

THE INSTRUMENTAL CASE IN MODERN TAMIL

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THE DEFINITION OF 'CASE'

The term 'case' has been defined and understood in different ways by various scholars. For instance, Lehmann (1958:187) believes that "a particular case is non-existent unless it is represented by forms which contrast in a system with others." He recognises a 'case' by the presence of a suffix or particle that occurs together with a particular noun. From Lehmann (1958:187), we also understand that Hirt (1905-7) on the other hand believed that "a 'case' was a notional category, whether or not it was exemplified in a form."

Association of certain 'cases' with certain 'case-endings' is not a new concept; it is to be found especially in inflectional languages. For example, it is normal for the Tamil speakers to associate the accusative case with the suffix *-ai*, the dative case with the suffix *-ku*, etc. However, it would be misleading to assign one 'casal-meaning' to one 'case-suffix'. This point can be illustrated by the following examples:

1. avaḷ kūṭaiyaip pūkkaḷāḷ nirappiṇāḷ
'She filled the basket with flowers'
(= avaḷ kūṭaiyil pūkkaḷai nirappiṇāḷ)
'She put the flowers into the basket'
2. avaṇ poṇṇai nakaiyākkiṇāṇ
'He made the gold into a jewel'
(= avaṇ poṇṇāḷ nakaiyai ākkiṇāṇ)
'He made a jewel with the gold'

In sentence 1, the suffix *-ai* is used in the locative¹ meaning since the flowers are put into the basket. In sentence 2 though the gold is the affected object, it is used as the material out of which the jewel is made; this shows that *-ai* indicates the material 'case' in this sentence. Hence, it would be clear that although the suffix *-ai* is generally known as the accusative suffix, it also acquires other meanings according to the context in which it occurs.

Therefore, mere morphological realization of a 'case', i.e., identifying a 'case' with the mere form of a particular 'case-ending' is inadequate. The syntactic environment and the semantic

¹ *nūṭṭpā* 568 to 574 and 580 of *Tolkāppiyam* give the case suffixes that can alternate with the second case suffix *-ai* in certain contexts. It will be worth while to note that according to these *nūṭṭpā* the suffix *-ai* alternates with either the seventh case suffix *-kaṇ* or the fifth case suffix *-iṇ*. *-kaṇ* is generally identified as the locative suffix while *-iṇ* is associated with the ablative meaning which is included within the locative case at times. These facts indicate that *Tolkāppiyam* had understood the second case as indicative of goal, whether it be concrete or abstract.

implication should be taken into account for the correct understanding of a particular 'case'.² In other words, the term 'case' means the grammatical relationship that exists between the verbal predicate and each of the nouns that occur in a sentence; in the case of genitive case, it would be the grammatical relationship between two nouns at the surface level. The same idea is conveyed by Fillmore (1968:21) when he says: 'I shall adopt the usage first proposed, as far as I can tell, by Blake (1930), of using the term 'case' to identify the underlying syntactic-semantic relationship, and the terms 'case form' to mean the expression of a case relationship in a particular language — whether through affixation, suppletion, use of clitic particles, or constraints in word order.'

The realization of such a complex nature of 'cases' has inspired the present linguists to carry out detailed studies on 'cases' on a syntactic as well as semantic basis. It should be noted, however, that the traditional grammarians also were aware of the fact that varied meanings could be associated with a particular case form. In his chapter on cases, the author of the oldest extant Tamil Grammar entitled *Tolkāppiyam*, gives the various meanings for each of the case suffixes. In the subsequent chapter he also deals with the contextual substitutability of one case suffix in place of another.³ When the English grammarians identify the dative meaning of the preposition 'to' from its other meaning, namely, the dative of direction, they are aware of the contextual meaning of the preposition 'to'.

It, therefore, becomes obvious that a proper understanding of the 'cases' can only be gained through a syntactic-cum-semantic oriented study of them.

THE DEFINITION OF THE INSTRUMENTAL CASE

The Instrumental case has also been defined from the viewpoints of syntax and semantics.

The syntactic definition of the Instrumental case that can be inferred from the words of Nilsen (1973:19) is that a noun phrase is to be considered Instrumental if and only if it could be the object of both 'with' and 'use' and still carry the same meaning.

Fillmore (1968:24) defines the Instrumental deep-case as "the case of the inanimate force or object causally involved in the action or state identified by the verb."

In his book, *Toward a Semantic Specification of Deep Case* (1972:37), Nilsen has tried to identify the various 'cases' in relation to three paired semantic features. In other words, Nilsen

²See also Sam Daniel (1976:63). In his article entitled, "A Syntactic Study of Instrumental Case in Tamil", he has emphasised that both semantic and syntactic criteria are necessary for the determination of case grammars. In doing so he has discussed some of the syntactic and semantic characteristics of the different kinds of Instrumental cases; but the present article makes an attempt to study the various functions of *-āi*, sort out those functions which are basically instrumental in nature and give the syntactic and semantic differences between the four meanings/functions viz., tool, material, cause and means, which belong to the deep instrumental case.

³Tolkāppiyar has not defined 'case' in an explicit manner anywhere in his work. The author of *Nappūl* defines 'case' as "those suffixes which change the meanings of the nouns to which they are suffixed" (*Nappūl*:291). This definition is also not as complete as that derived at in the present article. For instance, the definition of *Nappūl* does not emphasise explicitly that a case is recognised by the change in the syntactic function of a noun in a sentence. Only Teyvaccilaiyār, one of the commentators of *Tolkāppiyam Collatikāram* has explained case in such a manner which at least implies that the syntactic function of a noun is changed when a case suffix is affixed to it. He says that a case converts a noun into an agent, an object, an instrument, etc. (Refer Teyvaccilaiyār's commentary for *nūppā* 61 to *Tolkāppiyam Collatikāram*).

has given the semantic definition of the Instrumental case by way of giving its distinct semantic features. The features of the three relevant cases are as follows:

	Controller	Controlled	Cause	Effect	Source	Goal
Agent	+		+		+	
Instrumental		+	+	+	+	+
Causative			+		+	

From the chart given above, it can be noticed that a noun in the Agentive case will be the controller of another noun and therefore be the cause and source for the action of the second noun. A noun in the Instrumental case cannot be a controller of another noun; but it will be the noun controlled by the one in the Agentive case. Besides reflecting the effect and the goal of the agent's action, the noun in the Instrumental case will also be the cause and source of the action which affects a third noun which is in the objective case. As regards the noun which is in the Causative case, it does not control another noun; neither is it controlled by another noun. Nevertheless, it would be the cause as well as the source for the occurrence of an action.

Though the approaches towards the definition of the instrumental case seem different, all the three citations above reflect more or less a similar concept about the case, i.e., all the three require the noun in the Instrumental case to be controlled by an agent so that it would result in an action that affects another noun in the objective case. By comparing these citations, the following semantic definition can be given to the instrumental case: a noun phrase is said to be in the instrumental case, if the object concerned is used by an agent to cause an action that affects another object.

A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF THE TAMIL INSTRUMENTAL CASE

The instrumental case is considered as the third case in Tamil. It is generally associated with the suffix *-āḷ* and the particle *koṇṭu*:

3. *rāmu ūciyāl/ūcikoṇṭu kuttināṅ.*
'Ramu pricked with a needle.'

It has been stated earlier that it is impossible to allot a one-to-one meaning to any one of the case suffixes; the suffix *-āḷ* is not an exception to this. It acquires various meanings according to the various contexts. A few examples would illustrate this point clearly:

4. *avaṅ tuppākkiyāl cuṭṭāṅ.*
'He shot with a gun' (Tool)

5. avaḷ kaiyāl taittāl.
'She sewed with (her) hands.' (Tool)⁴
6. avan kallāl viṭu kaṭṭiṇaṅ.
'He built (a) house with stones.' (Material)⁵
7. puyalāl maram viḷuntatu
'The tree fell (down) because of the storm.' (Cause-natural force)
8. maḷaiyāl vellam vantatu.
'There was flood because of rain.' (Cause-natural force)
9. avaṅ tiruṭṭāl keṭṭāṅ.
'He ruined himself because of theft.' (Cause)
10. avaṅ tiruṭṭāl celvaṅ āṇāṅ.
'He became (a) rich man because of/'through' theft.' (Means)
11. avaṅ paṇattāl arici vāṅkiṇāṅ.
'He bought rice with money.' (Means)
12. maraṅkal avaṅḷ veṭṭappaṭṭaṅa.
'The trees were cut down by him.' (Agent)
13. eṇṇāl ataic ceyya muṭiyum.
'I can do that.' (Agent)
14. nāṅ avaṅḷ piḷaitteṅ.
'I survived because of him.' (Agent)⁶

⁴As regards the instrumental nouns in sentences 4 and 5, a distinction is generally made by naming the one in sentence 4 as 'tool' and the one in sentence 5 as 'body part'. Nilsen (1973-57) states thus: Later, in discussion related to Cause and controllability, a suggestion will be made that there is a hierarchy of Instrumentality. In this hierarchy, Body parts will be considered primary Instruments; Tools will be considered secondary Instruments; and Materials will be considered tertiary Instruments; As there is no significant syntactic and semantic distinction between 'Body part' and 'Tool' both are considered as 'Tool' in the present article.

⁵The term *ataṅiṅ iyaṅal* ('being composed of it') in *Tolkāppiyam: nūṟpā* 558, denotes the Material case. The commentators call it as *mutaṅkāraṅam* ('the first cause') and the instrument or tool, which is used to construct a particular thing, as *tunaikkāraṅam* ('the auxiliary cause'). Refer Naccinārkkinṅiyar's commentary for *nūṟpā* 74 of *Tolkāppiyam-Collatikāraṅam*.

⁶This sentence implies that 'he did something; therefore I survived'; hence it is implied that 'he' is agent at the deep level. In this case 'he' is a direct agent who is personally taking part in the 'act of saving'. Nevertheless, 'he' need not personally take part in the 'act of saving'; in this case 'he' would be the 'indirect agent'. This more or less corresponds with the idea of *ēvutal karttā* ('commanding agent') and *iyarṅutal karttā* ('performing agent') put forth by the Tamil commentators.

In old Tamil, *-āṇ*⁷ occurs with other meanings also:

15. 'oru miṇ viḷuntanrāl vicumpiṇāṇē (Puṛaṇāṇūru, 229:12)
'One star fell from the sky.' (Ablative)
16. 'avaḷ vakutta pacuṅkutaiyāṇ,
putaṇ mullaip pūppariḱkuntu.' (Puṛaṇāṇūru, 352:3-4)
'She plucks the mullai flowers off the shrub and puts them
in a green palm leaf basket made by her.' (Locative)⁸
17. 'tūṅku kaiyāṇ ṍṅku naṭaiya.' (Puṛaṇāṇūru, 22:1)
'Those (elephants) with moving trunks and majestic gait.' (Association)

The fourteen examples (sentences 4-17) illustrate the fact that a particular case cannot be identified by the mere morphological form of a 'case-suffix'. As regards the suffix *-āḷ*, its major function is to indicate the Instrumental case and secondly the Agentive case.⁹ Although the first eight examples (sentence 4-11) seem to represent four different functions of *-āḷ*, it can be shown that all the four are different surface manifestations of the deep instrumental case.

The 'use-with' test adopted in English to confirm the instrumental case can be used in Tamil also. It can be tested whether the suffix *-āḷ* can be replaced by '*-ai + payaṇpaṭutti*' in a sentence without changing its meaning.¹⁰ The examples other than sentences 7-9 can be paraphrased by using the verbal participle *payaṇpaṭutti* ('using') without change of meaning:

- 4a. avaṇ tuppāḱkiyaip payaṇpaṭuttic cuṭṭāṇ.
- 5a. avaḷ kaiyaip payaṇpaṭuttit taittāl.
- 6a. avaṇ kallaip payaṇpaṭutti viṭu kaṭṭiṇāṇ.
- 7a *¹¹ puyalaip payaṇpaṭutti maram viḷuntatu.
- 8a. *maḷaiyaip payaṇpaṭutti vellam vantatu.
- 9a. *avaṇ tiruṭṭaip payaṇpaṭuttic keṭṭāṇ.
- 10a. avaṇ tiruṭṭaip payaṇpaṭuttic celvaṇ āṇāṇ.
- 11a. avaṇ paṇattaip payaṇpaṭutti arici vāṅkiṇāṇ.

⁷The original form of *-āḷ*; is *-āṇ*; although *-āḷ* is used as the main instrumental suffix in Modern Tamil, *-āṇ* is still used as an allomorph of *-āḷ*.

⁸In *nūrpā* 333 of *Tolkāppiyam*, *āṇ* is given as a demonstrative noun having the meaning 'there'; this may be the reason for using *-āṇ* in the locative sense even in *Tolkāppiyam* itself: *mūviṭattāṇ (nūrpā 910)* and *iruvirraṇ (nūrpā 919)*.

⁹The traditional grammarians were aware of this fact, *nurpa* 557 of *Tolkāppiyam* states that 'third case suffix is *-oḷu* and it has as its basis the agentive and instrumental meanings'. This explanation suggests that *Tolkāppiyar* was aware that these two were the underlying/deep meanings of the third case suffix, although he did not state it in an overt manner. Though *nūrpā* 297 of *Nannūḷ* reflects this concept, it also includes the associative meaning to the third case-suffix. This shows that *Nannūḷ* does not differentiate between the deep and surface meanings of a case-suffix.

¹⁰Sam Daniel (1976:51-52) uses '*-ai + upayōkittu*' to test the possibility of replacing *-āḷ* in a sentence.

¹¹The astrisk is use to indicate that the corresponding construction is not at all acceptable to the ears of the Tamil speakers.

The fact that the term *payanpaṭutti* can be used in sentences 4a, 5a, 6a, 10a, and 11a shows that they are clear instances of instrumentals since something is being used to do something else. As *payanpaṭutti* cannot be used in sentences 7a, 8a and 9a what is the motivation to consider them as instrumentals? The term *payanpaṭutti* cannot be used in these instances because of the nature of the nouns used in those sentences; *puyal* ('storm') and *maḷai* ('rain') are natural forces and they cannot be used/controlled by human beings to do some work. On the other hand, natural forces can be used intentionally as instruments if a natural power like 'God' is posited as an agent:

18. *iraivaṅ puyalaip payanpaṭutti marattai viṭṭināṅ.*

19. *iraivaṅ maḷayaip payanpaṭutti veḷḷattai uṅṭākkiṅāṅ.*¹²

As regards sentence 9a, no one will steal with the 'intention' of ruining his/her life. Since the 'theft' is not done with the 'intention' of ruining one's self, the term *payanpaṭutti* cannot be used in this sentence. This fact would become clear if sentence 10a is taken into consideration. In sentence 10a, the same noun *tiruṭṭu* ('theft') is used; but the term *payanpaṭutti* can be used in this case because a person can steal with the 'intention' of becoming rich. Hence it becomes quite clear that the use of *payanpaṭutti* requires the 'intention' on the part of the agent.

In fact, it can be shown that the presence or absence of intention decides whether a particular 'case' is instrumental or causal. Even in the case of the tool instrumentals, the word *payanpaṭutti* cannot be used if something has occurred accidentally. If someone accidentally breaks a glass with a stone, it cannot be said as: 'He broke the glass accidentally by using a stone' (Chomsky, 1972:82). In Tamil, sentence 20 is possible but not sentence 21.

20. *avaṅ tarceyalākak kallāl kaṅṅāṭiyai uṭaittuviṭṭāṅ.*
'He accidentally broke the glass with (a) stone.'

21. **avaṅ tarceyalākak kallaip payanpaṭuttik kaṅṅāṭiyai uṭaittuviṭṭāṅ.*
**He accidentally broke the glass by using a stone.'

This shows that *kal* ('stone') in sentence 21 is more of a 'cause' than an 'instrument' for the breaking of the glass.

Therefore, it becomes clear that something is clearly understood as an instrument if it is intentionally used by an agent to do something. If the action is accidental, the tool concerned is not really used in the instrumental sense. Once the 'intention' is absent, the instrumental case merely becomes a causal one. Furthermore, 'cause' is a prevalent feature in 'Agentive', 'Instrumental' and 'Causal'.¹³ When an apple is cut by someone, using a knife, that 'someone'

¹²See also Sam Daniel (1976:53-54).

¹³The commentators state that although the terms, '*nimittam*', '*kāraṇam*', '*etu*', and '*karuvi*', seem different from one another they have the same meaning basically; '*nimittam*' is taken to be the 'objective'/'aim' in Cēṅāvaraiyar's commentary while it is taken to be the Agent in Nacciṅārkkīṅiyar's commentary and Caṅkaranamecivāyar's commentary. Moreover they use the term *kāraṇam* ('cause') as a synonym of the term *karuvi* ('tool'/'instrument') when they use the terms *mutarkāraṇam* for the material case and *tuṅaikkāraṇam* for the tool case.

as well as the 'knife' cause the apple to be cut. Hence, except for the presence and absence of 'intention', both instrumental and causal seem to be very closely related 'cases'. The 'presence of intention' indicates that the instrumental object is 'controlled' and the 'absence of intention' indicates that the causal object is 'uncontrolled'.

What is the difference between the 'causal' and the 'means' constructions? In both these constructions, two actions are involved.

In causal constructions one action automatically results in another action. As for instance, *maḷaiyāl veḷḷam vantatu*

can be split into,

maḷai peytatu; ataṇāl veḷḷam vantatu

'It rained; therefore it flooded.'

Even in the case of the sentence, *avaṇ tarceyalākak kallāl kaṇṇāṭiyai uṭaittuviṭṭāṇ*, it can be split into, *avaṇ kaiyil kal iruntatu; avaṇ atai erintāṇ; atu tarceyalākak kaṇṇāṭiyil paṭṭatu; ataṇāl kaṇṇāṭi utaintuvittatu*. Such a process cannot be carried out in the case of *avaṇ kattiyaip payaṇpaṭuttip paḷattai veṭṭiṇāṇ*, i.e., it cannot be split as *avaṇ kattiyaip payaṇpaṭuttināṇ; ataṇāl paḷam vettappaṭṭatu*.¹⁴ Therefore, in causal constructions, one action 'leads to/results in' another action.

Though sentences 10a and 11a allow the use of the term *payaṇpaṭutti*, in these sentences also two actions are involved:

10b. *avaṇ tiruṭiṇāṇ; ataṇāl celvaṇ āṇāṇ.*

11b. *avaṇ panattaik koṭuttāṇ; ataṇāl arici perrāṇ.*

Though two actions are involved in these sentences, one action is used as a 'means' to attain the target/goal indicated by the other action. Hence, when the suffix *-al* is used in such instances where one action is done intentionally to achieve some target, the suffix indicates 'means' through which the aim is achieved.

One more syntactic difference can be seen between these four meanings.

In the case of tool instrumentals, nominal compounds can be formed with the noun indicating the tool and the noun resulting from the action of the tool:

22. *katti veṭṭu* 'the cut of the knife'

23. *pēṇā eluṭtu* 'pen writing'

24. *kai vēlai* 'hand work'

Hence it can be seen that although the commentators could have been aware of the connections between the Agentive, Causal and Instrumental cases, they did not capture the exact similarities and differences between the three, so as to compare and contrast them in a positive and concrete manner. (Refer Cēṇāvaraiyar's commentary for *nūrpā* 73 and Naccinārkkiniyar's commentary for *nūrpā* 74 of *Tolkāppiyam-Collatikāram*; also refer Cankaranamacciṅṅaiyar's commentary for *nūrpā* 297 in *Nāṇṇūl Viruttiyurai*).

¹⁴It may be possible to split *avaṇ kattiyaip payaṇpaṭuttip paḷattai veṭṭiṇāṇ* as *avaṇ kattiyaip payaṇpaṭuttināṇ, ataṇāl paḷattai veṭṭiṇāṇ*; but here *atu* denotes the knife while in 'causal' and 'means' constructions *atu* denotes the entire sentence that precedes it.

The formation of such compounds may not be always possible; sentences like *kaiyāl aḷaittāṅ* ('he called by hands') and *kallāl uḷaittāṅ* ('he broke with stone') cannot yield the compounds **kaiyaḷaiḷippu* and **kalluḷaiḷippu* respectively; but such a transformation is possible in many instances.

As for the material case, compounds can be formed with the material and the object made of it:

25. malar māḷai 'garland made of flowers'

26. poṅ vaḷai 'golden bangle'

27. mara mējai 'wooden table'

It is not possible to form such compounds in the case of 'causal' and 'means' constructions. Sentences 7 and 11 cannot yield compounds such as **puyal viḷcci* (*'storm-falling') and **paṇam-ariḷi* (*'money-rice')/ **paṇam vaṅkal* (*'money-buying') respectively. Sentence 8 may yield the compound *malai veḷḷam* ('rain-flood'); but such compounds are rare.

A compound from a causal construction differs from that derived from a tool case in that the later yields compounds with the 'tools + nouns/verbal nouns' which indicate the action of the tools' and the first yields compounds with 'cause + the noun that indicates the resultant thing'; in this instance, derivation of nominal compounds with verbal nouns as heads is not possible. The material case yields compounds with 'material + the resultant object'.

CONCLUSION

Though *-āḷ* is known as the instrumental suffix, it would have become clear by now, that the suffix is not strictly an instrumental one. It represents the deep instrumental as well as the deep agentive; it also represents a few other cases at times. Among the various functions indicated by the suffix, *-āḷ*, it has been shown, both from the syntactic and semantic points of view, that the four functions, tool, material, cause and means can safely be taken to be the different surface manifestations of the deep instrumental case.

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