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*Full Length Research Paper*

# The Semantics of the Tumbuka Compound Noun

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The article on the semantics of the Tumbuka Compound noun is a research topic taken from a PhD research document titled "The Grammar of The Tumbuka Compound Noun: A Case Study of Tumbuka Compound Nouns of the Lundazi District in The Eastern Province of Zambia". The PhD research study was carried in order to collect Tumbuka compound nouns after which the researcher discussed their semantics, morphology and syntax. The research was designed to be qualitative, relying on open ended and self administering questionnaires. Using these instruments face to face interviews of 210 respondents were conducted. In addition, the researcher also used books and the internet in order to get secondary data before he turned to introspection as a Tumbuka himself. The research was done some villages of chiefs Mphamba, Magodi and Zumwanda were interviewed. This research study collected over 279 Tumbuka compound nouns were. The morphological analysis showed that Tumbuka compound words are agglutinatively composed with morphemes that play various functions. Semantically, it was observed that very few compound nouns directly derived their meanings from words that compose them. Most of them had meanings that had nothing to do with meanings of their individual words. Syntactically, it was noted that compound nouns were made from different parts of speech and that each word that made the nouns played specific roles and created networks of relationships with the other word or words within the compound nouns.

**Keywords:** used in the document

Semantics: The study of meaning in language.

Denotative meaning: This is context free meaning of a word which usually is referred to as the first/literal/logical/sentence meaning.

Connotative meaning: This is context based meaning of a word which is also referred to as the interpretive or utterance meaning.

Actual meaning: The meaning that the utterance was meant to stand for rather than the denotative meaning. It is also called the connotative meaning.

Cultural meaning: This is the meaning of an utterance based on cultural interpretations.

Nick name: Apart from the usual name another name is given to a person for a particular reason.

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### Introduction

This article discusses the Semantics of the Tumbuka Compound Noun. The real meanings of these structures should reveal the cultural fabric (life style) of the Tumbuka people of Lundazi District which may be scarce in public libraries.

It must be reiterated here that the research of the PhD

thesis was done due to four reasons. First, the researcher wanted to collect a list of Tumbuka compound nouns. Second, he wished to understand the composition of these words. The next thing was that he wished to find meanings of the compound nouns. Finally, the researcher also studied the syntax of the same data. As for far as this article is concerned, the writer wishes to talk about some semantic findings from the PhD thesis.

## Background

Tumbuka, spoken in Lundazi district of Zambia, is a Bantu language of the Niger Congo Kordofanian language family, from the Bantoid group of zone N 21. This language is spoken in Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania (The World Almanac, 1998; December 23, 2012).

Although Tumbuka used to be a language of instruction in lower primary schools of Zambia before independence, the language is demoted to vernacular (Simwinga, 205) and Zimba, 207). The consequence has been that the language is no longer popular in the country and the grammar books which were commonly seen before independence are no longer seen today. The consequence of these developments is that the language no longer has grammar books both in schools and public libraries, a trend that can only change when a lot of literature is written on the language.

## Rationale, Focus and Scope

### a. Rationale

The PhD research study on the Tumbuka compound noun was carried out due to four reasons: (i). gather a list of Tumbuka compound nouns, (ii). explain the meanings of the compound nouns, (iii). discuss the morphology for the collected data, and (iv). analyse the syntax of the same compound nouns. However, this article on The Semantics of the Tumbuka Language explains the meanings of some sampled compound nouns from the thesis.

### b. Focus

The PhD research paper dealt with the list of compound nouns, their Semantics, Morphology and Syntax. This article deals with only the Semantics of the Tumbuka Compound Noun. It covers both the literal and connotative meanings.

### c. Scope

The research came from the grammar of the Tumbuka language which is a topic under descriptive linguistics with five levels of linguistic analysis, namely, phonetics, phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax. Within descriptive linguistics, the researcher dealt with only three levels, namely, semantics, morphology and syntax. It is under semantics where the article for this journal comes from.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS USED FOR THE STUDY

### Materials

In order to have a successful study, the researcher used the Tumbuka Holy Bible, the internet, text books and Tumbuka people. The Holy Bible and people provided Compound nouns. People contributed meanings, the philosophy behind using the compound nouns and the nouns themselves. The text books and the internet provided morphological and syntactic knowledge about the collected data.

### Methods used for the study

#### Research Design

This research used the qualitative approach for data collection. It used face to face interviews in order to collect authentic data from respondents using self-administered questionnaires to exactly know people who answered them. In addition, the research used primary and secondary sources of data collection so that the information is cross checked for truth.

#### Data collection

Using open ended self administered questionnaires the researcher conducted face to face interviews on villagers and teachers (Cooper and Schindler, 2003; Johnson, 1994 and Eresmell, 1994). The interviews provided primary data while secondary resulted from reading various sources like the Tumbuka Holy Bible, the internet and text books. In addition, focus Group Discussions and introspection were also used to cross check findings. Lastly, special informant interviews on secondary school teachers became helpful when it came to collecting some tips on the morphological as well as syntactic analyses of the gathered data.

#### Research instruments

The study used open ended self administered questionnaires, introspection, books, the internet and the Holy Bible as tools for data collection.

#### Study area

The study was conducted in Mphamba, magodi and Zumwanda Chiefdoms of Lundazi district in the Eastern

Province of Zambia which have Tumbuka speaking people (Zimba, 2007). The Lundazi district is bordered by Chama district to the north, Chipata to the South, Mambwe to the South West, Serenje to the West and Malawi to the East.

### Sample structure

The sample comprised 210 participants, comprising 150 villagers and 60 teachers who were randomly selected. The respondents were resident Tumbuka people as well as Tumbuka-speakers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. awiseŵo ŵa amama 'father of my mother'  
The speaker has a mother and the person he is talking about is the father of the mother. Therefore, this parent is grand to the speaker. In Tumbuka this parent is called agogo 'grandfather' or awiseŵo ŵa amama. The compound noun describes the person being referred to and at the same time it shows respect. It is a name explaining the nature of relationship that exists between the speaker and the referent.

2. boza muleke 'lies stop'  
The name is given to a person who usually advises people to avoid telling lies. Sometimes this name is given to advise people that lies are divisive in society and that they can sometimes bring trouble to victims or to the liar.

Communities have many types of characters. Some of them are liars who once at work do divide societies. There is need to arrest this behavior. Sometimes this is done by giving such people a name that should alert people of the presence of a wrong person.

3. buku lotumbikika 'book which is respected'  
This is a name given to the Holy Bible. There are many books on earth that bare different kinds of messages. Of all the books, the bible is considered sacred because it carries God's instructions to human beings. Due to the nature of messages that the bible carries, people feel this book is chosen and set apart from others (lopatulika); hence it has to be respected a lot.

4. caka ca jembe 'handle of a hoe'. This is a name of a handle of the hoe. Caka refers to a handle. There are many types of handles whose names arise from what they are meant to be used with. Will it be used with an axe or a hoe? If the handle is used with a hoe, then it is called caka ca jembe 'handle of a hoe'. This name just describes the type of a handle this particular one is.

5. caka ca zoza 'handle with chronic soul'.  
The compound noun is a name for a handle of a hoe which has two parts where the hole could be foxed; the new one and the old one but blocked. The old blocked part is the one referred to as zoza (chronic ulcer). Handles of either an axe or a hoe are supposed to have only one hole but the handle in question has two. This name simply describes the type of a handle this one is.

6. cakola galu 'it has caught a dog'  
This name is given to people who feel that they are the best at doing things but when they fail to do what they feel they know best, they do not accept any blame. These people even jeer at others who fail to do the same things very well. However, when the same people (experts) fail to do the same things very well, they defend and excuse themselves and attribute errors to mere accidents. In response, the society gives such people this name in order to jeer at them also and remind the self proclaimed experts that no one has a monopoly to knowledge.

7. cakulya ca mise 'food for evening'  
This is a name that is given to a meal that is eaten in the evening. There are three major meals a day and each of them has a name in Tumbuka. The name describes the type of food this one is.

8. ciŵanda uka 'ghost wake up'.  
Ciŵanda generally refers to a bad spirit. Ciŵanda uka means spirit wake up. This is a praise name given to witch finders who are believed to be using their spirits to catch their victims. It is believed that witch doctors use spirits to catch witches. These spirits are usually asleep when the witch finders are not working. Therefore, whenever the witch finders are at work, they call upon their spirits to wake up and do their work. This name is given to famous witch finders as praise for the job they do to catch the witches and wizards.

9. cibinga nyama 'one which chases away animals'.  
This is a praise name which is given to successful medicine that chases away animals from fields and villages. Wild animals can attack crops in villages. People look for medicine that can chase away such animals. The medicine that succeeds to chase away these animals is given this name. Sometimes the same name is also given to the medicine man who administers this kind of medicine.

10. cidyaka munchile 'one that steps in the bush'  
This is a name given to the payment that people who go to the medicine man make in order to send the healer to go and fetch medicine in the bush. It is believed that when this payment is not made, even when medicine is sought and given to the patients, it cannot be effective.

This payment, therefore, clears the spirits in the medicine so that it becomes potent. This name indicates the type of payment under review.

11. cijala mulomo 'one that closes the mouth'  
This is the name for a bribe. Sometimes people commit cases which they do not want the society to know about. In order to make it a point that the one who knows about the case does not report, a payment is made to maintain the secret. It is this payment, called cijala mulomo, that closes the mouth of the person who knows something about the case since when it is not given someone can easily report the matter. This is the kind of payment under discussion.

12. cikana malango 'one that refuses rules'  
This name is given to people who do not want to take advice. Even when they go wrong, such people do not accept any rebuke or advice. The aim for giving this name is to advise people to accept advice once given. It also warns people against behaving this way because once they get into trouble, there will be nobody to blame. Among people there are certain people who like getting advice and others that do not.

13. cikhoso ca modulo 'the cough that cuts'  
This compound noun refers to tuberculosis (TB). It is believed that this cough only attacks people when some members of the family commit adultery. Once this illegal act happens, the victims have certain of their parts cut; hence they begin to cough out blood. The name arises from the fact that the patient coughs out blood as if one part of the body has been cut (kudula 'to cut'; a borrowed Chewa word).

14. ciza musoka 'it has come in troublesome circumstances'  
The name is given to a person who is born at a time a tragedy of any sort occurs to the family or village. This problem may be death, accident, an arrest of an important village in the village, or any other misfortune. By using the name, the society is always reminded of the sad event that occurred in the family or village.

15. gwaza pasi 'pierce ground' or 'You pierce the ground'  
This is the name to the witch finder who manages to repel diseases that witches send to their victims. To pierce refers to sending of any form of diseases. The name instructs the sender of the disease, in this case the witch, to pierce the ground. This means that the disease that is sent will not work. This is a praise name that is given to traditional doctors who are very good at administering preventive medicines. The same name also warns witches and wizards to desist from bewitching people as their charms would one day embarrass them

when they fail to function.

16. John wa nyanga 'John of witchcraft' or 'John who practises witchcraft'  
This name is given to a person who threatens people because he is considered by the society to be a witch. It says that the named person is a witch. The name condemns the referent but warns the society to be aware of this fact and protect themselves.

17. kamba tuweni 'speak good words' or 'You speak good words'  
This name is given to a person who wishes to promote peace with all people s/he lives with. It is also given to a person who discourages people from gossiping or telling lies. This name is clipped. It is supposed to be 'kamba tuwemi tumawu 'speak good words'. The compound noun instructs the referent to speak good words where s/he is going. It is a name that promotes peace and respect among people in the society.

18. manchaya nyoka 'beater of snakes' or 'one who beats snakes'  
Manchaya nyoka is a name that is given to loafers because they are lazy. Whenever homes are visited by snakes, normally societies call these loafers to come and kill them. This is done as a way of finding the loafers something to do although they are not paid for killing the snakes. This action is contemptuous as it indirectly rebukes the loafers for idling in life. It reminds the loafers that they can also be useful if only they decided to do something with their lives.

Our societies have two kinds of people when it relates to work; those that work and those that do not work. Those that work may have formal or informal jobs while those that do not work may not have found jobs although they have been looking for one or they may not have one because they do not look for one, they are lazy.

19. mudyaka cuma 'one who steps on wealth' or 'one who steps on money'  
The name stands for a very wealthy person. The philosophy behind this name is that this man is so rich that s/he can even start walking on money (wealth). The name praises the people who are rich and also encourages other people to also begin working hard so that they can also become rich. This is a praise name that is given to a very rich person.

20. mupapa dende 'one that carries or gives birth to relish'.  
This Tumbuka name is given to the mukwa tree. The tree does not just provide very good timber, but it also has edible leaves. Some people among the Tumbukas like to eat the tender leaves of this tree as a vegetable and this is why it is said to carry relish.

## 21. mutola yumo 'one who marries one'

This is a name for a monogamous man. In the Tumbuka culture men are encouraged to be polygamous. Therefore, polygamous men are praised as opposed to those that avoided this practice. In order to rebuke and tease monogamous men, they are given the name mutola yumo. In other words, by calling them by this name, men are encouraged and advised to be polygamous.

## 22. muzga tama 'slave depend on' or 'one who depends on slaves'

This is a name of a village which has inhabitants that do very well because they depend on slaves for cheap labour. It is also a name of a person who relies on slaves to earn life. The name rebukes or condemns or mocks such villagers and challenges them to stop relying on slaves and use their own strength to gain wealth.

## 23. njoka luzi 'snake fibre'

This is a name given to either impotent men or men who are very lazy. These are men who may not be very successful in life for one reason or the other. For example a man may be despised because he is very lazy or impotent. The implication is that these men are very weak do be fruitful in their lives. Therefore, they are likened to snakes that cannot bite; snakes that are like fibre (luzi).

## 24. nkhwenda waka 'I just walk'

This sympathetic name is given to sick people who are still active at doing various duties at their homes or in the society. They just force themselves to do these house chores.

## 25. nyifwa yikwenda 'the corpse is walking' walking corpse

This name is given to children who are born when many people in the family have died. It is given in families where a lot of relatives have died. By giving this name parents are complaining that too many people have died in their family and that even the one who given this name is a walking corpse. They say s/he is a walking corpse because the child is just awaiting death; s/he is already dead although still alive. The name further pleads to spare this particular child. In addition, the parents are also pleading with killers of their relatives to stop the practice.

## 26. pamutima pa ndopa 'purging of blood'

This is the name for dysentery. When a person suffers from dysentery, there is blood in hi or her stool. At the same time the patient develops diahorria which shows blood in the stool. This name arises from describing the kind of illness.

## 27. pasi pawo 'under the ground is theirs'.

This name is given to male children whose families have had a lot of deaths before they are born. It is given to these children so that the families inform the society of the danger in which the children are. It is also a name that pleads for mercy from the killers. The society is also told that the families have suffered from the many loses they have had. The name tells people that graves belong to their children.

## 28. sanje muleke 'jealous stop' stop jealous

This is a name of a compound in Lundazi district of the Eastern Province in Zambia. Prostitutes live in this compound. Many married men go to this compound to buy sex. At certain times wives go to this compound to quarrel with the prostitutes. The prostitutes tell these wives to stop being jealousy (sanje muleke) as the prostitutes do not get their husbands but just use them and then the husbands go back to their homes. Since prostitutes feel that these wives should stop feeling jealousy, the compound where they come from is named that way. This name discourages women from feeling jealousy when they hear that their husbands do visit the compound since they (husbands) would still go back to their homes. The implication is that wives should know that there are unmarried women in the world who sexually need men as well, and it is their husbands who should help such people.

## 29. siku la cibili 'day of second'

This name is given to the second day of the week, which is Tuesday. It is a descriptive expression.

## 30. themba cako 'depend on yours'

This is a praise name given to people who are self-reliant. It is given because people who are self reliant are the only ones who can honestly praise their property. In addition, it is only personal property that one can be sure of using at any time of need. The same cannot be expected of somebody's property. In a way this name promotes self reliance.

This name is contrasted against people who like borrowing things from other people. No matter how well such items can function, owners can with draw these items. Additionally, praising such items can be done, but the owners can get them away.

## 31. tunthu mufumbenge 'things you should be asking'

This is a name given to peace makers in society. They advise that for any rumour people get they insist on people verifying them before taking action. There are many things that are discussed in societies. People share a lot of these things. Some of these issues concern

certain people within the society. When people hear that certain people were talking about them, some people may react without taking a second thought. Some people fight, others merely quarrel, some of them drag each other to courts of law while the other group tries to verify facts before taking action. The last group reacts correctly. Issues need to be verified before any action is taken. People who insist on verifying facts are the ones given this name so that by using it. The society is reminded of the virtue.

32. vinyu liswesi 'wine red' (red wine)  
This is a name given to red wine in order to distinguish it from the other kinds of wine. This is a descriptive name.

33. vuta cipeta 'weed bush'  
This is a name that is given to husbands who do not sleep with their wives. The philosophy behind the name is that a person who wants to grow crops must be ready to weed his or her field. If husband marries, he must be ready to sleep with the wife. Hence the name that instructs the husband to be sleeping with the wife. As people use this name, the husbands are reminded that they a job they have to do; and this is to sleep with the wife.

34. watuka pako 'you have insulted on yours' 'you have insulted your own anus'  
This is a name that is given to dogs which are usually insulted when they stray to people's homes. The dogs that are owned by certain people stray to other people's homes and these people do insult these dogs. The owners of the dogs give their dogs this name in response to the insults that the dogs are given. To the dog owners the insults leveled at dogs are actually insults directed on them (the owners). The dog owners in turn give the dogs this name so that by implication they can also insult the people who insult them through their dogs. They dog owners insult back by saying 'you have insulted your own anus'. Psychologically, the name cools down the temper of the dog owners because they know that through the name they have also shouted and insulted the people who earlier on insulted them.

35. wuta waleza 'bow of lightening'. It is a bow for lightening.  
This is a name for the rainbow. The belief is that this is a bow (going by its curved shape it makes) but that the owner of this bow is lightening as the two often occur at the same time during rain seasons.

36. yesu khirisitu 'Jesus Christ'. Jesus is the Christ.  
This is a name for Jesus the son of God. It is a descriptive name which explains the kind of of a person this Jesus is.

37. zelu zatha 'thinking has stopped'  
This name is given to a village which experiences a lot of problems. It is these problems that hinder thinking amongst villagers. Wisdom has all finished due to too many problems, therefore, one cannot do anything about them (the problems). This is a declaration that nothing can be done about the current situation.

38. zila nyondo 'come for hummer'  
This name is given to a big brown or black wasp whose sting is very painful. The pain of the sting is likened to that of a hummer when it hits one's finger. The person who has been stung by these wasps is like he visited the place where wasps live in order to be hit by a hammer (coming to the nest of the wasps to be hit by a hammer).

## CONCLUSIONS

a. compound nouns are names that are given side by side with other names that people have. If a compound noun is a name for an animal, it is the only name that that animal has. However, the interpretations of such names is dependant on human thought. Severally names that bare compound nouns are nick names. Nick names are names that are given in order to play various roles. These names can advise the people against a certain vice. A compound noun such as vuta cipeta 'weed bush' is meant to advise husbands to be sleeping with their wives or else they disturb their marriages. Some compound nouns warn people about certain things. For example the compound noun zila nyondo 'come for hummer' warns people to be careful when they approach hidden places like shrubs which may harbor this type of wasps. These wasps are very vicious once they sting. The other roles the compound nouns play are to express hopelessness, mock, discourage, retaliate, describe, etc.

b. The compound nouns do have meanings. The meanings can be denotative where meanings are interpreted from the words that make the compound noun. For example the compound noun vinyu liswesi 'wine red' which simply describe the type of wine is in question. Other than denotative meanings, some compound nouns demand connotative interpretations. For example the compound noun zila nyondo is not interpreted directly since one requires to be initiated before they know that this name refers to a kind of wasp.

c. The cultural aspect of the Tumbuka people shows prominently. The peaceful character of the Tumbuka people, for example, shows in the compound nouns. The compound noun, for example, tunthu mufumbenge 'things you should ask' encourages people to up hold peace by avoiding reacting to rumours before verifications. Other cultural aspects that show in certain

compound nouns are fear for witches and death, sense of humour, being helpful to others, the ability to share, the desire to warn/advise each other, etc.

d. All in all, compound nouns are a very important aspect of Tumbuka language, like any other language. Compound nouns are very useful in language.

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