



The influence of nominal prefixes on the formation of compound words in Xitsonga

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Nominal prefixes play a crucial role in Xitsonga grammar by shaping word formation, categorisation and meaning. These affixes that are attached at the beginning of nouns convey crucial information about number, possession and noun class. While the influence of nominal prefixes on simple word formation has been explored to some extent, their impact on compound word formation in Xitsonga remains relatively understudied. This study delves into this underexplored area, investigating the intricate relationship between nominal prefixes and compound word construction in Xitsonga. The study used convenience sampling to collect data from secondary sources such as Xitsonga grammar books, dictionaries and academic articles. This study is grounded on a functional linguistic approach, which provides a robust framework for analysing the interactions between nominal prefixes and compound word formation. The findings unveil the profound influence of nominal prefixes on compound word construction in Xitsonga. These prefixes not only shape word categories and meanings but also express quantity, indicate location and convey time. These insights emphasise the significant role of nominal prefixes in defining Xitsonga's grammatical structure, expanding its vocabulary and reflecting its cultural context.

Contribution: This study contributes to the existing literature of compounding by highlighting the pivotal role of nominal prefixes in Xitsonga grammar, particularly in shaping word formation, categorisation and meaning. It examines how prefixes influence the creation of compound words in Xitsonga and their morphological functions.

Keywords: Xitsonga; nominal prefixes; compound words; word formation; functional linguistic approach.

Introduction

Xitsonga utilises various word formation processes for creating new words and expanding its vocabulary. It is highly productive in creating new words through compounding, a process of combining existing language elements. Maboja (2022) defined compounding as a word formation process that creates a new word by combining two or more individual words, resulting in a distinct meaning. Such words can emerge from the combination of two nouns, adjectives, verbs or a combination of these word categories (Christianto 2020). Compound words play a pivotal role in language, contributing to effective communication, precision and the evolution of vocabulary. It also enhances language richness, facilitates efficient expression and adapts to the changing needs of communication.

It is imperative to acknowledge that compounding, a significant word formation process in Xitsonga, has been explored by various scholars, including Nkondo (1973, 1981), Shilubane and colleagues (1986), Mkhari and Shikwambana (1987), Mushwana and Ndhlovu (1988) and Marhanele (1987, 2004, 2017). These scholars investigate how compound words in Xitsonga are formed, focusing on the combinations and patterns that emerge when different word categories are joined together to create new words. However, the literature on Xitsonga compounding notably lacks detailed descriptions of the influence of nominal prefixes on the formation of these lexical items. Plag (2003) describes nominal prefixes as affixes added at the beginning of a word to introduce a new term, exerting significant influence on word formation in various languages. These prefixes play a contributory role in word formation, impacting the graphological, phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic and stylistic properties of the word base (Prcic 2019). Thus, the prefixes serve as fundamental linguistic building blocks that influence both the structure and meaning of words. Xitsonga features the standard Bantu nominal class system, encompassing Classes 1–21, with the exception of Classes 12, 13, 19 and 20. Its nouns are categorised into these classes, denoted by basic numerals where odd numbers signify singular forms and even numbers indicate plurals (Lee & Hlungwani 2020).

The absence of substantial research into how nominal prefixes affect the structure and semantics of compound words in Xitsonga results in an incomplete documentation of the language's linguistic features. This gap hinders linguists and language scholars in their efforts to comprehensively describe and analyse Xitsonga compound words. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by investigating the influence of nominal prefixes on the formation of compound words in Xitsonga. The objectives are to analyse the roles of nominal prefixes; identify and categorise various types of nominal prefixes; and reveal how these prefixes interact with existing words to create new compound words. The findings of this study will advance our understanding of Xitsonga's morphological processes, particularly the role of nominal prefixes in shaping the structure and semantics of Xitsonga compound words. This study is structured as follows: Section 2 offers a concise review of the related work on compound words and nominal prefixes. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework. Section 4 details the methodology employed in the study. Section 5 focuses on data presentation and analysis. Lastly, Section 6 concludes the study.

Related work

Rumiyati (2015) examined the types of compound words and their meaning found in Lindsey Kelk's novel *The Single Girl's To-Do List*. These were endocentric, exocentric and copulative compounds. The words combined to form these compounds come from various word classes, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, prepositions and adverbs. Endocentric compounds were identified as headed compounds with predictable semantic relationships. A prime illustration of this is the compound *handbag*, composed of the nouns *hand* and *bag*. In this instance, the compound *handbag* features *hand* as the modifier and *bag* as the head. This shows that the pattern in English compounds consistently positions the head on the right side. Exocentric compounds have been identified as headless compounds devoid of the semantic head or modifier element. Consider the compound *aftershave*, formed by the preposition *after* and the noun *shave*, both belonging to different word categories. This word combination conveys the meaning of an astringent and falls under the category of exocentric compounds, as the semantic head is not explicitly stated. Copulative compounds have been recognised as compounds featuring two or more words that are linked on equal status, without a head, and their meanings are not figurative. Take the compound *sleepwalking*, formed by the nouns *sleep* and *walking*, both contributing equally to the compound's meaning. Additionally, the meanings of the compounds were classified as transparent or opaque. The transparent meaning is explicitly expressed or predictable from the constituents, while opaque meaning is not explicitly expressed and unpredictable from the constituents.

Maharani and Refnaldi (2022) discussed a morphological analysis of compound words in two contemporary English-language novels, namely *It Ends with Us* by Colleen Hoover and *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens. The main aim was to identify and analyse the patterns, structures and

meanings of compound words used in these novels. The findings of the study showed that compound words in both novels followed several categories and patterns. The categories of compound words were compound verbs, compound adjectives and compound nouns. Patterns such as verb with a verb, noun with a verb, adjective with a verb and preposition with a verb form compounds belonging to the verb category. For example, the compound *fake-cry* was formed by the adjective *fake* and the verb *cry*. On the other hand, nouns with adjectives, adjectives with adjectives and prepositions with adjective patterns form compounds in the adjective category. The compound *high-quality*, for instance, is formed by combining the adjective *high* and the noun *quality*. On the other hand, the compound noun category entails the patterns of a verb with a noun, a noun with a noun, an adjective with a noun and a preposition with a noun. For example, the compound *hometown* is created by merging the nouns *home* and *town*.

Sereikaite (2018) focused on contrasting types of prefixes in Lithuanian. The study delved into the differences in meaning and structure between lexical and nominal prefixes. It provided insights into how lexical prefixes impact argument structure and add perfective meaning to verbs, while nominal prefixes contribute to forming nouns that can be verbalised. The paper also discussed the layers of prefixes, stress patterns, clitic distribution and the formation of idiomatic meanings. Overall, the study offered a detailed analysis of the behaviour and functions of lexical and nominal prefixes within the Lithuanian language, providing valuable insights into morphological processes.

Taraldsen, Medová and Langa (2018) investigated the role of nominal class prefixes in Southern Bantu languages such as Xitsonga, isiXhosa, ChiShona and isiZulu, focusing on how some plural prefixes function as specifiers in a classifier-like noun phrase. The authors argued that these prefixes spell out a phrasal constituent rather than simply marking gender and number features associated with the noun. They propose a theory of lexicalisation that views class prefixes as morphemes lexicalising specifiers within the noun phrase. By analysing the relationship between primary and secondary prefixes in Bantu languages, the authors supported their conclusion that all nominal class prefixes in Southern Bantu languages lexicalise specifiers. They discussed the implications of this analysis for the pairing of prefixes and nouns, as well as for the analysis of agreement within these languages. The study also compared its findings with analyses in other languages, such as Chinese classifiers and Manjaku class prefixes, highlighting similarities in theoretical assumptions and empirical observations across different linguistic contexts. The authors emphasised the importance of theoretical assumptions in predicting the behaviour of nominal prefixes and suffixes in various languages.

Musehane (2007) explored the morphological structure and semantic classification of noun+noun compounds in Tshivenda. The objective of the study was to create a quantitative database outlining an acceptable structure for

Tshivenda compound nouns. This was achieved by supporting the proposed structure with insights from linguistic theories, including Selkirk's context-free morphology and Di Sciullo and Williams's left-handed rule theory. The research highlighted a notable finding regarding the structure of noun+noun compounds, revealing instances where the first noun's prefix may not overtly display a class prefix in the formation of compounds. For example, in the compound *balamutshenzhe* (peanut whose outer skin has been eaten by termites and left with white skin), the noun *bala* is prefixed with /li-/, and the removal of this prefix from the compound resulted in a change in the initial consonant sound from /vh-/ to /b-/. In the case of the noun *mutshenzhe*, the prefix /mu-/ is attached to the stem /-tshenzhe/. It was also noted that nouns can combine with either singular or plural prefixes to create new compound words. For instance, in the compound *khuhumulambo* (a species of waterfowl, dabchick), the singular prefix /mu-/ was preserved in the newly formed compound *khuhumulambo*. In the compound *muvhulavhusiku* (the tree *Xylopia antunesii*), the plural prefix /mi-/ can replace the singular prefix /mu-/ to form the compound *mivhulavhusiku* (many trees of *Xylopia antunesii*). Additionally, the study revealed that diminutive and augmentative prefixes can be attached to nouns to convey the concepts of diminution and augmentation, respectively, in compound formation. For example, in the compound *liivhathavha* (rock pigeon), the Class 5 prefix /li-/ is replaced by a diminutive Class 7 prefix /tshi-/ in the compound *tshiihathavha* (small rock pigeon). Meanwhile, in the compound *tshiihamuronzhe* (Namaqua dove), the first noun adopts the augmentative prefix /li-/, replacing the Class 7 prefix /tshi-/ in the formation of the compound *liivhamuronzhe* (big Namaqua dove). This analysis underscores the significance of class prefixes in shaping compound formations in Tshivenda.

Mpalanzi (2023) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the noun class prefix system in Hehe, a Bantu language spoken in Tanzania, utilising a qualitative descriptive approach. The study identified 19 noun classes, each with specific prefixes denoting singular or plural forms. These prefixes are critical for indicating the gender, class and number of nouns. Mpalanzi (2023) explored three augmentative prefixes (u-, a- and i-) and several nominal prefixes (mu-/va-, mu-/mi-, li-/ma-, ki-/fi-, N-/N-, lu-, ka-/tu-, wu-, ku-, pa-/ku-/mu and gu) used in Hehe noun phrases. Examples were provided to demonstrate the application of noun class prefixes across various contexts, including possessives, numerals, adjectives, intensifiers, relative clauses, associative or genitives, interrogatives and prepositional phrases. The study illustrated, for instance, how possessive pronouns in Hehe are marked for number and person, and how cardinal and ordinal numerals are constructed and utilised within noun phrases. A significant finding was the canonical ordering of prefixes in Hehe noun phrases, shaped by semantic and syntactic constraints. Mpalanzi's study contributed to the broader understanding of Bantu languages by highlighting the complexity and significance of noun class prefixes in Hehe. It demonstrated how these prefixes are integral to

the structure and interpretation of noun phrases and their interaction with other linguistic elements.

Previous studies have examined nominal prefixes in various languages, revealing significant patterns and functions that contribute to our understanding of language structures. Despite these studies, there is a gap in the analysis of nominal prefixes in Xitsonga, particularly their influence on the formation of compound words. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and contribute to the body of knowledge by investigating the role of nominal prefixes in the formation of compound words in Xitsonga, thus contributing to the broader understanding of Bantu language morphology.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for analysing the impact of nominal prefixes on compound word formation in Xitsonga is grounded in the functional linguistic approach. This approach represents a departure from traditional views that treat language merely as a set of rules for grammatical structures (Bavali & Sadighi 2008). Instead, it models language as a system where each element, including prefixes, serves a specific function that contributes to meaning and communication (Bates, Thal & MacWhinney 1991; Van Valin Jr 2003). By applying this framework, the study aims to clarify how nominal prefixes shape the structure and semantics of compound words in Xitsonga, while also enhancing our understanding of morphological processes in Bantu languages. The functional linguistic approach also allows for a systematic examination of how these prefixes influence compound word formation within the language's functional context, thus deepening our theoretical and empirical knowledge of Xitsonga morphology.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research approach to investigate the impact of nominal prefixes on the formation of compound words in Xitsonga. The researchers used a descriptive qualitative approach, which is ideal for exploring a phenomenon in its natural context (Christianto 2020). Instead of directly interacting with speakers, researchers relied on secondary sources like Xitsonga grammar books, dictionaries and academic articles. These sources provided rich data on compound words without needing direct contact with language users. To find relevant texts, the researchers used a convenience sampling technique. They then employed thematic analysis, a method for identifying recurring patterns within data (Braun & Clarke 2012). They used an inductive approach, allowing themes to naturally emerge from the data rather than forcing them into predefined categories. This ensured that their findings were based on the linguistic data itself, providing a solid exploration of how nominal prefixes influence compound word formation in Xitsonga.

Data presentation and analysis

This section presents an analysis of how nominal prefixes influence the formation of compound words in Xitsonga.

The data collected for this study were subjected to thematic analysis, revealing patterns in the way nominal prefixes contribute to the structure and meaning of compound words. The following analysis explores the role of nominal prefixes in various linguistic processes, including alterations in part of speech, semantic shifts, the expression of quantity, the indication of location and the conveyance of time. Each theme is detailed to understand the intricate role of nominal prefixes in shaping compound word formation in Xitsonga.

The alterations in part of speech

Nominal prefixes are crucial not only for noun formation but also for altering the part of speech during the creation of new words, especially compound words (Maharramova 2023). When a nominal prefix is attached to the base of combined words, the resulting compound word often undergoes a syntactic transformation, changing its part of speech to fulfil different grammatical functions. These prefixes act as powerful agents of change, adding complexity and nuance to language (Brinton 2000). Nordquist (2019) further supported that nominal prefixes typically maintain the word class they modify. In Xitsonga, this process occurs when combined words cannot form a complete compound on their own, with the resulting compound words generally being nouns. This highlights the fundamental role of nominal prefixes in altering the part of speech during compound word formation, as demonstrated in Figure 1a and Figure 1b.

In Figure 1a, the nominal compound *xisalandzhaku* (straggler, laggard or latecomer) is formed by combining the Class 7 prefix /xi-/ with the verb stem *sala* (remain) and the adverb of time *ndzhaku* (after). The compound is classified as endocentric, where the left-position morpheme, the nominal prefix /xi-/, functions as the head, while *sala* and *ndzhaku* act as modifiers. Mphasha (2006) and Lusekelo (2019) argue that a prefix functions as the head when it acquires the semantic attributes of the compound word, such as its meaning, number and lexical category. Similarly, the prefix /xi-/ has inherited the semantic characteristics of the compound *xisalandzhaku*. Figure 1b illustrates the compound *madyambitsi* (ring-finger), which is created by merging the Class 6 prefix /ma-/ with the verb stem *dya* (eat) and the noun *mbitsi* (offensive emotional distress). The compound *madyambitsi* can also refer to a person, particularly a parent who experiences challenges because of their child's misbehaviour. Such a child may be described as *madyisambitsi* (one who

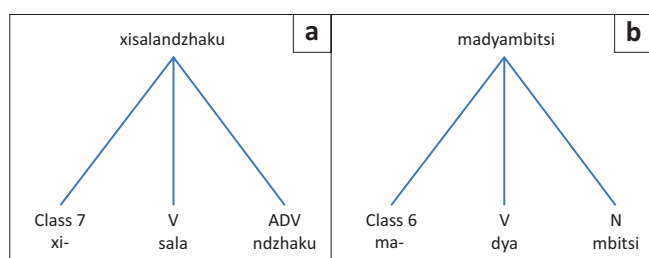


FIGURE 1: a) Nominal compound *xisalandzhaku* and; b) nominal compound *madyambitsi*.

causes emotional distress). The addition of the nominal prefixes /xi-/ and /ma-/ has transformed the elements *sala* and *ndzhaku* in *xisalandzhaku* and *dya* and *mbitsi* in *madyambitsi* into compound nouns, whereas in their absence, the elements would be considered verb phrases. Ekasani and colleagues (2018) define a verb phrase as a grammatical structure composed of a main verb along with its complements, objects or modifiers. It serves as the predicate in a clause, expressing an action, occurrence or state of being. This process underscores the crucial role of nominal prefixes in Xitsonga compound word formation, highlighting their impact on the alteration of parts of speech and the grammatical functions in the resulting compounds. Table 1 presents additional examples where nominal prefixes alter the part of speech in the formation of compound words.

Table 1 illustrates examples of compound words in Xitsonga where nominal prefixes play a crucial role in modifying parts of speech during compound word formation. The prefixes /xi-/ in *xitlakulandzwalo* (crane), /mu-/ in *mukhomelanandzu* (scapegoat), /ma-/ in *mafambayexe* (misanthrope) and /vu-/ in *vukambelantsumbu* (post-mortem or autopsy) transform the basic constituents of these compounds which are originally verbal phrases into fully formed compound nouns. For instance, *kambela ntsumbu* (examine corpse) is a verbal phrase without the prefix /vu-/. When this prefix is added, the phrase transforms into the compound noun *vukambelantsumbu*. In the case of *xipandzamananga* (car or vehicle), the prefix /xi-/, along with the basic constituents *pandza* (divide or split) and *mananga* (desert), contribute primarily to the compound's formation and its meaning is metaphorical. The compound *xipandzamananga* literally translates to 'that which divides or splits the desert'. This metaphorical expression refers to a car, highlighting its capacity to navigate and traverse challenging, barren terrains like deserts.

Semantic shifts

Nominal prefixes in Xitsonga significantly impact both the grammatical structure and semantic interpretation of compound words. Beyond their role in determining word class, these prefixes contribute to nuanced shifts in meaning, encompassing spatial, temporal or relational concepts (Morrison 2018; Prcic 2019). Furthermore, they can hierarchically restructure the semantic weight of base words within compounds (Fabregas 2007). Essentially, nominal prefixes operate as semantic operators, dynamically

TABLE 1: Nominal prefixes that modify parts of speech in compound word formation.

Combination	Compound words	New meaning
xi- (Class 7 prefix) + pandza (V) [divide or split] + mananga (N) [desert]	xipandzamananga	Car
mu- (Class 1 prefix) + khomela (V) [pardon or forgive] + nandzu (N) [fault or offence]	mukhomelanandzu	Scapegoat
xi- (Class 7 prefix) + tlakula (V) [carry] + ndzhwalo (N) [burdens]	xitlakulandzwalo	Crane
ma- (Class 6 prefix) + famba (V) [go] + yexe (PRON) [alone]	mafambayexe	Misanthrope
vu- (Class 14 prefix) + kambela (V) [examine] + ntsumbu (N) [corpse]	vukambelantsumbu	post-mortem or autopsy

modifying the original meaning to create novel conceptual entities. This process is exemplified in Xitsonga compound formation, where prefixes act as catalysts for linguistic innovation and expanded communicative potential, as illustrated in Figure 2a and Figure 2b.

Morphologically, the compound word *vandzindzakhombo* (insurers) is formed by combining the Class 2 prefix /va-/ with the verb stem *ndzindza* (insure) and the noun *khombo* (accident or disaster), as shown in Figure 2a. Figure 2b illustrates the compound word *vunyokahansi* (treacherous behaviours), created by merging the Class 14 prefix /vu-/ with the noun *nyoka* (snake) and the locative adverb *hansi* (underneath). The compound *vunyokahansi* is metaphorical as its meaning is not deduced from the individual components. Understanding the full meaning of this compound relies on the knowledge of Xitsonga culture and how Vatsonga perceive snakes. Both *vandzindzakhombo* and *vunyokahansi* can exist as compounds without the prefixes, such as *ndzindzakhombo* (insurance) and *nyokahansi* (treacherous person). However, the inclusion of the nominal prefixes /va-/ and /vu-/ significantly shifts the compounds' meanings, transforming insurance into a people or companies providing insurance, and treacherous person into behaviours that involve betraying trust, loyalty or confidence. This semantic shift is crucial for language evolution, enabling the continuous expansion of vocabulary and the expression of complex ideas (Acton 2023). In this case, prefixes serve as agents of linguistic change, driving innovation in word meaning and contributing to the dynamic nature of human communication. Table 2 provides further examples of how nominal prefixes change the meaning in the formation of compound words in Xitsonga.

Table 2 provides examples of Xitsonga compound words where nominal prefixes are pivotal in shifting semantics during word formation. The prefixes /vu-/ in *vunhenhakazi* (the triumph of the women), /va-/ in *vadyanhlampfi* (English people), /ma-/ in *madyondzelan'wingi* (senior wife) and /mu-/ in *muhoxaxandla* (contributor) act as catalysts for semantic change, enhancing the flexibility and innovation in language use. These prefixes not only enable grammatical transformations but also drive semantic evolution, expanding the expressive potential of the language. It is also worth noting that the compounds *vadyanhlampfi* and *muhoxaxandla* are metaphorical expressions, as their meanings cannot be directly inferred from their basic constituents. For example,

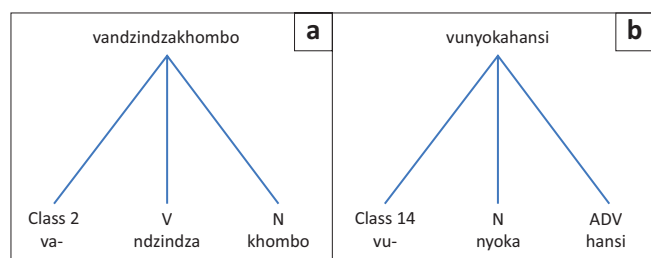


FIGURE 2: a) Nominal compound *vandzindzakhombo* and; b) nominal compound *vunyokahansi*.

the meaning of the compound *vadyanhlampfi* originates from observations of dietary practices. English-speaking communities, especially during colonial and missionary periods in Southern Africa, were often recognised for dominating the fishing industry and regularly consuming fish as a staple food (Kalina et al. 2019; Viljoen & Gericke 2001). This practice likely stood in contrast to the traditional diets of the Xitsonga-speaking people, who relied more heavily on other staple foods. Over time, this distinct dietary habit became a cultural marker, ultimately leading to the lexicalisation of the term *vadyahlampfi*, symbolising English-speaking individuals.

The expression of quantity

Nominal prefixes function as quantitative specifiers in compound word formation. Beyond their grammatical role, they carry a semantic weight that modifies base word properties measurable in number, amount, size or weight (Hamawand 2011). Acting as linguistic architects, these prefixes enhance flexibility and specificity, allowing language to adapt to various communicative needs by accurately reflecting quantitative changes (Acton 2023). They specify number, amount or degree, providing a concise and efficient method for expressing quantity (Mpalanzi 2023). By altering the semantic content of the base word, especially in Xitsonga, they generate a spectrum of quantitative nuances in compound words. However, the exact quantitative value conveyed by these prefixes can vary across languages and cultural contexts, necessitating careful consideration of the specific linguistic system in question, as presented in Figure 3a and Figure 3b.

The analysis of compound words such as *maphephahungu* (newspapers) and *tihoncinhova* (warthogs) reflects the principles of the functional linguistic approach by highlighting how nominal prefixes contribute to the

TABLE 2: Examples of nominal prefixes shifting compound words' meaning.

Combination	Compound words	New meaning
vu- (Class 14 prefix) + nhenha [champion] + kazi (a suffix used to derive feminine and augmentative forms of nouns)	vunhenhakazi	the triumph of the women
va- (Class 2 prefix) + dya (V) [eat] + nhlampfi (N) [fish]	vadyanhlampfi	English people
ma- (Class 6 prefix) + dyondzela (V) [studying] + n'wingi (N) [mother-in-law]	madyondzelan'wingi	senior wife
mu (Class 1 prefix) + hoxa (V) [to throw] + xandla (N) [hand]	muhoxaxandla	contributor

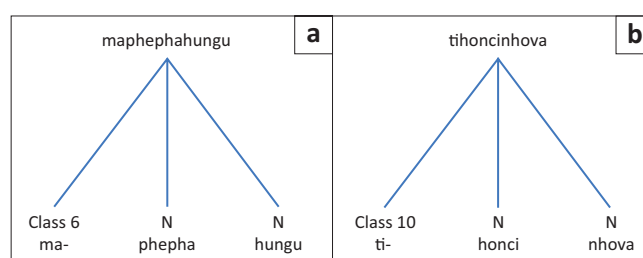


FIGURE 3: a) Nominal compound *maphephahungu* and; b) nominal compound *tihoncinhova*.

formation and meaning of compound words in Xitsonga. This approach emphasises that language elements, including prefixes, serve specific functions that impact communication and meaning. In Figure 3a, *maphephahungu* is formed by combining the Class 6 prefix /ma-/ with the nouns *phepha* (paper) and *hungu* (news). Here, the prefix /ma-/ adds a collective or plural dimension to the base noun, creating a compound word that denotes a collection of newspapers. Similarly, Figure 3b shows *tihoncinhova*, which combines the Class 10 prefix /ti-/ with *honci* (pig) and *nhova* (veld), resulting in a term for warthogs. The prefix /ti-/ in this case also introduces a collective or plural aspect to the meaning of the compound. These examples illustrate the functional role of prefixes in shaping the semantic and grammatical properties of compound words (Van Valin Jr. 2003). The prefixes /ma-/ and /ti-/ modify the base words by adding quantitative dimensions, thus forming new lexical items with specific meanings. According to the functional linguistic approach, such modifications are not arbitrary but serve to fulfil communicative needs by providing additional layers of meaning and context (Chesnokova, Khramchenko & Kupriyanova 2020). This demonstrates how prefixes function dynamically within Xitsonga, contributing to both the structure and semantics of compound words. It also aligns with the functional linguistic view that linguistic elements serve specific, context-dependent functions in communication. Table 3 offers additional examples of how nominal prefixes quantify compound words in Xitsonga.

Table 3 shows how the addition of nominal prefixes /ma-/ in *matikoxikaya* (rural areas), /mi-/ in *mitlhaveankuzi* (thorn-trees), /swi-/ in *swidzikisamarhumbu* (well-prepared foods) and /va-/ in *vantukuluxidzi* (grandsons) modifies the basic components of these compounds to denote variations in number or amount. This practice enhances the Xitsonga language by introducing nuanced expressions of quantity.

The indication of location

In Xitsonga, nominal prefixes can function as locative markers within compound word formations. Mallya (2020) explained that in Bantu languages, locative marking is integrated into the nominal prefix system. By attaching these prefixes to existing words, new lexical items that specify location relative to a reference point are created, carrying spatial meanings that modify the base word to indicate position, direction or proximity (Van de Velde 2019). Hickmann and Robert (eds. 2006) noted that this

morphological process allows languages to encode spatial information concisely and efficiently, thereby expanding the lexicon's expressive capabilities. However, they also suggest that the specific spatial meanings conveyed by these prefixes can vary significantly across different languages and cultural contexts. This ability to indicate location through nominal prefixes enhances the descriptive capacity of Xitsonga compound words, allowing for a more detailed and nuanced description of spatial relations, as illustrated in Figure 4a and Figure 4b.

The analysis of the compound words *vuchavelawhawha* (exile) and *marhandzambilu* (a beloved place) exemplifies the functional linguistic approach by illustrating how nominal prefixes play a crucial role in shaping the meaning and structure of compound words in Xitsonga, particularly in reflecting various locative aspects. In the case of *vuchavelawhawha*, the compound is formed by combining the Class 14 prefix /vu-/ with the verb stem *chavela* (flee or take refuge) and the ideophone *whawha* (the sound of a sjambok when it strikes something). The verb stem *chavela* itself is derived from *chava* (be anxious or frightened) through the applicative extension, which adds the suffix /-el-/ and the ending /-a/. The functional linguistic approach emphasises that each component of the compound contributes specific functional roles (Halliday & Matthiessen 2013). Here, the prefix /vu-/ serves to alter the verb stem and ideophone by providing a nominal class marker that transforms them into a compound word with a new, integrated meaning related to the concept of exile. Similarly, in *marhandzambilu*, the compound combines the Class 6 prefix /ma-/ with the verb stem *rhandza* (love) and the noun *mbilu* (heart). The prefix /ma-/ functions as the head of the compound, adding a specific grammatical and semantic role that transforms a simple verbal phrase into a compound that denotes a beloved place. The prefix imparts spatial and emotional significance, which reflects the compound's meaning as a cherished or emotionally significant location. These examples reflect the functional linguistic view by showing how prefixes modify and enhance the meanings of compound words, thereby fulfilling specific communicative functions. The prefixes /vu-/ and /ma-/ are not mere grammatical markers but actively contribute to the compound's semantic content by adding locative and emotional dimensions. This approach underscores the role of prefixes in organising and contextualising meaning, aligning with the functional linguistic perspective that language elements serve functions

TABLE 3: Nominal prefixes as quantitative specifiers in compound word formation.

Combination	Compound words	New meaning
ma- (Class 6 prefix) + tiko (N) [nation/state] + xikaya (ADJ) [informal]	matikoxikaya	rural areas
mi- (Class 4 prefix) + tlhavela (V) [vaccinate] + nkuzi (N) [bull]	mitlhaveankuzi	thorn-trees
swi- (Class 8 prefix) + dzikisa (V) [make sink] + marhumbu (N) [intestines]	swidzikisamarhumbu	well-prepared foods
va- (Class 2 prefix) + ntukulu (N) [grandchild] + xidzi (N) [something original]	vantukuluxidzi	male children of your son (grandsons)

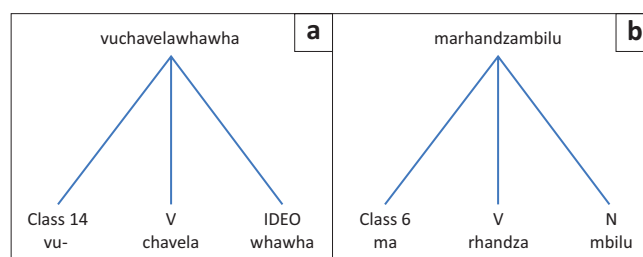


FIGURE 4: a) Nominal compound *vuchavelawhawha* and; b) nominal compound *marhandzambilu*.

in communication and structure. Table 4 shows other examples of compounds where nominal prefixes function as locative markers in Xitsonga.

Table 4 demonstrates how the Xitsonga Class 14 /vu-/ and Class 6 /ma-/ nominal prefixes are affixed to the base components of the compounds *vupeladyambu* (west), *vuhumadyambu* (east), *vurilanhlalala* (wilderness), *vugimamusi* (horizon), and *mahlangananhlo* (ball-and-socket joint). The meanings of the compounds *vupeladyambu*, *vuhumadyambu* and *mahlangananhlo* can be directly inferred from their basic components. In contrast, the compounds *vurilanhlalala* and *vugimamusi* possess metaphorical meanings that cannot be derived from their components. These compounds suggest movement towards a specific location, introducing a sense of dynamism to the word's meaning. This ability to indicate direction and position enhances linguistic expression, providing a more precise and comprehensive depiction of spatial concepts.

The conveyance of time

Nominal prefixes serve as significant nominal temporal markers, conveying temporal information when attached to existing words. Tonhauser (2007) describes these markers as morphemes that attach to word bases to express aspects of time. They can be either prefixes or suffixes that modify the base words to indicate duration, frequency, sequence or temporal proximity (Adamou 2015). The integration of temporal prefixes encapsulates time within the word itself, reducing the need for additional temporal adverbs or prepositional phrases (eds. Bauer, Lieber & Plag 2013). In Xitsonga, nominal prefixes act as temporal markers, integrating time-related semantics into the nominal structure of compound words. This process transforms the meaning of the base words to reflect temporal relations, as shown in Figure 5a and Figure 5b.

Figure 5a demonstrates the creation of the nominal compound *mahlambandlopfu* (dawn) by combining the Class 6 prefix /ma-/ with the verb stem *hlamba* (bath) and the noun *ndlopfu* (elephant). Figure 5b depicts the compound *vugimadyambu* (solstice), formed by merging the Class 14 prefix /vu-/ with the verb stem *gima* (end) and the noun *dyambu* (sun). The inclusion of the nominal prefixes /ma-/ and /vu-/ in these compounds transforms the modifying elements into distinct lexical items that convey temporal aspects such as time, thereby enhancing descriptive precision and expressive

TABLE 4: Nominal prefixes as locative markers in compound word formation

Combination	Compound words	New meaning
vu- (Class 14 prefix) + pela (V) [cross] + dyambu (N) [sun]	vupeladyambu	west
vu- (Class 14 prefix) + huma (V) [come out or flee] + dyambu (N) [sun]	vuhumadyambu	east
vu- (Class 14 prefix) + rila (V) [cry] + nhlalala (N) [honeyguide or trickle]	vurilanhlalala	wilderness
vu- (Class 14 prefix) + gima (V) [at the end] + musu (N) [pestle or smoke]	vugimamusi	horizon
ma- (Class 6 prefix) + hlangana (V) [meet] + nhlo (N) [divining bone]	mahlangananhlo	ball-and-socket joint

range. Without these prefixes, the elements would merely function as verbal phrases. The compound *mahlambandlopfu* metaphorically refers to the time of the day when the sun rises. The temporal relation stems from the verb *hlamba*, which suggests an action occurring at a specific time, which in this case is sunrise. On the other hand, the compound *vugimadyambu* captures the temporal concept of the solstice. The temporal connection in this case is embedded in the verb stem *gima*, which signifies cessation or conclusion, tying the term to a specific seasonal event. Therefore, the temporal nuances introduced by these prefixes can vary based on linguistic and cultural contexts, reflecting a diverse range of temporal expressions across languages (eds. Bauer et al. 2013). This highlights the significant role of nominal prefixes in compound word formation and their impact on articulating time-related information in Xitsonga. Table 5 provides further examples illustrating how the attachment of nominal prefixes serves as temporal markers in compound word formation.

Table 5 illustrates the Xitsonga compound word *ximanguvalawa* (modern), where the prefix /xi-/ plays a crucial role in forming new lexical items that encode temporal aspects, thereby enriching the word's descriptive precision and expressive range. According to functional linguistic theory, prefixes like /xi-/ are not merely grammatical markers but functional elements that contribute significantly to the meaning of compound words. They serve specific communicative functions by adding layers of meaning related to time, which enhances the language's ability to convey nuanced and contextually relevant information.

Conclusion

The study reveals the crucial role of nominal prefixes in Xitsonga compound words, highlighting their impact on both grammar and semantics. These nominal prefixes function as dynamic elements in compound word formation, altering parts of speech, inducing semantic shifts, specifying quantities, indicating locations and conveying temporal aspects. Nominal prefixes such as /xi-/ and /ma-/ are pivotal in altering parts of speech, transforming verb phrases into nouns and enhancing the language's expressive range. These prefixes not only modify grammatical functions but

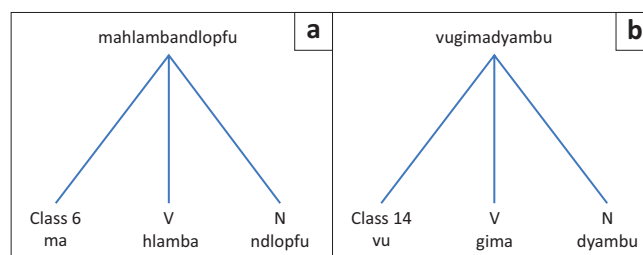


FIGURE 5: a) Nominal compound *mahlambandlopfu* and; b) nominal compound *vugimadyambu*.

TABLE 5: Nominal prefix as temporal marker in compound word formation.

Combination	Compound words	New meaning
xi- (Class 7 prefix) + manguva (N) [era] + lawa (PRON) [these]	ximanguvalawa	modern

also drive semantic shifts, with prefixes like /va-/ and /vu-/ creating new meanings and expanding the lexicon. Additionally, prefixes serve as quantitative and locative markers, adding specificity to compound words, and temporal markers like /xi-/ integrate time-related concepts, providing concise expression of temporal aspects. These findings affirm that nominal prefixes are integral to the formation and meaning of compound words in Xitsonga. They act as agents of grammatical and semantic transformation, reflecting the functional linguistic perspective that language elements serve specific roles in communication and meaning. The study highlights the versatility of nominal prefixes in enriching Xitsonga, demonstrating their essential role in the language's structural and expressive development.

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