



# CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

## 53<sup>rd</sup> Foundation Day Lecture Series

### Lecture 34

Wednesday, June 22, 2022 at 02:00 pm IST

How Westerners progressively discovered Classical Tamil  
in the 16th, 17th and 18th century



#### Jean-Luc Chevillard

Jean-Luc Chevillard is a researcher at the French "National Center for Scientific Research" (CNRS), Paris. He has more than 4 decades of experience in Tamil scholarly tradition. His PhD was on the Cēṅāvaraiyam, one of the commentaries of Tolkāppiyam. In his formative period, he studied with scholars such as Muthu Shanmugam Pillai, François Grosand T.V. Gopal Iyer. His most important focus has been on the grammatical and lexicographical texts created over many centuries by successive generations of Tamil scholars for transmitting a body of knowledge to their students, keen on mastering the Tamil poetical idiom. He has also worked on Tēvāram, a collection of Tamil devotional songs. He is the general editor of */Histoire Épistémologie Langage/*, a journal in the field known as "History of Linguistics". He is an active participant in the ERC project NETamil (directed by Eva WILDEN) and is currently engaged in the TST project (ANR-DFG), which aims at improving the cataloguing of Palm-leaf Manuscripts pertaining to Tamil in the Paris BnF (Bibliothèque de France).

The first linguist encounter between Tamil speakers and Europeans took place in the 16th century. We luckily have, thanks to pioneers such as Thani Nayagam, Vermeer, Hein & Rajam, the critically edited text and the English translation of a draft grammar of Tamil (T), written in Portuguese (P) in the 16th century by Henrique Henriques and currently preserved in Lisbon. This Portuguese grammar of Tamil, concisely symbolized as {P\t}, was the first milestone on a long path which would also see the composition of Latin grammars of Tamil, symbolized as {L\t}, when Latin started to replace Portuguese as the metalanguage of description, or the scientific Lingua Franca, playing the role now played by English. What these early missionary linguists did not know was that Tamilnadu possessed a long and ancient scholarly tradition and that there existed many {T\t} type objects, where Tamil (T) had been used as the "metalanguage" for the description of "Tamil (t) as an object language". In addition to grammars, other types of multilingual object were created, first in the form of incompletely lemmatized Tamil-Portuguese dictionaries, but also later as Portuguese-Tamil dictionaries. While preparing those tools, some of the early European students of Tamil discovered the existence of Nikaṇṭu-s, i.e. traditional vocabularies of Poetical Tamil, and tried to imitate them. This presentation will concentrate, within this general framework, on the progressive discovery by western descriptors of what can be concisely called the Tamil Triglossia, culminating in the 18th century in the work of Beschi, building of the work of his predecessors.

Join us via Google Meet at <https://meet.google.com/rhn-etdf-wxj>

LIVE Streaming on



YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/c/CIILMysore1>