are not a guess. The Unicode Character Database gives ேஶ a canonical decomposition, and it is exactly the two signs you have:

ேஶ = ே (the long-*ē* hook, written left) + ஶ (the long-*ā* stroke, written right)

So this is not one more mark to memorise. It is the sign you learned last lesson and the sign you learned in ஶஶஶ, put around the same letter — read the letter in the middle, and say the vowel once.

Be exact about what that citation settles. A canonical decomposition says the character is **composed of** those two, for text processing; it says nothing about how either half is drawn or where it lands. `tamil.json` has no entry for ேஶ at all. So take the composition from Unicode and the placement — hook left, stroke right — from the page in front of you.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece

ப	<i>pa</i>	from பெயர்
ோ	long <i>ō</i> , wrapped around it	this lesson

$$\text{ப} + \text{ோ} \rightarrow \text{போ}$$

One letter and one wrapped sign, and the whole word is two marks on the page. போ is “go” — the போ inside *pōy varugirēn*, “I’ll go and come back,” the farewell chapter 1 closes on and chapter 4 takes apart.

Your turn

- *Read it:* போ — then போ — the hook alone, then the hook with the stroke
- *Say it:* “pō” — “go”
- *Contrast:* போ · பா · போ — left only, right only, both at once
- *Read it:* போ again, and notice its ோ is the same hook

Before you move on

Read போ. Which two signs is ோ made of, and where does each one sit? (஋ on the **left**, ா on the **right**.) How many vowels do you say when you read it? (**One** — the two marks are one sign.) Which of its halves did you meet in நான்? (ா.) Next: the word for a door.

35.3 கதவு (kadavu) — “door,” and a word Tamil never gave up

Vīḍu — house. Say the cousin that swaps the front letter. (*Bīḍu*, Kannada.) Now the part of the house you actually stand at.

You'll want to know: கதவு

கதவு — *kadavu* — door

The leaf that swings, and the thing somebody opens when you arrive.

வீட்டுக் கதவு — *vīṭṭuk kadavu* — the house door

Two nouns in a row, the first leaning on the second. Tamil builds a great deal this way, and you have seen it inside a single word: தண்ணீர் is *taṇ* plus *nīr*, “cool” plus “water.”

The letters in this word

க + த + வு. The first letter is the one that taught you Tamil marks no voicing: க spells a hard *k*, a soft *g* and even an *h*, and **position decides**. Here it opens the word, so it is hard — *ka*, not *ga*.

The same rule then lands on the second letter. த is named *ta*, but it sits between two vowels, so it softens. That is why this book writes *kadavu* and not *katavu*. One rule, two letters, one word.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

கதவு is inherited Dravidian. Kannada's ಕದ (kada) is the same word with less on the end; Malayalam's കതവ് (katavu) matches Tamil closely.

Tamil also owns a second word for a door-leaf: கபாடம் (*kabāḍam*), taken from Sanskrit कपाट (kapāṭa). It exists, it is correct, and almost nobody says it. It lives in poetry and temple description; கதவு lives in the house.

That split is this language's habit. Where a neighbour borrowed a Sanskrit word and let the inherited one fade, Tamil often kept both and gave them different jobs — the inherited word for the everyday thing, the borrowed one for the elevated register. Do not turn that into a rule that Tamil never borrows. It borrows; it rarely evicts.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “kadavu” — door
- “vīṭṭuk kadavu” — the house door

- the hard one and the soft one in one word — “ka ... da”
- the everyday word, then the bookish one — “kadavu ... kabāḍam”

Before you move on

Say “the house door,” then explain why the க is hard and the த soft when neither changed shape. (*Vittuk kadavu*; **Tamil marks no voicing** — position decides.) Which of *kadavu* and *kabāḍam* would you hear at somebody’s house, and where did the other come from? (*Kadavu*; *kabāḍam* is **Sanskrit**, and stays literary.) Does keeping both mean Tamil refuses to borrow? (**No** — it borrows without evicting.)

35.4 அறை (arai) — “room,” and Tamil’s second r

Vīḍu, house. *Kadavu*, door — the everyday word Tamil kept while the Sanskrit one stayed in books. Open that door and you are in this word.

You’ll want to know: அறை

அறை — *arai* — room

Any room: in a house, in a hotel, a cell. Put it behind *vīḍu* the way you put *kadavu* there:

வீட்டு அறை — *vīṭṭu arai* — a room of the house

And with the dative, அறைக்கு (*araiḱku*), “to the room.”

The letters in this word

அ is the standing vowel *a* — a letter in its own right, not a sign hung on a consonant. Then ற, then the *ai* sign ை, which wraps around the front of its consonant: ற + ை → ைற.

ற is the hard *r* you first met inside நன்றி. It is not ர. Tamil keeps two r-letters and uses both.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

அறை is inherited. Malayalam's അറ (ara) is the same word, used for a chamber or an inner store-room, and it keeps the same hard r. So this is *kadavu*'s situation over: an everyday inherited word with a Sanskrit-derived alternative sitting unused in the higher register.

The letters in this word

Say the English word *hurry* and stop on the middle sound. That flick of the tongue against the ridge behind your teeth is close to Tamil ர (ra). Now make it stronger and longer, with real contact: that is ற (ra). Two cautions. **Do not curl your tongue back** — retroflex belongs to ண and ழ; ற is made at the ridge. And **do not soften it into the English r of red**, which is the wrong shape for both Tamil letters. Many Tamil speakers merge ர and ற in casual speech, so you will be understood either way. Learn the difference anyway: the **spelling** depends on it, and a word written with the wrong r is simply misspelled.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “arai” — room, on the hard r
- the two r's apart — “ra ... ra”
- “vīṭṭu arai” — a room of the house
- the three so far — “vīḍu, kadavu, arai”

Before you move on

Say “a room of the house,” and name which of Tamil's two r-letters is in *arai* and where else you have read it. (*Vīṭṭu arai*; ற, the hard one, in நன்றி.) Where is ற made, and what must your tongue not do? (At the **ridge** behind the teeth — **do not curl it back**.) If many speakers merge the two r's, why bother? (Because the **spelling** does not merge.)

35.5 நாற்காலி (nārkāli) — “chair,” counted out in legs

Three words in the order you meet them arriving: *vīdu*, *kadavu*, *arai*. Hold the hard r in *arai* at the ridge, not the roof. Now the one thing in that room a guest is always pointed at.

You’ll want to know: நாற்காலி

நாற்காலி — *nārkāli* — chair

Five syllables for a chair, which sounds extravagant until you find out what it is made of.

நான் நாற்காலி எடுக்கிறேன். — *nān nārkāli eḍukkireṇ* —
I take a chair.

The letters in this word

நா + ற் + கா + லி. Every piece is one you have handled.

ந is the dental *n*, first of Tamil’s three n-letters, wearing the long *ā* sign ா. ற் is the hard r of *arai* under a **pulli**, the dot that switches off the built-in vowel. கா is க with that same long *ā*. லி is ல with the *i* sign ி, the first vowel sign you learned, on the way to spelling நன்றி.

Now what does **not** happen at ற்கா. Two consonants meet, and Tamil keeps them as two letters with a dot between, rather than fusing them into a stacked shape as the scripts to the north do. That refusal is why a word this long stays readable one piece at a time.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

The word is a compound, and both halves are yours:

the piece

what it is

நால் *nāl*

“four” — the form four takes in compounds

கால் *kāl*

“leg, foot; a support”

Four plus leg: a chair is a four-legged thing, said out loud. English cannot do that with *chair*, which travels through French and Latin to a Greek word for “seat” without ever showing a leg.

The seam is audible. நான்கு (*nānku*) is the counting word; in a

compound four appears as நால், and before க that ல hardens to ற். Hence நாற்காலி, and hence நாற்பது (*nārpadu*), “forty.” Malayalam builds the chair from the same two pieces: നാൽക്കാലി. Both halves are inherited Dravidian. Nothing in this chapter was borrowed.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the seam — “nāṅku ... nāl ... kāl ... nār̥kāli”
- “nān nār̥kāli eḍukkirēn” — I take a chair
- the arrival, in order — “vīḍu, kadavu, arai, nār̥kāli”
- the Kannada front-swap on the first of them — “vīḍu ... bīḍu”

Before you move on

Take *nār̥kāli* apart, then walk somebody into your house four nouns deep. (நால், “four,” plus கால், “leg”; *vīḍu*, *kadavu*, *arai*, *nār̥kāli*.) What does the dot in ற் do, and what does Tamil refuse to do at that join? (**Switches off the built-in vowel**; Tamil **does not stack** the two consonants.) Which of this chapter’s words was borrowed? (**None.**)

Chapter 36

What You Are Offered

Modes: 👁 eyes (4) ✍ pen (1) 🖱 Hands-free start: first 3 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for தேநீர், பால் or உணவு in Tamil, say என் தவறு with no verb in it, find நீர் inside both தண்ணீர் and தேநீர், and state which of this chapter’s words was borrowed and which the dictionaries cannot account for.

Repair a wrong order — மன்னிக்கவும், என் தவறு — and account for the chapter honestly: பால் and உண் inherited, தேநீர் half a loan through a Malay port, சாப்பிடு with no entry in the Dravidian dictionary at all, and மன்னி native where the neighbours took Sanskrit kṣamā.

36.1 தேநீர் (tēnīr) — “tea,” half of it already yours

Nārkaḷi, and what its halves mean. (Four, and leg.) You are in the *arai* with the chair, and the next thing in a Tamil house is this.

You’ll want to know: தேநீர்

தேநீர் — *tēnīr* — tea

The second half is yours from the water lesson: நீர் (*nīr*), “water,” the plain older word inside தண்ணீர் (*tanṇīr*) — *tan*, “cool,” plus *nīr*. So தேநீர் is, literally, **tea water**.

தேநீர், தயவுசெய்து. — *tēnīr, tayavuseytu* — **Tea, please.**

In speech you will also hear plain டீ (*tī*), straight from English *tea*. தேநீர் is the fuller word — a sign, a menu, a formal host.

The letters in this word

தே is த with the *ē* sign ே, which stands in front of its consonant. நீ is ந with the long *ī* sign; ர் is ர shut by a pulli — the soft r, not the hard ற.

Two words beside it are worth reading. நன்றி is ந + ன் + றி, what you say when the tea arrives. In தயவுசெய்து, செய் is *ce* plus ய் shut by that same dot before து.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

நீர் is inherited and very old. தே is not Tamil at all: it is the combining form of தேய் (*tēy*), borrowed from Malay **teh**, which took it from the Hokkien of the southern Chinese coast, where the leaf is *tē*. The world's words for tea come in two shapes, decided by **how the tea reached each language**. The southern Chinese coast carried *te*: Dutch *thee*, and through Dutch, English *tea* and French *thé* — and by the Malay ports, Tamil's தே. The overland routes carried *cha*: Persian and Hindi *chāy*, Russian *chay*. Portuguese says **chá** despite being a sea power, because its traders worked out of Macau. Where the ship docked decided the word.

Tamil then did what the European *te*-languages did not: rather than take the loan whole, it welded it to நீர் — a word that has travelled outward as well, since English **mulligatawny** is Tamil மிளகுத்தண்ணீர், “pepper water.”

Weigh that against the rice word. அரிசி *may* stand behind English *rice* through Greek, and the dictionaries hedge. The tea routes are documented. **Different histories, different confidence.**

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the shared half — “nīr ... taṇṇīr ... tēnīr”
- “tēnīr, tayavuseytu” — tea, please
- the two routes — “te ... cha”

- the pepper water in an English soup — “miḷagut taṇṇīr”

Before you move on

Name the second half of *tēnīr* and the word that shares it, then ask for tea politely. (நீர், inside தண்ணீர்; *tēnīr*, *tayavuseytu*.) Why do some languages say *te* and others *cha*, and which is better established — the tea split or *arisi-to-rice*? (**The route the tea travelled; and the tea split.**)

36.2 பால் (pāl) — “milk,” and a p that becomes an h next door

Tēnīr. Which half is borrowed, and which is the old Tamil word for water? (*Tē* is the traveller; *nīr* is Tamil’s own.) Here is what goes into it.

You’ll want to know: பால்

பால் — *pāl* — milk

One syllable, one long *ā*, a final ல with no vowel after it. Say it short and closed: *pāl*, never *pāla*.

பால் தேநீர் — *pāl tēnīr* — milk tea

With தண்ணீர் (*taṇṇīr*, cool water) already in hand, you can now name what a Tamil household is likely to put in front of a guest.

The letters in this word

பா is ப with the long *ā* sign ா. Then ல்: ல with the **pulli**, the dot that removes the built-in *a* and leaves a bare consonant.

That dot is the whole reason the word ends where it does. Without it, பால் would be *pāla*, two syllables. A single dot carries the difference between a word and a non-word.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

பால் is inherited Dravidian, and its relatives are close:

the cousin	language
പാൽ <i>pāl</i>	Malayalam
పాలు <i>pālu</i>	Telugu
ಹಾಲು <i>hālu</i>	Kannada, modern

Kannada has changed the front of the word once more, this time **p** into **h** — the textbook example of the best-known sound change in the family. **Old Kannada said *pālu***, exactly as Tamil does; the *p*- began turning into *h*- around the tenth century and the change had run through the whole vocabulary by the fourteenth.

Put it beside the change you met at the house. Tamil **v**, Kannada **b**, in *vīḍu* / *bīḍu*. Tamil **p**, Kannada **h**, in *pāl* / *hālu*. Both are regular correspondences at the front of a word, and between them they let you recognise a Kannada word as a relative rather than a stranger. Telugu and Malayalam did neither: they keep the *p*, as Tamil does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “pāl” — stopped by the dot, not *pāla*
- “pāl tēnīr” — milk tea
- the two front-swaps together — “vīḍu, bīḍu ... pāl, hālu”
- what you can be offered — “taṇṇīr, tēnīr, pāl”

Before you move on

Say “milk tea,” then say what the dot on **ḷ** is doing and what the word would be without it. (*Pāl tēnīr*; it **removes the built-in vowel**, and without it, *pāla*.) What does Kannada put at the front instead of *p*, and is it a one-off? (**h** — *hālu*; **regular**, from the tenth century to the fourteenth.) Name the other Kannada front-swap. (**v** to **b** — *vīḍu*, *bīḍu*.)

36.3 உணவு (uṇavu) — “food,” from the verb underneath it

Pāl — milk — and the Kannada shape of it. (*Hālu*.) Drink is settled. Now the word for everything else on the plate.

You’ll want to know: உணவு

உணவு — *uṇavu* — food

The general word: food as a category, not a dish. It covers the rice words you have — அரிசி (*arisi*), the raw grain, and சாதம் (*sātam*), the cooked meal — and all that is served beside them.

உணவு, தயவுசெய்து. — *uṇavu, tayavuseytu* — Food, please.

Note the register. உணவு is the careful, written word — a menu, a sign. Around a family table people say சாப்பாடு (*sāppāḍu*).

The letters in this word

உ is a standing vowel — a full letter, not a sign. Then ண, then வு, which is வ with the *u* sign underneath. ண is the retroflex *n* you first wrote alongside ட, and the letter inside தண்ணீர்.

The letters in this word

Curl the tip of your tongue **back** to the roof of your mouth and release into the vowel. That is ண, and *uṇavu* gives it a clean run because the letter sits between two vowels. Contrast the ன of நன்றி and the ந of நீர், both made near the teeth.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

உணவு is உண் (*uṇ*), “to eat,” with a noun-forming ending. Food is literally *the eating*. Tamil has two eating verbs, of different ages:

the verb	where it lives
உண் <i>uṇ</i>	old, inherited, literary now
சாப்பிடு <i>sāppiḍu</i>	the everyday spoken verb

உண் is a bare inherited root, and the Dravidian dictionary lists *uṇavu* inside its entry.

சாப்பிடு is where the ground softens, so hold Chapter 32’s earlier account loosely. You were shown *sāppu*, “food,” plus இடு (*iḍu*), “to put.” The இடு is visible in the spelling; the first half is the problem. The great Tamil lexicon records no plain word *sāppu* meaning “food,” and the Dravidian etymological dictionary has **no entry for this verb at all**. It is not Sanskrit — Telugu and Malayalam have their own forms — but its origin is open. The word you would use at a table has the weaker paperwork.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the root and the noun — “uṇ ... uṇavu”
- the retroflex, tongue curled back — “uṇavu”
- the documented one, then the everyday one — “uṇ ... sāppiḍu”
- raw grain, then cooked meal — “arisi ... sātam”

Before you move on

What verb is *uṇavu* built on, and where does your tongue go for ண? (உண்; **curled back**.) Which eating verb would you use at a table, and how sure is anyone where it came from? (சாப்பிடு — **not at all**: the Dravidian dictionary has no entry.) Give the raw grain and the cooked meal. (*Arisi*; *sātam*.)

36.4 உணவு — the same vowel, twice, two ways

You have the ு sign — the *u* that hangs off a consonant, as in ஁. But a word that *starts* on *u* has no consonant to hang it from, and by now you know what Tamil does about that.

Script you'll notice: உ

உ is the standing letter for short *u*. It is the rule you met with ஆ in ஆம், working again: a vowel that opens a word is written as a **full letter**, never as a sign.

உ	the letter — opens a word
ு	the sign — rides a consonant

The word you already say holds both. That is the whole lesson.

Read it; do not draw it yet. உ has no entry in this book's script data, so it gets no stroke order here.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece

உ	<i>u</i>	independent — the word opens on a vowel
ண	<i>ṇa</i> , the retroflex <i>n</i>	first met beside ம
வு	<i>vu</i> — வ with the ு sign	வ was your first letter

உ · ண · வு → உணவு

Three pieces, and the first and last are the same vowel doing its two jobs: once standing on its own, once hanging off வ. The page keeps them apart so your eye can.

Your turn

- *Read it:* உ — then உணவு
- *Say it:* “uṇavu” — “food”
- *Contrast:* உ and வு — the letter that opens, the sign that rides
- *Contrast:* ஆம் and உணவு — the same opening rule, two vowels apart

Before you move on

Read உணவு. Why does it open with உ rather than the ு sign? (The word starts on a vowel — there is nothing for a sign to hang on.) Where else in the same word does that vowel appear, and in which form? (On வு, as the ு sign.) Which earlier word set this rule? (ஆம்.) Next: the word for a mistake.

36.5 தவறு (tavaru) — “a mistake,” and the rest of the apology

The chapter back: *tēnīr*, *pāl*, *uṇavu*. Suppose one arrives and it is not what you asked for. You have “sorry,” but not the word for what went wrong.

You’ll want to know: தவறு

தவறு — *tavaru* — a mistake, an error, a fault

With என் (*en*), “my,” and no verb — Tamil needs none:

மன்னிக்கவும், என் தவறு. பால் இல்லை, தேநீர்.

mannikkavum, en tavaru. pāl illai, tēnīr.

Sorry, my mistake. Not milk — tea.

மன்னிக்கவும் is the careful, written-leaning apology; in speech many Tamil speakers simply say *sorry*, in English. என் தவறு suits either.

The letters in this word

த + வ + று. The last piece is ற, the hard r of *arai*, with the *u* sign — made at the ridge behind the teeth, tongue flat, not curled.

The apology in front of it does something this word does not. மன்னிக்கவும் has ன்னி: the alveolar ன switched off by a dot, then written a second time with the *i* sign. Tamil doubles a consonant by **repeating the letter with a dot on the first**, never by inventing a joined shape — the க்க of வணக்கம் over.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

தவறு is inherited Dravidian, a verb and a noun in one shape: “to slip, to fail,” and “a slip, a mistake.” The dictionary files it beside தப்பு (*tappu*); its cousins are everywhere.

Now the chapter in a line. மன்னிக்கவும் was the showpiece: Tamil kept its own மன்னி where Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam reached for Sanskrit *kṣamā*. தவறு is inherited too, and so is உண் inside *uṇavu*, and பால். But தேநீர் is half a loan from a Malay port, and சாதம் was flagged as Sanskrit-influenced when you met it. So the honest statement is not “Tamil does not borrow.” It is that **Tamil borrows without evicting**: the inherited word stays, and the loan takes a different job or register.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “eṇ tavaru” — my mistake, with no verb in it
- the whole repair — “mannikkavum, eṇ tavaru”
- the two words for a mistake — “tavaru ... tappu”
- the borrowed one among this chapter’s words — “tēnīr”

Before you move on

Apologise, name the fault, and say why there is no word for “is” in it. (*Mannikkavum, eṇ tavaru*; **Tamil needs none**.) How does Tamil write a doubled consonant, as in மன்னி and க்க? (**The letter a second time**, dot on the first.) Which apology verb is native where the neighbours took Sanskrit, and does that make Tamil a language that never borrows? (மன்னி, against *kṣamā*; **no** — it **borrows without evicting**.)

Chapter 37

Your Town, Your Friend

Modes: 👁 eyes (5) ✍ pen (1) 🗣 Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask உங்கள் ஊர் என்ன? and introduce someone with இவர் என் நண்பர், choose between நண்பன், நண்பி and நண்பர், run Tamil's இ / அ / எ pointing series, and hear ண voice the ட that follows it.

Say இவர் என் நண்பர் with no verb in it, pick the ending by respect rather than by habit, name the -ūr inside Tanjore and Bengalūru, and state what Tamil forces you to decide for a sibling that it does not force for a friend.

37.1 ஊர் (ūr) — “town,” and the question Tamil asks early

En tavaru — my mistake, a word that is a verb and a noun at once. Then the general word for food. (*Unavu*.) Now back to meeting somebody.

You'll want to know: ஊர்

ஊர் — *ūr* — town, village; the place you are from

That last sense matters most. உங்கள் ஊர் is your **native place**, where your family is from, which may be somewhere you have never lived.

உங்கள் ஊர் என்ன — *uṅgaḷ ūr enna* — **What is your town**

It lands early in a Tamil conversation and is not nosiness — the slot English fills with “what do you do.

The letters in this word

ஊ is a standing vowel — long *ū*, partner of the *உ* that opens *uṇavu*. *ர்* is *ர*, the soft *r*, shut by a pulli. Hold the vowel: *ūr*, not *ur*. Vowel length is part of a word's identity here.

Grammar Lens: the two registers, side by side

You met this choice on the age question:

the question	who you say it to
உன் ஊர் என்ன <i>un ūr enna</i>	a friend, a child, a peer
உங்கள் ஊர் என்ன <i>uṅgaḷ ūr enna</i>	a stranger, an elder, anyone senior

Both are possessive plus noun plus question word, with **no verb** — the shape you learned for *உன் வயசு என்ன*. Only the possessive changes, and with it the social temperature. When unsure, use *உங்கள்*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

ஊர் is inherited Dravidian, and welded into city names you know in English:

the English name	what it is
Tanjore	Tamil தஞ்சாவூர் <i>Taṅjāvūr</i>
Vellore	Tamil வேலூர் <i>Vēlūr</i>
Bangalore	Kannada ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು <i>Bengalūru</i>

Every one of those *-ore* endings is this word: the British ear turned *-ūr* into *-ore*, and the cities have taken their own names back.

Two exactnesses. Bangalore is a **Kannada** town, so its *-ūru* is Kannada's form of the inherited word — the family's, not Tamil's alone. And the *first* halves are not all settled; *Vēl-* in Vellore is argued over. The ending is the certain part.

Weigh that against the rice word. அரிசி *may* stand behind English *rice* through Greek, and the dictionaries hedge. Nobody hedges about *-ūr*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the long vowel — “*ūr*,” not “*ur*”

- to a stranger — “uṅgaḷ ūr enṇa”
- to a friend — “uṇ ūr enṇa”
- the ending inside the map — “Taṇjāvūr ... Vēlūr ... Begaḷūru”

Before you move on

Ask a stranger where they are from, then a friend, and say what **ஊர்** means beyond “town.” (*Uṅgaḷ ūr enṇa*; *uṇ ūr enṇa*; **your native place**.) Which earlier question has this shape, and is *-ore* in Tanjore really this word? (**உன் வயசு என்ன**; **yes**.) How sure are we there, next to *arisi* and *rice*? (**Much surer**.)

37.2 நண்பன் (naṇban) — “friend,” with the ending doing the work

A stranger’s native place, then the ending inside Tanjore. (*Uṅgaḷ ūr enṇa*; *-ūr*.) Now the person you would introduce.

You’ll want to know: நண்பன்

நண்பன் — *naṇban* — **friend** (a man)

Tamil will not let you say a bare “friend” any more than a bare “brother.” The stem is **நண்ப-**; the ending decides.

the form	who it is
நண்பன் <i>naṇban</i>	a male friend
நண்பி <i>naṇbi</i>	a female friend
நண்பர் <i>naṇbar</i>	a friend spoken of with respect

The **-அர்** is the respectful plural that turns **நீ** into **நீங்கள்**, applied to a person.

This is a different axis from the family words. **அண்ணன்** and **தம்பி** split brothers by **age**; the friend words split by **sex**, **நண்பர்** by **respect**.

The letters in this word

ந + **ண்** + **ப** + **ன்** — every one of Tamil’s n-letters inside one word. **ந** opens it, dental, at the teeth. **ண்** is retroflex, tongue curled back, closed

by a pulli. ண் ends it, the alveolar n from நன்றி. The writing lesson gave them to you one at a time; here they arrive together.

The letters in this word

The letter after ண் is ப, named *pa*. This book writes *naṇban* because of the நன்றி rule: a nasal in front of a stop **voices it**. A Tamil reader supplies the voicing, as an English reader supplies the *sh* in *sugar*.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Behind நண்பன் is நண்பு (*naṇbu*), “friendship, closeness,” which belongs to the root family of நண்ணு (*naṇṇu*), “to draw near.” A friend, in Tamil’s own accounting, is someone who came close. Be precise. The Dravidian dictionary files *naṇbu* and *naṇban* in the same entry as *naṇṇu*; the Tamil lexicon prefers நள-, making them siblings rather than parent and child. They differ on the line of descent, not on the household.

Set it beside அப்பா and அம்மா, not built out of anything — the repeated-syllable shape children produce for parents worldwide. நண்பன் is assembled, from a root you can point at.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three endings — “naṇban, naṇbi, naṇbar”
- the voicing after the nasal — “naṇri ... naṇban”
- the root it came from — “naṇṇu, to draw near”
- the family words that split on age instead — “aṇṇan, tambi”

Before you move on

Give the friend-word for a woman, a man, and someone you respect. (*Naṇbi; naṇban; naṇbar*.) Which axis do the friend words split on, and which do the brother words? (**Sex and respect; age**.) Why is ப heard as *b*, and are அப்பா and அம்மா built from a root the way *naṇban* is? (**A nasal voices the stop after it; no.**)

37.3 உளர் — the long partner

உ opened உணவு last chapter. Tamil writes its long vowels as separate letters from the short ones, so $\bar{u}$ gets a letter of its own.

Script you'll notice: உள

உள is the standing letter for long $\bar{u}$, and it is the long partner of உ — the fourth short-and-long pair the strand has handed you, after அ/ஆ, ி/ீ and ெ/ே.

உ	short u
உள	long $\bar{u}$

Read it; do not draw it yet. உள has no entry in this book's script data, and neither has உ — so neither gets a stroke order, and the pairing above, like the way the shorter letter sits inside the longer one, is what the page shows rather than something the data states.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece		
உள	$\bar{u}$	independent — the word opens on a vowel
ர்	bare r — ர under a pulli	ர from சரி

உள · ர் → உளர்

Two pieces, and both were waiting for you. உளர் is the word for your own town, and holding it against உணவு shows the length doing real work: change the vowel and you change the word.

Your turn

- *Read it:* உள — then உளர்
- *Say it:* “ $\bar{u}r$ ” — “town”

- *Contrast:* உ and ஊ — short and long, two letters
- *Read it:* உணவு and ஊர் together — the pair, side by side

Before you move on

Read ஊர். Which letter is ஊ's short partner, and where did you read it? (உ, opening உணவு.) Why is the vowel a full letter here rather than a sign? (**The word starts on it.**) What is the dot on ஂ doing? (**Removing the built-in a.**) Next: pointing someone out politely.

37.4 இவர் (ivar) — “this person,” and Tamil’s pointing system

Naṇban, naṇbi, naṇbar — and the root behind them. (*Naṇṇu*, to draw near.) You have the word for a friend, but cannot point at one.

You’ll want to know: இவர்

இவர் — *ivar* — **this person** (near me, spoken of respectfully)

Not “he” and not “she”: இவர் is what you say about a person standing here whom you are treating with respect, and it does not commit you to their sex. It is built on இவன் (*ivan*) and இவள் (*ival*), with the same -அர் that gave you நண்பர்.

One caution about speech: இவர் is heard mostly of men, and இவங்க (*ivaṅga*) does the same respectful job for a woman.

The letters in this word

இ + வ + ஂ. இ is the standing vowel *i* — the letter, not the ி sign that hangs on a consonant. வ is the *va* opening வணக்கம் and வீடு. ஂ is the soft *r* with a pulli.

A word this short is almost all arc, which is the moment to recall the usual explanation for that roundness: Tamil was scratched into palm leaf, and a straight stroke along the grain can split the leaf. Hold it as the writing lesson asked — **the standard account, not a settled fact**, since

the earliest Tamil writing was cut into stone and is angular. What survives is the useful part: **the tool leaves fingerprints on the letters.**

Grammar Lens: near, far, and which

இவர் is one cell of a system, and the system is a single letter at the front:

the front letter	what it does
இ-	points near — this one, here
அ-	points away — that one, there
எ-	asks — which one

So இவர் is “this person,” அவர் (*avar*) “that person,” எவர் (*avar*) “which person.” You have been using one front already: என்ன (*enna*), “what,” is the எ- of asking.

Two honest notes. எ- is the **question**, not a third distance. And Old Tamil had a genuine third distance, உ-, for something visible but far off; modern Tamil has retired it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the three fronts — “i- ... a- ... e-”
- the row they build — “ivar, avar, evar”
- the question word you already had — “enna”
- the respectful ending on both — “naṇbar ... ivar”

Before you move on

What do இ-, அ- and எ- do at the front of a word, and which question word you already knew is built on எ-? (**Near; away; asks** — and என்ன.) Does இவர் tell you whether the person is a man or a woman? (**No** — it marks **respect**; spoken Tamil leans இவங்க for a woman.) How firmly should you hold the palm-leaf explanation for the curves? (As **the standard account, not a settled fact.**)

37.5 அவர் (avar) — the far half of a table you already have

Say the word for *this person*, the respectful one.

Now say which front letter points **near** and which points **away**.

You were given both. **The lesson before this one filled in only the near half.**

You'll want to know: அவர்

அவர் — *avar* — **that person** (away from you, spoken of respectfully)

One letter is the whole change. இவர் becomes அவர், and *this person here* becomes *that person there* — or, far more often, plain **he** or **she** about somebody who is not in the room.

Like இவர், it does not commit you to their sex, and like இவர் it carries respect. The caution is the same one the earlier lesson gave: அவர் is heard mostly of men, and அவங்க (*avaṅga*) does the same respectful job for a woman in speech.

Grammar Lens: the column that was empty

	near	far
a person, respectfully	இவர்	அவர்

The pointing system arrived a long way back, and it arrived as a **rule about a front letter** with only the near column filled in. A reader could say *this person* and could say what அ- would mean, and had no அ- word to say.

That is the ordinary way a gap survives: the pattern gets taught, the pattern is correct, and nobody notices that half of what it predicts was never handed over.

Filling it costs one letter, and from here அவர் is the word you reach for whenever you talk about somebody who is not present — which is most of the talking anybody does.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- அவர்
- the near partner of it
- which single letter is the difference
- whether அவர் tells you the person is a man or a woman (it does not)

Before you move on

What does அவர் mean? (*That person*, respectfully — or plain *he* or *she* about somebody elsewhere.) Which front letter does it carry, and what does that letter do? (அ-, which points away.)

37.6 இவர் என் நண்பர் — “this is my friend”

Ivar, avar, evar — near, away, the question. Then *nanban, nanbi, nanbar*. Everything this lesson needs is in your mouth; what is left is the order.

You’ll want to know: the introduction

இவர் என் நண்பர். — *ivar en nanbar* — This is my friend.

Three words, and **not one of them is a verb**. Tamil links two nouns by setting them beside each other, as in என் பெயர் ... and என் தவறு.

The pieces in order: இவர், the person here; என், my; நண்பர், friend-with-respect. Then stop.

The whole meeting:

— வணக்கம். இவர் என் நண்பர்.

— வணக்கம். உங்கள் ஊர் என்ன.

Every word in it is yours.

The letters in this word

என் is எ with ன், the alveolar n dotted shut. நண்பர் opens on dental ந, turns on retroflex ண், closes on ர். So one line makes you produce ன் and ண் within a breath of each other — one at the ridge, the other with the tongue curled back. Hear that difference and the three-way n is no longer theory.

Why it's said this way

நண்பர் rather than நண்பன் is a decision, not a default.

- இவர் என் நண்பன். — a male friend, plainly stated; warm among peers.
- இவர் என் நண்பி. — a female friend, the matching plain form.
- இவர் என் நண்பர். — the respectful ending; safe with anyone, and right when either party is older or senior.

If unsure, take நண்பர். Over-respect is invisible; under-respect is not. Notice how differently Tamil makes you think from one word to the next. For a **sibling** it forces **age**: there is no bare “brother” — you must choose அண்ணன் or தம்பி, அக்கா or தங்கை, and say whether they are older or younger than you before you can say anything at all. For a **friend** it forces **sex or respect**. For **parents**, nothing: அப்பா and அம்மா came into the language whole. Tamil rarely lets you be vague about a relationship.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the introduction — “ivar en naṇbar”
- the same line to a peer about a male friend — “ivar en naṇban”
- the greeting and the question around it — “vaṇakkam ... uṅgaḷ ūr enna”
- what a sibling word forces you to decide — “aṇṇan, older; tambi, younger”

Before you move on

Introduce a friend respectfully, and say how many verbs the sentence has. (*Ivar en naṇbar*; **none**.) What does a sibling word force you to decide that a friend word does not? (**Whether they are older or younger** — *aṇṇan* against *tambi*.) Which friend

ending is safe when unsure, and what does இ- tell your listener?
(நண்பர்; that the person is **near**.)

Chapter 38

Keeping Well, and Leaving

Modes: 👁 eyes (3) ✍ pen (1) 🖐 Hands-free start: first 3 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask உங்கள் உடம்பு எப்படி இருக்கு?, recognise சுகமா? and place it as the Sanskrit-derived option beside native நலம், say விடை பெறுகிறேன், and show that விடு, வீடு and விடை are one root while ஊர் and நண்பன் are not.

Close the visit with நன்றி. விடை பெறுகிறேன்., put விடு, வீடு and விடை in one dictionary entry, refuse the second விடை that means 'bull' and came from Sanskrit, and refuse to join ஊர் and நண்பன் to the pattern just because they are nearby.

38.1 உடம்பு (uḍambu) — “body,” and how Tamil asks after your health

Introduce a friend respectfully and name the ending. (*Ivar en naṇbar* — the respectful -அர்.) Next you would ask how they are.

You'll want to know: உடம்பு

உடம்பு — *uḍambu* — body

The whole of it, not a part. You have தலை (*talai*) and கை (*kai*) already; this is what they belong to, and the word inside the question Tamil speakers actually ask:

உங்கள் உடம்பு எப்படி இருக்கு — *uṅgal uḍambu eppaḍi irukku* — **how is your body**, that is, **how are you keeping**

Every piece is yours: உங்கள், எப்படி, and இருக்கு from இரு. What is new is that the health question hangs on a **noun** rather than on you.

Tamil has a second way to ask it, through உணவு — the noun standing on உண், “to eat.” Asking whether somebody has eaten is asking whether they are all right.

The letters in this word

உ + ட + ம் + பு: the standing vowel *u*, *ḍ*, then *m* — *ṁ* shut by the pulli you have used since வணக்கம் — and பு. *ṁ* was one of the first letters you formed with a pen, alongside retroflex ண.

The letters in this word

The letters say *u-ṭa-m-pu*; your mouth says *uḍambu*. *ḍ* sits between vowels, so it softens — the *paḍi* rule. *ṁ* follows the nasal *m*, so it voices — the *nanri* rule that also made *nanban*. Two rules, one short word, neither written down.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

Tamil has another word for the body, உடல் (*uḍal*), and the Dravidian dictionary does not treat them as rivals: உடல், உடம்பு and உடலம் sit in the **same entry**, with Kannada’s உಡಲು beside them. Usage has divided them: உடல் leans literary, உடம்பு is what you say aloud about someone unwell.

Grammar Lens: where the person goes in a health question

Two shapes Tamil uses to ask about a state:

the question	where the person sits
உங்கள் உடம்பு எப்படி இருக்கு	as a possessor
உனக்கு எத்தனை வயது ஆகிறது	in the dative

The formal age question does not make you the subject at all — “**to you**, how many years are becoming.” The body question makes உடம்பு the subject.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the two softenings — “uṭampu ... uḍambu”
- the question — “uṅgaḷ uḍambu eppaḍi irukku”
- the parts, the whole, and the two forms of one root — “talai, kai ... uḍambu ... uḍal”

Before you move on

Ask someone respectfully how they are keeping, through the body, and name the two sound rules inside *uḍambu*. (*Uṅgaḷ uḍambu eppaḍi irukku*; ʌ softens **between** vowels, ɓ voices **after** a nasal.) Are உடல் and உடம்பு different words, and where does the person sit in the formal age question? (**No**, same entry; **in the dative**.)

38.2 சுகம் (sugam) — “ease,” the word Tamil did borrow

Health through the body, and the other body-word in its entry. (*Uṅgaḷ uḍambu eppaḍi irukku*; uḍal.) A second answer came from abroad.

You’ll want to know: சுகம்

சுகம் — *sugam* — wellbeing, ease, comfort

The க is doing its old trick: the letter is *ka*, but between vowels it comes out *g*. *Su-g-am*, not *su-ka-m*.

சுகமா — *sugamā* — keeping well

It is **not** the ordinary Tamil “how are you,” which is நல்லா இருக்கீங்களா. சுகமா is warmer and more Sanskritic, and which you hear depends on somebody’s ஊர் — the native place whose name so often ends in *-ūr*.

The letters in this word

சு + க + ம்: ச with the *u* sign, a bare க, ம closed by the pulli. Nothing is doubled — hold that against மன்னிக்கவும், where ன்னி has ன dotted shut and written a second time, and க்க does the same to க.

Grammar Lens: where the dative is required

சுகமா has no dative in it, and a family of Tamil states demands one: எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும், “to me, Tamil is known.” Put a noun there and the shapes part:

the phrase	what happened
நான் to எனக்கு	the pronoun changes its body
நண்பர் to நண்பருக்கு	the noun just takes -உக்கு

So நண்பருக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும், and the formal age question does the same: உனக்கு எத்தனை வயது ஆகிறது. சுகமா does not: knowing and ageing come *to* a person; being well is what a person **is**.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

சுகம் is Sanskrit सुख (*sukha*), “ease” — the apology lesson in reverse. There, மன்னிக்கவும் stood on Tamil’s own மன்னி while the neighbours built their “sorry” on Sanskrit *kṣamā*. Here Tamil borrowed *sukha* and **kept** நலம் as the everyday word; Malayalam took the same loan, സുഖം, as its ordinary greeting. The old parse of *sukha* is *su-* “good” plus *kha* “aperture” — a chariot’s axle-hole. **Treat that as contested:** the standard Sanskrit dictionary hedges it with “said to be,” and offers *su-stha*.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the softened க — “sugam,” not “sukam”
- the state that needs a dative — “naṇbarukkuṭ tamīl teriyum”
- the state that does not, and the word kept beside it — “sugamā ... nalam”

Before you move on

Why is க heard as *g*, and what did the noun do that நான் does not? (**Between vowels**; it **takes** -உக்கு, while நான் becomes எனக்கு.) Which word did Tamil borrow, which did it keep, and how firm is the “good axle-hole” story? (சுகம்; நலம்; **contested**.)

38.3 விடை (vidai) — “leave,” and the root under the house

Sugam — which language it came from, and which Tamil word stayed beside it. (Sanskrit; நலம்.) You came through the door, took the நாற்காலி — four legs, counted out — were given tea, said என் தவறு when the wrong cup arrived, and introduced a friend. One thing is left.

You’ll want to know: விடை

விடை — *vidai* — leave; permission to depart

Not the act of going — you have போய் வருகிறேன் for that — but the **leave itself**, taken with பெறு (*peru*), “to obtain”:

நன்றி. விடை பெறுகிறேன். — *nanri. vidai perugirēn.* —
Thank you. I take my leave.

It is **formal and slightly literary**; leaving a friend’s house you would say போய் வருகிறேன்.

The தயவுசெய்து you learned for asking has a family across the Dravidian languages, all built on the same *daya*, “kindness,” plus a light verb. Leaving is not.

The letters in this word

வி + டை. வி is வ with the ி sign — the first vowel sign you learned, which made நன்றி possible. டை is ட with the ஐ sign ை, which wraps around the front.

நன்றி stands beside it above, so read it once more: ந + ன் + றி — dental n, alveolar n dotted shut, hard ற with that same ி. And பெறுகிறேன் has a க between vowels, so it softens.

The word, taken apart — its roots and family

விடை is inherited Dravidian, and belongs to விடு (*viḍu*), “to let go.” Leave is what you are *let go* with.

Now the first word of these lessons. வீடு, “house,” is filed by the Dravidian dictionary in the **same entry as** விடு — and விடை is in it too:

the word	what it is
விடு <i>viḍu</i>	to let go, to release
வீடு <i>vīḍu</i>	the house — and, in the old sense, final release
விடை <i>viḍai</i>	leave to depart

You walked in through வீடு and walk out through விடை, one word in different clothes. Kannada’s ಬೀಡು, the same house with its *b-*, sits on that root as well.

Two cautions, because a neat pattern is when to slow down. A second விடை means “bull,” a Sanskrit borrowing from *vr̥ṣa*; and ஊர் — the settlement inside Tanjore — and நண்பன் are outside this root entirely.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the departure — “nanri. viḍai perugirēn.”
- the one root, three ways — “viḍu ... vīḍu ... viḍai”
- the two that do not join it — “ūr ... naṇban”

Before you move on

Take your leave formally, thanks in front of it, and name the earlier word that shares this root. (*Nanri. viḍai perugirēn.*; வீடு, from விடு, “to let go.”) Do ஊர் and நண்பன் belong to that root? (No — a settlement and a closeness; not everything joins up.)

38.4 மூன்று — the fourth corner of the u-family

Three corners of one family are already yours: உ and ஊ, the letters that open a word, and ஁, the short sign that rides a

consonant. One corner is missing, and you can guess what it does.

Script you’ll notice: the ூ sign

ூ is the sign for long $\bar{u}$ — the long partner of ு, exactly as ஁ is the long partner of ஁. Both members of each pair, in both jobs:

	opens a word	rides a consonant
short u	஁	ு
long $\bar{u}$	஁	ூ

ம + ூ → மூ, said $m\bar{u}$.

The four corners are a pattern, not the whole system. Short **a** is the vowel with no sign at all: the data says a consonant carries a built-in *a* until a mark replaces it, which is why க needs nothing to be *ka*. Nor do signs all sit in one place — the ூ you met in இல்லை is written to the LEFT of its consonant, which the data does say; where ு and ூ sit is this lesson’s own description, since the data has no entry for either.

Read it; do not draw it yet. None of ஁, ஁, ு or ூ has an entry in this book’s script data, so none of them gets a stroke order, and the pairing above is what the page shows rather than something the data states.

Script you’ll notice: build the word

piece		
மூ	$m\bar{u}$ — ம with the ூ sign	ம from வணக்கம்
ன்	bare $\bar{n}$ — ன under a pulli	the alveolar n
று	ru — ற, the hard r , with the ு sign	ற from நன்றி

மூ · ன் · று → மூன்று

Three pieces, one new sign. மூன்று is “three” — a word you have counted with since chapter 7, and now one you can read. It joins இரண்டு,

நான்கு, ஆறு, எட்டு and பத்து, whose letters the strand has already given you; ஐந்து and ஏழு still wait on letters this book has not taught, and ஒன்று and ஒன்பது wait on one it is about to.

Your turn

- *Read it:* மூ — then மூன்று
- *Say it:* “mūnru” — “three”
- *Contrast:* று and மூ — the short sign and the long one, both riding
- *Contrast:* ஊர் and மூன்று — long $\bar{u}$ standing, then long $\bar{u}$ riding

Before you move on

Read மூன்று. Which sign is ூ’s short partner, and which letter is its standing form? (ஃ, and ஊ.) Name the four corners of that family. (உ ஊ standing, ஃ ூ riding.) What is the dot on ன் doing? (**Removing the built-in *a*.**) Next: asking for what you want.

Chapter 39

Asking for What You Want

Modes: 👁 eyes (3) ✍ pen (1) 🖐 Hands-free start: first 3 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say எனக்குத் ... வேண்டும் with myself in the dative and no subject at all, decline with வேண்டாம் rather than இல்லை, ask a price with எவ்வளவு and say why age took எத்தனை instead, put ஒரு in front of a noun where ஒன்று cannot go, and read ஒ in both shapes of “one”.

Order one tea end to end — ask தேநீர் எவ்வளவு?, say ஒரு தேநீர் வேண்டும், decline the second with வேண்டாம் — and say why ஒன்று cannot stand in front of the noun.

39.1 வேண்டும் (vēṇḍum) — “I want,” with no I in it

Say “I know Tamil” and name what is missing. (*Enakkut tamil teriyum* — **no subject**; knowing happens **to** you.) You have met that shape with தெரியும், புரிகிறது and பிடிக்கும். Here it is on the verb that asks for things.

You’ll want to know: வேண்டும்

வேண்டும் — *vēṇḍum* — is wanted, that is, I want / I need

எனக்குத் தண்ணீர் வேண்டும் — *enakkut taṇṇīr vēṇḍum* — to me, water is wanted

English makes wanting something you do. Tamil does not: the thing wanted is the subject, and you sit in the **dative** — எனக்கு, the irregular one whose pronoun changes body before the suffix lands. Swap it and you change who wants it, with nothing else touched: உங்களுக்குத் தண்ணீர் வேண்டும் — the joining த் survives the swap, because it is the **dative** that licenses it. Compare நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன்: same hard த in front, no dative behind, no doubling.

The letters in this word

வே + ண் + டு + ம்: வ with the ே of பேசு, retroflex ண under a pulli, ட from எப்படி with the ு of இருக்கிறீர்கள், and ம under a pulli — a four-piece word the strand owes you nothing for.

The letters in this word

The letters say *vē-n-tu-m*; your mouth says *vēṇḍum*. ட follows the nasal ண், so it voices — the நன்றி rule, as in *naṇban*.

Grammar Lens: the negative comes from somewhere else

You have negated with இல்லை since chapter 1. This verb refuses it.

I want it	வேண்டும்
I don't want it	வேண்டாம்

Not *vēṇḍum illai*. Tamil supplies a **separate negative word** on the same வேண்ட- stem. வேண்டாம் declines politely; இல்லை is understood, but sounds translated.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “enakkut taṇṇīr vēṇḍum” — and hear that no *I* is doing anything
- *Read it*: தண்ணீர் — the word from the rice-and-water pair, unchanged
- *Say it*: yours, then theirs — “enakkut taṇṇīr vēṇḍum” ... “uṅgalukkut taṇṇīr vēṇḍum”
- *Read it*: வேண்டும் — four pieces, no new letters

Before you move on

Ask for water, and say where you sit in it. (*Enakkut taṇṇīr vēṇḍum*; **in the dative**.) Why not இல்லை to decline? (வேண்டாம் — a **separate negative word**.) Why does ட sound like *d*? (A **nasal** in front.) Next: how to ask what it costs.

39.2 எவ்வளவு (evvaḷavu) — “how much,” and the question it is not

Ask for water, with yourself in the right case. (*Enakkut taṇṇīr vēṇḍum*.) Now you need the other half of any transaction: what it costs.

You’ll want to know: எவ்வளவு

எவ்வளவு — *evvaḷavu* — **how much**

தேநீர் எவ்வளவு? — *tēnīr evvaḷavu?* — **how much is the tea?**

It opens with the எ- that starts every Tamil question word you have met — எப்படி, எத்தனை, என்ன, எவர். That does not run the other way — என், எனக்கு and எட்டு open with it too — but no question word you have met starts anywhere else.

Grammar Lens: measure or count

English has two phrases for this too, and lets you slide between them. Tamil does not: the choice is lexical, and the line falls in the same place:

	asks about	example
எத்தனை	things you count, one by one	எத்தனை வயது — how many years
எவ்வளவு	quantity, extent, price	தேநீர் எவ்வளவு — how much is the tea

You already used எத்தனை for age, because years are counted. Money is not counted that way — you ask எவ்வளவு for a price even when the answer comes back as a number of rupees.

The test is not whether an answer has digits in it. It is whether the language treats the thing as a **heap** or as a **row**.

The letters in this word

எ + வ் + வ + ள + வு: the standing எ from என், then வ shut by a pulli and வ again, the retroflex ள from நீங்கள், and வ a third time carrying the ு sign.

Three வs in a five-piece word. The doubled வ்வ at the front is what makes it sound clipped rather than drawled.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “tēnīr evvaḷavu?” — then answer yourself with a number
- *Contrast:* “ettanai vayathu” and “tēnīr evvaḷavu” — counted, measured
- *Read it:* எவ்வளவு — find all three வ
- *Read it:* க உ ந ச ரு — then answer *evvaḷavu?* by pointing at one

Before you move on

Ask what the tea costs. (*Tēnīr evvaḷavu?*) Which question word did age take, and why is price different? (எத்தனை — years are **counted**; price asks about **quantity**.) What do all these question words share at the front? (எ-.) Next: how Tamil says “one” when it is not counting.

39.3 ஒரு (oru) — “one,” when it is not counting

Ask what the tea costs, then ask for it. (*Tēnīr evvaḷavu? ... Enakku ... vēṇḍum.*) One word is missing from the middle of that: how many.

You’ll want to know: ஒரு

ஒரு — *oru* — a, one

ஒரு தேநீர் வேண்டும் — *oru tēnīr vēṇḍum* — one tea,
please

You learned ஒன்று in chapter 7 as the number one. ஒரு is the same word in the shape it takes when it leans on a noun. Tamil will not let you say *onru tēnīr*.

Grammar Lens: the counting form and the leaning form

	shape	where it stands
the number itself	ஒன்று	alone — counting, answering “how many”
in front of a noun	ஒரு	ஒரு தேநீர், ஒரு நாள்

Other numbers have paired shapes of their own. This book does not set out to list them — meet ஒரு here, and expect the pattern rather than a rule.

This is also how Tamil manages without the word “a.” There is no article in the language; ஒரு does that work when you want it done, and nothing does it when you do not. தேநீர் வேண்டும் is perfectly good — it just does not specify one.

The letters in this word

ஒ + ரு: a standing vowel, then ர — one of the two *r*-letters, from சரி — carrying the ு sign.

ஒ is one of three standing vowels the book still owes you; ஏ and ஐ are the others, and they are still outstanding. ஒ goes first because it opens both ஒரு and ஒன்று, and the next lesson pays it.

Your turn

Order something, start to finish.

- *Say it:* “tēnīr evvaḷavu?”
- *Say it:* “oru tēnīr vēṇḍum”
- *Say it:* decline a second one — “vēṇḍām”
- *Contrast:* “onru” alone, “oru tēnīr” in front of a noun

- *Recall*: say *ūr*, then read நண்பன், then say *ivar*

Before you move on

Order one tea and refuse a second. (*Oru tēnīr vēṇḍum ... vēṇḍām.*)
Why not *onru tēnīr*? (ஒன்று is the **counting** shape; in front of a noun the word **leans** and becomes ஒரு.) Does Tamil have a word for “a”? (No — ஒரு does that work when you want it.) Next: the letter both shapes begin with.

39.4 ஒன்று — the letter under both shapes of “one”

You have just used ஒரு in front of a noun and ஒன்று on its own. Both begin with the same letter — one this book has printed since chapter 7 and the writing strand has never once opened up.

Script you’ll notice: ஒ

ஒ — *o* — a standing vowel: the form that opens a word, rather than a sign that rides a consonant

It joins the standing vowels you already read: அ ஆ இ உ ஊ எ. Those seven do not exhaust Tamil’s twelve — this book teaches the ones its own words need. ஒ goes first of the three because it opens the most words in this book: ஒரு, ஒன்று, and ஒன்பது, which chapter 7 showed you carrying the same ஒன்- at its front.

Read it; do not draw it yet. ஒ has no entry in this book’s script data, so it gets no stroke order, and nothing here describes how the pen moves.

Script you'll notice: build the word

piece

ஒ	<i>o</i>	this lesson
ன்	bare <i>n</i> — ன under a pulli	the alveolar <i>n</i>
று	<i>ru</i> — ற with the ூ sign	ற from நன்றி

ஒ · ன் · று → ஒன்று

The last two pieces are the ones you built மூன்று from, in the same order. Three and one differ only in what stands in front of ன்று.

Script you'll notice: the same letter, the shorter word

ஒ + ரு → ஒரு

Two pieces, and you can read the form that leans on a noun as well as the form that counts. ஒரு தேநீர் is now a line you can order aloud and read off a board.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ஒ — then ஒரு — then ஒன்று
- *Contrast:* ஒன்று and மூன்று — same ன்று, and மூ carries the ூ sign where ஒ stands alone
- *Say it:* “oru ... onru” — the leaning shape, then the counting one

Before you move on

Read ஒன்று, then ஒரு. What do ஒன்று and மூன்று share, and where do they differ? (They share ன்று at the end; they differ in the piece that opens them.) What is the dot on ன் doing?
(Removing the built-in *a*.)

Chapter 40

Pointing, and Asking

Modes: ⇄ voice (7) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can point at something in Tamil and ask who or where it is — and I can say what the six words have in common.

Say the near word, the far word and the question word in a row, and name the part that changed.

40.1 இது (idu) — this one — the thing near me

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: இது

இது — *idu* — this one — the thing near me.

Say it, and point while you say it. That is the whole word: it does not mean anything on its own, it means whatever your finger is on.

Its partner is அது *adu*, which you will meet in a moment. The two of them differ by one sound at the front — **i-** for near — and that is not a coincidence. It is the whole system, and the last lesson of this chapter says so.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “இது” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it:* it once with a word you already know after it

- Recall: say *uḍambu*

Before you move on

What is *idu*? (this one — the thing near me.) What sound does it start with, and does that sound mean near, far, or a question? (**i-** — near.)

40.2 அது (adu) — that one — the thing over there

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: அது

அது — *adu* — that one — the thing over there.

Say it, and point while you say it. That is the whole word: it does not mean anything on its own, it means whatever your finger is on.

Its partner is இது *idu*, which you will meet just now. The two of them differ by one sound at the front — **a-** for far — and that is not a coincidence. It is the whole system, and the last lesson of this chapter says so.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “அது” three times, pointing at something different each time
- it once with a word you already know after it

Before you move on

What is *adu*? (that one — the thing over there.) What sound does it start with, and does that sound mean near, far, or a question? (**a-** — far.)

40.3 இங்கே (iṅgē) — here — where I am

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: இங்கே

இங்கே — *iṅgē* — here — where I am.

Say it, and point while you say it. That is the whole word: it does not mean anything on its own, it means whatever your finger is on.

Its partner is அங்கே *aṅgē*, which you will meet in a moment. The two of them differ by one sound at the front — **i-** for near — and that is not a coincidence. It is the whole system, and the last lesson of this chapter says so.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “இங்கே” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it*: it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall*: say *sugam*, then read எவ்வளவு

Before you move on

What is *iṅgē*? (here — where I am.) What sound does it start with, and does that sound mean near, far, or a question? (**i-** — near.)

40.4 அங்கே (*aṅgē*) — there — where I am not

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: அங்கே

அங்கே — *aṅgē* — there — where I am not.

Say it, and point while you say it. That is the whole word: it does not mean anything on its own, it means whatever your finger is on.

Its partner is இங்கே *iṅgē*, which you will meet just now. The two of them differ by one sound at the front — **a-** for far — and that is not a coincidence. It is the whole system, and the last lesson of this chapter says so.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “அங்கே” three times, pointing at something different each time
- it once with a word you already know after it

Before you move on

What is *aṅgē*? (there — where I am not.) What sound does it start with, and does that sound mean near, far, or a question? (a- — far.)

40.5 யார் (yār) — who? — asking about a person

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You’ll want to know: யார்

யார் — *yār* — who? — asking about a person.

Say it, and point while you say it. That is the whole word: it does not mean anything on its own, it means whatever your finger is on.

Its partner is எங்கே *eṅgē*, which you will meet in a moment. The two of them differ by one sound at the front — e- for ask — and that is not a coincidence. It is the whole system, and the last lesson of this chapter says so.

Your turn

- *Say it*: “யார்” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it*: it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall*: say *vidai*, then read ஒரு

Before you move on

What is *yār*? (who? — asking about a person.) What sound does it start with, and does that sound mean near, far, or a question? (e- — ask.)

40.6 எங்கே (eṅḡē) — where? — asking about a place

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: எங்கே

எங்கே — *eṅḡē* — where? — asking about a place.

Say it, and point while you say it. That is the whole word: it does not mean anything on its own, it means whatever your finger is on.

Its partner is யார் *yār*, which you will meet just now. The two of them differ by one sound at the front — **e-** for ask — and that is not a coincidence. It is the whole system, and the last lesson of this chapter says so.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “எங்கே” three times, pointing at something different each time
- it once with a word you already know after it

Before you move on

What is *eṅḡē*? (where? — asking about a place.) What sound does it start with, and does that sound mean near, far, or a question? (**e-** — ask.)

40.7 i- / a- / e- — six words, one machine

Say the six words from this chapter out loud, in order. Listen to how they begin.

Grammar lens: one slot changes

You did not learn six words. You learned **three beginnings** and reused them.

meaning	word
near	இங்கே <i>iṅgē</i>
far	அங்கே <i>aṅgē</i>
question	எங்கே <i>eṅgē</i>

Tamil shows the system at its cleanest: இது, அது, எது differ in one letter.

Change the front, and the meaning walks from **near** to **far** to **a question**. Nothing else in the word moves.

The same three beginnings run the thing-words too: இது *idu* and அது *adu* start exactly like the first two rows. This chapter did not teach you the matching question word for things — that one arrives later, and when it does you will already know what it has to start with. This is worth more than the six words are. When you meet a new word in this family later, you will not have to be taught all three of it — you will be taught one and work out the others.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the near word, then the far word, then the question word
- *Say it:* them again for place, not for things
- *Notice:* the part that did NOT change

Before you move on

Which beginning means near? (i-) Far? (a-) And which one turns the word into a question? (e-)

Chapter 41

Describing Things

Modes: 🗣️ voice (6) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can point at something in Tamil and ask who or where it is — and I can say what the six words have in common.

Say the near word, the far word and the question word in a row, and name the part that changed.

41.1 பெரிய (periya) — big

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: பெரிய

பெரிய — *periya* — big.

Put it in front of a word you already know and you have said something new. That is all an adjective does in this language.

The last lesson of this chapter gives the one rule that governs every adjective you will ever meet here.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “பெரிய” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it:* it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall:* say *vēṇḍum*, then read இது, then say *adu*

Before you move on

What is *periya*? (**big**.) Where does it go — before the word it describes, or after? (**Before**.)

41.2 சிறிய (*siriya*) — small

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: சிறிய

சிறிய — *siriya* — small.

Put it in front of a word you already know and you have said something new. That is all an adjective does in this language.

You met பெரிய *periya* a moment ago. Put them side by side and nothing about either one changes.

The last lesson of this chapter gives the one rule that governs every adjective you will ever meet here.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “சிறிய” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it:* it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall:* read எவ்வளவு, then say *ingē*

Before you move on

What is *siriya*? (**small**.) Where does it go — before the word it describes, or after? (**Before**.)

41.3 நல்ல (*nalla*) — good

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: நல்ல

நல்ல — *nalla* — good.

Put it in front of a word you already know and you have said something new. That is all an adjective does in this language.

You met சிறிய *siriya* a moment ago. Put them side by side and nothing about either one changes.

The last lesson of this chapter gives the one rule that governs every adjective you will ever meet here.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “நல்ல” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it:* it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall:* say *aṅgē*

Before you move on

What is *nalla*? (**good.**) Where does it go — before the word it describes, or after? (**Before.**)

41.4 புதிய (pudiya) — new

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You'll want to know: புதிய

புதிய — *pudiya* — new.

Put it in front of a word you already know and you have said something new. That is all an adjective does in this language.

You met நல்ல *nalla* a moment ago. Put them side by side and nothing about either one changes.

The last lesson of this chapter gives the one rule that governs every adjective you will ever meet here.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “புதிய” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it:* it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall:* read ஒரு, then say *yār*

Before you move on

What is *pudiya*? (**new.**) Where does it go — before the word it describes, or after? (**Before.**)

41.5 பழைய (*palaiya*) — old — of a thing, not of a person

You can already name things. This is how you POINT at them.

You’ll want to know: பழைய

பழைய — *palaiya* — old — of a thing, not of a person.

Put it in front of a word you already know and you have said something new. That is all an adjective does in this language.

You met புதிய *pudiya* a moment ago. Put them side by side and nothing about either one changes.

The last lesson of this chapter gives the one rule that governs every adjective you will ever meet here.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “பழைய” three times, pointing at something different each time
- *Say it:* it once with a word you already know after it
- *Recall:* say *eṅē*

Before you move on

What is *palaiya*? (old — of a thing, not of a person.) Where does it go — before the word it describes, or after? (**Before.**)

41.6 before the noun, unchanged — five words, one rule

Say the five words from this chapter out loud, then say each one in front of a noun you already know.

Grammar lens: where an adjective goes

You did not learn five separate words. You learned **where an adjective goes**, and five words that go there.

meaning	word
big	பெரிய <i>periya</i>
small	சிறிய <i>siriya</i>
good	நல்ல <i>nalla</i>

Every one of them ends in -a and none of them ever changes.

This is worth more than the five words are. Every noun you already know — your name, the house, the water, the day — can now take any of them in front, and every adjective you meet from here goes in the same place.

Your turn

- *Say it*: each of the five in front of a noun you already know
- *Say it*: two of them with the same noun, one after the other
- *Notice*: whether the adjective changed shape when the noun did

Before you move on

Where does an adjective go in this language? (**In front of the noun.**) Does it change shape to match the noun? (unchanged.)

Chapter 42

More Everyday Verbs

Modes: ⇄ voice (4) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can tell someone to come, sit, read and give in Tamil.

Complete TA-C42-give and say all four verbs in order.

42.1 வா (vā) — come

A short run of everyday verbs, one at a time.

You'll want to know: வா

வா (*vā*) — “come”.

One syllable, and a complete sentence. The first thing said at a doorway, and the shortest verb form Tamil has: the bare stem, with nothing added.

What you've built

One more everyday action. Three follow, and each reuses the ones before.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *vā*
- it once more, slowly

Before you move on

What does வா mean? (“come”.) Say it once more.

42.2 உட்கார் (uṭkāṛ) — sit

Before the new one: what did *vā* mean?

You’ll want to know: உட்கார்

உட்கார் (*uṭkāṛ*) — “sit”.

Built from *ul*, ‘inside’, and *kār* — to settle oneself in. Tamil often builds a verb from a place-word plus an action this way.

What you’ve built

One more everyday action. Three follow, and each reuses the ones before.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *uṭkāṛ*
- it once more, slowly
- it after *vā*, so the two sit together

Before you move on

What does உட்கார் mean? (“sit”.) Say it once more.

42.3 படி (paṭi) — read

Before the new one: what did *uṭkāṛ* mean?

You'll want to know: படி

படி (*paṭi*) — “read”.

Also ‘to study’. The same word covers reading a page and studying a subject, so a student *paṭikkirār* whether they are holding a book or not.

What you've built

One more everyday action. Three follow, and each reuses the ones before.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *paṭi*
- it once more, slowly
- it after *uṭkār*, so the two sit together

Before you move on

What does படி mean? (“read”.) Say it once more.

42.4 கொடு (*koṭu*) — give

Before the new one: what did *paṭi* mean?

You'll want to know: கொடு

கொடு (*koṭu*) — “give”.

The everyday ‘give’. Tamil distinguishes giving away from giving toward the speaker; this is the giving-away one.

What you've built

That closes the run: four more actions, each met on its own.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *koṭu*
- it once more, slowly
- it after *paṭi*, so the two sit together

Before you move on

What does கொடு mean? (“give”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 43

The Household

Modes: 🗣️ voice (4) 🗋️ Hands-free start: all 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a child, a son, a daughter and the family in Tamil.

Complete TA-C43-family and say all four words in order.

43.1 குழந்தை (k_ulandai) — child

Before the new one: what did *koṭu* mean?

You'll want to know: குழந்தை

குழந்தை (*k_ulandai*) — “child”.

Take it apart and the stem is *k_ula-*, ‘young, tender’, closed off into a noun by *-ndai*. The same stem stands behind *k_ulavi*, ‘infant’. Nothing in the word says boy or girl: it names the age, not the sex.

What you’ve built

The first of four words for the people in a house. Three follow, and each reuses the ones before.

Your turn

- *Say it: k_ulandai*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*

- *Say it:* it after *koṭu*, so the two sit together
- *Recall:* say *periya*, then read சிறிய

Before you move on

What does குழந்தை mean? (“child”.) Say it once more.

43.2 மகன் (*makaṇ*) — son

Before the new one: what did *kulandai* mean?

You’ll want to know: மகன்

மகன் (*makaṇ*) — “son”.

The stem is *maka-*, an old Dravidian word for offspring, and *-aṇ* is the ending Tamil puts on a male person — the same *-aṇ* already sitting on *naṇbaṇ*, ‘friend’. So the word assembles in front of you: offspring, then male.

What you’ve built

A second word for the house, and an ending you had already met elsewhere.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *makaṇ*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* it after *kulandai*, so the two sit together
- *Recall:* read நல்ல

Before you move on

What does மகன் mean? (“son”.) Say it once more.

43.3 மகள் (*makaḷ*) — daughter

Before the new one: what did *makaṇ* mean?

You'll want to know: மகள்

மகள் (*makaḷ*) — “daughter”.

The same *maka-* stem as the last lesson, with *-aḷ* where that word had *-an*: one ending marks a woman, the other a man. The sibling words you met earlier needed four separate forms to split brother from sister by age; here a single stem does the work of two. Malayalam's *makan* and *makaḷ* match Tamil almost letter for letter.

What you've built

One stem, two endings, two people. One more word closes the chapter.

Your turn

- *Say it: makaḷ*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: it after makan, and hear only the ending move*
- *Recall: say pudiya*

Before you move on

What does மகள் mean? (“daughter”.) Say it once more.

43.4 குடும்பம் (*kuṭumbam*) — family

Before the new one: what did *makaḷ* mean?

You'll want to know: குடும்பம்

குடும்பம் (*kuṭumbam*) — “family”.

The collective word the family lesson never needed, because அப்பா, அம்மா and the four sibling words each named one particular person. It comes from Sanskrit *kuṭumba*, ‘household’ — which Sanskrit itself appears to have taken from a Dravidian source before handing it back — and the *-am* on the end is what Tamil gives such borrowings.

What you've built

That closes the run: child, son, daughter, and the word for all of them together.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kuṭumbam*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* it after *makal*, so the two sit together
- *Recall:* read பழைய

Before you move on

What does குடும்பம் mean? (“family”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 44

Things You Ask For

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name five everyday things I might ask somebody for in Tamil, and say which of them Tamil has held all along and which arrived from elsewhere.

Complete TA-C44-book and say all five words in order.

44.1 பழம் (paḷam) — a fruit

Before the new run of words: what did *makal* mean, and what did *kuṭumbam* mean?

You’ll want to know: பழம்

பழம் (*paḷam*) — “a fruit”.

Underneath it is a root about ripening. Proto-Dravidian ***pal**, ‘to ripen, to grow old’, handed this family both a fruit and an age, and Tamil kept the pair close enough to hear: *palaiya*, the “old” from the run of describing words, is that same root wearing a different ending. Ripe and old are one idea seen twice.

Malayalam says പഴം, very nearly the identical word — the ordinary state of affairs between the two closest sisters. Telugu went to పండు (*paṇḍu*) and Kannada to ಹಣ್ಣು (*haṇṇu*), and the Kannada form has lost its opening *p*- to a shift Tamil sat out entirely.

The ூ in the middle is the letter this book has already spent a writing lesson on, the one only these two sisters still write.

What you've built

The first of five things you might ask somebody for.

Your turn

- *Say it: palam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: palam, then tayavu seytu palam koṭuṅgaḷ — “please give a fruit”*
- *Recall: say vā*

Before you move on

What does பழம் mean? (“a fruit”.) Say it once more.

44.2 துணி (tuṇi) — cloth

Before the new one: what did *palam* mean?

You'll want to know: துணி

துணி (*tuṇi*) — “cloth”.

One shape, two jobs. *tuṇi* is the cloth you wear or wipe your hands on, and *tuṇi* is also ‘to dare, to resolve’. Nothing joins them but sound, and the sentence around them settles which is meant — the ordinary way a language carries two words in one skin.

Malayalam keeps തുണി unchanged. Telugu and Kannada reach for something else here, so this is one of the places where the two closest sisters agree and the other two go their own way.

What you've built

Two: something to eat and something to wear.

Your turn

- *Say it: tuṇi*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *palam*, then *tun̄i*, so the two sit together
- *Recall:* read உட்கார், then say *kulandai*

Before you move on

What does துணி mean? (“cloth”.) Say it once more.

44.3 விளக்கு (*viḷakku*) — a lamp

Before the new one: what did *tun̄i* mean?

You’ll want to know: விளக்கு

விளக்கு (*viḷakku*) — “a lamp”.

It stands on *vilangu*, ‘to shine, to be clear’, so the lamp is named for what it does rather than for what it is made of.

The same stem gives *vilakkam*, ‘clarity’, and *viḷakku* on its own can mean ‘to make something plain’. A lamp and an explanation are the same word in Tamil, which is a better picture of teaching than most languages get for free.

A Tamil house lights one at dusk, at the doorway, and the word turns up wherever that habit does.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third one shines.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *viḷakku*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *tun̄i*, then *viḷakku*, and hear the doubled letter in the second
- *Recall:* say *paṭi*, then read மகன்

Before you move on

What does விளக்கு mean? (“a lamp”.) Say it once more.

44.4 உப்பு (uppu) — salt

Before the new one: what did *vilakku* mean?

You’ll want to know: உப்பு

உப்பு (*uppu*) — “salt”.

Proto-Dravidian ***upp-**, and none of the four sisters did much to it: Malayalam ഉപ്പ്, Telugu ఉప్పు, Kannada ಉಪ್ಪು. Set them beside உப்பு and you are looking at one word in four hands.

A word that stable is usually a word nobody could do without. Salt is also how Tamil talks about savour in general — food with no *uppu* in it is food with nothing in it at all.

What you’ve built

Four, and this one has not changed in a very long time.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *uppu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *vilakku*, then *uppu*, and let the second one stop short
- *Recall:* read கொடு, then say *makal*

Before you move on

What does உப்பு mean? (“salt”.) Say it once more.

44.5 புத்தகம் (puttakam) — a book

Before the new one: what did *uppu* mean?

You'll want to know: புத்தகம்

புத்தகம் (*puttakam*) — “a book”.

Sanskrit *pustaka*, taken in whole, with the *-am* Tamil puts on the end of such arrivals — the same *-am* already sitting on *kuṭumbam*. Malayalam പുസ്തകം, Telugu పుస్తకం and Kannada ಪುಸ್ತಕ are the same borrowing, so the four agree here for a different reason than they agree about salt: not descent, but a shared debt.

Tamil kept its own word alongside. நூல் (*nūl*) is a thread, and thread is what bound palm leaves into a book before there was paper; the same *nūl* still names a written work. The borrowed word and the inherited one divide the job between them rather than fighting over it.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: a fruit, cloth, a lamp, salt, a book.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *puttakam*
- it once more, slowly
- all five in order — *palam*, *tunī*, *vilakku*, *uppu*, *puttakam*

Before you move on

What does புத்தகம் mean? (“a book”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 45

More of the Body

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name five more parts of the body in Tamil, and point to the sound changes that separate them from their Malayalam, Telugu and Kannada cousins.

Complete TA-C45-stomach and say all five words in order.

45.1 கண் (kaṇ) — an eye

Before the new run of words: what did *uppu* mean, and what did *puttakam* mean?

You’ll want to know: கண்

கண் (kaṇ) — “an eye”.

Proto-Dravidian *kaṇ, held almost still everywhere it went: Malayalam കണ്ണ്, Telugu కన్ను, Kannada ಕಣ್ಣು. Tamil’s is the shortest of the four, one syllable and done.

It reaches well past the face. A *kaṇ* is the joint on a stalk of sugarcane and the mesh of a net — wherever a thing has an opening or a knot, Tamil is willing to call it an eye.

talai and *kai*, the head and the hand, came earlier. The face gets its own turn now, one piece at a time.

What you’ve built

The first of five more parts of the body.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kaṇ*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *kaṇ*, then *talai*, so the part and the whole sit together
- *Recall:* say *kuḷandai*, then read பழம்

Before you move on

What does கண் mean? (“an eye”.) Say it once more.

45.2 காது (kādu) — an ear

Before the new one: what did *kaṇ* mean?

You’ll want to know: காது

காது (*kādu*) — “an ear”.

Here it is Tamil that stands apart. *kādu* is the ear a Tamil speaker has, and the other three sisters built their everyday word on a different root altogether: Malayalam ചെവി, Telugu చెవి, Kannada ಕಿವಿ.

Tamil owns that root as well. செவி (*sevi*) names the same organ and is kept for poetry and formal speech — so the word the sisters use over breakfast is the one Tamil holds back for its high register. Two words, one ear, and the occasion decides which.

What you’ve built

Two: an eye and an ear.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kādu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *kaṇ*, then *kādu*, and hear the long *ā* arrive in the second
- *Recall:* read மகன், then say துணி

Before you move on

What does காது mean? (“an ear”.) Say it once more.

45.3 மூக்கு (mūkku) — a nose

Before the new one: what did *kādu* mean?

You’ll want to know: மூக்கு

மூக்கு (*mūkku*) — “a nose”.

Another word the family barely touched: Malayalam മുക്ക്, Telugu ముక్కు, Kannada ಮೂಗು. Only the ending moves.

mūkku also names the point of a thing — the prow of a boat, the tip of a pen. Whatever sticks out in front is the nose of it.

What you’ve built

Three, and all three are on the face.

Your turn

- Say it: *mūkku*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *kādu*, then *mūkku*, and let the second start long
- Recall: say *makaḷ*, then read விளக்கு

Before you move on

What does மூக்கு mean? (“a nose”.) Say it once more.

45.4 பல் (pal) — a tooth

Before the new one: what did *mūkku* mean?

You'll want to know: பல்

பல் (*pal*) — “a tooth”.

Proto-Dravidian ***pal**, and the sisters pulled it three ways. Malayalam പല്ല്, Kannada ಹಲ್ಲು, Telugu పన్ను. Kannada is the odd one again, with the same *p*- to *h*- shift the fruit-word showed; Telugu turned the *l* into an *n*. Tamil stops the word dead on its *l* and adds nothing.

In everyday speech it often comes out *pallu*, with the *l* doubled — which is exactly the shape Malayalam and Kannada put on the page.

What you've built

Four, and the first one you can bite with.

Your turn

- *Say it: pal*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: mūḱku, then pal, and cut the second one short*
- *Recall: read குடும்பம், then say uppu*

Before you move on

What does பல் mean? (“a tooth”.) Say it once more.

45.5 வயிறு (*vayiru*) — the stomach

Before the new one: what did *pal* mean?

You'll want to know: வயிறு

வயிறு (*vayiru*) — “the stomach”.

The ற in the middle is the hard *r* this book met at *arai*, ‘a room’ — not the soft *r* of *peyar*. Malayalam says വയര്, the same word; Telugu and Kannada went elsewhere entirely for this one.

Where an English speaker says they are hungry, Tamil is happy to talk about the *vayiru* and leave the person out of it: the belly is what is empty, and you merely own it. That is the same habit behind *uṅgal uḍambu eppaḍi irukku*, where the health question hangs on the body rather than on you.

What you've built

That closes the run: an eye, an ear, a nose, a tooth, and what holds the food.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *vayiru*
- it once more, slowly
- all five in order — *kaṇ, kādu, mūkku, paḷ, vayiru*

Before you move on

What does வயிறு mean? (“the stomach”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 46

Who Somebody Is

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say what somebody’s work is in Tamil, and recognise the endings that mark a man, a woman and respect.

Complete TA-C46-guest and say all five words in order.

46.1 ஆசிரியர் (āsiriyaṛ) — a teacher

Before the new run of words: what did *pal* mean, and what did *vayiru* mean?

You’ll want to know: ஆசிரியர்

ஆசிரியர் (*āsiriyaṛ*) — “a teacher”.

Sanskrit *ācārya*, one who teaches by how they behave, arriving in Tamil with *-ar* on the end — the respectful ending already met on *ivar* and *naṇbar*. So the word is polite before it is anything else: there is no way to say it that does not show regard.

Tamil keeps the older and plainer ஆசான் (*āsān*) beside it, and that one is what a student of an art calls a master.

What you’ve built

The first of five ways to say who somebody is.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *āsiriyaṛ*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *āsiriyaṛ*, then *naṇbar*, and hear the same ending on both
- *Recall:* say *palam*, then read கண்

Before you move on

What does ஆசிரியர் mean? (“a teacher”.) Say it once more.

46.2 மாணவன் (māṇavan) — a student

Before the new one: what did *āsiriyaṛ* mean?

You’ll want to know: மாணவன்

மாணவன் (*māṇavan*) — “a student”.

Sanskrit *māṇava*, ‘a young person’, with the *-an* Tamil puts on a male — the same *-an* as *makan* and *naṇban*.

Change the ending and the person changes with it: *māṇavi* is a girl studying, *māṇavar* is said with respect or of more than one. One stem, three endings, and you already had all three.

What you’ve built

Two: the one who teaches and the one who is taught.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *māṇavan*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *āsiriyaṛ*, then *māṇavan*, so the pair sit together
- *Recall:* read துணி, then say *kādu*

Before you move on

What does மாணவன் mean? (“a student”.) Say it once more.

46.3 மருத்துவர் (maruttuvar) — a doctor

Before the new one: what did *māṇavan* mean?

You’ll want to know: மருத்துவர்

மருத்துவர் (*maruttuvar*) — “a doctor”.

This one is Tamil’s own. It stands on மருந்து (*marundu*), ‘medicine’, and takes the same respectful *-ar*: the person who deals in medicine.

Beside it sits *vaittiyar*, from Sanskrit *vaidya*, doing the same work with borrowed material. Where a language has both, it usually has a preference, and modern Tamil leans on *maruttuvar* — the signboard on the hospital says so.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third one you hope to need rarely.

Your turn

- *Say it: maruttuvar*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: māṇavan*, then *maruttuvar*, and hear the ending change
- *Recall: say vilakku*, then read மூக்கு

Before you move on

What does மருத்துவர் mean? (“a doctor”.) Say it once more.

46.4 விவசாயி (vivasāyi) — a farmer

Before the new one: what did *maruttuvar* mean?

You'll want to know: விவசாயி

விவசாயி (*vivasāyi*) — “a farmer”.

The ending is *-i*, which Tamil hangs on somebody by their work rather than by their sex, so the one word covers a man and a woman alike.

The stem is borrowed. The inherited word is உழவன் (*ulavan*), built straight on *ulu*, ‘to plough’, and it carries an older weight — Tamil poetry praises the *ulavan*, while a form at an office asks for the *vivasāyi*. Two words, one occupation, two registers.

What you've built

Four, and the fourth one feeds the other three.

Your turn

- *Say it: vivasāyi*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: maruttuvar*, then *vivasāyi*, and let the second end on *-i*
- *Recall: read உப்பு*, then say *pal*

Before you move on

What does விவசாயி mean? (“a farmer”.) Say it once more.

46.5 விருந்தாளி (*viruntāḷi*) — a guest

Before the new one: what did *vivasāyi* mean?

You'll want to know: விருந்தாளி

விருந்தாளி (*viruntāḷi*) — “a guest”.

Take it apart and the guest is named after the meal. The first half is *virundu*, a feast laid on for somebody; the second is *āḷi*, from *āl*, ‘a person’. A guest, in Tamil, is the person a feast is for — the obligation is inside the word, not added to it afterwards.

There is an older form too, *viruntinar*, carrying the *-ar* you now know well. Both say the same thing: somebody has arrived, and there will be food.

What you've built

That closes the run: a teacher, a student, a doctor, a farmer, a guest.

Your turn

- *Say it: viruntāḷi*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — āsiriyaṛ, māṇavaṇ, maruttuvar, vivasāyi, viruntāḷi*
- *Recall: say puttakam, then read வயிறு*

Before you move on

What does விருந்தாளி mean? (“a guest”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 47

Short Replies

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can answer with five short replies in Tamil, from a flat agreement to a hedge.

Complete TA-C47-just-so and say all five words in order.

47.1 உண்மை (uṇmai) — the truth

Before the new run of words: what did *vivasāyi* mean, and what did *viruntāli* mean?

You'll want to know: உண்மை

உண்மை (uṇmai) — “the truth”.

It is built out of *ul*, ‘to be, to exist’, and the *-mai* Tamil adds to turn a quality into something you can name. The truth, then, is is-ness: what is the case.

As a reply it stands on its own. Somebody tells you something surprising and *uṇmai* means “true” — and *uṇmaiā?*, with the question fixed to the end, means “really?”.

What you’ve built

The first of five short replies.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *uṇmai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *uṇmai*, then *sari*, so the two agreements sit together
- *Recall:* say *kaṇ*, then read ஆசிரியர்

Before you move on

What does உண்மை mean? (“the truth”.) Say it once more.

47.2 போதும் (pōdum) — that is enough

Before the new one: what did *uṇmai* mean?

You’ll want to know: போதும்

போதும் (*pōdum*) — “that is enough”.

It grows out of *pōdu*, ‘to suffice’, and it is the polite full stop of a Tamil meal: your host is serving, your plate is filling, and *pōdum* stops it without giving offence. Said twice — *pōdum pōdum* — it means you are serious.

It has nothing to do with *pō*, ‘to go’, though the two look alike at a glance. Different roots, similar clothes.

What you’ve built

Two: agreeing, and calling a halt.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *pōdum*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *uṇmai*, then *pōdum*, and let the second land firmly
- *Recall:* read காது, then say *māṇavan*

Before you move on

What does போதும் mean? (“that is enough”.) Say it once more.

47.3 நிச்சயமாக (nīccayamāka) — certainly

Before the new one: what did *pōdum* mean?

You’ll want to know: நிச்சயமாக

நிச்சயமாக (*nīccayamāka*) — “certainly”.

Sanskrit *nīścaya*, ‘a settled thing’, plus *-āka*, the ending Tamil adds when a word is to describe how something is done. *nīccayam* on its own is the certainty; *nīccayamāka* is doing the thing certainly.

That same *-āka* is inside *nalāmāka*, from the answer about being well, so the shape is already in your ear.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third leaves no room for doubt.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *nīccayamāka*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *pōdum*, then *nīccayamāka*, and feel how much longer the second is
- *Recall:* say *mūkkū*, then read மருத்துவர்

Before you move on

What does நிச்சயமாக mean? (“certainly”.) Say it once more.

47.4 ஒருவேளை (oruvēlai) — perhaps

Before the new one: what did *nīccayamāka* mean?

You'll want to know: ஒருவேளை

ஒருவேளை (*oruvēlai*) — “perhaps”.

Two pieces welded together: *oru*, ‘one’, which you have, and *vēlai*, ‘an occasion, a time’, which you have not. One occasion out of the several that could happen — which is exactly the claim “perhaps” makes.

Tamil builds its hedge out of counting. English does the same trick with “maybe”, which is a “may” and a “be” pushed against each other until they stuck.

What you've built

Four, and the fourth one steps back from the other three.

Your turn

- *Say it: oruvēlai*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: niccayamāka*, then *oruvēlai*, and hear the certainty drain out
- *Recall: read பல்*, then say *vivasāyi*

Before you move on

What does ஒருவேளை mean? (“perhaps”.) Say it once more.

47.5 அப்படியே (*appaḍiyē*) — just so

Before the new one: what did *oruvēlai* mean?

You'll want to know: அப்படியே

அப்படியே (*appaḍiyē*) — “just so”.

The front of it is the far pointer *a-* from *adu* and *aṅgē*; *appaḍi* is ‘in that manner’; and the *-ē* on the end is how Tamil presses down on a word. In that manner, precisely.

Move the pointer and the whole set follows: *ippaḍi*, ‘like this’, and *eppaḍi*, ‘how’ — which you have been saying since you first asked somebody how they were. One pattern, three words, and only the front letter moves.

What you've built

That closes the run: true, enough, certainly, perhaps, just so.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *appaḍiyē*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *uṇmai*, *pōdum*, *niccayamāka*, *oruvēlai*, *appaḍiyē*
- *Recall:* say *vayiru*, then read விருந்தாளி

Before you move on

What does அப்படியே mean? (“just so”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 48

Setting Out

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say that it is time, that I have a journey, and that I am setting out in Tamil.

Complete TA-C48-set-out and say all five words in order.

48.1 இப்போது (ippōdu) — now

Before the new run of words: what did *oruvēlai* mean, and what did *appāḍiyē* mean?

You'll want to know: இப்போது

இப்போது (*ippōdu*) — “now”.

The same pattern as the word that closed the run before, wearing the near pointer instead of the far one: *i-* and *pōdu*, ‘a time’. This time. And *appōdu* is that time, then.

In speech it usually shortens to *ippō*, the way English lets “going to” collapse into “gonna”. The full form is what you write; the short one is what you hear.

What you've built

The first of five words for going.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ippōdu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *appāḍiyē*, then *ippōdu*, and hear the pointer swap ends
- *Recall:* say *āsiriyaṛ*, then read உண்மை

Before you move on

What does இப்போது mean? (“now”.) Say it once more.

48.2 நேரம் (nēram) — time

Before the new one: what did *ippōdu* mean?

You’ll want to know: நேரம்

நேரம் (*nēram*) — “time”.

Not the hour on the clock — that is *maṇi*, which you already have — but time as a quantity of it: whether there is any, whether this is the right one, whether it has run out.

nēram āccu is how a Tamil speaker says the moment has come, and it is very often the sentence that ends a visit. Nobody has to be rude about leaving if the clock can be blamed.

What you’ve built

Two: this moment, and the stuff moments are made of.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *nēram*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *ippōdu*, then *nēram*, so the two sit together
- *Recall:* read மாணவன், then say *pōdum*

Before you move on

What does நேரம் mean? (“time”.) Say it once more.

48.3 பயணம் (payaṇam) — a journey

Before the new one: what did *nēram* mean?

You’ll want to know: பயணம்

பயணம் (*payaṇam*) — “a journey”.

Beside it Tamil also keeps *pirayāṇam*, straight from Sanskrit *prayāṇa*, and the pair divides the work the way *nalām* and *sugam* did: the shorter word is the everyday one, the longer is what goes into writing.

Somebody travelling is a *payaṇi*, with the same *-i* ending that made the farmer out of his field.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third one takes you somewhere.

Your turn

- *Say it: payaṇam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: nēram, then payaṇam, and hear both endings agree*
- *Recall: say maruttuvar, then read நிச்சயமாக*

Before you move on

What does பயணம் mean? (“a journey”.) Say it once more.

48.4 பிறகு (piraku) — afterwards

Before the new one: what did *payaṇam* mean?

You'll want to know: பிறகு

பிறகு (*piraku*) — “afterwards”.

Underneath it is *pin*, ‘behind’. What sits behind you in space becomes what comes after you in time, and Tamil made that move so long ago that nobody hears it any more. English did the same thing with “before”, which began as a word about the front of things.

As a way of parting it is gentle and slightly vague: *piraku pārkkalām*, “we’ll see each other later”, promises nothing and closes the conversation kindly.

What you’ve built

Four, and the fourth one puts off the parting.

Your turn

- Say it: *piraku*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *payaṇam*, then *piraku*, and let the hard *r* land in the second
- Recall: read விவசாயி, then say *oruvēlai*

Before you move on

What does பிறகு mean? (“afterwards”.) Say it once more.

48.5 புறப்படு (*purappaḍu*) — to set out

Before the new one: what did *piraku* mean?

You'll want to know: புறப்படு

புறப்படு (*purappaḍu*) — “to set out”.

Two pieces, both still visible. *puram* is the outside, and *paḍu* is the all-purpose ending Tamil uses when something happens to you. To *purappaḍu* is to come to be outside — which is what leaving a house actually consists of.

nān purappaḍugirēn announces your departure with none of the weight of *pōy varugirēn*. It is what you say at the door with your bag already in your hand.

What you've built

That closes the run: now, time, a journey, afterwards, and getting up to go.

Your turn

- *Say it: purappaḍu*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — ippōdu, nēram, payaṇam, piraku, purappaḍu*
- *Recall: say viruntāli, then read அப்படியே*

Before you move on

What does புறப்படு mean? (“to set out”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 49

Courtesy

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can thank somebody warmly in Tamil, show respect, and wish them well.

Complete TA-C49-many-thanks and say all five words in order.

49.1 அன்பு (anbu) — affection

Before the new run of words: what did *piraku* mean, and what did *purappaḍu* mean?

You'll want to know: அன்பு

அன்பு (*anbu*) — “affection”.

This is the warm, ordinary love — for a family, for a friend, for a place. *kādal* is the other kind, the one the poems are about, and Tamil keeps the two apart where English makes one word do both.

A letter opens *anbuḷḷa*, “dear”, which is literally ‘having affection’. Put the endings you know on the stem and you get *anban* and *anbar*, somebody who loves — the same two endings, doing the same work, on new material.

What you’ve built

The first of five courtesies.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *aṇbu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *aṇbu*, then *aṇbuḷḷa*, and hear the stem stay put
- *Recall:* say *uṇmai*, then read இப்போது

Before you move on

What does அன்பு mean? (“affection”.) Say it once more.

49.2 மரியாதை (mariyā dai) — respect

Before the new one: what did *aṇbu* mean?

You’ll want to know: மரியாதை

மரியாதை (*mariyā dai*) — “respect”.

Sanskrit *maryādā*, which started life as a boundary mark — the line at the edge of a field. Respect, in that picture, is knowing where the line runs and not stepping over it.

Tamil shows it in its endings as much as in its words. You have been doing it since *nīṅgal*, where the ending meant for many is aimed at one person on purpose: *mariyā dai* built out of shape rather than out of vocabulary.

What you’ve built

Two: what you feel, and what you show.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *mariyā dai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *aṇbu*, then *mariyā dai*, so the warm one and the formal one sit together
- *Recall:* read போதும், then say *nēram*

Before you move on

What does மரியாதை mean? (“respect”.) Say it once more.

49.3 சந்தோஷம் (*santōṣam*) — gladness

Before the new one: what did *mariyādai* mean?

You’ll want to know: சந்தோஷம்

சந்தோஷம் (*santōṣam*) — “gladness”.

Sanskrit *santoṣa*, ‘contentment’, sitting beside the native *magilcci* you met when somebody was pleased to see you. Both are in daily use and neither has driven the other out — the same arrangement as *nalām* and *sugam*.

santōṣam is what you reach for when you accept an invitation. On its own, in reply, it means “gladly”.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third one is an answer as much as a feeling.

Your turn

- *Say it: santōṣam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: mariyādai, then santōṣam, and let the second one lift*
- *Recall: say niccayamāka, then read பயணம்*

Before you move on

What does சந்தோஷம் mean? (“gladness”.) Say it once more.

49.4 வாழ்த்து (*vālttu*) — a good wish

Before the new one: what did *santōṣam* mean?

You'll want to know: வாழ்த்து

வாழ்த்து (*vāḷttu*) — “a good wish”.

Straight off *vāl*, ‘to live, to flourish’, which you had early. To give somebody a *vāḷttu* is to wish them a life — not luck, not success, but the thing itself.

vāḷttukkal is what a Tamil speaker says where English says “congratulations”, and it is the kinder sentence of the two: flourishing, offered in the plural, rather than a nod at what you managed to pull off.

What you've built

Four, and the fourth one is given rather than felt.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vāḷttu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *santōṣam*, then *vāḷttu*, and feel the ழ glide in the second
- *Recall:* read ஒருவேளை, then say *piraku*

Before you move on

What does வாழ்த்து mean? (“a good wish”.) Say it once more.

49.5 மிக்க நன்றி (*mikka nanri*) — thank you very much

Before the new one: what did *vāḷttu* mean?

You'll want to know: மிக்க நன்றி

மிக்க நன்றி (*mikka nanri*) — “thank you very much”.

nanri has been with you since the very beginning. *mikka* is the new piece in front of it: from *migu*, ‘to exceed’, so it means abundant, more than the usual measure.

Tamil does not raise its voice to be warm. It puts *mikka* at the front and leaves everything else exactly where it was. Set this beside *tayavu seytu* and *mannikkavum* and the courtesy kit is complete.

What you've built

That closes the run: affection, respect, gladness, a good wish, and thanks with weight behind it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *mikka nanri*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *aṇbu, mariyā dai, santōṣam, vālttu, mikka nanri*
- *Recall:* say *appaḍiyē*, then read புறப்படு

Before you move on

What does மிக்க நன்றி mean? (“thank you very much”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 50

At the Doorway

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the five things a guest meets at a Tamil doorway, and welcome them.

Complete TA-C50-welcome and say all five words in order.

50.1 வாசல் (vāsal) — a doorway

Before the new run of words: what did *vālttu* mean, and what did *mikka nanri* mean?

You'll want to know: வாசல்

வாசல் (*vāsal*) — “a doorway”.

Tamil separates the opening from the thing that shuts it. *kadavu*, which you have, is the door itself — the plank on its hinges. *vāsal* is the doorway: the gap, the step, and the strip of ground in front of it.

Almost everything that happens when a guest arrives happens at the *vāsal* rather than inside it, which is why the word carries more than architecture.

What you've built

The first of five things a guest meets at a Tamil door.

Your turn

- *Say it: vāsal*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kadavu, then vāsal, so the door and its opening sit together*
- *Recall: say ippōdu, then read அன்பு*

Before you move on

What does வாசல் mean? (“a doorway”.) Say it once more.

50.2 கோலம் (kōlam) — the design at a doorway

Before the new one: what did *vāsal* mean?

You’ll want to know: கோலம்

கோலம் (kōlam) — “the design at a doorway”.

Rice flour, drawn freehand on the ground each morning, usually by the woman of the house and usually before the sun is up. It is decoration and welcome at once — and because the flour feeds ants and birds, it is a small daily gift to whatever comes past.

The older sense of the word is ‘form, appearance, the shape a thing takes’. A *kōlam* is the shape the house puts on to receive the day.

What you’ve built

Two: the doorway, and what is drawn in front of it.

Your turn

- *Say it: kōlam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: vāsal, then kōlam, and let the long ō open the second*
- *Recall: read நேரம், then say mariyādai*

Before you move on

What does கோலம் mean? (“the design at a doorway”.) Say it once more.

50.3 மலர் (malar) — a flower

Before the new one: what did *kōlam* mean?

You’ll want to know: மலர்

மலர் (*malar*) — “a flower”.

The everyday word is *pū*, short and plain. *malar* is its fuller partner, the one that goes into names and poems and careful speech.

It also says what a flower does: *malar* means ‘to open, to blossom’. One shape names the act and the result of it, and Tamil saw no reason to invent a second word for the second thing.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third one arrives in somebody’s hand.

Your turn

- *Say it: malar*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kōlam*, then *malar*, and hear the soft *r* close the second
- *Recall: say payaṇam*, then read சந்தோஷம்

Before you move on

What does மலர் mean? (“a flower”.) Say it once more.

50.4 வெற்றிலை (verrilai) — betel leaf

Before the new one: what did *malar* mean?

You'll want to know: வெற்றிலை

வெற்றிலை (*verrilai*) — “betel leaf”.

The end of the word is plain once you have the pieces: *-ilai* is *ilai*, ‘a leaf’.

Betel leaf and areca nut, handed over together, are how a Tamil household says the visit mattered and the guest is owed something — at a wedding, at a farewell, at anything that counts. The leaf costs almost nothing and means a great deal, which is the usual arrangement for the things a culture puts at its centre.

What you've built

Four, and the fourth is the one you are sent home with.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *verrilai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *malar*, then *verrilai*, and let the hard *r* double in the second
- *Recall:* read பிறகு, then say *vālttu*

Before you move on

What does வெற்றிலை mean? (“betel leaf”.) Say it once more.

50.5 வரவேற்பு (*varavēṛpu*) — a welcome

Before the new one: what did *verrilai* mean?

You'll want to know: வரவேற்பு

வரவேற்பு (*varavēṛpu*) — “a welcome”.

Two pieces you can almost hear coming apart. *vara* is the coming, from *vā*, the word for ‘come’ you already have; *ēṛpu* is the accepting, from *ēṛru*, ‘to receive’. A welcome, in Tamil, is the acceptance of somebody’s arrival, and the word says that and nothing more.

varavēṛkirēn is “I welcome you”. At the *vāsal*, over the *kōlam*, with a *malar* and a *verrilai* in hand, it is the last thing left to say at a door —

and it sets you back down exactly where this book began, at a door, with *vaṇakkam*.

What you've built

That closes the run: a doorway, a design, a flower, a leaf, and the word for taking somebody in.

Your turn

- *Say it: varavērpu*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — vāsal, kōlam, malar, verrilai, varavērpu*
- *Recall: say purappaḍu, then read மிக்க நன்றி*

Before you move on

What does வரவேற்பு mean? (“a welcome”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 51

Overhead

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars and a cloud in Tamil.

Complete TA-C51-cloud and say all five words in order.

51.1 ஆகாயம் (ākāyam) — the sky

Before the new run of words: what did *verrilai* mean, and what did *varavērpū* mean?

You'll want to know: ஆகாயம்

ஆகாயம் (*ākāyam*) — “the sky”.

Sanskrit *ākāśa*, the open lit space. Malayalam and Telugu both keep the *ś* their letters can write and say *ākāśam*. Tamil has no letter for that sound, so the word arrives softened, with a ய standing where the *ś* was, and settles as ஆகாயம்.

Tamil's own inherited word for the same overhead space is *vāṇ*, which you have already met inside *vāṇilai*, the weather — the standing of the sky. ஆகாயம் took the wider and emptier sense: not the weather over your head but the space itself.

What you've built

The first of five things above you.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ākāyam*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *vaṇakkam*, then *ākāyam*, as you would greet somebody out of doors
- *Recall:* say *anbu*, then read வாசல்

Before you move on

What does ஆகாயம் mean? (“the sky”.) Say it once more.

51.2 சூரியன் (*sūriyan*) — the sun

Before the new one: what did *ākāyam* mean?

You’ll want to know: சூரியன்

சூரியன் (*sūriyan*) — “the sun”.

Sanskrit *sūrya*, and the three sisters differ only in what they hang on the end of it. Telugu makes సూర్యుడు (*sūryuḍu*), Malayalam *sūryan*, Tamil சூரியன். The ending is the part each language owns; the sun is shared.

Tamil’s inherited sun is *ñāyiru*, the word standing behind the name of the first day of the week you already count through. It stepped back into the calendar and into poetry and left the daily sun to சூரியன்.

What you’ve built

Two: the space, and the thing that lights it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *sūriyan*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *ākāyam*, then *sūriyan*, the sky first and then what is in it
- *Recall:* read மரியாதை, then say *kōlam*

Before you move on

What does சூரியன் mean? (“the sun”.) Say it once more.

51.3 நிலா (nilā) — the moon

Before the new one: what did *sūriyaṇ* mean?

You’ll want to know: நிலா

நிலா (*nilā*) — “the moon”.

Where both sisters took the Sanskrit moon — *candran* in Malayalam, *candruḍu* in Telugu — Tamil’s everyday moon is its own. நிலா is inherited, and it is the moon as light rather than as a body: *nilā* is what lies on a courtyard at night, the moonlight and the moon in one word. Tamil has *cantiraṇ* as well, from the same Sanskrit its sisters took, and saves it for almanacs and for verse.

Let the ஆ at the end run long. It is the length that makes the word.

What you’ve built

Three: the space, the day light, and the night one.

Your turn

- *Say it: nilā*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: sūriyaṇ, then nilā, and let the second one end long*
- *Recall: say santōṣam, then read மலர்*

Before you move on

What does நிலா mean? (“the moon”.) Say it once more.

51.4 விண்மீன் (viṇmīṇ) — a star

Before the new one: what did *nilā* mean?

You'll want to know: விண்மீன்

விண்மீன் (*viṇmīṇ*) — “a star”.

Two pieces, and they come apart cleanly. *viṇ* is the sky as height, the open air above; *mīṇ* is a fish, and from the oldest Tamil poetry onward it is a star as well. A star, in Tamil, is a fish in the sky — a shoal of small bright things moving in something you cannot walk on.

The sisters went other ways. Malayalam takes the Sanskrit नक्षत्रम् (*nakṣatram*); Telugu says చుక్క (*cukka*), which is also its word for a dot.

What you've built

Four, and this one is a picture rather than a name.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *viṇmīṇ*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *nilā*, then *viṇmīṇ*, the big light and then the small ones
- *Recall:* read வாழ்த்து, then say *verrilai*

Before you move on

What does விண்மீன் mean? (“a star”.) Say it once more.

51.5 மேகம் (*mēkam*) — a cloud

Before the new one: what did *viṇmīṇ* mean?

You'll want to know: மேகம்

மேகம் (*mēkam*) — “a cloud”.

Sanskrit *megha*, taken in whole. Tamil has inherited cloud-words too — *mukil* and *kār*, both still alive in names and in verse — but மேகம் is the one doing the daily work.

Telugu did not borrow here at all: its cloud is *mabbu*, its own. Which words a language takes and which it keeps is rarely tidy. On the sky the two of them borrowed together; on the cloud they part.

What you've built

That is the whole sky: the space, the sun, the moon, the small lights, and the thing that hides them.

Your turn

- *Say it: mēkam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — ākāyam, sūriyan, nilā, viṇmān, mēkam*
- *Recall: say mikka nanri, then read வரவேற்பு*

Before you move on

What does மேகம் mean? (“a cloud”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 52

A Tree

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a tree, its branch, its new shoot, its root and its seed in Tamil.

Complete TA-C52-seed and say all five words in order.

52.1 மரம் (maram) — a tree

Before the new run of words: what did *viṇmāṇ* mean, and what did *mēkam* mean?

You'll want to know: மரம்

மரம் (*maram*) — “a tree”.

Proto-Dravidian ***mar-**, and Malayalam did not lay a finger on it: മരം, the same word letter for letter. Telugu went somewhere else entirely, to చెట్టు (*ceṭṭu*) — the ordinary arrangement in this family, where the two closest sisters agree and the third has its own.

maram is the tree standing and the timber cut out of it. A carpenter works in *maram*; so does a forest.

What you've built

The first of five pieces of one tree.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *maram*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *mēkam*, then *maram*, the cloud and what stands under it
- *Recall:* say *vāsal*, then read ஆகாயம்

Before you move on

What does மரம் mean? (“a tree”.) Say it once more.

52.2 கிளை (kīlai) — a branch

Before the new one: what did *maram* mean?

You’ll want to know: கிளை

கிளை (*kīlai*) — “a branch”.

Both sisters reach for a word of a different shape here — Malayalam *kompŭ*, Telugu *komma* — where Tamil says கிளை.

And a கிளை is not only what grows off a tree. A family has them: the branch of a house, the people who come off one trunk. When Tamil calls somebody your *kīlai*, it is the tree word doing the work, and a bank branch is a *kīlai* too.

What you’ve built

Two: the trunk, and what comes off it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kīlai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *maram*, then *kīlai*, the tree and then what comes off it
- *Recall:* read கோலம், then say *sūriyan*

Before you move on

What does கிளை mean? (“a branch”.) Say it once more.

52.3 தளிர் (talir) — a tender shoot

Before the new one: what did *kilai* mean?

You’ll want to know: தளிர்

தளிர் (*talir*) — “a tender shoot”.

The new growth at the end of a branch: the pale soft leaf before it hardens and goes green. Tamil keeps a word of its own for it rather than calling it a small leaf, which tells you how much attention the thing has had.

talirkka is what a tree does after the first rains. Tamil says it of people as well — somebody who has been ill and is picking up again has *talirttu*, put out new growth.

What you’ve built

Three: the tree, the branch, and the newest thing on it.

Your turn

- *Say it: talir*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kilai, then talir, the branch and the new thing on the end of it*
- *Recall: say malar, then read நிலா*

Before you move on

What does தளிர் mean? (“a tender shoot”.) Say it once more.

52.4 வேர் (vēr) — a root

Before the new one: what did *talir* mean?

You'll want to know: வேர்

வேர் (*vēr*) — “a root”.

One word in three hands. Malayalam വേര് (*vērŭ*), Telugu వేరు (*vēru*), Tamil வேர். Set them beside each other and there is nothing left to choose between them.

It is the root of a plant and the bottom of anything else: a tooth has a வேர், and so does a word.

What you've built

Four: everything above ground, and now the part under it.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vēr*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *taḷir*, then *vēr*, the top of the tree and the bottom of it
- *Recall:* read வெற்றிலை, then say *viṇmīṇ*

Before you move on

What does வேர் mean? (“a root”.) Say it once more.

52.5 விதை (*vitai*) — a seed

Before the new one: what did *vēr* mean?

You'll want to know: விதை

விதை (*vitai*) — “a seed”.

Malayalam വിത്ത് (*vittŭ*) and Telugu విత్తనం (*vittanani*) are the same root wearing different endings, and Tamil keeps a *vittu* of its own beside விதை.

விதை is the seed and the sowing of it at once: *vitaikka* is to sow. The thing and what you do with it share one shape, which saves Tamil a word.

What you've built

A whole tree, from the seed under it to the softest thing on the end of a branch.

Your turn

- *Say it: vitai*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — maram, kilai, talir, vēr, vitai*
- *Recall: say varavēṛpu, then read மேகம்*

Before you move on

What does விதை mean? (“a seed”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 53

The Land

Modes: 🗣 voice (5) 🗣 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a river, a hill, a paddy field, a path and a village in Tamil.

Complete TA-C53-village and say all five words in order.

53.1 நதி (nadi) — a river

Before the new run of words: what did *vēr* mean, and what did *vitai* mean?

You'll want to know: நதி

நதி (*nadi*) — “a river”.

Sanskrit *nadī*, and Telugu prints it identically: నది. Malayalam did not take it for the everyday river and says പുഴ (*pulā*) instead, which is its own.

Tamil's inherited river is ஆறு — the same shape as the six you already count with. Which of the two is meant comes out of what sits around it, and நதி is the one that leaves no room for doubt.

What you've built

The first of five things in a stretch of country.

Your turn

- Say it: *nadi*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *vitai*, then *nadi*, the seed and the water that reaches it
- *Recall:* say *ākāyam*, then read மரம்

Before you move on

What does நதி mean? (“a river”.) Say it once more.

53.2 மலை (malai) — a hill

Before the new one: what did *nadi* mean?

You’ll want to know: மலை

மலை (*malai*) — “a hill”.

Proto-Dravidian, and it covers a hill and a mountain both — Tamil does not split them the way English does. Telugu keeps a small hill of its own, గుట్ట (*gutṭa*).

You have been reading this word all along without being told. The name *Malayālam* begins with it: the language of the hill country, named for its hills.

What you’ve built

Two: the water, and what it comes down from.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *malai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *nadi*, then *malai*, the water and the high ground behind it
- *Recall:* read குரியன், then say *kilai*

Before you move on

What does மலை mean? (“a hill”.) Say it once more.

53.3 வயல் (vayal) — a paddy field

Before the new one: what did *malai* mean?

You'll want to know: வயல்

வயல் (*vayal*) — “a paddy field”.

A wet field: the flooded one that grows rice, not a dry one. Malayalam writes വയൽ and means the same thing by it.

The dry field is a *kollai*, a different word altogether, and the split earns its keep. A farmer telling you which of the two he has is telling you what he can grow on it and when.

What you've built

Three: high ground, and now the flat wet ground under it.

Your turn

- *Say it: vayal*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: malai, then vayal, the high ground and the flat*
- *Recall: say nilā, then read தளிர்*

Before you move on

What does வயல் mean? (“a paddy field”.) Say it once more.

53.4 பாதை (pātai) — a path

Before the new one: what did *vayal* mean?

You'll want to know: பாதை

பாதை (*pātai*) — “a path”.

Something you can put your foot on: a track worn into the ground, a lane, a road.

Tamil has *vali* as well, and the two overlap less than they look as though they should. *vali* is the way — the route, the means, the manner of going

about something. பாதை stays physical. Malayalam’s everyday path-word is വഴി, the same one; Telugu’s is *bāṭa*.

What you’ve built

Four: three places, and now something joining them.

Your turn

- *Say it: pātai*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: vayal, then pātai, the field and the way to it*
- *Recall: read விண்மீன், then say vēr*

Before you move on

What does பாதை mean? (“a path”.) Say it once more.

53.5 கிராமம் (kirāmam) — a village

Before the new one: what did *pātai* mean?

You’ll want to know: கிராமம்

கிராமம் (*kirāmam*) — “a village”.

Sanskrit *grāma*, and Telugu takes it whole: గ్రామం. Tamil does not begin a word on two held-together sounds, so it let a vowel into the middle of the cluster and the word came out *ki-rā-mam*.

You already have *ūr* for the place you belong to. *ūr* is yours — your town, the one you name when somebody asks where you are from. கிராமம் is the word on the form and on the signboard at the edge of the road.

What you’ve built

Water, high ground, a wet field, a way across it, and the place at the end of the way.

Your turn

- *Say it: kirāmam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — nadi, malai, vayal, pātai, kirāmam*
- *Recall: say mēkam, then read விதை*

Before you move on

What does கிராமம் mean? (“a village”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 54

Things in the House

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the mat, basket, knife, bowl and box a Tamil house sets out for a guest.

Complete TA-C54-box and say all five words in order.

54.1 పాప (pāy) — a mat

Before the new run of words: what did *pātai* mean, and what did *kirāmam* mean?

You’ll want to know: పాప

పాప (*pāy*) — “a mat”.

The woven mat that is unrolled to sleep on and unrolled again for a guest to sit on. Malayalam says പായ (*pāya*) and Telugu చాప (*cāpa*).

పాప is also ‘to leap’. Nothing joins the two but the sound, and what sits around the word settles which is meant — the same one-shape-two-jobs arrangement *tuṇi* already showed you.

What you’ve built

The first of five things a house puts in front of you.

Your turn

- Say it: *pāy*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *kirāmam*, then *pāy*, the village and what is unrolled for you in it
- *Recall:* say *maram*, then read நதி

Before you move on

What does பாய mean? (“a mat”.) Say it once more.

54.2 கூடை (*kūṭai*) — a basket

Before the new one: what did *pāy* mean?

You’ll want to know: கூடை

கூடை (*kūṭai*) — “a basket”.

Woven, usually of palm leaf or split bamboo. Malayalam’s basket is *koṭṭa* and Telugu’s is *buṭṭa*; Tamil’s is கூடை.

It is the word for the basket a vendor sets down in front of you on the pavement, and for the one that goes up onto a head to be carried home.

What you’ve built

Two: something to sit on, and something to carry in.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kūṭai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *pāy*, then *kūṭai*, and let the long ஊ open the second
- *Recall:* read கிளை, then say *malai*

Before you move on

What does கூடை mean? (“a basket”.) Say it once more.

54.3 கத்தி (katti) — a knife

Before the new one: what did *kūtai* mean?

You'll want to know: கத்தி

கத்தி (*katti*) — “a knife”.

Three sisters and one word. Malayalam கത്തി, Telugu కత్తి, Tamil கத்தி. Not merely close — the same word three times, which happens with things every household has had for as long as there have been households.

The doubled த in the middle carries the whole difficulty. Hold it: *ka-t-ti*, with the tongue staying where it is between the two.

What you've built

Three, and this one is shared right across the family.

Your turn

- *Say it: katti*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kūtai, then katti, and hold the doubled த*
- *Recall: say talir, then read வயல்*

Before you move on

What does கத்தி mean? (“a knife”.) Say it once more.

54.4 கிண்ணம் (kinṇam) — a bowl

Before the new one: what did *katti* mean?

You'll want to know: கிண்ணம்

கிண்ணம் (*kinṇam*) — “a bowl”.

The small round one that holds a helping, rather than the pot the food was cooked in. Telugu's గిన్నె (*ginne*) is close enough to hear the same word underneath.

Malayalam reaches past both and takes the Sanskrit पात्रम् (*pātram*), a vessel of any sort. Tamil has that one as well and keeps it general; கிண்ணம் stays small.

What you've built

Four: to sit on, to carry in, to cut with, and to eat from.

Your turn

- *Say it: kiṇṇam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: katti, then kiṇṇam, and let the ண double this time*
- *Recall: read வேர், then say pātai*

Before you move on

What does கிண்ணம் mean? (“a bowl”.) Say it once more.

54.5 பெட்டி (petṭi) — a box

Before the new one: what did *kiṇṇam* mean?

You'll want to know: பெட்டி

பெட்டி (*petṭi*) — “a box”.

Malayalam പെട്ടി, Telugu పెట్టి, Tamil பெட்டி — the family agrees again, down to the doubled L in the middle. Two words in one short run where all three sisters say the same thing is worth noticing.

A பெட்டி is a box of any size: the tin trunk clothes live in, a matchbox, and the carriage of a train, which Tamil calls a *rayil petṭi*.

What you've built

Five things a house sets out: something to sit on, to carry in, to cut with, to eat from, and to keep it all in.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *peṭṭi*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *pāy, kūṭai, katti, kiṇṇam, peṭṭi*
- *Recall:* say *vitai*, then read கிராமம்

Before you move on

What does பெட்டி mean? (“a box”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 55

The Rest of You

Modes: 🗣 voice (5) 🖐 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name my neck, my back, a lip, a nail and a bone in Tamil.

Complete TA-C55-bone and say all five words in order.

55.1 கழுத்து (kaluttu) — the neck

Before the new run of words: what did *kinṇam* mean, and what did *petṭi* mean?

You'll want to know: கழுத்து

கழுத்து (*kaluttu*) — “the neck”.

Malayalam കഴുത്ത് (*kaluttū*) is the same word, ്ழு and all — that letter again, the one only these two sisters still write. Telugu went its own way here, to మెడ (*meḍa*).

It is the neck outside and the throat inside, both in one word. A garland goes round the கழுத்து, and so does the thread tied at a wedding.

What you've built

The first of five more pieces of you.

Your turn

- Say it: *kaluttu*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *petti*, then *kaluttu*, and hold the *ழ* in the middle
- *Recall:* say *nadi*, then read பாய்

Before you move on

What does கழுத்து mean? (“the neck”.) Say it once more.

55.2 முதுகு (mutuku) — the back

Before the new one: what did *kaluttu* mean?

You’ll want to know: முதுகு

முதுகு (*mutuku*) — “the back”.

Malayalam has മുതുകു (*mutukū*), letter for letter until the last one. Telugu takes వీపు (*vīpu*) and shares nothing with either.

To show somebody your முதுகு is to turn away from them, in Tamil much as in English — and the phrase is meant as unkindly in one language as in the other.

What you’ve built

Two: what a garland goes round, and what you turn on somebody.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *mutuku*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *kaluttu*, then *mutuku*, the top of you and the length below it
- *Recall:* read மலை, then say *kūtai*

Before you move on

What does முதுகு mean? (“the back”.) Say it once more.

55.3 உதடு (utaṭu) — a lip

Before the new one: what did *mutuku* mean?

You'll want to know: உதடு

உதடு (*utaṭu*) — “a lip”.

This is where the family stops agreeing. Malayalam says ചുണ്ട് (*cuṇṭ*), Telugu పెదవి (*pedavi*), Tamil உதடு — three words with nothing in common but the thing they name. It happens: a part of the body every language has a name for is not therefore a part every language named at the same time.

The ㄸ in the middle is the one made with the tongue curled back. Keep it curled and the word comes out right.

What you've built

Three, and this one the three sisters worked out separately.

Your turn

- *Say it: utaṭu*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: mutuku, then utaṭu, and curl the tongue back for the ㄸ*
- *Recall: say vayal, then read கத்தி*

Before you move on

What does உதடு mean? (“a lip”.) Say it once more.

55.4 நகம் (nakam) — a nail

Before the new one: what did *utaṭu* mean?

You'll want to know: நகம்

நகம் (*nakam*) — “a nail”.

The nail on a finger and the claw on an animal, in one word. Malayalam writes നഖം (*nakham*), with a breather letter in the middle that Tamil's

own set does not carry, so Tamil prints it plain: நகம். The two words are heard as one and written as two.

Telugu holds on to something else entirely, గోరు (*gōru*).

What you've built

Four: neck, back, lip, and the hard thing on the end of a finger.

Your turn

- *Say it: nakam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: utaṭu, then nakam, the softest part of you and the hardest*
- *Recall: read பாதை, then say kiṇṇam*

Before you move on

What does நகம் mean? (“a nail”.) Say it once more.

55.5 எலும்பு (*elumbu*) — a bone

Before the new one: what did *nakam* mean?

You'll want to know: எலும்பு

எலும்பு (*elumbu*) — “a bone”.

Malayalam എല്ല (*ellŭ*) and Telugu ఎముక (*emuka*) sit either side of Tamil's எலும்பு: the same opening, and then three different amounts of word after it.

elumbum tōlum — “bone and skin” — is what Tamil says of somebody who has gone very thin. English says the same two things in the other order.

What you've built

Five more of you: neck, back, lip, nail, and what holds the whole lot up.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *elumbu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *kaluttu*, *mutuku*, *utaṭu*, *nakam*, *elumbu*
- *Recall:* say *kirāmam*, then read பெட்டி

Before you move on

What does எலும்பு mean? (“a bone”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 56

How Much

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say how much I want in Tamil, from a little to a lot, and turn an offer down politely.

Complete TA-C56-let-it-be and say all five words in order.

56.1 சிறிது (*siritu*) — a little

Before the new run of words: what did *nakam* mean, and what did *elumbu* mean?

You'll want to know: சிறிது

சிறிது (*siritu*) — “a little”.

You already have *siriya*, “small”. சிறிது is the same root turned into an amount: not a small thing but a small quantity of something. Held a dish and asked how much, you say *siritu* and you get a little.

Tamil has a *koñcam* as well, which is the one you will hear across a table, and which Telugu shares as *koñcem*. சிறிது is the more formal of the two, and the one you would write down.

What you've built

The first of five answers to “how much?”.

Your turn

- *Say it: siritu*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: elumbu, then siritu, and keep the second one short*
- *Recall: say pāy, then read கழுத்து*

Before you move on

What does சிறிது mean? (“a little.”) Say it once more.

56.2 நிறைய (niraiya) — a lot

Before the new one: what did *siritu* mean?

You’ll want to know: நிறைய

நிறைய (*niraiya*) — “a lot”.

The other end of the same question. நிறைய is built on *nirai*, to fill, so a lot in Tamil is a fullness: as much as the thing will hold and no argument about it.

Telugu says ఎక్కువ (*ekkuva*) and builds it out of nothing to do with filling — a reminder that two languages can land on the same everyday answer by two quite different routes.

What you’ve built

Two, and they are opposite ends of one question.

Your turn

- *Say it: niraiya*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: siritu, then niraiya, the little and the lot*
- *Recall: read கூடை, then say mutuku*

Before you move on

What does நிறைய mean? (“a lot”.) Say it once more.

56.3 குறைவு (kuraivu) — a shortage, less than there should be

Before the new one: what did *niraiya* mean?

You’ll want to know: குறைவு

குறைவு (*kuraivu*) — “a shortage, less than there should be”.

kurai is to fall short, and குறைவு is the falling-short itself. That makes it a narrower word than the English “less”: it does not merely compare two amounts, it says one of them did not come up to the mark. There is a small complaint folded inside it.

Telugu’s word for the same ground is తక్కువ (*takkuva*).

What you’ve built

Three: a little, a lot, and not as much as there ought to be.

Your turn

- Say it: *kuraivu*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *niraiya*, then *kuraivu*, plenty and then not enough
- Recall: say *katti*, then read உதடு

Before you move on

What does குறைவு mean? (“a shortage, less than there should be”.) Say it once more.

56.4 தேவையில்லை (tēvaiyillai) — there is no need

Before the new one: what did *kuraivu* mean?

You'll want to know: தேவையில்லை

தேவையில்லை (*tēvaiyillai*) — “there is no need”.

Two pieces, and the second one has been yours since the early writing lessons: *tēvai* is a need, *illai* is the no you learned to put on paper. Together they are how Tamil turns something down without turning the person down.

A flat *illai* refuses the thing. தேவையில்லை says there is no call for it, which leaves everybody their footing. Telugu does the same work in one shorter piece, వద్దు (*vaddu*).

What you've built

Four, and this one is the polite way out.

Your turn

- *Say it: tēvaiyillai*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kuraivu*, then *tēvaiyillai*, and let the whole of the second run as one word
- *Recall: read கிண்ணம்*, then say *nakam*

Before you move on

What does தேவையில்லை mean? (“there is no need”.) Say it once more.

56.5 ஆகட்டும் (*ākattum*) — let it be so

Before the new one: what did *tēvaiyillai* mean?

You'll want to know: ஆகட்டும்

ஆகட்டும் (*ākattum*) — “let it be so”.

āku is to become, to come about. ஆகட்டும் is “let it come about” — what you say when somebody proposes something and you are content to let it happen. It agrees without promising to do anything.

The *ām* you have been saying for yes is that same *āku* worn down by a great deal of use, which is why the two sit so alike in the mouth. Telugu’s nearest of these is అలాగే (*alāgē*), “just so, alright then”.

What you’ve built

Five answers to an offer: a little, a lot, not enough, no need, and yes — let it happen.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ākattum*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *siritu*, *niraiya*, *kuraivu*, *tēvaiyillai*, *ākattum*
- *Recall:* say *petṭi*, then read எலும்பு

Before you move on

What does ஆகட்டும் mean? (“let it be so”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 57

Wind and Fire

Modes: 🗣 voice (5) 🖐 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name the wind, sand, mud, smoke and an ember in Tamil.

Complete TA-C57-ember and say all five words in order.

57.1 காற்று (kārru) — the wind

Before the new run of words: what did *tēvaiyillai* mean, and what did *ākattum* mean?

You'll want to know: காற்று

காற்று (*kārru*) — “the wind”.

Malayalam കാറ്റ് (*kārrū*) is the same word with its ending worn shorter. Telugu takes గాలి (*gāli*), which covers air as much as wind.

Tamil's word covers both too: the breeze coming through a doorway and the air inside a tyre are one word. What English splits into wind and air, Tamil leaves whole and lets the sentence decide.

What you've built

The first of five things you can point at outdoors.

Your turn

- Say it: *kārru*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* ākattum, then kārru, and let the doubled ற hold
- *Recall:* say kaluttu, then read சிறிது

Before you move on

What does காற்று mean? (“the wind”.) Say it once more.

57.2 மணல் (maṇal) — sand

Before the new one: what did kārru mean?

You’ll want to know: மணல்

மணல் (maṇal) — “sand”.

Malayalam മണൽ (maṇal), letter for letter and sound for sound. Telugu goes somewhere else, to isuka.

The ண is the one made with the tongue curled back — the same letter you have just been doubling in kiṇṇam. Here there is only one of them, so touch it once and move on.

What you’ve built

Two: what moves, and one of the things it moves.

Your turn

- *Say it:* maṇal
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* kārru, then maṇal, the wind and what it carries
- *Recall:* read முதுகு, then say niraiya

Before you move on

What does மணல் mean? (“sand”.) Say it once more.

57.3 சேறு (*sēru*) — mud

Before the new one: what did *maṇal* mean?

You’ll want to know: சேறு

சேறு (*sēru*) — “mud”.

Wet earth churned up: the mud of a paddy field after rain, not dust and not clay. Here the three sisters go three ways — Malayalam *celi*, Telugu *burada*, Tamil சேறு.

Tamil keeps *cakati* as well, for the thicker and dirtier kind. சேறு is the working mud, the sort somebody walks into on purpose with a plough behind him.

What you’ve built

Three: air, dry ground, and wet ground.

Your turn

- *Say it: sēru*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: maṇal, then sēru, dry ground and wet*
- *Recall: say utaṭu, then read குறைவு*

Before you move on

What does சேறு mean? (“mud”.) Say it once more.

57.4 புகை (*pukai*) — smoke

Before the new one: what did *sēru* mean?

You’ll want to know: புகை

புகை (*pukai*) — “smoke”.

Malayalam പുക (*puka*) is the same word one step shorter. Tamil’s ends in the *-ai* that so many of its everyday things end in: *kīlai*, *kūtai*, *vitai*, and now this one.

புகை is the smoke and also what somebody does over a cigarette. And when trains reached the Tamil country they were called *pukaivaṇṭi*, the smoke vehicle, which is still what a great many people call them.

What you've built

Four, and this one you can only see because of what it comes off.

Your turn

- Say it: *pukai*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *sēru*, then *pukai*, and let the *-ai* open at the end
- Recall: read நகம், then say *tēvaiyillai*

Before you move on

What does புகை mean? (“smoke”.) Say it once more.

57.5 கனல் (*kanal*) — an ember

Before the new one: what did *pukai* mean?

You'll want to know: கனல்

கனல் (*kanal*) — “an ember”.

The live coal under the ash: fire with no flame on it. Malayalam has the word unchanged, കനൽ (*kanal*). Telugu's నిప్పు (*nippu*) covers this and open fire together.

It is the word Tamil reaches for when it means heat held rather than heat let go. A *kanal* in somebody's eye is anger they are keeping to themselves, and everyone in the room can tell.

What you've built

Wind, sand, mud, smoke, and the coal under the ash.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kanal*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *kārru, manal, sēru, pukai, kanal*
- *Recall:* say *elumbu*, then read ஆகட்டும்

Before you move on

What does கனல் mean? (“an ember”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 58

Around the Yard

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a cow, a goat, a hen, a crow and a bird in Tamil.

Complete TA-C58-bird and say all five words in order.

58.1 பசு (pasu) — a cow

Before the new one: what did *pukai* mean, and what did *kaṇal* mean?

You'll want to know: பசு

பசு (*pasu*) — “a cow”.

The animal a Tamil household is built around. Kannada says ಹಸು (*hasu*): the same word, with the *p*-for-*h* trade Kannada makes right through its old words — the one this book pointed out when the numbers were lined up side by side. Tamil keeps the *p*.

It belongs to a விவசாயி before it belongs to anybody, and in a கிராமம் it stands tied in the yard rather than shut in a shed, near enough to the வாசல் that you step around it going in.

What you've built

The first of five animals.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *pasu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *pasu*, then *kirāmam*, and put the one inside the other
- *Recall:* say *siritu*, then read காற்று

Before you move on

What does பசு mean? (“a cow”.) Say it once more.

58.2 ஆடு (āṭu) — a goat

Before the new one: what did *pasu* mean?

You’ll want to know: ஆடு

ஆடு (āṭu) — “a goat”.

Smaller, cheaper, and kept by houses with no land for a பசு. It eats what it finds and needs nobody to cut for it.

Start it long — ஆ, held — and put the ட of கூடை in the middle. That keeps it clear of அது, which starts short and is a different word entirely. Kannada parts company here and says மೇಕೆ (*mēke*).

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it:* āṭu
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *pasu*, then āṭu, and say which one a house keeps when it has no land
- *Recall:* read நிறைய, then say மாநில

Before you move on

What does ஆடு mean? (“a goat”.) Say it once more.

58.3 கோழி (kōli) — a hen

Before the new one: what did *ātu* mean?

You’ll want to know: கோழி

கோழி (*kōli*) — “a hen”.

Hen or cock alike; the word does not split them, and where the difference matters a second word goes in front. Kannada ಕೋಳಿ (*kōli*) and Telugu కోడి (*kōḍi*) are the same word three ways, and the middle letter is where they separate: Tamil’s மு, Kannada’s ಳ, Telugu’s డ.

It is the clock of a கிராமம். A கோழி has a house awake well before anybody there needs to know the மணி.

What you’ve built

Three.

Your turn

- *Say it: kōli*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kōli, then maṇi, and say which one comes first in the morning*
- *Recall: say kuraivu, then read சேறு*

Before you move on

What does கோழி mean? (“a hen”.) Say it once more.

58.4 காக்கை (kākkai) — a crow

Before the new one: what did *kōli* mean?

You'll want to know: காக்கை

காக்கை (*kākkai*) — “a crow”.

Named off the noise it makes, and the sisters landed on the same trick from the same starting point: Kannada ಕಾಗೆ (*kāge*). Say it once and you have the etymology.

Of everything with wings around a Tamil house this is the one the house deals with daily. சாதம் set out on the வாசல் step is put there for the காக்கை, and it comes down within the minute.

What you've built

Four.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kākkai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *kākkai*, then *kōli*, and say which one is kept and which one turns up
- *Recall:* read தேவையில்லை, then say *pukai*

Before you move on

What does காக்கை mean? (“a crow”.) Say it once more.

58.5 பறவை (*paravai*) — a bird

Before the new one: what did *kākkai* mean?

You'll want to know: பறவை

பறவை (*paravai*) — “a bird”.

The wide word. Whatever flies is a பறவை, the கோழி and the காக்கை taken in along with everything that was never given a name of its own.

Here the three go three ways: Kannada ಹಕ್ಕಿ (*hakki*), Telugu పక్షి (*pakṣi*) off the Sanskrit, and Tamil's own பறவை. The ற in the middle is the hard one, the same ற standing in ஆறு.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: a cow, a goat, a hen, a crow, and the word for everything that flies.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *paravai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *pasu, āṭu, kōli, kākkai, paravai*
- *Recall:* say *ākattum*, then read கனல்

Before you move on

What does பறவை mean? (“a bird”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 59

In the Kitchen

Modes: 🗣 voice (5) 🗣 Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name curd, ghee, oil, jaggery and sugar in Tamil.

Complete TA-C59-sugar and say all five words in order.

59.1 தயிர் (tayir) — curd

Before the new one: what did *kākkai* mean, and what did *paravai* mean?

You'll want to know: தயிர்

தயிர் (*tayir*) — “curd”.

Set பால், soured overnight in a covered pot. It is what a Tamil meal finishes on, turned through the last of the சாதம், and it is the thing a hot afternoon is survived with.

The sisters do not agree here at all: Kannada ಮೊಸರು (*mosaru*), Telugu పెరుగు (*perugu*), Tamil தயிர். Three households, three words, one pot.

What you've built

The first of five kitchen words.

Your turn

- Say it: *tayir*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *tayir*, then *sādam*, and say which one goes on top of the other
- *Recall:* say *kārru*, then read பசு

Before you move on

What does தயிர் mean? (“curd”.) Say it once more.

59.2 நெய் (ney) — ghee

Before the new one: what did *tayir* mean?

You’ll want to know: நெய்

நெய் (*ney*) — “ghee”.

Butter cooked down until the water has gone and only the fat and the smell are left. Short, old, and Tamil’s own. Telugu keeps it as నెయ్యి (*neyyi*); Kannada walked off to ತುಪ್ಪ (*tuppa*).

A spoon of it goes over hot சாதம் at the start of a meal on a day that matters, which is most of what it does.

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ney*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *tayir*, then *ney*, and say which one ends a meal and which one opens it
- *Recall:* read மணல், then say *ātu*

Before you move on

What does நெய் mean? (“ghee”.) Say it once more.

59.3 எண்ணெய் (eṇṇey) — oil

Before the new one: what did *ney* mean?

You’ll want to know: எண்ணெய்

எண்ணெய் (eṇṇey) — “oil”.

The end of it is நெய், standing there unchanged. The front piece is an old name for the sesame seed, so the whole thing began as sesame-fat — and then it widened until it covered every oil a kitchen has, sesame or not.

Kannada kept the same word as ಎಣ್ಣೆ (eṇṇe); Telugu went to నూనె (nūne). The doubled ண் in the middle is the one made with the tongue curled back, held twice as long.

What you’ve built

Three, and the third is built out of the second.

Your turn

- *Say it: eṇṇey*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: ney, then eṇṇey, and hear the first one still sitting inside the second*
- *Recall: say sēru, then read கோழி*

Before you move on

What does எண்ணெய் mean? (“oil”.) Say it once more.

59.4 வெல்லம் (vellam) — jaggery

Before the new one: what did *eṇṇey* mean?

You’ll want to know: வெல்லம்

வெல்லம் (vellam) — “jaggery”.

Cane juice boiled down and left alone — no bleaching, no crystals — and sold as a dark heavy lump you break a piece off. Kannada has the same word as ಬೆಲ್ಲ (*bella*), with *v* softened to *b*.

In an older Tamil kitchen sweetness meant this before it meant anything white, and வெல்லம் still goes into the food that has to taste the way it used to.

What you've built

Four.

Your turn

- *Say it: vellam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: vellam, then ney, and say which of the two a sweet needs*
- *Recall: read புதை, then say kākkai*

Before you move on

What does வெல்லம் mean? (“jaggery”.) Say it once more.

59.5 சர்க்கரை (sarkkarai) — sugar

Before the new one: what did *vellam* mean?

You'll want to know: சர்க்கரை

சர்க்கரை (*sarkkarai*) — “sugar”.

The refined white kind, beside வெல்லம் rather than in place of it. Kannada ಸಕ್ಕರೆ (*sakkare*), Telugu చక్కర (*cakkeru*): one word, lightly redressed three times.

It has travelled further than any other word in this run. Sanskrit *śarkarā* went out through Arabic, Greek and Latin and came back into English as *sugar*, so சர்க்கரை and the English word are one word wearing different clothes.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: curd, ghee, oil, jaggery, and sugar.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *sarkkarai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *tayir, ney, eṇṇey, vellam, sarkkarai*
- *Recall:* say *kaṇal*, then read பறவை

Before you move on

What does சர்க்கரை mean? (“sugar”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 60

Things People Make

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a needle, a rope, an umbrella, a broom and a comb in Tamil.

Complete TA-C60-comb and say all five words in order.

60.1 உஸி (ūsi) — a needle

Before the new one: what did *vellam* mean, and what did *sarkkarai* mean?

You'll want to know: உஸி

உஸி (ūsi) — “a needle”.

The sewing needle, and whatever else is that shape. It is the tool துணி is repaired with, which is most of what துணி asks for.

Kannada ಸೂಜಿ (*sūji*) and Telugu సూది (*sūdi*) hold on to a sound at the front that Tamil let go of, so Tamil's is the shortest of the three. Open it on a long உஸ்.

What you've built

The first of five made things.

Your turn

- Say it: *ūsi*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *ūsi*, then *tunī*, and say which one repairs the other
- *Recall:* say *pasu*, then read தயிர்

Before you move on

What does ஊசி mean? (“a needle”.) Say it once more.

60.2 கயிறு (*kayiru*) — a rope

Before the new one: what did *ūsi* mean?

You’ll want to know: கயிறு

கயிறு (*kayiru*) — “a rope”.

Twisted up out of coconut fibre, which is what a coast with that many palms was going to make rope out of. Thin ones tie a bundle; thick ones draw water.

The ற at the end is the hard one — the same ற standing in ஆறு and in பறவை. A பசு in a yard is at the end of a கயிறு, which is the commonest place to meet the word.

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kayiru*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *kayiru*, then *pasu*, and say which one holds the other
- *Recall:* read ஆடு, then say *ney*

Before you move on

What does கயிறு mean? (“a rope”.) Say it once more.

60.3 குடை (kuṭai) — an umbrella

Before the new one: what did *kayiru* mean?

You'll want to know: குடை

குடை (*kuṭai*) — “an umbrella”.

Against மழை and against the சூரியன் equally, and in Tamil country the second job is the larger one. It is carried in a month with no rain in it without anybody thinking that odd.

Kannada ಕೊಡೆ (*kode*) is the same word. It ends on the ை you already put on கூடை and on விதை.

What you've built

Three.

Your turn

- *Say it: kuṭai*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kuṭai, then malai, and say which one you take out for the other*
- *Recall: say kōli, then read எண்ணெய்*

Before you move on

What does குடை mean? (“an umbrella”.) Say it once more.

60.4 துடைப்பம் (tuṭaiṭṭam) — a broom

Before the new one: what did *kuṭai* mean?

You'll want to know: துடைப்பம்

துடைப்பம் (*tuṭaiṭṭam*) — “a broom”.

Coconut ribs bound at one end, held short, swung low. It is the first thing that touches a வாசல் in the morning: the ground is swept, then wetted, and only then does the கோலம் go down on it.

Three houses, three words again — Kannada ಪೊರಕೆ (*porake*), Telugu చీపురు (*cīpuru*), Tamil துடைப்பம். The doubled ப் in the middle is the one you have been holding since பெட்டி taught you to hold a letter twice.

What you've built

Four.

Your turn

- *Say it: tutaippam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: tutaippam, then kōlam, and say which one comes first*
- *Recall: read காக்கை, then say vellam*

Before you move on

What does துடைப்பம் mean? (“a broom”.) Say it once more.

60.5 சீப்பு (sīppu) — a comb

Before the new one: what did *tutaippam* mean?

You'll want to know: சீப்பு

சீப்பு (*sīppu*) — “a comb”.

A comb, and nothing borrowed about it. The ீ at the front is held long, and then the doubled ப் comes again, so it lands in the same shape as துடைப்பம் and பெட்டி.

A சீப்பு and a மலர் are what go into hair on a morning that is being made something of, and the two turn up in the same sentence often enough to be worth learning together.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: a needle, a rope, an umbrella, a broom, and a comb.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *s̄ippu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *ūsi*, *kayiru*, *kuṭai*, *tūṭaippam*, *s̄ippu*
- *Recall:* say *paravai*, then read சர்க்கரை

Before you move on

What does சீப்பு mean? (“a comb”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 61

How the Body Feels

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say I am hungry, thirsty, sleepy, feverish or in pain in Tamil.

Complete TA-C61-pain and say all five words in order.

61.1 பசி (pasi) — hunger

Before the new one: what did *tutaippam* mean, and what did *sippu* mean?

You'll want to know: பசி

பசி (*pasi*) — “hunger”.

Hunger as a thing that arrives, rather than something you are. Kannada makes it ಹಸಿವು (*hasivu*) — the *p* traded for *h* one more time, exactly as it was between பசு and ಹಸು. Telugu went elsewhere, to ఆకలి (*ākali*).

Set பசி beside பசு and only the last mark separates them: one ends on the ி, the other on the ு. They are not related, and the difference is worth practising until it stops needing thought.

What you've built

The first of five feelings.

Your turn

- *Say it: pasi*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: pasu, then pasi, and hold the two endings apart*
- *Recall: say tayir, then read உளசி*

Before you move on

What does பசி mean? (“hunger”.) Say it once more.

61.2 தாகம் (tākam) — thirst

Before the new one: what did *pasi* mean?

You’ll want to know: தாகம்

தாகம் (*tākam*) — “thirst”.

Thirst. Sanskrit-descended, unlike பசி beside it, and taken in whole with the *-am* Tamil hangs on such arrivals — the same *-am* already sitting on புத்தகம்.

It is answered with தண்ணீர் and with nothing else in particular, and a Tamil house offers the தண்ணீர் before it is asked for.

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it: tākam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: pasi, then tākam, and say what each of the two is answered with*
- *Recall: read நெய், then say kayiru*

Before you move on

What does தாகம் mean? (“thirst”.) Say it once more.

61.3 தூக்கம் (tūkkam) — sleep

Before the new one: what did *tākam* mean?

You’ll want to know: தூக்கம்

தூக்கம் (*tūkkam*) — “sleep”.

Sleep as a state — the sleep you get, lose, or need more of. Kannada ನಿದ್ರೆ (*nidra*) and Telugu నిద్ర (*nidra*) both took the Sanskrit word; Tamil kept its own and stayed out of it.

Open it on a long ஊ, the same long ஊ that opens ஊசி, and then hold the க்க twice.

What you’ve built

Three.

Your turn

- *Say it: tūkkam*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: tūkkam, then ūsi, and hear the same long vowel open both*
- *Recall: say enney, then read குடை*

Before you move on

What does தூக்கம் mean? (“sleep”.) Say it once more.

61.4 காய்ச்சல் (kāyccal) — a fever

Before the new one: what did *tūkkam* mean?

You'll want to know: காய்ச்சல்

காய்ச்சல் (*kāyccal*) — “a fever”.

The body running hot. Tamil built the word on its own idea of heating rather than importing one, which is why it looks nothing like Kannada's ಜ್ವರ (*jvara*), taken straight from the Sanskrit.

It is the first thing anybody tells a மருத்துவர், and it is said flatly, the way you would report weather.

What you've built

Four.

Your turn

- *Say it: kāyccal*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: kāyccal, then maruttuvar, and say which one you take to the other*
- *Recall: read வெல்லம், then say tuṭaippam*

Before you move on

What does காய்ச்சல் mean? (“a fever”.) Say it once more.

61.5 வலி (vali) — pain

Before the new one: what did *kāyccal* mean?

You'll want to know: வலி

வலி (*vali*) — “pain”.

Pain, plainly: the ache itself, wherever it sits. Kannada says ನೋವು (*nōvu*). Put it with what you already have for the body and it does its work at once — a வலி in the முதுகு, a வலி in the பல்.

Keep it away from *vali*, the way or the route, which came up beside பாதை. வலி takes the plain ல; *vali* takes the ழ you learned to curl the tongue back for. Two letters English would spell alike, and Tamil holds them apart.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: hunger, thirst, sleep, a fever, and pain.

Your turn

- *Say it: vali*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: all five in order — pasi, tākam, tūkkam, kāyccal, vali*
- *Recall: say sarkkarai, then read சீப்பு*

Before you move on

What does வலி mean? (“pain”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 62

Only and Still

Modes: ⇄ voice (5) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say only, still, soon, at once and first of all in Tamil.

Complete TA-C62-first-of-all and say all five words in order.

62.1 மட்டும் (maṭṭum) — only

Before the new one: what did *kāyccal* mean, and what did *vali* mean?

You'll want to know: மட்டும்

மட்டும் (*maṭṭum*) — “only”.

This and nothing beside it. Where English puts *only* in front of the thing it limits, Tamil hangs மட்டும் on the end of it: தண்ணீர் மட்டும் — water, and nothing else.

Telugu does the same job with మాత్రమే (*mātramē*). The doubled ட்ட in the middle is the one held twice, as in ஆகட்டும்.

What you've built

The first of five.

Your turn

- Say it: *maṭṭum*

- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *maṭṭum*, then *taṇṇīr*, and put them in the Tamil order
- *Recall:* say *ūsi*, then read பசி

Before you move on

What does மட்டும் mean? (“only”.) Say it once more.

62.2 இன்னும் (*innum*) — still, yet

Before the new one: what did *maṭṭum* mean?

You’ll want to know: இன்னும்

இன்னும் (*innum*) — “still, yet”.

For something that has not finished, and for a bit more of it: இன்னும் சிறிது, a little more still. Kannada ಇನ್ನೂ (*innū*) is the same word; Telugu says ఇంకా (*inkā*).

The ன் doubled in the middle is the soft one — the alveolar ன, not the curled ண you have in கிண்ணம். Tamil keeps three of these apart and this word wants the middle one twice.

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *innum*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *innum*, then *siritu*, and say the two together
- *Recall:* read கயிறு, then say *tākam*

Before you move on

What does இன்னும் mean? (“still, yet”.) Say it once more.

62.3 சீக்கிரம் (sikkiram) — soon

Before the new one: what did *innum* mean?

You'll want to know: சீக்கிரம்

சீக்கிரம் (*sikkiram*) — “soon”.

Soon, and quickly — Tamil lets one word carry nearness in நேரம் and speed of doing together, and which one is meant comes out of the sentence around it.

Set it against பிறகு and the pair covers the whole span: சீக்கிரம் is the near end, பிறகு the loose one that promises nothing. Kannada says ಬೇಗ (*bēga*).

What you've built

Three.

Your turn

- *Say it: sikkiram*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: sikkiram, then piraku, and say which of the two commits you*
- *Recall: say kuṭai, then read தூக்கம்*

Before you move on

What does சீக்கிரம் mean? (“soon”.) Say it once more.

62.4 உடனே (uṭanē) — at once

Before the new one: what did *sikkiram* mean?

You'll want to know: உடனே

உடனே (*uṭanē*) — “at once”.

Tighter than சீக்கிரம்: not soon but now, with nothing allowed in between. It is the word that answers an instruction you intend to obey.

Say it ending long, on the ே. That final length is doing the work — it is what makes the word press rather than merely inform.

What you’ve built

Four, and the fourth pushes harder than the third.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *uṭaṇē*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *sikkiram*, then *uṭaṇē*, and say which one leaves you no room
- *Recall:* read துடைப்பம், then say *kāyccal*

Before you move on

What does உடனே mean? (“at once”.) Say it once more.

62.5 முதலில் (mutalil) — first of all

Before the new one: what did *uṭaṇē* mean?

You’ll want to know: முதலில்

முதலில் (*mutalil*) — “first of all”.

Before anything else. It puts an order on things that had none: முதலில் தண்ணீர், பிறகு சாதம் — water to begin with, and the rice after.

With this one you can lay out a sequence end to end: முதலில், then உடனே or சீக்கிரம் for what follows fast, then பிறகு for what can wait.

What you’ve built

Five, and the run is closed: only, still, soon, at once, and first of all.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *mutalil*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly

- *Say it:* all five in order — *maṭṭum*, *innu*, *sikkiram*, *uṭanē*, *mutalil*
- *Recall:* say *sīppu*, then read வலி

Before you move on

What does முதலில் mean? (“first of all”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 63

Asking Well

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🖱️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a request, permission, hesitancy, trust and humility in Tamil.

Complete TA-C63-humility and say all five words in order.

63.1 வேண்டுகோள் (vēṇḍukōḷ) — a request

Before the new one: what did *uṭaṇē* mean, and what did *mutalil* mean?

You'll want to know: வேண்டுகோள்

வேண்டுகோள் (vēṇḍukōḷ) — “a request”.

A request as a thing you make and hand over, rather than the asking itself. It stands beside வேண்டும், which you already have, and you can hear that word at the front of it.

Kannada ವಿನಂತಿ (*vinanti*) and Telugu మనవి (*manavi*) both went their own way. A வேண்டுகோள் is what தயவுசெய்து is put in front of when the asking has to be formal.

What you've built

The first of five.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vēṇḍukōḷ*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *vēṇḍukōḷ*, then *tayavu seytu*, and say which one dresses the other
- *Recall:* say *pasi*, then read மட்டும்

Before you move on

What does வேண்டுகோள் mean? (“a request”.) Say it once more.

63.2 அனுமதி (anumati) — permission

Before the new one: what did *vēṇḍukōḷ* mean?

You’ll want to know: அனுமதி

அனுமதி (*anumati*) — “permission”.

Permission to do a thing — asked for, given, refused. Here all three sisters took the same Sanskrit word and did not even change its shape: Kannada ಅನುಮತಿ (*anumati*), Telugu అనుమతి (*anumati*), Tamil அனுமதி.

Hold it apart from விடை, which you already have. விடை is permission to go, taken formally at a door. அனுமதி is the wider one and covers everything else you might be allowed.

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *anumati*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* *anumati*, then *viḍai*, and say which of the two is only about leaving
- *Recall:* read தாகம், then say *innum*

Before you move on

What does அனுமதி mean? (“permission”.) Say it once more.

63.3 தயக்கம் (tayakkam) — hesitancy

Before the new one: what did *anumati* mean?

You’ll want to know: தயக்கம்

தயக்கம் (*tayakkam*) — “hesitancy”.

The holding back before you ask: the half-step not taken, the sentence begun and dropped. Kannada carries the same idea in ಸಂಕೋಚ (sankōca).

The தயவு inside தயவுசெய்து opens the same way and is a different word — that one is kindness given, this one is a foot kept back. Tamil puts them next to each other and expects you to hear the difference.

What you’ve built

Three.

Your turn

- Say it: *tayakkam*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *tayakkam*, then *tayavu seytu*, and say which one is a giving
- Recall: say *tukkam*, then read சீக்கிரம்

Before you move on

What does தயக்கம் mean? (“hesitancy”.) Say it once more.

63.4 நம்பிக்கை (nambikkai) — trust

Before the new one: what did *tayakkam* mean?

You'll want to know: நம்பிக்கை

நம்பிக்கை (*nambikkai*) — “trust”.

Trust, and the confidence that comes with it. All three are off the same old stem: Kannada ನಂಬಿಕೆ (*nambike*), Telugu నమ్మకం (*nammakam*), Tamil நம்பிக்கை.

A விருந்தாளி is given this before anything else is given, which is the whole of what a Tamil house means by hospitality.

What you've built

Four.

Your turn

- Say it: *nambikkai*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *nambikkai*, then *viruntāli*, and say who is given which
- Recall: read காய்ச்சல், then say *uṭaṇē*

Before you move on

What does நம்பிக்கை mean? (“trust”.) Say it once more.

63.5 பணிவு (*paṇivu*) — humility

Before the new one: what did *nambikkai* mean?

You'll want to know: பணிவு

பணிவு (*paṇivu*) — “humility”.

The bending: humility, deference, a manner rather than an act. Set it against மரியாதை, which you already have — மரியாதை is respect paid outward to somebody, பணிவு is the carriage you keep in yourself.

Telugu's మర్యాద (*maryāda*) is the same word as your மரியாதை, which makes the pair easy to keep straight across the two.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: a request, permission, hesitancy, trust, and humility.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *paṇivu*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *vēṇḍukōl*, *aṇumati*, *tayakkam*, *nambikkai*, *paṇivu*
- *Recall:* say *vali*, then read முதலில்

Before you move on

What does பணிவு mean? (“humility”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 64

The Harvest

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name paddy, grass, a standing crop, a threshing floor and the harvest in Tamil.

Complete TA-C64-harvest and say all five words in order.

64.1 நெல் (nel) — paddy

Before the new one: what did *nambikkai* mean, and what did *paṇivu* mean?

You'll want to know: நெல்

நெல் (*nel*) — “paddy”.

Rice still in its husk — standing in the வயல், cut, carried, stored, but not yet அரிசி. The two words do not trade places: நெல் goes into the field and அரிசி comes out of the kitchen, and the husking is the border between them.

Kannada ಭತ್ತ (*bhatta*) and Telugu పరి (*vari*) each have their own word for it, so this is one the three do not share.

What you've built

The first of five field words.

Your turn

- *Say it: nel*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: nel, then arisi, and say which one the husk is still on*
- *Recall: say mattum, then read வேண்டுகோள்*

Before you move on

What does நெல் mean? (“paddy”.) Say it once more.

64.2 புல் (pul) — grass

Before the new one: what did *nel* mean?

You’ll want to know: புல்

புல் (*pul*) — “grass”.

Grass, of the kind cut and carried home. Kannada makes it ಹುಲ್ಲು (*hullu*) — the *p*-for-*h* trade a third time, and by now you can guess a Kannada word before you meet it. Telugu went elsewhere, to గడ్డి (*gaddi*).

புல் and பல் sit one mark apart, and the mark is the whole difference: keep the உ round and low and the word stays grass. A பசு and an ஆடு are put out for புல்.

What you’ve built

Two.

Your turn

- *Say it: pul*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: pul, then pal, and hold the two vowels apart*
- *Recall: read இன்னும், then say anumati*

Before you move on

What does புல் mean? (“grass”.) Say it once more.

64.3 பயிர் (payir) — a standing crop

Before the new one: what did *pul* mean?

You’ll want to know: பயிர்

பயிர் (*payir*) — “a standing crop”.

What is growing in the வயல் at this moment, green and still rooted. It is not the வயல், which stays there when nothing is on it, and it is not the நெல் in the sack, which has stopped growing.

So the run has three separate things now where English leans on one word: the ground, the standing green, and the grain. Kannada calls the standing green ಬೆಳೆ (*bele*).

What you’ve built

Three, and the three are carefully apart.

Your turn

- *Say it: payir*
- *Say it: it once more, slowly*
- *Say it: vayal, then payir, then nel, in that order*
- *Recall: say sikkiram, then read தயக்கம்*

Before you move on

What does பயிர் mean? (“a standing crop”.) Say it once more.

64.4 களம் (kaḷam) — a threshing floor

Before the new one: what did *payir* mean?

You'll want to know: களம்

களம் (*kaḷam*) — “a threshing floor”.

The beaten flat ground at the edge of a village where cut நெல் is spread, trodden and winnowed. Telugu has the same word as కల్లం (*kallam*), which makes it old.

It is not காலம், the season word you already have. This one is short at the front and takes the ள; காலம் opens long and takes the ல. One mark and one letter, and they are unrelated.

What you've built

Four.

Your turn

- Say it: *kaḷam*
- Say it: it once more, slowly
- Say it: *kaḷam*, then *nel*, and say what is brought to which
- Recall: read உடனே, then say *nambikkai*

Before you move on

What does களம் mean? (“a threshing floor”.) Say it once more.

64.5 அறுவடை (*aruvaṭai*) — the harvest

Before the new one: what did *kaḷam* mean?

You'll want to know: அறுவடை

அறுவடை (*aruvaṭai*) — “the harvest”.

The cutting and the gathering together, and the stretch of the year named after them. Kannada ಸುಗ್ಗಿ (*suggi*) and Telugu పంట (*paṇṭa*) each named the same weeks their own way.

The front of it is the reaping, not the ஆறு you counted with: this one opens short on அ and takes the hard ற straight away, where six opens long on ஆ. Close together on the page, far apart in the mouth.

What you've built

Five, and the run is closed: paddy, grass, a standing crop, a threshing floor, and the harvest.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *aruṇaṭai*
- *Say it:* it once more, slowly
- *Say it:* all five in order — *nel*, *pul*, *payir*, *kaḷam*, *aruṇaṭai*
- *Recall:* say *mutalil*, then read பணிவு

Before you move on

What does அறுவடை mean? (“the harvest”.) Say it once more.

Chapter 65

Doing, and Undoing

Modes: ⇄ voice (6) ✍ pen (1) ⇄ Hands-free start: first 2 of 7 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say drink, walk, stop, open and close in Tamil, and name the action that undoes each one.

Complete TA-C65-doing-recall and produce each of the five doings from the act that undoes it, out of order.

65.1 குடி (kuḍi) — drink

Before the new one: what did *aruvaḍai* mean?

You'll want to know: குடி

குடி (*kuḍi*) — “drink”.

You already have சாப்பிடு (*sāppiḍu*) for what you chew. குடி is what you do to a liquid, and Tamil keeps the two apart the way English does: rice is சாப்பிடு, தண்ணீர் is குடி.

Say what is being drunk, and say it in front of the verb: தண்ணீர் குடி (*taṇṇīr kuḍi*), தேநீர் குடி (*tēnīr kuḍi*), பால் குடி (*pāl kuḍi*). Naming the liquid is not decoration. On its own, without anything in front of it, குடி is also the everyday noun for the drinking *habit* — a man described as being given to குடி is being described as a drinker. So a speaker who wants the plain, ordinary sense puts the drink in the sentence, and there is nothing left to misread.

Across the family: Kannada uses ಕುಡಿ (*kuḍi*) and Malayalam കുടിക്കുക (*kuṭikkuka*) — the same word, worn a little differently. Telugu reached for something else entirely and drinks with త్రాగు (*trāgu*).

What you've built

The first of five everyday doings, and the one that completes the pair you had half of.

Your turn

- *Say it: kuḍi*
- *Say it: taṇṇīr kuḍi* — “drink water”
- *Say it: tēnīr kuḍi*, then *pāl kuḍi*
- *Say it: which of sāppiḍu and kuḍi takes sādama, and which takes taṇṇīr*
- *Recall: say vēṇḍukōḷ, then read நெல்*

Before you move on

What does குடி mean? (“drink”.) And what does a speaker put in front of it, every time? (The drink itself.)

65.2 நட (naḍa) — walk

What did kuḍi mean, and what does a speaker name in front of it?

You'll want to know: நட

நட (naḍa) — “walk”.

You have போ (pō) for going. போ says nothing about how — by bus, by train, on foot. நட names the feet. Where போ leaves the manner open, நட fills it in, so the two sit side by side rather than competing: pō to leave, naḍa to leave on foot.

One neighbour worth hearing apart. You have met நடு (naṭu, “middle”), inside the words for midday and midnight. நட and நடு differ by the little ு hook at the end and by nothing else, and they are two separate words: one is an action, one is a position.

Across the family: this one all four sisters kept. Kannada ನಡೆ (naḍe), Telugu నడుచు (naḍucu), Malayalam നടക്കുക (naṭakkuka) — and Tamil

நட. Where the drinking word split Telugu off, the walking word holds the family together.

What you've built

Two doings. One of them fills in what the other leaves open.

Your turn

- *Say it: naḍa*
- *Say it: pō, then naḍa, and say which one names the feet*
- *Say it: naḍa, then naṭu, and hear the hook arrive*
- *Say it: kuḍi, then naḍa*
- *Recall: read அனுமதி, then say pul*

Before you move on

What does நட mean? (“walk”.) Which of போ and நட tells you the feet were doing it? (நட.)

65.3 குடி — a word with nothing new in it

Two lessons ago you learned to say *kuḍi*, and a walking word came between. Now look at it on the page.

Script you'll notice: nothing new

Every lesson in this strand so far has arrived carrying a letter you had not met. This one arrives carrying none. All four pieces of குடி are already yours, and the work is putting them together.

piece

கு	<i>ku</i> — க with the ு sign	க from the very first writing lesson; the ு hook from <i>uṇavu</i>
டி	<i>di</i> — ட with the ி sign	ட from <i>eppadi</i> ; the ி sign from <i>nanri</i>

கு • டி → குடி

Two letters, two signs riding them, and a word you have been saying since the drinking lesson. Nothing here is a new shape; the only new thing is that these four now sit together.

Script you'll notice: the letter you can hear moving

஁ is the letter this book writes as *ḍ* here and as *ṭ* elsewhere, because Tamil does not mark the difference on the page — the position in the word decides it. Inside எப்படி you say *eppaḍi*, and inside குடி you say *kuḍi*: in both, ஁ sits between vowels and softens. The same shape, read by where it stands.

Your turn

- *Read it:* கு — then டி — then குடி
- *Contrast:* குடி and எப்படி — find the ஁ in each
- *Say it:* *kuḍi*, and name the drink you would put in front of it

Before you move on

Read குடி. How many letters carry a vowel sign in it? (Both of them.) What decides whether ஁ comes out *ṭ* or *ḍ*? (Where it stands in the word.)

65.4 நிறுத்து (niruttu) — stop

Read குடி off the page once. Then: what did *naḍa* mean?

You'll want to know: நிறுத்து

நிறுத்து (*niruttu*) — “stop”.

This is what undoes நட. Feet moving is *naḍa*; நிறுத்து! called across a street brings them to a halt, and it is the word for stopping a bus, a song, a clock or an argument as readily as a person.

It is a long word for a short act, and it comes apart. Inside it is the standing-family that gave you நிலை (*nilai*, “a state, a standing”) — the piece you already met welded into வானிலை (*vāṇilai*, “weather”), the sky's *standing*. Where நிலை names the state, நிறுத்து is the making of

it: bring the thing to a stand. The weather word and the stopping word are cousins, and knowing that is why *niruttu* has somewhere to sit in your memory rather than four syllables to survive on.

Across the family: Kannada ನಿಲ್ಲಿಸು (*nillisu*) and Malayalam നിർത്തുക (*nirttuka*) are built the same way, from the same standing-verb.

What you've built

Three doings, and the first pair that undoes itself: *naḍa* against *niruttu*.

Your turn

- Say it: *niruttu*
- Say it: *naḍa*, then *niruttu* — moving, then halted
- Say it: *niruttu* the way you would call it across a street
- Say it: *vāṇilai*, and name the piece of it this verb is related to
- Recall: say *tayakkam*, then read பயிர்

Before you move on

What does நிறுத்து mean? (“stop”.) Which everyday word already carried its family? (வானிலை — the sky’s *standing*.)

65.5 திற (tira) — open

What did *niruttu* mean, and which walking word does it undo?

You'll want to know: திற

திற (*tira*) — “open”.

You have கதவு (*kadavu*), the door. திற is what you do to it. The ற in the middle is the hard, tapped *r* you first met in நன்றி (*nanri*) — the same letter, in a word where nothing hides it.

Tamil joins a verb to the thing it acts on with an ending this chapter does not open yet, so hold *kadavu* and *tira* as two words you can say in sequence rather than a sentence you can build. The pair is worth having

early even without the joint: a door and the act of opening it are two of the first things anyone needs at somebody else's house.

Across the family, one old word in four shapes: Kannada has ತೆರೆ (*tere*), Telugu has తెరుచు (*terucu*), and Malayalam has തുറക്കുക (*turakkuka*). Tamil's keeps the tapped ற the others softened away.

What you've built

Four doings, and a verb that belongs to a noun you already carry.

Your turn

- Say it: *tira*
- Say it: *kadavu*, then *tira* — the thing, then the act
- Say it: *nanri*, then *tira*, and hear the same ற twice
- Say it: *niruttu*, then *tira*
- Recall: read நம்பிக்கை, then say *kaḷam*

Before you move on

What does திற mean? (“open”.) Which door word does it go with? (கதவு.)

65.6 மூடு (*mūḍu*) — close

What did *tira* mean, and which noun does it belong beside?

You'll want to know: மூடு

மூடு (*mūḍu*) — “close”, “shut”.

The verb that undoes திற. A கதவு you have opened is a கதவு you can மூடு, and the two travel together the way *naḍa* and *niruttu* do.

The long ூ at its front is the same sign you read in மூன்று (*mūnru*, “three”). Two words, one sign, no relation between their meanings — worth noticing so the shape stops being a surprise.

Across the family, this one did not travel. Kannada shuts a door with ಮುಚ್ಚು (*muccu*), Telugu with మూయు (*mūyu*), and Malayalam with

അടയ്ക്കുക (*aṭaykkuka*). Four sisters, three different words — after two verbs the family held in common, a reminder that the sharing is real but never guaranteed.

What you've built

Five everyday doings, in pairs: *sāppiḍu* with *kuḍi*, *naḍa* with *niruttu*, *tira* with *mūḍu*. Each one arrived beside the act that undoes it, which is the cheapest way there is to hold two words instead of one.

Your turn

- Say it: *mūḍu*
- Say it: *tira*, then *mūḍu*
- Say it: all five in order — *kuḍi*, *naḍa*, *niruttu*, *tira*, *mūḍu*
- Say it: for each of *naḍa* and *tira*, the word that undoes it
- Say it: *taṇṇīr kuḍi*, then *kadavu*, then *mūḍu*
- Read it: குடி — the one word of the five you have spelled out
- Recall: say *paṇivu*, then read அறுவடை

Before you move on

Say the five doings in order. Which two of them make a pair with a door? (திற and மூடு.) Which drink word did you put in front of குடி? (*taṇṇīr*, or *tēnīr*, or *pāl*.)

65.7 The five doings, retrieved

Reach back one chapter first: what did *kaḷam* mean, and what did *aruvaḍai* mean? Nothing new arrives in this lesson.

Your turn — retrieve, do not recite

Say these aloud:

- the word for drinking, and a drink to put in front of it

- the word for walking, and then the word that stops it
- what you do to a கதவு, and then the act that undoes that
- all five, in the order you met them
- all five again, fastest you can hold them

Your turn — the pairs, out of order

Each prompt names one half. Say the other.

- *mūḍu* → [PAUSE 2s] (*tira*)
- *naḍa* → [PAUSE 2s] (*niruttu*)
- *sāppiḍu* → [PAUSE 2s] (*kudī*)
- *niruttu* → [PAUSE 2s] (*naḍa*)
- *tira* → [PAUSE 2s] (*mūḍu*)
- *Read it:* குடி, then say what goes in front of it

Before you move on

Which of the five has no partner among the other four, and where does its partner live instead? (குடி — its partner is சாப்பிடு, from the eating lesson.)

Chapter 66

Which Way

Modes: 🗣️ voice (7) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say up, down, inside, outside, right and left in Tamil, and put each one in front of a verb or a noun I already know.

Complete TA-C66-whichway-recall and produce each of the six directions from its opposite, then sort all six by the ending they take.

66.1 மேலே (mēlē) — up, above

One word back from last chapter first: what did *mūḍu* mean?

You’ll want to know: மேலே

மேலே (*mēlē*) — “up, above”.

It sits in front of the verb, where every Tamil adverb sits: மேலே பார் (*mēlē pār*) — “look up”. You already have பார் from the seeing lesson, so this is one new word buying you a whole instruction.

Underneath it is மேல் (*mēl*), the bare word for “the top”, a native Dravidian positional word. Kannada says ಮೇಲೆ (*mēle*) for the same idea, and it is the same word, worn the same way.

Why it’s said this way

Listen to the end of the word, and then say the two pointing words you already have. இங்கே (*iṅgē*, “here”) and அங்கே (*aṅgē*, “there”) end the same way. That -ஏ is Tamil’s way of turning a bare place-word

into “**at** that place, **to** that place” — and மேல் plus -ஏ is மேலே, “at the top, upward”.

So this is not a new machine. It is a machine you already own, running on a new word.

Your turn

- Say it: *mēlē*
- Say it: *mēlē pār* — “look up”
- Say it: *iṅgē, aṅgē, mēlē* — three words, one ending
- Recall: say *nel*, then read குடி

Before you move on

What does மேலே mean? (“Up, above”.) What two pointing words end the same way, and what does that ending do? (இங்கே and அங்கே — the -ஏ makes a place-word mean “at, or to, that place”.)

66.2 கீழே (*kīlē*) — down, below

Say the word for “up”, and the instruction you built with it.

You’ll want to know: கீழே

கீழே (*kīlē*) — “down, below”. The other half of the pair, and built by the same two pieces: கீழ் (*kīl*, “the bottom”) plus the -ஏ you met one lesson ago.

கீழே பார் (*kīlē pār*) — “look down”. Same slot, same verb, opposite direction.

The letters in this word

The middle of this word is ழ (*l*), the retroflex glide you first met inside மகிழ்ச்சி and again in தமிழ் itself. Curl the tongue back and let the air pass beside it; it is not an English *l* and it is not an English *r*. The vowel in front of it is **long**: *kīl*, not *kil*. Tamil separates words by vowel length, so the length is doing work here, not decoration.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kīlē* — feel the *ழ*
- *Say it:* *mēlē pār*, then *kīlē pār*
- *Say it:* both bare words, *mēl* and *kīl*, then both with the ending
- *Recall:* read புல், then say *naḍa*

Before you move on

What does கீழே mean, and what two pieces build it? (“Down, below” — கீழ் plus -ஏ.) Which rare Tamil letter sits in the middle of it? (ழ, the same one in *tamīl*.)

66.3 மேலே — the same sign twice

Two lessons ago you learned to say *mēlē*, and *kīlē* came between. Now look at it on the page.

Script you’ll notice: two letters, one sign, used twice

Like குடி before it, மேலே brings no new shape. It brings something better: the same vowel sign riding two different letters, one after the other.

piece

மே	<i>mē</i> — ம with the ே sign	ம from the letter- <i>ma</i> lesson; the ே sign from the vowel-sign lesson, and again inside <i>pēsū</i>
லே	<i>lē</i> — ல with the ே sign	ல from the letter- <i>la</i> lesson; the same ே again

மே • லே → மேலே

Read it once as two beats. Both beats are long, and both are long for the same reason: the ே hook in front of each letter.

Script you’ll notice: the hook goes in front, the sound comes after

The ே sits to the **left** of the letter it belongs to, and is said **after** it. ே is written hook-then-ம and read *mē*. That is not a quirk of this word — it is how this sign has always worked, and ேே shows it twice in a row so you can watch the eye do it.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ே — then ே — then ேே
- *Point to:* the ே in each of the two beats
- *Read it:* ேே, then say the instruction you built from it

Before you move on

Read ேே. How many times does the ே appear, and on which side of its letter does it sit? (**Twice**; on the **left**, though it is said after.)

66.4 உள்ளே (uḷḷē) — inside

Read ேே off the page, and then say its opposite.

You’ll want to know: உள்ளே

உள்ளே (uḷḷē) — “inside, in”.

The same shape a third time: உள்ள (uḷ, “the inside”) plus the -ஏ that turns a place-word into a place you can go to.

And now it earns its keep. உள்ளே வா (uḷḷē vā) — “**come in.**” That is what a Tamil household says at the door, and you have had வா since the coming-and-going lesson. One new word, and you can answer a doorway.

Why it’s said this way

Written out, உள்ள ends in the retroflex ள், and the ending brings a second one: உள்ள + ஏ → உள்ளே, with ள்ள doubled in the middle. Hold it a beat longer than a single ள், the way you already hold the *kk* in வணக்கம்.

You have met that doubling before without being told it was the same

thing: வெள்ளை (*vellai*, “white”) carries it too.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ullē* — hold the doubled ள
- *Say it:* *ullē vā* — “come in”
- *Say it:* *mēlē, kīlē, ullē* — three place-words, one ending
- *Recall:* say *payir*, then read நிறுத்து

Before you move on

What does உள்ளே mean, and what do you say at a door with it? (“Inside” — உள்ளே வா, “come in”.) What happens to the ள when the ending arrives? (It **doubles**.)

66.5 வெளியே (*veliyē*) — outside

What do you say at a door to bring someone in?

You’ll want to know: வெளியே

வெளியே (*veliyē*) — “outside, out”. The answer to உள்ளே, and the fourth word built the same way: வெளி (*veli*, “the open, the outside”) plus -ஏ.

வெளியே போ (*veliyē pō*) — “go out”. Put it beside உள்ளே வா and you have a matched pair of instructions, each one an old verb with a new word in front of it.

Why it’s said this way

உள் ends in a consonant, so -ஏ doubled it. வெளி ends in a vowel, and two vowels cannot sit against each other, so Tamil slides a ய் (*y*) between them: வெளி + ஏ → வெளியே.

Tamil grammar has a name for that sliding letter: உடம்படுமெய் (*uḍamḇuḁmey*), the “body-joining consonant”. Its whole job is to stand between two vowels that would otherwise meet, and it is either ய் or வ். Once you know it is there, you stop hearing வெளியே as a word with a strange extra letter and start hearing it as வெளி with

an ending on it.

Your turn

- Say it: *veliyē*
- Say it: *ullē vā*, then *veliyē pō*
- Say it: the bare pair — *uḷ* and *veḷi* — then both with the ending
- Recall: read களம், then say *tira*

Before you move on

What two instructions does this pair give you at a door? (உள்ளே வா, “come in”, and வெளியே போ, “go out”.) Why is there a ய inside வெளியே and not inside உள்ளே? (வெளி ends in a vowel, so a ய slides in to keep two vowels apart.)

66.6 வலது (valadu) — the right side

Say the pair you can use at a door.

You’ll want to know: வலது

வலது (*valadu*) — “the right side, the right-hand one”.

It does not take the -ஏ ending, because it is not that kind of word. It goes straight in front of a noun: வலது கை (*valadu kai*) — “the right hand”. You have had கை since the head-and-hand lesson, so again the new word is the only new thing.

Why it’s said this way

Listen to how it ends, and say the two pointing words again — this time the pair that names things rather than places. இது (*idu*, “this one”) and அது (*adu*, “that one”) end in the same -து. That ending means “**the one that is**” — so வலது is, quite literally, “the right one”.

Two endings from the same stretch of the book, and now you can hear the machine from both sides: -ஏ makes a **place** you can move to, -து makes a **thing** you can point at.

Tamil’s word for the right side sits close to **வலி** (*vali*), “strength” — the strong hand naming the side, a link many languages make (English gets *dexterity* from the Latin for “right”). Take that as the usual account rather than a settled derivation.

Your turn

- *Say it: valadu*
- *Say it: valadu kai* — “the right hand”
- *Say it: idu, adu, valadu* — three words, one ending
- *Recall: say aruvaṭai, then read மூடு*

Before you move on

What does **வலது** mean, and what does it not take that **மேலே** does? (“The right side”; it takes **no -ஏ**.) Which two pointing words share its ending? (**இது** and **அது**.)

66.7 இடது (iḍadu) — the left side

Which hand is the **வலது** கை? Hold it up.

You’ll want to know: இடது

இடது (*iḍadu*) — “the left side, the left-hand one”. The last of the six, and it behaves exactly like **வலது**: no **-ஏ**, straight in front of the noun. **இடது கை** (*iḍadu kai*) — “the left hand”.

Both hands, in two words you can now hold up and check against each other.

Why it’s said this way

Written out, **இடது** carries **Ḍ** between two vowels — and you learned in the reading lesson for **குடி** that a **Ḍ** in that position softens. So the book writes this word *iḍadu*, not *iṭadu*, for the same reason it writes *kudī* and *eppaḍi*. One letter, read by where it stands.

Tamil’s word for the left side looks a great deal like இடம் (*iḍam*), “place, room” — and dictionaries do connect them. Treat that as the usual account rather than a settled fact; it is the kind of link that is easy to see and hard to prove.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *iḍadu*
- *valadu kai*, then *iḍadu kai* — and raise each hand as you say it
- all four of the -ஏ words, then both of the -து words

Before you move on

What does இடது mean? (“The left side”.) Why is its ட read as a soft *d*? (Because it sits **between two vowels**, the same rule as in *kudī*.)

66.8 The six directions, retrieved

Reach back one chapter first: what did *tira* mean, and what did *mūdu* mean? Nothing new arrives in this lesson.

Your turn — retrieve, do not recite

Say these aloud:

- the word for “up”, and the instruction that sends the eyes there
- the word for “down”, and the same instruction pointed the other way
- what you call at a door to bring someone in
- all four of the -ஏ words, in the order you met them
- all four again, fastest you can hold them

Your turn — the pairs, out of order

Each prompt names one half. Say the other.

- *kālē* → [PAUSE 2s] (*mālē*)
- *veliyē* → [PAUSE 2s] (*ullē*)
- *iḍadu* → [PAUSE 2s] (*valadu*)
- *ullē vā* → [PAUSE 2s] (*veliyē pō*)
- *mālē pār* → [PAUSE 2s] (*kālē pār*)
- *Read it:* மேலே, then say the verb that goes after it

Your turn — sort the six

Two endings, and every word in this chapter takes one of them.

- *Sort:* which four take -ஏ, and which two take -து
- *Say it:* why the four go in front of a **verb** and the two go in front of a **noun**
- *Say it:* வலது கை, then இடது கை, raising each hand

Before you move on

Which two of the six never take -ஏ, and what do they take instead?
(வலது and இடது — the -து of இது and அது.)

Chapter 67

What You Wear

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a shirt, a veshti, a sari, sandals and a cap in Tamil, and run the five from the head down to the floor.

Complete TA-C67-cap and say all five words of the chapter in order.

67.1 சட்டை (saṭṭai) — a shirt

Before the new one: one word back from last chapter: what did *iḍadu* mean?

You'll want to know: சட்டை

சட்டை (*saṭṭai*) — “a shirt”.

The ordinary word for a shirt — the thing that goes over the top half of you, in a shop or on a washing line.

You already own துணி (*tun̄i*), cloth. The two are one step apart: துணி is the material, and சட்டை is the thing cut and sewn out of it. Ask for துணி and you get a length of fabric; ask for a சட்டை and you get a garment.

Say the middle hard. The doubled ட்ட in சட்டை is the same doubled ட் you already hear in பெட்டி (*peṭṭi*), a box — and it is what keeps this word *saṭṭai* rather than a softer *saḍai*.

What you've built

The first of five things you can wear.

Your turn

- *Say it: saṭṭai*
- *Say it: tuṇi, then saṭṭai* — and say which one is still just cloth
- *Recall: say valadu, then say idadu, then say saṭṭai*
- *Recall: say mēlē, then read கீழே*

Before you move on

Say it once more, holding the doubled ட.

67.2 வேட்டி (vēṭṭi) — a veshti, the cloth a man wraps at the waist

Before the new one: what did *saṭṭai* mean?

You'll want to know: வேட்டி

வேட்டி (*vēṭṭi*) — “a veshti, the cloth a man wraps at the waist”.

Not a sewn garment at all. A **வேட்டி** is a single uncut length of துணி, wrapped round the waist and tucked — which is why the cloth word sits so close behind it.

English borrowed the northern word *dhoti* for the same idea. In Tamil Nadu the word you will hear, and the word to say, is **வேட்டி**.

Its middle is the doubled ட you met one lesson ago in சட்டை, riding a long ே this time.

What you've built

Two garments, and the same doubled consonant in both.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vēṭṭi*
- *Say it:* *saṭṭai*, then *vēṭṭi* — and say which one was never cut
- *Recall:* say *idadu*, then say *saṭṭai*, then say *vēṭṭi*
- *Recall:* read உள்ளே

Before you move on

Which of the two is one uncut length of cloth? (வேட்டி.)

67.3 சட்டை — what a doubled letter looks like

Before the page: you have said *saṭṭai* and *vēṭṭi* aloud. Now look at the first one on the page.

Script you'll notice: சட்டை — what a doubled letter looks like

சட்டை brings no new shape. It brings a familiar one used twice in a row, which is worth watching once slowly.

piece

ச	<i>sa</i>	the letter on its own, with its own built-in <i>a</i>
ட	the ட with a புள்ளி on top	the dot that takes the vowel away, so nothing is said after it
டை	<i>ṭai</i>	the same ட again, this time with the ை sign

ச · ட · டை → சட்டை

The dot in the middle is doing the whole job. Without it you would have ச-ட-டை, three open beats. With it, the first ட closes and leans on the second, and the word comes out hard in the middle: *saṭṭai*.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ச — then ட — then டை
- *Point to:* the புள்ளி, and say what it takes away
- *Read it:* சட்டை, then say what it means
- *Recall:* say *sattai*, then say *vētti*, then read சட்டை

Before you move on

Read சட்டை. Which mark makes the middle hard? (The புள்ளி on the first ட.)

67.4 புடவை (puḍavai) — a sari

Before the new one: read சட்டை once, then say what it means.

You'll want to know: புடவை

புடவை (*puḍavai*) — “a sari”.

The everyday Tamil word for the draped cloth a woman wears.

English took **sari** in from the north. Tamil's own word is புடவை, and it is the one that works in a Tamil shop: say புடவை and you will be shown exactly what you asked for.

It ends in the டை you have now met three times over — in தலை (*talai*), the head, and twice inside சட்டை.

What you've built

Three garments, and a Tamil word English never borrowed.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *puḍavai*
- *Say it:* *talai*, *sattai*, *puḍavai* — three words, one ending
- *Recall:* say *vētti*, then read சட்டை, then say *puḍavai*
- *Recall:* say *veliyē*

Before you move on

Which ending do தலை, சட்டை and புடவை share? (The ை.)

67.5 செருப்பு (seruppu) — a sandal, footwear

Before the new one: what did *puḍavai* mean?

You'll want to know: செருப்பு

செருப்பு (*seruppu*) — “a sandal, footwear”.

Footwear — and in Tamil it is really a doorway word.

செருப்பு comes off at the வாசல் (*vāsal*) before anyone steps உள்ளே. So the thing you have just named is the one thing that stays வெளியே: three words from earlier chapters, and this one is the reason they get used every day.

What you've built

Four, and the run has reached the floor.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *seruppu*
- *Say it:* *seruppu*, then *vāsal* — and say which side of the door each one is on
- *Recall:* read சட்டை, then say *puḍavai*, then say *seruppu*
- *Recall:* read வலது

Before you move on

Where does the செருப்பு stay — உள்ளே or வெளியே? (வெளியே.)

67.6 தொப்பி (toppi) — a cap, a hat

Before the new one: what did *seruppu* mean, and what did *puḍavai* mean?

You'll want to know: தொப்பி

தொப்பி (*toppi*) — “a cap, a hat”.

The last of the five, and the highest one: a தொப்பி sits மேலே, on the தலை.

Its ொ is the short o sign you met long before this chapter, and its doubled ப் works exactly like the doubled ட் you took apart in சட்டை — a புள்ளி closing the first letter onto the second.

With this one the run has both ends: தொப்பி at the top, செருப்பு at the floor.

What you've built

Five things to wear, top to bottom.

Your turn

- *Say it: toppi*
- *Say it: all five from the head down — toppi, saṭṭai, vēṭṭi, puḍavai, seruppu*
- *Recall: say puḍavai, then say seruppu, then say toppi*
- *Recall: say idadu*

Before you move on

Which of the five sits highest, and which stays வெளியே?
(தொப்பி; செருப்பு.)

Chapter 68

At the Shop

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a shop, a price, money, buying and a bag in Tamil, and ask what something costs.

Complete TA-C68-bag and say all five words of the chapter in order.

68.1 கடை (kaḍai) — a shop

Before the new one: what did *toppi* mean?

You'll want to know: கடை

கடை (*kaḍai*) — “a shop”.

Any shop at all: the tea shop, the cloth shop, the one at the end of the street. Tamil does not split the word by what is sold — a கடை is a கடை, and what is inside it is said separately.

It ends in the same ை as தலை and சட்டை, and it is where every garment of the last chapter came from.

What you've built

The place the next four words happen in.

Your turn

- Say it: *kaḍai*

- *Say it:* *kaḍai*, then name one thing from last chapter you would go there for
- *Recall:* say *seruppu*, then say *toppi*, then say *kaḍai*
- *Recall:* say *mēlē*, then read கீழே, then say *saṭṭai*

Before you move on

Say it once more.

68.2 விலை (*vilai*) — a price

Before the new one: what did *kaḍai* mean?

You'll want to know: விலை

விலை (*vilai*) — “a price”.

The number the shopkeeper says back to you.

This one word turns a question you already own into a whole sentence. You have எவ்வளவு (*evvaḷavu*), “how much”. Put them together and you have விலை எவ்வளவு? — “the price, how much?”

Notice what is not there: no verb, and no word for “is”. Tamil names the thing, then asks about it, and stops.

What you've built

Two words, and a question you can already ask.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vilai*
- *Say it:* *vilai evvaḷavu?*
- *Say it:* *kaḍai*, then *vilai*, then the whole question
- *Recall:* say *toppi*, then say *kaḍai*, then say *vilai*
- *Recall:* read உள்ளே, then say *vēṭṭi*

Before you move on

How do you ask what something costs? (விலை எவ்வளவு?)

68.3 கடை — a sign that wraps the letter

Before the page: you can already say *kaḍai* and *vilai*. Now read the first one.

Script you'll notice: கடை — a sign that wraps the letter

கடை is as short as a Tamil word gets: two letters, one sign, nothing new.
piece

க	<i>ka</i>	the letter with its own built-in <i>a</i>
டை	<i>ṭai</i>	ட with the ை sign, the same one you read at the end of சட்டை

க • டை → கடை

Look at where the ை sits. It is drawn to the **left** of its letter but said **after** it, which is the habit you first met on the ே of மேலே. Two signs now, both hanging in front of the letter they belong to.

And notice what the same two letters do without the sign: கடு, கடி and கடை are three different words with the same skeleton. In Tamil the sign is not decoration.

Your turn

- *Read it:* க — then டை — then கடை
- *Point to:* the ை, and say which side of its letter it is drawn on
- *Read it:* சட்டை, then கடை, and find the ending they share
- *Recall:* say *kaḍai*, then say *vilai*, then read கடை

Before you move on

Read கடை. On which side of ட is the ை drawn, and when is it said? (Drawn on the **left**; said **after**.)

68.4 பணம் (paṇam) — money

Before the new one: read கடை, and say what it means.

You'll want to know: பணம்

பணம் (*paṇam*) — “money”.

Money, in the plain everyday sense — what is in your hand, not what is in a bank.

The ண in the middle is the curled-back one, the same ண you have been saying since வணக்கம் on the very first page. And it closes with ம், the ending that finishes so many Tamil nouns: வணக்கம், தூக்கம், and now பணம்.

What you've built

Three: the shop, the price, and what you pay it with.

Your turn

- *Say it: paṇam*
- *Say it: vaṇakkam, then paṇam — and say what the two have in common*
- *Recall: say vilai, then read கடை, then say paṇam*
- *Recall: say veliyē, then read புடவை*

Before you move on

What does பணம் mean? (“Money”.)

68.5 வாங்கு (vāṅgu) — to buy, to get

Before the new one: what did *paṇam* mean?

You'll want to know: வாங்கு

வாங்கு (*vāṅgu*) — “to buy, to get”.

The verb that makes a shop work.

It is also the ordinary Tamil verb for **receiving**. Buying something and being handed something are the same act here, and one word covers both — so வாங்கு is as useful at a doorway as at a counter.

Set it against கொடு (*koṭu*), “give”, which you already have. One hand out, one hand in, and the pair covers most of what happens over a counter.

What you've built

Four, and now something can change hands.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vāṅgu*
- *Say it:* *koṭu*, then *vāṅgu* — and say which way each hand is moving
- *Recall:* read கடை, then say *paṇam*, then say *vāṅgu*
- *Recall:* read வலது, then say *seruppu*

Before you move on

What two jobs does வாங்கு do? (Buying, and receiving.)

68.6 பை (pai) — a bag

Before the new one: what did *vāṅgu* mean, and what did *paṇam* mean?

You'll want to know: பை

பை (*pai*) — “a bag”.

One of the shortest words in this book: ப with the ை sign, and that is all of it.

A பை is what everything you வாங்கு goes into. It is the last piece of the shop, and the one you carry home.

Five words now stand in a row you can walk through in order: the கடை you go to, the விலை you ask for, the பணம் you hand over, the வாங்கு that does it, and the பை it all leaves in.

What you've built

Five, and the shop is closed.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *pai*
- *Say it:* all five in the order they happen — *kadai, vilai, paṇam, vāṅgu, pai*
- *Recall:* say *paṇam*, then say *vāṅgu*, then say *pai*
- *Recall:* say *iḍadu*, then read தொப்பி

Before you move on

What does பை mean, and which sign is on it? (“A bag”; the ை.)

Chapter 69

Getting There

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a vehicle, a bus, a train, a road and a station in Tamil.

Complete TA-C69-station and say all five words of the chapter in order.

69.1 வண்டி (vaṇḍi) — a vehicle, a cart

Before the new one: what did *pai* mean?

You'll want to know: வண்டி

வண்டி (*vaṇḍi*) — “a vehicle, a cart”.

The general word for a thing with wheels. A bullock cart is a வண்டி; so is a bicycle, and so is a car. Tamil starts here and adds a word in front when it needs to be exact.

In the middle sits ண் — the curled-back ண closed by a புள்ளி and leaning on ட. That pair is one of the most common shapes in the language, and you will now start seeing it everywhere.

What you've built

The word the rest of this chapter is built on.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vaṇḍi*
- *Say it:* it once more, curling the tongue back for the ண
- *Recall:* say *vāṅgu*, then say *pai*, then say *vaṇḍi*
- *Recall:* say *sattai*, then read கடை

Before you move on

What does வண்டி mean? (“A vehicle, a cart.”)

69.2 பேருந்து (pērunḍu) — a bus

Before the new one: what did *vaṇḍi* mean?

You’ll want to know: பேருந்து

பேருந்து (*pērunḍu*) — “a bus”.

A made word, and you can take it apart. பேர்- is the big-word பெரு, and உந்து is “to push along”. A big pushed thing.

This is the printed and announced word: it is what stands on the board at the stop and in the newspaper. In the street you will also hear the English “bus” said plainly, and both are understood — but only one of them is written on the board you have to read.

What you’ve built

Two, and one of them you can take apart.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *pērunḍu*
- *Say it:* the two pieces, then the whole word
- *Recall:* say *pai*, then say *vaṇḍi*, then say *pērunḍu*
- *Recall:* read வேட்டி, then say *vilai*

Before you move on

What are the two pieces inside பேருந்து? (“Big”, and “push along”.)

69.3 வண்டி — a dot joining two letters

Before the page: you can say *vaṇḍi* and *pērunḍu*. Now look at the first one on the page.

Script you’ll notice: வண்டி — a dot joining two letters

வண்டி brings no new shape either. What it brings is the புள்ளி doing its job **between** two different letters, where சட்டை showed it between two of the same one.

piece

வ	<i>va</i>	the letter with its built-in <i>a</i>
ண்	ண் with a புள்ளி	closed — nothing said after it
டி	<i>ḍi</i>	Ḍ with the ி sign

வ • ண் • டி → வண்டி

Read the middle two as one movement rather than two beats. That is what the புள்ளி is asking for: ண் has no vowel of its own left, so it has nowhere to go except onto the letter after it.

Your turn

- *Read it:* வ — then ண் — then டி
- *Point to:* the புள்ளி, and say which letter it has emptied
- *Read it:* சட்டை, then வண்டி — the same dot, two different jobs
- *Recall:* say *vaṇḍi*, then say *pērunḍu*, then read வண்டி

Before you move on

Read வண்டி. What has the புள்ளி done to the ண? (Taken its vowel away, so it leans on the ட.)

69.4 ரயில் (rayil) — a train

Before the new one: read வண்டி, and say what it means.

You'll want to know: ரயில்

ரயில் (*rayil*) — “a train”.

A borrowed word, and it wears the borrowing openly: English “rail”, written straight out in Tamil letters.

There is a clue in the very first letter. Tamil words do not normally **begin** with ர, so a word that starts that way has almost always come in from somewhere else. You now have a small test you can run on a word before anyone tells you where it is from.

What you've built

Three, and one of them is a visitor.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *rayil*
- *Say it:* *vaṇḍi*, then *rayil* — and say which one is Tamil's own
- *Recall:* say *pērandu*, then read வண்டி, then say *rayil*
- *Recall:* say *puḍavai*, then read பணம்

Before you move on

What does the ர at the front tell you about ரயில்? (That it is a **borrowed** word.)

69.5 சாலை (sālai) — a road

Before the new one: what did *rayil* mean?

You'll want to know: சாலை

சாலை (*sālai*) — “a road”.

A made road, wide enough for a வண்டி to go down.

Set it beside பாதை (*pātai*), the path you already have. A பாதை is walked; a சாலை is driven. The difference is not size so much as what it was made for.

Both end in the same ை, which by now you have read four times.

What you've built

Four, and the vehicles have somewhere to run.

Your turn

- Say it: *sālai*
- Say it: *pātai*, then *sālai* — and say which one you drive down
- Recall: read வண்டி, then say *rayil*, then say *sālai*
- Recall: read செருப்பு, then say *vāṅgu*

Before you move on

What is the difference between a பாதை and a சாலை? (One is **walked**; one is **driven**.)

69.6 நிலையம் (*nilaiyam*) — a station

Before the new one: what did *sālai* mean, and what did *rayil* mean?

You'll want to know: நிலையம்

நிலையம் (*nilaiyam*) — “a station”.

The place where the vehicle stands still.

Inside it is நிலை (*nilai*) — “standing, state” — and you have met that piece before without being told. It is sitting inside வானிலை (*vāṇilai*), the weather, which is literally the sky's *state*. One small piece, two words that could hardly be further apart.

That is worth more than the word itself: Tamil builds long words out of short ones you already own, and from here on you can start looking for the pieces.

What you've built

Five, and the chapter runs end to end.

Your turn

- *Say it: nilaiyam*
- *Say it: vāṇilai, then nilaiyam, and name the piece they share*
- *Say it: all five — vaṇḍi, pērundu, rayil, sālai, nilaiyam*
- *Recall: say rayil, then say sālai, then say nilaiyam*
- *Recall: say toppi, then read பை*

Before you move on

Which piece do வானிலை and நிலையம் share, and what does it mean? (நிலை — “standing, state”.)

Chapter 70

The Room You Are In

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name a table, a bed, a wall, the floor and a roof in Tamil, and place each one against a direction I already know.

Complete TA-C70-roof and say all five words of the chapter in order.

70.1 மேசை (mēsai) — a table

Before the new one: what did *nilaiyam* mean?

You’ll want to know: மேசை

மேசை (*mēsai*) — “a table”.

The table you eat at, or write at.

Put it beside நாற்காலி (*nārkāli*), the chair you already have — the word you could take apart into “four” and “leg”. A மேசை and a நாற்காலி are the pair a room is furnished with, and now you can name both.

Its two signs are old friends: the ே in front of ம, and the ை at the end.

What you’ve built

The first thing in the room.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *mēsai*
- *Say it:* *nārkaḷi*, then *mēsai* — the pair, in the order you sit down to them
- *Recall:* say *sālai*, then say *nilaiyam*, then say *mēsai*
- *Recall:* say *kaḍai*, then read வண்டி

Before you move on

What does மேசை mean? (“A table”.)

70.2 கட்டில் (kaṭṭil) — a bed

Before the new one: what did *mēsai* mean?

You’ll want to know: கட்டில்

கட்டில் (*kaṭṭil*) — “a bed”.

A bed — and in Tamil it is named as a **made thing**: a frame with cords or webbing tied across it.

You already have தூக்கம் (*tūkkam*), sleep. The pair is easy to hold: the தூக்கம் happens on the கட்டில்.

Its middle is the doubled ட் you took apart in சட்டை, and it closes on ல் — a letter with the vowel taken off, exactly like the ண் in வண்டி, except that here there is nothing after it to lean on.

What you’ve built

Two, and you can now name where you sleep.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *kaṭṭil*
- *Say it:* *tūkkam*, then *kaṭṭil* — the thing and the place
- *Recall:* say *nilaiyam*, then say *mēsai*, then say *kaṭṭil*
- *Recall:* read விலை, then say *pērundu*

Before you move on

Where does the தூக்கம் happen? (On the கட்டில்.)

70.3 மேசை — two front-hanging signs in one word

Before the page: you can say *mēsai* and *kattil*. Now read the first one.

Script you'll notice: மேசை — two front-hanging signs in one word

மேசை is the first word you have read that carries a front-hanging sign on each of its two letters.

piece

மே	<i>mē</i>	ம with the ே sign, the one you read twice in மேலே
சை	<i>sai</i>	ச with the ை sign, the one you read at the end of சட்டை and கடை

மே · சை → மேசை

Both signs are drawn to the **left** of their letter and said **after** it. So the eye moves left-to-right across four marks while the mouth says only two beats, and the order of the two is not the order they were printed in. Read it slowly once and let that happen on purpose.

Your turn

- *Read it:* மே — then சை — then மேசை
- *Point to:* both signs, and say which side of their letters they sit on
- *Read it:* மேலே, then மேசை, and find the sign they share
- *Recall:* say *mēsai*, then say *kattil*, then read மேசை

Before you move on

Read மேசை. How many signs does it carry, and are they said before or after their letters? (**Two; after.**)

70.4 சுவர் (suvar) — a wall

Before the new one: read மேசை, and say what it means.

You'll want to know: சுவர்

சுவர் (*suvar*) — “a wall”.

The wall of a room or a house.

It is short and it is bare — two letters and a closing ர், no vowel signs hanging off the front of anything. Words shaped this plainly are usually old ones, and this is one of them.

It is also the surface that makes உள்ளே and வெளியே mean anything: a சுவர் is what there is an inside and an outside of.

What you've built

Three, and the room has an edge.

Your turn

- *Say it: suvar*
- *Say it: suvar*, then *ullē* and *veliyē* — the wall, and its two sides
- *Recall: say kattil*, then read மேசை, then say *suvar*
- *Recall: say paṇam*, then read ரயில்

Before you move on

What does சுவர் mean? (“A wall”.)

70.5 தரை (tarai) — the floor

Before the new one: what did *suvar* mean?

You'll want to know: தரை

தரை (*tarai*) — “the floor”.

The floor — and also the ground outside. Tamil does not need two words for it; what is under your feet is தரை wherever you are standing.

This is where the கோலம் (*kōlam*) is drawn each morning, just inside the வாசல். Both of those words are already yours, and this is the one that was missing to put them in a place.

It ends in the ஓ again — the fifth word in three chapters to do so.

What you've built

Four, and the room has a bottom.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *tarai*
- *Say it:* *kōlam*, then *vāsal*, then *tarai* — and say where the design is drawn
- *Recall:* read மேசை, then say *suvar*, then say *tarai*
- *Recall:* read வாங்கு, then say *sālai*

Before you move on

Where is the கோலம் drawn? (On the தரை.)

70.6 கூரை (*kūrai*) — a roof

Before the new one: what did *tarai* mean, and what did *suvar* mean?

You'll want to know: கூரை

கூரை (*kūrai*) — “a roof”.

The roof over you.

With தரை under your feet and கூரை over your head, the room has both ends — and you already have the two words for the space between them: மேலே and கீழே. Point up at the கூரை, down at the தரை, and every word in that sentence is one you have been taught.

Its ூ is the long u sign, and it ends, like தரை, in ூ.

What you've built

Five: a table, a bed, a wall, a floor and a roof.

Your turn

- *Say it: kūrai*
- *Say it: mēlē, then kūrai; kīlē, then tarai*
- *Say it: all five — mēsai, kaṭṭil, suvar, tarai, kūrai*
- *Recall: say suvar, then say tarai, then say kūrai*
- *Recall: say pai, then read நிலையம்*

Before you move on

Which of the five is மேலே, and which is கீழே? (கூரை; தரை.)

Chapter 71

Through the Day

Modes:  voice (4)  eyes (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: none of the 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say get up, sleep, run, wash and play in Tamil, and read the letter ஓ.

Complete TA-C71-play and say all five words of the chapter in order.

71.1 எழு (elu) — to get up, to rise

Before the new one: what did *kūrai* mean?

You'll want to know: எழு

எழு (elu) — “to get up, to rise”.

The first verb of the morning: to get up, off the கட்டில் you named last chapter. It is also what the sun does.

Look at it hard, because you have seen these two letters before with one more on the end. எழுது (eludu) is “to write”. எழு is “to rise”. Whether the longer one grew out of the shorter is a question this book does not answer, because the dictionaries do not agree on it — and it does not matter yet. What matters is that they are two different verbs, they are one letter apart, and swapping them changes what you said.

What you've built

The first of five things a day is made of.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *elu*
- *Say it:* *elu*, then *eludu* — and say which one is “write”
- *Recall:* say *tarai*, then say *kurai*, then say *elu*
- *Recall:* say *vaṇḍi*, then read மேசை

Before you move on

What does எழு mean, and which longer verb starts the same way?
 (“To get up”; எழுது.)

71.2 தூங்கு (tūngu) — to sleep

Before the new one: what did *elu* mean?

You’ll want to know: தூங்கு

தூங்கு (*tūngu*) — “to sleep”.

The other end of the day — and the verb behind a noun you already own.

தூக்கம் (*tūkkam*) is sleep, the thing. தூங்கு is sleeping, the doing. Tamil makes that pair again and again, and once you can hear it you get two words for the price of one: the noun தூக்கம் sits still, and the verb தூங்கு does something.

Its ங்க is the same nasal-plus-க you say inside வாங்கு.

What you’ve built

Two verbs, and the day has both ends.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *tūngu*
- *Say it:* *tūkkam*, then *tūngu* — the thing, then the doing
- *Say it:* *vāngu*, then *tūngu*, and find the sound they share
- *Recall:* say *kurai*, then say *elu*, then say *tūngu*

- *Recall:* read பேருந்து, then say *kattil*

Before you move on

Which is the verb and which is the noun — தூங்கு or தூக்கம்?
(தூங்கு is the verb.)

71.3 ஒ — the letter behind a sign you already read

Before the page: before the new shape: which letter did உ turn out to be the free-standing half of?

Script you'll notice: ஒ — the letter behind a sign you already read

ஒ — *ō*.

You have been reading its **sign**, ோ, for a long time: it is the hook on போ (*pō*), “go”, and it is in கோலம் too. This is the other half of the same vowel — the **independent** shape, used when a word *begins* with the sound.

That is the Tamil pattern you already know from உ, met once more. Every vowel has two bodies: a free-standing letter for the front of a word, and a sign for inside one.

The next lesson opens with this letter, which is why it arrives here and not later.

Your turn

- *Look:* at these two, and say which is the letter and which is the sign

ஒ · ோ

- *Trace it:* ஒ three times, saying *ō* as you finish each one
- *Read it:* போ — and point at the sign of this same vowel inside it
- *Recall:* say *elu*, then say *tūngu*, then name the letter ஒ

Before you move on

Which character is this — ஓ? Where does the letter go, and where does the sign ஓ go? (**Letter** at the start of a word; **sign** on a consonant inside one.)

71.4 ஓடு (ōḍu) — to run

Before the new one: what did *tūṅgu* mean, and which letter did you meet after it?

You'll want to know: ஓடு

ஓடு (*ōḍu*) — “to run”.

“To run” — and the first word in this book that **begins** with the letter you met one lesson ago.

It is not only for people. Water runs, and so does a வண்டி on a சாலை: Tamil uses this same verb for all three, where English would want “flow” for one of them.

Two letters, one sign, and you can read every part of it.

What you've built

Three, and something is moving.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ōḍu*
- *Read it:* ஓடு, and point at the letter you learned last lesson
- *Say it:* *ōḍu*, then name two things other than a person that can do it
- *Recall:* say *tūṅgu*, then name the letter ஓ, then say *ōḍu*
- *Recall:* say *rayil*, then read சுவர்

Before you move on

Read ஓடு and say what it means. (“To run”.)

71.5 கழுவு (kaluvu) — to wash

Before the new one: what did *ōdu* mean?

You'll want to know: கழுவு

கழுவு (*kaluvu*) — “to wash”.

To wash: hands, a கிண்ணம், the தரை.

It carries ழ, the curled glide that Tamil kept and named itself with — the ழ at the end of தமிழ். You have met it inside எழுது and at the front of கீழே, and here it sits between two *u* sounds, which is the hardest place to hear it and the best place to practise it.

What you've built

Four, and the day has some housework in it.

Your turn

- *Say it: kaluvu*
- *Say it: tamil, then kaluvu — the same letter, twice*
- *Say it: kaluvu, then name one thing in this book you could wash*
- *Recall: name the letter ழ, then say ōdu, then say kaluvu*
- *Recall: read சாலை, then say tarai*

Before you move on

Which letter is in the middle of கழுவு, and where else have you met it? (ழ — in தமிழ் and எழுது.)

71.6 விளையாடு (vilaiyāḍu) — to play

Before the new one: what did *kaluvu* mean, and what did *ōdu* mean?

You'll want to know: விளையாடு

விளையாடு (*vilaiyāḍu*) — “to play”.

The longest word in this chapter, and it is two words welded together.

The back half is ஆடு, which on its own means “to move, to sway, to play”. And you already know a completely different ஆடு: the goat, from the animal chapter. Same letters, same sound, two unrelated words — Tamil lets them share the spelling and lets the sentence sort it out.

That is the last thing this chapter teaches, and it is bigger than the word: a long Tamil word usually has a short one you already own hiding at one end of it.

What you've built

Five verbs — get up, sleep, run, wash, play — and one new letter.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *vilaiyāḍu*
- *Say it:* *āḍu* on its own, and name the two things it can mean
- *Say it:* all five — *elu*, *tūṅgu*, *ōḍu*, *kaluvu*, *vilaiyāḍu*
- *Recall:* say *ōḍu*, then say *kaluvu*, then say *vilaiyāḍu*
- *Recall:* say *nilaiyam*, then read கூரை

Before you move on

What word is hiding at the end of விளையாடு, and what else does it mean? (ஆடு — and it is also the **goat**.)

Chapter 72

How It Feels

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can name anger, fear and sorrow in Tamil, and say to laugh and to cry.

Complete TA-C72-cry and say all five words of the chapter in order.

72.1 கோபம் (kōpam) — anger

Before the new one: what did *vilaiyādu* mean?

You'll want to know: கோபம்

கோபம் (*kōpam*) — “anger”.

Anger — the ordinary everyday word for it, not a literary one.

You can read all of it already, and one part of it you only just learned: கோ is க with the ோ sign, the sign whose free-standing letter ஓ you met last chapter.

It ends in ம், like வணக்கம், தூக்கம் and பணம் before it. That ending is now four words deep, and it is a good bet for a Tamil noun.

What you've built

The first of five feelings.

Your turn

- Say it: *kōpam*

- *Read it:* கோபம், and point at the sign of the letter you met last chapter
- *Say it:* paṇam, then kōpam, and name the ending they share
- *Recall:* say kaluvu, then say vīlaiyāḍu, then say kōpam
- *Recall:* say mēsai, then read எழு

Before you move on

What does கோபம் mean, and which sign is on its first letter?
 (“Anger”; the ொ.)

72.2 பயம் (payam) — fear

Before the new one: what did kōpam mean?

You’ll want to know: பயம்

பயம் (*payam*) — “fear”.

Fear.

Three letters and not one vowel sign anywhere: ப, ய, and ம with a பள்ளி. Every letter is carrying its own built-in *a*, which is the plainest *a* Tamil word can possibly be written.

It ends in the same ம் as கோபம், which is not a coincidence — Tamil keeps a whole shelf of feeling-nouns with that ending.

What you’ve built

Two, and both of them end the same way.

Your turn

- *Say it:* payam
- *Say it:* kōpam, then payam — and say what both endings have in common
- *Recall:* say vīlaiyāḍu, then say kōpam, then say payam
- *Recall:* read கட்டில், then say tūṅgu

Before you move on

How many vowel signs does பாயம் carry? (**None** — every letter keeps its built-in *a*.)

72.3 பாயம் — a word with no vowel signs

Before the page: you can say *kōpam* and *payam*. Now read the second one.

Script you'll notice: பாயம் — a word with no vowel signs

Every word you have read so far carried at least one sign. பாயம் carries none, and that makes it the clearest possible demonstration of what a bare Tamil letter is worth.

piece

ப	<i>pa</i>	no sign — the letter's own built-in <i>a</i> is the vowel
ய	<i>ya</i>	the same again
ம்	<i>m</i>	ம with a புள்ளி, so no vowel at all

ப • ய • ம → பாயம்

So a Tamil consonant is never really silent by default. It says *a* unless something stops it, and the only thing that stops it is the dot. Read the word once and hear the two *a* sounds you were never told about.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ப — then ய — then ம்
- *Point to:* the one mark in the whole word, and say what it does
- *Read it:* பாயம், then கடை, and say which one needed a sign
- *Recall:* say *kōpam*, then say *payam*, then read பாயம்

Before you move on

Read பயம். Which vowel do ப and ய carry, and why is none written? (*a* — it is built into the letter.)

72.4 வருத்தம் (varuttam) — sorrow, regret

Before the new one: read பயம், and say what it means.

You'll want to know: வருத்தம்

வருத்தம் (*varuttam*) — “sorrow, regret”.

One word for both kinds of sorry: sad **about** something, and sorry **for** something.

This is the word that finishes an apology in ordinary speech. You already have தவறு (*tavaru*), the mistake, and மன்னிக்கவும் (*mannikkavum*), which asks formally to be forgiven. வருத்தம் sits between them: it names the feeling rather than making the request, and it is the one you can say to a friend without sounding like a letter.

Its middle is a doubled த்த, the same closing-and-leaning you read in சட்டை and வண்டி.

What you've built

Three feelings, and one of them is an apology.

Your turn

- *Say it: varuttam*
- *Say it: tavaru*, then *varuttam* — the mistake, then the feeling about it
- *Say it: mannikkavum*, then *varuttam*, and say which is the formal one
- *Recall: say payam*, then read பயம், then say *varuttam*
- *Recall: say suvar*, then read ஓடு

Before you move on

Which of the two would you say to a friend — மன்னிக்கவும் or வருத்தம்? (வருத்தம்.)

72.5 சிரி (siri) — to laugh

Before the new one: what did *varuttam* mean?

You'll want to know: சிரி

சிரி (*siri*) — “to laugh”.

To laugh.

Two letters, both wearing the same ி sign — ச and ர, each with the short *i*. Words that repeat a sign like that are easy to read and easy to say, and this is a good one to read aloud before you meet its opposite.

After three nouns, this is a verb: something a person **does**, not something they have.

What you've built

Four, and the feelings start doing something.

Your turn

- *Say it: siri*
- *Read it: சிரி*, and point at the sign that appears twice
- *Say it: kōpam*, then *siri* — and say which one is a verb
- *Recall: read பயம்*, then say *varuttam*, then say *siri*
- *Recall: read தரை*, then say *kaluvu*

Before you move on

What does சிரி mean, and which sign does it carry twice? (“To laugh”; the ி.)

72.6 அழு (alu) — to cry

Before the new one: what did *siri* mean, and what did *payam* mean?

You'll want to know: அழு

அழு (*alu*) — “to cry”.

To cry — the mirror of the verb before it, and just as short.

It opens on அ, the free-standing letter, because the word begins with that vowel: the same pattern you saw when ஓ opened ஓடு. And in the middle is ழ again, the third time you have met it after தமிழ் and கழுவு.

Five feelings now: three you can have — கோபம், பயம், வருத்தம் — and two you can do, சிரி and அழு.

What you've built

Five: three nouns and two verbs.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *alu*
- *Say it:* *siri*, then *alu* — the pair, one after the other
- *Say it:* all five — *kōpam*, *payam*, *varuttam*, *siri*, *alu*
- *Recall:* say *varuttam*, then say *siri*, then say *alu*
- *Recall:* say *kūrai*, then read விளையாடு

Before you move on

Which three of the five are things you **have**, and which two are things you **do**? (கோபம், பயம், வருத்தம்; சிரி, அழு.)

Chapter 73

Today, Yesterday, and the Year

Modes: 🗣️ voice (5) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say today, yesterday and before in Tamil, and name a month and a year.

Complete TA-C73-year and say all five words of the chapter in order.

73.1 இன்று (inru) — today

Before the new one: what did *alu* mean?

You'll want to know: இன்று

இன்று (*inru*) — “today”.
“Today”.

You already have நாள் (*nāl*), the day itself, and நாளை (*nālai*), tomorrow. இன்று is the day you are standing in, and it completes the middle of that little set.

This is the careful, written form, and it is the one printed on a page. In fast speech you will also hear இன்னைக்கு (*innaikku*) for the same thing — worth recognising, but இன்று is the one to say.

What you've built

The day you are standing in.

Your turn

- Say it: *inru*
- Say it: *nāl*, then *inru*, then *nālai*
- Recall: say *siri*, then say *alu*, then say *inru*
- Recall: say *elu*, then read கோபம்

Before you move on

What does இன்று mean, and which word already gave you “tomorrow”? (“Today”; நாளை.)

73.2 நேற்று (nērru) — yesterday

Before the new one: what did *inru* mean?

You’ll want to know: நேற்று

நேற்று (*nērru*) — “yesterday”.

“Yesterday” — the third corner of the same triangle: நேற்று, இன்று, நாளை.

The middle is a doubled ற்ற, the hard r held long, and it is the sound that most often catches a new speaker out. Say it slowly: the first ற has a புள்ளி and no vowel, so it leans straight onto the second.

With three words you can now place any day against the one you are in.

What you’ve built

Two, and the days on either side of today are named.

Your turn

- Say it: *nērru*
- Say it: *nērru*, *inru*, *nālai* — the three, in order
- Say it: *nērru* once more, holding the doubled ற்ற
- Recall: say *alu*, then say *inru*, then say *nērru*
- Recall: read தூங்கு, then say *payam*

Before you move on

Say the three days in order, starting with yesterday. (நேற்று, இன்று, நாளை.)

73.3 இன்று — a word that opens on a vowel

Before the page: you can say *inru* and *nērru*. Now read the first one.

Script you'll notice: இன்று — a word that opens on a vowel

இன்று puts together two things you have read separately: a word that **begins** with an independent vowel, and a புள்ளி making one consonant lean on the next.

piece

இ	<i>i</i>	the free-standing letter, because the word opens on the vowel
ன்	<i>n</i>	ன with a புள்ளி — no vowel of its own
று	<i>ru</i>	ற with the ு sign

இ · ன் · று → இன்று

This is why the letters ஓ and உ were taught on their own. A vowel at the **front** of a word cannot be a sign — there is nothing for it to sit on — so Tamil keeps a separate shape for exactly this job, and இன்று is that shape doing it.

Your turn

- *Read it:* இ — then ன் — then று
- *Point to:* the letter that could only ever be a free-standing one, and say why
- *Read it:* இன்று, then ஓடு — two words that open on a vowel
- *Recall:* say *inru*, then say *nērru*, then read இன்று

Before you move on

Read இன்று. Why is the first shape a letter and not a sign?
(Because the word **begins** with the vowel, so there is no consonant
for a sign to sit on.)

73.4 முன்பு (munbu) — before, earlier

Before the new one: read இன்று, and say what it means.

You'll want to know: முன்பு

முன்பு (*munbu*) — “before, earlier”.

“Before” — the general one, for anything earlier than the moment you are standing in.

You already have பிறகு (*piraku*), “afterwards”. முன்பு is its opposite, and between them the two put events in order without your needing a single verb tense to do it.

The ன் in its middle is closed by a புள்ளி and leans on the ப after it — the same joint you read a moment ago inside இன்று.

What you've built

Before and after, and a day on each side of today.

Your turn

- Say it: *munbu*
- Say it: *piraku*, then *munbu* — the two directions in time
- Say it: *nērru*, then *munbu* — one is a day, one is any earlier moment
- Recall: say *nērru*, then read இன்று, then say *munbu*
- Recall: say *ōḍu*, then read வருத்தம்

Before you move on

Which word is the opposite of பிறகு? (முன்பு.)

73.5 மாதம் (mādam) — a month

Before the new one: what did *munbu* mean?

You'll want to know: மாதம்

மாதம் (*mādam*) — “a month”.

A month.

You already know twelve of them by name — the Tamil months you met in their own chapter. This is the word for the unit itself, the one you need to say “one month” rather than to name a particular one.

And another ம் ending — like கோபம், பயம் and பணம் before it — on a word whose middle vowel is the long ா.

What you've built

Above the day: the month.

Your turn

- Say it: *mādam*
- Say it: *nāl*, then *mādam* — smaller, then bigger
- Recall: read இன்று, then say *munbu*, then say *mādam*
- Recall: read கழுவு, then say *siri*

Before you move on

What does மாதம் mean? (“A month”.)

73.6 ஆண்டு (āṇḍu) — a year

Before the new one: what did *mādam* mean, and what did *munbu* mean?

You'll want to know: ஆண்டு

ஆண்டு (*āṇḍu*) — “a year”.

A year — and it is the unit hiding inside a question you can already ask.

When you ask about someone's வயது (*vayathu*), their age, what is being counted is ஆண்டு. The question was yours a long time ago; this is the word for what the answer is made of.

It opens on the free-standing ஆ, because the word begins with that vowel — the same reason இன்று opens on இ. In the middle is the ண்ட you first read in வண்டி.

Three sizes now, each holding the one before it: நாள், மாதம், ஆண்டு.

What you've built

Five: today, yesterday, and the three units above the day.

Your turn

- *Say it:* āṇḍu
- *Say it:* *vayathu*, then āṇḍu — the question, and what the answer counts
- *Say it:* the three sizes in order — *nāl*, *mādam*, āṇḍu
- *Recall:* say *munbu*, then say *mādam*, then say āṇḍu
- *Recall:* say *vilaiyāḍu*, then read அழு

Before you move on

What is counted when someone answers about their வயது?
(ஆண்டு — years.)

Chapter 74

And, and Also

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can join two things with -um, say that one more thing applies too, and deny both at once.

Complete TA-C74-neither and say a two-item list, then the same list denied.

74.1 -உம் ... -உம் — how Tamil says “and”

Before the new one: what did *mādam* mean, and what did *āṇḍu* mean?

Grammar lens: no word goes between them

-உம் ... -உம் (-um ... -um) — “both ... and”.

English drops a word *between* two things. Tamil puts an ending on **each** of them and leaves the space between them empty.

பால் (*pāl*) is milk. தேநீர் (*tēnīr*) is tea. Milk and tea:

பாலும் தேநீரும் — *pālum tēnīrum*

Both words are still there, in the same order, and nothing new sits between them. Each one has grown a tail instead.

The tail is always -உம், and it lands on every item in the list — the last one included. Two things, two tails.

you have	you say
பால், தேநீர் மேசை, கட்டில்	பாலும் தேநீரும் மேசையும் கட்டிலும்
மேசை ends in a vowel, so a light ய் slides in before the ending: மேசையும்.	

What you've built

The first thing so far that joins two words you already had.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *pālum tēnīrum*
- *Say it:* *mēsaiyum kaṭṭilum*
- *Count:* how many tails a list of two carries
- *Recall:* say *mādam*, then say *āṇḍu*, then join the two — *mādamum āṇḍum*
- *Return to:* say *nērru*, *kuṭai* and *tarai* — three distances back — then join two of them with -உம்

Before you move on

Where does Tamil keep its “and”? (**On the end of every item, as -உம் — never between them.**)

74.2 -உம் on its own — “also”, “too”

Say milk and tea in Tamil. How many -உம் endings did that take?

Grammar lens: one tail, not two

Put -உம் on two words and you have joined them. Put it on **one** word and it means something else: *that one too*.

நான் (*nān*) is “I”. நான் with the tail:

நானும் — *nānum* — “me too”

Somebody says they are going. You say **நானும்** and you are going with them. One word, one ending, a whole reply.

The same tail on the things around you:

word	with -உம்	it means
நீங்கள்	நீங்களும்	you too
இது	இதுவும்	this one too

இது ends in a vowel, so **வ்** slides in the way **ய்** did after **மேசை**. This is one of the most-used endings in the language, and you have now met both of its jobs.

What you've built

One ending, two jobs: on two words it joins, on one word it adds.

Your turn

- *Say it: nānum*
- *Say it: nīngalum, then iduvum*
- *Contrast: pālum tēnīrum against pālum alone — two tails join, one tail adds*
- *Recall: say āṇḍu, then say pālum tēnīrum, then say nānum*
- *Return to: read இன்று, say tuṭaippam and say kūrai — three distances back — then join two of them with -உம்*

Before you move on

Someone says they are leaving and you are leaving too. One word. (நானும்.)

74.3 பாலும் — an ending you can now see

Before the page: say *pālum tēnīrum*, then say *nānum*.

Script you'll notice: பாலும் — where the tail begins

You have read பால் already. Adding the joining ending changes one thing on the page, and it is worth seeing exactly where.

piece

பா	<i>pā</i>	ப with the long-ா sign
லு	<i>lu</i>	ல with the ு sign
ம்	<i>m</i>	ம with a புள்ளி

பா • லு • ம் → பாலும்

Look at what happened to the middle. In பால் the ல carried a புள்ளி and had no vowel of its own. The ending brings a உ, the ல takes it, and the புள்ளி moves along to the ம் that arrived with it.

Nothing was inserted between two words. The seam is inside the word.

The same seam in தேநீரும்: ர picks up ு, and ம் closes the word.

Your turn

- *Read it:* பா — then லு — then ம்
- *Read it:* பாலும் தேநீரும்
- *Point to:* the letter that lost its புள்ளி, and say where the புள்ளி went
- *Recall:* say *pālum tēnīrum*, then say *nānum*, then read பாலும்
- *Return to:* say *munbu*, *sippu* and *elu* — three distances back — then join two of them with -உம்

Before you move on

Read பாலும். Which letter changed when the ending arrived? (ல — it took the உ the ending brought.)

74.4 -உம் ... -உம் இல்லை — neither one nor the other

Say *nānum*. Then read பாலும் aloud.

Grammar lens: the list stays, the end changes

English swaps the whole join to say the opposite: *both ... and* becomes *neither ... nor*. Tamil keeps the join it already has and puts இல்லை after it.

பாலும் தேநீரும் இல்லை — *pālum tēnīrum illai* —
“neither milk nor tea”

இல்லை is the very first word of chapter one, the one that means *no*, *there isn't*. It has been waiting for a list to stand at the end of.

Say the shop has neither:

you say	it means
பாலும் தேநீரும்	milk and tea
பாலும் தேநீரும் இல்லை	neither milk nor tea

One word longer, and the meaning has turned over. Nothing inside the list moved.

What you've built

Four things in this chapter and only one ending: joining, adding, reading the seam, denying the lot.

Your turn

- Say it: *pālum tēnīrum illai*
- Say it: *mēsaiyum kaṭṭilum illai*
- Turn: say the list, then say it again with இல்லை on the end
- Recall: say *nānum*, then read பாலும், then say *pālum tēnīrum illai*
- Return to: say *mādam*, *pasi* and *tūngu* — three distances back — then join two of them with -உம்

Before you move on

The shop has neither milk nor tea. Say it. (பாலும் தேநீரும் இல்லை.)

Chapter 75

Yes or No

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) ✍️ pen (1) 🗣️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can turn any sentence I know into a yes-or-no question, answer one, and ask permission.

Complete TA-C75-permission and ask to be let in, then grant the same request.

75.1 -ஆ — the question you can build yourself

Read பாலும். Then say: neither milk nor tea.

Grammar lens: one letter on the end

Every question you have been given so far came ready-made: எப்படி, என்ன, யார், எங்கே, எவ்வளவு. Each one asks about a thing you name in advance.

-ஆ (-ā) asks about the whole sentence, and it is yours to attach to anything.

Take a statement. Put -ஆ on its last word. It is now a question that wants *yes* or *no*.

statement	question
நீங்கள் நலம் — you are well	நீங்கள் நலமா? — are you well?
இது பால் — this is milk	இது பாலா? — is this milk?
சரி — okay	சரியா? — okay?

Word order does not move. Nothing is added at the front. The ending

goes on the **last** word, and the last word is the one being asked about.

What you've built

Every sentence you already own can now be a question.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *sariyā?*
- *Say it:* *nīṅgaḷ nalamā?*
- *Turn:* say *idu pāl*, then ask *idu pālā?*
- *Recall:* read **பாலும்**, then say *pālum tēnīrum illai*, then ask *sariyā?*
- *Return to:* say *āṇḍu*, say *tākam* and read **ஓ** — three distances back — then ask about one of them with **-ஆ**

Before you move on

Which word in the sentence carries **-ஆ**? (The last one — and that is the word the question is about.)

75.2 ஆம், இல்லை — and the answer Tamil likes better

Ask, in Tamil: is this milk? Then say: neither milk nor tea.

Grammar lens: two answers, and a third

You have had **ஆம்** and **இல்லை** since chapter one. Now there is something to answer.

இது பாலா? — *idu pālā?*

ஆம். / **இல்லை.**

Both work, and both are correct. But listen to how Tamil speakers actually reply, because they often reach for neither: they **repeat the word that was asked about**.

இது பாலா? — **பால்.**

சரியா? — சரி.

The echo is the everyday answer. ஆம் is a shade more formal, and it is the one to use when the question was long and you want to be plain. இல்லை has no echo version. To deny, you say இல்லை.

What you've built

You can ask a yes-or-no question and answer one, in the two shapes a speaker will hear.

Your turn

- *Answer: idu pālā?* — with the echo
- *Answer: idu pālā?* — with இல்லை
- *Ask and answer: sariyā?* — then *sari*
- *Recall: say pālum tēnīrum illai, then ask nīṅgaḷ nalamā?, then answer nalam*
- *Return to: say -um ... -um, tūkkam and oḍu — three distances back — then ask about one of them with -ஆ*

Before you move on

Somebody asks சரியா? and you agree. What is the everyday reply? (சரி — the echo, not ஆம்.)

75.3 சரியா — a question you can see

Before the page: ask *sariyā?*, then give the echo answer.

Script you'll notice: சரியா — the ending is a sign, not a letter

சரி was the third word in this book, and you wrote it in chapter nineteen. The question ending adds one shape to it.

piece		
ச	<i>ca</i>	the letter for a whole family of sounds
ரி	<i>ri</i>	ர with the ி sign
யா	<i>yā</i>	ய with the long ா sign

ச • ரி • யா → சரியா

A ய appeared that was not in சரி. That is the same slide you saw in மேசையம்: சரி ends in a vowel, so a light ய் carries the ending on.

And the ending itself is the sign ா, sitting after ய the way it sits after ப in பா. A question mark closes the line on the page, but the question is already in that sign.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ச — then ரி — then யா
- *Read it:* சரி, then சரியா — a statement, then a question
- *Point to:* the shape that does the asking
- *Recall:* ask *sariyā?*, then answer *sari*, then read சரியா
- *Return to:* say *-um*, *kāyccal* and *kaluvu* — three distances back — then ask about one of them with -ஆ

Before you move on

Read சரியா. Which single shape turned it into a question? (The long ா on the end.)

75.4 நான் உள்ளே வரலாமா? — may I come in?

Read சரியா, then answer it.

You'll want to know: வரலாமா?

நான் உள்ளே வரலாமா? (*nān ullē varalāmā?*) — “may I come in?”

Three pieces you have, and one you half-have. நான் is “I”. உள்ளே is “inside”, from the six directions. வா is “come”.

The half-known piece is -லாம். It has been in your goodbye since chapter four: நாளை பார்க்கலாம் — “we may see each other tomorrow”. On a verb, -லாம் means *it is allowed*.

வா becomes வரலாம் — “may come”. Then chapter seventy-five’s ending arrives:

வரலாம் → வரலாமா? — “may I come?”

Permission is a yes-or-no question, so it takes the yes-or-no ending. Nothing new to learn about the asking.

To grant it, you have both answers already:

ஆம், வரலாம். or, at a doorway, plainly: சரி.

What you’ve built

A doorway you can stand in and be let through.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *nān ullē varalāmā?*
- *Grant:* *ām, varalām*
- *Grant again:* *sari*
- *Recall:* answer *sariyā?*, then read சரியா, then ask *varalāmā?*
- *Return to:* read பாலும், say *vali* and say *vilaiyādu* — three distances back — then ask about one of them with -ஆ

Before you move on

You are at a door and want to be let in. Say it. (நான் உள்ளே வரலாமா?)

Chapter 76

But, and Or

Modes:  voice (2)  eyes (1)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 1 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can set one statement against another, offer a choice between two, and take the answer.

Complete TA-C76-choice and offer two drinks, in the long form and the short one.

76.1 ஆனால் (ānāl) — but

Read சரியா. Then ask to be let inside.

You'll want to know: ஆனால்

ஆனால் (ānāl) — “but”.

Chapter seventy-four joined two **things**. This joins two **statements**, and unlike -உம் it is a word of its own, standing between them.

தேநீர் வேண்டும், ஆனால் பால் வேண்டாம்.

tēnīr vēṇḍum, ānāl pāl vēṇḍām.

“I want tea, but I don’t want milk.”

Both halves are sentences you could already say. ஆனால் sets the second against the first.

The word is built out of ஆகு, “to become”: ஆனால் began as “if that is so”. A sentence that starts by granting the first half and then turns is exactly what *but* does.

In everyday speech the tail wears down and you will hear ஆனா. It is the same word.

What you’ve built

Two sentences held together, with the second one pushing back.

Your turn

- Say it: āṇāl
- Say it: tēnīr vēṇḍum, āṇāl pāl vēṇḍām
- Build: idu nalla vīḍu, āṇāl siriya vīḍu
- Recall: read சரியா, then ask varalāmā?, then say āṇāl
- Return to: say -um ... -um illai, maṭṭum and kōpam — three distances back — then set two of them against each other with ஆனால்
- Recall: say inru, then read நேற்று, then say munbu

Before you move on

What sits between the two halves, and what does the second half do? (ஆனால் — and the second half turns against the first.)

76.2 அல்லது (alladu) — or

Ask to be let inside. Then say *but* in Tamil.

You’ll want to know: அல்லது

அல்லது (*alladu*) — “or”.

Like ஆனால், it is a word of its own and it stands between the two things it offers.

பால் அல்லது தேநீர்.

pāl alladu tēnīr.

“Milk or tea.”

Look at the shape of the word. அது is “that one”, which you have had since chapter forty; அல்ல is a denial. அல்லது is “it is not that” — and a list that says *this, or if not that* is an offer of a choice.

So Tamil’s *and* is an ending, and Tamil’s *or* is a small denial. Neither one is the word English would have led you to expect.

It works on two statements as well as two things:

நீங்கள் வரலாம், அல்லது நான் வருகிறேன்.

“You may come, or I will come.”

What you’ve built

Two joins in two lessons: one that sets things against each other, one that offers a choice.

Your turn

- *Say it: alladu*
- *Say it: pāl alladu tēnīr*
- *Contrast: pālum tēnīrum* against *pāl alladu tēnīr* — both, then either
- *Recall: ask varalāmā?*, then say ānāl, then say *alladu*
- *Return to: say -ā, innum and payam* — three distances back — then offer two of them with அல்லது
- *Recall: read மாதம்*, then say āṇḍu

Before you move on

Offer somebody milk or tea. (பால் அல்லது தேநீர்.)

76.3 ஆனால் — three shapes, all of them old

Before the page: say *but*, then say *or*.

Script you'll notice: ஆனால் — the same long sound, written two ways

Read it in three pieces.

piece		
ஆ	$\bar{a}$	the free-standing long vowel, because the word opens on it
னா	$n\bar{a}$	ன with the long ா sign
ல்	l	ல் with a புள்ளி, so it carries no vowel

ஆ · நா · ல் → ஆனால்

One word, and the long $\bar{a}$ appears twice in it — first as a whole letter, then as a sign. That is the rule from இன்று and ஆம் shown twice inside a single word: at the front of a word a vowel needs its own shape, and anywhere after a consonant it becomes a mark.

The word ends on a புள்ளி, and that closing ல் is the piece everyday speech drops when it says ஆனா.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ஆ — then நா — then ல்
- *Read it:* ஆனால்
- *Point to:* the two places the long $\bar{a}$ is written, and say why they differ
- *Recall:* say $\bar{a}n\bar{a}l$, then say *alladu*, then read ஆனால்
- *Return to:* say $\bar{a}m$ / *illai*, say *sikkiram* and read பயம் — three distances back — then offer two of them with அல்லது

Before you move on

Why is the first $\bar{a}$ a letter and the second a sign? (Because the word begins with the first one, and the second sits on ன.)

76.4 பால் வேண்டுமா, அல்லது தேநீர் வேண்டுமா? — offering a choice

Read ஆனால். Then say *or*.

You'll want to know: two questions, one offer

பால் வேண்டுமா, அல்லது தேநீர் வேண்டுமா? *pāl vēṇḍumā, alladu tēnīr vēṇḍumā?* — “Would you like milk, or would you like tea?”

Every piece is yours. வேண்டும் is “want”, from chapter thirty-nine. The -ஆ on the end of each half is last chapter’s question ending. அல்லது sits between them.

Notice what Tamil does not do: it does not ask one question with two answers in it. It asks **two whole questions** and puts *or* between them. Each half could stand alone.

The shorter form drops the second verb, and a host at a doorway will say it that way:

பால் அல்லது தேநீர்?

Answer it with the echo you learned for any yes-or-no question — name the one you want:

தேநீர்.

What you’ve built

You can put a choice in front of somebody and take their answer.

Your turn

- *Offer:* *pāl vēṇḍumā, alladu tēnīr vēṇḍumā?*
- *Offer short:* *pāl alladu tēnīr?*
- *Answer:* name one of them
- *Recall:* say *alladu*, then read ஆனால், then make the full offer
- *Return to:* read சரியா, say *uṭaṇē* and say *varuttam* — three distances back — then offer two of them with அல்லது

Before you move on

How many questions does Tamil ask when it offers two things?
(Two — one for each, with அல்லது between.)

Chapter 77

Saying, and Thinking

Modes: ⇐ voice (3) ✍ pen (1) ⇐ Hands-free start: first 2 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can report what was said and give an opinion, by putting a whole sentence inside another.

Complete TA-C77-opinion and give an opinion about two different things.

77.1 சொல் (sol) — to say, to tell

Read ஆனால். Then offer somebody milk or tea.

You'll want to know: சொல்

சொல் (sol) — “to say, to tell”.

You have been using this verb since chapter eight without being told its name. சொல்லுங்கள் — “please tell me” — is சொல் with the respectful ending you met in the same chapter.

Now it stands on its own, the way போ and வா and சாப்பிடு do.

சொல் — say it

சொல்லுங்கள் — please say it

சொல் also means *a word*. The same three letters name the thing and the act, and no Tamil speaker finds that odd: a word is what saying produces.

You will need this verb for the next lesson, because Tamil has a particular way of handing somebody else's words to it.

What you've built

A verb you have been saying since chapter eight, now yours to use.

Your turn

- *Say it: sol*
- *Say it: sol*, then *solluṅgaḷ* — the bare verb, then the polite one
- *Notice:* the second meaning, *a word*
- *Recall:* read ஆனால், then offer *pāl alladu tēnīr?*, then say *sol*
- *Return to:* say *nāṇ ullē varalāmā?*, *mutalil* and *siri* — three distances back — then quote one of them with என்று

Before you move on

Which word you already knew is this verb wearing a polite ending?
(சொல்லுங்கள்.)

77.2 என்று (enru) — the end of a quotation

Offer somebody a choice of two drinks. Then say the verb *to say*.

Grammar lens: the quotation carries its own closing word

English opens a quotation with *that* or with a comma. Tamil closes it, with என்று.

“சரி” என்று சொல்லுங்கள்.

“sari” enru solluṅgaḷ. — ‘Say “okay”’

The words being reported come first, whole and unchanged. என்று then marks where they end, and the verb of saying comes last, where every Tamil verb goes.

“பால் வேண்டும்” என்று சொல்லுங்கள்.

‘Say “I want milk”’

என்று is itself made from an old verb meaning *to say*, so what you are doing is saying that something was said. Two sayings, one sentence — and that is why nothing needs to be added at the front. Everyday speech shortens it to -ன்னு, stuck straight onto the quotation: *sari-nnu solluṅaḷ*. You will hear that far more often than the full word.

What you've built

A way to put a whole sentence inside another one.

Your turn

- Say it: *enru*
- Say it: “*sari*” *enru solluṅaḷ*
- Build: “*pāl vēṇḍum*” *enru solluṅaḷ*
- Recall: offer *pāl alladu tēnīr?*, then say *sol*, then say the whole quoted line
- Return to: say *ānāl*, *vēṇḍukōḷ* and *alu* — three distances back — then quote one of them with என்று

Before you move on

Where does என்று stand — before the quoted words or after them? (After. It closes them, and the verb follows.)

77.3 சொல் — a sign on both sides of one letter

Before the page: say the verb *to say*, then close a quotation with என்று.

Script you'll notice: சொல் — two letters, and a sign that surrounds one

piece

சொ	<i>so</i>	ச with the ொ sign
ல்	<i>l</i>	ல with a புள்ளி

சொ • ல் → சொல்

The ொ sign is the one you first met inside சொல்லுங்கள் in chapter eight, and it is unusual: it puts one piece **before** its letter and another **after** it. The letter sits in the middle of its own vowel.

Compare it with ோ in போ, which does the same thing for the long *ō*. Tamil has a small family of signs that wrap around, and both of them are in words you already say.

The word ends the way ஆனால் did, on a ல் carrying a புள்ளி.

Your turn

- *Read it:* சொ — then ல்
- *Read it:* சொல், then போ — two wrapping signs, one short and one long
- *Point to:* the two halves of the ொ sign, and the letter caught between them
- *Recall:* say *sol*, then say “*sari*” *enru solluṅgaḷ*, then read சொல்
- *Return to:* say *alladu*, *anumati* and *inru* — three distances back — then quote one of them with என்று

Before you move on

What is unusual about the ொ sign? (It wraps around its letter — part before, part after.)

77.4 ... என்று நினைக்கிறேன் — I think that ...

Read சொல். Then say: ‘Say “okay”.’

You’ll want to know: what என்று hands to நினை

நினை (*ninai*) has been in the book since chapter thirty-three: “to think”. Until now it had nothing to think **about**, because a thought is a whole sentence and nothing could carry one.

என்று carries one.

இது நல்ல வீடு என்று நினைக்கிறேன்.

idu nalla vīdu enru ninaikkirēn.

“I think this is a good house.”

The opinion comes first and stands whole — இது நல்ல வீடு, a sentence you could say on its own. என்று closes it. Then the verb, built the way பேசுகிறேன் was in chapter five: நினை, the middle piece for *now*, and -ஏன் for *I*.

Swap the front half for anything you can say:

இது சிறிய கடை என்று நினைக்கிறேன்.

What you’ve built

An opinion, which is the first thing here that is yours rather than a fact.

Your turn

- Say it: *ninaikkirēn*
- Say it: *idu nalla vīdu enru ninaikkirēn*
- Swap: put *idu sirīya kadai* in the front half and say the whole thing
- Recall: say “sari” *enru solluṅgaḷ*, then read சொல், then give your opinion
- Return to: read ஆனால், say *tayakkam* and say *nērru* — three distances back — then quote one of them with என்று

Before you move on

What stands between your opinion and the verb நினைக்கிறேன்? (என்று.)

Chapter 78

Why, and Because

Modes:  voice (4)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 2 of 5 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask for a reason and give one, before or after the thing it explains.

Complete TA-C78-for-the-sake-of and answer one why three different ways.

78.1 ஏன் (ēn) — why

Read சொல். Then say: I think this is a good house.

You'll want to know: ஏன்

ஏன் (ēn) — “why”.

Chapter forty gave you the shape of every Tamil question word: they begin on an e-. என்ன, எங்கே, எப்படி, எவ்வளவு. ஏன் belongs to the same family, and it is the one that asks for a reason.

It holds a long ஏ where the others hold a short எ. The family is real; the length is part of this particular member.

On its own it is a whole question:

ஏன்? — “Why?”

Or in front of a sentence:

ஏன் தேநீர் வேண்டும்? — “Why do you want tea?”

This is the first question in the book that cannot be answered by naming a thing. Its answer is a sentence, and the next lesson is the word that lets you give one.

What you've built

The sixth member of a question family whose pattern you have known since chapter forty.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *ēn*
- *Say it:* the question words in a row — *enna*, *enḡē*, *eppaḡi*, *evvaḡavu*, *ēn*
- *Ask:* *ēn tēnṛ vēṇḡum?*
- *Recall:* read சொல், then say *idu nalla vīḡu enru ninaikkirēn*, then ask *ēn?*
- *Return to:* say *pāl vēṇḡumā*, *alladu tēnṛ vēṇḡumā?*, say *nambikkai* and read இன்று — three distances back — then ask ஏன் about one of them
- *Recall:* say *āṇāl*

Before you move on

What does every Tamil question word begin with, and what is different about this one? (**An e-** — **and this one's is long:** ஏ.)

78.2 ஏனென்றால் (*ēnenrāl*) — because

Give an opinion about a house. Then ask *why*.

You'll want to know: ஏனென்றால்

ஏனென்றால் (*ēnenrāl*) — “because”.

It is long, and it is long for a reason you can already read. Take it apart:

piece

ஏன்	<i>ēn</i>	why — last lesson
என்றால்	<i>enrāl</i>	if it is said

”If you ask **why** —”. That is the whole word. Tamil answers a *why* by repeating the question and then going on.

என்றால் is the same verb you met one chapter ago in என்று. There it closed a quotation; here it closes a question and turns it into a hinge.

தேநீர் வேண்டும், ஏனென்றால் எனக்குத் தாகம்.

tēnīr vēṇḍum, ēnenrāl enakkut tākam.

“I want tea, because I am thirsty.”

The second half is a whole sentence — the dative one from chapter six, *to me, thirst*. ஏனென்றால் joins it on without changing either side.

Everyday speech shortens it to ஏன்னா, the same wearing-down that made ஆனால் into ஆனா.

What you’ve built

You can ask for a reason and give one.

Your turn

- *Say it: ēnenrāl*
- *Say it: tēnīr vēṇḍum, ēnenrāl enakkut tākam*
- *Split:* say the two halves apart, then join them
- *Recall:* say your opinion of a house, then ask *ēn?*, then answer with *ēnenrāl*
- *Return to:* say *sol*, *paṇivu* and *munbu* — three distances back — then ask ஏன் about one of them
- *Recall:* read அல்லது, then say *sol*

Before you move on

Which question word is hiding at the front of ஏனென்றால்?
(ஏன்.)

78.3 ஏன் — the shortest question in the book

Before the page: ask *why*, then answer with *because*.

Script you'll notice: ஏன் — two shapes, and one of them is a whole letter

piece		
ஏ	$\bar{e}$	the free-standing long e, because the word opens on it
ன்	n	ன with a புள்ளி

ஏ · ன் → ஏன்

Two shapes. Nothing else in this book is shorter and still a question. Now set it beside the question word you read in chapter twenty-nine:

எப்படி opens on எ · ஏன் opens on ஏ

Same family, different length, and Tamil gives each length its own letter rather than a mark on one shape. That is why both had to be learnt separately, and why a reader who has both can now tell an *eppadi* from an $\bar{e}n$ before hearing either.

The closing ன் is the alveolar n you first wrote in chapter seven, the same one that ends நான்.

Your turn

- Read it: ஏ — then ன்
- Read it: ஏன், then எப்படி — long, then short
- Point to: the two letters that hold the two lengths

- *Recall*: ask *ēn?*, then answer with *ēnenrāl*, then read ஏன்
- *Return to*: say *enru*, *nel* and *mādam* — three distances back — then ask ஏன் about one of them

Before you move on

Read ஏன். How does the page tell it apart from எப்படி? (A different letter for the long e.)

78.4 அதனால் (adaṇāl) — because of that, so

Read ஏன். Then say *because*.

You'll want to know: அதனால்

அதனால் (adaṇāl) — “because of that”, “so”.

ஏனென்றால் puts the reason **after** the result. அதனால் puts it **before**, and points back at it.

எனக்குத் தாகம். அதனால் தேநீர் வேண்டும்.

enakkut tākam. adaṇāl tēnīr vēṇḍum.

“I am thirsty. So I want tea.”

Same two facts as the last lesson, in the other order. Both are ordinary Tamil, and which one you reach for depends on which half you want to lead with.

The word is அது — “that one”, from chapter forty — carrying an ending that means *by*. *By that*. It can only point backwards, which is why it never opens a conversation.

What you've built

The reason can now go on either side of the result.

Your turn

- *Say it*: adaṇāl
- *Say it*: enakkut tākam. adaṇāl tēnīr vēṇḍum.

- *Flip*: say the same two facts with *ēnenrāl* instead
- *Recall*: say *ēnenrāl*, then read ஏன், then say *adanāl*
- *Return to*: read சொல், say *pul* and say *āṇḍu* — three distances back — then ask ஏன் about one of them

Before you move on

Which of the two joins puts the reason first? (அதனால் — it points back at a reason already given.)

78.5 -க்காக — what a thing is for

Read ஏன். Then say: I am thirsty, so I want tea.

Grammar lens: a reason that is not a sentence

ஏனென்றால் and அதனால் both join a whole sentence. Sometimes the reason is not a sentence at all — it is a person, or a thing. -க்காக (*-kkāga*) is the ending for that. It grows on the dative -உக்கு you have had since chapter six.

word	with the ending	it means
உங்கள்	உங்களுக்காக	for you
நண்பன்	நண்பனுக்காக	for a friend

உங்களுக்காக தேநீர். — *uṅḡalukkāga tēnīr*. — “Tea for you.”

Hear the -உக்கு still inside it. Chapter six taught that ending as *to* or *for*; -க்காக sharpens it into *for the sake of*, which is purpose rather than direction.

This is the third answer to ஏன் in one chapter: a following sentence, a preceding sentence, and now a single word.

What you’ve built

A whole chapter about reasons: asking for one, giving one after, giving one before, and naming who a thing is for.

Your turn

- *Say it: uṅgaḷukkāga*
- *Say it: uṅgaḷukkāga tēnīr*
- *Build: naṇbaṇukkāga*
- *Answer: ask ēṇ? and answer it three ways — with ēṇēṇrāl, with adaṇāl, and with uṅgaḷukkāga*
- *Return to: say payir, -um ... -um and ... enru ninaikkirēṇ — three distances back — then ask ஏன் about one of them*

Before you move on

Which older ending is inside -க்காக? (-உக்கு, the dative from chapter six.)

Chapter 79

When

Modes: 🗣️ voice (3) ✍️ pen (1) 🖱️ Hands-free start: first 2 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can ask when, point at a time already named, and say that two things happen together.

Complete TA-C79-when-clause and say the three time-words, then a when-clause.

79.1 எப்போது (eppōdu) — when?

Say *so, therefore*. Then say: tea for you.

You'll want to know: எப்போது

எப்போது (eppōdu) — “when?”

You have had இப்போது, “now”, since chapter forty-eight, and you have had the pattern behind it since chapter forty: **i-** for near, **a-** for far, **e-** for a question.

So this word was already half yours:

word

இப்போது	<i>ippōdu</i>	now — this time
எப்போது	<i>eppōdu</i>	when? — which time

The shared piece is போது, a word meaning *a time, an occasion*. Change only the front and you have walked from a statement to a question, exactly as இங்கே walked to எங்கே.

எப்போது வேண்டும்? — “When do you want it?”

What you've built

The question word for time, and the small word போது that sits inside it.

Your turn

- Say it: *eppōdu*
- Say it: *ippōdu*, then *eppōdu* — the statement, then the question
- Ask: *eppōdu vēṇḍum?*
- Recall: say *adaṇāl*, then say *uṅgaḷukkāga*, then ask *eppōdu?*
- Return to: say *-um*, *kaḷam* and *ēṇ* — three distances back — then say when one of them happens
- Recall: say *sol*

Before you move on

What is the piece these two words share, and what does it mean?
(போது — a time.)

79.2 அப்போது (*appōdu*) — then, at that time

Say *for you*. Then ask *when?*

You'll want to know: அப்போது

அப்போது (*appōdu*) — “then, at that time”.

The third seat was empty and now it is filled:

இப்போது	<i>ippōdu</i>	now
அப்போது	<i>appōdu</i>	then
எப்போது	<i>eppōdu</i>	when?

Near, far, question — the same three fronts you first met on இங்கே, அங்கே, எங்கே.

Then in Tamil means a time somebody has already named. It looks backwards, the way அதனால் does, and for the same reason: both begin on the **a-** that means *that one, over there*.

நாளை. அப்போது சொல்லுங்கள். — “Tomorrow. Tell me then.”

What you’ve built

A complete set of three, from a pattern you were given nearly forty chapters ago.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *appōdu*
- *Say it:* all three in order — *ippōdu*, *appōdu*, *eppōdu*
- *Notice:* the front that means *that one*, in அப்போது and in அதனால்
- *Recall:* say *uṅgaḷukkāga*, then ask *eppōdu?*, then answer *appōdu*
- *Return to:* say *aruvaṭai*, read பாலும் and say *ēṇēṇrāl* — three distances back — then say when one of them happens

Before you move on

Why can அப்போது never open a conversation? (Because *a*-points at a time somebody has already named.)

79.3 எப்போது — the doubled letter, read across a seam

Before the page: say *now*, *then*, *when?* in that order.

Script you'll notice: எப்போது — one letter, twice, on either side of a புள்ளி

piece		
எ	<i>e</i>	the free-standing short e, because the word opens on it
ப்	<i>p</i>	ப with a புள்ளி
போ	<i>pō</i>	ப with the wrapping ோ sign
து	<i>du</i>	த with the ு sign

எ · ப் · போ · து → எப்போது

The middle is the shape you first read in சட்டை: the same letter written twice, the first one wearing a புள்ளி and leaning on the second. Here it is ப, and the doubling is exactly what makes the *pp* you hear.

Read the seam and the word divides itself: எ is the question front from chapter forty, and போது is the time-word. அப்போது is the same page with one letter changed at the start.

Your turn

- *Read it:* எ — then ப் — then போ — then து
- *Read it:* எப்போது, then அப்போது
- *Point to:* the two ப shapes, and say which one carries no vowel
- *Recall:* ask *eppōdu?*, then answer *appōdu*, then read எப்போது
- *Return to:* say *-um ... -um illai*, say *kudī* and read ஏன் — three distances back — then say when one of them happens

Before you move on

Read எப்போது. Which one letter would you change to read *then* instead? (The first — எ becomes அ.)

79.4 -உம் போது — when one thing happens, so does another

Read எப்போது. Then say *then, at that time*.

Grammar lens: the time-word does the joining

எப்போது asks about a time. போது on its own can pin one, and when a verb stands in front of it the whole thing becomes *when that happens*.

The verb takes -உம் first:

வா → வரும் → வரும் போது — “at the coming time”
— “when [you] come”

நீங்கள் வரும் போது, சொல்லுங்கள்.

nīṅgaḷ varum pōdu, solluṅgaḷ. — “When you come, tell me.”

Two things happening at once, held together by a word that means *time*. No word for *when* is needed, because போது already is one. One warning, because it would otherwise mislead you. The -உம் here is **not** the joining ending from chapter seventy-four. That one sat on nouns and meant *and*. This one sits on verbs and marks a happening. Same two letters, two different jobs — and the word in front of them tells you which.

Everyday speech runs it together and clips it, so you will hear *varumbōdu* as one word.

What you’ve built

The last of this chapter’s three: a time you ask about, a time you point at, and a time you build out of a verb.

Your turn

- Say it: *varum pōdu*
- Say it: *nīṅgaḷ varum pōdu, solluṅgaḷ*
- Separate: say *pālum* and then *varum* — the same ending, two different jobs

- *Recall:* answer *appōdu*, then read எப்போது, then say the whole *varum pōdu* line
- *Return to:* say *-ā*, *naḍa* and *adaṇāl* — three distances back — then say when one of them happens

Before you move on

Two words end in -உம்: பாலும் and வரும். What tells them apart? (**What they sit on** — a naming word joins, a doing word marks a happening.)

Chapter 80

One, the Other, and the Price

Modes:  voice (3)  pen (1)  Hands-free start: first 2 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can tell two things apart, choose between them, and ask what one costs.

Complete TA-C80-price and run the whole counter exchange, from choosing to asking.

80.1 மற்றது (marradu) — the other one

Read எப்போது. Then say: when you come, tell me.

You'll want to know: மற்றது

மற்றது (marradu) — “the other one”.

இது and அது name a thing by where it stands: near me, over there. மற்றது names it by what it is not — the one that is *left*, once you have picked one up.

இது வேண்டும். மற்றது வேண்டாம்.

idu vēṇḍum. marradu vēṇḍām. — “I want this one. Not the other.”

The tail of the word is அது, the same *that one* that ends அதனால். Tamil builds a surprising amount out of that small word, and once you hear it inside a longer one you can usually guess what the longer one is doing.

What you've built

A third way to point at a thing, once two of them are on the table.

Your turn

- Say it: *marradu*
- Say it: *idu vēṇḍum. marradu vēṇḍām.*
- Notice: the அது at the end of மற்றது and at the start of அதனால்
- Recall: read எப்போது, then say *varum pōdu*, then say *marradu*
- Return to: say *ām / illai*, read குடி and say *-kkāga* — three distances back — then set two of them against each other, one and the other
- Recall: say *ēn*, then read ஏனென்றால், then say *adanāl*

Before you move on

இது names a thing by where it is. What does மற்றது name it by? (By being the one left over.)

80.2 ஒன்று ... மற்றது — one here, the other there

Say: when you come, tell me. Then say *the other one*.

Grammar lens: a pair, split across two halves

ஒன்று has been the number *one* since chapter seven. Put மற்றது opposite it and the number stops counting and starts distributing.

ஒன்று இங்கே, மற்றது அங்கே.

onru ingē, marradu aṅgē. — “One is here, the other is there.”

Two halves, no joining word between them, and no verb in either. Tamil sets them side by side and the pairing does the work — the same silence you first met in இவர் என் நண்பர்.

It works with any two facts you can already state:

ஒன்று பெரிய வீடு, மற்றது சிறிய வீடு.

Chapter seventy-four joined two things into one list. This does the opposite: it takes two things and holds them apart.

What you've built

Both directions now: a way to put two things together, and a way to tell them apart.

Your turn

- *Say it:* *onru ingē, marradu aṅgē*
- *Build:* *onru periya vīḍu, marradu sirīya vīḍu*
- *Contrast:* *pālum tēnīrum* against *onru ... marradu* — held together, then held apart
- *Recall:* say *varum pōdu*, then say *marradu*, then say the whole pair
- *Return to:* say *niruttu*, read சரியா and say *eppōdu* — three distances back — then set two of them against each other, one and the other

Before you move on

How many joining words stand between the two halves? (**None** — the pair itself is the join.)

80.3 மற்றது — a doubling you have read twice before

Before the page: say *one here, the other there*.

Script you'll notice: மற்றது — ற standing on ற

piece		
ம	<i>ma</i>	the letter on its own
ற்	<i>r</i>	ற with a புள்ளி
ற	<i>ra</i>	ற again, this time carrying its vowel
து	<i>du</i>	த with the ு sign

ம · ற் · ற · து → மற்றது

The middle is the doubling you read in சட்டை with ட and in எப்போது with ப. A third letter, the same shape of seam: one wearing a புள்ளி, leaning on its twin.

Once you have seen it three times it stops being a thing to work out. It is a shape.

The last two letters spell து, and the word they close is அது — the *that one* the lesson before pointed out. On the page you can see the whole word being built out of things you have.

Your turn

- *Read it:* ம — then ற் — then ற — then து
- *Read it:* மற்றது, then எப்போது, then சட்டை — three doublings, three letters
- *Point to:* in each one, the letter carrying the புள்ளி
- *Recall:* say *marradu*, then say *onru ingē*, *marradu aṅgē*, then read மற்றது
- *Return to:* say *tira*, *nāṇ ullē varalāmā?* and *appōdu* — three distances back — then set two of them against each other, one and the other

Before you move on

Read மற்றது. Which letter is written twice? (ற — the first one with a புள்ளி.)

80.4 விலை எவ்வளவு? — how much does it cost?

Read மற்றது. Then say: one here, the other there.

You'll want to know: the question the shop is for

விலை எவ்வளவு? (*vilai evvaḷavu?*) — “How much does it cost?”

Both words have been yours for a long time. எவ்வளவு came in chapter thirty-nine and விலை in chapter sixty-eight. Standing side by side they are the question a shop exists for, and until now nothing put them side by side.

No verb, and no word for *is*. Tamil names the thing and asks about it:

விலை எவ்வளவு? — the price, how much?

இது எவ்வளவு? — this one, how much?

Then chapter seventy-five lets you check what you heard, or push back on it:

விலை குறைவா? — *vilai kuraivā?* — “Is the price low?”

குறைவு is the shortfall word from chapter fifty-six, and the -ஆ on the end is the question ending. Two chapters, one sentence you can say across a counter.

What you've built

A whole shop exchange: choose one of two, ask the price, question the answer.

Your turn

- Ask: *vilai evvaḷavu?*
- Ask: *idu evvaḷavu?*
- Push back: *vilai kuraivā?*
- Recall: say *onru ingē*, *marradu anigē*, then read மற்றது, then ask the price
- Return to: say *mūdu*, say *ānāl* and read எப்போது — three distances back — then set two of them against each other, one and the other

Before you move on

How many words does it take to ask a price in Tamil, and how many verbs? (**Two words, and no verb.**)

Chapter 81

Two Tamils

Modes: 🗣️ voice (2) 🗣️ Hands-free start: all 2 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say why written Tamil and spoken Tamil differ, and move between them.

Complete TA-C81-which-tamil and say three joining words in both forms.

81.1 ஆனால் / ஆனா — the two Tamils

Read மற்றது. Then ask a shopkeeper the price.

Grammar lens: one language, two forms, and everybody uses both

Something has been happening quietly in the last eight chapters, and it is time it was said plainly.

Tamil comes in two forms. One is written — in books, on signs, in the news. The other is spoken — at home, in a shop, on a bus. They are not an accent apart. Words differ, and endings differ, and a page of one is not a recording of the other.

Every Tamil speaker uses both and knows which is which. Nobody chooses one and abandons the other.

You have already met three pairs, one per chapter:

written	spoken
ஆனால் ஏனென்றால் என்று	ஆனா ஏன்னா -ன்னு

That is not a coincidence of these particular words. Joining words are where the split shows most, because they are said constantly and worn down fastest — the same reason an English speaker says *cos* far more often than *because*.

It reaches ordinary words too: இன்று, the written *today*, is இன்னிக்கி in speech.

What you've built

The single most important fact about Tamil, and a reason the last eight chapters gave you two forms of everything.

Your turn

- Say it: *ānāl*, then *ānā*
- Say it: *ēṇenrāl*, then *ēṇnā*
- Listen: for the piece that is dropped each time — a closing consonant
- Recall: read மற்றது, then ask *vilai evvaḷavu?*, then say both forms of *but*
- Return to: say *alladu* and *-um pōdu* — two distances back — then say which of the two Tamils each one belongs to

Before you move on

Does a Tamil speaker pick one of the two forms and keep to it? (No — everyone uses both, in different places.)

81.2 என்று / -ன்னு — which one you are being taught

Ask a price. Then say *but* twice — the written way, then the spoken way.

Grammar lens: the headword is the written one, on purpose

In every lesson of this book, the big word at the top is the **written** form, and the spoken clip is named beside it in the text. That choice is worth explaining, because it is not obvious.

The written form is the one on the page you will read, the sign you will pass and the form your dictionary will list. It is also understood everywhere Tamil is spoken, which no single spoken variety is.

And it runs one way. From என்று you can predict -ன்னு; from -ன்னு alone you could not have rebuilt என்று. Learn the longer one and the shorter one comes free.

“சரி” என்று சொல்லுங்கள். — written

“சரி”ன்னு சொல்லுங்கள். — spoken

Same sentence. The quotation does not move, the verb does not move; the joining word shrinks onto the word in front of it.

So: say either. Expect to **hear** the clipped one nearly always, and read the full one nearly always.

What you’ve built

You know which Tamil is in front of you, and you can get from one to the other.

Your turn

- *Say it:* “sari” enru solluṅgal
- *Say it:* “sari”-nnu solluṅgal
- *Convert:* take ēnenrāl and say the clip; take ēnnā and rebuild the full word
- *Recall:* read மற்றது, then ask *vilai evvaḷavu?*, then say both forms of the quotation line
- *Return to:* say *mēlē*, read ஆனால் and say *marradu* — three distances back — then say which of the two Tamils each one belongs to

Before you move on

Why does this book put the written form at the top? (**Because the spoken form follows from it, and not the other way round.**)

Chapter 82

Which One in the Line

Modes: ⇐ voice (5) 👁 eyes (1) ⇐ Hands-free start: none of the 6 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say first to fifth in Tamil, and make an ordinal from any number by adding -aavadhu.

The five said in order, four of them built by the ending and the fifth a word the learner had been saying since chapter 62 without knowing it was one.

82.1 முதல் (mutal) — first, and you have had it all along

A new kind of number word starts here, so the recalls come first, at the four growing distances this book measures.

- *Recall:* say enru and then its spoken -nnu — **R1**, one lesson back
- *Recall:* say onru ... marradu — **R2**, five lessons back
- *Recall:* offer a choice with alladu — **R3**, twenty lessons back
- *Recall:* say kūlē — **R4**, eighty lessons back

You'll want to know: முதல்

முதல் (*mutal*) — “first”.

You already know this word. Look at முதலில் (*mutalil*), “first of all”, which this book already taught as a way of putting one thing before another:

முதல் + இல் → முதலில்

இல் is the ending that means “in” or “at”. Take it off and what is left is முதல், first — and it was standing there in your mouth the whole time, carrying the meaning, without ever being named.

முதல் நாள் (*mutal nāl*), the first day. முதல் பாதை (*mutal pātai*), the first road.

Across the family: the word four languages built on

முதல் is one of the oldest words in this family, and its sisters did four different things with it:

language	what it did with <i>mutal</i>	its word for “first”
Tamil	kept the meaning outright	முதல் <i>mutal</i>
Kannada	built an ordinal on it	ಮೊದಲನೆಯ <i>modalaneya</i>
Telugu	built an ordinal on it	మొదటి <i>modaṭi</i>
Malayalam	kept the word, changed the sense to “from”	uses ഒന്നാം <i>onnām</i> instead

None of the four builds “first” on its own word for **one**, and three of them build it on this word. Tamil is where it still simply *means* first.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *mutalil*, then take the *-il* off and say *mutal*
- *mutal nāl* — the first day
- *onru* is how many, *mutal* is which one

Before you move on

What word is inside முதலில்? (முதல் — first.) Is it built on ஒன்று? (No — and neither is Kannada’s or Telugu’s.)

Sources: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates; Omniglot, Tamil numbers.

82.2 இரண்டாவது (iraṇḍāvadu) — second

- *Recall*: say *mutal*, and say what word it came out of — **R1**
- *Recall*: read மற்றது — **R2**
- *Recall*: say *sol* — **R3**
- *Recall*: read மேலே — **R4**

You'll want to know: இரண்டாவது

இரண்டாவது (iraṇḍāvadu) — “second”.

இரண்டு answers *how many*. இரண்டாவது answers *which one in the line*.

இரண்டாவது நாள் (iraṇḍāvadu nāl), the second day. இரண்டாவது கதவு (iraṇḍāvadu kadavu), the second door.

Grammar Lens: one ending, and one word that does not take it

cardinal

ordinal

இரண்டு (iraṇḍu)

இரண்டாவது (iraṇḍāvadu)

Add -ஆவது (-āvadu) to a number and you have its ordinal. That is the rule, and it works on every number Tamil has.

There is exactly **one** exception in the whole set, and you met it last lesson: you do not say *onrāvadu* for **first**. Tamil reaches for முதல் instead.

So the one word a learner would have to memorise here is the one word this book did not have to teach you.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *iraṇḍu*, then *iraṇḍāvadu*
- *mutal*, then *iraṇḍāvadu*
- *iraṇḍāvadu kadavu* — the second door

Before you move on

What do you add to a number to make its ordinal? (-ஆவது.)

Which number refuses it? (**One** — that one is முதல்.)

Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

82.3 முதலாவது (mutalāvadu) — first, taking the ending after all

- *Recall:* say *iraṇḍāvadu*, and say what you added to *iraṇḍu* — **R1**
- *Recall:* ask *vilai evvalavu?* — **R2**
- *Recall:* use *enru* to report what somebody said — **R3**
- *Recall:* say *ullē* — **R4**

You'll want to know: முதலாவது

முதலாவது (*mutalāvadu*) — “**first**”, said the long way.

Look at what happened:

முதல் + ஆவது → முதலாவது

The ending is the *same* ending. முதல் takes -ஆவது exactly as இரண்டு did. So the exception is narrower than it looked a lesson ago: *first* does not refuse -ஆவது at all. It simply takes it on முதல் rather than on ஒன்று.

The **stem** is the exception. The **ending** is not.

Both forms are current: முதல் நாள் and முதலாவது நாள் are both the first day, and முதல் is the shorter and commoner of the two in front of a noun.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *mutal*, then *mutalāvadu*
- *mutalāvadu*, *iraṇḍāvadu*
- which part of *mutalāvadu* is the same as in *iraṇḍāvadu*

Before you move on

Which part of முதலாவது is irregular, the stem or the ending?
(**The stem** — the ending is the ordinary one.)
Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

82.4 மூன்றாவது (mūnrāvadu) — third

- *Recall:* say *mutalāvadu*, and say which part of it is irregular — **R1**
- *Recall:* say *ānāl*, then its spoken *ānā* — **R2**
- *Recall:* read சொல் — **R3**
- *Recall:* say *veḷiyē* — **R4**

You'll want to know: மூன்றாவது

மூன்றாவது (mūnrāvadu) — “third”. மூன்று (mūnru) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

Three is the number the Dravidian family never quarrelled over — Tamil *mūnru*, Malayalam *mūnnŭ*, Kannada *mūru*, Telugu *mūdu*, all keeping the long *ū* at the front. The ordinal keeps it too, because the ending only touches the end of the word.

மூன்றாவது கதவு (mūnrāvadu kadavu), the third door.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *mūnru*, then *mūnrāvadu*
- the ordinal before this one, then *mūnrāvadu*
- *mūnrāvadu nāl* — the third day

Before you move on

Say the first three in order. (முதல், இரண்டாவது, மூன்றாவது.)
Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

82.5 நான்காவது (nāṅkāvadu) — fourth

- Recall: say *mūṇrāvadu* — **R1**
- Recall: say *enru* and its spoken *-nnu* — **R2**
- Recall: say what you think, with ... *enru ninaikkirēṇ* — **R3**
- Recall: say *valadu* — **R4**

You'll want to know: நான்காவது

நான்காவது (*nāṅkāvadu*) — “fourth”. நான்கு (*nāṅku*) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

நான்காவது நாற்காலி (*nāṅkāvadu nārkaḷi*), the fourth chair.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *nāṅku*, then *nāṅkāvadu*
- the ordinal before this one, then *nāṅkāvadu*
- *nāṅkāvadu nāl* — the fourth day

Before you move on

Say the fourth, then the third. (நான்காவது, மூன்றாவது.)
Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

82.6 ஐந்தாவது (aindāvadu) — fifth

- Recall: say *nāṅkāvadu* — **R1**
- Recall: say *mutal*, and say what word it came out of — **R2**
- Recall: ask *ēṇ?* — **R3**
- Recall: say *iḍadu* — **R4**

You'll want to know: ஐந்தாவது

ஐந்தாவது (*aindāvadu*) — “fifth”. ஐந்து (*aindu*) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

That is the first five. Count the work: **four of them were built** from numbers you already count with, and the fifth — முதல் — was a word you had been saying since you learned *mutalil*, without knowing it was a number word.

Nothing in this chapter was a word you had to learn.

இடது பக்கம் முதல் பாதை is now sayable in its useful half: முதல் பாதை, the first road, with இடது for which side of the street.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *aindu*, then *aindāvadu*
- the ordinal before this one, then *aindāvadu*
- *aindāvadu nāl* — the fifth day

Before you move on

Say first to fifth. (முதல், இரண்டாவது, மூன்றாவது, நான்காவது, ஐந்தாவது.)

Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

Chapter 83

All the Way Up, and On a Calendar

Modes: ⇄ voice (8) ⇄ Hands-free start: all 8 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can say sixth to eleventh in Tamil, make the ordinal of any number I know, and say a date with the ending a calendar uses.

Eleven ordinals and two endings retrieved out of order, with three ordinals made for numbers no lesson taught and three dates said with the calendar ending.

83.1 ஆறாவது (ārāvadu) — sixth

- Recall: say *aīndāvadu* — **R1**
- Recall: say *iraṇḍāvadu* — **R2**
- Recall: give a reason with *ēṇenrāl* — **R3**

You'll want to know: ஆறாவது

ஆறாவது (*ārāvadu*) — “sixth”. ஆறு (*āru*) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

Six to ten were a separate lesson from one to five when you learned to count, because the words themselves had to be learned. For ordering they are not a separate anything: the same ending, on the next number.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- $\bar{a}ru$, then $\bar{a}r\bar{a}vadu$
- the ordinal before this one, then $\bar{a}r\bar{a}vadu$
- $\bar{a}r\bar{a}vadu\ n\bar{a}l$ — the sixth day

Before you move on

Did the ending change above five? (**No.**)
Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

83.2 ஏழாவது ($\bar{e}l\bar{a}vadu$) — seventh

- *Recall:* say $\bar{a}r\bar{a}vadu$ — **R1**
- *Recall:* say $mutal\bar{a}vadu$ — **R2**
- *Recall:* read ஏன் — **R3**
- *Recall:* say $sattai$ — **R4**

You'll want to know: ஏழாவது

ஏழாவது ($\bar{e}l\bar{a}vadu$) — “seventh”. ஏழு ($\bar{e}lu$) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

ஏழு carries the curled $\bar{l}$, the sound in the name *Tamil* itself and the one this language shares with Malayalam while Kannada and Telugu hardened it away. Adding the ending does not soften it: ஏழாவது, tongue still curled.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- $\bar{e}lu$, then $\bar{e}l\bar{a}vadu$
- the ordinal before this one, then $\bar{e}l\bar{a}vadu$
- $\bar{e}l\bar{a}vadu\ n\bar{a}l$ — the seventh day

Before you move on

What happens to the ழ when the ending goes on? (**Nothing.**)
Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

83.3 எட்டாவது (eṭṭāvadu) — eighth

- Recall: say *eḷāvadu* — R1
- Recall: say *mūṇṇāvadu* — R2
- Recall: say *adaṇāl* — R3
- Recall: say *vēṭṭi* — R4

You'll want to know: எட்டாவது

எட்டாவது (*eṭṭāvadu*) — “eighth”. எட்டு (*eṭṭu*) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

எட்டு has the doubled retroflex ட்ட. The ending lands after all of it, so the doubling is untouched: எட்டாவது.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *eṭṭu*, then *eṭṭāvadu*
- the ordinal before this one, then *eṭṭāvadu*
- *eṭṭāvadu nāl* — the eighth day

Before you move on

Did the doubled ட்ட change? (**No.**)
Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

83.4 ஒன்பதாவது (onpadāvadu) — ninth

- Recall: say *eṭṭāvadu* — R1
- Recall: say *nāṇkāvadu* — R2

- *Recall:* say why you are doing something with *-kkāga* — **R3**
- *Recall:* read சட்டை — **R4**

You'll want to know: ஒன்பதாவது

ஒன்பதாவது (*onpadāvadu*) — “**ninth**”. ஒன்பது (*onpadu*) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

ஒன்பது was already a built word when you learned it: an old ஒன், one, in front of பது, ten — one short of ten. The ordinal ending goes on top of that, and none of the machinery underneath reacts to it.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *onpadu*, then *onpadāvadu*
- the ordinal before this one, then *onpadāvadu*
- *onpadāvadu nāl* — the ninth day

Before you move on

What two numbers are inside ஒன்பது? (One and ten — nine is one short of ten.)

Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

83.5 பத்தாவது (*pattāvadu*) — tenth

- *Recall:* say *onpadāvadu* — **R1**
- *Recall:* say *aīndāvadu* — **R2**
- *Recall:* ask *eppōdu?* — **R3**
- *Recall:* say *puḍavai* — **R4**

You'll want to know: பத்தாவது

பத்தாவது (*pattāvadu*) — “**tenth**”. பத்து (*pattu*) takes -ஆவது, and nothing else changes.

பத்தாவது நாள் (*pattāvadu nāl*), the tenth day, and the ten are done.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *pattu*, then *pattāvadu*
- the ordinal before this one, then *pattāvadu*
- *pattāvadu nāl* — the tenth day

Before you move on

Count the ordinals from one to ten. How many of them were words you had to learn? (**None** — ten of them were built by one ending on numbers you already count with, and முதல் you already had.)

Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

83.6 பதினொன்றாவது (patinonrāvadu) — eleventh, and the edge that is not there

- Recall: say *pattāvadu* — R1
- Recall: say *ārāvadu* — R2
- Recall: say *appōdu* — R3
- Recall: say *seruppu* — R4

You'll want to know: பதினொன்றாவது

பதினொன்றாவது (*patinonrāvadu*) — “eleventh”.

பதினொன்று was itself a built word: *patin-*, the joining shape of ten, with *onru* welded on. Now the ordinal ending goes on top of *that*, and the result is a word of three parts, none of which had to be learned as a whole.

Grammar Lens: the ending is a fact about numbers, not about ten

Most books stop an ordinal chapter at *tenth*, and a learner reasonably concludes that those ten words were the set. In Tamil there is no set. -ஆவது attaches to a **number**, so every number you learn from here on arrives with its ordinal already made: இருபது gives இருபதாவது (*irupadāvadu*), twentieth, without a lesson. That is why this book taught the ending in the second lesson of the

previous chapter rather than after ten examples. The examples were never the content.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *patinonru*, then *patinonrāvadu*
- *pattāvadu*, *patinonrāvadu*
- take *irupadu* and make its ordinal yourself

Before you move on

Do you need a lesson for *twentieth*? (**No** — the ending goes on any number.)

Source: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates.

83.7 தேதி (tēdi) — the date, and the ending a calendar uses

- *Recall*: say *patinonrāvadu*, and say why *irupadāvadu* needs no lesson — **R1**
- *Recall*: say *ēlāvadu* — **R2**
- *Recall*: read எப்போது — **R3**
- *Recall*: say *toppi* — **R4**

You'll want to know: தேதி

தேதி (tēdi) — “a date”, the day-number on a calendar.

Grammar Lens: a second ending, for one job

Tamil has a **second** ordinal ending, and it is not a free alternative to the first: -ஆம் (-ām) is what a **date** takes.

said of a place in a line	said of a date
இரண்டாவது <i>iraṇḍāvadu</i>	இரண்டாம் தேதி <i>iraṇḍām tēdi</i>
மூன்றாவது <i>mūṇrāvadu</i>	மூன்றாம் தேதி <i>mūṇrām tēdi</i>

Same number, same job in the world, two endings — and the calendar keeps the older, shorter one.

You already have the months. சித்திரை இரண்டாம் தேதி (*Chithirai iraṇḍām tēdi*) is the second of Chithirai, and that is a date you can now write down.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- *iraṇḍāvadu*, then *iraṇḍām tēdi*, and say which one is the date
- *Chithirai iraṇḍām tēdi*
- today's day-number with the ending a calendar uses

Before you move on

Which ending does a date take, -ஆவது or -ஆம்? (-ஆம்.) Say “the third of the month”. (மூன்றாம் தேதி.)

Sources: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates; Omniglot, Tamil numbers.

83.8 The ordinals, at a distance

- *Recall*: say *iraṇḍām tēdi*, and say which ending a date takes — **R1**
- *Recall*: say *eṭṭāvadu* — **R2**
- *Recall*: build a when-clause with *-um pōdu* — **R3**
- *Recall*: say *kaḍai* — **R4**

Your turn

Eleven ordinals, two endings and one word that was never new. Run it four ways.

1. Say first to eleventh straight through, once slowly and once fast.
2. Hear six of them out of order; say each back and say the one above it.

3. Take three numbers you were **not** taught an ordinal for and make theirs.
4. Say three dates with the month names you already have, using the ending a calendar takes rather than the ordinary one.

Then answer aloud: which of the eleven is not built by the ending on its own number, what is it built on instead, and where in this book did you first say it?

Before you move on

Which word for **first** was already inside a word you knew? (முதல், inside முதலில்.) Which ending does a date take? (-ஆம்.)
Sources: learntamil.com, Ordinal Numbers / Dates; Omniglot, Tamil numbers.

Chapter 84

Reading — Words, Lines, and a First Passage

Modes:  voice (3)  Hands-free start: all 3 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can read a Tamil word as shapes rather than sounds, recognise a question by its last word, and hold a whole passage without translating it word by word.

Thirty words of Tamil with no new word in them, four of whose lines have no verb at all because Tamil needs no word for is.

84.1 (reading) — six words, counted in shapes

Every word below you have written. Not one is new.

What is new is that nobody says them first.

Read this

வீடு புத்தகம் தண்ணீர் பால் அம்மா அப்பா

Read down the list once, without stopping.

Again — and this time count the shapes in each word rather than the sounds.

What to know first

They do not match. Tamil joins a consonant and its vowel into one shape, so வீடு is four sounds and two shapes.

That is the thing a reader has to stop fighting. You learned these words as sounds and wrote them as shapes, and reading asks you to take the shape whole rather than to unpack it back into sounds.

அம்மா and அப்பா are the clearest pair: same length, same rhythm, one shape different in the middle.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six words down the list, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many of the six were new? (**None.**)

Does a Tamil word have as many shapes as sounds? (**No** — fewer.)

84.2 (reading) — six lines, and a question that ends where it asks

The last lesson gave you words. These are things you would say.

You have said every one of them.

Read this

வணக்கம். நன்றி. ஆம். இல்லை. உன் பெயர்
என்ன? இங்கே.

Read down once, without stopping.

Again — and look at where the question word sits in the fifth line.

What to know first

At the end. உன் பெயர் என்ன? — *your name what?* English puts the question word first and Tamil puts it last, so a reader does not know a line is a question until the line is over.

That is worth meeting on a page, where you can look again. In speech the intonation gives it away early; in writing only the final word does.

வணக்கம் is a bowing, from the verb to bend — the same idea as namaste and namaskar, except Tamil kept the noun.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the six lines, once, in order, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

When do you find out a Tamil line is a question? (**At its last word.**)

What is வணக்கம், literally? (**A bowing.**)

84.3 (reading) — the first passage

Six words, then six lines. Now twelve of them together.

Thirty words, and not one of them is new.

Read this

வணக்கம். நான் நல்லா இருக்கிறேன். இது என்
வீடு. வீடு பெரிய. நான் புத்தகம் படிக்கிறேன்.
புத்தகம் நல்ல, ஆனால் பெரிய. அம்மா இங்கே.
அப்பா அங்கே. தண்ணீர், பால், தேநீர். இன்று
நான் படிக்கிறேன். உன் பெயர் என்ன? நன்றி.

Read it once without stopping. Do not translate as you go — let the sentences arrive.

Now read it again, and notice which lines have no verb at all.

What to know first

Four of them. வீடு பெரிய. அம்மா இங்கே. Tamil does not need a word for *is*, so a noun and what you are saying about it stand side by side and the sentence is finished.

A reader has to accept that a line can end without anything that looks like a verb. English cannot do it; Tamil does it constantly.

The one joiner here is ஆனால். The lesson that taught it also taught ஆனா, the same word as people say it — this passage sits on the written side of that split, which is where reading lives.

This is the first whole passage the book has asked you to hold at once, and it works because everything in it was paid for.

Your turn

- *Say it:* the passage aloud, once, without stopping

Twice through:

Before you move on

How many words in that passage were new? (**None.**)

What does Tamil not need in அம்மா இங்கே? (**A verb.**)

Chapter 85

The People Not Here

Modes: ⇐ voice (2) ◉ eyes (2) ⇐ Hands-free start: first 1 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can talk about somebody who is not in the room, choosing between the familiar and respectful words, and I can say we in the two ways Tamil requires.

From cold: the four third-person and we-words, the front letter that marks distance, and the question each choice answers.

85.1 அவன் / அவள் — the pair underneath the respectful word

Say the respectful word for a person who is not here. Say whether it tells you anything about their sex. (It does not.)

Today's two words do.

You'll want to know: அவன் and அவள்

அவன் — *avan* — he அவள் — *aval* — she

These are the plain, familiar words, and அவர் was built on top of them: the lesson that taught இவர் said so in passing, that it comes from இவன் and இவள் with the same -அர் that makes நண்பர் out of நண்பன்.

So the ending you met on a word for *friend* is the same ending that turns a familiar *he* into a respectful *that person*. **One suffix, three words, and it does the same job in all of them.**

Grammar Lens: choosing between them

about

a man, familiarly
a woman, familiarly
either, respectfully

you say

அவன்
அவள்
அவர்

The choice is about the relationship, not about the grammar.

அவன் and அவள் go with somebody younger, a close friend, a child — the people you would use the familiar நீ with rather than நீங்கள். Reaching for அவன் about a stranger or an elder lands the way the familiar *you* would.

A learner in doubt is safer with அவர். Being a shade too polite passes without comment; the other direction does not.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- அவன், அவள்
- which of the three words hides the person's sex
- which one you would use about somebody's grandmother
- the ending that அவர் and நண்பர் have in common

Before you move on

Which word is *she*? (அவள்.) Which is *he*? (அவன்.) Which one would you choose if you were unsure of the relationship? (அவர்.)

85.2 அவர்கள் — they, and an ending hiding in a word you already say

Say the polite word for *you*. Look at its last syllable.

You have been carrying a plural ending around since chapter two without being told it was one.

You'll want to know: அவர்கள்

அவர்கள் — *avarkal* — they

It is அவர் with -கள் on the end, and -கள் is Tamil's plural. The same piece is sitting on the end of நீங்கள், which is why that word does double duty as a polite singular *you* and a plain plural *you*.

one	more than one
நீ அவர்	நீங்கள் அவர்கள்

The ending you have been pronouncing for eighty chapters turns out to be a word-building piece, and now it builds something for you rather than arriving pre-attached.

Grammar Lens: the same double duty

அவர்கள் carries the same ambiguity as நீங்கள். About several people it is plainly *they*; about one person it is a step more respectful still than அவர் — the way some languages use a plural to raise the register.

Context settles which, and context usually settles it easily: a room with three people in it needs no disambiguation.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- அவர்கள்
- the two pieces it is made of
- the word for polite *you*, and point at the same piece inside it
- what அவர்கள் can mean about a single person

Before you move on

What is Tamil's plural ending? (-கள்.) What is அவர்கள் built from? (அவர் plus that ending.) Which other word you already say carries it? (நீங்கள்.)

85.3 நாம் / நாங்கள் — two words for “we”, and you have to choose

Say the word for *I*.

Now say *we*. Tamil will ask you a question first, and English never has.

You’ll want to know: நாம் and நாங்கள்

நாம் — *nām* — **we**, counting the person you are talking to
நாங்கள் — *nāṅgal* — **we**, not counting them

English has one *we* and hides which it means. Tamil has two and makes you decide every time.

you mean	you say
you and me	நாம்
me and them, but not you	நாங்கள்

“Shall we go?” said to a friend is நாம் — the invitation is the point. “We went yesterday” said to somebody who stayed behind is நாங்கள், and using நாம் there would tell them they had been present when they were not.

Grammar Lens: the piece you can already see

நாங்கள் ends in the plural -கள் met in the lesson before this one. நாம் does not, and that is a useful shape to hold on to: the shorter word is the one that gathers everybody in.

This distinction has no English equivalent to lean on, so it is worth practising as a question rather than as a pair of words. Before saying *we*, ask whether the person listening is inside it. The answer picks the word for you.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- நாம், நாங்கள்
- which one you would use to invite a friend somewhere
- which one you would use telling a friend about a trip they missed

- which of the two carries the plural ending

Before you move on

Which *we* includes the listener? (நாம்.) Which leaves them out? (நாங்கள்.) What question do you ask yourself before choosing? (Whether the person listening is inside the *we*.)

85.4 (the people not here) — four words, from cold

Close the four lessons before this one. Say the word for *this person*, the one you have had since chapter thirty-seven.

Grammar Lens: the table, filled in

	near	far
respectfully	இவர்	அவர்
he / she	—	அவன் / அவள்
more than one	—	அவர்கள்

The far column was empty and its pattern had been taught.

That is the shape of this chapter: the pointing system arrived long ago, correct and complete as a rule, with only half its cells ever handed over.

Grammar Lens: the question behind each choice

before you say	ask yourself
he or she	how close is this person to me
we	is my listener inside it

Both questions are ones English lets a speaker skip. Tamil asks them every time, and neither has a safe default you can lean on forever — though a learner in doubt about the first is better off one shade too polite.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four words this chapter taught, from memory

- which front letter all but one of them carry
- which *we* invites the listener along
- the plural ending, and two words you know that carry it

Before you move on

Which word is respectful and hides the person's sex? (அவர்.)
Which is *they*? (அவர்கள்.) Which *we* leaves the listener out?
(நாங்கள்.)

Chapter 86

The One It Is Done To

Modes: ⇨ voice (2) 👁 eyes (2) ⇨ Hands-free start: first 1 of 4 lessons.

By the end of this chapter: I can mark the object of a verb with -ai, say me and you as objects, and tell when the ending is compulsory and when it is a choice that means 'the'.

From cold: the accusative ending and which end of the word it sits on, the two pronoun objects and the changed bodies they stand on, and the one question — is the object a person — that decides whether the ending may be left off.

86.1 -ஐ — your second case ending

Your first case ending was -உக்கு, and what it taught was bigger than its meaning: English puts a word in front, Tamil sticks a piece on the back.

Here is the second piece, and it goes on the same end.

You'll want to know: -ஐ

-ஐ — -ai — marks the one the verb is done to

A sentence can have two people in it, and something has to say which of them is doing and which is being done to. **English uses position:** *the teacher saw the child* and *the child saw the teacher* are built from the same three words and mean opposite things, and the only signal is the order.

Tamil marks the one being done to, and then the order stops carrying the weight:

நான் அவரை நினைக்கிறேன்

nāṇ avarai ninaikkirēṇ — “I think of them”

அவர் became அவரை. Nothing else moved. The verb you already know from the thinking chapter did not change, and *nāṇ* is still optional because the *-ēṇ* on the end is already saying “I”.

Grammar Lens: where the two endings sit

the word	+ ending	what it says
அவர்	அவர்உக்கு → அவருக்கு	to them, for them
அவர்	அவர்ஐ → அவரை	them, as the one it is done to

Two endings, one place to put them, and the noun underneath is the same word both times. **A case ending in Tamil is a seam you can see**, which is the thing the dative chapter said was the biggest structural fact about the language — and this is the second piece of evidence for it rather than a new idea.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “avar ... avarai”
- “nāṇ avarai ninaikkirēṇ”
- which word in that sentence is the one being thought of, and how you can tell
- “avarukku” and “avarai” one after the other, and what each of them does

Before you move on

What does **-ஐ** mark? (**The one the verb is done to.**) Where does it go? (**On the end of the word**, like every Tamil case ending.) What is *avar* as the one it is done to? (**Avarai.**) And what does English use instead of an ending here? (**Position** —

which word comes first.)

86.2 என்னை / உன்னை — the body you already changed once

Say “to me”. Then say the word for “I” on its own.

They do not look like each other, and the dative chapter told you why: the pronoun changes its body before an ending lands on it.

You’ll want to know: என்னை and உன்னை

என்னை — *ennai* — **me**, as the one it is done to உன்னை — *unnai* — **you**, as the one it is done to

These cost you nothing new. You changed *nān* into *en-* to build *enakku* chapters ago. That changed body is the same one -ஐ lands on:

the word	to / for	the one it is done to
நான் <i>nān</i> — I	எனக்கு <i>enakku</i>	என்னை <i>ennai</i>
நீ <i>nī</i> — you	உனக்கு <i>unakku</i>	உன்னை <i>unnai</i>

Read down the middle column and then down the right one. **The left part of each word never changes once you have it.** Learning the body is the work; the endings are the cheap part, and there are only so many of them.

என்னை நினை

ennai ninai — “think of me”

A bare verb stem is already a command — you met that with *pō!* in the farewell chapter — so this is a whole sentence with no machinery you have not used.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “*enakku ... ennai*”

- “unakku ... unnai”
- the part of those four words that never changes
- “ennai ninai” — think of me

Before you move on

What is *me*, as the one it is done to? (**Ennai.**) And *to me*? (**Enakku.**) What do those two have in common? (**The changed body en-.**) Which of the two endings would you put on it to say “for you”? (-உக்கு, on *un-*.)

86.3 தேநீர் / தேநீரை — when the ending is a choice

Say “I think of them”. Say which piece of that sentence marks the one being thought of.

Now the part nobody tells you: that piece is not always required.

Grammar Lens: a person must have it, a thing need not

அவரை நினைக்கிறேன் — I think of **them**

தேநீர் வாங்குகிறேன் — I buy tea

தேநீரை வாங்குகிறேன் — I buy **the** tea

On a person the ending is obligatory. Leaving it off does not make a casual sentence; it makes a broken one.

On a thing it is a choice, and the choice carries meaning. Bare தேநீர் is tea in general, the kind of thing you buy. தேநீரை is *that* tea, a particular one already in view. Tamil has no word for *the*, and this is one of the places the job gets done instead.

the object is	the ending
a person	required
a thing, in general	usually left off
a thing, a particular one	put on

Across the family: the same line, drawn at the other end

Spanish draws this line too, and a Spanish learner has met it: *veo la casa* (“I see the house”) against *veo a María* (“I see María”). A human object gets a marker; a thing does not.

Spanish puts that marker in front of the word as a separate piece. Tamil sticks it on the back. Same distinction between a person and a thing, opposite end of the word — which is the difference the dative chapter opened with, now showing up in a second place.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- “avarai ninaikkirēṇ”
- “tēnīr vāṅgugirēṇ” and then “tēnīrai vāṅgugirēṇ”
- which of those two is about a particular tea
- which of the three objects could not drop the ending, and why

Before you move on

When is **-ṇ** obligatory? (**When the object is a person.**) What does putting it on a thing add? (**That it is a particular one** — Tamil has no word for *the*.) And where does Spanish put its marker for a human object? (**In front**, as a separate word, where Tamil puts it on the back.)

86.4 (the one it is done to) — from cold

Close the lessons before this one. Say the ending that marks the one a verb is done to, and say which end of the word it goes on.

Grammar Lens: one ending, one question

the object	with the ending	required?
அவர் — that person	அவரை	yes
நான் — I	என்னை	yes
நீ — you	உன்னை	yes
தேநீர் — tea	தேநீரை	only for a particular one

Three of the four rows are people, and people have no choice.

The question to ask of an object is not *is this the subject or the object* — the ending answers that — but **is this a person**.

Two things carry over from earlier chapters rather than being new here. The pronouns stand on the changed bodies **en-** and **un-** that the dative built. And the ending sits on the back of the word, which is what your first case ending taught and what separates this language from the one that would put a word in front.

Your turn

Say these aloud:

- the four objects in the table, each with its ending
- “avarai ninaikkirēn” and “ennai ninai”
- which row of the table lets you choose, and what choosing adds
- the two words that share the body en-

Before you move on

What is *them*, as the one it is done to? (**Avarai.**) What is *me*? (**Ennai.**) When may the ending be left off? (**On a thing, when it is not a particular one.**) And what has to be true before it is compulsory? (**The object is a person.**)

The Tamil script — a reference

A **reference**, not a chapter — a place to look things up. You are *not* meant to read this before the lessons: the lessons teach reading through real words, introducing each letter as a word needs it. This page just gathers the system in one spot.

How the Tamil script works (the three facts the lessons teach)

1. **Consonants carry a built-in “a”.** க = “ka,” ம = “ma,” ர = “ra.”
You never write the short *a* — it’s already there.
2. **A vowel sign changes that built-in vowel.** Hooked onto a consonant, it swaps the *a* for another vowel — க ka + ி gives கி ki. The signs are ா = ā (கா = kā) · ி = i (கி = ki) · ீ = ī · ு = u · ூ = ū · ெ = e · ே = ē · ை = ai · ொ = o · ோ = ō · ௐ = au.
3. **A *pulli* (the dot, ◌்) removes the built-in vowel.** க் = bare “k.”
A vowel-less consonant then leans into the next (க் + க → க்க, a held “kk”).

Independent vowels (word-initial)

When a word *starts* with a vowel, a full vowel letter is used: அ a · ஆ ā · இ i · ஈ ī · உ u · ஊ ū · எ e · ஏ ē · ஐ ai · ஒ o · ஓ ō · ஔ au.

What makes Tamil distinctive

- **Three *n*’s, three *l*’s, two *r*’s.** Tamil *writes* the place of articulation: dental ந / alveolar ன / retroflex ண; ல ள ழ; ர ற.

English fuses each set into one letter and never notices; in Tamil they are distinct and can change meaning.

- **One letter, several sounds.** Tamil marks no voicing or aspiration: **க** can be *k*, *g*, or *h*; **ச** can be *s* or *ch* — **position** decides. The alphabet is small; the exact sound is read from context, picked up by ear.
- **No Sanskrit-only letters in the core set.** Classical Tamil gets by with 18 consonants; a handful of *grantha* letters (ஜ *ja*, ஷ *ṣa*, ஸ *sa*, ஹ *ha*) are added only to spell loanwords.

Tamil in the Dravidian family

Dravidian is a language family entirely separate from Indo-European (English, Latin, Sanskrit). Tamil is its oldest-attested member and the most protective of its native word-stock; its sisters — **Malayalam** (closest), then **Kannada** and **Telugu** — share the grammar and many roots but borrowed far more freely from Sanskrit. The lessons trace, word by word, which Tamil words are home-grown and which the sisters replaced (*vaṇakkam* vs. *namaskāra*; *nanri* vs. *dhanyavāda*).

Glossary

This glossary collects every word and phrase taught in the book. Pronunciation appears when it differs from the written form; chapter numbers show where each entry is introduced.

-ஐ *-ai*

the accusative suffix -ai, which marks the one the verb is done to
Introduced in Chapter 86.

-உக்கு *-ukku*

the dative suffix -ukku, 'to / for,' including its two surface forms and irregular enakku
Introduced in Chapter 6.

... என்று நினைக்கிறேன் ... *enru ninaikkirēn*

giving an opinion — I think that ...
Introduced in Chapter 77.

aaru eezhu ettu onpatu pattu

hear and say six to ten before meeting their written forms
Introduced in Chapter 7.

அதனால் *adanāl*

because of that, so
Introduced in Chapter 78.

அது *adu*

that one — the thing over there
Introduced in Chapter 40.

ஐந்தாவது *aindāvadu*

fifth — the ending working on a number you already count with
Introduced in Chapter 82.

ஆகட்டும் *ākattum*

let it be so
Introduced in Chapter 56.

ஆகாயம் *ākāyam*

the sky
Introduced in Chapter 51.

அல்லது *alladu*

or

Introduced in Chapter 76.

அழு *alu*

to cry

Introduced in Chapter 72.

ஆம் *ām*

yes (*ām*)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

ஆம் / இல்லை / சரி *ām / illai / sari*

answering in Tamil — the five words in use, and the two habits behind them

Introduced in Chapter 1.

ஆனால் *ānāl*

but

Introduced in Chapter 76.

அன்பு *anbu*

affection

Introduced in Chapter 49.

ஆண்டு *āṇḍu*

a year

Introduced in Chapter 73.

அங்கே *aṅgē*

there — where I am not

Introduced in Chapter 40.

அனுமதி *anumati*

permission

Introduced in Chapter 63.

அப்பா அம்மா அண்ணன் தம்பி அக்கா தங்கை *appā ammā aṇṇan
tambi akkā tangai*

father, mother, and FOUR sibling words — Tamil splits “brother”/“sister” by age, where Spanish/French use just one word each

Introduced in Chapter 12.

அப்படியே *appaḍiyē*

just so

Introduced in Chapter 47.

அப்போது *appōdu*

then, at that time

Introduced in Chapter 79.

அறை *arai*

room — and the letter ற, the hard r that is not the r you think it is

Introduced in Chapter 35.

ஆறாவது *ārāvadu*

sixth — the ending working on a number you already count with
Introduced in Chapter 83.

அறுவடை *aruvaṭai*

the harvest

Introduced in Chapter 64.

ஆசிரியர் *āsiriyaṛ*

a teacher

Introduced in Chapter 46.

ஆடு *ātu*

a goat

Introduced in Chapter 58.

அவன் / அவள் *avan / aval*

he and she, the familiar pair the respectful word was built out of

Introduced in Chapter 85.

அவர் *avar*

that person — the far half of a pointing system whose pattern you were given without the words

Introduced in Chapter 37.

அவர்கள் *avarkaḷ*

they — the respectful word with the plural ending you have been saying since chapter two

Introduced in Chapter 85.

சித்திரை வைகாசி ஆனி ஆடி ஆவணி புரட்டாசி ஐப்பசி

கார்த்திகை மார்கழி தை மாசி பங்குனி *Chithirai Vaikāsi Āni Āḍi*

Āvaṇi Purattāsi Aippasi Kārthigai Mārgazhi Thai Māsi Panguni

the twelve months of the Tamil solar calendar — Tamil's OWN calendar, distinct from both the Gregorian and Hindu lunisolar systems

Introduced in Chapter 16.

எடு *eḍu*

to take, to pick up — one vowel away from இடு, “to put,” and pointing the opposite way

Introduced in Chapter 34.

ஏழாவது *ēlāvadu*

seventh — the ending working on a number you already count with

Introduced in Chapter 83.

எழு *elu*

to get up, to rise

Introduced in Chapter 71.

எழுது *eludu*

to write — carrying ழ, the retroflex glide Tamil and Malayalam kept and their sisters gave up

Introduced in Chapter 33.

எலும்பு *elumbu*

a bone

Introduced in Chapter 55.

என் *en*

my

Introduced in Chapter 2.

ஏன் *ēn*

why

Introduced in Chapter 78.

என் பெயர் ... *en peyar ...*

my name is... (with no “is”)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் *enakut tamil teriyum*

‘I know Tamil’ — built with no subject, because knowing happens TO you

Introduced in Chapter 6.

ஏனென்றால் *ēnenrāl*

because

Introduced in Chapter 78.

எங்கே *engē*

where? — asking about a place

Introduced in Chapter 40.

என்ன *enna*

what

Introduced in Chapter 2.

என்னை / உன்னை *ennai / unnai*

me and you as the one it is done to, standing on the same changed body the dative already used

Introduced in Chapter 86.

எண்ணெய் *enney*

oil

Introduced in Chapter 59.

எப்படி *eppadi*

how

Introduced in Chapter 3.

எப்போது *eppōdu*

when?

Introduced in Chapter 79.

எட்டாவது *eṭṭāvadu*

eighth — the ending working on a number you already count with

Introduced in Chapter 83.

எவ்வளவு *evvaḷavu*

how much — the question for things Tamil does not count one by one
Introduced in Chapter 39.

இடது *idadu*

the left side

Introduced in Chapter 66.

இது *idu*

this one — the thing near me

Introduced in Chapter 40.

இல்லை *illai*

no / there isn't (illai — the negative)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

இங்கே *ingē*

here — where I am

Introduced in Chapter 40.

இனிய இரவு *iniya iravu*

“good night” — fully native Dravidian, “sweet/pleasant night,” unlike Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam’s shared Sanskrit-descended śubha rātri phrase; Tamil breaks the pattern this arc found in every other language

Introduced in Chapter 25.

இன்னும் *innum*

still, yet

Introduced in Chapter 62.

இன்று *inru*

today

Introduced in Chapter 73.

இப்போது *ippōdu*

now

Introduced in Chapter 48.

இரண்டாவது *iraṇḍāvadu*

second — and the ending that makes every other ordinal in the language

Introduced in Chapter 82.

இரவு *iravu*

“night” — native Dravidian, already used standalone inside “midnight”

(naḷḷiravu); a Sanskrit loan alternative, rāttiri, also exists — and per at least one dictionary source, rāttiri may actually be the MORE common word in everyday spoken Tamil, the opposite direction from நாள்’s story last lesson

Introduced in Chapter 24.

இரு *iru*

to be, to exist, to stay — and the three-piece machine every Tamil verb is built on

Introduced in Chapter 32.

இவர் *ivar*

this person, spoken of with respect — the near end of Tamil’s இ / அ / எ pointing system
Introduced in Chapter 37.

இவர் என் நண்பர் *ivar en nanbar*

“this is my friend” — three words, no verb, and a choice of ending that says how you regard them
Introduced in Chapter 37.

கடை *kaḍai*

a shop
Introduced in Chapter 68.

கதவு *kadavu*

door — Tamil’s everyday word is its own, while the Sanskrit one stayed in books
Introduced in Chapter 35.

காது *kādu*

an ear
Introduced in Chapter 45.

காக்கை *kākkai*

a crow
Introduced in Chapter 58.

காலை *kālai*

morning (kālai) — Wiktionary itself HEDGES the etymology (“possibly from Sanskrit काल्य/kālya”), not a confirmed Dravidian root; genuinely uncertain, unlike Kannada’s confidently-native or Telugu’s confidently-Sanskrit morning-words; பகல் (already met, TA-C17, “daytime”) is Wiktionary’s own listed coordinate term; அதிகாலை (“early dawn”) is a transparent ati-+kālai compound
Introduced in Chapter 26.

காலை வணக்கம் *kālai vaṇakkam*

good morning (kālai vaṇakkam), literally “morning greetings” — a transparent compound of காலை (already met, TA-C26) + வணக்கம் (already met, TA-C01, “reverence, homage”); confirmed via TWO independently-fetched sources as the standard, formal greeting, used from sunrise until around 11 AM; NOT a śubha-equivalent construction, breaking the pattern its neighbours share; a WebSearch summary’s claim that a Sanskrit-borrowed “suprabhatham” is a casual alternative could NOT be traced to either directly-fetched source and is therefore not asserted here
Introduced in Chapter 29.

களம் *kaḷam*

a threshing floor
Introduced in Chapter 64.

கழுத்து *kaluttu*

the neck

Introduced in Chapter 55.

கழுவு *kaluvu*

to wash

Introduced in Chapter 71.

கண் *kaṇ*

an eye

Introduced in Chapter 45.

கனல் *kaṇal*

an ember

Introduced in Chapter 57.

காற்று *kārru*

the wind

Introduced in Chapter 57.

கருப்பு வெள்ளை சிவப்பு நீலம் *karuppu vellai sivappu nīlam*

black, white, red, blue — three native Tamil colors, and one Sanskrit loan

Introduced in Chapter 11.

கத்தி *katti*

a knife

Introduced in Chapter 54.

கட்டில் *kaṭṭil*

a bed

Introduced in Chapter 70.

காய்ச்சல் *kāyccal*

a fever

Introduced in Chapter 61.

கயிறு *kayiru*

a rope

Introduced in Chapter 60.

கேள் *kēl*

to ask — and to hear, because Tamil gives both jobs to one verb, whose stem changes shape before the beads

Introduced in Chapter 34.

கிளை *kilai*

a branch

Introduced in Chapter 52.

கீழே *kīlē*

down, below

Introduced in Chapter 66.

கிண்ணம் *kiṇṇam*

a bowl

Introduced in Chapter 54.

கிராமம் *kirāmam*

a village

Introduced in Chapter 53.

கோலம் *kōlam*

the design at a doorway

Introduced in Chapter 50.

கோழி *kōli*

a hen

Introduced in Chapter 58.

கோபம் *kōpam*

anger

Introduced in Chapter 72.

கொடு *koṭu*

give

Introduced in Chapter 42.

குடி *kuḍi*

drink

Introduced in Chapter 65.

குழந்தை *kuḷandai*

child

Introduced in Chapter 43.

கூரை *kūrai*

a roof

Introduced in Chapter 70.

குறைவு *kuraiṭu*

a shortage, less than there should be

Introduced in Chapter 56.

குடை *kuṭai*

an umbrella

Introduced in Chapter 60.

கூடை *kūṭai*

a basket

Introduced in Chapter 54.

குடும்பம் *kuṭumbam*

family

Introduced in Chapter 43.

மாதம் *mādam*

a month

Introduced in Chapter 73.

மகிழ்ச்சி *magilcci*

joy / pleased to meet you

Introduced in Chapter 2.

மகள் *makal*

daughter

Introduced in Chapter 43.

மகன் *makan*

son

Introduced in Chapter 43.

மலை *malai*

a hill

Introduced in Chapter 53.

மாலை *mālai*

evening (mālai) — a genuine HOMONYM: Wiktionary lists TWO separate etymologies for this exact spelling — “garland/necklace” (possibly a Dravidian word BORROWED INTO Sanskrit as **माला**/mālā, a reverse-direction loan) and, unrelated, “evening” (compared to **மால்**, Proto-Dravidian *mā*/māl, whose senses include “**கருமை**,” darkness); confidently native for the evening sense, unlike TA-C26’s uncertain **காலை**, though the exact semantic mechanism (“evening” ← “darkness” specifically) isn’t spelled out with full certainty by the source
Introduced in Chapter 27.

மாலை வணக்கம் *mālai vaṇakkam*

good evening (mālai vaṇakkam), literally “evening greetings” — the SAME compositional pattern as TA-C29’s **கலை வணக்கம்**: **மாலை** (already met, TA-C27, “evening”) + **வணக்கம்** (already met, TA-C01); confirmed via TWO independently-fetched sources (talkpal.ai, preply.com — same practical-content tier as TA-C29’s sources) as real and used from afternoon/late-afternoon through nightfall, one labeling it formal; no śubha-equivalent word here either, consistent with TA-C29’s finding, not just assumed to carry over automatically
Introduced in Chapter 30.

மலர் *malar*

a flower

Introduced in Chapter 50.

மணல் *maṇal*

sand

Introduced in Chapter 57.

மாணவன் *māṇavan*

a student

Introduced in Chapter 46.

மணி *maṇi*

hour — Tamil’s OWN dictionaries treat this as a native Dravidian “bell” word, most likely NOT Kannada/Telugu/Hindi’s Sanskrit ghaṇṭā, and a probable homophone trap with an unrelated Sanskrit “gem” word spelled the same way Introduced in Chapter 18.

மன்னிக்கவும் *mannikkavum*

please forgive (mannikkavum — a formal/written polite request, from மன்னி manṇi “to forgive”) Introduced in Chapter 9.

மரம் *maram*

a tree
Introduced in Chapter 52.

மரியாதை *mariyāḍai*

respect
Introduced in Chapter 49.

மற்றது *marradu*

the other one
Introduced in Chapter 80.

மருத்துவர் *maruttuvar*

a doctor
Introduced in Chapter 46.

மதிய வணக்கம் *matiya vaṇakkam*

good afternoon (matiya vaṇakkam), confirmed by two sources for roughly noon to 4 PM, while a third source does not teach a separate afternoon greeting Introduced in Chapter 31.

மட்டும் *maṭṭum*

only
Introduced in Chapter 62.

மேகம் *mēkam*

a cloud
Introduced in Chapter 51.

மேலே *mēlē*

up, above
Introduced in Chapter 66.

மேசை *mēsai*

a table
Introduced in Chapter 70.

மிக்க நன்றி *mikka nanri*

thank you very much
Introduced in Chapter 49.

மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் *mīṇḍum sandippōm*

we'll meet again

Introduced in Chapter 4.

மூடு *mūḍu*

close, shut

Introduced in Chapter 65.

மூக்கு *mūḱḱu*

a nose

Introduced in Chapter 45.

முன்பு *munbu*

before, earlier

Introduced in Chapter 73.

மூன்றாவது *mūnrāvadu*

third — the ending working on a number you already count with

Introduced in Chapter 82.

முதல் *mutal*

first — the one word in the set you already had, hidden inside the word for first of all

Introduced in Chapter 82.

முதலாவது *mutalāvadu*

first, with the ending on it — the exception is the stem, not the rule

Introduced in Chapter 82.

முதலில் *mutalil*

first of all

Introduced in Chapter 62.

முதுகு *mutuku*

the back

Introduced in Chapter 55.

நட *naḍa*

walk

Introduced in Chapter 65.

நதி *nadi*

a river

Introduced in Chapter 53.

நகம் *nakam*

a nail

Introduced in Chapter 55.

நாள் *nāl*

“day” — Tamil’s everyday, native Dravidian word, already met inside

“tomorrow”; unlike Kannada’s *dina*, Telugu’s *rōju*, and Malayalam’s *divasam*,

Tamil’s plain day-word is NOT a loanword at all — நாள் just is the everyday word, no Sanskrit or Persian substitute doing that job

Introduced in Chapter 23.

நாளை பார்க்கலாம் *nālai pārkkalām*

see you tomorrow

Introduced in Chapter 4.

நலம் *nalām*

well, wellness, good — and the reply “*nān nalamāga irukkirēn*”

Introduced in Chapter 3.

நல்ல *nalla*

good

Introduced in Chapter 41.

நாம் / நாங்கள் *nām / nāṅgaḷ*

the two words for we — one that takes the listener in and one that leaves them out

Introduced in Chapter 85.

நம்பிக்கை *nambikkai*

trust

Introduced in Chapter 63.

நான் *nān*

I

Introduced in Chapter 3.

நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் *nān tamīl pēsugirēn*

I speak Tamil

Introduced in Chapter 5.

நான் உள்ளே வரலாமா? *nān ullē varalāmā?*

may I come in? — asking permission, and granting it

Introduced in Chapter 75.

நண்பன் *naṇban*

friend — one word with three endings for man, woman and respect, and a root meaning “close”

Introduced in Chapter 37.

நான்காவது *nāṅkāvadu*

fourth — the ending working on a number you already count with

Introduced in Chapter 82.

நண்பகல் நள்ளிரவு *naṇpakal naḷḷiravu*

noon and midnight — NO Sanskrit here at all (unlike Kannada/Telugu); both trace to the same old “middle” root, நள் (naḷ), but Tamil ALSO keeps fully transparent synonyms built on நடு, the everyday word for “middle”

Introduced in Chapter 17.

நன்றி *nanri*

thank you (nanri — “goodness, gratitude”)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

நாற்காலி *nārkali*

chair — a word you can take apart into “four” and “leg,” and the thing a guest is offered

Introduced in Chapter 35.

நாய், பூனை *nāy, pūnai*

dog and cat — நாய் is THE solid, ancient, undisputed Dravidian root behind Kannada/Malayalam’s dog-words too, the honest opposite of the tangled dog-words of Spanish, Hindi, and English; பூனை is Tamil’s everyday cat-word, one of (at least) three genuinely separate Dravidian cat-word families

Introduced in Chapter 21.

நெல் *nel*

paddy

Introduced in Chapter 64.

நேரம் *nēram*

time

Introduced in Chapter 48.

நேற்று *nērru*

yesterday

Introduced in Chapter 73.

நெய் *ney*

ghee

Introduced in Chapter 59.

நீ / நீங்கள் *nī / nīngal*

you (familiar / respectful)

Introduced in Chapter 2.

நிச்சயமாக *niccayamāka*

certainly

Introduced in Chapter 47.

நிலா *nilā*

the moon

Introduced in Chapter 51.

நிலையம் *nilaiyam*

a station

Introduced in Chapter 69.

நினை *ninai*

to think — and, with no second word, to remember, because Tamil files thinking and recalling under one verb

Introduced in Chapter 33.

நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்? *nīngal eppadi irukkirīrgal?*

how are you? (respectful)

Introduced in Chapter 3.

நிறைய *niraiya*

a lot

Introduced in Chapter 56.

நிறுத்து *niruttu*

stop

Introduced in Chapter 65.

ஓடு *ōḍu*

to run

Introduced in Chapter 71.

ஒன்பதாவது *onpadāvadu*

ninth — the ending working on a number you already count with

Introduced in Chapter 83.

onru irantu muunru naanku aintu

hear and say one to five before meeting their written forms

Introduced in Chapter 7.

ஒரு *oru*

a, one — the form ஒன்று takes when it stands in front of a noun

Introduced in Chapter 39.

ஒருவேளை *oruvēlai*

perhaps

Introduced in Chapter 47.

பச்சை, மஞ்சள் *paccai mañcal*

green and yellow — paccai is the pan-Dravidian *pac-* word already met in Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam; manjal (“yellow, turmeric”) is a separate native Dravidian root, matching Malayalam’s mañña/maññaḷ closely — and Tamil dictionaries also record a rarer, less-commonly-used pacuppu (“greenish yellow”), a genuine doublet of paccai itself, echoing Telugu’s pattern in miniature

Introduced in Chapter 22.

படி *paḍi*

to read, to study — and the reason this book writes it paḍi with a d when the letter is ௫

Introduced in Chapter 33.

பை *pai*

a bag

Introduced in Chapter 68.

பல் *pal*

a tooth

Introduced in Chapter 45.

பால் *pāl*

milk — one syllable, inherited whole, and the word that shows Kannada turning p into h

Introduced in Chapter 36.

பால் வேண்டுமா, அல்லது தேநீர் வேண்டுமா? *pāl vēṇḍumā, alladu tēnīr vēṇḍumā?*

offering somebody a choice between two things

Introduced in Chapter 76.

பழைய *palaiya*

old — of a thing, not of a person

Introduced in Chapter 41.

பழம் *palam*

a fruit

Introduced in Chapter 44.

பணம் *paṇam*

money

Introduced in Chapter 68.

பணிவு *paṇivu*

humility

Introduced in Chapter 63.

பார் *pār*

to see, to look — and the doubled consonant that sorts every Tamil verb into strong or weak

Introduced in Chapter 32.

பறவை *paravai*

a bird

Introduced in Chapter 58.

பரவாயில்லை *paravāyillai*

it's okay / no problem / you're welcome

Introduced in Chapter 3.

பசி *pasi*

hunger

Introduced in Chapter 61.

பசு *pasu*

a cow

Introduced in Chapter 58.

பாதை *pātai*

a path

Introduced in Chapter 53.

படி *paṭi*

read

Introduced in Chapter 42.

பதினொன்று — இருபது *patinondru — irupathu*

11-20 — additive “ten-echo” compounds for the teens, then இருபது (20), transparently “two-tens” — closing out the arc: all four Dravidian languages build twenty compositionally, unlike Sanskrit, Latin, or Arabic’s opaque special words

Introduced in Chapter 20.

பதினொன்றாவது *patinonrāvadu*

eleventh — proof the ending was never a fact about one to ten
Introduced in Chapter 83.

பத்தாவது *pattāvadu*

tenth — the ending working on a number you already count with
Introduced in Chapter 83.

பாய் *pāy*

a mat

Introduced in Chapter 54.

பயம் *payam*

fear

Introduced in Chapter 72.

பயணம் *payaṇam*

a journey

Introduced in Chapter 48.

பயிர் *payir*

a standing crop

Introduced in Chapter 64.

பெரிய *periya*

big

Introduced in Chapter 41.

பேருந்து *pērunḍu*

a bus

Introduced in Chapter 69.

பேசு *pēsu*

to speak

Introduced in Chapter 5.

பெட்டி *peṭṭi*

a box

Introduced in Chapter 54.

பெயர் *peyar*

name

Introduced in Chapter 2.

பிடி *piḍi*

to catch, to hold — and so, in பிடிக்கும், to please, with the liker pushed into the dative

Introduced in Chapter 34.

பிறகு *piraku*

afterwards

Introduced in Chapter 48.

பிற்பகல் *pirpakal*

afternoon (pirpakal) — a transparent compound, பின் (pin, “after”) + நண்பகல்’s own பகல் (“daytime”), with பின் surfacing as பிற்- before ப, a SIMILAR kind of consonant sandhi to the one already taught in TA-C17 (நள்→நண்) — though Wiktionary itself does not discuss the sandhi mechanism, and the two changes move in different phonetic directions (nasal→stop vs. lateral→nasal), so this is the lesson’s own analysis, not a sourced claim; Wiktionary-listed formal register; a real, citable overlap worth flagging honestly: Wiktionary’s OWN afternoon-word page ALSO lists நடுப்பகல் as a synonym, even though TA-C17 established நடுப்பகல் as a synonym of NOON specifically; also related but distinct: மதியம், a Sanskrit tatsama (from madhya, “middle”) meaning “noon,” a synonym of நண்பகல் — NOT specifically “afternoon,” despite an unverified WebSearch claim that matiyam “originally meant moon,” which does not appear anywhere on its actual Wiktionary page and is therefore not asserted here

Introduced in Chapter 28.

போ *pō*

to go (and vā, to come)

Introduced in Chapter 4.

போ *pō*

to go — the same three-slot verb with the middle bead swapped for past, present or future

Introduced in Chapter 32.

போதும் *pōdum*

that is enough

Introduced in Chapter 47.

போய் வருகிறேன் *pōy varugirēn*

goodbye (lit. “I’ll go and come back”)

Introduced in Chapter 4.

புடவை *puḍavai*

a sari

Introduced in Chapter 67.

புதிய *pudiya*

new

Introduced in Chapter 41.

புகை *pukai*

smoke

Introduced in Chapter 57.

புல் *pul*

grass

Introduced in Chapter 64.

புறப்படு *purappadu*

to set out

Introduced in Chapter 48.

புரி *puri*

to be understood, to become clear — so the understander is not the subject but sits in the dative, as with தெரி

Introduced in Chapter 33.

புத்தகம் *puttakam*

a book

Introduced in Chapter 44.

ரயில் *rayil*

a train

Introduced in Chapter 69.

சாலை *sālai*

a road

Introduced in Chapter 69.

சந்தோஷம் *santōṣam*

gladness

Introduced in Chapter 49.

சாப்பிடு *sāppiḍu*

to eat — a verb Tamil assembled from a noun plus a light verb, alongside the inherited eat-word it kept

Introduced in Chapter 32.

சரி *sari*

okay / alright / correct (sari)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

சர்க்கரை *sarkkarai*

sugar

Introduced in Chapter 59.

சட்டை *sattai*

a shirt

Introduced in Chapter 67.

சேறு *sēru*

mud

Introduced in Chapter 57.

செருப்பு *seruppu*

a sandal, footwear

Introduced in Chapter 67.

சீக்கிரம் *sīkkiram*

soon

Introduced in Chapter 62.

சீப்பு *sīppu*

a comb

Introduced in Chapter 60.

சிரி *siri*

to laugh

Introduced in Chapter 72.

சிறிது *siritu*

a little

Introduced in Chapter 56.

சிறிய *siriya*

small

Introduced in Chapter 41.

சொல் *sol*

to say, to tell

Introduced in Chapter 77.

solluṅgaḷ

please tell me

Introduced in Chapter 8.

சுகம் *sugam*

wellbeing, ease — the Sanskrit word Tamil did take in, sitting beside the native

நலம் it never dropped

Introduced in Chapter 38.

சூரியன் *sūriyaṇ*

the sun

Introduced in Chapter 51.

சுவர் *suvar*

a wall

Introduced in Chapter 70.

தாகம் *tākam*

thirst

Introduced in Chapter 61.

தலை கை *talai kai*

head and hand — both native Dravidian words, unlike Hindi's Sanskrit-descended

pair

Introduced in Chapter 13.

தளிர் *talir*

a tender shoot

Introduced in Chapter 52.

தண்ணீர் அரிசி சாதம் *taṇṇēr arisi sātam*

water, and rice — the actual staple food here, not bread — with a widely-cited (if not fully certain) link from arisi to the English word “rice” itself

Introduced in Chapter 15.

தரை *tarai*

the floor

Introduced in Chapter 70.

தவறு *tavaru*

a mistake — the noun that lets you finish an apology, and the same word as the verb “to slip”

Introduced in Chapter 36.

தயக்கம் *tayakkam*

hesitancy

Introduced in Chapter 63.

தயவுசெய்து *tayavu seytu*

please (tayavu seytu — “do the kindness,” from தயவு tayavu “compassion/ grace”)

Introduced in Chapter 8.

தயிர் *tayir*

curd

Introduced in Chapter 59.

தேதி *tēdi*

a date — and the second ordinal ending, the one a calendar uses

Introduced in Chapter 83.

தேநீர் *tēnīr*

tea — a borrowed syllable welded onto the நீர் that is already inside தண்ணீர்

Introduced in Chapter 36.

தேநீர் / தேநீரை *tēnīr / tēnīrai*

the ending a person must have and a thing can do without — and the line Tamil draws where Spanish draws it too

Introduced in Chapter 86.

தெரி *teri*

to know, to be apparent — the verb that takes no person ending, because knowing happens to you

Introduced in Chapter 32.

தேவையில்லை *tēvaiyillai*

there is no need

Introduced in Chapter 56.

திங்கள்-ஞாயிறு *thingal-ñāyiru*

the seven weekdays — a mix of Tamil’s OWN planet-words and Sanskrit borrowings

Introduced in Chapter 10.

திற *tira*

open

Introduced in Chapter 65.

தொப்பி *toppi*

a cap, a hat

Introduced in Chapter 67.

தூக்கம் *tūkkam*

sleep

Introduced in Chapter 61.

தூங்கு *tūngu*

to sleep

Introduced in Chapter 71.

துணி *tūṇi*

cloth

Introduced in Chapter 44.

துடைப்பம் *tutaippam*

a broom

Introduced in Chapter 60.

உடம்பு *uḍambu*

body — the noun in the everyday Tamil way of asking after someone's health

Introduced in Chapter 38.

உதவு *udavu*

to help, to be of use — a native word where three sisters and Hindi all reach for Sanskrit instead

Introduced in Chapter 34.

உள்ளே *uḷḷē*

inside, in

Introduced in Chapter 66.

உனக்கு எத்தனை வயது ஆகிறது? *unakku ettanai vayathu*

aakirathu?

how old are you? — literally “to you how many years is becoming?”; the SAME Sanskrit *vayas* word as Kannada/Telugu/Malayalam; Tamil actually spans BOTH grammatical shapes seen so far, from a plain possessive in casual speech to this more formal dative+verb construction

Introduced in Chapter 19.

உணவு *uṇavu*

food — the noun standing on உண், the older eating verb behind சாப்பிடு's everyday one

Introduced in Chapter 36.

உங்கள் பெயர் என்ன? *uṅgaḷ peyar enna?*

what's your name?

Introduced in Chapter 2.

உண்மை *uṇmai*

the truth

Introduced in Chapter 47.

உப்பு *uppu*

salt

Introduced in Chapter 44.

ஊர் *ūr*

town, village — where you are from, which a Tamil introduction asks for, and the -ore in Bangalore

Introduced in Chapter 37.

ஊசி *ūsī*

a needle

Introduced in Chapter 60.

உடனே *uṭanē*

at once

Introduced in Chapter 62.

உதடு *utaṭu*

a lip

Introduced in Chapter 55.

உட்கார் *uṭkāṛ*

sit

Introduced in Chapter 42.

வா *vā*

come

Introduced in Chapter 42.

வா *vā*

to come — the word you say it by is **வா**, but the beads attach to a different shape, **வரு**-

Introduced in Chapter 32.

வாழ் *vāl*

to live, to flourish

Introduced in Chapter 5.

வலது *valadu*

the right side

Introduced in Chapter 66.

வலி *vali*

pain

Introduced in Chapter 61.

வாழ்த்து *vālttu*

a good wish

Introduced in Chapter 49.

வணக்கம் *vaṇakkam*

hello / greetings (vaṇakkam — “reverence, homage”)

Introduced in Chapter 1.

வண்டி *vaṇḍi*

a vehicle, a cart

Introduced in Chapter 69.

வாங்கு *vāṅgu*

to buy, to get

Introduced in Chapter 68.

வானிலை *vāṇilai*

weather — most likely a NATIVE Dravidian compound, unlike Kannada/Telugu/Malayalam's Sanskrit compounds: vaanam (“sky”) + nilai (“state, standing”)

Introduced in Chapter 20.

வரவேற்பு *varavēṛpu*

a welcome

Introduced in Chapter 50.

வருத்தம் *varuttam*

sorrow, regret

Introduced in Chapter 72.

வாசல் *vāsal*

a doorway

Introduced in Chapter 50.

வசந்த காலம் கோடைக் காலம் மழைக் காலம் குளிர்

காலம் *vasantha kaalam kodai kaalam mazhai kaalam kulir kaalam*

spring, summer, monsoon, winter — and the honest note that the REAL locally central season is the rains, not a Western four-way split

Introduced in Chapter 14.

வயல் *vayal*

a paddy field

Introduced in Chapter 53.

வயிறு *vayiru*

the stomach

Introduced in Chapter 45.

வேலை செய் *vēlai sey*

to work (lit. “work-do”)

Introduced in Chapter 5.

வெளியே *veḷiyē*

outside, out

Introduced in Chapter 66.

வெல்லம் *vellam*

jaggery

Introduced in Chapter 59.

வேண்டுகோள் *vēṇḍukōḷ*

a request

Introduced in Chapter 63.

வேண்டும் *vēṇḍum*

want, need — another verb Tamil builds with no subject at all
Introduced in Chapter 39.

வேர் *vēr*

a root

Introduced in Chapter 52.

வெற்றிலை *verrilai*

betel leaf

Introduced in Chapter 50.

வேட்டி *vēṭṭi*

a veshti, the cloth a man wraps at the waist

Introduced in Chapter 67.

விடை *vidai*

leave to depart — the noun for taking your leave, from the same root as வீடு
Introduced in Chapter 38.

வீடு *vīḍu*

house, home — the word behind the door you say வணக்கம் at, and a v where
Kannada says b

Introduced in Chapter 35.

விலை *vilai*

a price

Introduced in Chapter 68.

விலை எவ்வளவு? *vilai evvaḷavu?*

how much does it cost? — asking a price, and checking the answer

Introduced in Chapter 80.

விளையாடு *vilaiyāḍu*

to play

Introduced in Chapter 71.

விளக்கு *vilakku*

a lamp

Introduced in Chapter 44.

விண்மீன் *viṇmīṇ*

a star

Introduced in Chapter 51.

விருந்தாளி *viruntāḷi*

a guest

Introduced in Chapter 46.

விதை *vitai*

a seed

Introduced in Chapter 52.

விவசாயி *vivasāyi*

a farmer

Introduced in Chapter 46.

யார் *yār*

who? — asking about a person

Introduced in Chapter 40.

Review Questions

Try these without looking ahead. Every prompt comes from the same canonical lesson data as its chapter. Answers begin in the next section.

Chapter 4

4.1 *Tamil's curves — the writing surface leaves a trace*

What writing surface is usually linked to Tamil's rounded shapes?

Chapter 84

84.1 *(reading) — six words, counted in shapes*

Which word is the house?

84.2 *(reading) — six lines, and a question that ends where it asks*

Where does the question word sit in the Tamil question?

84.3 *(reading) — the first passage*

What word does Tamil leave out of வீடு பெரிய?

Answer Key

The first response is the canonical display answer. When a question accepts other authored forms, they appear underneath.

Chapter 4

4.1 *Tamil's curves — the writing surface leaves a trace*

Answer: palm leaves

Also accepted: palm leaf; leaves of palm

Chapter 84

84.1 *(reading) — six words, counted in shapes*

Answer: veedu

Also accepted: வீடு; house

84.2 *(reading) — six lines, and a question that ends where it asks*

Answer: at the end

Also accepted: last; end

84.3 *(reading) — the first passage*

Answer: is

Also accepted: the verb is; to be

Index

Look up an English meaning, a dedicated language topic, or a chapter topic. Each linked reference opens the chapter where the material is introduced; the focus labels name only explicitly typed lesson sections.

0–9

11-20 — additive “ten-echo” compounds for the teens, then இருபது (20), transparently “two-tens” — closing out the arc: all four Dravidian languages build twenty compositionally, unlike Sanskrit, Latin, or Arabic’s opaque special words பதினொன்று — இருபது (patinondru — irupathu)
explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 20, p. 149

A

- a bag** பை (pai)
Chapter 68, p. 449
- a basket** கூடை (kūṭai)
Chapter 54, p. 359
- a bed** கட்டில் (kaṭṭil)
Chapter 70, p. 461
- a bird** பறவை (paravai)
Chapter 58, p. 383
- a bone** எலும்பு (elumbu)
Chapter 55, p. 365
- a book** புத்தகம் (puttakam)
Chapter 44, p. 299
- a bowl** கிண்ணம் (kiṇṇam)
Chapter 54, p. 359
- a box** பெட்டி (peṭṭi)
Chapter 54, p. 359

a branch கிளை (kilai)

Chapter 52, p. 347

a broom துடைப்பம் (tuṭaippam)

Chapter 60, p. 395

a bus பேருந்து (pērundu)

Chapter 69, p. 455

a cap, a hat தொப்பி (toppi)

Chapter 67, p. 443

a cloud மேகம் (mēkam)

Chapter 51, p. 341

a comb சீப்பு (sīppu)

Chapter 60, p. 395

a cow பசு (pasu)

Chapter 58, p. 383

a crow காக்கை (kākkai)

Chapter 58, p. 383

a date — and the second ordinal ending, the one a calendar uses தேதி (tēdi)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 83, p. 541

a doctor மருத்துவர் (maruttuvar)

Chapter 46, p. 311

a doorway வாசல் (vāsal)

Chapter 50, p. 335

a farmer விவசாயி (vivasāyi)

Chapter 46, p. 311

a fever காய்ச்சல் (kāyccal)

Chapter 61, p. 401

a flower மலர் (malar)

Chapter 50, p. 335

a fruit பழம் (paḷam)

Chapter 44, p. 299

a goat ஆடு (āṭu)

Chapter 58, p. 383

a good wish வாழ்த்து (vāḷttu)

Chapter 49, p. 329

a guest விருந்தாளி (viruntāḷi)

Chapter 46, p. 311

a hen கோழி (kōḷi)

Chapter 58, p. 383

a hill மலை (malai)

Chapter 53, p. 353

a journey பயணம் (payaṇam)

Chapter 48, p. 323

a knife கத்தி (katti)

Chapter 54, p. 359

a lamp விளக்கு (viḷakku)

Chapter 44, p. 299

a lip உதடு (utaṭu)

Chapter 55, p. 365

a little சிறிது (siritu)

Chapter 56, p. 371

a lot நிறைய (niraiya)

Chapter 56, p. 371

a mat பாய் (pāy)

Chapter 54, p. 359

a mistake — the noun that lets you finish an apology, and the same word as the verb “to slip” தவறு (tavaru)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 36, p. 241

a month மாதம் (mādam)

Chapter 73, p. 479

a nail நகம் (nakam)

Chapter 55, p. 365

a needle ஊசி (ūsi)

Chapter 60, p. 395

a nose மூக்கு (mūkku)

Chapter 45, p. 305

a, one — the form ஒன்று takes when it stands in front of a

noun ஒரு (oru)

explicit focus: script, grammar; Chapter 39, p. 271

a paddy field வயல் (vayal)

Chapter 53, p. 353

a path பாதை (pātai)

Chapter 53, p. 353

a price விலை (vilai)

Chapter 68, p. 449

a request வேண்டுகோள் (vēṇḍukōḷ)

Chapter 63, p. 413

a river நதி (nadi)

Chapter 53, p. 353

a road சாலை (sālai)

Chapter 69, p. 455

a roof கூரை (kūrai)

Chapter 70, p. 461

a root வேர் (vēr)

Chapter 52, p. 347

a rope கயிறு (kayiru)

Chapter 60, p. 395

a sandal, footwear செருப்பு (seruppu)

Chapter 67, p. 443

a sari புடவை (puḍavai)

Chapter 67, p. 443

a seed விதை (vitai)

Chapter 52, p. 347

a shirt சட்டை (saṭṭai)

Chapter 67, p. 443

a shop கடை (kaḍai)

Chapter 68, p. 449

a shortage, less than there should be குறைவு (kuraivu)

Chapter 56, p. 371

a standing crop பயிர் (payir)

Chapter 64, p. 419

a star விண்மீன் (viṇmīn)

Chapter 51, p. 341

a station நிலையம் (nilaiyam)

Chapter 69, p. 455

a student மாணவன் (māṇavan)

Chapter 46, p. 311

a table மேசை (mēsai)

Chapter 70, p. 461

a teacher ஆசிரியர் (āsiriyar)

Chapter 46, p. 311

a tender shoot தளிர் (taḷir)

Chapter 52, p. 347

a threshing floor களம் (kaḷam)

Chapter 64, p. 419

a tooth பல் (pal)

Chapter 45, p. 305

a train ரயில் (rayil)

Chapter 69, p. 455

A Tree

chapter topic; Chapter 52, p. 347

a tree மரம் (maram)

Chapter 52, p. 347

a vehicle, a cart வண்டி (vaṇḍi)

Chapter 69, p. 455

a veshti, the cloth a man wraps at the waist வேட்டி (vēṭṭi)

Chapter 67, p. 443

a village கிராமம் (kirāmam)

Chapter 53, p. 353

a wall சுவர் (suvar)

Chapter 70, p. 461

a welcome வரவேற்பு (varavēṛpu)

Chapter 50, p. 335

a year ஆண்டு (āṇḍu)

Chapter 73, p. 479

affection அன்பு (anbu)

Chapter 49, p. 329

Afternoon

chapter topic; Chapter 28, p. 185

afternoon (pirpakal) — a transparent compound, பின் (pin, “after”) + நண்பகல்’s own பகல் (“daytime”), with பின் surfacing as பிற்- before ப, a SIMILAR kind of consonant sandhi to the one already taught in TA-C17 (நள்→நண்) — though Wiktionary itself does not discuss the sandhi mechanism, and the two changes move in different phonetic directions (nasal→stop vs. lateral→nasal), so this is the lesson’s own analysis, not a sourced claim; Wiktionary-listed formal register; a real, citable overlap worth flagging honestly: Wiktionary’s OWN afternoon-word page ALSO lists நடுப்பகல் as a synonym, even though TA-C17 established நடுப்பகல் as a synonym of NOON specifically; also related but distinct: மதியம், a Sanskrit tatsama (from madhya, “middle”) meaning “noon,” a synonym of நண்பகல் — NOT specifically “afternoon,” despite an unverified WebSearch claim that matiyam “originally meant moon,” which does not appear anywhere on its actual Wiktionary page and is therefore not asserted here பிற்பகல் (pirpakal)

Chapter 28, p. 185

afterwards பிறகு (piraku)

Chapter 48, p. 323

All the Way Up, and On a Calendar

chapter topic; Chapter 83, p. 541

an ear காது (kādu)

Chapter 45, p. 305

an ember கனல் (kaṇal)

Chapter 57, p. 377

an eye கண் (kaṇ)

Chapter 45, p. 305

an umbrella குடை (kuṭai)

Chapter 60, p. 395

And, and Also

chapter topic; Chapter 74, p. 485

ி and நன்றி — replace the vowel, then hear *ndr*

script and writing topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, script; Chapter 13, p. 109

anger கோபம் (kōpam)

Chapter 72, p. 473

answering in Tamil — the five words in use, and the two habits**behind them ஆம் / இல்லை / சரி (ām / illai / sari)**

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 1, p. 1

Around the Yard

chapter topic; Chapter 58, p. 383

Arriving at a House

chapter topic; Chapter 35, p. 231

Asking for What You Want

chapter topic; Chapter 39, p. 271

Asking Someone's Age

chapter topic; Chapter 19, p. 143

Asking Well

chapter topic; Chapter 63, p. 413

at once உடனே (uṭanē)

Chapter 62, p. 407

At the Doorway

chapter topic; Chapter 50, p. 335

At the Shop

chapter topic; Chapter 68, p. 449

B**because ஏனென்றால் (ēnenrāl)**

Chapter 78, p. 509

because of that, so அதனால் (adanāl)

Chapter 78, p. 509

before, earlier முன்பு (munbu)

Chapter 73, p. 479

before the noun, unchanged — five words, one rule

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 41, p. 285

betel leaf வெற்றிலை (verrilai)

Chapter 50, p. 335

big பெரிய (periya)

Chapter 41, p. 285

black, white, red, blue — three native Tamil colors, and one**Sanskrit loan கருப்பு வெள்ளை சிவப்பு நீலம் (karuppu vellai**

sivappu nilam)

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 11, p. 101

Body Parts

chapter topic; Chapter 13, p. 109

body — the noun in the everyday Tamil way of asking after**someone’s health** உடம்பு (uḍambu)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 38, p. 263

but ஆனால் (ānāl)

Chapter 76, p. 497

But, and Or

chapter topic; Chapter 76, p. 497

C**certainly** நிச்சயமாக (niccayamāka)

Chapter 47, p. 317

chair — a word you can take apart into “four” and “leg,” and**the thing a guest is offered** நாற்காலி (nārkaali)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 35, p. 231

child குழந்தை (kuḷandai)

Chapter 43, p. 295

close, shut மூடு (mūḍu)

Chapter 65, p. 425

cloth துணி (tuṇi)

Chapter 44, p. 299

Colours

chapter topic; Chapter 11, p. 101

come வா (vā)

Chapter 42, p. 291

Courtesy

chapter topic; Chapter 49, p. 329

curd தயிர் (tayir)

Chapter 59, p. 389

D**Dative Case and Dative Subjects**

chapter topic; Chapter 6, p. 47

daughter மகள் (makal)

Chapter 43, p. 295

Day

chapter topic; Chapter 23, p. 163

“day” — Tamil’s everyday, native Dravidian word, already met inside “tomorrow”; unlike Kannada’s *dina*, Telugu’s *rōju*, and Malayalam’s *divasam*, Tamil’s plain day-word is NOT a loanword at all — நாள் just is the everyday word, no Sanskrit or Persian substitute doing that job நாள் (*nāl*)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 23, p. 163

Days of the Week

chapter topic; Chapter 10, p. 93

Describing Things

chapter topic; Chapter 41, p. 285

Dog and Cat

chapter topic; Chapter 21, p. 155

dog and cat — நாய் is THE solid, ancient, undisputed Dravidian root behind Kannada/Malayalam’s dog-words too, the honest opposite of the tangled dog-words of Spanish, Hindi, and English; பூனை is Tamil’s everyday cat-word, one of (at least) three genuinely separate Dravidian cat-word families நாய், பூனை (*nāy*, *pūnai*)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 21, p. 155

Doing, and Undoing

chapter topic; Chapter 65, p. 425

door — Tamil’s everyday word is its own, while the Sanskrit one stayed in books கதவு (*kadavu*)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 35, p. 231

down, below கீழே (*kīlē*)

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 66, p. 433

drink குடி (*kuḍi*)

Chapter 65, p. 425

E

eighth — the ending working on a number you already count

with எட்டாவது (*eṭṭāvadu*)

Chapter 83, p. 541

eleventh — proof the ending was never a fact about one to

ten பதினொன்றாவது (*patinonrāvadu*)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 83, p. 541

Evening

chapter topic; Chapter 27, p. 181

evening (mālai) — a genuine HOMONYM: Wiktionary lists TWO separate etymologies for this exact spelling — “garland/necklace” (possibly a Dravidian word BORROWED INTO Sanskrit as माला/mālā, a reverse-direction loan) and, unrelated, “evening” (compared to மால், Proto-Dravidian *mā*/māl, whose senses include “கருமை,” darkness); confidently native for the evening sense, unlike TA-C26’s uncertain காலை, though the exact semantic mechanism (“evening” ← “darkness” specifically) isn’t spelled out with full certainty by the source மாலை (mālai) explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 27, p. 181

F

Family

chapter topic; Chapter 12, p. 105

family குடும்பம் (kuṭumbam)

Chapter 43, p. 295

Farewells

chapter topic; Chapter 4, p. 31

father, mother, and FOUR sibling words — Tamil splits

“brother”/“sister” by age, where Spanish/French use just one

word each அப்பா அம்மா அண்ணன் தம்பி அக்கா தங்கை (appā

ammā aṇṇaṇ tambi akkā tangai)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 12, p. 105

fear பயம் (payam)

Chapter 72, p. 473

fifth — the ending working on a number you already count

with ஐந்தாவது (aindāvadu)

Chapter 82, p. 533

first of all முதலில் (mutalil)

Chapter 62, p. 407

first — the one word in the set you already had, hidden inside

the word for first of all முதல் (mutal)

explicit focus: family and cognates; Chapter 82, p. 533

first, with the ending on it — the exception is the stem, not the

rule முதலாவது (mutalāvadu)

Chapter 82, p. 533

Five familiar words — now in Tamil script

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

Five numerals — hide, then write

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

food — the noun standing on உண், the older eating verb behind

சாப்பிடு’s everyday one உணவு (uṇavu)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, etymology; Chapter 36, p. 241

Four Verbs Between People

chapter topic; Chapter 34, p. 221

Four Verbs of the Mind

chapter topic; Chapter 33, p. 211

fourth — the ending working on a number you already count

with நான்காவது (nāṇkāvadu)

Chapter 82, p. 533

friend — one word with three endings for man, woman and

respect, and a root meaning “close” நண்பன் (naṇban)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, etymology; Chapter 37, p. 251

G

Getting There

chapter topic; Chapter 69, p. 455

ghee நெய் (ney)

Chapter 59, p. 389

give கொடு (koṭu)

Chapter 42, p. 291

giving an opinion — I think that என்று நினைக்கிறேன் (...)

enru ninaikkirēn)

Chapter 77, p. 503

gladness சந்தோஷம் (santōṣam)

Chapter 49, p. 329

good நல்ல (nalla)

Chapter 41, p. 285

Good Afternoon

chapter topic; Chapter 31, p. 195

good afternoon (matiya vaṇakkam), confirmed by two sources for

roughly noon to 4 PM, while a third source does not teach a

separate afternoon greeting மதிய வணக்கம் (matiya vaṇakkam)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 31, p. 195

Good Evening

chapter topic; Chapter 30, p. 193

good evening (mālai vaṇakkam), literally “evening greetings” — the SAME compositional pattern as TA-C29’s kālai vaṇakkam: மாலை (already met, TA-C27, “evening”) + வணக்கம் (already met, TA-C01); confirmed via TWO independently-fetched sources (talkpal.ai, preply.com — same practical-content tier as TA-C29’s sources) as real and used from afternoon/late-afternoon through nightfall, one labeling it formal; no śubha-equivalent word here either, consistent with TA-C29’s finding, not just assumed to carry over automatically மாலை வணக்கம் (mālai vaṇakkam)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 30, p. 193

Good Morning

chapter topic; Chapter 29, p. 189

good morning (kālai vaṇakkam), literally “morning greetings” — a transparent compound of காலை (already met, TA-C26) + வணக்கம் (already met, TA-C01, “reverence, homage”); confirmed via TWO independently-fetched sources as the standard, formal greeting, used from sunrise until around 11 AM; NOT a śubha-equivalent construction, breaking the pattern its neighbours share; a WebSearch summary’s claim that a Sanskrit-borrowed “suprabhatham” is a casual alternative could NOT be traced to either directly-fetched source and is therefore not asserted here காலை வணக்கம் (kālai vaṇakkam)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 29, p. 189

Good Night

chapter topic; Chapter 25, p. 173

“good night” — fully native Dravidian, “sweet/pleasant night,” unlike Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam’s shared Sanskrit-descended śubha rātri phrase; Tamil breaks the pattern this arc found in every other language இனிய இரவு (iniya iravu)

explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 25, p. 173

goodbye (lit. “I’ll go and come back”) போய் வருகிறேன் (pōy varugirēn)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 4, p. 31

grass புல் (pul)

Chapter 64, p. 419

Green and Yellow

chapter topic; Chapter 22, p. 159

green and yellow — *paccai* is the pan-Dravidian *pac-* word already met in Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam; *manjal* (“yellow, turmeric”) is a separate native Dravidian root, matching Malayalam’s *mañña/maññaḷ* closely — and Tamil dictionaries also record a rarer, less-commonly-used *pacuppu* (“greenish yellow”), a genuine doublet of *paccai* itself, echoing Telugu’s pattern in miniature பச்சை, மஞ்சள் (*paccai mañcaḷ*)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 22, p. 159

Greetings

chapter topic; Chapter 1, p. 1

H

he and she, the familiar pair the respectful word was built out of அவன் / அவள் (*avaṇ / avaḷ*)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 85, p. 553

head and hand — both native Dravidian words, unlike Hindi’s Sanskrit-descended pair தலை கை (*talai kai*)

Chapter 13, p. 109

hear and say one to five before meeting their written forms *onru irantu muunru naanku aintu*

explicit focus: pronunciation; Chapter 7, p. 59

hear and say six to ten before meeting their written forms *aaru eezhu ettu onpatu pattu*

explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 7, p. 59

Heard numbers — write without a model

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

hello / greetings (*vaṇakkam* — “reverence, homage”) வணக்கம் (*vaṇakkam*)

explicit focus: pronunciation, writing, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

here — where I am இங்கே (*iṅgē*)

Chapter 40, p. 279

hesitancy தயக்கம் (*tayakkam*)

Chapter 63, p. 413

hour — Tamil’s OWN dictionaries treat this as a native Dravidian “bell” word, most likely NOT Kannada/Telugu/Hindi’s Sanskrit *ghaṇṭā*, and a probable homophone trap with an unrelated Sanskrit “gem” word spelled the same

way மணி (*maṇi*)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 18, p. 135

house, home — the word behind the door you say வணக்கம் at,
and a v where Kannada says b வீடு (vīḍu)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 35, p. 231

how எப்படி (eppaḍi)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 23

How Are You?

chapter topic; Chapter 3, p. 23

how are you? (respectful) நீங்கள் எப்படி இருக்கிறீர்கள்? (nīṅgal
eppaḍi irukkiṇīrkaḷ?)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 23

How It Feels

chapter topic; Chapter 72, p. 473

How Much

chapter topic; Chapter 56, p. 371

**how much does it cost? — asking a price, and checking the
answer விலை எவ்வளவு?** (vilai evvaḷavu?)

Chapter 80, p. 523

**how much — the question for things Tamil does not count one
by one எவ்வளவு (evvaḷavu)**

explicit focus: script, grammar; Chapter 39, p. 271

**how old are you? — literally “to you how many years is
becoming?”; the SAME Sanskrit vayas word as Kannada/
Telugu/Malayalam; Tamil actually spans BOTH grammatical
shapes seen so far, from a plain possessive in casual speech to
this more formal dative+verb construction உனக்கு எத்தனை
வயது ஆகிறது?** (unakku ettanai vayathu aakirathu?)

Chapter 19, p. 143

How the Body Feels

chapter topic; Chapter 61, p. 401

humility பணிவு (paṇivu)

Chapter 63, p. 413

hunger பசி (pasi)

Chapter 61, p. 401

I

I நான் (nān)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 23

i- / a- / e- — six words, one machine

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 40, p. 279

‘I know Tamil’ — built with no subject, because knowing

happens TO you எனக்குத் தமிழ் தெரியும் (enakkut tamīl teriyum)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 6, p. 47

I speak Tamil நான் தமிழ் பேசுகிறேன் (nān tamīl pēsugirēn)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 39

In the Kitchen

chapter topic; Chapter 59, p. 389

inside, in உள்ளே (uḷḷē)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 66, p. 433

Introducing Yourself

chapter topic; Chapter 2, p. 15

it's okay / no problem / you're

welcome பரவாயில்லை (paravāyillai)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 3, p. 23

J

jaggery வெல்லம் (vellam)

Chapter 59, p. 389

joy / pleased to meet you மகிழ்ச்சி (magilcci)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

just so அப்படியே (appaḍiyē)

Chapter 47, p. 317

K

Keeping Well, and Leaving

chapter topic; Chapter 38, p. 263

L

leave to depart — the noun for taking your leave, from the same

root as வீடு விடை (viḍai)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 38, p. 263

let it be so ஆகட்டும் (ākattum)

Chapter 56, p. 371

M

may I come in? — asking permission, and granting it நான்

உள்ளே வரலாமா? (nān uḷḷē varalāmā?)

Chapter 75, p. 491

me and you as the one it is done to, standing on the same
changed body the dative already used என்னை /

உன்னை (ennai / unnai)

Chapter 86, p. 559

milk — one syllable, inherited whole, and the word that shows
Kannada turning p into h பால் (pāl)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 36, p. 241

money பணம் (paṇam)

Chapter 68, p. 449

More Everyday Verbs

chapter topic; Chapter 42, p. 291

More of the Body

chapter topic; Chapter 45, p. 305

Morning

chapter topic; Chapter 26, p. 179

morning (kālai) — Wiktionary itself HEDGES the etymology
 (“possibly from Sanskrit काल्य/kālya”), not a confirmed Dravidian
 root; genuinely uncertain, unlike Kannada’s confidently-native or
 Telugu’s confidently-Sanskrit morning-words; பகல் (already met,
 TA-C17, “daytime”) is Wiktionary’s own listed coordinate term;
 அதிகாலை (“early dawn”) is a transparent ati-+kālai

compound காலை (kālai)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 26, p. 179

mud சேறு (sēru)

Chapter 57, p. 377

my என் (en)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

my name is... (with no “is”) என் பெயர் ... (en peyar ...)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

N

name பெயர் (peyar)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

new புதிய (pudiyā)

Chapter 41, p. 285

Night

chapter topic; Chapter 24, p. 169

“night” — native Dravidian, already used standalone inside **“midnight”** (naḷḷiravu); a Sanskrit loan alternative, rāttiri, also exists — and per at least one dictionary source, rāttiri may actually be the MORE common word in everyday spoken Tamil, the opposite direction from நாள்’s story last lesson இரவு (iravu)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 24, p. 169

Night words — a register hypothesis and a semantic boundary
grammar topic; explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 24, p. 169

ninth — the ending working on a number you already count
with ஒன்பதாவது (onpadāvadu)
Chapter 83, p. 541

no / there isn’t (illai — the negative) இல்லை (illai)
explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

Noon and Midnight
chapter topic; Chapter 17, p. 131

noon and midnight — NO Sanskrit here at all (unlike Kannada/Telugu); both trace to the same old “middle” root, நள் (naḷ), but Tamil ALSO keeps fully transparent synonyms built on நடு, the everyday word for “middle” நண்பகல் நள்ளிரவு (naṇṇapakal naḷḷiravu)
explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 17, p. 131

Noon or afternoon? — let the sources keep their blur
etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 28, p. 185

now இப்போது (ippōdu)
Chapter 48, p. 323

Numbers Eleven to Twenty and Weather
chapter topic; Chapter 20, p. 149

Numbers One to Ten
chapter topic; Chapter 7, p. 59

O

offering somebody a choice between two things பால் வேண்டுமா, அல்லது தேநீர் வேண்டுமா? (pāl vēṇḍumā, alladu tēnīr vēṇḍumā?)
Chapter 76, p. 497

oil எண்ணெய் (eṇṇey)
Chapter 59, p. 389

okay / alright / correct (sari) சரி (sari)
explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

old — of a thing, not of a person பழைய (paḷaiya)
Chapter 41, p. 285

ோ — **one character, met inside words you already say**
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

ா — **one character, met inside words you already say**
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 10, p. 93

ூ — **one character, met inside words you already say**
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 17, p. 131

ே — **one character, met inside words you already say**
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 19, p. 143

One heard request — write it

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

One, the Other, and the Price

chapter topic; Chapter 80, p. 523

only மட்டும் (maṭṭum)

Chapter 62, p. 407

Only and Still

chapter topic; Chapter 62, p. 407

open திற (tira)

Chapter 65, p. 425

or அல்லது (alladu)

Chapter 76, p. 497

outside, out வெளியே (veḷiyē)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 66, p. 433

Overhead

chapter topic; Chapter 51, p. 341

P

paddy நெல் (nel)

Chapter 64, p. 419

pain வலி (vali)

Chapter 61, p. 401

perhaps ஒருவேளை (oruvēlai)

Chapter 47, p. 317

permission அனுமதி (aṇumati)

Chapter 63, p. 413

Please

chapter topic; Chapter 8, p. 75

please forgive (mannikkavum — a formal/written polite request,

from மன்னி manni “to forgive”) மன்னிக்கவும் (mannikkavum)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 9, p. 87

please (tayavu seytu — “do the kindness,” from தயவு tayavu

“compassion/grace”) தயவுசெய்து (tayavu seytu)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 8, p. 75

please tell me *solluṅgal*

Chapter 8, p. 75

Pointing, and Asking

chapter topic; Chapter 40, p. 279

R

read படி (paṭi)

Chapter 42, p. 291

Reading — Words, Lines, and a First Passage

chapter topic; Chapter 84, p. 549

respect மரியாதை (mariyāḍai)

Chapter 49, p. 329

room — and the letter ற, the hard r that is not the r you think

it is அறை (arai)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, etymology; Chapter 35, p. 231

S

salt உப்பு (uppu)

Chapter 44, p. 299

sand மணல் (maṇal)

Chapter 57, p. 377

Saying, and Thinking

chapter topic; Chapter 77, p. 503

Seasons

chapter topic; Chapter 14, p. 115

second — and the ending that makes every other ordinal in the

language இரண்டாவது (iraṇḍāvaḍu)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 82, p. 533

see you tomorrow நாளை பார்க்கலாம் (nāḷai pārkkalām)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 4, p. 31

Setting Out

chapter topic; Chapter 48, p. 323

seventh — the ending working on a number you already count

with ஏழாவது (ēḷāvaḍu)

Chapter 83, p. 541

Short Replies

chapter topic; Chapter 47, p. 317

sit உட்கார் (uṭkāṛ)

Chapter 42, p. 291

Six to ten — family resemblances and one Kannada shift

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 7, p. 59

Six to ten — now in Tamil script

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

sixth — the ending working on a number you already count**with ஆறாவது** (ārāvadu)

Chapter 83, p. 541

sleep தூக்கம் (tūkkam)

Chapter 61, p. 401

small சிறிய (siriyā)

Chapter 41, p. 285

smoke புகை (pukai)

Chapter 57, p. 377

Solluṅgaḷ — hide, then write

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

son மகன் (maṅaṇ)

Chapter 43, p. 295

soon சீக்கிரம் (sikkiram)

Chapter 62, p. 407

sorrow, regret வருத்தம் (varuttam)

Chapter 72, p. 473

Sorry

chapter topic; Chapter 9, p. 87

spring, summer, monsoon, winter — and the honest note that**the REAL locally central season is the rains, not a Western****four-way split வசந்த காலம் கோடைக் காலம் மழைக் காலம்****குளிர் காலம்** (vasantha kaalam kodai kaalam mazhai kaalam kulir

kaalam)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 14, p. 115

still, yet இன்னும் (innum)

Chapter 62, p. 407

stop நிறுத்து (niruttu)

Chapter 65, p. 425

sugar சர்க்கரை (sarkkarai)

Chapter 59, p. 389

T**Tamil Months**

chapter topic; Chapter 16, p. 123

Tamil's curves — the writing surface leaves a trace

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 4, p. 31

tea — a borrowed syllable welded onto the நீர் that is already

inside தண்ணீர் தேநீர் (tēnīr)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 36, p. 241

Telling Time

chapter topic; Chapter 18, p. 135

tenth — the ending working on a number you already count

with பத்தாவது (pattāvadu)

Chapter 83, p. 541

thank you (nanri — “goodness, gratitude”) நன்றி (nanri)

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

thank you very much மிக்க நன்றி (mikka nanri)

Chapter 49, p. 329

that is enough போதும் (pōdum)

Chapter 47, p. 317

that one — the thing over there அது (adu)

Chapter 40, p. 279

that person — the far half of a pointing system whose pattern

you were given without the words அவர் (avar)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 37, p. 251

the accusative suffix -ai, which marks the one the verb is done

to -ஐ (-ai)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 86, p. 559

the back முதுகு (mutuku)

Chapter 55, p. 365

The Core Verbs

chapter topic; Chapter 32, p. 201

the dative suffix -ukku, 'to / for,' including its two surface forms

and irregular enakku -உக்கு (-ukku)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 6, p. 47

the design at a doorway கோலம் (kōlam)

Chapter 50, p. 335

◌ — the dot that leaves both letters visible

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 7, p. 59

◌ — the dot that takes the vowel away

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 18, p. 135

the ending a person must have and a thing can do without —

and the line Tamil draws where Spanish draws it too தேநீர் /

தேநீரை (tēnīr / tēnīrai)

explicit focus: grammar, family and cognates; Chapter 86, p. 559

The First Verbs

chapter topic; Chapter 5, p. 39

ி — the first vowel sign

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 19, p. 143

the floor தரை (tarai)

Chapter 70, p. 461

The Harvest

chapter topic; Chapter 64, p. 419

the harvest அறுவடை (aruvatai)

Chapter 64, p. 419

The Household

chapter topic; Chapter 43, p. 295

The Land

chapter topic; Chapter 53, p. 353

the left side இடது (idaḍu)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 66, p. 433

the moon நிலா (nilā)

Chapter 51, p. 341

the neck கழுத்து (kaluttu)

Chapter 55, p. 365

The One It Is Done To

chapter topic; Chapter 86, p. 559

the other one மற்றது (marradu)

Chapter 80, p. 523

The People Not Here

chapter topic; Chapter 85, p. 553

The Rest of You

chapter topic; Chapter 55, p. 365

the right side வலது (valadu)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 66, p. 433

The Room You Are In

chapter topic; Chapter 70, p. 461

the seven weekdays — a mix of Tamil's OWN planet-words and

Sanskrit borrowings திங்கள்-ஞாயிறு (thingal-ñāyiru)

explicit focus: grammar, usage and culture; Chapter 10, p. 93

the sky ஆகாயம் (ākāyam)

Chapter 51, p. 341

the stomach வயிறு (vayiru)

Chapter 45, p. 305

the sun சூரியன் (sūriyan)

Chapter 51, p. 341

the truth உண்மை (uṇmai)

Chapter 47, p. 317

the twelve months of the Tamil solar calendar — Tamil’s OWN calendar, distinct from both the Gregorian and Hindu lunisolar systems சித்திரை வைகாசி ஆனி ஆடி ஆவணி புரட்டாசி ஐப்பசி கார்த்திகை மார்கழி தை மாசி பங்குனி (Chithirai Vaikāsi Āṇi Āḍi Āvaṇi Puraṭṭāsi Aippasi Kārthigai Mārgazhi Thai Māsi Panguni)
explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 16, p. 123

the two words for we — one that takes the listener in and one that leaves them out நாம் / நாங்கள் (nām / nāṅgaḷ)
explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 85, p. 553

the wind காற்று (kārru)

Chapter 57, p. 377

then, at that time அப்போது (appōdu)

Chapter 79, p. 517

there is no need தேவையில்லை (tēvaiyillai)

Chapter 56, p. 371

there — where I am not அங்கே (aṅgē)

Chapter 40, p. 279

they — the respectful word with the plural ending you have been saying since chapter two அவர்கள் (avarkaḷ)
explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 85, p. 553

Things in the House

chapter topic; Chapter 54, p. 359

Things People Make

chapter topic; Chapter 60, p. 395

Things You Ask For

chapter topic; Chapter 44, p. 299

third — the ending working on a number you already count with முன்றாவது (mūṇṇāvadu)

Chapter 82, p. 533

thirst தாகம் (tākam)

Chapter 61, p. 401

“this is my friend” — three words, no verb, and a choice of ending that says how you regard them இவர் என் நண்பர் (ivar enṇ naṇbar)

explicit focus: script, usage and culture; Chapter 37, p. 251

this one — the thing near me இது (idu)

Chapter 40, p. 279

this person, spoken of with respect — the near end of Tamil’s இ / அ / எ pointing system இவர் (ivar)

explicit focus: script, grammar; Chapter 37, p. 251

Three heard numbers — write their numerals

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

Through the Day

chapter topic; Chapter 71, p. 467

time நேரம் (nēram)

Chapter 48, p. 323

to ask — and to hear, because Tamil gives both jobs to one verb, whose stem changes shape before the beads கேள் (kēl)

explicit focus: script, etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 34, p. 221

to be, to exist, to stay — and the three-piece machine every**Tamil verb is built on இரு (iru)**

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar; Chapter 32, p. 201

to be understood, to become clear — so the understander is not the subject but sits in the dative, as with தெரி புரி (puri)

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 33, p. 211

to buy, to get வாங்கு (vāṅgu)

Chapter 68, p. 449

to catch, to hold — and so, in பிடிக்கும், to please, with the liker pushed into the dative பிடி (piḍi)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 34, p. 221

to come — the word you say it by is வா, but the beads attach to a different shape, வரு- வா (vā)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 201

to cry அழு (aḷu)

Chapter 72, p. 473

to eat — a verb Tamil assembled from a noun plus a light verb, alongside the inherited eat-word it kept சாப்பிடு (sāppiḍu)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 32, p. 201

to get up, to rise எழு (eḷu)

Chapter 71, p. 467

to go (and vā, to come) போ (pō)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 4, p. 31

to go — the same three-slot verb with the middle bead swapped for past, present or future போ (pō)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 201

to help, to be of use — a native word where three sisters and Hindi all reach for Sanskrit instead உதவு (udavu)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 34, p. 221

to know, to be apparent — the verb that takes no person ending, because knowing happens to you தெரி (teri)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 201

to laugh சிரி (siri)

Chapter 72, p. 473

to live, to flourish வாழ் (vāḷ)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 39

to play விளையாடு (vīlaiyāḍu)

Chapter 71, p. 467

to read, to study — and the reason this book writes it paḍi with a d when the letter is ட படி (paḍi)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 33, p. 211

to run ஓடு (ōḍu)

Chapter 71, p. 467

to say, to tell சொல் (sol)

Chapter 77, p. 503

to see, to look — and the doubled consonant that sorts every

Tamil verb into strong or weak பார் (pār)

explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 32, p. 201

to set out புறப்படு (purappaḍu)

Chapter 48, p. 323

to sleep தூங்கு (tūngu)

Chapter 71, p. 467

to speak பேசு (pēsu)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 39

to take, to pick up — one vowel away from இடு, “to put,” and pointing the opposite way எடு (eḍu)

explicit focus: script, etymology; Chapter 34, p. 221

to think — and, with no second word, to remember, because

Tamil files thinking and recalling under one verb நினை (ninai)

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 33, p. 211

to wash கழுவு (kaḷuvu)

Chapter 71, p. 467

to work (lit. “work-do”) வேலை செய் (vēlai sey)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 5, p. 39

to write — carrying ழ, the retroflex glide Tamil and Malayalam kept and their sisters gave up எழுது (eḷudu)

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, etymology; Chapter 33, p. 211

today இன்று (inru)

Chapter 73, p. 479

Today, Yesterday, and the Year

chapter topic; Chapter 73, p. 479

town, village — where you are from, which a Tamil introduction asks for, and the -ore in Bangalore ஊர் (ūr)

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 37, p. 251

trust நம்பிக்கை (nambikkai)

Chapter 63, p. 413

Two Tamils

chapter topic; Chapter 81, p. 529

Two to five — one family in four regional coats

etymology topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, etymology; Chapter 7, p. 59

U**-ukku, -ku, -ge, -ikku — the family shows its bones**

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 6, p. 47

up, above மேலே (mēlē)

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 66, p. 433

W**walk நட (naḍa)**

Chapter 65, p. 425

want, need — another verb Tamil builds with no subject at**all வேண்டும் (vēṇḍum)**

explicit focus: pronunciation, script, grammar; Chapter 39, p. 271

Water and Rice

chapter topic; Chapter 15, p. 119

water, and rice — the actual staple food here, not bread — with**a widely-cited (if not fully certain) link from arisi to the English****word “rice” itself தண்ணீர் அரிசி சாதம் (taṇṇīr arisi sātam)**

explicit focus: usage and culture; Chapter 15, p. 119

we’ll meet again மீண்டும் சந்திப்போம் (mīṇḍum sandippōm)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 4, p. 31

weather — most likely a NATIVE Dravidian compound, unlike**Kannada/Telugu/Malayalam’s Sanskrit compounds: vaanam****(“sky”) + nilai (“state, standing”) வானிலை (vāṇilai)**

Chapter 20, p. 149

well, wellness, good — and the reply “nāṇ nalamāga**irukkirēṇ” நலம் (nalam)**

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 3, p. 23

wellbeing, ease — the Sanskrit word Tamil did take in, sitting**beside the native நலம் it never dropped சுகம் (sugam)**

explicit focus: script, grammar, etymology; Chapter 38, p. 263

what என்ன (enna)

explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

what’s your name? உங்கள் பெயர் என்ன? (uṅgaḷ peyar enna?)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

What You Are Offered

chapter topic; Chapter 36, p. 241

What You Wear

chapter topic; Chapter 67, p. 443

When

chapter topic; Chapter 79, p. 517

when? எப்போது (eppōdu)

Chapter 79, p. 517

where? — asking about a place எங்கே (eṅgē)

Chapter 40, p. 279

Which One in the Line

chapter topic; Chapter 82, p. 533

Which Way

chapter topic; Chapter 66, p. 433

who? — asking about a person யார் (yār)

Chapter 40, p. 279

Who Somebody Is

chapter topic; Chapter 46, p. 311

why ஏன் (ēn)

Chapter 78, p. 509

Why, and Because

chapter topic; Chapter 78, p. 509

Wind and Fire

chapter topic; Chapter 57, p. 377

Y**yes (ām) ஆம் (ām)**

explicit focus: pronunciation, grammar, etymology; Chapter 1, p. 1

Yes or No

chapter topic; Chapter 75, p. 491

yesterday நேற்று (nērru)

Chapter 73, p. 479

you (familiar / respectful) நீ / நீங்கள் (nī / nīṅgal)

explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 2, p. 15

Your age what? / To you how many years becomes?

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 19, p. 143

Your Town, Your Friend

chapter topic; Chapter 37, p. 251

Other**அ — one character, met inside words you already say**

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 15, p. 119

ஆ — one character, met inside words you already say
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 16, p. 123

-ஆ — the question you can build yourself
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 75, p. 491

ஆனால் — three shapes, all of them old
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 76, p. 497

ஆனால் / ஆனா — the two Tamils
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 81, p. 529

ஆம் — writing a word that starts with a vowel
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 16, p. 123

ஆம், இல்லை — and the answer Tamil likes better
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 75, p. 491

இன்று — a word that opens on a vowel
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 73, p. 479

இருக்கிறீர்கள் — the last sign, and the whole question
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 31, p. 195

இல்லை — a vowel in front, a vowel sign behind
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 18, p. 135

உ — the letter behind a sign you have used for chapters
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

-உக்கு — one carriage in a suffix train
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 6, p. 47

உணவு — the same vowel, twice, two ways
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 36, p. 241

-உம் on its own — “also”, “too”
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 74, p. 485

-உம் ... -உம் — how Tamil says “and”
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 74, p. 485

-உம் ... -உம் இல்லை — neither one nor the other
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 74, p. 485

-உம் போது — when one thing happens, so does another
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 79, p. 517

ஊர் — the long partner
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 37, p. 251

எ — one character, met inside words you already say
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

என் — the third vowel that opens a word
script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 21, p. 155

என்று (enru) — the end of a quotation
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 77, p. 503

என்று / -ன்னு — which one you are being taught
grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 81, p. 529

எப்படி — the retroflex stop

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 29, p. 189

எப்போது — the doubled letter, read across a seam

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 79, p. 517

ஏன் — the shortest question in the book

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 78, p. 509

ஏழு — hide, then write

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

ஒன்று — the letter under both shapes of “one”

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 39, p. 271

ஒன்று ... மற்றது — one here, the other there

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 80, p. 523

ஓ — the letter behind a sign you already read

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 71, p. 467

க — the letter that is three bowls

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 13, p. 109

-க்காக — what a thing is for

grammar topic; explicit focus: grammar; Chapter 78, p. 509

கடை — a sign that wraps the letter

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 68, p. 449

குடி — a word with nothing new in it

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 65, p. 425

சு — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 12, p. 105

சொ — one new sign in a familiar request

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

சுட்டை — what a doubled letter looks like

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 67, p. 443

சரி — one letter, several sounds

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 19, p. 143

சரியா — a question you can see

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 75, p. 491

சொல் — a sign on both sides of one letter

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 77, p. 503

சொல்லுங்கள் — one visible copy

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

ௌ — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 14, p. 115

ண — the first of three n's

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 6, p. 47

த — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 18, p. 135

தமிழ் — the letter the language is named for

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 33, p. 211

தயவுசெய்து or -உங்கள்? — politeness in phrase or verb

grammar topic; explicit focus: script, usage and culture; Chapter 8, p. 75

ந — the third n, and the only one built from uprights

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 8, p. 75

ந, ன, ண — three stops on one tongue-map

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 6, p. 47

ந, ன, ற — the letter bodies inside நன்றி

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 10, p. 93

நீங்கள் — two old promises, paid

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 27, p. 181

நடுப்பகல் and நடு இரவு — the transparent twins

etymology topic; Chapter 17, p. 131

நான் — the sign that stands after

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 25, p. 173

நன்றி — a native family word with a register edge

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

நல்ல இரவு and இரவு வணக்கம் — old roots recombined

etymology topic; Chapter 25, p. 173

நாள் and தினம் — everyday native, formal borrowed

etymology topic; Chapter 23, p. 163

ன — the second n, and how to tell it from ண

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

ப — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 6, p. 47

போ — one sign, two marks

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 35, p. 231

பேசு — the long partner of ெ

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 34, p. 221

பயம் — a word with no vowel signs

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 72, p. 473

பெயர் — a sign that waits on the left

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 23, p. 163

பாலும் — an ending you can now see

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 74, p. 485

ம and ண — a loop, and a curled tongue

script and writing topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, script; Chapter 6, p. 47

ம — upright on the left, curve on the right

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 16, p. 123

மேசை — two front-hanging signs in one word

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 70, p. 461

மணி — hour or jewel? Context decides

etymology topic; explicit focus: grammar, etymology; Chapter 18, p. 135

மதிய — the greeting takes a different root

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology; Chapter 31, p. 195

மன்னிக்கவும் — formal forgiveness and a doubled n

grammar topic; explicit focus: script, usage and culture; Chapter 9, p. 87

மூன்று — the fourth corner of the u-family

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 38, p. 263

மற்றது — a doubling you have read twice before

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 80, p. 523

மேலே — the same sign twice

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 66, p. 433

ய — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 20, p. 149

ர — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 13, p. 109

ற — the last of the family, and the one that drops below the line

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 10, p. 93

ல — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 9, p. 87

ழ — one character, met inside words you already say

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 11, p. 101

வ and க — the vowel inside each consonant

script and writing topic; explicit focus: pronunciation, script, grammar; Chapter 5, p. 39

வ — one spiral, one motion

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 6, p. 47

வ (va) — copy one visible shape with help

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 1, p. 1

வணக்கம் — one bow, two lexical loyalties

etymology topic; explicit focus: etymology, usage and culture; Chapter 1, p. 1

வணக்கம் — the first whole written word

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 8, p. 75

வண்டி — a dot joining two letters

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script; Chapter 69, p. 455

க · உ · ங — three numeral shapes

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

க உ ங ச று — one visible copy

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

ச · று — finish the first five numerals

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

சா · எ · அ — three more numeral shapes

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

சா எ அ கூ ய — one supported copy

script and writing topic; explicit focus: writing; Chapter 7, p. 59

கூ · ய — nine and ten

script and writing topic; explicit focus: script, writing; Chapter 7, p. 59