



# **An English Dictionary of the Tamil Verb (DVD Included)**

*Harold F. Schiffman*

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This dictionary has been in preparation for at least 25 years, and has been the result of a collaboration between the chief editor and various associate editors since 1978. It has benefited from the contributions of many people and has been funded by several different agencies, academic institutions, and endowments. From its earliest conception, this dictionary has involved the use of computers in the processing and editing of the data.

This dictionary was begun because of a number of needs that were not being met by existing or previously-extant English-Tamil dictionaries. The main goal of this dictionary is to get an English-speaking user to a Tamil verb, irrespective of whether he or she begins with an English verb or some other item, such as an adjective; this is because what may be a verb in Tamil may in fact not be a verb in English. The web and DVD versions of this dictionary are searchable, so that if a particular English verb the user wants a Tamil equivalent for is not one of the main entries, inputting the search item should take the user to the English synonym file, which will give the user the Tamil verb. Our original conception was therefore to specifically concentrate on supplying the kinds of information lacking in all previous attempts at capturing equivalencies between English and Tamil.

**Verb classes:** Most English-Tamil dictionaries do not give verb classes, but without this information, non-Tamils cannot know how to predict the various tense forms of the Tamil verb. Because Tamil verb classification is more complex for the spoken forms, we have adapted the verb-classification system of Graul to serve both for the Literary Tamil forms, and the Spoken Tamil Forms.

**Spoken Tamil:** No English-Tamil dictionaries give information about spoken Tamil, which non-Tamils need to know in order to communicate with Tamils in the language most of them use in almost all situations involving natural communication with other Tamils. In the electronic form (on the DVD) the spoken example sentences are also given in sound files to give a better idea of what the language sounds like as spoken by mother-tongue speakers.

**Example Sentences:** Currently extant English-Tamil dictionaries give few if any example sentences illustrating the morphological and/or syntactic frames that verbs occur in. These are all given in both written and spoken Tamil form.

**Modern Usage:** Most extant English-Tamil dictionaries are now seriously out of date, since their compilers have often simply replicated the data found in previous dictionaries, so the forms in them are often stilted or archaic.

**Syntactic Complexity of the Verb Phrase:** Because the Tamil verb is morphologically complex, and the verb phrase therefore syntactically very complex, we decided to focus only on the Tamil verb.

We hope that this dictionary will be helpful not only to those learning Tamil, but that mother-tongue speakers will also find it useful.

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