

## \*On the phonetic texture or the "colour" (*/vaṇṇam/*) of poetry\*

Jean-Luc CHEVILLARD

(CNRS, University Paris-Diderot-Paris 7, UMR7597, HTL)

Among the 26 main constituents (or "limbs" */uṛuppu/*) of a "poetical composition" (*/ceyyu/*) which are enumerated in TP310i (the first sūtra of the */Ceyyuliyal/*, 8th chapter of the TP, i.e. the */Poruḷatikāram/* of the Tamil treatise called */Tolkāppiyam/*), */vaṇṇam/* is the last one. Since the word */vaṇṇam/* (from Prakrit */vaṇṇa/* and Sanskrit */varṇa/*) is also found three times in the */Collatikāram/* (=TC) of the */Tolkāppiyam/*, in TC26i, TC75i and TC410i, where it refers to the physical quality of "colour", we might be tempted to say that */vaṇṇam/* is the "colour" of a poetical composition but "phonetic texture" is probably a more precise rendering, as this seems to be the common feature of the 20 types of */vaṇṇam/* enumerated in TP514i and detailed from TP515i upto TP534i. Two of those 20 theoretical */vaṇṇam/s* were made use of by the colophon-writer of the */Patirruppattu/* (an anthology from which 80 poems have been preserved), where we have prominent mention of */oḷuku vaṇṇam/* "flowing v." and, sometimes simultaneously, of */corcīr vaṇṇam/*, which is supposed to characterize a poem "wherein feet coincide with words", as noted by John R. Marr[1985/1958]. The inspiration for the Tamil theoreticians characterizations might possibly have to be looked for in the list of */śabda-guṇa/s* contained in the 17th chapter of the */Nāṭya Śāstra/*, and which follows two chapters devoted to a presentation of Sanskrit meters. Among the Tamil theoreticians who are later than the */Tolkāppiyam/* but whose work is mostly lost, the name of Avinayaṇār stands out, as remembered in the */Yāpparuṅkalavirutti/*, as the name of one who enumerated 100 types of */vaṇṇam/*. Later Tamil theoreticians seem to have preferred the use of the word */ōcai/* "sound, rhythm" to the use of */vaṇṇam/*, having 4 main categories (*/akaval-ōcai/* "calling sound", */ceppal-ōcai/* "telling sound", */tuḷḷal-ōcai/* "jumping sound" and */tūṅkal-ōcai/* "swinging sound") and sometimes subcategorizing them further by making use of the term */icai/* ("sound, modulation"), as in */ēnt-icaic ceppal-ōcai/* "a telling sound with a maintained modulation". The technical term */vaṇṇam/* was then somehow free to start a new career and became emblematic of another type of poetry, based on the combinations of 16 elementary rhythmic patterns called */vaṇṇak kulippu/s* or */cantak kulippu/*, such as "tatta", "tātta", "tanta", "tānta", "taṇa", "tāṇa", etc., as enumerated in the late treatise */Vaṇṇattiyalpu/*.