CHAPTER XIX

COMPOUNDS
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19.1. Views of Tolkāppiyar on Compounds.

Tolkāppiyar does not explicitly define what a compound is. But the term 'tokai' chosen by him to denote compound helps us to infer its definition. The term 'tokai' is derived from the root tok(u) which means "to join together" or "to elide". Tolkāppiyar clearly states in a sutra that all compounds are of the same nature as single words, i.e., they are unitary in nature. Thus it is obvious that while defining compounds, Tolkāppiyar attaches much importance to the meaning "to join to-gether" (to form one unit) for the term 'tokai'. Besides, he does not explicitly define compounds by the criterion of elision of affixes or particles and it is interesting to note that there are no affixes or particles elided in some of the compounds like karunākutir-i, cārei-p-pampa, etc.

The meaning elision which can be applied only to a certain types of compounds, may be taken as a secondary criterion to define compounds.

19.2. Views of the Commentators on Compounds.

Cēnavaraiyar mentions that there are two schools of thoughts with regard to the interpretation of the term 'tokai'. One adopts the meaning "elision" and thinks that the compound is that where the case marker, particle of comparison, ending of verbs, particle -em or termination of qualitative nouns is dropped; the other adopts the meaning "joining to-gether" and thinks that the compound is that in which two or more words are joined to-gether without any interruption.
Iłampūraṇar and Naçaigārkkiṇiyar advocate the former school of thought but Cēṉavaṟaiyar the latter and also condemns the view of Iłampūraṇar for the following two reasons. 1. According to the interpretation of Iłampūraṇar even the expressions like cayṭṭu, porul and iruttān māṭattu would also become compounds, since the case markers -ai and -kaṇ are respectively dropped after the words porul and māṭattu. 2. Secondly, the expressions like kāḷapandṛ and vēḻakkarumpu must also be included under the compounds, but they cannot be included according to the former interpretation. Teyvaccīḷiyar also fully agrees with the interpretation of Cēṉavaṟaiyar.

Dr. P.C. Sastri states that though there is generally some elision in the first member of a compound, it should not be taken as the definition of 'tokai'.


Bloomfield says that compound words have two (or more) free forms among their immediate constituents. Earlier, by way of defining the free forms, he says that in his description he usually treats the stem as if it were a free form. Bloch and Trager define a compound as a word composed entirely of smaller words. Hockett states that in the stem compounds, both the immediate constituents are themselves stems.

19.4. Definition Evolved.

In the light of the foregoing discussions and definitions the following criteria may be set up to define the compounds, depicted by Tolkāppiyaiyar.
1. In a compound two or more words are joined together to form immediate constituents among them.

2. The members of a compound, as a whole, function as a single word.

3. Certain suffixes or particles may be elided in some types of compounds.

19.5. Members of a Compound.

Where there are two members, the first one is known as the prepound and the second one as the postpound. In Tamil, the prepound always remains an uninflected word, i.e., a compound is capable of being inflected only after the postpound and not after the prepound.

When two free forms are juxtaposed to form a compound, some modification may occur in the prepound or in the termination of the prepound.

E.g., katu-yana kottiyana
munam-cevi munancevi, etc.


Tolkappiyar divides the compounds, in Tamil language, into six kinds\textsuperscript{12}. They are 'vēṟṟumattokai' (the declensional compound), 'uvamattokai' (the compound of comparison), 'vinaikkai' (the verb compound), 'paṟṟuttokai' (the qualitative compound), 'umattokai' (the conjunctival or conjunctional compound) and 'agnojittokai' (the metonymical compound).

These compounds may be looked into from the point of view of the classification of constructions made by the modern linguists.
The modern linguists classify the constructions into two main classes. They are endocentric constructions and exocentric constructions. They sub-divide the endocentric constructions into sub-ordinate or attributive constructions and co-ordinate constructions.\[1\]

Except the metonymical compound, all the other five kinds of compounds are evidently endocentric constructions. Out of them, the conjunctival compound alone represents the co-ordinate construction and the remaining four the attributive construction. There is no real exocentric construction in the compounds enumerated by Tolkāppiyār. 'Appōlittokai' which is formed of other compounds is only a metonymical compound (19.12). From the structural point of view, it is preferable to class the appōlittokai also under the endocentric constructions (see note 51).

19.7. Declensional Compound.

'Vēṟṟumittokai' or the declensional compound is that in which the precompound stands in case relation to the postcompound. Prof. T.P. Meenakshisundaram further elucidates by stating that in the declensional compounds the first member may be taken to occur in the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth or seventh cases, roughly corresponding to the accusative, instrumental, dative, ablative of motion, genitive and locative respectively and that the nominative and the vocative cannot form compounds.\[15\]

E.g., kulsiṅkeṭu, poykutṭam, karuppuvoli

malaiyaruvi, kāyanalar, kumrakkōktai, etc.

Nālamūrapar and Naccigārkkiniyar think that the declensional compound is that wherein the case marker is elided. Čēṉavāraliyar and
Teyvaccilaiyar do not agree with this definition. It is worthy of notice that Ceyavareiyar considers the phrase like nilam kāntaṁ "He crossed the ground", where nilam is an object and kāntaṁ is a finite verb, as an example of 'vēppumattakai'. The problem, whether the expressions like nilam kāntaṁ, nakkaramaṁ, etc., are compounds or not, will be discussed later (19.14).

The internal structure of these compounds is noun + noun. Usually the postpound is the head and the prepound is attribute to the head, i.e., attributes → head.

In a few instances, when the compounds are in the sixth case relationship, the prepound may become the head and the postpound its attribute.

E.g., munina (may be expanded as navigatu muṇi)
     vāyil     (illigatu vēy)

Usually in the declensional compounds, the prepounds drop the case markers when compounded with the post-grounds.


'Uvasattakai' or the compound of comparison is that in which the prepound is compared to the postpound. The prepound is 'upamāya' (i.e., one which occurs as a comparison) and the postpound is 'upamāya' (i.e., to which one is compared).

E.g., muṇaśevi, pagaṇi, tukiyitai, etc.

These compounds can be expanded in two ways. For example, muṇaśevi - "vine-like ear" can be expanded into maṭatt-aì evam uṇaśevi or maṭin aṇga evi. The former way of expansion reveals the
fact that the prebound is in second case relation to the postbound. Čeṇāvareiyar says that if one is inclined to expand it in the former way it may be taken as 'vṛttumittokai'. Dr. P.S. Bāstri does not agree with Čeṇāvareiyar but he thinks that even though in the former instance the former member is in case-relation to the following member it is not so in the second one and hence uvariattokai cannot be classed as a species of vṛttumittokai. Prof. T.P. Meenakshisundaram thinks that uvariattokai is accusative compound and thus vṛttumittokai mentioned separately because of its importance in literature.

Čeṇāvareiyar and Prof. T.P. Meenakshisundaram are correct in their observations, since Tolkāppiyar also includes comparison as one of the shades of meaning denoted by the accusative case (6.7).

In 'uvariattokai' the prebound as well as the postbound is a noun, i.e., noun+noun. The postbound is the head and the prebound is attribute to the head, i.e., attribute → head.

The particle of comparison is elided between the two members of this compound (17.13).


According to Tolkāppiyar, 'vīṇāittokai' or the verb compound is in the nature of denoting tense.

E.g., kolyāṇai, ceykuṇru, atukāḷiru, etc.

Čeṇāvaraiyar opines that the prebound may be taken as a verbal noun (tolkāppiyar, 5.2) and refutes the view of Īḻampūraṇar that the compounds like kolkāḷiru are made up of verbs and nouns. Čeṇāvaraiyar agrees that there are compounds like kolkāḷiru, but he differs from Īḻampūraṇar as regards the prebound kol. Īḻampūraṇar
considers it as a curtailed form of participle. According to Dr. P.S. Sastri, the prepound is a participle denoting tense.

Prof. T.P. Kesanakrishundaran says "even verbal roots occur as attributes of nouns as in kolyāṇai. This is called vinasittokai; the first member of the compound is a verbal root as against the nominal roots elsewhere".

Thus it may be concluded that in 'vinasittokai' the prepound is a verbal root and the postpound is a noun, i.e., verbal root + noun. The postpound is the head and the prepound, its attribute, i.e., attribute → head.

The prepound verbal root can be expanded to denote the different tenses.

kolyāṇai  konra yāṇai - past.
           kollus yāṇai - nonpast

The verb compound is also capable of occurring as subject and of being declined as other single nouns.

19.10. Qualitative Compound.

'Panputtokai' or the qualitative compound is that in which the prepound is a stem denoting colour, shape, extent, taste, etc., and the postpound is qualified by the prepound in such a way as to indicate its nature.

karukkurai (colour)
vattakkal (shape)
kuṇuḍakal (extent)
tīnkarumpu (taste)
The numeral compounds where the preponderds denote the extent of number, also come under 'papputtokai' (4.19.1).

E.g., 
rupatu. 
āručir, etc.

The commentators think that the expressions like 
caipppampu, 
valakkarupu, etc., in which cārai, vālam, etc., are not denoting qualities, but indicating the particular species, should also be taken as 'papputtokai'.

In the qualitative compound, the preponder is a noun or adjectival stem and the post-poumd is a noun, i.e., noun + noun or adjectival stem + noun. The post-pounding is head and the preponder is its attribute, i.e., attribute → head.

The termination of the preponder is dropped when compounded with the post-poumd in 'papputtokai'.

19.11. Conjunctional Compound.

'Ummaittokai' or the conjunctional compound is that in which two nouns, many nouns, nouns of measurement, nouns denoting countable objects, nouns of weights or numerals (4.19.2) are combined together. It is evident from Tolkāppiyam that only the conjunctional compounds may be formed of more than two words.

E.g.,
kapilaparañar
āṭalpatañ
pulivikkantai (three free forms)

(puli-vi-nil-kantai)
In the conjunctival compounds, all the members are nouns, i.e., noun+noun or noun+noun+noun, and structurally they are of equal rank. The conjunctival particle -um is elided in between the members of this compound.

Tolkāppiyāṉar says that the conjunctival compounds having rational nouns as component parts, are of the nature of rational plural nouns. It means that they take the rational plural endings, e.g., kapilaparamār, kuracēlapāṭiṇār, etc (2.9.3).

Teyvaccilaiyār takes a different reading of the word 'pala' in the āṅgāra dealing with the above aspect as 'pala' and hence interprets that the conjunctival compounds of rational nouns are of the nature of many words. This interpretation does not help them to be considered as compounds and so it is not suitable in the context.


According to Tolkāppiyāṉar, 'ānājñittokai' or the metonymical compound is formed of the qualitative, conjunctival or declensional compound. The members of 'ānājñittokai' may stand to each other in any of the three relations, viz., qualifier-noun relation, conjunctiv-relaion or case relation.

E.g., 1. vellāṭai (vantaḷ) "white dress"
   "She who wears white dress came"

2. ṭakaraṇāḷal (puṇīṇāḷ)
   (ṭakaramu naḷalum čēnta
    čēntu puṇīṇāḷ)

3. pagaṭi (vantaḷ) "golden bangles"
   "She who has golden bangles came"
In these compounds something is understood after the postbound, which can be understood only from the contexts.

The commentators think that there are metonymical compounds formed of the other two compounds also (uvamattokai and vigaittekkai). Teyvaccilaiyar considers the metonymical compounds which may be formed of the verb compound and of the compound of comparison as a type of transferred nouns (ukuppye) 30.

The internal structure of the metonymical compounds are the same as already described under the concerned types of compounds.

From the semantic point of view ammolittekai is only a metonymic figure of speech to be discussed under semantics 31.

19.15. Significance of Meaning in Compounds.

Tolkappiyar says that in the above six kinds of compounds the emphasis or significance of meaning lies in four different ways, i.e., on the prebound, on the postbound, on both the prebound and postbound and neither on the prebound nor on the postbound but on something else 32. It is here evident that the classification of compounds according to their significant or head words was well recognized by Tolkappiyar.

In Tamil, the declensional compounds, the compounds of comparison, the verb compounds and the qualitative compounds have significance or emphasis of meaning usually on the postbounds. There is an exception of a few instances in the declensional compounds with sixth case relation, e.g., munina, munil, etc. In these compounds the significance of meaning lies on the prebound
In the conjunctival compounds the significance of meaning lies on all the members and in 'agamāttekai' it lies on none of the members but on something else.

Those compounds that have significance of meaning either on the prepound or on the post pound represent attributive constructions; those which have significance of meaning on all the members represent co-ordinate construction and those which have significance of meaning on none of the members are considered a class of metonymic figure of speech.


It is of interest to note that all the six kinds of compounds enumerated by Tolkāppiyānār are nominal compounds in the sense that their heads are nouns and they are of the same distribution as (single) nouns. They also occur as subjects and are capable of taking case markers.

E.g., yavaikkuventatu
      tuśiyatō saicantatu
      kolyagai vantatu
      cintamarei malammtatu
      atal-patal nechantatu
      pokkāli ventat

Tolkāppiyānār refers to the compounds in a sutra\(^{23}\) in Vērṇaye-mayaṇākilyal and says that they can also stand in the nominative case and take predicates. There in the sutra he makes use of the phrase 'peyariṇākīya tokayum' and thus identifies the compounds by the expression 'peyariṇākīya tokai'. Almost all the
Dr. P.S. Sastri takes it to mean compounds having nouns as their final member.

The particle 'um' in the phrase 'peyarिनākiya tokai-y-um' is differently interpreted by different scholiasts. According to Ilampūranaṉar and Nācīnārkkiṇīṉar, it suggests that there are compounds made of verbs and nouns, such as kolkāliyā, ceykār, etc. According to Cēvavārāiṉar, it suggests that there are compounds formed of nouns and verbs, such as nilaṃ kaṭantāṅ, nā-kkōṅantāṅ, etc. Dr. P.S. Sastri rightly thinks that the particle 'um' connects 'peyarīnākiya tokai' with 'peyar' which is referred to in the preceding sutras (that deal with the nouns standing in the nominative case and taking predicates).

It is evident that in the preceding sutras Tolkāppiyāṉar deals with the external distribution of nouns. So, one can rightly infer that while he adds 'peyarिनākiya tokai' with nouns, he refers to their external distribution only and not their internal structure, as all the commentators, wrongly interpret. Thus in the sūtra Tolkāppiyāṉar says that the compounds, which are of the same external distribution as that of nouns, take predicates occurring as subjects. Here 'peyarīnākiya tokai' literally means compounds like nouns and the particle 'um' suggests not only nouns but also compounds. Thus 'um' connects compounds with nouns.

According to Cēvavārāiṉar, there are compounds made up of nouns and verbs. Nācīnārkkiṇīṉar also thinks that there are compounds formed of nouns and verbs occurring as predicates, though
he does not take that it is suggested by the particle -'um'.

E.g., nilam kaṭantāṃ "(He) crossed the ground"

Cēṉavaṉaiyār cites such examples for 'vārūnmittekai'. In nilam kaṭantāṃ, kaṭantāṃ is a finite verb and nilam is its object. This is only a phrase consisting of two words. In phrases also the case marker can be elided. The following arguments will reveal the fact that the expressions like nilam kaṭantāṃ, are not compounds, according to Tolkāppiyānār.

1. Tolkāppiyānār nowhere explicitly states that a noun and a verb can form a compound.

2. The particle -'um' in 'pēyarin ṛāk ya tokayum' suggests that not only nouns mentioned in sutra, 66 and 68 (TC) but also compounds like nouns, can occur as subjects taking predicates. Thus it is evident that Cēṉavaṉaiyār wrongly interprets -'um' to suggest compounds made up of nouns and verbs.

3. In Tamil, the compounds are either attributive or co-ordinate constructions nilam kaṭantāṃ, māk kōruntāṅ, etc., belong to objective construction, which is a type of directive constructions. No compound enumerated in Tolkāppiyām occurs as a directive construction.

4. If the second member of nilam kaṭantāṃ is a verb, the expression as a whole cannot stand in the nominative case. Thus Cēṉavaṉaiyār's interpretation to include the phrases formed of nouns and verbs under compounds defeats the sole purpose of the sutra to describe the external distribution of the compounds.

Thus it may be concluded that all the compounds enumerated
in Telukuppiyan are nominal compounds from the point of view of their external distribution.

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Notes on Chapter XIX.

1. TC, 412-421.
2. TC, 421.
5. Genç, op. cit., TC, 412.
9. Ibid., p.228.
12. TC, 412.
13. Kida, Eugene, Morphology, p.94.
   Hockett, C.F., op. cit., 183-190.
14. TC, 413.

The constituent, whose privileges of occurrence are matched
by those of the constitute, is the head or centre; the other constituent is the attribute.

17. TC, 414.
18. Cāpa., op. cit., TC, 414.
21. TC, 415.
22. Cāpa., op. cit., TC, 415.
 probabil. op. cit., TC, 68, 409.
25. TC, 416.
26. TC, 417.
27. TC, 421.
29. TC, 418.
30. Tey., op. cit., TC, 412.
31. Nida, Eugene, Morphology, p. 94.

Ampollittokai is treated as an endocentric construction from the structural point of view. According to the description of Nida, it appears to be exocentric. For example, perroṭi (pop - toṭi) is a noun, and the nuclear constituent, i.e., toṭi is also a noun. But this nuclear constituent belongs to a class for which the pronominal substitute is 'it', whereas the construction perroṭi has the pronominal substitute 'she'.

perroṭi vantāl. "The woman who has golden bangles came"
Tōśi is to this extent not a member of the same distribution class and hence apojaditekai may, according to Nida, be treated as an exocentric construction.

Hockett prefers to class the constructions like 'apojaditekai' under endocentric, on the formal grounds.

(op. cit., p.185)

32. TC, 419.
33. TC, 67.
34. Sastrī, P.B., op. cit., TC, 67.
35. Ila., op. cit., TC, 68.
Nac., op. cit., TC, 68.
36. Čemā., op. cit., TC, 67.
38. TC, 68, 68.
Sastrī, P.B., op. cit., TC, 77.

In the phrase 'peyar-in ākiya tokai' -in- may be taken as fifth case marker denoting comparison (6.10).

40. Čemā., op. cit., TC, 420.

"Čemāvaraiyar is very obstinate in considering it (nilam kaṭantān) a compound. The reason he adduces in support of his opinion is that in TE, 133 Tolkāppiyār has stated that a noun, which has its case suffix dropped, is combined with the following verb so as to form a compound".

Ilampārapar gives a different interpretation to the same. When a noun with, or without, a case marker is followed by a verb, it is treated as a separate word. When a noun with, or without,
a case marker is followed by a verbal noun (class III), it is
treated as a part of a compound of which the verbal noun forms
the second part (postpound)

(Ref. Sastri, P.S., EGT., pp.214, 215)

According to the interpretation of Iṣampūraṇar,
ilam kātantaṁ is a compound, when kātantaṁ is a participial
noun (cf. A Commentary on TE, 133 by Iṣampūraṇar).


According to the descriptions of Hockett, the expressions
like 'nilam kātantaṁ' may be treated as a directive construction
and thus, it can be taken only as a phrase.