



VEDA'S

JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (JOELL)

An International Peer Reviewed (Refereed) Journal

Impact Factor (SJIF) 6.018

<http://www.joell.in>

Vol.11, No. 2

(April-June)

2024

RESEARCH ARTICLE



COMPOUNDING PATTERNS IN TAI AITON LANGUAGE

Unmesha Dutta

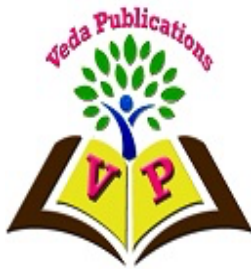
(Ph.D Research Scholar, Assam University, Silchar)

E-mail: unmeshadutta6@gmail.com

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2024.11208>

ABSTRACT

Compounding is a process of word formation in which new words are formed with two or more roots. It is a common phenomenon of the word formation process in Tai-Kadai languages. The paper is an attempt to explore the compounding patterns in Tai Aiton language- a south-western language from the Tai-Kadai group. Tai Aiton is an endangered language of North-East India, spoken by the Aiton people inhabitant of the Indian state Assam. Thus the paper explores the aspect of compounding in Tai Aiton highlighting its types and structures from a descriptive approach of analysing the field data.



Article history:

Received on : 11-05-2024

Accepted on : 22-05-2024

Available online: 30-06-2024

Keywords: *Tai Aiton language, Tai-Kadai language, compounding, critically endangered language*

Author(s) retain the copyright of this article

Copyright© 2024 VEDAPublications

Author(s) agree that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons

Attribution License 4.0 International License



1. INTRODUCTION

The Tai languages are spoken mainly in the southeast part of Asia and southern China. Sir George Abraham Grierson stated Tai group of languages as a combined branch called 'Siamese-Chinese' under the Proto Sino-Tibetan language family (Grierson, 1903). Although this classification is followed by a large number of scholars but a major initiative was taken by Paul k. Benedict in 1972. Benedict snapped the linkage of Tai languages and deconstructed the Siamese-Chinese or Sino-Tibetan language family and established a new family called the 'Tai-Kadai' language family (Benedict, 1972). Tai languages are the largest groups within the Tai-Kadai language family. The languages are spoken mostly in southeast and east Asia. The Tai languages can be broadly divided into three groups namely, The South-Western Group, The Central Group, and The Northern Group. The names of these groups are based on the geographical areas of the Tai inhabitants. It is the South-Western Group of Tai languages that the Tai Aiton or Aiton language falls under (Phukon, 2021). There are presently eight Aiton villages found in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Three of them are Duburoni Shyam Gaon, Tengani Shyam Gaon, Borhola Shyam Gaon, of Golaghat district, and the other five are Ahomani Shyam Gaon, Bargaon Shyam Gaon, Chakihola Shyam Gaon, Kaliani Shyam Gaon, Balipathar of Karbi Anglong district of Assam, India. In comparison to other Tai groups, the Aiton still has a good number of speakers including the grandparents and parents. The population of Tai Aiton people is about 2000 in number as estimated by the community.

"Word-Formation is that branch of the science of language which studies the patterns on which a language forms new lexical units i.e., words. Word formation can only be concerned with composites, which are analyzable both formally and semantically" (Marchand, 1969). There are different processes in which new words are formed in a language. Compounding is one such process of word formation in Tai Aiton language. In other words it can be said that it is one of the most productive morphological process in the language. In Tai Aiton, compounding is done by adding two or more roots. Each root carries some meaning. Sometimes the final word inherit the meaning and word class of one of the roots and sometimes they are completely new; which is completely different from the individual or combined meaning of the roots.

2. OBJECTIVES

Compounding is a process which has a great impact in the word formation process of Tai Aiton language. Therefore, a detailed linguistic work has been attempted to describe the compounding patterns in the language. Although the community is very rich in oral literature and some socio-cultural works but it is very limited in the field of linguistics. Thus the present study will try to enrich a little bit in that area. While studying the compounding patterns of Tai Aiton, attempts will be made to identify different types of compounds- semantic or structural and various ways of forming them. The study will try to present an authentic structure of the compounds in the language and will present how the process contributes to increase the vocabulary of the language.



3. METHODOLOGY

The present study deals with a morphological process called compounding and it is based on the linguistic point of view. It is mainly based on primary source-data collected from field visit. Interview method has been adopted for the collection of data. People of different age group of sex and occupation have been interviewed for the collection of appropriate data. The collected data than have been cross checked with the other speakers of the same language for the consistency and authenticity of the same.

Data for the study has also been collected from secondary sources which include available written material in the form of books, journals, articles etc.

4. COMPOUNDING PATTERNS IN TAI AITON

Compounding is a word formation process based on the combination of lexical elements (words or stems) (Hacken, Mar 2017). It is a highly productive morphological process in Tai Aiton language. There are many types of compounding in the language. These sub-types may be considered in terms of both structural and semantic aspects. At a lexical level, Tai Aiton compounds are usually formed by juxtaposing two or more words, ranging up to a combination of five or even more words. For example,

4.1. Lexical Compounds:

4.1.1. Two-word Compounding:

(1) $p^ha+daam > p^ha daam$

sky+black>'cloudy'

(2) $mɔ+k^hau > mɔ khau$

a cooking pot+rice>'rice cooking pot'

4.1.2. Three word compounding:

(1) $ma:k+pak+k^ham > ma:k pak k^ham$

fruit+vine+to indicate pumpkin>'pumpkin'

(2) $k^hau+kan+nau > k^hau kan nau$

rice+middle+morning>'breakfast'

4.1.3. Four word compounding:

(1) $wan+anai+kan+k^ham > wan anai kan k^ham$

day+this+morning+sunset> 'tonight'

(2) $p^ha+ba+p^ha+p^hun > p^ha ba p^ha p^hun$

weather+strom+cloud+rain> 'thunder storm'

4.1.4. Five word compounding:

(1) $p^hak+pakat+hau+tum+na:m > p^hak pakat hau tum na:m$

herb+pot-herb+cabbage+boil+water>'boiled cabbage'

According to the semantic aspect the compounds in Tai Aiton, it can be divided into three types- endocentric, exocentric and copulative compounds. According to the structural aspect the compounds can be classified as- root compounding, noun forming compounds, verb compounds, adjectival compounds, adverbial compounds and compound numerals. For the convenience of the present study the compound patterns are classified into four as- semantic compounds, root compound, structural compounds and compound numerals.

4.2. Semantic Compounds:

Only three types of semantic compounds are found in Tai Aiton and they are endocentric, exocentric and copulative compounds. Of them endocentric compounds constitute a large set of compounds whereas exocentric compounds are fewer in number.

4.2.1. Endocentric Compounds:

An endocentric compound consists of a head which is the categorical part that contains the basic meaning of the whole compound and a modifier that restricts and modifies its meaning. Endocentric compound is a



type of compound in which one member functions as the head and the other as its modifier, attributing a property to the head (Buragohain, 2019). In short the central meanings of this type of compounds are carried by the head. In most of the endocentric compounds in Tai Aiton the head is on the left- 'left headed compounds'. Although right headed compounds are also found in the language but they are very few in numbers. The following examples show the possible formation of endocentric compounds in Tai Aiton:

Left-headed endocentric compounds:

(8) *kun +ma >kun ma*
man+mad>'madman'

(9) *ka+na:m>ka na:m*
crow+water>'dipper'

(10) *baou ɔn>baou ɔn*
leaf+small>'tender leaf'

(11) *kai+t^hun>kai t^hun*
cock+grassy land>'wild fowl'

(12) *p^hai+tek>p^hai tek*
fire+spark>'spark of fire'

Right-headed endocentric compounds:

(13) *luk+wu>luk wu*
small+cow>'calf'

(14) *t^han+p^hai>t^han p^hai*
coal+fire>'burning coal'

(15) *mɔ+k^hau>mɔ k^hau*
a cooking pot+rice>'rice cooking pot'

From the above examples it has been observed that the endocentric compounds are formation of a head, mostly noun and a modifier, which can be noun, verb, adjective and sometimes adverbs. The head consists the basic meaning of the lexeme as in example (2) where *ka* in *ka na:m* refers to a kind of crow that is seen in water areas like pond, river etc. the second part of the lexeme acts as a modifier to the head making it water crow or dipper. The same can be observed in all the examples. The left headed endocentric compounds occupy a major area in the compound formation in particular and word formation process in general. Right headed endocentric compounds are very few in Tai Aiton language. Observations show that these right headed compounds may be an influence of the Indo-Aryan language Assamese because it is the dominant language of the valley where the Aiton people inhabit. Assamese is very much rich in their right-headed formation thus the same in Tai Aiton may be a later inclusion from the influence of the Assamese speakers.

4.2.2. Exocentric Compound:

Exocentric compounds are compounds where the central meaning isn't carried by the head. In this type of compounds the meaning is external to the literal meaning of the compound (Saha, 2022). Thus an exocentric compound is a compound word that is not a hyponym of its grammatical head. For examples;

(1) *mai+tem> mai tem*
stick+to write>'pen'

(2) *p^ha+da:m>p^ha da:m*
sky+black>'cloudy'



(3) *ap+na:m>ap na:m*

to wash+water>'bathroom'

The meaning of an exocentric compound does not follow from the meaning of the parts participated in the compounding process. As in example (3) where *ap* meaning 'to wash' and *na:m* meaning 'water' doesn't imply wash water of washing water but a place where one washes or cleans himself/herself using water-the bathroom. Although a limited number of exocentric compounds are found in the language in comparison to endocentric compounds but they definitely play a vital role in the word formation process.

4.2.3. Copulative compound:

Copulative compounds are compounds that have two semantic heads. In this type of compounds, all the parts of the word share the same status. All the parts of such compounds function as the head of the word since we do not find any particular head to specify the word class. Consider following examples for copulative compound:

(1) *p^ha+mi>p^ha mi*

husband+wife>'husband-wife'

(2) *aŋ+wan>aŋ wan*

plate+bowl>'plate-bowl'

(3) *pɔ+me>pɔ me*

father+mother>'parents'

(4) *taikɔ+taisi>taikɔ taisi*

malefriend+femalefriend>friend

4.3. Root Compounding:

In morphology, a root compound is a compound construction in which the head element is not derived from a verb. They are made up of free morphemes and the semantic relations between the elements are not inherently restricted. In Tai Aiton root compounds are very common in the names of birds, fish, vegetables and fruits etc. The following examples describe the root compounds in Tai Aiton language:

4.3.1. Names of Birds (free + bound = noun):

In Tai Aiton *nuk* is a free morpheme meaning 'bird' is attached to many bound morphemes to form the names of birds in the language. Most of the bird's names in the language are formed by the exact process. For instance:

(5) *nuk+tu>nuk tu*

bird+to indicate dove>'dove'

(6) *nuk+zəŋ>nuk zəŋ*

bird+to indicate heron>'heron'

(7) *nuk+kau>nuk kau*

bird+to indicate owl>'owl'

(8) *nuk+kiu>nuk kiu*

bird+to indicate myna>'myna'

(9) *nuk+sɔk>nuk sɔk*

bird+to indicate sparrow> sparrow

4.3.2. Names of fish (free + bound = noun):

In Tai Aiton most of the fishes' names are formed by adding the free root *pa* meaning 'fish' to the bound roots to indicate a specific kind of fish. For example:



(10) *pa+hulun>pa hulun*

fish+to indicate a kind of large fish>'bahu,catla'(popular northeast Indian names)

(11) *pa+sio>pasio*

fish+to indicate a kind of small fish>'muwa' popular northeast Indian names)

(12) *pa+jun>pa jun*

fish+to indicate an eel>'kusiya'(popular northeast Indian names)

(13) *pa + k^ha > pa k^ha*

fish+to indicate a porpoise>'dolphin'

4.3.3. Names of fruits and vegetable (free+bound=noun):

ma:k meaning 'fruit' is the free root added to bound roots to form the names of fruits and vegetables in the language. For example:

(14) *ma:k+lan>ma:k lan*

fruit+ to indicate jakefruit>'jakefruit'

(15) *ma:k +k^hɔ>ma:k k^hɔ*

fruit+ to indicate Chinese date>'Chinese date'

(16) *ma:k+ pwn>ma:k pwn*

fruit+ 'to indicate coconut>'coconut'

(17) *ma:k+ teŋ>ma:k teŋ*

fruit+ to indicate cucumber>'cucumber'

(18) *ma:k+ p^hit>ma:k p^hit*

fruit+ to indicate chilli>'chilli'

4.4. Structural compounding:

In Tai Aiton many nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are formed by the process of compounding. All these type of compounds are included in the classification. The different types of noun, verb, adjective and adverbs in this process are discussed below with suitable examples.

4.4.1. Noun formation by compounding:

A large number of nouns in Tai Aiton language are formed by the process compounding. While compounding the nouns Tai Aiton language shows various structural patterns such as- Noun+Noun>Noun, Noun+Verb>Noun, Noun+Adjective>Noun, Noun+Adjective+Noun>Noun, Noun+Verb+Noun>Noun, Noun+Noun+Adverb>Noun. The following examples show different noun structures in Tai Aiton language.

Noun+Noun>Noun

(1) *me+kɔ>me kɔ*

mother+friend>'the female friend of parents'

(2) *k^hun+ta>k^hun ta*

eye+terminal hair>'eyebrow'

(3) *kun+ t^hwn>kun t^hwn*

man+forest>'ape'

Noun+Verb>Noun

(4) *ti+k^hi>ti k^hi*

place+to toilet>'toilet'

(5) *k^hau+lam>k^hau lam*

rice+ to burn>'rice prepared in a bamboo tube'



(6) *k^hau+sen>k^hau sen*

rice+to fry>'fried rice'

Noun+Adjective>Noun

(7) *pɔ+na>pɔ na*

father+maternal>'husband of mother's younger sister'

(8) *pɔ+ t^hao>pɔ t^hao*

father+old>'an old man'

(9) *me+en> me en*

mother+ small>'mother's younger sister'

(10) *k^hau+niu>k^hau niu*

rice+sticky>'sticky rice'

Noun+Adjective+Noun>Noun

(11) *ma:k+pak+k^ham> ma:k pak k^ham*

fruit+vine+ to indicate pumpkin>'pumpkin'

(12) *ma:k+pak+mun> ma:k pak mun*

fruit+ vine+ to indicate white gourd>'white gourd'

(13) *k^hau+ kaŋ+ nau> k^hau kaŋ nau*

rice+middle+morning>'breakfast'

Noun+Verb+Noun>Noun

(14) *hwn +taŋ+k^hau> hwn taŋ k^hau*

house+cook+ rice>'kitchen'

(15) *hwn + a:p+na:m> hwn a:p na:m*

place + to wash+water>'bathroom'

(16) *k^hem+yap+p^ha> k^hem yap*

needle+stitching+cloth> cloth stitching needle

Noun+Noun+Adverb>Noun

(17) *kun+ muŋ+ anai>kun muŋ anai*

man+country+this>native

4.4.2. Verb formation by compounding:

Compound verbs in Tai Aiton are formed by Verb+Noun>Noun and Verb+Verb>Verb compounding process. These processes are described below:

Verb+Noun>Verb

(18) *hut+nin> hut nin*

to dig+soil> 'digging'

(19) *k^hut+ nwt> k^hut nwt*

to dig+bread> 'shave'

(20) *taŋ+k^hau>taŋ k^hau*

cook+rice> 'to prepare rice'

Verb+Verb>Verb

(1) *tuŋ+kin>tuŋ kin*

receive+eat>'bagging'

(2) *tŋam+wa>tŋam wa*

to test+to speak>'try to tell'

4.4.3. Adjective formation by compounding:

Adjectives in Tai Aiton are also formed by the process of compounding. Noun+Adjective>Adjective and Adjective+Noun>Noun are the two compounding process in which adjectives are formed in the language. For example:

Noun+Adjective>Adjective

(3) *p^hum+k^hao> p^hum k^hao*

hair+gray> 'gray hair'

(4) *sw+un> sw un*

shirt+loose>'loosly fitted shirt'

(5) *kun+p^hai>kun p^hai*

man+smart> 'intelligent man'



Adjective+Adjective>Adjective

(6) *k^hao+panpan > k^hao panpan*

white+sense of white light> 'excess white'

(7) *leŋ+phephe > leŋ phephe*

red+sense of red light> excess black

4.4.3. Adverb formation by compounding:

A small number of adverbs in Tai Aiton language are also formed by the compounding process. The only structure for compound adverbs found in the language is Adverb+Noun>Adverb. The following examples illustrate the compound adverbs in Tai Aiton language.

Adverb+Noun>Adverb

(8) *tai+hwn > tai hwn*

near+houn>'near the house'

(9) *tai+ta > tai ta*

near+eye> 'in front of eye's'

(10) *ka+nɔk > ka nɔk*

wall+outside> 'outside the house'

(11) *ka+ mu > ka mu*

wall+inside> 'inside the house'

4.5. Compound Numerals:

Compound Numerals are numerals which are a combination of two or more numerals. Compound numerals in Tai Aiton can be divided into three categories: Additive Compound numerals, Multiplicative Compound Numerals and Additive cum Multiplicative Compound Numerals.

4.5.1. Additive Compound Numerals

The numerals from 11 to 19 and 21 to 29 are formed by the summation of basic numerals. Examples of

Additive Numerals in Tai Aiton language can be illustrated below:

(12) *sip+it > sip it*

ten+ one> 'eleven'

(13) *sip+ha:> sip ha:*

ten+five>'fifteen'

(14) *sau+huk > sau huk*

twenty+six> 'twenty six'

4.5.2. Multiplicative Compound Numerals

The decade numerals from 30 to 90 and the century numerals from 100 to 900 and the mega numerals from 1000 to 9000 all are multiplicative compound numerals in Tai Aiton language. For example:

(15) *sa:m+sip > sa:m sip*

three+ten> 'thirty'

(16) *pet+pak > pet pak*

eight+hundred> 'eight hundred'

(17) *si+hiŋ > si hiŋ*

four+thousand> four thousand'

4.5.3. Multiplicative cum Additive compound numerals

This type of numerals in Tai Aiton language is formed with the notions of multiplication of the first two numerals and then the summation of the third one.

Numerals from 31-39, 41-49, 51-59,

and 61-69 71-79 81-89 91-99 are formed by this process. For example:

(1) *sa:m+sip+it > sa:m sip it*

three+ten+one> 'thirty one'



(2) *huk+sip+ha:*>*huk sip ha:*

six+ten+five> 'sixty five'

(3) *pet+sip+sɔŋ*> *petsipsɔŋ*

eight+ten+two> 'eighty two'

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The present study is an attempt to discuss various compounding patterns found in Tai Aiton language. The study proves that compounding can be placed among the most productive morphological process in the language. Semantically three types of compounds are present in the language namely- endocentric compounds, exocentric compounds and copulative compounds. The language lacks appositional compounds. Many nouns in Tai Aiton are formed by adding and free root to a bound root; for example:

(4) *pa+huluŋ*> *pa huluŋ*

fish+to indicate a kind of large fish>'bahu,catla'(popular northeast Indian names)

(5) *nwk+tu*> *nwk tu*

bird+to indicate dove> 'dove'

These types of compounds are discussed under the sub-heading root compounding in the paper. The names of fruits, birds, vegetables, fish etc. are formed using this method. When we look at the structural point of view a good number of nouns are formed in Tai Aiton using compounding process. Tai Aiton language shows various structural patterns in noun formation such as-

Noun+Noun>Noun,

Noun+Verb>Noun,

Noun+Adjective>Noun,

Noun+Adjective+Noun>Noun,

Noun+Verb+Noun>Noun,

Noun+Noun+Adverb>Noun.

Besides nouns a significant number of verbs, adjectives and adverbs are also formed using the same method. The higher numerals in the language are also formed by compounding process. Numerals starting from 11 to all the higher numerals are formed by the same process.

Thus to conclude it can be said that although there is a wide range of word formation process in Tai Aiton language but compounding plays a significant role in the process. The monosyllabic nature of lexemes makes way for this richness in compounds. The language demonstrates a great number in both semantic and syntactic compound types.

REFERENCES

- Proceeding. (1998).* Institute of Language and Cultural for rural Development (p. *Proceeding of International Conference o Tai Studies*). Bangkok: Mahidhal University.
- Benedict, P. K. (1972).* Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brahma, A. (JSEALS 14.1 (2021)).* Word Formation in Dimasa. Journal of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society, i-xviii.
- Buragohain, D. (2019).* Compounding in Tai Ahom: A Descriptive Study. Education and Linguistics Research, 103-116.
- Gogoi, N. (2018).* Tai Aiton Asomiya Engraji Sabdokosh. Guwahati: Bhabani Offset and Imagining System Pvt. Ltd.
- Grierson, G. (1903).* Linguistic Survey of India. Calcutta: Calcutta office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.
- Hacken, P. t. (Mar 2017).* Compounding in Morphology. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics.
- Kakoty, D. (2020).* Tai Aiton(Assam,India)-Language Snapshot. Language Documentation and Description, 76-81.
- Marchand, H. (1969).* The categories and types of present day English word-formation. München: Verlag C. H. Beck.
- Morey, S. (2005).* The Tai Languages of Assam: a grammar and texts. Australia: Pacific Linguistics Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200.
- Phukon, G. (2021).* Tais of Northeast India and Southeast Asia. Guwahati, Assam, India: H.B Road, Panbazar, Guwahati-781001, Assam, India.



Saha, R. (2022, May 2). *Word Formation in Tai Phake*(M.phil Dissertation). Word Formation in Tai Phake. Cachar, Assam, India: Assam University, Silchar.

UNESCO [6197]. (2010). Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger. Retrieved August 30, 2023, from UNESCO Digital Library:
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000187026>
