Glosses – Lexicography – Semantics

An important task when studying the transmission of texts and improving their editions is the refinement of the lexical tools. The Tamil-English standard dictionary, the Tamil Lexicon, impressive and useful as it is, was no more than a first attempt and poses all the problems connected with an early stage of documentation: missing words, fallacious derivations and etymologies, haphazard construction of lemmata (many words clubbed together under one entry, sometimes also the opposite), insufficient coverage of sources. Although making use of a wide range of source texts, many texts were not yet published, and since, in a pre-digital, age all the search had to be done manually, many important passages have not been taken up even of published texts. Quotations are often based on commentaries, but indirectly, that is, on modern editors' and commentators' interpretations of medieval glosses (and anyway for a sizable part of the oldest corpus no medieval commentaries survive). Where the editors did not find a literary source for a meaning perceived, they quote the traditional *Nikaṇṭu* works, thus incidentally giving a distortive image of traditional lexicography, because due to this technique the *Nikaṇṭu*-s appear only for the "weird" meanings.

The problems are similar but different with the *Tamiḻ Ilakkiya Pērakarāti* published, purely in Tamil, by the Cānti Cātaṉā trust, a work going back to the efforts of the Rājam group in the 1950s and -60s. They often deviate from the TL in bringing in additional meanings and a bigger number of literary quotations, but what makes both works equally unreliable in use is their lack in chronological acumen. While many entries follow a roughly chronological order, beginning with what is believed to be the earliest sources, the sequence is often disrupted or altogether forgotten. Moreover, for many meanings it is possible to find earlier quotations, and for many references to the Nikaṇṭu-s it is in fact possible to find literary quotations. An additional overall weakness in modern Tamil lexicography is their purely additive approach towards semantics, a trend also to be observed in the otherwise impressive word indexes made in Trivandrum in the 1960s. The goal seems to be to find as many meanings as possible instead of trying to understand who the meaning of a word might have developed.

The NETamil team cannot aspire to a monumental new lexicon of Tamil literature as a whole, but we can hope to improve the foundation of future work firstly in producing a *Caṅkam* dictionary based on the full available evidence, that is, not only including all the words (and their forms and derivations) but also their variants. Some progress will also be possible in the areas of *Kīḻkaṇakku, Tivyappirapantam* and *Ilakkaṇam*. The workshop intends to link up three of our working areas, namely text edition, commentary studies and the exploration of the traditional thesauri, the *Nikaṇṭu*-s. Accordingly we invite presentations on particular words of groups of words, on exegetcial strategies of word analysis and the structure of the lexicon in certain areas or word fields. Emphasis will be put on tracing the sources for traditonal glosses and on examining the poetic context for the tenability of the gloss. We plan to publish a volume of semantic studies with the basic aim to demonstrate that it is possible to improve that general state of affairs by the application of diligence, philological methods and simple common sense.