

Abstract

Formation of lexical categories in the syntactic workspace has been a part of generative investigation since last few decades. This dissertation investigates the syntactic formation of lexical categories like nouns, verbs, and adjectives in Santali, an understudied Austroasiatic Language spoken in India. The central concern of the current research is the extent to which Syntax affects the internal structure of words/categories. This study employs Distributed Morphology as the theoretical framework to analyze the formation of nouns, verbs and adjectives in Santali because it provides an ideal empirical domain due to its fluid categorial system.

This dissertation addresses three specific questions, each forming the focus of a dedicated chapter. The first question examines the structural position of Santali nominalization. It specifically asks how morphologically zero nominals, traditionally analyzed as root-derived in the literature, can exhibit complex internal structure by showing stem-derivation. By using diagnostics like the presence of argument structure, adverbial modification, aspectual modification, and productivity, this dissertation shows that Santali zero nominals possess verbal characteristics and lack root-level idiosyncrasies. By using these tests, the dissertation also presents that Santali zero nominals are formed at higher derivational points, like *vP*, *VoiceP*, and *AspectP* levels. Connecting it to the nouniness squish (Ross, 1973), this dissertation shows that Santali nominalization happens at different structural heights: prototypical and affixal nominals are root-derived, while zero nominals, despite being morphologically simplex, exhibit syntactic complexity and access extended verbal functional structures.

The second research question addresses how verbalization, widely claimed to be an idiosyncratic operation cross-linguistically, demonstrates systematic syntactic compositionality yielding productive change-of-state semantics in Santali. Santali exhibits both root-derived verbs and stem-derived verbs formed from already categorized nouns or adjectives. In the case

of stem-derivation, Santali verbalizes any categorial or phrasal stem productively by assigning a change-of-state meaning. This dissertation proposes a feature-based account to analyze this phenomenon where the verbalizer carries a [FIENT] feature that encodes the transition event assigning the change-of-state interpretation to its complement and yielding inchoative and causative interpretation.

The third question addresses the internal structure of adjectives, a category whose presence has been reported to be uncertain in the typological literature. Using specific diagnostics the dissertation first establishes that Santali possesses adjectives as a composite category formed through adjectivization of both roots and stems. Root-derived adjectives are idiosyncratic, lack overt morphological adjectivizers, and are formed low in the derivation. Stem-derived adjectives, in contrast, are regular and compositional, marked by the overt adjectivizer *-ih(aa)*. This chapter also demonstrates the structural asymmetry in the stem-derived adjectivization by showing how Santali adjectivizers can merge with extended functional projections like NumP and DP in the nominals domain, while it is restricted to the ν P-level in the verbal domain. This asymmetry shows how categorization is input sensitive and the selectional restriction of categorizers to merge at different structural points may depend on input categories.

The findings of this dissertation unveils several theoretical implications. Firstly, morphologically simplex units can also carry derivational complexity as categories can contain complex internal structures to be formed at various derivational heights. Secondly, regular semantics on productive categorization can be a result of the feature present on the categorizer head. Thirdly, categorization is also input sensitive selecting different structural heights as the complement depending on the input category, as we learn from Santali adjectivization. This also means that even when the categorization system of a language shows extreme fluidity, it maintains certain constraints in the derivational operation. Since words are uniformly formed using the merge of specific categorizers, merge can be taken as the single fundamental operation sufficient for category formation in syntax cross-linguistically.