

## **Pali Compound Reference Sheet:**

### **Acknowledgments:**

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Everett (Rett) Thiele, Stephen Hodge, Dr. Ole Holten Pind, and Ong Yong Peng.

And the following references:

Some borrowed examples from these books: "Introduction to Pāli" by A.K. Warder, "Teach Yourself Sanskrit" by Michael Coulson, and "A Practical Grammar of the Pāli Language" by Charles Duroiselle.

[Compiled by Alan McLure]

### **Introduction:**

Knowing the differences between the different types of compounds and how they are used is important when translating Pāli. Though in some cases one might mistake one compound for another and still translate the passage in an acceptable way, there are definite cases where misunderstanding of the type of compound in question can lead to unfortunate mis-translations.

There are six types of compounds found in Pāli literature; namely:

- 1) Tappurisa compounds:** Dependent Determinate Compounds
- 2) Kammadhāraya compounds:** Descriptive Determinate Compounds
- 3) Bahubbīhi compounds:** Possessive or Attributive Compounds
- 4) Dvanda Compounds:** Copulative or Aggregative Compounds
- 5) Digu compounds:** Dependent Determinate Compounds
- 6) Avyayībhāva compounds:** Adverbial Compounds

Compounds are created by combining adverbs, adjectives, participles, pronouns and nouns in order to form more complex words with richer meanings. When compounds are formed, if declension is necessary (as is usually the case) then only the final word is declined with the prefixed words being in their stem form (with the exception of words in –ant and –an which are resolved to –at and –a respectively).

Each of these types of compounds will be discussed at length below.

If you are having some trouble analyzing a compound, and are therefore having trouble deciding upon its meaning, please try the **Compound Algorithm** [below](#).

### **1) Tappurisa compounds:**

Tappurisa compounds are composed of two or more words (adjectives, participles, pronouns, and nouns) and can be used as a noun or an adjective. The prefixed word is associated with the posterior word (which predominates) via a direct relation that may have the quality of the following cases, i.e., accusative, instrumental, dative, genitive, ablative, or locative.

A Tappurisa compound which helps to illustrate this is "mad-house." This may be explained by a dative relation such as "house for the mad" as is the common usage of the word in English, or if it is indeed that "the mad" own the house, then it may be "house of the mad" with a genitive relation, though this sense of the term "Mad-house" in English is not usual.

One could create a variety of other tappurisa compounds with the other case relations such as:

#### **English:**

Fish-fry (acc): a frying session that cooks fish

Sword-fight (ins): fight by sword

Birthday-cake (dat): cake for a birthday

Book-learning (abl): learned from a book

Door-knob (gen): knob of a door

Home-made (loc): made in a home

#### **Pāli:**

Araññagato (acc): gone to the forest

Buddhabhāsito (ins): Spoken by the Buddha

Buddhadeyyaṃ (dat): Worthy to be offered to the Buddha

Rukkhapatito (abl): fallen from the tree  
Rājaputto (gen): a son of a king (prince)  
Araññavāso (loc): living in the forest

It is important to keep in mind that though tappurisa compounds are often used as nouns, they may also function as adjectives.

To borrow the example of "home-made" above, it is possible to say:

"These brownies are home-made" with "home-made" helping to clarify the quality of the brownies, i.e., they were not bought from a store. In this case, "home-made" serves as an adjective in relation to "brownies."

The key is that when the final member of a tappurisa compound is an adjective then we have a tappurisa functioning as an adjective rather than a bahubbīhi compound (see below) which would function adjectivally but end with a noun.

An important rule to remember for tappurisa compounds is that if the words were separated, the second member would keep the same case as the former compound while the prefixed member would have the case of the relation between the two words. Example, if "sword-fight" were separated, then "fight" would keep the case that the compound originally had, and "sword" would have the instrumental case.

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## **2) Kammadhāraya Compounds:**

There are four general types of kāmādhāraya compound constructions:

- 1) adj+substantive(noun)**
- 2) adjective (or adverb)+adjective(or participle)**
- 3) substantive+adj**
- 4) substantive+substantive**

**English:**

- 1) Black-bird: a bird that is black

- 2) Soft-spoken
- 3) Ice-cold: cold like ice
- 4) Girl-friend: friend who is a girl

### **Pāli:**

- 1) Akālamegho: untimely cloud
- 2) Sammāpaṭipanna: rightly disposed, rightly seen (as in right view)
- 3) Pāṇasama: lit: 'The same as life', hence: 'dear as life'.
- 4) Rājisi: "king-sage" (there is elision of the –an)

The key to recognizing these compounds is noting that the anterior term qualifies the posterior term (which predominates) adjectivally, and so in these compounds, if the two components were to be separated, the first word would be in the same case as the second word. "Black" would conform to the case of "bird" which would remain in the case of the former compound. Compare this to tappurisa compounds where the anterior member would change cases according to the case relation (instrumental, dative, genitive, etc.)

Further guidelines for kammadhāraya compounds:

- (a) In kammadhāraya compounds, the adjective: mahanta assumes the form: mahā, and, if the consonant which follows is reduplicated, the form: maha.
- (b) The word: santa, good, being, takes the form; sa (Sanskrit sat).
- (c) The word: puma, a male, rejects its final a.
- (d) When the two members of a kammadhāraya are feminine, the first one assumes the form of the masculine.
- (e) The Prefix na, not, is replaced by a before a consonant and by an before a vowel.
- (f) Prefix ku, meaning bad, little, may become ka before a consonant, and kad before a vowel.
- (g) In their uncompound state, the two members of a kammadhāraya are in the same case.

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### **3) Bahubbīhi compounds:**

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Bahubbīhi compounds are adjectival compounds ending in nouns that always have an exocentric focus or one could say are "possessed" by an external object. This means that as they refer to an outside object, they must be considered in relation to that object in order to be fully comprehensible.

One example of an English sentence using a compound of this type is:

"Hey big-mouth, get over here!"

"Big-mouth" in this case obviously does not literally refer to a "big-mouth" that someone is calling, but to a person who **HAS** a "big-mouth," or more specifically, a person who talks too much or too loudly. The referent in this case is a person, and thus even though "big-mouth" is a noun, it is qualifying the referent which is a person and is hence acting as an adjective.

Thus, this compound "big-mouth" is an adjective qualifying a person showing that the person possesses it, and must be understood as such since it functions as a noun in the sentence. To gloss the term "big-mouth" as literally referring to a big mouth would be a mistake and the resulting translation would be quite incorrect.

One may note that "big-mouth" is in fact formed just like a kammadhāraya compound and the only thing that makes it a bahubbīhi is the context. As a bahubbīhi it is acting as an adjective of the referent that is not included in the compound itself. If we were indeed speaking of a big mouth such as in the phrase: "wow, look at that big-mouth" and we literally meant that there was a really big mouth that were looking at, then it would simply be a kammadhāraya in the form of (adj+substantive).

This rule applies to other bahubbīhi compounds which may be formed as tappurisa compounds (or the other types of compounds for that matter) such as "baby-face" where the case relation is genitive between the members, i.e., "face of a baby," yet if we were to speak to an adult thusly: "Hey baby-face, get over here!" then this compound that is formed as a tappurisa would be used as a bahubbīhi compound and thus would function as an adjective related to the referent which is not specifically

mentioned here(the adult). In sentences with bahubbīhi compounds, however, the referent may be either stated or implicit.

An example of a bahubbīhi in Pāli would be in the following phrase:

“kaṇhadantaṃ passāmi” = I see “black-tooth.”

In this case, "black-tooth" is not a black tooth that someone sees, but a person whose single tooth (or perhaps plural) is black (or very dark) and is therefore referred to as

“black-tooth.” If we wanted to really specify the referent, we would have to translate this as: “I see [the person] who **HAS** the black tooth(/teeth).”

Thus, because “black-tooth” refers to a non-present referent in this sentence, it is adjectival and a bahubbīhi. Additionally, as explained above, we can see that this bahubbīhi

is formed as a kammadhāraya type 1 as explained above, i.e. adj+substantive.

Bahubbīhi compounds will be in the same case, gender, and number (singular or plural) as the noun they are referring to. Thus, even if the final member of a bahubbīhi is

normally a feminine noun ending in "ā," if the noun it is referring to is plural and masculine, it will be inflected in the same manner as an adjective that would be qualifying the same noun.

### **Example:**

'upādānuupaniso bhavo'

The first word of the above phrase is a kammadhāraya composed of upādāna +upanisā being used as a bahubbīhi compound.

Normally 'upanisā' is a feminine noun ending in "ā," yet here as part of a bahubbīhi compound it is inflected to agree with "bhavo," a masculine singular noun in the nominative case.

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## **4) Dvanda Compounds:**

- Dvanda compounds are two nouns that are added together with no added meaning due to the compounding.

## Examples in English:

Sixty-seven: sixty+seven (not) sixty 7's

Bitter-sweet: Bitter+sweet

## Examples in Pāli:

Candimasuriyā: the sun and the moon

Samaṇabrāhmaṇā: Samanas and Brahmins

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## 5) Digu Compounds:

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Digu compounds begin with a number and are followed by a noun.

## Examples in English:

Four-score

Ten-pence

Two-ply

In these compounds, the numbers are telling us literally how many of the nouns are involved. In the case of "four-score" we have four scores, with a score being twenty of something-- years for example-- and so the term here is designating 80 [years]. In the second case we have the term describing how many single pence there are; "ten."

## Examples in Pāli:

Tilokaṃ: the three worlds

Catusaccaṃ: the four truths

Navasataṃ: nine-hundred = 9 multiplied by 100, (not) 9+100 =109.

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## **6) Avyayībhāva Compounds:**

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Avyayībhāva compounds are used as adverbs and as such are indeclinable. They must refer to a verb in some way. In this type of compound, it is the first word rather than the following word that predominates and this first word as well as the compounded whole, is also an indeclinable. The indeclinable form taken is usually based on the neuter nominative/accusative singular ending.

### **Examples in English:**

Overhead  
Underground  
Superfast

### **Examples in Pāli:**

Bahigāmā: outside the village  
Anutīre: along the bank  
Antaravithiyam: in the street

In these cases, the indeclinable compounds refer to where or how the action (verb) is being done and thus function as adverbs.

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## **Compound Algorithm:**

It can sometimes be difficult to know which type of compound we are dealing with. Here is an algorithm that can help you to figure out the compound type. When you think that you have found the correct compound, consult the above compound guide to double check:

- 1.** If the compound is composed only of numbers as members and the first number is larger than the second then it is a dvanda; if the second number is larger then it is a digu.
- 2.** If the compound starts with a number and is followed by a non-



numeral, there are two possibilities. If the two members would be in the same case if they were to be separated, then the compound is a digu; if the two members would be in different cases, then it is a tappurisa.

**3.** If the compound starts with an indeclinable that qualifies a following noun in the compound, and the whole compound is acting as an adverb, the compound is an avyayībhāva.

**4.** For all other compounds, try to determine the case of the last member as well as what the case of the first member would have been, had it not been compounded with the last.

- If the cases would certainly differ, see 5 below
- If the cases would certainly be the same, see 6 below
- If it is impossible to tell for sure, see 7 below

**5.** If the cases certainly differ, then it is a tappurisa compound.

**6.** If the cases would certainly be the same, then it is a kammadhāraya or a dvanda. A dvanda will have two or more words that don't qualify each other but are simply being added together as with the word "and" between them. In a kammadhāraya, however, the first member of the compound will help to qualify the final member.

**7.** If it is impossible to tell the cases of the parts of the compound, then it may be a tappurisa or kammadhāraya compound and context and doctrinal familiarity should be your guide to figuring out the solution. Not all compounds are easily analyzed.

**8.** If you have a compound that fits the "type" of one of the above compounds but the last member is a noun, or is used as a noun, but yet this last member is agreeing (case, gender, number) with an external noun as would an adjective, then regardless of its normal gender, etc., you are dealing with a Bahubbīhi compound.

Please see the above sections on compounds.

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**Concluding Statments:**

- Remember; knowing the differences between the different types of compounds is important for efficient and accurate translations.

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