A Comparative study of the Genitive and Locative Cases in Tamil and Sinhala

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ABSTRACT

Tamil and Sinhala are members of the Asian language family and both are official languages in Sri Lanka. As morphologically rich languages, they express grammatical variations in both nouns and verbs through agglutinative and inflectional features. While Tamil and Sinhala share certain linguistic and lexical similarities, they also differ due to the unique characteristics of each language. Accordingly, both the affixation of case markers and the way nouns convey meaning through them in Tamil and Sinhala reveal notable similarities and differences. This study aims to examine the genitive and locative cases in the written forms of Tamil and Sinhala, and to explore how case markers are used in each language to express meaning. A qualitative approach was adopted, employing the observation method, with data collected from secondary sources to identify the case markers associated with these grammatical cases. The hypothesis of the research is that in Tamil, the genitive and locative cases have distinct case markers to indicate the grammatical form of the noun. In contrast, Sinhala uses the same case markers for both the genitive and locative cases to express the grammatical meaning of the noun.

Keywords: Bound forms, Case markers, Genitive case, Locative case, Sinhala, Tamil.

INTRODUCTION

Case refers to the grammatical function of a noun or pronoun, indicating its relationship with other words in a sentence. Grammarians of Tamil and Sinhala have described cases and case makers from various perspectives based on the usage of Tamil and Sinhala from time to time. This research discusses the genitive and locative cases based on the current usage of Tamil and Sinhala. Except for the nominative case, each case in Tamil and Sinhala is marked by its own specific case marker. Similarly, the genitive and locative cases are formed by attaching case markers to nouns to convey their grammatical meaning. This study investigates the types of case markers used with the genitive and locative cases in Tamil and Sinhala and aims to clarify how these markers function in both cases.

DISCUSSION

The genitive case is used to indicate possession or a relationship between two nouns. In both Tamil and Sinhala, suffixes or bound forms are used to express this relationship. Based on the observed data, it has been identified that the usage of genitive case markers differs between the two languages.

In modern Tamil, the genitive case markers **-iṉ, -uṭaiya,** and **-atu** are attached to both animate and inanimate nouns, in both singular and plural forms. In Sinhala, the genitive case is marked by suffixes such as **-gē, -ē, -ehi,** and **-vala**. Singular and plural animate nouns in Sinhala typically inflect with the genitive marker **-gē.** In contrast, singular inanimate nouns are marked with **-ē** or **-ehi,** while plural inanimate nouns take the genitive marker **-vala.**

Using genitive case markers for singular animate nouns in Tamil and Sinhala

Tamil			Sinhala		English equivalent
avariṉ அவரின்	avar-iṉ He-Gen.	அவர்-இன்	ohugē ඔහුගේ	ohu-gē ඔහු-ගේ He-Gen.	of him
avaratu அவரது	avar-atu He-Gen.	அவர்-அது			
avaruṭaiya அவருடைய	avar-uṭaiya He-Gen.	அவர்-உடைய			
Tamil			Sinhala		English equivalent
kiḷiyiṉ கிளியின்	kiḷi-iṉ parrot-Gen.	கிளி-இன்	giravāgē ගිරවාගේ	giravā-gē ගිරවා-ගේ Parrot-Gen.	of parrot
kiḷiyiṉatu கிளியினது	kiḷi-iṉ-atu parrot-L.Mor.Gen.	கி ளி -இன் -அது			
kiḷiyiṉuṭaiya கிளியினுடைய	kiḷi-iṉ-uṭaiya parrot-L.Mor.Gen.	கி ளி -இன் -உடைய			

In the Tamil language, in certain contexts, the bound forms **-uṭaiya** and **-atu** appear together with the link morpheme **-in** to convey the same genitive meaning. For example,

Tamil			English equivalent
pūviṉatu பூவினது	pū-iṉ-atu flower-L.mor.Gen.	பூ-இன்-அது	Flower's/ Of flower
pūviṉuṭaiya பூவினுடைய	pū-iṉ-uṭaiya flower-L.mor.Gen.	பூ-இன்-உடைய	
pāṭṭiyiṉatu பாட்டியினது	pāṭṭi-iṉ-atu flower-L.mor.Gen.	பாட்டி-இன்-அது	Grandmother's / Of grandmother
pāṭṭiyiṉuṭaiya பாட்டியினுடைய	pāṭṭi-iṉ-uṭaiya grandmother-L.mor.Gen.	பா ட் டி -இன் -உடைய	

Using genitive case markers for plural animate nouns in Tamil and Sinhala

Tamil			Sinhala		English equivalent
avarkaḷ அவர்கள்	avarkaḷ-iṉ They-Gen.	அவர்கள்;-இன்	ovuṉgē ඔවුන්ගේ	ovuṉ-gē ඔවුන්-ගේ They-Gen.	of them
avarkaḷatu அவர்களது	avarkaḷ-atu They-Gen.	அவர்கள்-அது	-	-	
avarkaḷuṭaiya அவர்களுடைய	avarkaḷ-uṭaiya They-Gen.	அவர்கள்;-உடைய	-	-	
Tamil			Sinhala		English equivalent

kiḷikaḷiṉ கிளிகளின்	kiḷikaḷ-iṉ parrots-Gen.	கிளிகள்-இன்	giravuṉgē ගිරවුන්ගේ	giravuṉ-gē ගිරවුන්-ගේ Parrots-Gen.	of parrots
kiḷkaḷatu கிளிகளது	kiḷikaḷ-atu parrots-Gen.	கிளிகள்-அது	-	-	
kiḷikaḷuṭaiya கிளிகளுடைய	kiḷikaḷ-uṭaiya parrots-Gen.	கிளிகள்-உடைய	-	-	

In the above table, the Tamil inflected noun **kiḷikaḷatu** or **kiḷikaḷuṭaiya** can also be written using the link morpheme **-iṉ**, resulting in forms like **kiḷikaḷiṉatu** or **kiḷikaḷiṉuṭaiya**. This is an optional form.

In Sinhala, when the genitive case marker **-gē** is added to the plural form of animate nouns, the original plural form of the noun undergoes a change. Specifically, the plural form of the noun typically ends with the sound **-uṉ** or **-aṉ** before the genitive marker **-gē** is attached.

Singular	Original plural form	Changed plural form	Inflected plural form with genitive case marker
ohu ඔහු	ovuhu ඔවුහු	ovuṉ ඔවුන්	ovuṉgē ඔවුන්ගේ
giravā ගිරවා	girav ගිරවි	giravuṉ ගිරවුන්	giravuṉgē ගිරවුන්ගේ
putā පුතා	puttu පුත්තු	putuṉ පුතුන්	putuṉgē පුතුන්ගේ
yahaluvā යහළුවා	yahaluvō යහළුවෝ	yahaluvaṉ යහළුවන්	yaluvaṉgē යහළුවන්ගේ
kurullā කුරුල්ලා	kurullō කුරුල්ලෝ	kurullaṉ කුරුල්ලන්	kurullaṉgē කුරුල්ලන්ගේ

Using genitive case markers for neuter nouns in Tamil and Sinhala

Tamil		Sinhala		English equivalent
nūliṉ நூலின்	nūl-iṉ நூல்-இன் book-Gen.	potē පොතේ	pota-ē පොත-ඒ Book-Gen.	Of book
nūliṉatu நூலினது	nūl-iṉ-atu நூல்-இன்-அது book-L.mor.Gen.	potehi පොතෙහි	pota-ehi පොත-එහි Book-Gen.	
nūliṉuṭaiya நூலினுடைய	nūl-iṉ-uṭaiya நூல்-இன்-உடைய book-L.mor.Gen.	-	-	
Tamil		**Sinhala**		**English equivalent**
malariṉ மலரின்	malar-iṉ மலர்-இன் flower-Gen.	male මලේ	mala-ē මල-ඒ Book-Gen.	

malariṉatu மலரினது	malar-iṉ-atu மலர்-இன்-அது flower-L.Mor.Gen.	malehi මලෙහි	mala-ehi මල-එහි Flower-Gen.	Of flower
malariṉutaiya மலரினுடைய	malar-iṉ-uṭaiya மலர்-இன்-உடைய flower-L.Mor.Gen.	-	-	

In the above examples, in Tamil, three types of case markers are used for singular neuter nouns. In Sinhala, two types of case markers are used. Besides, in Sinhala, when attaching case markers to singular nouns, the final phoneme of the singular noun will be deleted.

Using case markers for plural neuter nouns

In Tamil, the same genitive case markers **-iṉ**, **-uṭaiya**, or **-atu**—are used for both animate singular and plural forms of nouns. These markers are attached to the plural form of the noun to indicate the genitive case with a plural meaning. In contrast, in Sinhala, to express the plural form in the genitive case, distinct case markers such as **-vala** or **-hi** are used with the **plural forms of neuter nouns**.

Tamil		Sinhala		English equivalent
nūlkaḷiṉ நூல்களின்	nūlkaḷ-iṉ நூல்கள்-இன் Books-Gen.	potvala පොත්වල	pot-vala පොත්-වල books-Gen.	Of books
nūlkaḷiṉatu நூல்களினது	nūlkaḷ-iṉ-atu நூல்கள்-இன்-அது Books-L.Mor.Gen.	pothi පොත්හි	pot-hi පොත්-හි books-Gen.	
nūlikaḷiṉuṭaiya நூல்களினுடைய	nūlkaḷ-iṉ-uṭaiya நூ ல் கள் -இன் -உடைய Books-L.Mor.Gen.			
Tamil		**Sinhala**		**English equivalent**
maraṅkaḷiṉ மரங்களின்	maraṅkaḷ-iṉ மரங்கள்-இன் Trees-Gen.	gasvala ගස්වල	gas-vala ගස්-වල trees-Gen.	Of trees
maraṅkaḷiṉatu மரங்களினது	maraṅkaḷ-iṉ-atu மரங்கள்-இன்-அது Trees-L.Mor.Gen.	gashi ගස්හි	gas-hi ගස්-හි trees-Gen.	
maraṅkaḷiṉuṭaiya மரங்களினுடைய	maraṅkaḷ-iṉ-uṭaiya ம ர ங் கள் -இன் -உடைய Trees-L.Mor.Gen.			

In Tamil, the same case markers are used to express both singular and plural forms in the genitive case. However, in Sinhala, separate case markers such as **-vala** or **-hi** are attached to neuter nouns to indicate plural notions in the genitive case. This shows that, unlike Tamil, Sinhala uses different case markers with plural forms to express the genitive case.

The locative case is a grammatical case that indicates the location or place where something happens, exists, or is situated. In both Tamil and Sinhala, distinct case markers are used for animate and neuter nouns in the locative case.

In Tamil, the locative is typically formed by adding the case marker **-il** or **-ilē** to neuter nouns. For animate nouns, the bound form **-iṭam** is used to indicate location.

In Sinhala, the locative case for singular neuter nouns is marked by **-ehi** or **-ē.** For plural or collective nouns, the locative is expressed using vala or **-hi.**

Notably, in Sinhala, the locative forms of both singular and plural neuter nouns often resemble those of the genitive case in structure - meaning that the same case markers (such as **-ē** and **-ehi** for singular neuter, and **-vala** or **-hi** for plural neuter) are used in both genitive and locative constructions, with the intended meaning understood from context.

For animate nouns in Sinhala, the bound forms **laňga** or **satuva** are used as locative markers, depending on context and formality. However, traditional Sinhala grammar does not mention specific case markers for animate nouns; case markers are provided only for neuter nouns.

Locative case markers for singular neuter nouns in Tamil and Sinhala

Tamil		Sinhala		English equivalent
nūlil நூலில்	nūl-il நூல்-இல் Book-Loc.	potē පොතේ	pota-ē පොත-ඒ Books-Loc.	In the book
nūlilē நூலிலே	nūl-ilē நூல்-இலே Book-Loc.	potehi පොතෙහි	pota-ehi පොත-එහි Book-Loc.	
Tamil		**Sinhala**		**English equivalent**
nīril நீரில்	nīr-il நீர்-இல் Water-Loc.	diyē දියේ	diya-ē දිය-ඒ Water-Loc.	In the water
nīrilē நீரிலே	nīr-ilē நீர்-இலே Water-Loc.	diyehi දියෙහි	diya-ehi දිය-එහි Water-Loc	

Based on the above chart, it can be observed that Tamil uses different case markers for neuter singular nouns to indicate the genitive and locative cases. However, in Sinhala, the same case markers are used for both cases. For clear understanding, lets, look at some sentence patterns using genitive and locative case markers in both languages.

இந்தப் புத்தகத்தின் விலை என்ன? (inta puttakattiṉ vilai eṉṉa?)

මෙම පොතේ / පොතෙහි මිල කීයද? (mema potē / potehi mila kīyada?)

What is the price of this book?

இந்தப் புத்தகத்தில் எத்தனை பக்கங்கள் உள்ளன? (inta puttakattil ettaṉai pakkaṅkaḷ uḷḷaṉa?)

මෙම පොතේ / පොතෙහි පිටු කීයක් තියෙනවද? (mema potē / potehi piṭu kīyak tiyenavada?)

How many pages are in this book?

Locative case markers for plural neuter nouns in Tamil and Sinhala

In Tamil, the locative case markers used for plural neuter nouns are the same as those used for singular neuter nouns, namely **-il** or **-ilē**.

In Sinhala, however, the locative case markers for plural neuter nouns are **-vala** or **-hi**, which are also used for the genitive case in plural neuter nouns.

Tamil		Sinhala		English equivalent
nūlkaḷil நூல்களில்	nūlkaḷ-il நூல்கள்-இல் books-Loc.	potvala පොත්වල	pot-vala පොත්-වල books-Loc.	In the books
nūlkaḷilē நூல்களிலே	nūlkaḷ-ilē நூல்கள்-இலே books-Loc.	Pothi පොත්හි	pot-hi පොත්-හි books-Loc.	
Tamil		**Sinhala**		**English equivalent**
maraṅkaḷil மரங்களில்	maraṅkaḷ-il மரங்கள்-இல் trees-Loc.	gasvala ගස්වල	gas-vala ගස්-වල Trees-Loc.	On trees
maraṅkaḷilē மரங்களிலே	maraṅkaḷ-ilē மரங்கள்-இலே trees-Loc.	gashi ගස්හි	gas-hi ගස්-හි Trees-Loc.	

According to the above examples, similar case markers are used for both singular and plural notions in Tamil. However, in Sinhala, two different case markers are used for singular and plural nouns.

Locative case - animate nouns

In both Tamil and Sinhala, bound forms are attached to nouns to indicate the locative case. In Tamil, the case marker **-iṭam** is attached to animate nouns. Additionally, to enhance the beauty or stylistic quality of a sentence, the bound forms such as **-iṭattē**, **-iṭattil**, and **-iṭattilē** are also used in certain contexts.

In Sinhala, although traditional grammarians did not specify case markers for animate nouns, in modern usage, the bound form **satuva** is employed with animate nouns to convey a meaning equivalent to the Tamil locative

case. In spoken Sinhala, the bound form **laňga** is commonly used instead.

Tamil		Sinhala		English equivalent
avariṭam அவரிடம்	avar-iṭam அவர்-இடம் He-Loc.	ohu satuva ඔහු සතුව	ohu – satuva ඔහු - සතුව He-Loc.	He has
avariṭattē அவரிடத்தே	avar-iṭattē அவர்-இடத்தே He-Loc.	ohu laňga ඔහු ළඟ	ohu - laňga ඔහු - ළඟ He-Loc.	
avariṭattil அவரிடத்தில்	avar-iṭattil அவர்-இடத்தில் He-Loc.	-	-	
avariṭattilē அவரிடத்திலே	avar-iṭattilē அவர்-இடத்திலே He-Loc.	-	-	

In Tamil, the locative case markers **-il** or **-ilē** are primarily attached to neuter nouns. However, in certain contexts, they are also used with animate nouns to express feelings or emotions. For example,

உன்னிடத்தில் / உன்னிடத்திலே எனக்கு நம்பிக்கை உண்டு.

uṉṉitattil / uṉṉitattilē eṉakku nampikkai uṇṭu.

I have trust in you.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study of the genitive and locative cases in Tamil and Sinhala reveals both similarities and differences. A key similarity is that both languages use suffixes as case markers to modify the grammatical meaning of nouns. However, a significant difference lies in how each language distinguishes between the genitive and locative cases.

In Tamil, distinct and consistent case markers are used to differentiate between these cases. The genitive case is primarily expressed through suffixes such as **-iṉ**, **-uṭaiya**, and **-atu**, while the locative case is marked by **-il** and **-ilē** for neuter nouns, and **-iṭam** or its variants for animate nouns. These markers are applied systematically across both singular and plural forms, with occasional optional variations involving link morphemes.

In contrast, Sinhala uses the **same** case markers-such as **-gē**, **-ē**, **-ehi**, **-vala**, and **-hi**-for both genitive and locative functions. The marker **-gē** is specifically used for the genitive case with animate nouns, while **-ē** and **-ehi** can denote both genitive and locative meanings for neuter singular nouns. For animate nouns in locative contexts, Sinhala employs bound forms such as **satuva** and **laňga**, especially in modern usage.

Overall, Tamil maintains a clear morphological distinction between the genitive and locative cases, whereas Sinhala merges these functions through shared markers, relying more on contextual interpretation. These differences reflect broader typological traits: Tamil emphasizes structural clarity and morphological consistency, while Sinhala allows greater flexibility and contextual dependency. The findings of this study highlight the grammatical diversity within South Asian languages and underscore the importance of language-specific analysis when comparing morphosyntactic features across related yet distinct linguistic systems.

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