

Aspect as a Discourse Category in Tamil

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1. Introduction.

A handful of linguists writing within the past decade, most notably Hopper (1979, 1982) and Givón (1979), but more recently also Du Bois (1987), have advanced the view that the process of grammaticization proceeds, both diachronically and synchronically, from discourse on down to the sentence or morpho-syntactic level. In other words, rather than deriving discourse functions from extensions of a core meaning associated with a particular grammatical form, as has traditionally been done (cf. Comrie 1985:26), they have essentially reversed the process by claiming that the 'core meaning' is itself a discourse function which gives rise to various 'additive' meanings, some of which become grammaticized (or 'syntacticized') in the formal structure of a language.

As evidence for this claim, Hopper discusses the case of aspectual marking, and in particular, 'perfective' marking, as it relates to narrative discourse in a number of languages. He argues that the sense of completion associated with perfective aspect derives from a more fundamental discourse function, which is that of signalling successive events in narration. The fact that events in sequence must be discrete and bounded gives rise, in turn, to the perfective or completive interpretation of individual events. The completive interpretation tends to grammaticize in individual languages as perfective or perfect aspect, or as past tense. In Literary Malay, for example, the primary use of the focus particle *lah* is to signal major sequential events, i.e. in narration. When *lah* appears with a nominal element in a sentence in isolation, it has an emphatic function, as in example 1):

- 1) Anjing-*lah* yang hilang, bukan kucing.
dog which lost not cat
'It was a dog I lost, not a cat.'

When the same particle follows a verb, however, it appears to function as a marker of completion:

- 2) Mati-*lah* anak raju itu.
die prince the
'The prince died/has died.'

The example of Literary Malay therefore provides an illustration of the principle of extension of meaning from discourse to sentence level, according to Hopper.

Leaving aside for the moment the larger theoretical implications of this claim, the evidence regarding the discourse origins of perfectivity is intriguing, and merits further consideration. The purpose of this paper is to present new evidence which supports the claim that perfective aspect is inherently a discourse phenomenon.

2. The Tamil situation.

The data are from Tamil, a Dravidian language with agglutinative morphology and OV word order. In addition to three simple morphological tenses (past, present, future), Tamil has three aspectual auxiliaries which derive diachronically from verbs meaning 'to leave, let' (*viṭu*), 'to be holding' (*konṭiru*), and 'to be'

(*iru*), and which express the notions 'completion', 'continuation', and 'perfect of resultant state', respectively. Of the three, the so-called 'completive' auxiliary *viṭu* is the most frequently used in the modern language, and also the most difficult to characterize semantically. It has been described variously as 'completive' (Dale 1975; Annamalai 1985), 'definitive' (Shanmukam Pillai 1968; Paramasivam 1983), and 'intensive' (Arden 1942; Kumaraswami Raja 1966). The situation is further complicated by the fact that the auxiliary *viṭu* has a different meaning when it appears in its so-called "conjunctive" (non-finite, also known as adverbial participle) form, i.e. between clauses intra-sententially, than when it is associated with the finite verb. In its former, non-finite use, it is disjunctive, separating clauses into discrete events essentially unrelated except by their occurrence in temporal sequence.

- 3) Kumār tavuṇukku pōy-*viṭu* pāṇṭiyaṇ ṭṭālil cāppittāṇ.
K. town-dat go-AvP-*viṭu*-AvP Pandian Hotel-loc eat-P3ms
'Kumar went to town and (then he) ate at the Pandian Hotel.'
(e.g. in reply to the question "What did Kumar do today?"
The Pandian Hotel may or may not be located in town.)
- 4) Kumār tavuṇukku pōy pāṇṭiyaṇ ṭṭālil cāppittāṇ.
K. town-dat go-AvP Pandian Hotel-loc eat-P3ms
'Kumar went to town and ate at the Pandian Hotel.'
(The Pandian Hotel is located in town.)

This disjunctive function recalls the intransitive lexical meaning of the verb *viṭu*, which is 'to leave (off doing something)', as opposed to its transitive meaning, 'to let (something go)'; e.g., 'Kumar went to town, left off (doing that), and (then) ate at the Pandian Hotel.' *Viṭu* still functions as a fully independent verb in Modern Tamil, as in 5):

- 5) Patināru vayatāka irukkum pōtu, kumār viṭṭai viṭṭāṇ.
16 years-adv be-FAjP time, K. house-acc leave-P3ms
'Kumar left home when he was sixteen.'

In addition to the main verb *viṭu* and the 'completive' auxiliary *viṭu*, Annamalai (1985) identifies another verbal auxiliary of the same form and conjugation which has extended the transitive meaning 'let' to that of 'release (of direct object following the action of the main verb)', and by extension, 'release into the hands of an intermediary', as in examples 6) and 7):

- 6) Ammā makalukku pēṇ pārttu-*viṭṭāṇ*.
mother daughter-dat lice search-AvP-release-P3fs
'The mother picked lice for her daughter.'
- 7) Uṇ caikkilāi lāriyil ēri-*viṭukirēṇ*.
your bike-acc truck-loc load-AvP-release-Pr1s
'I'll send your bicycle by truck' (i.e. have sent via an intermediary).

The differences between the two auxiliary *viṭus* are not only semantic but phonological, in that the initial syllable 'vi-' drops out in the aspectual use in the spoken language, but remains with the other. If both are present modifying the same verb, they occur in the order *viṭu*(release) *viṭu*(perfective), with tense, person,

gender, and number inflections attached to the latter, as in example 8):

- 8) Kumārukku pālai aṇuppi-viṭṭu-(vi)ṭṭāyā?
 K.-dat milk-acc send-AvP-release-AvP-pfv-P2s-Q
 'Did you finish having the milk sent to Kumar?/
 Did you get the milk sent to Kumar?' (i.e. via an intermediary)

From these and other facts, we may conclude that the aspectual *viṭu* is the more grammaticized of the two auxiliaries, in that it appears farthest from the main verb, exhibits phonological reduction, and is more abstract in meaning.

2.1. The semantic characterization of aspectual *viṭu*.

Let us turn now to the aspectual *viṭu* and the problem of determining its 'core' meaning. As I mentioned, there has been some disagreement among linguists and grammarians on this point, and not without reason. Considered in sentences in isolation, *viṭu* sometimes appears to lend a sense of completion; other times of definiteness or assurance; and at other times, emphasis on the proposition expressed by the main verb. Native speaker informants attribute a nuance of 'inadvertance' or 'unexpectedness' to some instances of its use, and a sense of 'expected' or even 'long-awaited outcome' to others. It interacts differentially with tense. This has led some grammarians to describe it as 'completive' in the past tense, and 'definitive' in the present and future. Even this compromise position is problematic, however, as I will attempt to illustrate here.

2.1.1. The 'completive' analysis.

Evidence for the completive analysis is based primarily on the fact that many if not all transitive accomplishment verbs in Tamil, such as *uṭai* 'break', *urukku* 'melt', and *kol* 'kill', imply a resultant change of state only weakly, such that the lack of that result may then be explicitly stated without contradicting the truth of the previous utterance.

- 9a) Aiyar tēnkāyai uṭaittār.
 brahmin coconut-acc break(tr)-P3resp.
 'The brahmin broke the coconut.'
 9b) Aṇāl tēnkāy uṭaiya-villai.
 but coconut break(int)-neg
 'But the coconut didn't break.'
 10a) Kumār palliyai konṛāṇ.
 K. lizard-acc kill-P3ms
 'Kumar killed the lizard.'
 10b) Aṇāl palli cāka-villai.
 but lizard die-neg
 'But the lizard didn't die.'

If the auxiliary *viṭu* is added to the a) sentences above, however, it is no longer possible to follow them with the sentences in b):

- 9a') Aiyar tēnkāyai uṭaittu-(vi)ṭṭār.
 brahmin coconut-acc break(tr)AvP-*viṭu*-P3resp
 'The brahmin broke the coconut (and finished breaking it).'
 9b) *Aṇāl tēnkāy uṭaiya-villai.
 but coconut break(int)-neg
 10a') Kumār palliyai konṛu-(vi)ṭṭāṇ.
 K. lizard-acc kill-AvP-*viṭu*-P3ms
 'Kumār killed the lizard (and finished killing it).'
 10b) *Aṇāl palli cāka-villai.
 but lizard die-neg

To characterize *viṭu* as completive in examples such as these seems valid. With intransitive accomplishment verbs, as well as with verbs of achievement, process, and state, however, such a contrast is not possible, and the use of past tense alone implies completion of the event. It is impossible to differentiate between 11) and 11'), for example, on the grounds that the action of going home in one is more 'completed' than in the other:

- 11) Kumār viṭṭukku pōṇāṇ.
 K. house-dat go-P3ms
 'Kumar went home.'
 11') Kumār viṭṭukku pōy-(vi)ṭṭāṇ.
 K. house-dat go-AvP-*viṭu*-P3ms
 'Kumar went home.'

Moreover, *viṭu* is not necessarily present in every sentence which expresses 'completion'. Explicit completion is most typically expressed by the verb *muṭi* 'finish' or by the use of adverbials, as in examples 12) and 13):

- 12) Cāvittiri kaṭittattai paṭittu-muṭittāl/paṭittu-muṭittu-(vi)ṭṭāl.
 Savitri letter-acc read-AvP-finish-P3fs/read-AvP-finish-AvP-*viṭu*-P3fs
 'Savitri finished reading the letter.'
 13) Kumār muḷu puttakattaiyum paṭittāṇ/paṭittu-(vi)ṭṭāṇ.
 K. whole book-acc+ read-P3ms/read-AvP-*viṭu*-P3ms
 'Kumar read the entire book.'

2.1.2. The 'definitive' analysis.

Alternatively, a number of grammarians have characterized *viṭu* as definitive in meaning, expressing (or emphasizing) the definite occurrence of an event. While a few have applied this interpretation to the use of *viṭu* in all three tenses, others have restricted it to the present and future tenses, noting further that *viṭu* in the present tense has future, rather than present time reference (cf. Annamalai 1985, also endnote 6). Examples 14) and 15) illustrate this usage:

- 14) Nāṇ nāḷaikkū avanīṭam pēci-(vi)ṭukirēn.
I tomorrow he-loc speak-AvP-viṭu-PrIs
'I'll (definitely) speak to him tomorrow.'
- 15) Pālai iṅkē vaiṭṭāl, keṭṭup-pōy-(v)ṭum.
milk-acc here put-cond go.bad-AvP-viṭu-F3ns
'If you put the milk here, it will (surely) spoil.'

What should be pointed out is that the so-called 'definitive' nuance supplied by the verbal auxiliary here is a pragmatic, not a semantic one. The unrealized propositions expressed in sentences 14) and 15) would be equally certain (or uncertain) whether *viṭu* was used or not. They do contrast with the equivalent sentences in the simple present or simple future tense, but not in terms of the degree of probability of occurrence of the event. Example 14) is a promise and example 15) is a warning; without *viṭu* both would be pragmatically neutral statements about the future. The semantic notion 'definiteness', on the other hand, may be expressed adverbially, either with or without *viṭu*:

- 16) Kumār niccayamāka varuvāṇ/vantu-(vi)ṭuvāṇ.
K. definitely come-F3ms/come-AvP-viṭu-F3ms
'Kumar will definitely come.'

Further, *viṭu* is not incompatible with elements which express uncertainty or lack of definiteness, as example 17) shows:

- 17) Kumār oruvēlai varuvāṇ/ vantu-(vi)ṭuvāṇ/ vantu-(vi)ṭalām.
K. perhaps come-F3ms/come-AvP-viṭu-F3ms/come-AvP-viṭu-may
'Kumar will/may perhaps (*definitely) come.'

Thus it is evident that of the two principal semantic characterizations proposed for the Tamil verbal auxiliary *viṭu*, 'completive' and 'definitive', neither accounts for the data very satisfactorily.² The latter, as we have seen, cannot properly be considered a referential meaning at all, but rather a conventionalized pragmatic association. On the other hand, while there is evidence in partial support of the completive analysis, it cannot be meaningfully applied in the majority of instances, since the simple tenses alone tend to receive the same interpretation with respect to completion or incompleteness whether *viṭu* is used or not.

Having noted a few of the problems with ascribing grammatical meaning to *viṭu* in sentences in isolation, the question then becomes the following: does it interact with the larger discourse context in any more systematic way? Might it be possible to isolate a "core" function, rather than a core meaning, which in turn could be generalized and extended to account for a majority or even all of its diverse uses? If so, what kind of evidence would such a discovery constitute for the "discourse-down" theory of grammaticization? I will attempt to answer these questions in what follows.

2.2. *Viṭu* in discourse.

It is clear from my work with native speaker informants that most uses of *viṭu* require extensive contextualization in order to be understood at all. A context-enriched approach reveals an additional set of nuances, some of which

appear to be pragmatically conditioned, such as the assuring/warning use in examples 14) and 15), and the sense of expected or unexpected/unintentional event attributed to it by Annamalai (1985), to mention but a few. Other nuances represent distinct discourse functions. The most important of these, 'completed event which has relevance to the following event', and 'dismissal of previous topic preparatory to change of topic', indicate that the auxiliary may function as a type of 'perfect'. Thus for example, some speakers of Tamil feel that the difference between the use of the simple past tense and the auxiliary *viṭu* in sentences such as 12)

- 12) Cāvittiri kaṭittattai paṭittu-muṭṭāḷ/paṭittu-muṭṭu-(vi)ṭṭāḷ.
Savitri letter-acc read-AvP-finish-P3fs/read-AvP-finish-AvP-viṭu-P3fs
'Savitri finished/has finished reading the letter.'

is that the simple past variant is a matter-of-fact statement of Savitri's activity. As such, it is likely to be followed by another sentence with Savitri as the subject; e.g. what she did next. The use of *viṭu*, however, implies that we are through with Savitri for the moment; the focus is rather on the relevance of her action to the current situation. The following sentence might be about the letter itself, having as its subject one of those present at the time of utterance (e.g. 'Now you can read it').

Annamalai translates many of his *viṭu* examples with the English present perfect. He derives the meaning as an extension of the sense of completion which he posits for *viṭu*, noting that its use

suggests that the message is complete; the topic of the next sentence is most probably different; its intonation is terminal; it cannot be followed by the conjunctive participle [repetition of the predicate of the previous sentence, i.e. in narrative, in its 'conjunctive' (AvP) form] (1985: 85).

A context of two or three contiguous sentences is sufficient to establish the 'perfect' function of *viṭu*. What is revealed, then, when we consider a discourse in its entirety, as for example a narrative? Narrative has the advantage of being a relatively simplified discourse type pragmatically, since it involves much less interaction between narrator and audience than, say, between the participants in a conversation. A narrative also typically relates completed events in past time, and thus is likely to make use of the notion of completion in its organizational structure. Hopper (1979) observes that perfective aspect in a number of languages, including French, Russian, and Malay, plays an important role in the sequencing of major events within a narrative. He relates perfectivity to a complex of notions cross-linguistically, including strict chronological sequencing of dynamic, kinetic events; human topics; preservation of subject (typically presupposed); assertion of new information in the verb; and 'foregrounding', or signalling of events indispensable to the narrative.

In order to test this hypothesis, I analyzed the use of *viṭu* in Tamil oral narrative discourse with respect to each of the features mentioned by Hopper. Twenty narratives told by 9 adult native speakers have been analyzed; of these, eleven are folk stories, and nine are personal narratives.³ The results of my analysis are summarized in 18):

18)

Feature		Frequency	%
total finite <i>viṭu</i>		210/1096	19.16%
tense:	past	171	81.43%
	present	34	16.19%
	future ⁴	5	2.34%
verb type:	accomp.	182	88.66%
	achiev.	20	9.52%
	process	5	2.34%
	state	3	1.43%
transitivity:	tr.	63	30.00%
	intr.	147	70.00%
chronologically sequenced		185/201	92.04%
dynamic/kinetic event		155	73.81%
"human" subject/topic		189	90.00%
same s/t as previous S		133/207	64.25%
same s/t as following S		121/197	61.42%
S contains no 'new' NPs (assertion in verb)		201	95.71%
narrative foreground		192	91.43%

Out of a total of 1096 finite verbs employed by the narrators in all of the stories, 210 (or 19.16%) are modified by *viṭu*. Of these, most are intransitive⁵ accomplishment verbs inflected for past tense. As the figures in 18) show, use of *viṭu* in the oral narratives correlates strongly with clauses with human (or anthropomorphized animal) subjects (90.00%) relating chronologically sequenced (92.04%), 'foreground'--or indispensable to the story line--events (91.43%), where the main assertion is in the verb (95.71%). With regard to these features, therefore, Tamil *viṭu* is a strong indicator of narrative perfectivity as characterized by Hopper. Hopper's prediction that perfective events tend to be dynamic in nature is also borne out (73.81%), although less overwhelmingly. This is due to the fact that a number of verbs which commonly take *viṭu*, including the verbs *eṇ* and *col* 'to say', cannot be considered to express highly kinetic events, but may nevertheless be evaluated by the speaker as indispensable to the narrative sequence. This suggests that the foregrounding function supercedes the requirement that events be dynamic.

The foregrounding function of *viṭu* is illustrated in the narrative sample in example 19) below:

19)

- a. Anta..anta oru ūr poṇṇu vantu. anta paiyaṇai kūṭṭiṭṭu atu pōy-iṭuccu.
that..that a town girl come-AvP that boy-acc take-AvP it go-*viṭu*-P3ns
- b. "Kalyāṇam paṇṇiṭṭu ōṭi pōy-iṭalām" nṇu collitṭu pōy-iṭuccu.
wedding do-*viṭu*-AvP run.away-*viṭu*-may thus say-*viṭu*-AvP go-*viṭu*-P3ns
- c. Pōy oru mācam, eṇkēyō oṭṭu iruntu-tṭāṇka.
go-AvP one month somewhere hide-AvP be-*viṭu*-P3pl
- d. Appuram..oru, oru appuram, vantu-tṭāṇka-ō.
after a a after come-*viṭu*-P3pl-DUB
- e. Vantu, inta aṇṇaṇ, tampi.. inta poṇṇu pōnatuṇāle anta family-kkē matippu
come-AvP this older.bro younger.bro this girl go-since that family-dat! respect
koṇṇu-ṭum.
lessen-*viṭu*-F3ns
- f. Atuvum uṇmai tāṇ.
that+ truth emph.
- g. Nāṇē..eṇka viṭle ellām atu tāṇ piraccaṇai.
I! our house-loc all that emph. problem
- h. Oru- anta poṇṇu pōy-iṭuccu nṇā, uṇāṇē, iṇāṇka viṭṭilēyē,
a that girl go-*viṭu*-P3ns cond. immediately their house-loc!
iṇāṇkaḷukkullēyē, iṇāṇka jātikkullēyē, iṇāṇkaḷai kēvalamā pēcuvāṇka illai.
they-inside! their caste-inside! they-acc disgrace-adv speak-F3pl tagQ
- i. Kēvalamā tāṇ pēcuvāṇka.
disgrace-adv emph. speak-F3pl
- j. Appa..anta paiyaṇaiyum, anta poṇṇaiyum kūṭṭiṭṭu, "Niṇka vantu nāṇka vantu
then that boy-acc+, that girl-acc+ take-AvP, you-pl come-AvP we come-AvP
uṇkaḷukku kalyāṇam muṭiccu veccu-ṭarōm" appaṭi nṇu colli-ṭarāṇka.
you-dat wedding finish-AvP keep-*viṭu*-Pr1pl like.that thus say-*viṭu*-Pr3pl
- k. Collitṭu anta poṇṇaiyum..anta paiyaṇaiyum kūṭṭiṭṭu vantu-tṭāṇka.
say-*viṭu*-AvP that girl-acc+ that boy-acc+ take-AvP come-*viṭu*-P3pl
- l. Kūṭṭiṭṭu vantu.. kalyāṇam muṭiccu-tṭāṇka.
take-AvP come-AvP wedding finish-*viṭu*-P3pl
- a. That..a girl from that place, um, *went off* with that boy.
- b. She said "We can get married and then run away," and then *went off*.
- c. And then for a month, they hid somewhere and *waited*.
- d. Afterwards..um, afterwards, *did they come?*
- e. Um, (her) older brother (and) younger brother..since the girl had gone, the family would lose face.
- f. And that('s) really true.
- g. Even (with) me..in our house and everything..that('s) the problem.
- h. If a- the girl has gone off, immediately they'll bad-mouth them in their home, among themselves, in their caste, right?
- i. They'll really bad-mouth them.
- j. So they brought the boy and the girl, and *tell*⁶ them, "You, um, we'll finalize your wedding."
- k. And then, they *brought* the girl and the boy *back*.
- l. And then, they *finalized* the wedding.

In this sample, taken from a longer story about inter-caste marriages, the *viṭu* sentences relate the primary events of the narrative: 'she went off', 'they hid and waited', 'her brothers came', 'they tell them "We'll finalize your wedding"', 'they brought them back', 'they finalized the wedding'. Sentences (h) and (i), which give general background information in the future/habitual tense, and the equational (verbless) sentences (f) and (g) expressing the speaker's personal evaluation, do not have *viṭu*. (The use of *viṭu* with the future tense in sentence (e) does not signal a narrative event but rather indicates pragmatic assertion, as do also the *viṭu*-marked verbs within quotes in sentences (b) and (j)). Note that the stative main verb *iru* 'to be' in line (c) when followed by *viṭu* takes on a more dynamic, eventive interpretation: 'They hid somewhere and waited.' The 'waiting' here is a discrete event viewed in its entirety, without any temporal overlap with the events of the surrounding sentences. Not all of the oral narratives I have examined signal foreground events by the use of *viṭu* with such a high degree of systematicity. It is not unusual for events of the primary narrative sequence to be related in the simple past, or unmarked narrative tense, alongside of others (presumably, those to which the narrator most wishes to draw the listener's attention) marked by *viṭu*. Nevertheless, the trend is evident in virtually every narrative in which *viṭu* appears at all.⁷ Thus the evidence supports the claim that the primary function of *viṭu* in narrative discourse is that of 'perfectivity'.

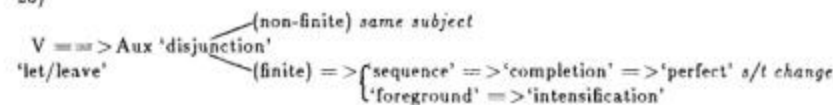
How does this finding relate to what we have seen of *viṭu* in other discourse contexts? It is interesting to note that Annamalai's predictions regarding the 'perfect'-like behavior of 'completive' *viṭu*, namely that it closes off the "message", cannot be followed by a conjunctive participle, and implies a following shift of topic, are not supported by the narrative data. Example 19) constitutes a single episode; the use of *viṭu* for individual events within it does not imply any special closure. Moreover, lines (c), (e), (k), and (l) all begin with a conjunctive participle repeating the finite, *viṭu*-marked predicate of the preceding sentence. In these sentences, the subject is necessarily maintained, due to a syntactic constraint⁸ on maintaining the same subject across clauses with the use of the conjunctive form. The discrepancies can be accounted for by the fact that Annamalai's observations were based on example sentences interpreted as though in the context of conversation, not narrative. It is noteworthy, however, that of the 16 *viṭu* clauses in my sample which are not on the narrative time line (that is, not in strict chronological sequence), 12 of them (75%) relate previously completed events and must be translated by the English past perfect. This suggests that the notion of 'perfect' as expressed by Tamil *viṭu* is not incompatible with narrative, although it clearly takes second place to the perfective, sequencing function.

2.3. 'Perfectivity' as core function.

At this point I would like to submit that the characterization of *viṭu* as a marker of narrative perfectivity can be extended to account for its non-narrative uses as well. As Hopper observed, the notion of 'completion' arises logically from narrative sequencing, since one event must be complete before the next can follow. However Tamil already has a productive past tense which alone implies 'completion'; thus the applications of 'completive' aspect on the propositional level are

somewhat restricted in the language. With transitive accomplishment verbs, as in examples 9) and 10), *viṭu* indicates that the event has reached its logical end point (as evidenced by the total affectedness of the patient). Where such a contrast cannot be made, *viṭu* preserves a more general sense of 'intensification of the verbal action' which has given rise in turn to a variety of pragmatic nuances, many of them verb or situation-specific. Probably related to the notion of 'intensity' as well are *viṭu*-marked assertions regarding the future, which have come to be associated with 'definiteness' on the speech act level; e.g. '(I definitely assert that) Kumar may perhaps come' (cf. ex.17). In the context of continuous discourse, focus on the end point of a completed event, as in the 'perfect' function of *viṭu*, extends the notion of 'completion' to the relevance of the completed event to what follows. (The fact that Tamil already has a productive perfect construction formed from the verb *iru* 'to be' may help to explain why *viṭu* has not grammaticalized further in this sense). Ultimately, we may posit that the 'disjunctive' role which *viṭu* plays in non-finite clauses (cf. ex.3) is related to both the original lexical meaning of the main verb ('to leave (off)') and the sequencing function evidenced in Tamil narrative, quite possibly as an intermediary step between the two. The extensions of meaning of *viṭu* are represented schematically in 20):

20)



In addition to relating the senses of *viṭu* in a logically plausible fashion, the direction of development which I have postulated here is consistent with maintenance of subject/topic across *viṭu*-marked clauses. The original disjunctive use typically requires that the subject of the main clause be the same as that of the subordinate clause, as in example 3). The extended 'perfect' use, on the other hand, implies a change of subject/topic. In the oral narrative sample, as summarized in the table in 18), subjects/topics are maintained following finite *viṭu* clauses only about 60% of the time. That is, they do not incline significantly one way or the other in this regard, contrary to the conflicting predictions of Annamalai and Hopper. This suggests that the explicit topic-shifting function is further removed from the disjunctive function than it is from the use of *viṭu* in narrative, as figure 20) implies.

3. Summary and conclusion.

Before returning to the theoretical issues raised in the beginning of this paper, let us summarize briefly what we have seen thus far. In §2.1., it was argued that the Tamil auxiliary *viṭu* is not adequately described on the propositional level by any of the grammatical labels which have been applied to it. There is, however, evidence that it interacts in a more systematic fashion with the larger discourse context. My analysis of 20 oral narratives revealed that in the context of narrative discourse *viṭu* functions in the overwhelming majority of its occurrences as a marker of what, following Hopper, I refer to as 'narrative perfectivity'. In §2.3., I proposed that 'narrative perfectivity' gives rise to certain additive meanings, such as 'completion' and 'verbal focus', which can be extended to

account for all of the major categories of meaning expressed by the auxiliary *viṭu*, on the propositional as well as on the discourse level.

While this proposal cannot be considered to constitute "proof" of the direction of grammaticization independent of confirmation from actual diachronic evidence, I would like to argue that the evidence of Tamil *viṭu*, along with that of Malay *lah*, suggest that the functional-semantic notion of 'perfectivity' is inherently bound to the narrative discourse context, and that in Tamil at least, certain features of its meaning, such as 'chronological sequence' and 'verbal focus', would have been unlikely to arise at all outside of narrative. The objection will no doubt be made that these are not basic senses of perfectivity but rather are derived from precisely that same extended discourse context. The notions of sequence and focus are central, however, to the characterization of Tamil *viṭu*. It is via the sense of 'disjunction' that the original lexical meaning of 'leave (off)' is most likely to have grammaticized, as evidenced by the non-finite use of *viṭu*, which was presumably insulated from further extension of meaning by its sentence-internal position. In sentence-final position, the only possible application of 'disjunction' (a type of conjunction) would have been in larger discourse units of events in sequence. Verbal focus, on the other hand, accounts for important uses of *viṭu* on the sentence level ('intensification', pragmatic 'definiteness') as well as on the discourse level ('foregrounding').

An explanation moving in the opposite direction; that is to say, from sentence to discourse; would encounter a number of problems not posed by the current hypothesis. It would have to account for the sense of 'focus' or 'emphasis' independent of the functional notion 'foregrounding'. Similarly, it would have to account for the extension of meaning from 'disjunction' to 'completion' without passing through the intermediary of 'sequence' (a notion available only in connected discourse). It would ultimately be forced to the inelegant conclusion that the notion of 'completion' was then lost in the context of narrative (since narrative *viṭu* does not display any of the features of 'completion' as described by Annamalai) and replaced with the notion of 'sequence/disjunction'. Even if solutions were to be found to these difficulties, a theoretical position taking the propositional meaning (which I assume would be 'completive', for lack of a better candidate) as primary would need to account for why the application of this meaning is so restricted on the sentence level. Given the existence of problems such as these, it is the "discourse-first" hypothesis, and not the traditional approach, which provides the more elegant and internally consistent account of the facts of Tamil *viṭu*.

These conclusions should not be taken to imply that the traditional account of the grammaticization process for other linguistic elements is necessarily incorrect, nor that it is impossible to arrive at workable semantic characterizations on the sentence level, since clearly much valuable work has been and continues to be done in these areas. What I would like to suggest is that the largely unquestioned belief in the "unidirectionality" of the grammaticization process be reconsidered in the light of phenomena such as Tamil *viṭu*, which appears to provide evidence not only for the opposite direction of change but for a bi-directional give and take (as suggested for example by the extended narrative use of the *viṭu* 'perfect'). The Tamil data further illustrate that, even when there exists evidence

from a large number of languages in support of a particular development, the process of grammaticization can never be fully predictable, inasmuch as it is influenced by the availability of grammatical categories within a given language at a given point in time. The story of Tamil *viṭu* might have been a different one altogether if the language had not already had a fully productive past tense and perfect construction in relation to which it had to negotiate its semantic and functional role. Finally, the concept that grammaticization may be motivated by discourse functions as well as by referential meaning deserves much more serious consideration. Such a conclusion need not stand in opposition to what we already know about semantic processes, but would rather add to it a dimension which reflects a profoundly basic fact about language use: that it often serves an underlying non-referential agenda.

Endnotes

1. The 'continuous' auxiliary *konfiru* is actually made up of two verbs, *kol* 'to hold' and *iru* 'to be'. By itself, *kol* is used as an auxiliary to express 'continuation' or 'simultaneity' in non-finite clauses, and 'reflexivity' or 'middle voice' in finite position. As it is not fully "aspectual" in the same sense as the others, I have not included it here.
2. I have not attempted to argue for or against the third characterization, 'intensive', in that this sense is impossible to demonstrate for sentences in isolation without having access to the intentions of the speaker or writer. This alone disqualifies it as a candidate for 'core meaning'.
3. As the folk narratives and the personal narratives behave similarly with respect to the use of *viṭu*, I make no further distinction between them here. A somewhat different pattern emerges when we consider written narrative, however, which suggests that 'narrative perfectivity' as indicated by *viṭu* is a characteristically oral phenomenon. This is an area which requires further investigation.
4. Instances of *viṭu* in future tense with habitual meaning have been excluded from the analysis, as the inherent imperfectivity of the future tense in Tamil tends to restrict it to 'background' functions.
5. The predominance of intransitive verbs in the foregrounded narrative event sequence might seem surprising, particularly in view of the predictions made by Hopper and Thompson's (1980) Transitivity Hierarchy. The 70% figure for intransitive verbs in this sample reflects the fact that the four verbs most commonly used with *viṭu*, and which alone account for 35.71% of its occurrences, happen to be intransitive. These are: *pō* 'go' (24 instances), *vā* 'come' (19 instances), *col* 'say' (17 instances), and *eṇ* 'say' (15 instances).
6. Narrative uses of present tense such as this one must be considered referentially equivalent to the past. As such, the example does not contradict the observation that *viṭu* plus present tense may not refer to present time (a fact which is consistent with its perfectivity).
7. At least one instance of finite *viṭu* appears in 19 out of the 20 narratives in my sample. The narrative which lacks it is a very short (7 finite verbal forms) folk tale related predominantly in the future/habitual tense.

8. There are exceptions to this constraint (cf. Lindholm 1975; Paramasivam 1983) but these need not concern us here.

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