

## Compounding in Gangte

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### Abstract

This paper attempts to discuss Compounding in Gangte, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Kuki-Chin subgroup spoken by around 21,813 (Thurgood 2003) speakers of northeast India. This paper discusses three types of compounding: Endocentric, Exocentric and Conjunctive Compounds in Gangte. Compound words in Gangte are mostly endocentric in nature.

### Keywords

Compounding, Gangte, Kuki-Chin

### 1. Introduction

Gangte (ISO 639-3:gnb) is a Kuki-Chin language of the Northern Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman group (Thurgood 2003). Accorded recognition in 1956, Gangte is one of the recognized tribes of Indian Union. They are found in the North-eastern part of India, particularly in the States of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram with a population of 21,813 speakers approximately. In the state of Manipur, they are found distributed in 80 villages where their main population concentrates in Cheingkonpang of Churachandpur which lies about 52 km from the state capital, Imphal.

The word order is Subject-Object-Verb (SOV). It is an agglutinative language.

### 2. Compounding

Compounding is a morphological process that fuses two or more words, yielding one independent word. In other words, it is a combination of two free forms or words that have an otherwise independent existence.

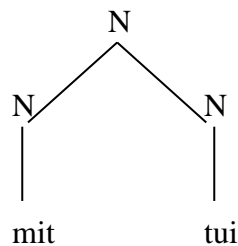
Crystal, David (2008:96) defines compound as:

“a linguistic unit which is composed of elements that function independently in other circumstances”.

For example:

Gangte	Gloss
mit-tui	□□□□□□ □□□□□□□□
	eye-water                      ‘teardrop’              (lit. Water which comes from eyes)

Compounds have internal structures and can be represented in word tree forms. The compound ‘**mit-tui**’ will have the structures as below:



*Fig: structure of ‘mit-tui’ (adopted from Lieber:2009)*

In the above example, **mit tui** ‘teardrop’, both the elements **tui** (water) **mit** (eye) can exist independently on their own. The meaning may be established as the water which comes from the eye.

However, in some languages, bound roots are an element in compounds that exist as free forms.

The meaning of a compound may be similar or different from the meanings of its components in isolation. The component elements may be of the same parts of speech, or they may belong to other parts of speech.

### 3. Classification

Bloomfield (1993:235) proposed two types of Compounds differentiating between 'endocentric' and 'exocentric' compounds, which is one of the most extensively used

taxonomic distinctions. It is usually understood based on headedness, whether the compound belongs to the same class as the head.

In Gangte, Compound words are mostly disyllabic. Endocentric compounds are very productive, and they may be sub-divided into two distinct categories, namely, right-headed and left-headed, depending on the nature of the constituent element.

#### 4. Endocentric Compounds:

Compounds that have heads are called ‘**endocentric compounds**’. The head of an endocentric compound determines the grammatical category of the compound and carries its core meaning. For instance *ən-bel*, ‘rice pot’ is an endocentric compound consisting of two different elements, *ən* ‘rice’ and *bel* ‘pot’ where the head is *bel*. In this example, the compound is a hyponym of the grammatical head: a ‘rice pot’ is a kind of pot. In other words, endocentric compounds denote a sub-class of the items marked by one of its elements. This is supported by Bauer, (2003:42) where he says:

*... endocentric compounds, that is they denote a subclass of the items denoted by one of the elements.*

#### 4.1 Right-headed Compounds:

In right-headed compounds, the second element is the head, whereas the first element attributes the head. The head determines the semantic category of the compound. In Gangte, right-headed compounds generally have the combination of noun+noun and are highly productive.

They are illustrated in 1(a-f) as below:

(1) Noun+Noun

a. mitmul

mit-mul

Eye-feather

‘eyelash’

(lit. Feathers of the eye)

- b. boŋek  
 boŋ-ek  
 Cow-dung            ‘cow dung            (lit. Dung of Cow)
- c. vokən  
 vok-ən  
 Pig-food            ‘pig food’            (lit. Food for pig)
- d. savun  
 sa-vun  
 Animal-skin            ‘leather’            (lit. Skin of an animal)
- e. boŋnoy  
 boŋ-noi  
 Cow-milk            ‘milk’            (lit. Milk of a cow)
- f. inmay  
 in-may  
 House-face            ‘courtyard’            (lit. Front portion of a house)

#### 4.2 Left-headed Compounds

In Left-headed compounds, it is the second element that modifies the first element. Nominal compounds such as noun+adjectives (2 a-g) are left headed.

##### (2) Noun+Adjectives

- a. mivom  
 mi-vom  
 Man-black            ‘black man’
- b. minem  
 minem

- |                        |               |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Man-short              | ‘short man’   |
| c. m̀llen              |               |
| m̀l-len                |               |
| Hill-big               | ‘big hill’    |
| d. ɳagop               |               |
| ɳa-gop                 |               |
| Fish-dry               | ‘dryfish’     |
| e. kum <sup>h</sup> ək |               |
| kum-t <sup>h</sup> ək  |               |
| Year-new               | ‘newyear’     |
| f. hun <sup>h</sup> a  |               |
| hun-p <sup>h</sup> a   |               |
| Season-good            | ‘good season’ |
| g. luineu              |               |
| lui-neu                |               |
| River-small            | ‘stream’      |

In all the above instances, the compounds are hyponyms of its head.

In some cases, the stages of plants, young ones of animals and kinship terms are constructed by suffixing diminutive and augment suffixes to it. The resulting compound words are left-headed, where the second element modifies the first element. They are illustrated in examples (3 a-c), (4 a-c) and (5 a-c).

*The tender stage of plants are formed by suffixing the diminutive suffix –don/ –toi*

(3)

a. t<sup>h</sup>iŋ don  
t<sup>h</sup>iŋ- don  
tree-tender            ‘tender tree’            (lit. Tender part of a tree)

b. gotoi  
go-toi  
Bamboo-tender        ‘bamboo shoot’        (lit. Tender stage of bamboo)

c. tiŋ don  
tiŋ-don  
Cane-tender            ‘tender stage of cane’

*Kinship terms are constructed by suffixing the diminutive/augment suffix –neu/–len*

(4)

a. palen  
pa-len  
Father-big            ‘uncle’            (lit. Elder brother of one’s father)

b. nuneu  
nu-neu  
Mother-small        ‘aunty’            (lit. Younger sister of one’s mother)

c. pineu  
pi-neu  
Grandmother-small ‘grandmother’        (lit. Younger sister of one’s grandmother)

*Young ones of animals are formed by suffixing –nəw*

(5)

a. uinəw  
ui-nəw

- Dog-small            ‘puppy’  
b. loinəw  
   loi-nəw  
Buffalo-small        ‘buffalo calf’  
  
d. aknəw  
   ak-nəw  
Chicken-small        ‘chick’

### 5. Exocentric compounds

Compounds without heads are known as ‘**exocentric compounds**’ (*bahuvrihi* compound in the Sanskrit tradition). It is a conglomeration of syntactically unrelated words where neither word is functionally equivalent to the entire group. In this case, neither of the two elements can be perceived as a formal head, and its meaning cannot often be realized comprehensively by its constituent elements.

According to Bauer (2003:42), exocentric compounds ‘*denote something which is not a sub-class of either of the elements in the compounds...*’

This can be illustrated with the following examples in Gangte, which are nominal compounds of noun+noun and are limited in number. They are shown in (6 a-c).

- (6)  
a. sumkoŋ  
   sum-koŋ  
Money-plate        ‘tortoise’  
  
b. k<sup>h</sup>onuŋ  
   k<sup>h</sup>o-nuŋ  
Village-back        ‘future’

- c. kolha  
 kol-ha  
 Cliff-tooth            ‘sweet potato’

It can be seen from the above examples that they do not form hyponyms of either of the elements involved in their formation.

## 6. Conjunctive compounds

In conjunctive compounds, two nouns are conjoined with the help of the conjunctive particle *-le*. The resultant compound is always nouns.

### (7) Noun+le+Noun

#### a. saleŋa

sa-le-ŋa

Meat-CONJ.-fish    ‘meat and fish’            (lit. Non-vegetables)

#### b. uilekel

ui-le-kel

Dog-CONJ.-goat    ‘dog and goat’            (lit. Dog and goat)

#### c. nulepa

nu-le-pa

Mother-CONJ.-father    ‘parents’            (lit. Mother and father)

#### d. nik    lepuon

nik-le-puon

Skirt-CONJ.-cloth            ‘garments’            (lit. Dresses)

## 7. Conclusion

Compounding is a morphological process that fuses two or more words, yielding one independent word. It is a combination of two free forms or words that have an otherwise



independent existence. Gangte has both endocentric as well as exocentric compounds. Compound words in Gangte are mostly endocentric in nature. Endocentric compounds fall into two separate groups, viz. right-headed and left-headed compounds, depending upon the nature of the constituent elements. The first element modifies the second element in the case of right-headed compounds while, in left-headed combinations, in contrast, the second element modifies the first element.

Gangte also displays few examples of an exocentric compound in which none of the constituent units acts as the head. In addition, it also exhibits conjunctive compounds where the conjunctive particle -le conjoins two nouns.

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