

A study of meaning formation, inference and conceptual patterns of the endocentric compound nouns of Farsi¹

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Abstract

The interpretation of a compound and access to it as a whole or its constituents separately as well as its retrieval from mental lexicon of speakers is heavily affected by the type of relation exist between elements of a compound; several relations might be activated at the same time and the speaker actually select a specific relation from simultaneously activated ones. Considering the semantics of compounds, semantic compositionality unites the meanings of components to reach a compositional meaning; based on this principle, there exist endocentric compounds with semantic head; On the other hand, there are plentiful of compounds in language with no semantic head and consequently no compositionality. Therefore the referent of the compound is out of it and the compound should be listed in the lexicon and memorized. Exocentric compounds with no clear semantic head and no compositionality have opaque meaning. Based on the claims of CARIN theory which has a cognitive approach, we could explain the semantic aspect of a compound (to be transparent or opaque) in terms of the existence or lack of a semantic relation between the elements. This paper aims at recognizing all possible relations in

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endocentric compound nouns of Modern Persian (Farsi). The interpretation of a compound and access to it as a whole or its constituents separately as well as its retrieval from mental lexicon of speakers is heavily affected by the type of relation exist between elements of a compound; several relations might be activated at the same time and the speaker actually select a specific relation from simultaneously activated ones. This area has been the focus of many researches done by cognitive linguists like C. Gagne and others as well as CARIN (CARIN theory known as *competition among relations in nominals*). Compound nouns are semantically classified in four groups: 1. Endocentric: a noun compound with one semantic head, 2. Apposition: a noun compound with two semantic heads, 3. Exocentric: a noun compound with no semantic head and 4. Coordinate; in these kinds of compound nouns the compound as a whole is not a kind of semantic head. Headless compounds do not contain an element to function as the semantic head modified by the non-head element; “football” and “greenhouse” are examples of headless compounds. Semantically an endocentric compound indicates a sub-group within the class of entities that head denotes.

For example, a “schoolboy” is a kind of boy. Due to their semantic head, endocentric compounds are transparent in meaning. In other words, endocentric compounds have compositional meaning and we could guess their meaning when we face them for the first time. Exocentric compounds are non-compositional; their meanings are not predictable and should be learned and memorized; they are actually opaque. Many linguists consider a transparent compound to be decompositional but it is not always the case; there exist some compounds which are morphologically decomposable and are still opaque in meaning. The Principle of Semantic Compositionality is that the meaning of an expression is a function

of, and only of, the meanings of its parts together with the method by which those parts are combined. From the cognitive view, an endocentric compound has focal concept that is the same as the semantic head in the compound. When the compound has no semantic head (exocentric), it does not have a focal concept which is compatible with the semantic head of compound; by missing these two elements in two different levels (i.e. focal concept (cognitive level) and semantic head (semantic level)), in fact the noun compound violates “the principle of semantic compositionality. This violation causes the compound noun to be opaque in meaning.

For example in “teapot” the focal concept is “a kind of pot” not “tea” and this focal concept, as a semantic head, defines the meaning of the compound as a whole; so it is transparent. According to CARIN, interpreting a combination involves identifying the relation between two concepts. The relations assumed by CARIN form a small set of highly generalized types, adopted from the linguistic typology of Levi (1978). The theory makes two basic claims: first, the relation is a bound representation with no independent existence; it is captured within the representation of the modifier, but not the representation of the head noun. Second, several relations become activated and compete for selection during comprehension. The modifier is primarily responsible for interpretation, more frequent relations for a given modifier receive higher activation than less frequent ones. The very semantic relation that CARIN theory recognizes as the key entity for interpretation is responsible for a compound being transparent or opaque. In endocentric compound, the relation between head and modifier creates the focal concept in the compound; in fact such semantic relation leads to interpretation of noun compound even if we face it for the first time. The presence or absence of semantic relation for a compound is the key explanation behind semantic transparency and

opacity. A generalization could be extracted based on the analysis of data: Endocentric compounds have semantic head, semantic relation as well as focal concept; they satisfy the principle of semantic compositionality and finally they are semantically transparent. Exocentric compounds lack semantic head as well as semantic relation and there is no formation of focal concept; they violate the principle of semantic compositionality and finally they are semantically opaque. This paper studies head- initial and head-final endocentric compound nouns of Farsi regarding meaning, inference and conceptual combination.

Keywords: meaning, inference, conceptual combination, head-final and head-initial endocentric compound nouns, CARIN theory