

THE SEMANTICS OF COMPOUNDING IN ENGLISH AND TIV LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This research examines the semantic aspect of morphological compounding in the English and Tiv languages. The choice of the two languages is motivated by the fact that research works in word formation generally, and compounding particularly, in Tiv language have not taken this dimension. And with adequate studies of this nature in the English language, what is or not obtainable in the Tiv language can be discovered through a comparative method of analysis. The study is designed on a survey method, with both primary and secondary sources of information. The study finds out that a number of these compounds in both English and Tiv languages have heads referring to the categorical elements that have the basic meanings of certain compounds. Again, the English language, just like the Tiv language, is still identified with a number of compounds described as exocentric. These are compounds that are realised holistically without necessarily regarding any of the components as a head. But copulative compounds are discovered to be rich in English, but skeletal in the Tiv. It is concluded that the comparative analysis could help, to a great extent, in solving the problems usually associated with learning a foreign language. Therefore, learners of English, and especially from the Tiv community of speakers, can benefit richly from the research work which is shown to have phenomena contribution to this area of linguistic study.

Keywords: *compounding, copulative, endocentric, exocentric, languages, semantics.*

Introduction

Compounding remains a prominent source of word creation in many languages such as Tiv and English. It is defined severally as a process of bringing together two or more already existing words to form a single lexical unit. Pyles (1971: 289) defines compounding as:

Putting together two or more words to make a new word with a meaning in some way different, if only in being more specific, from that of its separate elements in juxtaposition – for instance, a ‘black board’ is not the same thing as ‘blackboard’ ...

It is an additive process of word creation that contributes prominently in the building up of the vocabulary of many languages such as English and Tiv. In favour of the English language, Elesawy (2002:24) says that compounding as a morphological process is long in usage, and well known in English since the days of Chaucer till

early and late modern periods. The author refers, for instance, to *garlic* as an old English compound from ‘gar’ = spear + ‘leac’ = ‘leek’. Strang (2015:27) also confirms that “especially, but not exclusively, in the fields of science and technology, abundant new formations depend on processes more akin to compounding than affixation”.

The formation of compounds is generally based on three basic aspects of linguistic analyses: the phonological criteria for compound; the syntactic or grammatical classification of compounds, and the semantic consideration of compound forms. The current discussion focuses on how compounds are semantically classified. This refers to the meaning component involved in the classification of morphological compounds. This research concerns the semantic aspect of compounding as it affects the English and Tiv languages. The choice of the two languages is motivated by the fact that research works on word formation generally, and compounding

particularly, in Tiv language have not taken this dimension. And with adequate studies of this nature in English language, we are helped to discover what is or not obtainable in the Tiv language through a comparative method of analysis.

A fact has been sustained in linguistic investigation that difficulties are often encountered in the learning of a second or foreign language with a distinct structure. Such a problem is hoped to be tackled in this study. After a discovery of what it is and what is not in the chosen languages, certain adjustments can be made by the Tiv speakers in their use of the English language. Moreover, this is by all means a source of additional knowledge for continuous researches in the area of language studies.

Methodology

This study is designed on a survey method. For information from the English language, the researchers relied heavily on secondary sources, referring to books, research papers and other relevant academic material. For data on the semantics of Tiv compound system, the researchers consulted older and competent Tiv speakers in addition to the researcher's knowledge of the Tiv language. This was supported by the use of Tiv language Bible from where certain words were discovered to be useful for analysis.

Conceptual Framework

There exist a number of compound types based on the semantic classification. The compounds are described as: endocentric, exocentric, copulative and appositional.

(a). Endocentric Compounds

An endocentric construction, according to SIL (2014:1), is a construction that contains:

a head, which is the single obligatory element in the construction (except in coordinate constructions, which have multiple heads), one or more optional elements subordinate to the head. The optional elements can, in the proper context, be omitted without loss of grammaticality. The head is a syntactically adequate substitution for the whole construction.

An endocentric compound, therefore, comprises a

categorical element that contains the basic meaning of the entire compound. That meaning-determiner is commonly called a *head*, and it partners with a modifier, which limits the meaning involved. An example is seen in the English Compound *chalkboard*, with 'board' as the head, and 'chalk' as the modifier. This obviously carries the meaning of a *board* that is meant for *chalk*. Another example is found in the English compound *steamboat* as compared with *boat* which is a modified, expanded version of *boat* with its range of usage restricted, so that *steamboat* will be found in basically the same semantic contexts as the noun *boat*. The compound also retains the primary syntactic features of *boat*, since both are nouns. Hence, a *steamboat* is a particular type of *boat*, where the class of *steamboats* is a subclass of the class of boats. Endocentric compounds tend to be of the same word class as their head, as in the case of *doghouse*. Headedness, according to Bauer (2008:1), is shown most clearly by hyponymy, and this means that the compound as a whole is a hyponym of its head. So, *traffic-light* is a hyponym of light, but not a hyponym of traffic.

(b). Exocentric Compounds

In contra-distinction to endocentric compounds, none of the components in exocentric compounds is perceived as a formal head, and its meaning cannot always be determined transparently from its constituents. Khullar (2003:1) describes them as "compounds with no clear head inside them, giving rise to semantic arbitrariness and opaqueness". *Hotdog*, for instance, is not necessarily *hot*; neither does it refer to a *dog*. In the words of Nordquist (2016:5);

an *exocentric compound* is a compound construction that lacks a headword: that is, the construction as a whole is not grammatically and/or semantically equivalent to either of its parts, also called a *headless compound*, contrast with *endocentric compound* (a construction that fulfils the same linguistic function as one of its parts)

Nordquist, also acknowledges Adams (2013) who explains exocentric generally as the term that describes expressions in which no part seems to be of the same kind as the whole or to be central to it. The noun *change-over* is exocentric, and so are 'verb-complement' noun compounds like *stop-gap*, along with adjective + noun and noun + noun compounds like *air-head*, *paperback*, *lowlife*. These compounds . . . do not denote the same kind of entity as their final elements. "Adams goes on to say that exocentric compounds are "a rather small group in modern English" (Nordquist, 2016:10). In determining a word class for an exocentric compound, the whole lexical item is considered irrespective of the parts that constitute it. This explains why a *must-read*, which consists of two verbs, is not a verb but a noun. *Bahuvrihi* is an alternative term for *exocentric* compound, sometimes treated as its famous type.

Distinguishing it from endocentric compounds, Bauer (2008:1) describes an exocentric compound as one without a relationship of hyponymy among its elements, and which appears, therefore, to lack a head or probably to have a head external to the compound

itself. Such is the case with English words like *redhead* = a person with red hair; *flat-foot* = policemen; and *egg-head* = intellectual.

The notion of exocentricity was extended from syntax to the morphological form of compounds by Bloomfield (1935) who himself linked the term exocentric compound with the earlier Sanskrit term *bahuvrihi*, thereby establishing the equivalent use of the two terms in the subsequent technical literature.

A very striking difference, according to O'Grady and Guzman (2011:130), between English endocentric and exocentric compounds sometimes shows up in cases where the head is a word like *tooth* or *foot* which has an irregular plural form. Whereas the endocentric compounds employ the usual irregular plural (teeth, feet, etc.), the exocentric compounds permit the plural suffix *-s* for words such as *tooth*, *foot* and *man*. Examples of such kinds are provided as presented in the following table:

Table 1: Showing the differentiating examples between endocentric and exocentric compounds as described above, sourced from O'Grady and Guzman (2011:130)

In endocentric compounds	In exocentric compounds
Wisdom teeth	Sabertooths (extinct species of carnivore)
Club feet	Big foots (mythical creature sasquatch)
Policeman	Watchmans (a type of portable Tv)
Oak leaves	Maple leafs (Toronto's NHL hockey team)

The difference between endocentric and exocentric compounds is not entirely a clear cut. At one end of the spectrum, we find prototypical endocentric compounds that are truly compositional and semantically transparent; e.g. *first born* (the eldest child) and *mountain top* (which is literally the summit of a mountain). The meanings of such compounds can be inferred from the meanings of their parts. At the other end of the spectrum, we find prototypical exocentric compounds whose meanings cannot be inferred from the meanings of their parts. E.g. *ladybird*, which is neither a *lady*, nor a *bird*, but a *little round red beetle with black spots*. Likewise,

rocky road is not a road with rock on it, rather a *cup cake dessert whose principal ingredients are milk chocolate and marshmallow*.

A vast number of compounds fall somewhere between these extremes. Often, the meaning of the compound bears some relation to the meaning of the words it is made up of, but the meaning of the whole is not totally transparent. You can see this if you reflect on the meaning of compounds such as *wind farm*, *fire engine*, *speed trap*, *brick-layer*, *bag lady* and *dinner lady*.
 (c). Copulative Compounds

Also known as coordinative compounds, copulative compounds have more than a single

semantic head. Each member of such a compound has a separate referent, and both elements constituting the compound are on an equal footing such that they can be paraphrased with the use of *and*. A *father-daughter* event, for instance, can be re-phrased as *father and daughter* event. A copulative compound also represents a coordinate connection between two concepts that are both identified concomitantly with an individual. This is what Olsen (2001:1) means when she expresses that “copulative compounds encompass a coordinative relationship between the two constituents such that both concepts are attributed simultaneously to one individual”. Compounds such as *poet-doctor*, *farmer-driver*, and *songwriter-producer* and so on, are some of the examples. On the types of copulatives, it could be arranged as:

- a. Profession + Characteristics Activity. E.g.
Actor – environmentalist
Director-pilot
- b. Profession + property. E.g.
Robber – pastor
Journalist -- drunkard
- c. Characteristic properties. E.g.
Owner-driver
Tiger-human
- d. Profession + kinship. E.g.
Teacher – father
Lawyer – son

Basically, the constituents in a copulative compound refer to properties of the same entity.

(d) Appositional Compounds

In appositional compound, both elements have the same referent, very difficult to distinguish from endocentric, where compound narrows reference of head. A *student worker*, for instance, is a type of worker, but also a type of student. Other possible examples are:

Student-teacher
Songwriter-singer
Ape-man
Mechanic - electrician

For Fabb (1998:69), an appositional compound is the same as a coordinate compound. He describes both as being constituted by elements that equally share head-like characteristics, as in *student-prince*, which refers to both *student* and *prince*.

But traditionally, appositional compounds are lexemes that have two (contrary) attributes that classify the compound. This is equal to a situation like *A* and *B* provide different descriptions for the same referent, as in the case of *actor-director* which refers to one but not two persons.

A Comparative Analysis

A number of these compounds in both the English and Tiv languages have heads. A head in this context refers to the categorical element that has the basic meaning of an entire compound. The other element in partnership serves as a modifier that limits the meaning involved. Compounds with heads are described as *endocentric*. Examples are:

a.

Secret cult, with ‘cult’ as the head, and ‘secret’ as the modifier
Open heaven, with ‘heaven’ as the head, and ‘open’ as the modifier
Wan kwase = a girl, with ‘kwase’ as the head, and ‘wan’ as the modifier
Gum-or = a boy, with ‘or’ as the head, and ‘gum’ as the modifier

On the contrary, some of these compounds are named *exocentric*. In an exocentric compound, none of the components is perceived formally as a head, and its meaning is not always determined transparently from its constituents. Such is the case with:

b.

Breakthrough
Born again
Gba-aondo (in Tiv language) = nature
Pendatyo (in Tiv language) = most cherished wife
whose meanings are not derived obviously from their constituent elements.

But when a compound has more than a single semantic head, as it is found out with certain compounds, it is said to be *copulative* or *coordinative*. Each element in such a compound has a distinct referent, and both members constituting the compound are so placed equally that they can be rephrased with the use of *and*. *AondoTer* = God father, for instance, can be paraphrased as; *Aondo man Ter* = God and Father. A copulative compound also represents a

coordinative relationship between two concepts that are both attributed simultaneously to one individual. Compounds such as; poet-doctor, farmer-driver, songwriter-producer and so on, suit that description.

Areas of Similarity and Difference

Endocentricity and Exocentricity of Compounds

This study has discovered that many compounds in both English and Tiv are endocentric. These are compounds that have heads, and any of such a head represents the meaning of an entire compound. In English, for example, we have:

c.

Willing tools = 'tool' as the head

Waste belts = 'belt' as the head

Oversize = 'size' as the head

Day dream = 'dream' as the head

In the Tiv Language, we could refer to:

d.

Kyomkwase: Kyom (barren) + kwase (woman) = Barren woman

Gbilinkwagh: Gbilin (empty) + kwagh (thing) = A no issue

Cighanruamabera: Cighan (holy) + ruamabera (scripture) = Holy Scripture

Igyamusu: Igyam (hell) + usu (fire) = Hell fire

Nomhyowe: Nom (male) + hyowe (finger) = Thumb.

It is found out also that endocentric compounds in English are mostly right-headed. Apart from the above examples, the right-headedness can also be seen in:

e.

Babysit

Watchman

Overdo

Understate

Blackboard.

This is quite similar to the Tiv compounds as earlier exemplified. It can be seen in:

f.

Iniunkwase: Iniun (virginity) + kwase (female) = a virgin

Hyo-nguhar: Hyo (finger) + nguhar (leg) = toe

Gwarce: Gwar (strand) + ce (hair) = a strand of hair

Igbor-ahi = bambara nut

Kom-gbenda: Kom (baren) + gbenda (road) = scarcely used path

These are some of the right-headed compounds in the Tiv language. Yet, a good number of English compounds are left-headed. In direct contrast with right-headed compounds, left-headed compounds have heads on the left, and this equally means that the grammatical meaning of such a compound is achieved from the left-hand side of it. Some, among many examples are:

i.

Director-general

Attorney-general

Passer-by

Father-in-law

Lady-in-waiting.

A number of compounds in Tiv are also found to be left-headed. Such is the case with:

j.

Kwaghfan = wisdom

Ter-kem = father-in-law

Orgen = another person

Wanakiriki = a little boy

Kwaghbo = bad thing/something bad.

The English language, just like the Tiv language, is still identified with a number of compounds which are realised holistically without necessarily regarding any of the components as a head. This has been described earlier as exocentric compound. A perfect example is the English compound - *white-collar*, whose whole meaning has nothing to do with 'white' or 'collar'. This can also be seen in *A go-between* and *A silver fish*.

In Tiv grammar, words such as the following are discovered:

k.

Gbashima = determination

Ibume-suwa = wrong fishing

Tse-makeranta = old school

Endocentricity and exocentricity of compounds in both the English and Tiv languages as analysed above is represented in the following table:

Table2: Table showing endocentricity and exocentricity of compounds in both English and Tiv languages

	English	Tiv
Endocentric compounds	✓ E.g. daydream	✓ E.g. kyomkwase (barren woman)
Right-headed	✓ E.g. babysit	✓ hyo-nguhar (toe)
Left-headed	✓ E.g. attorney-general	✓ E.g. kwaghfan (wisdom)
Exocentric	✓ E.g. white collar	✓ E.g. gbashima (determination)

That schematisation, in addition to the previous analysis, confirms that both Tiv and English have both endocentric and exocentric features. And that both languages have instances of both right-headed and left-headed compounding as it is explained by endocentricity. The marking signs inside the table simply indicate what is present.

Copulative Compounds

Copulative compounds are realised in both the English and Tiv languages. We have defined them earlier as these compounds with more than a single semantic head. One example is *Yesu Kristu*, a Tiv word for *Jesus Christ*. Both ‘*Yesu Kristu*’ and ‘Jesus Christ’ are copulative compounds for the reason that each of them is double-headed. It has been mentioned earlier that each element in such a compound has a distinct referent, and both constituents of the compound are placed so equally that they can be

paraphrased with the use of *and*. With this example, *Yesu Kristu* can be rephrased as *Yesu man Kristu*, just in the same way that we can have ‘Jesus and Christ’.

Copulative compounds are discovered to be abundant in English, but few in the Tiv. In the review of literature on page 7 of this study, copulatives were identified based on:

Profession + characteristic activity

Profession + property

Profession + kinship

A combination of characteristic properties.

We have a number of English examples for each type, but for the Tiv language, it has been discovered that copulatives can be formed, but with a combination of characteristic properties. The following table contains this information with specific examples:

Table 3: Table contains information on combinations for copulative compounds

Copulative combinations	English	Tiv
Profession + characteristic activity	✓ E.g. actor-environmentalist	X
Profession + property	✓ E.g. journalist-drunkard	X
Profession + kinship	✓ E.g. teacher-father	X
Characteristic property	✓ E.g. tiger-human	✓ E.g. <i>kwase-mbaiv</i> = woman-thief, a literal meaning of a woman who steals.

The marking signs under English and Tiv respectively represent the forms that are attestable and those that are not attestable. The available combinations are supported by one example in each case.

Conclusion

In summary, the semantic aspect of compounding, for instance, reveals that certain compounds consist of categorical elements that contain the basic *meanings* of the entire compounds; that is, the element that determines

meaning, commonly known as the head. The heads pattern with a modifier which limits the meaning involved. A number of compounds in both the English and Tiv languages have heads; such compounds with heads are described as *endocentric*. On the other hand, some compounds are called *exocentric*, which means that none of the components involved is perceived formally as a head, and its meaning is not always determined transparently from its constituents. Yet, certain

compounds have more than a single semantic head, with each member of such a compound having a separate referent. Copulative compounds are also realised in both the English and Tiv languages. But while copulative compounds are discovered to be abundant in English, they are observed to be few in the Tiv language.

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