

Heads of Compound Verbs in Urhobo

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Abstract

This study investigates heads of compound verbs in Urhobo. The study classified Urhobo compound verbs using Lexicalist criteria as a theoretical frame work. Lexicalism is a theoretical standpoint in modern generative linguistics, according to which the processes that form complete words (derivation and compounding) are accounted for by a set of lexical rules, independent of and different from the syntactic transformation. Headedness refers to a relationship between the positions of units in a linguistic constituent structure. That is, it is the argument of the compound that projects in the compound verb formed. In this regards the verb is taken as the head of the compound verb assigning its features and the properties to the compound formed. The study reveals three groups of compound verb heads, namely: left headed compound verbs, right headed compound verbs, as well as both left and right headed compound verbs. The study also reveals that, there is no overt morphological head in a V-V compound; all the components being verbs, the result become the same category as the head. it is equally reveals that in the Urhobo language, compound verb heads position is determined by the verbs (V_1 or V_2) that predominantly convey the meaning of the compound. This means that the heads of compound could be left headed; when the first verb conveys the message in the argument, and head right headed when the second verb conveys the message in the argument structure; and both left and right when the pair of verbs jointly convey the message in the argument structure. It therefore means that compound verb formation in Urhobo could be in prefix position, suffix as well as both initial and final positions.

Key words: Argument structure, compound verb, headedness, thematic, Urhobo.

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1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Compounding is a controversial notion, but one that deserves attention. Compounding poses many challenges for any linguistic typological framework. It exists between morphology and syntax; it exemplifies obvious features of both, and yet is not one or the other. Because compounding involves a kind of derivation that intersects with semantics to produce highly idiosyncratic results, it becomes very hard to define its limits and equally as hard to categorise the kinds of compounds that one finds in language.

It should be noted that verbal compound is characterised by a co-occurrence of particular formal characteristics with particular restrictions on interpretation. Not all languages have synthetic compounds (e.g. English does, but French does not). The formal characteristic is that a synthetic compound has as its head, a derived word consisting of a verb plus one of a set of affixes (many writers on English restrict this to agentive *-er*, nominal and adjectival *-ing*, and the passive adjectival *-en*). Thus the following are

formally characterised as synthetic compounds: expert-test-ed checker-play-ing (as an adjective: a checker-playing king) window-clean-ing (as a noun) meat-eat-er (There is some disagreement about whether other affixes should also be included, so that *slum-clear-ance* for example would be a synthetic compound.) Compounds with this structure are subject to various restrictions (see Roeper and Siegel 1978), most prominent of which is that, the left-hand member must be interpreted as equivalent to a syntactic ‘first sister’ of the right-hand member. There have been many accounts of synthetic compounds, including Roeper and Siegel 1(978), Selkirk (1982), Lieber (1983), Fabb (1984), and Botha (1981).

2.1 Theoretical studies

Chomsky’s (1981), Ithionu’s (1992) and Oha’s (2010) delimitedness principle embodies Hale and Keyser’s (2002) own version of the *Argument Structure: the Lexical Argument Structure*, The kernel of this framework is that lexical categories and their complements enter into a system of representation

which is in essence lexical but governed by syntactic principles such as the unambiguous path and the X-bar theory. As a component of the framework the delimitedness principle states that all verbs are transitive in nature and are only delimited. Ihionu

(1992) proposes a generalised predicate formation rule - form a predicate - as follows:

1. $[v^1V XP]$

The rule implicates in the following structure in figure 1:

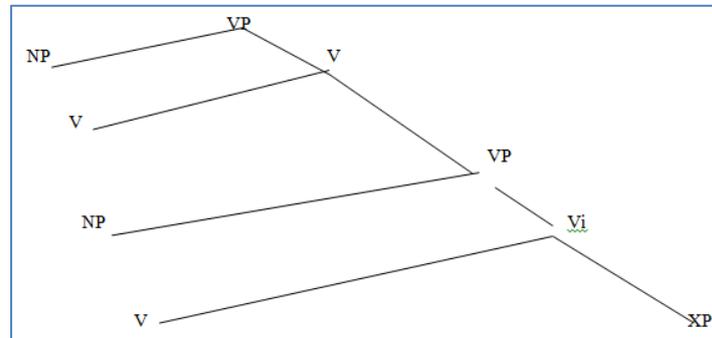


Fig-1

Ihionu (1992) opines that verb compounding involves the selection of a generalised XP in the above frame. In the case, the XP in the generalised structure in 1 is the VP, which delimits the event denoted by the first verb. This XP also provides for where the second component of the compound is a suffix. Ihionu (1992) reasons that the so-called suffix in compound verb is used in the same manner that second verb are used, namely forming a predicate that fills the XP template. With the frame work, Ihionu (1992) establishes a source (Rule 1 and Figure 1) for several predicate formations such as the *Inherent Complement verb* (ICV) and serialisation.

Ihionu's (1992) proposal is limited to only the resultative form of compound verb even when the frame work, as he observes, provides for other types of compound verbs such as the -ri (eat) second member compound verbs. Ihionu (1992), for whatever syntactic principle, rejects this type of transitive + transitive compound verbs.

Lexicalism is a theoretical standpoint in modern generative linguistics, according to which the processes that form complete words (derivation and compounding) are accounted for by a set of lexical rules, independent of and different from the syntactic transformation (see Okpalike 2017). Lexicalist theories are theories that account for the transformation or the derivation of complex words by set of lexical rules. Oha (2010) observes that the lexicalist theory of morphology advocates a separate rule of derivational morphology distinct from syntactic transformation. He further observes that lexicalist theory of morphology arose to counter the enormous generative power ascribed to the transformational theory on the derived nominalisation and compound by Lees (1960).

Chomsky (1972) argues that transformation should capture the regular correspondences between

linguistic forms. A syntactic transformation in the ideal case is supposed to capture productive and regular relationships between sentences. On the other hand, all idiosyncratic information belongs to the lexicon. These idiosyncratic features, according to Chomsky (1972), are the hallmark of derivation. The process of deriving what he terms derived nominalisation is purely a morphological operation within the lexicon. Illustrating with verbs from which the majority of English nominals are derived with a handful of exceptions, he shows what it is for a form to have regular formation. All transitive verbs form a passive. In the passive construction the complement which is adjacent to the verb in active form always corresponds to the subject of the passive form. This does not mean that there is no difference between the passive forms and the active form (see Mafredi 1987). However nearly all verbs have an identifiable passive participle and this is always identifiable in form to the past participle. As a transform of the other, the corresponding passive sentences have extreme close meaning with the active verb. Chomsky (1972) therefore concludes that there is something general and regular about the passive relation in English which typifies it as transformational.

On the other hand, such derivational process of some nominalisation, the derived nominalisation, follows a pattern that cannot be regarded as regular. Spencer (1991) gives example of the following: 'give' and 'gift' to show the idiosyncrasy in the derivation of one from the other. Chomsky (1972) makes a distinction between derived nominalisation which he regards as the result of derivational morphology as 'give' and 'gift', and gerundive nominalisation which is a result of inflectional process (the addition of -ing to the verb). Chomsky (1972) then argues that derived nominalisation shares many things with words including the one-morpheme words. Gerundive nominalisations on the other hand involve syntactic processes in their formation. Derived nominalisations

are therefore morphologically, syntactically and semantically idiosyncratic, while gerundive nominalisations are regular and transparent. So, the two cannot be derived from the same source. Moreover, derived nominalisations are not derived at all but listed in the lexicon.

Thompson (1973) is among the early lexicalist theorists on compound verbs. She equally holds the view that productive processes in a language are not necessarily best represented in a grammar as transformational processes. The theory provides a model of the lexicon, which enables the native speaker to create new words as in:

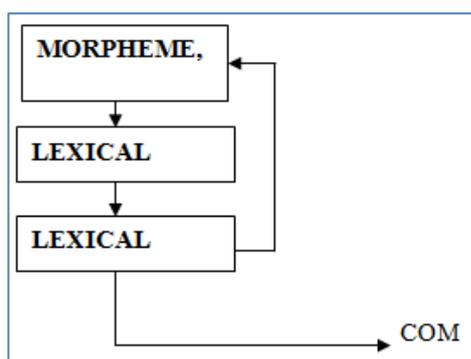


Fig-2

According to Thompson (1973) the framework proposes a lexical derivational rule creating potential forms of Resultative Verbs (RVs) which operate in the lexicon without exception as in the generalisation in:

2. Lexical Potentialising Rules for RV:
 {a. [v-de-v]RV}
3. $[V - V]_{RV} \rightarrow \{b. [v-bu v]_{RV}\}$
 (Obligatory if—v is —qi,-guO)

In arguing for the framework, Thompson (1973) pointed the above rules to the one in English that adds *un* to verbs of accomplishment, for example *un* yield *untie*. She explains that such rules are generally 'meaning changing' the semantic difference between the input and the output forms being specified as part of the rules.

Lord (1975) in contributing to this framework criticises Thompson's (1973) type of lexical derivational rule for its inconsistency. It is unable to show an advantage over a transformational process since it still allows for the listing of compounds with meaning idiosyncracies separately in the lexicon while similar items would be related through lexical redundancy rules. She modifies Thompson's (1973) framework on compounding and states a generalisation for the formation of word that equally provides a simple combinatory rule for the formation and interpretation of compound verb as in 5 and 6 below:

4. $v + v \rightarrow [v-v]RV$
5. $v + s \rightarrow [v-s]RV$

According to Lord (1975), the above rules mean that the first verb which to her is the main verb (v) can be combined with a verb (v) or with a suffix (s) to produce a resultative verb compound (RV). And this second position is always occupied by this suffix-like verb component. Lord (1975) argues for each compound and its components to be listed in the lexicon with complete morphological, syntactic and semantic information. In other words, compound would be related to their component morphemes by redundancy rules, and redundant information in the entry for the compound would be recognised and reflected in the lower economy (Lord 1975). Lord (1975) further proposes two entries in the lexicon: the redundant entry will handle cases of compounds with idiosyncratic meanings or formations, the other for predictable combinations. As for the predictable combination, there will be no idiosyncratic information given, and Lord (1975) formation is by means of rules which maybe to some extent transformational, resulting in a fully redundant lexical entry (Lord, 1975). As clearly revealed in the rules, the framework has its thrust on a kind of compound (the resultative verb compound). Moreover, the approach does not entirely exclude transformation as her rule (6 above) is all about the regularly formed compound verbs. A theory should account for the process of formation of the range of compounds of the language, not one that stipulates some kinds of formation for one and set a different kind for others.

Ogwueleka's (1982) contribution to the lexicalist framework is to create a lexicon where compound verb is viewed as expressing a single event. The event consists of various dimensions. Structurally it consists of morpheme components. The components reflect the various dimensions of events. In theory a compound may consist of as many as seven components, though in practice, not more than five instances have been observed. The components are positionally classified according to semantic functions. The language user then selects the morpheme which best expresses the focus of his thought as the main stem (MS). The main stem is the syntactic head of the compound. The other components are systematically placed before or after the main stem. Ogwueleka (1982) uses two unique terms to define the positions of the components of the compound: Prefix stem and suffix stem. To him if the MS is occupying the initial position in the compound its following component will be a suffix stem that is the main stem is the first component in the compound.

Oha (2010) observes that the departure from known terminological usage becomes a theoretical problem in understanding Ogwueleka's (1982) model. For example the terms "suffix" and "prefix" are ascribed to fully fledged words that can stand on their own, while what he calls "stems" in the model are, in the standard morphological literature, roots, and 'suffix'

and 'prefix' standardly used as dependent morphemes. This terminological inconsistency is a problem in understanding the model including its usefulness.

2.2 Theoretical frame work

Theoretical frame work adopted for this work is lexicalist theory. Lexicalism is a theoretical standpoint in modern generative linguistics, according to which the processes that form complete words (derivation and compounding) are accounted for by a set of lexical rules, independent of and different from the syntactic transformation.

2.3 Empirical studies

Aziza (2010) investigates word formation processes in Urhobo, using a descriptive approach. The study shows that Urhobo like every language employs different strategies to expand its vocabulary. The strategies commonly found in Urhobo are; affixation, reduplication, compounding, borrowing and coinage. Aziza (2010) investigates possible word formation processes in Urhobo, using a descriptive approach, while the present study examines heads of compound verb formation in Urhobo, using lexicalist criteria. Both studies examine compounding in the Urhobo language.

Ajiboyi (2014) examines the description of some of the morphological factors involved in compounding in Urhobo. It was observed that Urhobo has both headed and headless compounds. Though the heads of Urhobo compounds are left branching, there are instances where the heads are right branching. Pronominal affixes were found to head some Urhobo compounds. There are many examples of headed compounds; however, headless compounding seems to be more productive in the language. These headless compounds range from lexicalized phrases and sentences to coordinate and copulative compounds. The use of complete and partial reduplication of some words result into repetitive rhyme-based compounds in Urhobo. Different kinds of compounds are used in different kinds of discourse. Ajiboyi's (2014) study examines the description of some of the morphological factors involved in compounding in Urhobo. While the present study looks heads of compounds in the Urhobo language with lexicalist criteria as a theoretical frame work. Both studies examine compounding in Urhobo.

Aziza & Utulu (2018) looked at the comparative study of word formation process in Èwùlù and Ùrhòbò and attempts to explore the various procedures by which both languages adopt in deriving compounds. The study adopts descriptive approach. The work revealed that Èwùlù and Ùrhòbò, though are two different Nigerian languages, yet exploit nearly the same morphological patterns of compounding to create new words. Aziza and Utulu (2018) investigate comparative analysis of word formation processes in Urhobo and Èwùlù, using a descriptive approach, while the present study investigates heads of compound verb

formation in Urhobo, using lexicalist criteria. Both studies examine word formation processes.

2, 4 Summary of literature review

This segment of the research reviews scholarly works in the area of study. Objectively, the review shows that much has been done on compound verb in some languages; proper attention has no pay to works on lexicalist theory of verb compounding in Urhobo, hence the need for this research.

3.1 Heads of compound verbs in Urhobo

Headedness refers to a relationship between the positions of units in a linguistic constituent structure. The notion of heads was extended from syntax to morphology with the proposal that just as phrases have heads, complex words also have heads. Verb –Verb compounding in Urhobo could be left headed, right headed or both left headed, and right headed. There is no fixed position of head, in verb- verb compounding; that is V_2 is a projection of V_1 and gives parenthetical information about the V_1 , while V_1 is equally a projection of V_2 and gives parenthetical information about V_2 . This is as exemplify in the structures below.

3.1.1. Left headed compound verb.

In Urhobo, left headed compound verbs are those verbs whose first members passes on their argument structures to the entire compound as in the following example

6. Oni mè siobónó úkó ná vwò kẹ́ Óvie

Mother my COM- siobó(V_1). release→HD-
nó(V_2)- look PAST cup that has give name. My mother
has released/handed over the cup to Óvie

In the above example, the head of the construction is *siobo-release*, which can be substituted for the entire construction, $V_1 - siobo-release$ is the head of this construction and performs that function effectively.

7. Ójí ná vádjè
Thief that COM- vá(V_1)-burst/escape→HD
djè(V_2)-run PAST
The thief escape
8. Émò ná vénró ékì ná
Children that COM- vén(V_1)-rush→HD-
ró(V_2)-enter PAST market that
The children rushed into the market
9. Óvie kpáré òmò ná name COM- kpá(V_1)-
vomit →HD – ré(V_2)-eat PAST child that
Óvie vomited the child
10. Ósháré ná gbáphíyó áyé ná
Man that COM- gbá (V_1)-tié→HD phíyó(V_2) –
put PAST woman that

The man entangle the woman

The following are the components of compound verb that gives the sense of combining verbs of the compound verbs formed in example 6-10

V₁: vá-burst, vén-rush, tá-talk; kpá-vomit; gbá-tie.

V₂: djè-run, ró-enter; mú-carry; ré-eat; phýó-put.

By syntax/morphological and event structure mapping the following derivation is arrived at;

Table-1

Syntactic order	V ₁	V ₂
Morphological structure	Head	Non head
Event structure	CAUSATION	RESULT

The event structure column in the table shows that the common core meaning of the initial verb components of compound verb form in example 6-10 is CAUSATION while that of the second verb is RESULT.

From the analysis above, (examples 6-10), the second member of the pair of verbs show the manner in which the action of the first member of the compound verbs are carry out. The head of the compound is located to the left of the compound (verb phrase). In all the examples (6-10), there is a relationship between the subcategorisation and the argument relation. Aziza (2010), Iloene (2010), and Oha (2010) agree with Hoeksema (2003) that there are two types of relationship to inflectional languages (subcategorisers relation, and modifiers relation), and that both types of relation are indicted by affixes. The markers on arguments of the head are usually called case markers and the ones on modifiers are agreement markers.

3.1.2 Right headed compound verbs

Verb final arguments linking compound verbs are groups of compounds whose heads are right headed. This is in accordance with Lieber (1983), who postulates that the English compound verb and most of the world languages have head final position. This is as identified by Lieber (1983) in English, Oha (2010), Anyanwu (2007), and Nneji (2013) in Igbo, and Gammerschalag (2000) in Japanese, to mention but a few. In Urhobo, there are compound verb types whose second members pass on their argument structures to the entire compound. A good number of this group of compound verbs in Urhobo is as follows:

- 11. djèvábó
COM djè(V₁)-run – vábó(V₂) escape PAST
Escaped
- 12. djèvré
COM djè(V₁)-run – vré(V₂) pass PAST
Overtook
- 13. várhé

COM vá(V₁)-burst- rhè(V₂)come PAST
Raised

Example 11-13 are compound verbs that show the second member of the pair of verbs as the verb giving a clear picture of the semantic realisation, which means that, in Urhobo, a compound can be right headed. The head of a compound verb can appear in any position in a word. It therefore means that the head of a construction can subcategorise for any other lexical item in order to make up that construction. Example, *djevre*-overtook; the head of this structure is the verb *vré*-pass. The construction selects the second verb to determine, in what way the action of the verb (*djè*- run) may be carried out. This means that V₂ specifies particular information on how the action of the V₁ could be carried out. This is as exemplified in the structure below.

14. Òmò ná djèvábó rhé
Child that COM- djè(V₁)-run- vábó(V₂)-
escape→HD PAST AuxVPAST
The child has escape

15. Òmò ná djèvré òkò ná rhé
Child that COM-djè(V₁)-run- vré(V₂)-
pass→HD PAST hut that Aux rVPAST

The child passed/overtook the hut

16. Úvó ná várhé rhé
Sun_i that COM vá(V₁)-burst- V₂- rise→HD
PAST OVS ti

The sun has risen

17. Ójí ná reojá
Thief that COM- re(V₁)- eat→HD ojá(V₂)-
suffer PAST
The thief suffered

By syntax/morphological and event structure mapping the following derivation is Arrived at;

Table-2

Syntactic order	V ₁	V ₂
Morphological structure	Non head	Head
Event structure	ACTION	MOTION

The event structure column in table 2, shows that the common core meaning of the initial verb components of compound verb form in example 14-17 is ACTION while that of the second verb is MOTION. This means that V₂ is the projection of the compound verb form.

In example 95-98, V₂ gives additional information about the action of V₁ (*djè*-run, and *djè* in both structures), showing how the motion of *djè*-run, and *djè*-run were performed. Below is their separate form in the deep structure.

- 18a. òmò ná djèré
Child that djè (V₁) -run PAST MOTION
The child ran
- b. òmò ná vábó rhé
Child that vábó (V₂).escape PAST MOTION it
The child escaped it
- 19a. òmò ná djèré
Child that djè (V₁)-run PAST MOTION
The child ran
- b. òmò ná vrè rhé
Child that vrè (V₂). pass PAST it

The child passed it

From example 18a -19a, the verbs: *djè* – run, *djè*- run are V₁, while example 18b -19b, are V₂ in their underlying structures. The V₂ of the verbs: *vrè*-pass, *vábó*-escape are transferred to the compound form, showing that the second verb is projecting the message in the argument.

3.1.3 Both heads compound verbs

From our observation, in Urhobo, there are compound verbs that take both left and right headed verb to give meaningful semantic readings. In other words, this group of compounds are made up of simple verbs, which have their separate meanings in the deep structure. The following are such example:

- 20. òmò ná vwè èbé ná támú
Child that PREP paper that COM- tá(V₁)-talk→HD mú(V₂)-carry PAST

The child gummed the paper
- 21. Óní mè gháré é mú ná
Mother my COM-ghá(V₁)-forbid→HD- ré(V₂)-eat→HD PAST food that My mother divided the food
- 22. Ósiobé ré úkókó ná fuèrè ébé ná
Secretary of meeting that COM-fuè(V₁)-quench→HD- rẹ(V₂)-level→HD PAST book that

The secretary of the meeting examined the book
- 23. Ójí ná kpáré ékpéti ná nè ótò
Thief that COM- kpá(V₁)-vomit→HD ré (V₂)-eat→HD PAST box that PREP ground

The thief lifted the box from the ground
- 24. Òmò ná sáré àmè kuè égòdò ná
Child that COM- sá(V₁) -shoot→HD ré(V₂)-eat→HD PAST water OVS compound that

The child splashed water in the compound
- 25. Ònòmè guoghò úvwéwí ré óní mè
name COM- guo(V₁)-melt→HD- ghò(V₂)-entertain→HD PAST PREP mother my
Ònòmè destroyed my mother's house

Table-3

Syntactic order	V ₁	V ₂
Morphological structure	Head	Head
Event structure	ACTION	PROCESS

By syntax/morphological and event structure mapping the following derivation is arrived at; Table 3.

Examples 21-25 above: *gháré* (v₁.ghá, v₂.ré)-divide, *fuèrè* (v₁.fuè, v₂.è)-examine, *kpáré* (v₁.kpá v₂.ré) -examine, *sáré* (v₁.sá v₂.ré)-sprinkle and *guoghò*-destroy (v₁.guo , v₂.ghò)-destroy, are compound verb form. From the analysis, we see that, the first verb in the underlying structures: v₁.ghá- forbid in example 21 and v₂.ghò - entertain in example 22 are associated with the theme of arguments: *émú* food, and *óní mè* - my mother.

The event structure column in table 3, shows that the common core meaning of the initial verb components of compound verb in example 22-25 is ACTION while that of the second verb is the PROCESS.

Another group of compound verbs that fall under both verb argument-taking verbs is compound verb of occurrence. The examples below illustrate this:

- 26. Úrhé ná mú yámú vwè égbóródé
Tree that carry COM-yá(V₁)-dry→HD mú(V₂)-carry→HD PAST in forest

The tree dried up suddenly in the forest
- 27. Ághòn ré ímághòrò ná sídòn
Hand mango that COM sí(V₁) . write→HD dòn(V₂)-lean→HD PAST

The branch of the mango tree withered
- 28. Ònòmè chéré é mú ná
My own COM- ché(V₁)-will AuxV→HD ré(V₂)-eat→HD PAST food that

Ònòmè cooked the food

One of the features of compound verb of occurrence is that it unaccusative. This is exemplified in the argument below

- 29a. Úrhé ná yáré
Tree that V₁-dry PAST
The tree dried up
- b. Úrhé ná múrú
tree that V₂-germinate PAST
The tree germinated
- 30a. Ábò ímáǵòró ná sí réyò
Hand mango that V₁-withdraw PAST
The branch of the mango tree is deformed
- b. Ábò ímáǵòró ná dònré

Hand mango that dòn(V₂)-lean PAST

The branch of the mango tree is deformed

- 31a. ònòmè chá
Name (chá) V₁-will AuxV
Ònòmè will come
- b. ònòmè rè é mú na
name rè(V₂)-eat PAST food that
Ònòmè ate the food.

From example 29-31, the study reveals that all the component verbs in the examples are unaccusative. It is obvious that none of the verbs (V₁, V₂) has totally its feature at the deep structure convey the message onto the compound verb; rather the two verbs pass their argument structure to the verb initiating the compound verb.

4.1 Summary of findings

In Urhobo, there is no overt morphological head in a V-V compound; all the components being verbs, the result become the same category as the head. This study classified Urhobo compound verbs using the argument structure. That is, it is the argument of the compound that projects in the compound verb formed. In this regard the verb is taken as the head of the compound verb assigning its features and the properties to the compound formed.

The study therefore, reveals three groups of compound verb heads, namely: left headed compound verbs, right headed compound verbs, as well as both left and right headed compound verbs.

The work reveals that compound verb heads position in the Urhobo language is determined by the verbs (V₁ or V₂) that predominantly convey the meaning of the compound.

This means that the heads of compound could be left headed; when the first verb conveys the message in the argument, and head right headed when the second verb conveys the message in the argument structure; and both left and right when the pair of verbs jointly

convey the message in the argument structure. It therefore means that compound verb formation in Urhobo could be in prefix position, suffix as well as both initial and final positions.

4.2 CONCLUSION

Headedness refers to a relationship between the positions of units in a linguistic constituent structure. Morphologically, heads defines the relationship between a head and non-head in a complex word. The notion of heads was extended from syntax to morphology with the proposal that just as phrases have heads, complex words also have heads. The principle of percolation guarantees that the head is specified with features identical to those of the entire constituent. This entails that head of a phrase is a noun; the head of verb phrase is a verb etc. The Urhobo language is a head initial language: this means that the head or nucleus of a construction comes first in the construction.

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