

A STUDY OF HAUSA COMPOUND WORDS – AN ONOMASIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of Hausa compound words using an onomasiological approach. The study seeks to investigate the semantic relation of compound words in naming concepts. The main aim of this paper is to analyse the semantic relationship between the constituents of compound words in the Hausa language. Data for this study were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Being a native Hausa and surrounded by Hausa people, it becomes easier for the researcher to obtain the desired and accurate data. The finding shows that compound words, in Hausa, can be analysed by an onomasiological approach using their tripartite terms: the base, the mark and the conceptual meaning. This paper seeks to fill an academic gap and concludes that compound words in Hausa are productive and are composed of a base and a mark.

Keywords: Hausa, compound words, onomasiology, base, mark

1.0 Introduction

This paper presents an analysis of Hausa compound words. The term compound word involves the combination of two or more words to form a single lexical unit with a unified meaning. In this study, the concern is with compound words formed by two words. It is one of the most productive word-formations in most languages, including Hausa. Compound words are a linguistic strategy of naming new concepts, objects and experiences by combining the cognitive organisation and socio-cultural realities. The newly created meaning is readily transparent to language users. However, the interpretation of certain compound words requires extra linguistic knowledge. The meaning of

'tsamiyar biri', for instance, does not mean 'tamarind of monkey' but a kind of leguminous fruit known in English as 'black velvet tamarind'. Therefore, to understand such compound words, language users must infer extra linguistic knowledge for the special interpretation of these compound words. What I will be concerned with in this paper is the relation of the constituents of compound words in naming new concepts. This is to analyse the contribution of the constituents of compound words in relation to the naming of concepts. The main investigation of this paper is to account on the conceptual motivation behind the meaning of the compound words.

Conventionally, the study of compound word has been described in terms of structural patterns and formal combination. On that basis, the study of conceptual motivations and semantic relations is neglected. The linguistic task is to investigate the conceptual motivation for naming. This gap is then addressed by the onomasiological theory of word formation. The groundbreaking contribution to the study of how concepts are structured and named is the work of Milos Dokulil (1962) and elaborated by Stekauer (1998, 2001). This approach shifts the attention of linguists from the study of only the formal structures of compound words to the functional processes of naming, or rather, the conceptual aspects of compound words. The semantics of compound words have been extensively documented through semasiological analysis, which treats compound words as composed of individual words to form a meaning. This leaves the fundamental questions unanswered. To clarify this conceptual genesis, this paper adopts an onomasiological approach, inverting the analytical lens to ask: What linguistic strategies and cognitive pathways does a language employ to name a compound word? This approach provides tools for dissecting the motivation behind compound words. It allows us to see compound words not as arbitrary concatenations, but as systematic outputs of a language's preferred patterns for conceptualising experience, whether through literal description or metaphorical mapping. . The onomasiological perspective is concerned

with how speakers express concepts and with which linguistic resources they choose to name them. This approach sees language not only as the combination of lexical items but also as a concept-driven process motivated by communicative needs.

Hausa is a Chadic language. It is a language of major significance in West Africa and one of the major languages in Nigeria. One of the processes that the Hausa language uses to technically name concepts, objects or experiences is a compound word. This paper investigates the core principles guiding how Hausa conceptualise entities such as substances, emotional states and human-centric spaces using compound words.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

Traditional linguistic analysis of compound words has largely been semasiological: it starts from a given form and analyses its internal structure, constituent meanings and semantic interpretation. The onomasiological approach, by contrast, begins with the concept to be named and investigates the array of possible linguistic structures a language can employ to express it. This review charts the development of this approach, from its foundational theories to its modern applications.

The onomasiological tradition in word-formation originates with Dokulil (1962), who distinguishes two complementary aspects of word-formation: the generic (how words are formed) and the functional-structural (how formed words operates). Dokulil proposed that the creation of a new naming unit is a cognitive process involving three logical steps. His central innovation was the concept of the onomasiological category, a two parts conceptual structure comprising the onomasiological basis (the class to which the object belongs) and the onomasiological feature (the characteristic distinguishing it from other objects in that class).

Stekauer (1998, 2001) developed a comprehensive cognitive theory of word-formation. He built directly on Dokulil foundations. His model specifies five processing levels that a speaker navigates when coining a new naming unit

3.0 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This explains the methods to be used in collecting the data for this study. It also discusses the sampling technique and the area in which the data are collected. Therefore, the study adopts a descriptive research design. The research design is qualitative in nature and focuses on the interpretation of compound words in Hausa. The study uses semantic analysis with particular attention to the onomasiological approach. Data from this study are drawn from both primary and secondary sources. On the One hand, the primary source of data includes native speaker intuition of Hausa and everyday spoken Hausa expressions. On the other hand, the secondary source of data is obtained from linguistic textbooks on semantics, scholarly journal articles on compound words and the theoretical works on onomasiology. The study's population includes all compound words in Hausa. However, the study is limited to selected representative compound words that clearly illustrate semantic patterns relevant to this research. The analysis will be guided by an onomasiological approach as formulated by Dokulil (1962) and elaborated by Stekauer (1998, 2001). This approach provides tools for explaining the conceptual motivations involved in naming strategies in Hausa. The onomasiological approach examines the interplay between conceptual categories, semantic relations and formal realisation. It is a tripartite approach. Therefore, each compound word is analysed in terms of three steps identified by the onomasiological approach. These steps are the base, the mark and the conceptual motivation. This approach is important to this study. It helps in analysing how the Hausa speech community names concepts, experiences and objects. It starts with

concepts or ideas and moves to analyse the words that form the compound words.

4.0 Data Analysis

This section presents an Analysis of data collected for this study. The analysis is guided by an onomasiological approach. The data of this study consist of selected compound words drawn from Hausa texts and native speaker intuitions.

(1) **Baƙin ciki**

Here, the motive of the Hausa speakers is to conceptualise and name a concept that can be used to refer to emotion. This compound Word is made up of an adjective 'baƙi (black)', a genitive linker 'n' which is attached to the adjective and a 'ciki (stomach)'. The word 'ciki (stomach)' is the base of this compound word. The word is used metaphorically to name an abstract entity. The base 'ciki (stomach)', in this compound word, is a container. The container is marked to indicate an unpleasant situation. The base 'ciki (stomach)' is modified by an element that differentiates it from other members of its class. The word 'baƙi (black)' is the mark. The element that specifies the state of the 'base'. Literally, the word 'baƙi' means black. However, in this compound word it is used metaphorically to denote 'bad or unpleasant'. The conceptual need is to name an unpleasant situation. Hausa conceptualises this compound word to mean 'sadness'.

(2) **Cin hanci**

The compound word has 'ci (eat)' as the base. The word 'ci' is a conceptual domain from which the compound is built. A genitive 'n' is linked to the word 'ci (eat)' to refer to the act of eating. It does not mean physical eating but rather a metaphorical one. The constituent 'hanci (nose)' is the mark. It is used to restrict and specify the meaning of the

base 'ci (eat)'. The word 'hanci (nose)', like the base, is used metaphorically. In this regard, 'hanci (nose)' as a part of the face is seen as a dignity of an individual. The literal meaning of 'cin hanci' is 'eat nose'. The literal meaning is meaningless in Hausa. However, the conceptual motivation behind this compound word is to create a name of an abstract social concept of 'influencing a person in an unethical way, equivalent to the meaning of 'bribe'. Thus, the compound word is used metaphorically. The conceptual category is an unethical social status.

(3) **Daurin aure**

The compound word which is used to conceptually name a legal and religious union of a man and a woman, and as a husband and wife, is 'daurin aure'. Two words are used to conceptualise the name of this social institution: 'dauri and aure', with a genitive linker attached to 'dauri'. Onomasiologically, the base is 'daurin'. The literal meaning of this word is 'tying or binding'. However, in this compound word, the word is metaphorically used to mean 'binding of two parties'. Moreover, the mark in this compound word is 'aure'. The word 'aure' specifies the type of 'tying'. The importance of the mark (aure) in this compound word is to distinguish the base (daurin) from other forms of 'daurin'. The conceptual category is an event.

(4) **Dogon yaro**

The conceptual category involved in this compound word is that of naming a concrete entity. This compound word is used to name a specific type of tree. Onomasiologically, the base in this compound word is 'yaro (boy)'. The base in this compound is a metaphorical. It is the cognitive starting point for the naming process. A category in which this new concept is built. In this compound word, we metaphorically use the quality and feature of a 'yaro (boy)', not a generic category 'bishiya (tree)'. The mark in this compound word is 'dogo (tall)'. The genitive 'n' is attached to the mark. The mark is the specific feature that

distinguishes the concept from other members of the base category. The specifying feature is the height attribute. In this compound word, the mark modifies and narrows down the base. The word 'dogo (tall)' is a descriptive term used to coin the word 'tall boy'. Therefore, we conceptualise an object (tree) metaphorically as a 'tall boy'. The intended meaning is a tree not human being. The conceptual motivation in this compound word is to name a tree with characteristics of tall, straight and slender body. Thus, the word 'yaro' is used metaphorically to encompass youth and straightness. Therefore, the compound word 'dogon yaro (tall boy)' serves as a metaphorical name for a specific tree. The conceptual category is a natural entity. Denoting an object which is concrete and natural.

(5) Filin wasa

The conceptual need for this compound word is to name an open area of land for playing games. The meaning is directly compositional from its parts. The onomasiological structure directly mirrors the real-world relationship between a space and its use. The base is 'fili (field)'. The base 'fili' is the fundamental category of this compound word. The mark is 'wasa (play)'. It specifies the purpose or function of this open space. Therefore, the mark (wasa) tells us that this particular base (fili) is designated for the activity of playing. A genitive linker 'n' is used in this compound word to relate the two words. The linker is attached to the word 'fili'. Literally, the compound word means 'field of playing'. Hausa conceptualise a playground by first identifying its essential physical character as an open field (the base) and then marking it explicitly for its primary human activity, play (the mark). The conceptual category is a concrete physical place for recreation and social activities.

(6) Gidan bene

The conceptual category of this compound word is to name a space. The base is a fundamental, general concept upon which the new, specific term is built. In this compound word, the base is 'gida (house)'. The base (gida) provides the essentials category frame, a category that means to conceptualise an enclosed place. Moreover, the word 'bene' is the mark, a modifying element that narrows down the base and specifies what distinguishes this concept from the general category. The mark (bene) shows that the base (gida) is not just any house, but a house characterised by its elevated position. The conceptual need for this compound word is to create a name for a house with a different architectural design, as opposed to a flat house. The specific concept to be named here is the 'upper floor of a building or upstairs'. Gidan bene (upstairs) is not just a house but a specific vertical section within a residential structure. Hausa conceptualise the new idea of an 'upper floor' not as an entirely new entity, but as a subtype of 'house' distinguished by the specific feature of height. Therefore, the compound word 'gidan bene (upstairs)' is a clear example of linguistic economy and semantic extension. It uses the existing word for 'house (gida)' as the base and applies a specifying 'mark (bene)' to create a new lexical unit for a modern architectural concept. This shows how language builds new meanings on old ones.

(7) Ruwan sama

Here, we have two nouns joined by a genitive linker 'n'. In this compound word, the word 'ruwa (water)' is the base, which is the foundational concept in forming the name. The word 'sama (sky)' is the mark, the modifying element that specifies which kind of water. The use of the mark (sama) distinguishes the base (ruwa) from other types of water. The conceptual category in this compound word is to conceptually name a substance. The conceptual motivation is that Hausa conceptualise 'ruwan sama' as a substance that is a specific type of water. The meaning of the compound word is literal. Literally, it

means water that comes from the sky. The conceptual category of this compound word can either be a natural phenomenon or a substance. Hausa uses a compound word to conceptualise a kind of water that is not just water, but water with a special feature.

(8) Sharar fage

The base in this compound word is 'shara (sweep)', the general conceptual category from which the compound word is formed. The word 'shara (sweep)' is metaphorical. The concept of removing debris or preparing space is used in this compound word. 'Fage (field)' is the mark in this compound word. It specifies a functional relation associated with the base. The conceptual motivation for this compound word is to use a metaphorical word to arrive at the meaning of 'introduction'. The compound word reflects a semantic relation between an action (shara) and a place (fage). The analysis shows how Hausa use the compound word 'sharar fage' to conceptualise the process, by anchoring it with the relevant action 'shara (sweep)'. The two words are linked by a genitive linker 'n', which is attached to 'shara (sweep)'. This concept is then applied to mean 'introduction'. The conceptual category is a communicative and rhetorical concept. 'Sharar fage' means sweeping or preparing a place or field for an event. The meaning is then extended.

(9) Turaren wuta

The base of this compound word is 'turare (perfume)', the conceptual category. Specifically, the word 'turare (perfume)' refers to any fragrant, pleasant smell. In this compound word, 'turare (perfume)' is a category upon which the new concept is created. To specify the kind of 'turare (perfume)', the mark 'wuta (fire)' is used. Thus, the mark 'wuta (fire)' is used in this compound word to specify a special perfume different from other forms of 'turare (perfume)'. The conceptual

motivation is to name the substance which is burnt to produce perfume. The meaning of this compound word is conventionalised in the Hausa language. The conceptual category is a concrete cultural artefact that is associated with fragrance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the onomasiological approach revealed different key insights into Hausa compound words. The study has investigated the use of an onomasiological approach in the Hausa language. In all the examples of Hausa compound words, the interactions between the bases and the marks yield interpretations based on context. Moreover, the study showed that Hausa compound words are not arbitrary but are formed systematically. In a nutshell, this approach provided a comprehensive framework in understanding the relationship between Hausa compound words. It also enhanced our appreciation of the intricate relationship between language and thought. It has been shown that many of these compound words require extra linguistic knowledge for interpretation.

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