

வாங்க, தமிழ் படிக்கலாம்
vAnga, thamizh padikkalAm

Lesson No.1

K.P.Sundararajan
Bangalore, India
April, 2021

Hi everyone,

Welcome to this learning journey. We are going to be together for many many weeks to come. Let us understand what this journey is all about.

Our Goal

Learn to READ Tamil (henceforth, Thamizh)

Yes, it is NOT going to be READ & WRITE.

Eligibility

Can you read English? Welcome aboard.

Non-Tamilians also?

Of course, anyone from any language background is welcome. Thamizh is such a simple language. Come along, you will realize it yourself.

How long is it going to take?

Are you in hurry? Relax. We are not here to win a Race or break records.

We are learning for a life time of happiness. Is six months too long for you? Don't worry, if you want to go on the fast lane, that is also possible.

Why not Read and WRITE?

We all know how to read and write English. But, do we really WRITE English?

Technology has made manual writing redundant. Either we TYPE or we SPEAK and use a Speech to Text converter.

That applies for Thamizh also. One can comfortably use an English Keyboard and type in English, whatever one wants to say in Thamizh. The software would convert it to Thamizh sentences. One can speak and let Google convert it to a Thamizh document.

But, if you can't READ it, how would you know if the software has done its job properly?

So, it is of paramount importance to be able to read Thamizh. That is why, our focus is on that. Hope you agree with me.

- 0 -

Transliteration

Writing in one language using another language is called Transliteration. Haven't we written "Vanakkam, nalamaga irukkireergala" in our Whatsapp correspondences?

We will use the same technique to write Thamizh words in English.

When a Japanese word "Yamaguchi" is written in English, do we have any difficulty in reading it?

What about the German word "angst"?

Or, the Russian "Soyuz"?

We used this technique for the title of this course; **vAnga, thamizh padikkalAm**, which means, Come, let's read Thamizh.

May be that mixing up of lowercase and uppercase "vAnga" and strange combinations like "zh" are confusing. But that's ok; you will get to know them soon.

Such exceptions are not very uncommon. Haven't we learnt and got used to reading "San Jose" as "San Ho·seh"?

Similarly, a little bit of getting used to a few exceptions is all you need, to read Thamizh fluently *with the correct pronunciation, almost as a native Thamizh speaker would read*. In fact, you might be surprised to find that you pronounce it even better, because you meticulously followed the rules!

Children use a "training wheel" when they start learning to ride a bicycle. It helps them learn effortlessly. Once they learn, they get rid of it.

English Transliteration is your "training wheel". You will need it only in the initial learning phase. Slowly, your brain's pattern recognition mechanism would swing into action and you would be reading Thamizh directly. **Our aim is not to read the words syllable by syllable. We should be able to recognize the whole words.**

In the pages that follow, we will start familiarizing ourselves with the Tamizh Alphabets. We will practice reading short words with two or three letters. Each Thamizh word would have its English transliterated version below that. That will act as your "training wheel" to start reading Thamizh words.

Generally, you should not have any difficulty in getting the correct pronunciation of the Thamizh word. When something is not so intuitive, the comments column would guide you.

- 0 -

Vowels

Let's start with some basics.

Like any other language, Thamizh also has Vowels and Consonants.

Consonants cannot exist on their own without Vowels.

Thamizh, very appropriately calls them "Uyir ezhuthukkaL" meaning, "Letters of Life".

This week let's focus only on Vowels.

English has five Vowels, viz., 'A', 'E', 'I', 'O' and 'U'.

They represent the primitive sounds which can be made without using tongue, just by shaping our mouth & lips.

Unfortunately, most of us have learnt them as "letters"; we ignored their "sounds".

We learnt to read "A" as "yeh", whereas it represents the "aaaa" sound. We learnt "E" as "yee" but it sounds as "yeh" in "end".

We will not make that mistake while learning Tamil. The way we pronounce the alphabet and the way it will sound in the word would be the same.

Thamizh has TWELVE vowels. Each sound is unique. They are just the long sound and short sound variations of the five English Vowels with a few additions.

In English a vowel may denote different sounds in different words; e.g. observe the four different sounds of "a" in "alone", "author", "fan", and "fate". Thamizh vowel sounds do not change like that.

So, once you are familiar with the pronunciation of their English representation, you don't need any prior knowledge of Thamizh or guidance to read the words correctly.

Let us look at each of these Vowels in more detail and practice reading short words **beginning** with those letters.

Why did I say "**beginning**"? Because, **these letters will be used only at the beginning of a word**. You will not find them anywhere in the middle or end of a word.

Let's start reading. It is enough if you focus on the Vowels, the starting letters.

Although meanings for the words are given, don't bother to understand or memorize the meanings. If you already know it, it is fine.

Remember our goal is to READ. Everything else would be a natural fallout. It will happen automatically without you realizing it.

- 0 -

The first letter is

அ

We will represent this by "a" when we write the Thamizh words in English.

We pronounce it as "uh", the sound of 'a' in "attend"

'a' can take many forms in English. e.g. "fat", "fate", "fall"; each sound is quite different from the other.

In Tamizh, we have only one sound for 'a'. That is the sound of 'a' in "attend", "authority", "assert", etc.

Here are a few words starting with அ. Look at the Thamizh word and read the English **transliterated** word below that. The meaning is also given in the next column.

You don't have to memorize the word or its meaning. Just read and get used to the sound and pattern of the word.

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
அகல் agal	small oil lamp	
அசல் asal	original, principal	
அம்மா amma	Mommy	
அப்பா appa	Daddy	
அவன் avan	he	
அவர் avar	he (respectful)	



This is the long sound of 'a' as in "calm". Using the same letter for both short and long sounds would cause confusion. Therefore we assign the upper case "A" to represent this sound. ¹

Here are some words beginning with அ and the English transliteration.

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஆசை Asai	desire	read it as aasai
ஆடு Adu	Lamb, play (game)	read it as aadu
ஆடை Adai	dress	read it as aadai
ஆமை Amai	original	read it as aamai
ஆலை Alai	Factory, Plant	read it as aalai
ஆனை Anai	elephant	read it as aanai
ஆப்பம் Appam	Rice cake	read it as aappam

¹ One may ask why not use "aa" instead of "A". From a pattern recognition angle, it is easier for the Brain to associate each sound with an unique letter. Initially it may be difficult but beneficial in the long run.



This is the sound of "i" in "ink". Therefore we will assign "i" to represent this letter

In English, the sound of "i" in "ink", and "kind" are totally different.

In Thamizh, no such confusion. Only one sound as in "ink".

We pronounce it as "yi".

Some examples of words starting with இ. No need to memorize the word or its meaning. Just get familiar with the word pattern and sound

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
இசை isai	music	
இடை idai	hip	
இமை imai	eye lid	
இலை ilai	leaf	
இவர் ivar	This person	
இவை ivai	these (things)	
இன்று indru	today	
இனிப்பு inippu	sweet	



This is the long sound counterpart; the sound of "ee" in "keep"

So, it makes sense to assign "ee" to represent this sound.

We pronounce it as "yee"

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஈ ee	Fly (insect), give	An unique word. A single Vowel is a word by itself, with two different meanings.
ஈடு eeedu	match, equal	
ஈட்டு eettu	earn	
ஈட்டி eetti	lance	
ஈசன் eesan	God (Easwaran)	
ஈரம் eeram	wet	
ஈழம் eezham	Tamil name for SriLanka	

One may ask why "ee"? Why not "E", as we did for "A"? You will get the answer a few pages down the line.

Some people prefer to use "ea" instead of "ee", because of words like "leap", "feast", "leave". But "ee" is more common; e.g. eel, feel, seed, feed, need, deed, etc. In my Software, I have provided an option to choose "ee" or "ea". We will talk about it at the end of this course.

உ

It is the sound of "u" in "put". So, we will assign "u" to represent that.

We pronounce it as "wu" (as in "wurst", similar to the short "woo" in "wood", or "wool")

Unlike in English, where the "u" in "unity" and "under" sound quite different; in Thamizh, it is only one sound "wu"

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
உடை udai	dress	
உமா uma	popular girl name (consort of Lord Siva)	(Heard of Uma Thurman?!)
உமி umi	Rice husk	
உப்பு uppu	Salt	
உடல் udal	body	
உயிர் uyir	life (force)	
உரல் ural	mortar (used with pestle)	
உயரம் uyaram	height	

உள

This is the long sound counterpart. It is the sound of "oo" in "ooze"

We pronounce it as "woo".

We will represent this by "U"

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
உளி Usi	needle	Read as oosi
உமை Umai	dumb	Read as oomai
உர் Ur	village, town, city, etc (generic name)	Read as oor
உதா UdhA	color (combination of Blue, Black and Red)	Read oodhaa
உது Udhu	blow (air)	
உளை ULai	howl (Jackal)	Read ooLai
உஞ்சல் Unjal	Swing	Read as oonjal
உட்டி விடு Utti vidu	Feed (the baby)	Read as ootti vidu

S

Some people use the "oo" alternative in place of "U", because many English words are written that way; e.g. boot, hoot, loot, root, soot. But, as I said before, it is preferable to assign an unique letter for each sound.

எ

This is the sound of "e" in "eclipse". So, we will represent this by "e"

We pronounce it as "eh".

Unusually, "e" doesn't seem to have any variation in English. It has the same sound in hen, pen, den, peck, fell, bell, better, get, entry, enable, every, etc

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
எடு edu	take	<i>Thamizh has a strange twist in pronunciation when it comes to "u" sound in the middle or at the end of a word.</i>
எட்டு ettu	eight	<i>It is NOT "wu" with the lips fully rounded (as if you are about to kiss someone!).</i>
எது edhu	which	<i>Try saying edu or ettu or edhu without moving the lips, using only the tongue to make the sound.</i>
என் en	mine	
எங்கே enge	where	
எந்த endha	which	
என்ன enna	what	
எப்போ eppo	when	
எப்படி eppadi	how	

ஏ

The long sound counterpart. It is the sound of "ae" in "aero",

We will represent this by "E".

We pronounce it as "yeh".

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஏடு Edu	creamy layer of milk, generic name for document	Read it as aedu
ஏது Edhu	which, how, from where	Read it as aedhu
ஏன் En	why	Read it as aen
ஏரி Eri	lake	Read it as aeri
ஏறு ERu	Lion	Read it as aeru (treat R as r, for now)
ஏழு Ezhu	seven	Read it as aezhu
ஏழை Ezhai	poor person	Read it as aezhai
ஏப்பம் Eppam	belching	Read it as aeppam
ஏக்கம் Ekkam	longing	Read it as aekkam



This is the sound of "i" in "rice, spice, pine", fine, dine, etc

We will represent this by "ai"

We pronounce it as "**aye**"

This sound, quite understandably, does not have the usual short and long forms.

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஐந்து aindhū	Five	
ஐயா aiyā	Sir (addressing a person respectfully)	
ஐயர் aiyar	Chief (person) Also used as the name of a certain caste.	
ஐயம் aiyam	doubt, alm	
ஐவர் aivar	five people	



This is the sound of "o" in "one".

We will represent it by "o" (lower case o)

We pronounce it also as "ஓ".

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஒரு oru	one	
ஒலி oli	sound	
ஒளி oLi	light	"L" represents the heavier sound of "l" It is like the "l" in "plea" or plum. Don't bother now. We will see it later.
ஒட்டு ottu	Glue it, grafted	
ஒன்று ondru	One	
ஒன்பது onbadhu	Nine	
ஒட்டகம் ottagam	camel	



This is the long sound counterpart. It is the 'o' sound as in "ode" or ovary

We will represent this by "O" (upper case O)

We pronounce it as "woe" (long sound).

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஓம் Om		Read as oam
ஓடு Odu	run, roof tile	Read as oadu
ஓசை Osai	sound, noise	Read as oasai
ஓது Odhu	read	Read as oadhu
ஓடம் Odam	boat	Read as oadam
ஓய்வு Oivu	rest	Read as oaivu
ஓலை Olai	dried palm leaf	Read as oalai
ஓநாய் OnAi	Wolf	Read as oanaai
ஓவியம் Oviyam	painting	Read as oaviyam

ஓள

This is the somewhat like the sound of "ow" in "bow", "cow", or the "ou" in "out", ounce, etc.

English does not have an equivalent vowel.

We will represent this by "au".

Tamil Word	Meaning	Comments
ஓளவை auvai	Renowned Tamil Poet	
ஓளடதம் audadham	medicine	
ஓளவியம் auviyam	talk jealously	



This letter is very unique to Thamizh. It is called "Aidha Ezhuthu"

You don't need to know anything about it for the moment.

We will take this up later.

Practice Session

See if you can recognize and read the letters comfortably.

The first column is in the natural order to help you, in case you forget something.

அ	ஏ	ஈ	உள	இ	எ	ஊ	ஒள	ஏ
ஆ	ஏ	ஒள	ஆ	உ	ஈ	அ	ஐ	எ
இ	ஒள	ஆ	ஈ	அ	ஒ	எ	ஆ	உ
ஈ	ஒ	ஆ	ஒள	ஏ	இ	அ	ஒ	ஈ
உ	ஈ	ஊ	உ	ஏ	எ	எ	ஆ	அ
ஊ	ஏ	ஆ	எ	அ	ஈ	ஒள	ஐ	இ
எ	ஐ	ஒ	ஐ	ஊ	இ	ஈ	இ	ஈ
ஏ	ஒ	ஒ	ஊ	எ	ஒ	அ	ஐ	ஒள
ஐ	ஏ	ஈ	ஊ	இ	எ	ஊ	ஒள	ஏ
ஒ	ஊ	ஒ	உ	ஆ	ஐ	ஒ	ஒ	ஈ
ஒ	ஆ	ஒ	ஒள	ஐ	ஆ	ஒ	அ	ஈ
ஒள	ஏ	எ	ஆ	ஒ	ஒள	ஐ	ஏ	ஈ
அ	ஒள	எ	ஆ	ஐ	உ	ஊ	ஊ	ஆ
ஆ	ஐ	ஆ	ஒ	ஆ	அ	ஊ	இ	எ
இ	எ	அ	ஒ	எ	எ	இ	ஊ	ஒ
ஈ	இ	ஐ	ஒ	ஆ	ஐ	உ	ஏ	ஐ
உ	ஒள	ஒ	அ	எ	ஒ	ஆ	ஒள	ஈ

Time to say, Bye for now.

Having travelled this far, how do you find it? Was it easy?

If it wasn't, do let me know what troubled you. We can always find a way to sort it out.

I am open to suggestions. Let us make this journey a pleasant one for every one of us.

Mail me on,

kps.tamil2021@gmail.com

Keep reading the words again and again. One reading is certainly not enough. You have a whole week. Read it at least once a day.

By the end of the week, if you are able to recognize all the TWELVE VOWELS, I am happy. If you can recall entire words without looking at the English transliteration, I am even more happy. If you couldn't, that's ok. We are not in a hurry. As time goes by, you will be amazed at how effortlessly you have learnt.

Until next week,

Best Wishes to you all,

Sundararajan

(Feel free to address me as KPS)