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Characteristics of exocentric nominal compounds in Berom: A semantic view of the noun-verb agentive *mwat tabak* and *mwat ha*

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Abstract

Nominal compounds, which are very productive in Berom, are formed by combining the noun and verb constituents. The NV compounds are interpreted as the agent, location, or instrument based on the meaning of the existing nominal constituent. This study analyses the semantics of two types of Berom agentive compounds: *mwat tabak* 'preacher, [literally, person shoot]' and *mwat ha* 'speaker, [literally, person talk]'. First, both words are realized from the NV structure and the agentive meaning of the compounds is derived from the interpretation of an unspecified N [*mwat*] that performs the action which is apparently expressed by the V constituent in *mwat ha* and an action that is not expressed by the V constituent in *mwat tabak*. Secondly, the two compounds lack the deverbal suffix such as the English *-er* that is usually attached to agentive nouns and as such they are both treated as compounds with different semantic realizations. The analyses show that the two constructions vary significantly not only in terms of semantics, but also in their specific role and interpretation of the action expressed by the verbal constituent. We argued that the agent nouns in the compounds employ diverse prosodic features such as tone and pitch, in the activity that the compound revealed. Consequently, we conclude that the meaning of agentive compounds in Berom may not necessarily be determined by the structural and semantic property of the compound but by the interaction between the constituents and the relevant context of usage.

Keywords: nominal compounds, noun-verb compounds, agentive compounds

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1. Introduction

Berom[1] is a Niger-Congo Language that is used by about 1,250,000 people for communication in communities mostly within central Nigeria, particularly, in Plateau State, where they are said to be the largest autochthonous ethnic group (Simons et al., 2018). In spite of this, the language is generally under-described as only a few aspects of the grammar of the language have been described.

For instance, Pwajok (1987) and Marcus (2018) have revealed that the word order in Berom declarative sentences is exclusively SVO. This claim, which is similar with several Niger-Congo languages, such as Akan (cf. Aboh & Essegbey, 2010) and Esahie (cf. Broohm & Melloni, 2021) suggests that the verb intervenes between the agent and patient in both transitive and intransitive clauses as shown in the subsequent illustrations from Marcus (2021).

(1) *Ma* *a* *sei* *rugu*.
1SG *AGR/TM* buy shirt
'I bought a shirt'.

(2) *Gwaha* *a* *ku.*
Gwaha AGR/TM die
'Grandpa died'.

Most languages of the world have a large number of complex lexical items that are compounds which makes compounding a very productive and regularly observed phenomenon (Creissels, 2019; Good, 2017). Berom employs principally the techniques of "prefixation and compounding" in building and enlarging its reservoir of vocabulary (cf. Blench and Dendo, 2005; Marcus, et al., 2015). Illustratively, Marcus et al. (2015, p. 58) identified the plural prefix *be-* which can be used to show how the number of nouns is inflected in lexical words (3a) and compound nouns (3b) as shown below:

[1] Berom is a minority Niger-Congo language that is spoken in parts of central Nigeria. The term (previously spelt in several ways such as Birom, Berum, etc.) refers to both the language and the ethnic group. "Berom appears in the Glottolog database (glottology.org) under the code *bero1242*. Berom is the endonym of the people while *wurom* is its singular form. The speakers of Berom refer to their language as Berom, Gbang, *Cèn Bèrom* [Berom Language] or *Lêm Berom* [Berom Tongue]" (Higazi, 2016, pp. 371-372).

(3) a. *dwa* *be-dwa*
car PL-car
'car' cars

b. *dwa nshi* *be-dwa nshi*
car water PL-car water
'ship' 'ships'

Nominal compounds like the illustration in 3b above abound in Berom and their interpretation is not expressively deduced from the meaning of their constituent parts. The present study considers nominal compounds as productive mechanisms that can be exploited in developing the morphology and semantics of words in the language.

Berom Noun-Verb (henceforth, NV) compounds are lexically categorized as nominal compounds consisting of a left-hand constituent noun which typically heads the compound and a right-hand complement verb (Marcus, 2021; Marcus & Yamaguchi, forthcoming, *(IJHSSM)*). The compounds illustrated in 4a-c are typical examples of exocentric N-V compounds in Berom and their respective agentive, locative, and instrumental meanings in 4a, b, and c do not emanate from the compositional meaning of the constituents in each of the NV compound structure.

(4) a. *mwat tabak*
person shoot
'preacher'

b. *lɔ basa*
house read
'school'

c. *pyè yere*
thing cut
'cutter'

By default, the left-hand nominal constituent in the compounds in (4) is the syntactic head of the compound as it determines the lexical class of each compound (which is N). Additionally, the lexical head in the compounds has a semantic interpretation that is analogous to the role of either agent, location, or thing that performs or expresses the activity of the complement verb (Marcus & Yamaguchi, forthcoming). For example, in (4c) *pyè yere* 'cutter, [literally, thing cut]', the

nominal constituent *pyè 'thing'* determines the lexical class of the compound *pyè yere* 'cutter, [N]' and it is also interpreted as the 'thing' [object] that is used to *yere* 'cut'.

Berom NV compounds, such as those demonstrated in (4), are known to be very productive in the language (Marcus, 2021; Marcus & Yamaguchi, forthcoming) and novel compounds may be formed based on the agentive, locative, or instrumental interpretation of the nominal constituent in the NV structure of the existing compound. Giving the example in 4c (*pyè yere* 'cutter') where the nominal constituent *pyè* 'thing' has an objective/instrumental reading and the compound is construed as the object/instrument that is used to *yere* 'cut', we can (through a paradigmatic means of substitution of the N constituents in 4a and b) create novel structure, such as those in (5), to reveal their agentive (in [a]) and locative (in [b]) meanings/interpretations.

(5) a. *mwat yere*
person cut
'slaughterer'

b. *lɔ yere*
house cut
'abattoir'

In spite of their productivity, Berom NV compounds have not attracted the attention of researchers (Blench, 2000[2]) and the study on the semantics of Berom NV compounds has not been sufficiently carried out (Marcus, 2021). This study focuses on two compounds: *mwat tabak* and *mwat ha* whose NV lexical categories reveal that they are both nominal compounds with agentive meanings that are interpreted differently.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews noun-verb agentive compounds across languages with the major focus on the properties and semantics of Berom noun-verb compounds. The methodology for the study is presented in Section 3. In section 4 we analyze the semantics of the Berom agentive compounds *mwat tabak* and *mwat ha*. The findings of the study are presented in Section 5 and the conclusion is drawn in Section 6.

[2] Blench (2000) lamented on the challenge of undertaking a study on Plateau languages which he ascribed to the failure to publish existing data. He acknowledged the existence of "very short orthographic lists from students at the University of Ibadan [but] decried their inaccessibility because of their existence as personal papers of the authors" (p. 5)

2. Review of noun-verb agentive compounds

Noun-verb agentive compounds which are well attested in several languages (including the English language and other languages such as the Germanic languages), have been analyzed as synthetic compounds in which the V constituents are deverbal (cf. Selkirk, 1982; Lieber, 1983). Such compounds (like the English, *shoemaker* and *taxi driver*) are considered endocentric constructions in which a deverbal nominal head (such as the suffix *-er* that is attached to the verbs *make[-er]* and *drive[-er]*) which denotes the external argument of the verb, accedes to the internal argument of the verb (Selkirk, 1982, Lieber, 1983; Di Sciullo and Wiliams, 1987; Booij, 1988; Haspelmath, 2002; Benczes, 2006).

Recently, Lieber (2016, p. 41) treats the English examples (such as *truck driver*) as "endocentric subordinate compounds in which the deverbal nominal head [*driver* marked by the suffix *-er*] refers to the external argument of the verb". Lieber's position and treatment of the NV compounds is not completely new as a similar view is previously expressed in the characteristic of syntactic compounds in Katamba and Stonham (2006, p. 321)[3] and in several other studies (cf. Selkirk, 1982; Booij, 1988; Haspelmath, 2002). Contrary to the endocentric view of the English NV compounds, Lieber (2016) analyses the Romance variety as exocentric since the compound as a whole does not refer to either of its constituent parts and concluded that NV compounds are endocentric subordinates in English but are exocentric in the Romance (p. 48).

In her characterization of synthetic compounds, Grimshaw (1990), however, argues that "the distinction between root and synthetic compounds is not necessarily based on the presence of a deverbal constituent in synthetic compounds but the fact that they contain heads whose argument structure (AS) must be satisfied by the non-head constituent" (p. 70). Threading on the same line of argument expressed in Grimshaw (1990), Bauer (2008, 2010) separates exocentric synthetic compounds from endocentric synthetic. He posits that the endocentric synthetic compound has an overt bound morpheme like English *-er* which corresponds to the external argument of the verb. In the exocentric synthetic compound, however, the verb and its internal argument form a noun that signifies the entity that performs the role of the external argument. Bauer (2008) affirms that

[3] Katamba and Stonham (2006, p. 321) enumerates the following "characteristics of a syntactic compound:

i. Possessing a complex head adjective or noun that is derived from a verb.
ii. The nonhead constituent is interpreted as a syntactic argument of the deverbal noun or adjective head.
iii. The Ɵ-role of the nonhead is that of agent, patient, etc.
iv. The meaning of the compound is transparent."

"in a number of languages, exocentric compounds which seem to fulfil the same function do not carry the final suffix but are made up of a verb and an argument of that verb" (p. 61). For instance, in the French compound "*gratte-ciel,* [literally, scratch-sky]", only the verb (*gratte*) and its internal argument (*ciel*) are present, but the entire compound refers to an external argument- "that which scratches the sky" (Bauer, 2008, p. 71). Similarly, Contreras (1985) and Yoon (2009) argued for the exocentric structure and claimed that the compound-head is external. They showed that the V constituent in the compounds is responsible for different argument structure patterns which may not be sufficient to ascertain the meaning of the compounds and concluded that the semantics of such compounds can either be that of agents or instruments of the V. Yoon (2009, p. 509) illustrates this in her analysis of the Spanish compound *limpiabotas* 'shoeshine boy (literally, cleans [*limpia*] boots [*botas*])'.

In the morphological patterns of some Niger-Congo languages (a language family that Berom is classified under), Creiseels (2019) has shown that the verb to noun derivation characteristically involves the addition of either "a derivational suffix" or "a class morphology" demonstrating the obligation of the derived noun to a particular gender (p. 18). For example, in Jóola Banjal (an Atlantic language spoken in Senegal), the noun [**e-**]*ffɐŋ-um* (pl. [**si-**] *ffɐŋ-um*) 'key' contains a derivational suffix *-um* that is attached to the verb *ffaŋ* 'close' to derive the noun of instrument (key) from the verb (close) and *e-* and *si-* mark the class of the words. Similarly, both affixation and compounding have been attested to be productive ways of forming agentive nouns in the Niger-Congo languages. For instance, Creissels (2019, p. 18) posited that "agent nouns may be formed by compounding verbal lexemes with the noun *man*" and correspondingly, "names of instruments [may be formed] by compounding the verbal lexemes with the noun thing". These compounding patterns that require the attachment of the nouns 'man' and 'thing' are part of the Berom morphological formation (such as those earlier illustrated in [4]) that are used to express the agentive, locative, and instrumental semantics of nominal compounds in Berom. To illustrate these compounding patterns in Berom, we discuss Berom nominal compounding in the subsequent section.

Basically, languages that have an undisputed membership with the Niger-Congo phylum have been shown to be highly productive in nominal compounding (Creissels, 2019, p. 21). Surprisingly, in the Mande language, whose Niger-Congo affiliation is uncertain, nominal

compounding is also a very productive word formation pattern, and the structure of nominal compounds may also involve a derivational suffix (DS) such as in the compound in (6) below:

(6) *mòo-fáa-láa*
person-kill-DS
'murder'
(Creissels, 2019, p. 26)

One productive way that complex nominals are formed in Berom is by compounding either two nominal lexemes [NN], such as *lɔ rwak* 'cloud, [literally, house rain]' or by merging a nominal lexeme and a verbal base [NV], such as *duk basa* 'study room, [literally, room read]'. The other forms that Berom employs in nominal compounding have only recently been discussed (cf. Marcus, 2021; Marcus & Yamaguchi, 2019; Marcus & Yamaguchi, forthcoming) and are summarily presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Pattern of Berom Nominal Compounding (Marcus, 2021)

Collocating Elements							
N – N		**N – V**		**N- A**		**N – P**	
Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss
dwa nshi car water	ship	*jɛng jɔgɔ* time play	break time	*yey tsiru* heart black	sadist	*da majey* father outside	ward head
hwey gul child wind	waywardness	*nu ha* mouth talk	opinion	*bwol pwɛng* leg white	ill-fated person	*mwat nuyel* person infront	leader
V – N		**V – V**		**V- A**		**V – P**	
Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss
wunâ to join head	act of uniting	*jut tale* carry run	a marriage	None		None	
wunâ nu join mouth	act of conniving						
A - N		**A – V**		**A - A**		**A – P**	
Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss	Constituents	Gloss
gbɔng mwat big person	prominence	*bere ne-ha* plenty PL-talk	information	None		None	
*nta gw*i sweet sun	pride of god						

Basically, nominal compounding in Berom involves the presence of a constituent whose lexical class is either a N, V, or A that occupies the left-hand position of the compound. Each of these

three lexical classes (of N, V, and A) is required to collocate with a corresponding right hand constituent of similar or diverse lexical status (N, V, A, or P) to produce the patterns presented in Table 1 and which we summarize in (7):

(7)	Left-hand constituent	collocational constituents
a.	N	[N], [V], [A], [P]
b.	V	[N], [V]
c.	A	[N], [V]

The concern of the current study is only on the category of the nominal compounds whose left-hand constituent is a N and whose collocational right-hand constituent is a V as shown in (7a). In the ensuing section, we discuss the methodology adopted for the study and subsequently, present the analysis of the NV compounds in Berom.

3. Methodology

The study relied on 200 exocentric compounds that were previously drawn from *Bere Neha* (a quarterly newsletter publication that is written in the Berom language) and analyzed in Marcus (2021). Several volunteers contribute to the writing of articles in *Bere Neha* which essentially cover opinions on local and national issues that are socio-political, cultural, religious, educational, etc. We adopted the principle of compositionality (Higginbotham, 2003, 2007; Booij, 2010, 2013) to describe the semantic of NV exocentric compounds in Berom. The principle of compositionality stresses that the meaning of a complex structure can be inferred from the structural relationship of the constituent parts. Additionally, complex constructions may typically express intense or diverse meanings contrary to the meanings that are expected to be revealed by the combined meaning of their constituent parts. As such, the interpretation of complex structures may convey elements that are not necessarily symbolized by any of the constituent parts of the complex structure.

4. Analysis

Berom NV exocentric compounds are lexically categorized as nominal compounds consisting of a head noun and a complement verb and the overall meaning of the compound does not come

solely from either the noun or the verb constituent. We illustrate in Table 2 compounds with the NV constituents in Berom.

Table 2: NV compounds in Berom (Marcus, 2021)

	Compound	Constituents	Gloss	Translation
a	*lɔ basa*	*lɔ + basa*	house read	school
b	*jɛng jɔgɔ*	*jɛng + jɔgɔ*	time play	breaktime
c	*duk basa*	*duk + basa*	room read	classroom
d	*kwɔn ro*	*kwɔn + ro*	place sell	market
e	*nu ha*	*nu + ha*	mouth talk	opinion
f	*yey hwɔsɔ*	*yey + hwɔsɔ*	heart draw	interest
g	*mwat tabak*	*mwat + tabak*	person shoot	preacher
h	*lɔ tɔk*	*lɔ + tɔk*	house know	institution
i	*bwɔk basa*	*bwɔk + basa*	cover read	textbook
j	*bwɔk jɛk*	*bwɔk + jɛk*	cover write	writing paper

The interpretation of the entire compounds presented in Table 2 is not predictable from their constituent parts. We consider such compounds as exocentric since they do not have a compositional meaning even though they show an argument-predicate semantic relation. In the ensuing, we present the properties of the constituent parts of the Berom NV compounds in 4.1 and subsequently show the semantics of their structure in 4.2.

4.1 Interaction between the properties of Berom NV compounds

The constituents of Berom NV exocentric compounds exhibit an argument-verb relation and the grammatical and/or semantic properties of both constituents are non-compositional. Consequently, the constituents do not contribute to the resolve of the meaning of the compound. Usually, the N constituent in the compound loses its semantic content, and it may be interpreted metaphorically. A similar metaphorical interpretation may also be employed on the V constituent. For instance, the meaning of the constituents *nu* 'mouth' and *ha* 'talk' is completely bleached in the compound *nu ha* 'opinion' and the mere merging of the constituents does not resolve in the meaning of the construction. We explore each of the N and V components of Berom NV compounds in the subsequent paragraphs and we conclude with the discussion of their semantics in 4.2.

The noun constituent in the Berom NV compound is essentially diverse as both concrete and abstract nouns are employed. The concrete nouns include physical objects such as *lɔ* 'house', *duk* 'room', and parts of the human body like *yey* 'heart', *nu* 'mouth'. Similarly, abstract concepts

like *jɛng* ‘time’ are also employed. Based on their semantic role, the noun constituents in Berom N-V exocentric compounds can be interpreted as either the subject or object in the construction. For example, in *mwat tabak* ‘preacher [literally, person shoot]’, the N *mwat* ‘person’ is interpreted as the subject that executes the corresponding action which is expressed by the V while in *lɔ tɔk* ‘institution [literally, house know]’) the N *lɔ* ‘house’ is considered as the location where the activity of the verb *tɔk* ‘know’ takes palce. In contrast with the subjective and objective semantic roles of the N constituent, some of the Berom nouns in the NV exocentric compounds cannot be interpreted as arguments because of the intransitivity of the verbs. For instance, the N constituent in the compound *nu ha* ‘opinion [literally, mouth talk]’ is neither the subject nor object of the V *ha* ‘talk’.

Thus, we argue based on these illustrations in Table 2 that the grammatical relation between the constituents of Berom NV exocentric compounds is nuanced. To illustrate this, let us consider the compounds *mwat tabak* ‘preacher [literally, person shoot]’ and *mwat raa* ‘believer [literally, person follow]’. The noun constituent *mwat* ‘person’ is the agent of the action designated by the verbs *tabak* ‘shoot’ and *raa* ‘follow’.

In some of the compounds however, the noun constituents are not agentive. They, instead, refer to the place or location where the activity designated by the verb is performed. Illustratively, in the compounds *lɔ basa* ‘school [literally, house read]’ and *kwɔn ro* ‘market [literally, place sell]’, for instance, the noun constituents *lɔ* ‘house’ and *kwɔn* ‘place’ have a locative interpretation. Additionally, the nominal constituent *bwok* in the compounds *bwok jɛk* ‘writing paper [literally, cover write]’ and *bwok basa* ‘textbook [literally, cover read], for instance, are interpreted as physical objects/instruments.

In the NV constructions in Berom, both the transitive and intransitive verbs may occur, and the action designated by the verb may be interpreted either expressively or metaphorically. For example, in *mwat raa* ‘believer [literally, person follow]’, the action of the V constituent *raa* ‘follow’ is not expressively indicated in the agentive reading of the compound ‘believer’ instead it has a metaphorical agentive reading. However, in compounds such as *mwat sele* ‘helper, [literally, person help]’, the action of the V *sele* ‘help’ is expressively contained in the resolution of the compound ‘helper’.

4.2 Multiple semantics of NV compounds

Although the prototypical referent of most Berom NV compounds is the agent, it may also exhibit other semantic roles such as location or instrument. The semantic roles of agent, instrument or location are usually signaled by the N constituent which is itself an instance of an idiomatic construction that is used to refer to the entity or object and place involved in the metaphorical activity which is designated by the verb.

As such, the class of NV compounds, like those exemplified in Table 3, that are interpreted as agents have the free morphemes *mwat* and *pye*/*ma* as their N constituent in the agent and instrument, respectively. Similarly, in the compounds that are interpreted as locations, the free morpheme *kwon*/*duk* is consistently attached as the N constituent in the construction as shown in Table 4.

Principally, the Berom NV compounds shown in Table 2 are said to be exocentric as it is evident that "none of the constituents may apparently function as the head … and the exocentricity is a problem for their analysis" (Kornfeld, 2009, p. 439). With this insight, the compounds are like the Italian *lavatiati* 'dishwasher' type of compound which is mostly considered as being exocentric (cf. Bauer, 2010).

In the subsequent sections, we present two semantic interpretations for Berom NV exocentric compounds: agentive and locative, based on the compounds presented in Table 2 above.

4.2.1 NV agentive

Typically, the compounds represented in Table 3 below have an agentive interpretation as they refer to either the person or instrument that does an action for a potential beneficiary or receives the action that is apparently or supposedly expressed by the V. For example, in *mwat bereng* 'foreteller [literally, person see]' the N constituent patterns with the verb to derive the N-V structure that is interpreted as the agent. Here, the agent is not a beneficiary of the event that is expressed by the compound. Similarly, in *ma jɛk* 'pen [literally, thing write]', the compound expresses an activity that is carried out by the agent.

Table 3: NV Agentive (Marcus, 2021)

	Compound	Constituents	Gloss	Translation
1	*mwat raa*	*mwat + raa*	person follow	believer
2	*mwat bereng*	*mwat + see*	person see	foreteller

3	*mwat tabak*	*mwat + tabak*	person shoot	preacher
4	*mwat fugu*	*mwat + fugu*	person trouble	enemy
5	*mwat sele*	*mwat + sele*	person help	helper
6	*pye/ma yere*	*pye/ma + yere*	thing cut	cutter
7	*pye/ma bereng*	*pye/ma + bereng*	thing see	viewer
8	*pye/ma yising*	*pye/ma + yising*	thing sweep	sweeper
9	*pye/ma kus*	*pye/ma + kus*	thing wash	washer
10	*pye/ma jɛk*	*pye/ma + jɛk*	thing write	pen

4.2.2 NV locative

In addition to the agentive semantic relation that exhibit between the constituents on NV compounds illustrated in 4.2.1, the reading of Berom NV compounds may also be that of location or place. Usually, the noun constituent in this class of compounds is interpreted as the location or place of the verb's action as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4: NV Location (Marcus, 2021)

	Compound	Constituents	Gloss	Translation
1	*lɔ basa*	*lɔ + basa*	house read	school
2	*lɔ tɔk*	*lɔ + tɔk*	house know	institution
3	*duk basa*	*duk + basa*	room read	classroom
4	*kwɔn ro*	*kwɔn + ro*	place sell	market
5	*kwɔn wusal*	*kwɔn + wusal*	place worship	worship center
6	*kwɔn yere*	*kwɔn + yere*	place cut	abattoir
7	*duk wusal*	*duk + wusal*	room worship	worship center

From the illustrations in Table 4, in the compound *lɔ basa* ‘school [literally, house read]’; for example, the nominal constituent *lɔ* ‘house’ denotes the place for the activity that is expressed by the verbal constituent *basa* ‘read’. Yet, the compound *lɔ basa* ‘school’ is neither interpreted as *lɔ* ‘house’ nor *basa* ‘read’ because none of the constituents is a hyponym of the compound. Thus, neither the meaning of the left-hand constituent *lɔ* ‘house’ nor the activity expressed by the right-hand constituent *basa* ‘read’ is expressively contained in the interpretation of the compound *lɔ basa* ‘school’.

5. Findings and Discussions

The *mwat tabak* and *mwat ha* compound types are considered nominal compounds in Berom of the NV structure. The *mwat tabak* 'preacher (literally, person shoot)' and *mwat ha* 'speaker (literally, person speak)' NV compound types are both agentive because the N element (*mwat*) is interpreted to be an agent that performs the action that is expressed by the V element literally, or otherwise. Admitting that the two constructions are basically interpreted as agentive nouns that perform some activity related to speaking, their underlying semantic realizations are absolutely perceived to be different since the act of 'speaking' is expressively revealed in the V constituent *ha* 'speak' but not in *tabak* 'shoot'. In the case of *mwat tabak*, the V element does not express the action of speaking or preaching in a literal manner but does so figuratively. Although the language users may possibly perceive the constructions (*mwat tabak* and *mwat ha*) as same in the grammar of the language and may further claim that there is a common semantic property that unifies both constructions, we discuss in this study that their semantics is apparently diverse.

While in *mwat tabak*, the agentive noun that performs the action expressed by the V (*tabak*), induces a deliberate reaction of perhaps an immediate acceptance of the information that is being communicated to the listener, in *mwat ha* however, the agentive entity may not necessarily require any reaction or response from the listener since the communication is basically intended to be just informative. However, both compounds have the overall meaning of an agentive entity that communicates to an audience.

Additionally, the referents of the agentive nouns in *mwat tabak* and *mwat ha* are apparently distinguished by the different tones in their communication. In *mwat tabak*, the tone of the referent is aggressive and usually characterized by a high pitch since the central sense of the communication is intended at convincing the listener to accept the information that is being expressed. Thus, the V constituent in the compound (*tabak* 'shoot') has a metaphorical interpretation and the communication is perceived as a convincing weapon that is targeted on the listener. On the contrary, the tone of the agentive noun in *mwat ha* is subtle and characterized by low pitch. This is revealed in the causal meaning of the V constituent (*ha* 'talk') which is literally interpreted.

Given that the agentive nouns *mwat tabak* and *mwat ha* both share structural features and are sometimes used interchangeably, we have found that the compounds are different and can be distinguished. The great structural resemblance between the compounds is their constituents which

are composed of NV lexical items. This structure which characterizes agentive persons in Berom as previously shown in Table 3. Yet, the exhibited structural similarity which both compounds share, their interpretation can reveal a convergent or divergent agentive meaning. The convergent meaning is usually at the surface level where both compounds *mwat tabak* 'preacher' and *mwat ha* 'speaker' can be construed and interpreted by the language users as "someone who speaks" without any recourse to the context or the communication environment. This coexistence of similar meanings by the compound words enables the language users to appropriate divergent meanings to compounds depending on their context of occurrence. The central sense of interpreting the compounds *mwat tabak* 'preacher' and *mwat ha* 'speaker' can be argued to be an agent who says something. From the cognitive perspective, we have found that the agentive meaning of both compounds is divergent when their context of usage is considered. In view of this, the agentive *mwat tabak* 'preacher' is not only construed and interpreted as "someone who speaks", (like *mwat ha* 'speaker') but "someone who speaks … to elicit a response from the hearer".

6. Conclusion

In this study, we have demonstrated that the agent compounds in Berom are formed with the agentive prefixes *mwat-* and *pye-* or *ma-* and the prefixes are responsible for the semantic interpretation that distinguishes compounds with such prefixes. While compounds with the *mwat-* prefix have the 'agentive person' reading, the other class of compounds with either the *pye* or *ma-* prefix are interpreted as 'instruments'.

We have compared two agentive constructions: *mwat tabak* 'preacher [literally, person shoot]' and *mwat ha* 'speaker [literally, person talk]' which are both formed with the prefix *mwat-* . We have argued that the two agentive compounds have the NV structure but are differently interpreted. We have shown that in *mwat tabak* 'preacher', the overall meaning of the compound is an agentive entity that performs an activity which is metaphorically revealed by the V constituent and the entire reading of the compound requires a response from the listener. In *mwat ha* 'speaker', however, the compound is simply interpreted as an agentive noun that performs the activity that is expressively revealed by the V constituent. To understand the difference in the semantics of the compounds, we argued that the agent nouns in the compounds employ diverse prosodic features, such as tone and pitch, in the activity that the compound revealed. While the tone and pitch of the agent in *mwat tabak* is aggressive and high, in *mwat ha*, the tone is calm, and the pitch is low.

Finally, the analyses carried out demonstrated that both compounds are significantly different in their semantics which is largely determined by the context of usage. Understanding the difference in the interpretation of the compounds is necessary especially for the teaching and learning of the Berom language. Most importantly, the current study will contribute to studies on Berom compounds through the documentation of the Berom language.

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