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TAMIL NOUNS: LEXICAL-SEMANTIC GROUPS AND THEIR PARADIGMATIC RELATIONS

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Abstract

This article examines lexical-semantic groups of nouns in the Tamil language and their paradigmatic relations. The study classifies Tamil nouns into semantic fields and analyzes lexical units related to kinship, governance, nature, animals, religion, and abstract concepts. Particular attention is paid to synonymic, hyponymic, and hyponymic relations within the lexical system of Tamil. The findings demonstrate that the Tamil lexical system possesses a highly structured semantic organization shaped by linguistic and cultural factors.

Keywords: Tamil language, lexical semantics, semantic field, lexical-semantic group, noun classification, paradigmatic relations, synonymy, hyponymy.

Introduction

The vocabulary of a language represents a complex and systematic structure in which lexical units are interconnected through various semantic relations. In modern linguistics, the theory of lexical-semantic groups and semantic fields serves as one of the most important tools for studying vocabulary as an organized system. Scholars such as J. Trier, J. Lyons, D. Cruse, and Yu. D. Apresyan have provided a theoretical foundation for the semantic classification of lexical units [14; 7; 4; 1].

Tamil, one of the oldest and most developed languages of the Dravidian family, possesses a written history spanning more than two millennia [5]. The social, cultural, and religious experiences of the Tamil people are reflected in its lexical system [15]. Therefore, the study of lexical-semantic groups of Tamil nouns is important not only from a linguistic perspective but also from cultural and cognitive viewpoints.

The purpose of this article is to identify the major lexical-semantic groups of nouns in Tamil and to analyze the paradigmatic relations existing among them.

Research Methodology. The study employs descriptive, comparative-typological, componential, and semantic field analysis methods. The research material includes the Tamil Lexicon, modern Tamil dictionaries, examples from Sangam literature, and scholarly works by English, Russian, and Uzbek linguists [13; 11].

Tamil nouns were classified according to their semantic characteristics, and paradigmatic relations among them were examined.

Major Lexical-Semantic Groups of Tamil Nouns

Tamil nouns can be classified into the following major lexical-semantic groups:

1. Kinship and Human Relations

- (aṇṇaṉ) – elder brother

- (taṅgai) – younger sister
- (tāttā) – grandfather
- (pāṭṭi) – grandmother

2. **Governance and Administration**

- (arasi) – queen
- (talaiyar) – leader
- (āḷuṉar) – governor

3. **Natural Objects**

- (kāḍu) – forest
- (ēri) – lake
- (nilam) – land

4. **Animals**

- (nāy) – dog
- (pūṉai) – cat
- (kuraṅku) – monkey

5. **Religious Concepts**

- (ālayam) – temple
- (sāmi) – deity
- (aruḷ) – divine grace

6. **Abstract Concepts**

- (amaithi) – peace
- (nampikkai) – trust
- (verri) – victory

These groups reflect the conceptual worldview encoded in the Tamil language. According to semantic field theory, lexical units within a field share common semantic components [4].

The Kinship Semantic Field

Kinship terminology in Tamil constitutes a highly developed lexical system. These nouns reflect not only biological relations but also social and cultural relationships [15].

Examples include:

- (aṇṇaṉ) – elder brother
- (cakōtaraṉ) – brother
- (māmā) – uncle

Female kinship terms include:

- (akkā) – elder sister
- (cakōtari) – sister
- (attai) – aunt

The richness of kinship vocabulary demonstrates the significance of family relations in Tamil society [12].

Governance and Social Status Field

Tamil history has contributed to the development of numerous lexical units associated with governance and administration [5].

Examples include:

- (talaiyar) – leader
- (āḷuṉar) – governor
- (nītipati) – judge

Additional examples are:

- (ceyalāḷar) – secretary
- (atikārappūrvar) – official
- (nirvāki) – administrator

These lexical items represent social hierarchy and administrative structures within Tamil society [11].

Nature Semantic Field

Nature-related vocabulary occupies a significant place in Tamil due to the historical relationship between the Tamil people and their natural environment [15].

Examples include:

- (kāḍu) – forest
- (maram) – tree
- (nilam) – land

Water-related nouns include:

- (ēri) – lake
- (kiṇaṟu) – well
- (nīrvīḻcci) – waterfall

Together, these nouns form an extensive semantic field related to nature.

Animal Semantic Field

Animal names in Tamil constitute a well-organized lexical system [13].

Examples include:

- (nāy) – dog
- (pūṉai) – cat
- (kuraṅku) – monkey
- (muyal) – rabbit

These lexical items belong to the broader category of "animals." Certain animals also carry symbolic meanings in Tamil folklore and literature [15].

Religious Semantic Field

Tamil religious vocabulary has been influenced by Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism [5].

Examples include:

- (sāmi) – deity
- (aruḷ) – grace
- (ālayam) – temple

Additional examples are:

- (tīpam) – sacred lamp
- (pirārttaṉai) – prayer
- (tarmam) – virtue, moral duty

These nouns form the core of the religious semantic field.

Abstract Concepts Field

Abstract nouns express intellectual, emotional, and social concepts [1].

Examples include:

- (amaithi) – peace
- (nampikkai) – trust
- (verṟi) – victory
- (naṭpu) – friendship

Unlike concrete nouns, these lexical units denote intangible concepts.

Analysis of Paradigmatic Relations

Several types of paradigmatic relations can be observed among Tamil nouns [7].

Synonymy

- (leader) – (administrator)
- (elder brother) – (brother)

These nouns exhibit semantic similarity while differing in stylistic or contextual usage.

Hyponymy

(animal)

→ (dog)

→ (cat)

→ (monkey)

→ (rabbit)

In this hierarchy, the subordinate concepts are hyponyms of the superordinate category.

Hypernymy. Lexical items such as (forest) and (tree) belong to the broader category of natural objects.

Similarly, kinship terms are united under the hypernym (human being).

These relations contribute to the systematic organization of the Tamil lexicon [4].

Results and Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that Tamil nouns form a highly organized semantic system. The semantic fields of kinship and governance appear to be particularly rich and developed. This phenomenon reflects the historical and cultural development of Tamil society [5; 15].

The abundance of synonymic series also indicates the richness of Tamil vocabulary. Many synonymous nouns differ according to stylistic, historical, religious, or social contexts [11].

Conclusion. Tamil nouns can be classified into several major lexical-semantic groups, including kinship and human relations, governance, nature, animals, religion, and abstract concepts. Within these groups, synonymic, hyponymic, and hypernymic relations actively function and contribute to the internal organization of the Tamil lexical system. These paradigmatic relations reflect both the structural characteristics of the language and the cultural worldview of Tamil-speaking communities.

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