Aspects of pragmatics in Tolkāppiyam: vaḷuvamaiti as logical deviation and appropriateness conditions

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Tolkāppiyam is the earliest grammar available in the history of Tamil language. Though its date is disputed with reference to Sangam classics, the prevalent and common opinion is that it is pre-Sangam period (pre-Christian era). It covers the entire structure of Tamil, though its description might not be elaborate and explicit. But the uniqueness of Tolkāppiyam is the coverage of literary and spoken usage, contents, prosody of literature of Tamil within its perspective. It has three parts namely ejuttikāram, collattikāram and porulattikāram. Tolkāppiyam, as a teaching tool of language teaching, has accommodated both the structure and function of Tamil. It is a treatise to understand the structure, function and nature of literary convention. There are two concepts namely vaḷu (error/deviation) and vaḷuvamaiti (accepted deviation from the norm). There are seven kinds of vaḷus: 1. tiṇai (human and non-human), 2. pāl (gender), 3. itam (personal pronouns), 4. kālam (tense), 5. marapu (convention), 6. viṇa (question) and 7. ceppu (answer/reply). tiṇai, pāl and itam are related to the phenomenon of agreement system. kālam is concerned with the compatibility of tense and time adverb and marapu with the deviation of conventional usage. viṇa and ceppu are concerned with the relationship of question and answer i.e., the logical relationship between question and answer in an ideal condition. These vaḷus may be considered as logical deviation from the norms stated as generalizations in Tolkāppiyam. These logical deviations, though viewed as vaḷus, are accepted as normal in the usage. This is from the point of view of language function which takes into account the social contexts in which the speech takes place. The description of this phenomenon could be equated with the concept of vaḷuvamaiti. vaḷuvamaiti may be interpreted as appropriate social conditions in language use.