ACTION NOMINALIZATION IN LƐTƐ[1]

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Abstract

The primary aim of this paper is to describe the process of action nominalization as it operates in Lɛtɛ. It will further explore morphosyntactic properties that the action noun shares with a prototypical Lɛtɛ noun phrase. 'An action nominalization refers to an action, usually in the abstract, expressed by the verb root ' (Payne, 1997: 224). Generally, the phenomenon can be formulated as:

$$V \rightarrow N_{\text{ACTION designed by V}} \text{ (Payne 1997: 224)}.$$

Languages of the world employ one or more mechanisms for deriving action nouns from action verbs 'meaning the act of that verb' (Comrie and Thompson, 2007: 335). Lɛtɛ uses two strategies in deriving action nouns from action verbs. One mechanism involves a tonal change; usually underlying high tones become low, and underlying low tones become high. It has been established that the underlying tonal pattern of the verb root is that of the imperative form (Akrofi Ansah 2009). Secondly, an action noun may be formed from a verb phrase consisting of an action verb and its object by reversing the order of the verb and the object. Transitive and intransitive verbs may undergo action nominalization. The derived noun possesses some morphosyntactic properties of a prototypical noun phrase. For example, it can be focused and also function as object NP in a transitive clause. The paper makes a contribution to our knowledge of some nominalization strategies that related languages like Akan (Appah 2005) and Lɛtɛ share.

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[1] The language under discussion is referred to by its speakers as Lɛtɛ; in the literature, it is often known as Larteh.

1. Preliminaries

The primary objective of this paper is to provide a description of the phenomenon of action nominalization as it occurs in Lɛtɛ, a South Guan language which is genetically affiliated to the Kwa branch of Niger-Congo languages (Lewis, 2009). The derivational devices that create action nouns from lexical verbs will be discussed; furthermore the morphosyntactic properties of the derived nominals will be demonstrated in line with those of prototypical nouns in Lɛtɛ.

Action nominalization is a productive derivational process in Lɛtɛ. Nominals that are derived through the process perform notable syntactic functions in the grammar. In Lɛtɛ focus marking for instance, a verb cannot be focused unless it has been nominalized.

Languages make use of certain devices to modify the grammatical category of a root. For example, a noun may undergo verbalization to become a verb. In the same sense, a verb may become a noun through nominalization after which the derived noun performs syntactic functions similar to those performed by prototypical nouns in the language. The phenomenon of nominalization is defined by Matthews (2005: 244) as "... any process by which either a noun or a syntactic unit functioning as a noun phrase is derived from any other kind of unit". Broadly speaking, nominalization is a process whereby an adjective, a verb or a verb phrase is converted to a noun. The phenomenon may be simply represented as follows:

V→N   (Payne 1997: 223).

Nominalization takes different forms where, in each operation, the resulting noun reflects its relationship with the original root. The resulting noun may be the name of the activity or state stipulated by the root: the verb or adjective. The derived noun may also represent one of its arguments. In action nominalization which is the focus of this paper, the nominalization refers to the activity, usually in the abstract, stipulated by the verb. Action nominalization may be formulated as follows:

V→N$_{\text{Action designated by V}}$ (Payne 1997: 224).

Various action nominalization strategies are available to languages. English for instance makes use of a "zero" operator to derive an action noun from an action verb (1). This type of derivation can be considered to be a lexical process (Payne 1997).

1   a.   **I dance at church**.
1   b.   **Let's go for a dance**.

In (1a) the root "dance" is the main verb of the clause, whereas in (1b), "dance" functions as a noun, denoting an activity. The form of the verb therefore does not undergo any change during the derivation.

Appah (2005: 133)) reports that in Akan, the difference between the non-stative verb and the action nominal derived from it is signaled by the tonal pattern of the word (2).

2. **(i) nàǹtsèẁ**   'walk'   (V)
    náńtséẃ   'walk(ing)   (N)

This is similar to what pertains in Lɛtɛ as the ensuing discussion will demonstrate.

Furthermore, the action nominalization process may be analytic, as in Mandarin (Li and Thompson (1981) cited in Payne, 1997: 225) or syntactic as in Gwari (Hyman and Magaji (1970) cited in Comrie and Thompson 2007).

The constraints related to action nominalization differ with languages. In English for instance, suffixes that derive action nouns cannot be applied to every verb or adjective. In some ways, action nominalization in Lɛtɛ is similar to what is recorded about related languages like Akan (Obeng Gyasi 1981; Appah 2005) and Ewe (Ofori 2002). However, whereas in Lɛtɛ both transitive and intransitive verbs may undergo action nominalization, Appah (2005: 135) reports that Akan nominalized verbs are usually derived from intransitive verbs.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: in section 2, typological features of Lɛtɛ which are relevant to the discussion are discussed. This is followed in the third section by a description of the two strategies that derive action nominals in Lɛtɛ. In section four, morphosyntactic properties that action nouns share with prototypical nouns in Lɛtɛ are described. The discussion is summarized and concluded in the fifth part.

2.   Some Typological Features of Lɛtɛ

Lɛtɛ is a South Guan (Kwa, Niger-Congo) language (Lewis, 2009) spoken in Larteh, a town located in southeast Ghana, West Africa by about 8, 310 people (2000 Ghana Housing and Population Census). The language has not received much attention from language experts. Similar to most African languages, it is tonal with two level tones: high and low. The lexical tone is contrastive; it distinguishes meaning between two or more words which are the same morphologically. The

grammatical tone distinguishes tense and aspectual forms, and also functions in category-changing derivational processes. Six verbal structures are identified in Lɛtɛ. Each of these verbal structures possesses a distinct underlying tonal pattern as exemplified in (7). Lɛtɛ has a basic Agent, Verb, Object (AVO) and Subject, Verb (SV) order and syntax (3).

3.   **Kofi**   **bétè**   **sika**
       Kofi   PST.take   money
       S/A   V   O
       'Kofi took money.'

However, for pragmatic purposes, the basic order as demonstrated in (3) may change where the object argument is preposed to be marked for focus as exemplified in (4). The morpheme *ne* also functions as a relative clause marker as shown in (15).

4.   **Sika**   **ne**   **Kofi**   **bétè**   **a**
       money   FOC   Kofi   PST.take   CFP
       O   S/A   V
       'It was money Kofi took.'

Two types of ditransitive constructions operate in Lɛtɛ: the double object construction (5) and the indirect construction (6). In the double object construction, the recipient-like argument precedes the theme, whereas in the indirect construction, the order is reversed with an adposition intervening the two objects.

5.   **Kofi**   **nὲ**   **Ama**   **sika**
       Kofi   PRES.give   Ama   money
       A   R   T
       'Kofi gives Ama money.'

6.   **Kofi**   **bétè**   **sika**   **nὲ**   **Ama**
       Kofi   PST.take   money   ADP   Ama
       A   T   R
       'Kofi took money for Ama.'

In Lɛtɛ, morphological case is not marked; grammatical relations are determined by constituent order. The morphology of Lɛtɛ is largely agglutinating. The principle of tongue root harmony is operational in Lɛtɛ.

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3. The Action Nominalization Phenomenon in Lɛtɛ

Action nominalization in Lɛtɛ involves two strategies: a morphological means which involves a tone pattern change, and a syntactic one which has to do with a re-ordering of verbal phrase constituents and compounding. With both processes, an action verb is changed to become an action noun.

3.1 Morphological strategy

An action noun may be derived from an action verb through a change in tonal pattern. With this process, whereas low tones of the action verb are raised in the derived nominal, high tones of the action verb are lowered when nominalized. Action nouns may be derived from both transitive and intransitive action verbs by the morphological strategy. The process involves all the six verbal structures with their corresponding underlying tonal patterns (7a-7e) identified in Lɛtɛ (Akrofi Ansah 2009).

7.   a. CV

    nà → ná   **gyì → gyí**
    walk walking   eat   eating

    b. CVCV

    màsé → másè   **fòkyé → fókyè**
    laugh   laughter   sweep   sweeping

    c. CVV (1)   CVV (2)

    bìɛ́ → bíɛ̀   **wùò → wúó**
    bathe bathing   descend   descending

    d. CVCVCV   CVNCV

    kpòràkyé → kpórákyè   **bùǹkyí → búńkyì**
    vomit   vomiting   return   return

    e. CVCVNCV

    fèràǹkyé → féráńkyè
    peel   peeling

In examples 7a-7e, the six different verb structures with their underlying tonal patterns have been used to demonstrate the tone pattern change that occurs when action verbs derive action nouns. In all the instances, the form of the tonemes change as previously described. The action nouns depict the actions that are associated with the verb roots.

3.2 **Syntactic strategy**

With the syntactic strategy, there is a re-ordering of the constituents of a verb phrase and compounding. Verb phrases that undergo the process are made up of a transitive action verb and its internal argument. In the resulting compound, the argument precedes the action verb. With the syntactic strategy also, a tone pattern change in the action verb, similar to what takes place under the morphological strategy has been observed. However, the tone pattern change in the nominal part of the compound is unpredictable at this stage (compare 8a with 8b-e).

8.   a.   **dàǹkɛ́   tégyí →   tégyídáńkɛ**
           cook   food   cooking

     b.   **sùá   été   →   ètèsúà**
           learn   thing   learning

     c.   **nù   ńtɛ   →   ǹtɛnú**
           drink   alcohol   drinking (of alcohol)

     d.   **kèrá   été   →   ètèkérà**
           read   thing   reading

     e.   **bùè   èsúmì →   èsúmíbúé**
           do   work   working

4.   **Morphosyntactic Properties of Action Nouns**

Derived nouns possess some morphosyntactic characteristics which are common to prototypical nouns. These properties are distributional and structural and they help to determine how 'noun-like' the derived noun is. In the next two sections, distributional and syntactic properties shared by Lɛtɛ prototypical nouns and derived action nouns are discussed.

4.1 **Distributional Properties**

Distributional properties have to do with how words are distributed in phrases, clauses and texts; prototypical nouns for instance, can function as subjects and objects of clauses. In addition, a prototypical non-relational noun may function as the possessed item in an alienable possessive construction in Lɛtɛ. Furthermore, for pragmatic reasons, a noun which occurs as the object argument of a clause may be preposed to be marked for focus. From examples (9) to (12) it will be demonstrated that derived action nouns also possess these distributional properties.

The derived action noun may function as subject of a clause as found in (9), and object as demonstrated in (10).

9. **Ètèkérà   bɛ̀-bóà   a-yirebi   a**
   reading   FUT-help   SG-child   DEF
   'Reading will help the child'.

10. **Ama   bé-kyìrɛ fókyè**
    Ama   NEG-like   sweeping
    'Ama does not like sweeping.'

In an alienable possessive construction, a derived nominal which is non-relational may function as a possessed noun as illustrated in (11).

11. **Ama   mo   ètèkérà   gyí   basaa.**
    Ama   3SG.poss   reading   COP.be   bad
    'Ama's reading is bad.'

The object argument of the verb in (12a) is a derived nominal which may be preposed for focusing. When the object (derived nominal) is put clause-initially, it is followed by the focus marker **ne** as illustrated by (12b).

12. a. **Ama   kyìrɛ̀   ètèsúà**
       Ama   PRES.like   learning
       'Ama likes learning.'

    b. **Ètèsúà   ne   Ama   kyìrɛ̀   a**
       learning   FOC   Ama   PRES.like   CFP
       'It is learning that Ama likes.'

The underlying forms of verbs that occur in double object constructions and indirect constructions may also be nominalized. In such an instance, the nominalized verb and the verb root co-occur in the construction. Similar to (12b), the nominalized verb is placed clause-initially and focus-marked. However, the inflected form of the verb root remains as the main verb of the construction. Examples 13 (a-d), ((b) and (d) same as (5) and (6)) illustrate the phenomenon.

13 a. **Kofi   nɛ̀   Ama   sika**
      Kofi   PRES.give   Ama   money
      'Kofi gives Ama money.'

b. **Nɛ́**   **ne**   **Kofi**   **nɛ̀**   **Ama**   **sika**   **a**
   giving   FOC   Kofi   PRES.give   Ama   money   CFP
   'It is giving that Kofi gives Ama money.'

c. **Kofi**   **bétè**   **sika**   **nɛ̀**   **Ama**
   Kofi   PST.take   money   ADP   Ama
   'Kofi took money for Ama.'

d. **Bétè**   **ne**   **Kofi**   **bétè**   **sika**   **nɛ̀**   **Ama**   **a**
   taking   FOC   Kofi   PST.take   money   ADP   Ama   CFP
   'It is taking that Kofi took money for Ama.'

4.2 **Structural Properties**

Typical morphological categories for which nouns may be specified include case, number, class or gender and definiteness. Generally, it is also expected that a prototypical noun will take descriptive modifiers (Payne 1997: 35). As already explained, morphological case is not marked in Lɛtɛ, but prototypical nouns in Lɛtɛ are marked for number. They also take descriptive modifiers and are marked for definiteness.

The derived nouns are not marked for number because they are abstract nouns. However, similar to prototypical nouns, the derived action nominals use descriptive modifiers, and may also be modified by relative clauses. They are also specified for definiteness.

Structural properties that derived nominals share with prototypical Lɛtɛ nouns are described in the ensuing section.

A prototypical Lɛtɛ noun may be modified by an adjective from the eight-member adjective class of Lɛtɛ (Akrofi Ansah 2009). Adjectives which belong to this class may be used attributively and predicatively. Examples (14a) and (14b) demonstrate that an adjective from this class may be used to modify a derived nominal both attributively and predicatively.

14 a. **Mo**   **oni**   **nɛ́**   **mo**   **fókyè**   **kpotii**
   3SG.POSS   mother   PST.give   3SG   sweeping   big
   'His/her mother gave him/her a large area to sweep'.

b. **Mo**   **fókyè**   **gyi**   **kpotii**
   3SG.poss   sweeping   COP.be   big
   'His sweeping (plot) is big.'

A derived nominal in Lɛtɛ may be syntactically modified by a relative clause. In such a construction, the relative clause functions as a modifier of the nominalized verb which acts as the common argument for the main clause and the relative clause (15a) and (15b).

15 a. **Másè a [ne Kofi másè o-nyinɛ a] yɛ́-hàw mo**
    laughter DEF REL Kofi PST.laugh SG-man DEF PERF-worry 3SG
    'The laughter which Kofi laughed the man has worried him (the man).'

  b. **Ètèsúà a [ne bo sukuu a te] bé-gyí okosɛ**
    learning DEF REL LOC school DEF POST NEG-be good
    'The learning which is in the school is not good.'

Definiteness distinctions in Lɛtɛ nouns are marked by using the definite article **a** as against the indefinite article **ɔko**. Examples (16a) and (16b) demonstrate that derived nominals may be distinguished by the definite and the indefinite articles respectively.

16 a. **Òfúrébúè a ne Kofi bé-kyìrè a**
    farming DEF FOC Kofi NEG-PRES.like CFP
    'It is the farming that Kofi does not like.'

  b. **Kofi dé-màsì másì ɔ-ko bo fura a**
    Kofi PROG-laugh laughter SG- a/some ADP compound DEF
    'Kofi is laughing some laughter on the compound.'

5.0 Conclusion

Action nominalization is a productive derivational process in Lɛtɛ. Derived nominals play significant roles in morphosyntactic processes in the language. During the process, action verbs both transitive and intransitive undergo nominalization. The derived noun represents the action denoted by the verb root. In Lɛtɛ, the strategies that are employed are morphological and syntactic in nature. These are common nominalization strategies in Akan, a related language.

What may be described as morphological involves a tone pattern change where low tones in the root verb are raised in the derived noun, whereas high tones are lowered. In what represents a syntactic process, there is a word order change in a verb phrase, followed by compound formation of the action verb and its internal argument. The head of the verb phrase is a transitive action verb with object complement. It has been observed that the word order change and compounding also involves a tone pattern change, similar to what happens in the morphological process. Action nouns

and prototypical Lεtε nouns have some common morphosyntactic properties. The derived action nouns may occur in subject and object positions of a simple clause. In addition, they can take some descriptive modifiers and also determiners. Syntactic modifiers in the form of relative clauses may also be employed. In a possessive construction, an action noun may represent the possessed element. Finally, the action noun may be marked for focus.

Abbreviations

ADP	adposition	POSS	possessive
CFP	clause-final particle	PRES	present
COP	copula	PROG	progressive
DEF	definite	REL	relative clause marker
FOC	focus	SG	singular
FUT	future	3SG 3	singular
LOC	locative	V	verb
N	noun		
NEG	negative		

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