

Persian Endocentric Compounds: Simple or Complex Conceptual Structures?

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Abstract

A number of linguistic studies on compounding have acknowledged that due to the existence of head element, endocentric compounds are semantically compositional and transparent. The current study aims to focus on the semantic aspect of Persian endocentric compounds to show that: 1) in some cases, the existence of head element does not entail the semantic compositionality and simplicity of conceptual structure in endocentric compounds, and 2) compound words which are categorized as endocentric compounds differ in terms of the complexity of conceptual structure. Considering that the ability of Conceptual Blending Theory (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) to describe meaning construction in compound words has been previously approved by some cognitive linguists, this theory has been applied to analyze meaning construction in a number of Persian endocentric noun-noun nominal compounds. A close analysis reveals that although some endocentric compounds are semantically compositional and prompt for simplex networks, there are endocentric compounds which are not semantically as transparent and compositional. In this kind of endocentric compounds, metaphor or metonymy has affected the modifier element, thus meaning construction triggers single-scope networks which are neither as complex as double-scope networks nor as simple and compositional as simplex networks. This result implies the diversity of conceptual structure in words which are defined as endocentric compounds..

Keywords: endocentric compounds, semantic compositionality, conceptual blending theory, meaning construction

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1. Introduction

Compounding is a common word-formation process almost in all languages (Dressler, 2006: 23), for forming new lexical units by merging two or more pre-existing lexical units. Based on the most pervasive and traditional semantic categorization of compound words, as proposed by Bloomfield (1933), there are two main groups of compounds, namely endocentric and exocentric compounds. In endocentric compounds, one of the constituents plays the role of head and a hyponymic relation is observable between the compound and the head element. Numerous prior studies have acknowledged that, due to the existence of head element, the semantics of endocentric compounds is transparent and compositional. However, no study has been made yet to specify whether the presence of head element leads necessarily to the semantic simplicity of conceptual structure in endocentric compounds.

Given that conceptual blending theory can account for the meaning construction process of compound words (cf. Coulson, 2001; Fauconnier & Tuner, 2003; Benczes, 2006; Schmid, 2011), the current study applies the network model of conceptual blending to explore the semantics of Persian noun-noun nominal compounds in order to show that: 1) in some cases, the existence of head element does not entail the semantic compositionality and simplicity of conceptual structure in endocentric compounds, and 2) compound words which are categorized as endocentric compounds differ in terms of the complexity of conceptual structure.

2. Literature Review

The semantics of compounds has been one of the most challenging aspects of compound words being investigated in numerous studies. These studies cover many areas of investigation including semantic transparency and opacity (e.g., Afrashi, 2000; Sabzevari, 2013; MirEmadi & Majidi, 2007), headedness and the position of head (e.g., Tabatabaei, 2004; Khabbaz, 2008), the relation between constituents (e.g., Tabatabaei, 2013; Sabzevari, 2012, 2018), and the role of metaphor (or metonymy) in the meaning of compounds (e.g., Estaji & Ghanun, 2009; Torabian, 2013).

Besides, through the development of conceptual blending theory, several studies have analyzed compound words within the integration network model of conceptual blending (e.g., Turner & Fauconnier, 1995; Sweetser, 1999; Coulson, 2001; Fauconnier & Turner, 2003; Benczes, 2006).

3. Methodology

To the aim of collecting noun-noun nominal compounds in Persian, *Sokhan Comprehensive Dictionary* (2003) was consulted and a total number of 694 compounds were extracted from the dictionary. As a next step, endocentric compounds were taken out from the collected data (a number of 372 endocentric compounds) and the possible action of metaphor and/or metonymy upon their meaning was examined. This procedure led to 216 non-metaphorical and non-metonymical compounds, 137 compounds with metonymical modifier, and 19 words with metaphorical modifier. Following this, considering the frequency of identified patterns, we randomly analyzed a number of compounds from each pattern based on the network model of conceptual blending theory.

4. Results and Discussion

The blend analysis of Persian endocentric nominal compounds reveals that, besides semantically compositional endocentric compounds, such as *âb-anbâr*, which trigger simplex network and their modifier is linked through a role-to-value relation to their head element, there are several endocentric compounds that show a slightly more complex conceptual structure. In the meaning construction of non-compositional endocentric compounds, such as *taxte-sang* and *sofre-mâhi*, while the input space corresponded to the head element contributes literally to the blended space, the input space corresponded to the modifier is projected metaphorically or metonymically. This group of endocentric compounds prompt for single-scope networks which are neither as complex as double-scope networks nor as simple as simplex networks.

5. Conclusion

The current study found that the existence of head element does not necessarily guarantee the semantic simplicity and compositionality of endocentric compounds. In a number of cases, metaphor or metonymy acts upon the modifier element of endocentric compounds, therefore the meaning construction triggers single-scope networks which are not as simplex and compositional as simplex networks. In other words, not all endocentric compounds are semantically simple and compositional. Instead, there are several endocentric compounds that are not fully compositional, that is, they have a slightly more complex conceptual structure. This implies that drawing a strict boundary between endocentric and exocentric compounds, based on compositionality and semantic transparency, is not reasonable, because there are endocentric compounds which, like exocentric compounds, are metaphorical or metonymical. This study suggests a continuum to show different degrees of complexity of compounds. While non-metaphorical and non-metonymical endocentric compounds lie at the one end of the hypothetical continuum, endocentric compounds with metaphorical or metonymical modifier are nearer to the other end of the continuum where compounds with metaphor- and/or metonymy-based head and modifier lie.