

A Preliminary Description of *vanthu* in Spoken Tamil

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ABSTRACT

Although *vanthu* has only been described as a filler word or discourse marker in spoken Tamil, this word is being used in various grammatical functions in colloquial Tamil speech. An analysis of the syntactic constraints and distribution of the occurrences of *vanthu* in one Tamil speaker shows that *vanthu* is being used primarily as a topic marker, then as a copula, a discourse marker, and a quotative. This analysis of *vanthu* suggests a change in progress occurring in colloquial spoken Tamil and confirms the necessity of more formal linguistic analysis to be done in this informal register of Tamil speech which can reveal phenomena that cannot be observed in formal or written registers of Tamil.

1 Introduction

This study provides a preliminary description of the Tamil word *vanthu*, previously only described as a discourse marker (Aiyer 2020), which seems to be taking on multiple grammatical functions in colloquial Tamil speech including as a copula, topic marker, and quotative.

The word *vanthu* seems to be expanding beyond its attested usage as a discourse marker to take on grammatical functions as well. Through an analysis of the occurrences of *vanthu* in the naturalistic speech of a Tamil-English bilingual woman, this study investigated the usage of this word in colloquial spoken Tamil in order to provide a preliminary analysis of its various emerging functions. This analysis revealed that *vanthu* was primarily used as a topic marker, then as a copula, then a discourse marker, and finally as a quotative. It was also found that *vanthu* is performing a different function than existing Tamil topic markers, copulas, and quotatives.

The Tamil word *vanthu* ('have come') is the past participle conjugation of *vaa* ('come') (Lehmann 1989: 204, Schiffman 1999: 154), as shown in example 1.

- (1) *na Rochester va-n-thu oru varushom aa-ch-i*
1SG Rochester come-PST-PTCP one.INDF year become-PRS-PRF
'It has been one year since I have come to Rochester.'

However, this word is frequently heard in colloquial Tamil speech outside of this meaning but has only been described by Aiyer (2020) as a filler word, roughly equivalent to the English 'like', which is used to bide for time to "allow the speaker to think of the right language" (3). While *vanthu* can be used in this manner as a discourse marker, new usages are emerging in colloquial spoken Tamil where it is serving various grammatical purposes as well.

In spoken Tamil, the word *vanthu* seems to be shifting from a content word to a grammatical word where it is now being utilized as a copula, topic marker, and quotative. This semantic bleaching and context broadening of *vanthu* points to a change in progress occurring in the language which has so far not been described in the literature. There is a lack of formal linguistic analysis done on colloquial Tamil speech and even less done on Tamil-English code-mixed

speech. However, this type of speech can illuminate interesting changes in progress occurring in the language that cannot be seen in formal speech or written language. The change in progress of *vanthu* will be described in this paper through utterances obtained from one Tamil speaker.

This paper has been organized as follows: Section 2 will provide more background information on existing Tamil copulas, topic markers, and quotatives, Section 3 will describe the methodology used in data gathering and analysis, Section 4 will show the results of the study through the distribution and description of *vanthu*, Section 5 will provide a discussion, and Section 6 will detail the next steps.

2 Background

Tamil is a highly diglossic language with the High variety (Literary Tamil), which can only be formally acquired, used primarily in writing and the Low variety (Standard Spoken Tamil), which is acquired naturally, used primarily in speech (Annamalai & Steever 2019). The phenomenon of the emerging usages of *vanthu* that will be discussed in this paper is only observed in colloquial spoken Tamil, which might explain why its description has so far not been found in grammars or linguistic analyses of written Tamil corpora or formal Tamil speech.

Another potential reason for the lack of study of *vanthu* could be due to the persistent language ideology among Tamil speakers, especially those who embody a prescriptivist view of the language, that *vanthu* is improper speech and should be avoided. This is a salient ideology that is reflected widely on online message boards like Quora, where one Tamil speaker acknowledges the pervasiveness of *vanthu* in Tamil speech by confirming that “it is a popular mannerism among Tamil speakers in casual conversation” while simultaneously denigrating its usage by saying that “it should be ignored. It has no meaning, no significance, and is used to fill up pauses while speaking and while groping for words to continue the conversation.” (Vishwanath 2021). This speaker later goes on to say that “there is no reason for using these words, and good speakers avoid these needless words and expressions.”

Another Tamil speaker believes that the usage of *vanthu* “means you lack confidence in what you speak or you are making up” (D 2021). A third speaker does recognize its function as a discourse marker, but only as a discourse marker, and explicates this by saying that usage of the word is “not required but perceived by the speaker as necessary to structure his thoughts” and that it can be used to “change the topic, or give new information about the same topic or even to contradict the listener”. This speaker believes that the “English equivalent of ‘*vanthu*’ is ‘actually’”, which suggests that it is used to emphasize or provide contrastive information (Ambrose 2021).

This cursory look at the general attitude of Tamil speakers towards *vanthu* online is often echoed in conversations with Tamil speakers offline as well. While the prevailing notion seems to be that *vanthu* is relegated to a filler word that plays no meaningful role other than as a discourse marker, this paper will show why this is not the case and how this word is actually employing various grammatical functions in its usage in Tamil speech. Sections 2.1 - 2.3 will summarize the existing copulas, topic markers, and quotatives in the Tamil language to provide

sufficient background for later explaining how *vanthu* employs these functions in a different manner in Section 4.

2.1 Tamil copulas

In this paper, copulas will be defined as a grammatical construct that occurs as a linking verb between a subject and a non-verbal predicate. Tamil is a zero-copula language for present tense sentences with nominal predicates (Asher 1982). Therefore, verbless clauses can exist in Tamil as exemplified below:

- (2) *naan auto-kaar-an*
 1SG auto-NMLS-M
 ‘I am an auto driver (male).’

There are two auxiliary verbs which can be used in their nonauxiliated forms as a copula in Tamil: *iru* (‘to be/sit/exist’) and *aaku* (‘to become’) (Lehmann 1989: 172). The first copula *iru* ‘‘predicates a temporary location or state of its subject’’ (Steever 2006: 169) which can be seen below with locational predicates (example 3) and existential predicates (example 4). In both cases, *iru* must overly agree with the subject.

- (3) *intak kiraama-tt-il muunru koovil (iru-kkir-atu)*
 this village-OBL-LOC three temple IRU-PRES-3SN¹
 ‘There are three temples in this village.’ (Lehmann 1989: 173)

- (4) *naangkaL ungkaL aNiyaaka irunt-oom*
 1PL.NOM 2SG.GEN team.DAT be-1PL
 ‘We were your team.’ (Antonini 2012: 60)

However, *iru* cannot be used with nominal predicates as shown by the ungrammatical construction in example 5.

- (5) *kumaar vakkiil (*irukkiratu/*irukkiraan)*
 Kumar lawyer (read-PRES.3SN/IRU.3SM)
 ‘Kumar is a lawyer.’ (Lehmann 1989: 171)

Schiffman (1999) analyses *iru* as meaning ‘be (located)’ which can indicate possession along with the dative case as seen in example 6 or inflected with another verb as a present tense marker *-kk-* as seen in example 7.

¹ Lehmann glosses *iru* as its own category IRU, while others gloss it as ‘be’ or ‘is’.

(6) *en-akku panam irukku*
me-DAT money is
'I have money.'
(Schiffman 1999: 29)

(7) *naan padi-kkr-en*
1SG read-PRS-1SG
'I am reading.'

Unlike *iru*, the verb *aaku*, is used to indicate a change of state of the subject, as seen below in example 8.

(8) *avan manitan a-v-aan*
He-NOM man-NOM become-FUT-3SM
'He will become a man.'
(Steever 2006: 169)

The existing Tamil copulas as described above show three main behaviors: a) they must overtly agree with the subject, b) they are often marked for locative and existential function, and c) they occur at the end of a sentence or utterance. So, there are no copulas in Tamil that can serve as a purely grammatical function, such as a linking word, without having an associated lexical function.

2.2 Tamil topic markers

While topicalization can be achieved syntactically through the usage of marked word order by fronting the clause to be emphasized, a topic marker is a grammatical construct which explicitly marks the topic of a sentence or utterance. This phenomenon has been primarily discussed in Japanese (the thematic or contrastive topic marker *wa*) and Korean (the neutral or contrastive topic marker *nun*) as distinctive characteristics (Lee & Shimojo 2016).

In Tamil, topic markers are typically referred to as emphatic particles or markers, such as *-ee* and *-thaan*, which are used to “emphasize or focus attention on particular elements of the sentence, as well as to handle other discourse phenomena such as whether information is new, old but related to new, presupposed, and for other pragmatic functions” (Schiffman 1999: 192). Since Tamil does not employ word stress to show emphasis, it needs to use emphatic markers such as these to show emphasis in an utterance (Schiffman 1999: 192).

The examples below show the semantic difference between the usage of existing Tamil emphatic markers *-ee* (example 9) and *-thaan* (example 10).

(9) *inge-yee irukku*
here-EMPH is
'It's RIGHT HERE (rather than somewhere else)'.
(Schiffman 1999: 192)

- (10) *inge-daan irukku*
 here-EMPH is
 ‘It’s here (and ONLY here)’. (Schiffman 1999: 192)

The main difference between these two emphatic markers is that *-ee* signifies a comparative sense of “one compared to many” while *-thaan* signifies “one and only one (compared to none)” (Schiffman 1999: 192). Schiffman (1999) mentions that these emphatic markers often “cannot be literally translated” (192) into English, even though a translation is often attempted with words like ‘only’, ‘itself’, and ‘just’. In other words, example 9 could be roughly translated as ‘it’s just here’ and example 10 as ‘it’s here only’.

2.3 Tamil quotatives

Quotatives are grammatical markers used to introduce reported speech (Tagliamonte & D’Arcy, 2004). The Tamil suffix *-nnu* is used as a quotative to indicate both direct and indirect reported speech, as seen in examples 11 (indirect speech) and 12 (direct speech), where the only difference in the two constructions is pronoun concord (Schiffman 1999: 152). The reported speech would appear within the square brackets in both examples.

- (11) *jaan [varraar] nnu sonnaaru*
 John will-come QT said
 ‘John said he would come.’ (Schiffman 1999: 152)

- (12) *jaan [naan varreen] nnu sonnaaru*
 John [I will-come] QT said
 ‘John said, “I will come”.’ (Schiffman 1999: 152)

This affix is also often used in constructions like “*appadi-ngraan* ‘that’s what he says’ or *appadi-mbaan* ‘that’s what he’ll say’” (Schiffman 1999: p. 56) or as the more general *appadi-ngraanga* ‘they say’ or ‘people say’ which occurs after finite verbs (152). As Tamil is a head-final language, quotatives occur immediately after the reported speech (Schiffman 1999: 151).

3 Methodology

In order to comprehensively investigate the behavior of *vanthu* in Spoken Tamil, I obtained recordings of naturalistic Tamil speech and analyzed the syntactic constraints and distribution of the occurrences of *vanthu* to better understand its function. Recordings (49:27 minutes of audio and 83:12 of video) of the naturalistic Tamil-English code-mixed speech of a 25-year-old woman were obtained via a discussion of the Tamil art form of *kolam*. These recordings yielded 5 regular occurrences of *vanthu* (usage as the past participle of ‘come’) and 56 non-regular occurrences of *vanthu* which were then analyzed for their syntactic constraints and distribution,

in order to help provide a more complete description of the word and its uses. Each utterance that the token was found in was transcribed in Tamil and then translated into English.

The speaker, Oviya, was born in Tamil Nadu but spent her childhood living in both the US and Tamil Nadu, so she is proficient in both Tamil and English and utilizes both Tamil and Standard American English phonology. The speaker and the researcher are both Indian Tamil-English bilinguals living in the United States. This is important to note as the researcher often code-mixed Tamil lexical items within her English speech during the interview process, which might have prompted more naturalistic, code-mixed speech from the speaker and therefore more uses of the colloquial *vanthu*.

4 Results

Out of the 56 non-regular occurrences of *vanthu*, the word appeared in three main syntactic environments: a) between the subject and the subject complement, b) immediately following a spatial (e.g., here, there) or temporal (e.g., now, then) deictic marker, and c) immediately before reported speech. In the first two environments, the word employed a function as either a copula or a topic marker and in the last environment it employed a quotative function. It also appeared in its attested usage as a discourse marker as expected.

Table 1 shows the distribution of *vanthu* as it is used as a copula, topic marker, quotative, and discourse marker. Within each column, the syntactic environment that the token appears in is specified according to the aforementioned categories of a) between the subject and complement, b) following a spatial or temporal deictic marker, and c) preceding reported speech.

Copula		Topic Marker		Quotative	Disc
<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>c</i>	-
7	2	17	23	2	5
12.5%	3.6%	30.4%	41%		
16.1%		71.4%		3.6%	8.9%
<i>Total</i>					56

Table 1. Categorization and syntactic distribution of *vanthu*

From the summarized data shown in Table 1, it is clear that *vanthu* was primarily used in its topicalizing function. The second most used manner was as a copula, then as a discourse marker, and finally as a quotative. Sections 4.1 - 4.5 will further explain each of these categorizations with examples from the data.

4.1 Copula

Since Tamil is an agglutinative language, it is not surprising that while the lexical form of *va-n-thu* has three distinct morphemes (come-PST-PTCP) as shown in example 1 (Schiffman 1999), these morphological distinctions are lost when the word is semantically bleached and used in its grammatical functions. This is clearly shown in example 13 where *vanthu* is used as a copula to link the subject ‘one of them’ to the nominal predicate ‘mom’s school classmate’.

- (13) *One of them vanthu actually amma-oda school classmate*
One of them COP actually mom-POS school classmate
‘One of them was actually my mom’s school classmate.’

Like in example 13, example 14 below also shows *vanthu* being used as a copula to link the subject to its complement.

- (14) *a-ppo vanthu full-aa school*
DIST-time COP full-ADVZ school
‘At that time it was fully school.’

Here, it is important to note that *vanthu* is not overtly marked for tense. In the above examples where the tense of *vanthu* is interpreted as being past tense, this is gleaned from the larger discourse context of the utterance. In example 13, the speaker was talking about a story that happened in the past and in example 14, the distal temporal deictic marker *appo* prompts the past tense interpretation of *vanthu*. The word also never overtly agrees with the subject.

Example 15 shows *vanthu* acting as a copula to link the subject ‘where I was born’ with its complement ‘Erode’ while the marked SVO word order of this utterance also syntactically topicalizes ‘where I was born’ through fronting.

- (15) *na poran-tha-thu vanthu Erode-la*
1SG born-PST-PTCP COP Erode-LOC
‘Where I was born is in Erode.’

In the majority English utterance in example 16, *vanthu* occurs immediately before the English past tense copula ‘was’, seeming to repeat or emphasize the copular function of linking the subject ‘my second language’ to the nominal predicate ‘Hindi’. Again, *vanthu* is not marked for tense here but it is interpreted as past tense due to the usage of the past tense ‘was’ immediately afterwards.

- (16) *aana my second language vanthu was Hindi*
but my second language COP was Hindi
‘But my second language was Hindi.’

Since existing Tamil copulas cannot be used in constructions with nominal predicates, the usages of *vanthu* in the examples above show that it is filling this gap in Tamil by performing the function of a copula that can link a subject with a nominal predicate.

Unlike existing Tamil copulas (*iru, aaku*) which overtly agree with arguments and subjects (Antonini 2012: 60) and typically appear at the end of a sentence, following the default SOV position in Tamil, *vanthu* never appeared at the end of an utterance and it also never overtly agreed with subjects and arguments. Thus, it seems to only serve a grammatical purpose without the locative and existential functions that existing Tamil copulas typically employ. The lack of subject agreement and inflection for tense of *vanthu* shows that it is acting in a purely grammatical function as a linking verb, and the complementary distribution of *vanthu* (which never occurs utterance-finally) with Tamil copulas (which only occur utterance-finally) shows that the word *vanthu* is performing a different function than existing Tamil copulas.

4.2 Topic marker

Among non-regular usages of *vanthu*, the most prevalent function was as a topic marker. Below, example 17 shows *vanthu* being used in this manner by topicalizing the immediately preceding clause ‘In Erode’, signaling to the interlocutor that the focus of this utterance is ‘Erode’. This utterance follows the canonical SOV word order in Tamil so there is no fronting or otherwise marked word order to syntactically signal topicalization, which means that only *vanthu* is performing a topicalization function to bring focus to ‘Erode’.

- (17) *na Erode-la vanthu romba naal illa*
 1SG Erode-LOC TOP many day be.NEG
 ‘In Erode, I was not there for much time.’

Examples 18 and 19 show two utterances that were spoken in succession. These two utterances were produced mainly in English but show *vanthu* being used to topicalize ‘*appa*’ and ‘Dad’ in both utterances.

- (18) *appa vanthu lived in Mumbai almost seven years*
 Dad TOP lived in Mumbai almost seven years
 ‘Dad lived in Mumbai almost seven years.’

- (19) *So Dad vanthu konjam speaks Hindi*
 so Dad TOP little speaks Hindi
 ‘So Dad speaks Hindi a little.’

While the existing Tamil emphatic marker *-thaan* can perform a contrastive function to contrast new information with old information (Schiffman 1999: 192), *vanthu* does not need to perform a

contrastive function along with its topicalizing function as shown in examples 18 and 19 where it is used to signal to the interlocutor to maintain focus on one topic.

Example 20 also shows *vanthu* in its topicalizing function by highlighting ‘the design’ as the emphasized topic in this utterance.

- (20) *Design vanthu i-volo fine-aa var-aa-thu*
 design TOP PROX-much fine-ADVZ come-NEG-PTCP
 ‘The design will not come out this finely.’

Example 21 shows how *vanthu* employs a different function as a topic marker compared to the Tamil emphatic marker *-thaan*. In this example, *vanthu* is used immediately after the third person plural pronoun as a topic marker to focus the interlocutor’s attention to the subject and the Tamil emphatic marker *-thaan* is used at the end of the utterance to emphasize the entire utterance. This shows the complementary distribution of *vanthu* and *-thaan*, since *vanthu* never appears at the end of an utterance, further suggesting that it plays a different role than the existing Tamil emphatic marker which can appear at the end of an utterance.

- (21) *avanga vanthu generation generation-aa Tamil Nadu-la iru-n-thovanga*
 3PL TOP generation generation-ADVZ Tamil Nadu-LOC be-PST-3PL

a-ntha maathari-thaan
 DIST-that like-EMPH
 ‘They were in Tamil Nadu for generations, that’s what they were like.’

One interesting function of *vanthu* as a topic marker is that it can occur more than once in one utterance, seeming to bring attention to two different topics as seen in example 22.

- (22) *a-ntha arisi maavu vanthu erumbu-kku vanthu saapaadu ah-um*
 DIST-that rice.uncooked flour TOP ant-DAT TOP food be-FUT
 ‘That rice flour will become food for ants.’
 Lit. ‘That rice flour, for ants, will become food.’

It seems that the initially occurring *vanthu* highlights the most important topic (‘rice flour’), or the main topic of the entire utterance, and the second *vanthu* highlights the secondary topic (‘ant’), or the topic within the embedded clause. In other words, the fact that ‘rice flour’ serves as food is primarily important but it is also important to emphasize that it is becoming food for ‘ants’ specifically, and not for any other creature.

Unlike existing Tamil emphatic markers, *vanthu* employs a different function by allowing a non-contrastive, thematic focus on the topic of an utterance, thus functioning as a topic marker.

4.3 Quotative

There were two examples of *vanthu* being used as a quotative in the data. In example 23, although the utterance-final Tamil quotative *appadimbaaru* is already used to signal that the preceding clause is reported speech, *vanthu* is also used immediately before the clause to introduce the quote and therefore bookending the quote between two different quotatives.

- (23) *a-var vanthu nee i-nnai-kku enna pan-n-a a-thu Hindi-la*
DIST-3MSG.HON QUOT 2SG PROX-day-DAT what do-PST-FV DIST-thing Hindi-LOC
soll-u a-ppadi-mb-aar-u
say-FV DIST-like-FUT-3MSG.HON-FV
'He will be like, "Say what you did today in Hindi", that's what he'll say.'

In example 24, the speaker does not employ any existing Tamil quotatives, which would have to appear after the reported speech, but instead only uses *vanthu* to introduce the reported speech.

- (24) *Everyone ellarum vanthu kanna nalla iru-kkiy-a kanna*
Everyone everyone QUOT sweetheart good be-PRS-Q sweetheart
'Everyone will say, "sweetheart, are you doing good sweetheart?''

This inability of *vanthu* to appear at the end of an utterance unlike existing Tamil quotatives, similar to the same behavior with Tamil copulas and topic markers, suggests that it is performing a different function from existing quotatives, copulas, and topic markers in Tamil.

4.4 Discourse marker

As expected, *vanthu* does appear as its attested usage as a discourse marker in the data but it only appeared in this function 8.9% of the time. This suggests that a categorization as a discourse marker cannot be the primary description of *vanthu* in spoken Tamil.

The usage of *vanthu* as a discourse marker in the data was primarily determined by its syntactic position at the beginning of an utterance, meaning that there was no preceding word or clause for it to topicalize or link, or paralleling the use of the English discourse marker 'like'.

Example 25 shows an utterance that contains two usages of *vanthu* with different functions: the first occurrence is as a discourse marker which is clear as it occurs utterance-initially and therefore with nothing preceding it to topicalize or link, and the second occurrence is as a topic marker to bring attention to the subject of 'kolam powder'.

- (25) *vanthu kola-podi vanthu arisi maavu-la sei-vaa-nga*
DISC kolam-powder TOP rice.uncooked flour-LOC do-FUT-3PL
'They will make kolam powder using rice flour.'

Example 26 shows the speaker beginning the utterance in English with ‘but like’ and then immediately repeating this phrase in Tamil by saying ‘*aana vanthu*’ (‘but like’). This repetition suggests that *vanthu* is being used in a parallel manner to the English discourse marker ‘like’ in this scenario.

(26) *but like aana vanthu I feel like video eddu-thu a-ntha video ella paakam-bo-thu*
 but like but DISC I feel like video take-PTCP DIST-that video all see-when-PTCP

my parents probably took videos when I was speaking in English

my parents probably took videos when I was speaking in English

‘But like, I feel like when the videos were taken and we all look at the videos, my parents probably took videos when I was speaking in English.’

As shown above, *vanthu* is still used as a discourse marker in colloquial spoken Tamil but it was used in this manner relatively fewer times than its usage as a topic marker or copula.

5 Discussion

This preliminary analysis of *vanthu* in colloquial spoken Tamil shows that it is being used in Tamil speech in various grammatical capacities outside of its attested description as a discourse marker. The most salient function that *vanthu* performs in the speech of one Tamil speaker is as a topic marker, then as a copula, then a discourse marker, and finally a quotative. It is important to note that *vanthu* functioned significantly more as a topic marker and a copula than as a discourse marker, which suggests that a discourse marker is not its primary function as previously described in the literature. Therefore, there seems to be a change in progress happening in spoken Tamil where *vanthu* is being used in increasingly grammatical forms.

This change in progress occurring in *vanthu* could be motivated by many different factors, including syntactic influence from language contact. Silva-Corvalán (1998) has described how English syntactic influence can result in the use of parallel linguistic structures, such as in creole languages where “language contact can lead to linguistic structures which are typologically unique” (Deumert & Durrleman-Tame 2006: 2). Contact from geographically nearby Indo-Aryan languages could also influence Dravidian languages like Tamil (Sankaravelayuthan 2019), resulting in the use of parallel linguistic structures.

Within the scope of syntactic transfer, copulas, which was the second most salient way that *vanthu* was used in the data analyzed in this paper, seem to promote the emergence of parallel structures. For example, copula emergence has been described in L2 acquisition of English as one of the first morphological features acquired (Deumert & Durrleman-Tame 2006: 98) and copula deletion has been observed in spoken English due to syntactic transfer from Tamil (Herat 2005). The grammaticalization of verbs is an areal feature in many South Asian languages and there is an established pathway in Dravidian languages where verbs are grammaticalized into

auxiliaries or complementizers (Sankaraveleyathan 2019), so *vanthu* could be following a similar pathway in colloquial spoken Tamil.

A comparative linguistic approach can be taken in further studies to compare what is happening with *vanthu* in Tamil with other languages. For example, Nordoff (2010) proposes that Sri Lankan Malay is seeming to grammaticalize its word for ‘come’ (*dhaatang*) as a copula. However, Nordoff argues that this phenomenon independently developed in Sri Lankan Malay because the geographically closest contact languages (Sinhalese and Tamil) do not use a similar word as a copula. In fact, Nordoff explicitly states that *vanthu* is not used in a copular manner in Tamil, but it appears that the data he used to reach this conclusion is primarily from Lehmann’s 1989 Tamil grammar which only contains a more formal register of Tamil. This register of Tamil would not have any occurrences of *vanthu* in its grammatical functions as described in this paper as this phenomenon only occurs in colloquial spoken Tamil.

This reiterates the necessity of having more formal linguistic analysis done on colloquial Tamil speech, since many of the phenomena occurring in this register will not be found in formal speech which is often the primary register used for linguistic analysis of Tamil. Tamil-English code-mixed speech also requires more formal linguistic analysis since most of the literature on this topic focuses on their indexical functions or use as a discourse strategy (Canagarajah 1995, Krishnasamy 2015, Sanmuganathan 2020).

This study will be continued to provide a more complete description of *vanthu* in colloquial spoken Tamil through the analysis of more occurrences of the word in naturalistic Tamil speech. The grammaticalization of this word will also be investigated using the apparent time construct to simulate diachronic change using synchronic data. As research has shown, the quotative system is a prime area to observe ongoing language change (Cukor-Avila 2002, Tagliamonte & D’Arcy 2004). Therefore, special attention will be paid to the usage of *vanthu* in reported speech in future studies to explore how it performs a different function from existing Tamil quotatives and how that might signal language change in progress.

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