SOME OBSERVATIONS ON SUMERIAN COMPOUND VERBS

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This paper focuses on the lexico-semantic and morphosyntactic aspects of Sumerian compound verbs, namely, the verbs that consist of a noun and a verb stem. They are very frequent in Sumerian, and the majority have a noun designating a part of the body as their nominal constituent, indicating the body-part’s involvement in a given expression. I consider Sumerian compound verbs as a type of noun incorporation called lexical compounding whose constituents are formally discontinuous. The nominal constituent is semantically incorporated but, unlike typical cases of noun incorporation in other languages, it holds its syntactic status occupying the absolutive position. Therefore, it can regain its semantic independence in some constructions, thus allowing its referentiality to be manipulable. I believe that this study of the compound verbs, using a functional-typological approach, contributes to our understanding of some aspects of the Sumerian verbal system and to the typology of noun incorporation.

Keywords: compound verb, noun incorporation, body-part term, discontinuous, valency reduction

1. Introduction

I imagine that most of us who have studied or are studying Sumerian in some way or another have a common experience. Recall when you first encountered a line like dinana er-na šu ba-si-in-ti (Lugalbanda 1 195). You tried a causative translation, “Inana made her hand approach in his tears,” although it was not clear to you how the Sumerian causative worked. Or you tried an instrumental translation, “Inana approached by hand in his tears,” assuming that šu “hand” had the ablative-instrumental or locative-terminative case-marker although it was not graphically indicated. You tried every possibility and exhausted your imagination. Then your professor said, “no, what you have here

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This paper will discuss the nature of Sumerian compound verbs focusing on two aspects: first, the semantic unity and morphological discontinuity of the nominal and verbal constituents; second, the unique characteristics from a cross-linguistic perspective of the nominal constituent in the Sumerian compound verb which leads to the fuzzy boundary between compound verb constructions and regular syntactic ones. Primarily I will deal with a specific subset of such verbs, namely those containing body-part terms. I do so because these nouns systematically occupy a prominent position as nominal constituents of the compounds, thus forming a coherent group. My data are collected mainly from the Nippur Core Corpus, some sixty Sumerian literary compositions known from the Old Babylonian period in the city of Nippur (Civil 1976, 145 note 36). As the theoretical framework, I have adopted the functional-typological approach, which I believe brings a comparative perspective to the study of Sumerian grammar.

Before entering the discussion of compound verbs, I would like to give a brief outline of my general understanding of Sumerian grammar and its terminology. The basic order of the Sumerian sentence is Subject-Object-Verb. Sumerian is a language with ergative features. The Agent is marked as ergative with the suffix -e; the Patient as absolutive which is a zero morph. In the case of an intransitive sentence, the Single argument is formally identical with the Patient of a transitive. Oblique markings are dative, locative, locative-terminative, terminative, and ablative-instrumental.

2. Sumerian Compound Verbs in Bilingual Texts

Langdon, in his article “Syntax of Compound Verbs in Sumerian” published in 1908, grouped the compound verbs by their nominal constituents such as šu “hand,” igi “eye,” and ki “place,” etc. Subsequently, most grammars of Sumerian recognized the existence of “compound verbs” and dealt with them in varying detail, with the notable exception of Poebel’s. Poebel (1933-34, 250) did not seem to recognize a category of compound verb, but instead used the term “idiom” (Redensart in German) in his commentary of the inscription of Samsuiluna. In general, the label “compound verb” in Sumerian is applied to a unit formed by a noun and a verb stem, which often corresponds to a simple Akkadian verbal lexeme in native bilingual (Sumero-Akkadian) vocabularies.
and compositions.6

2.1. A Lexical Bilingual

Thomsen (1984, 295-323), in her book *The Sumerian Language*, lists only some 200 simple Sumerian verbal lexemes, namely, one-word verbs. This rather low number of simple verbs in Sumerian is compensated by the frequent use of compound verbs—M. Civil estimates about 45 percent of the predicates are compounds (personal communication). Even a cursory survey of its verbal lexemes shows that Sumerian lacks, for instance, simple verbs of visual perception and attention; in other words, Sumerian has no simple verbs corresponding to the English verbs “see,” “watch,” “look (at),” “inspect,” etc. To express these concepts, Sumerian instead uses compound verbs in which the noun *igi* meaning “eye” is combined with various verb stems. In the lexical list “Igituḫ Short Version” (Landsberger & Gurney 1957, 81), *igi* “eye” is combined with the verbs lá (1a), gál (1b-c), bar (1d), tūm (1e), ḫuš (1f), gid (1g), and kár (1h), and these compounds are all translated by simple Akkadian verbs. It is reasonable to assume that each entry was considered a unit.

(1)  Igituḫ Short Version ll. 2-9
(1a)  igi-lá  amāru  “to see”
(1b)  igi-gál  naṭālu  “to see”
(1c)  igi-gál  dagālu  “to look at”
(1d)  igi-bar  naplusu  “to look at”
(1e)  igi-tūm  šapātum  “to spy”
(1f)  igi-ḫuš  nekelmū  “to look at angrily”
(1g)  igi-gid-da  nekelmū  “to look at angrily”
(1h)  igi-kár  barū  “to inspect”

2.2. A Literary Bilingual

Sumero-Akkadian bilingual texts are another source where we can study the Sumerian compound verbs and the corresponding Akkadian verbs. In the examples taken from “Gilgames, Enkidu and the Netherworld,” we find four Sumerian compound verbs and their corresponding expressions in Akkadian: the Sumerian ki—ág and ne—su-ub (2a) correspond to the Akkadian verbs rāmu “to love” and našaqu “to kiss”(2b), respectively; the Sumerian ḫuł—gig and nig—ra-ra (2c) correspond to the Akkadian zēru “to hate” and mahāṣu “to hit” (2d), respectively.
(2a) dam  ki-á-gá-zu  ne na-an-su-ub-bé-en
(2b)  aššatka  ša tarammu  la tanaššiq  
     "You should not kiss your beloved wife" (GE:195)
(2c) dam  ḫul-gig-ga-zu  nig nam-mu-ra-ra-an
(2d)  aššatka  ša tazerru  la tamahḥaš  
     "Nor should you beat your hated wife" (GE:196)

How ingrained this compounding process was in the Sumerian verbal system is shown by the treatment of Semitic loanwords. For instance, šu-ḫu-uz (from šuhuzu, the Š-form of Akkadian aḫāzu, in the meaning “to set on fire”) was analyzed as consisting of šu “hand” + verb stem, and inflected as a compound verb like šu mi-ni-ḫu-uz (Lugal-e 94),8 šu bi-in-ḫu-ḫu-uz (Lament over Sumer and Ur 416)9 (Civil 1994).

3. Current Views of Sumerian Compound Verbs

Recently Attinger (1993, 179-182) introduces the concept of noun incorporation to define Sumerian compound verbs morphosyntactically. Following Sapir (1911), noun incorporation denotes a particular form of modifying the primary meaning of the verb by affixing a noun stem to the verb stem. In many languages, the incorporated noun loses its individual salience both semantically and syntactically: thus, it has no syntactic status of its own (see 4.1). Attinger applies this cross-linguistic generalization of noun incorporation to Sumerian compound verbs and tries to establish that in some compound verb constructions the nominal constituent does not have a syntactic status. The nominal constituent of Sumerian compound verbs has, in general, zero case-marking, i.e., it is formally the patient (direct object). Attinger believes that, in the verbal chain of the marû-conjugation, the nominal constituent is sometimes referenced by an explicitly written pre-radical -b-, sometimes not. As the standard theory of Sumerian grammar correlates the pre-radical -b- with the Patient-Absolutive (direct object) in the marû-conjugation (see note 10), Attinger argues that when the nominal constituent is not referenced by the pre-radical -b-, it has no syntactic status and has, therefore, been incorporated into the verb.

However, observe the compound verb gu—é “to wear.” While example (3a) does not contain -b-, example (3b) does; in example (3c), -n- occurs in the pre-radical position as well. Since the exact function of -b- (or -n- and also the pre-radical -m- for that matter)10 remains unknown, -b- should not be used as the criterion for judging the syntactic status of the nominal constituent.
Zólyomi (1996), in his review of Attinger’s book, argues against the interpretation of Sumerian compound verbs as noun incorporation, because: Sumerian exhibits neither the valency reduction which is expected in the process of noun incorporation; nor the characteristics of compound formation (see 4.1.). Zólyomi (1996, 100) explains his first point as follows: “Since Sumerian is a morphologically ergative language, should the valency of a verb reduce, the case-marking of the nominal constituents would change as well. But in Sumerian, neither will the S[econd] O[bject] change to an O[bject], nor will A[gent] (=NP-e) become S[ubject] (=NP-∅). In most cases, both SO and A retain their original nominal case-marking, which implies that the phenomenon to be explained is not the incorporation of the object, but the lack of the element referring to this object in the prefix-chain.” As for his second criticism about the formal characteristics, Zólyomi (1996, 101) writes that “for example, should šu—bar be an instance of noun incorporation, šu must be situated next to the verb bar and not before the prefix-chain; in other words, it would become part of the verbal base.”

It is probably true that Sumerian compound verbs do not behave in the same way as typical cases of noun incorporation do. Nevertheless, Sumerian compound verbs seem to be analogous to the basic mechanism of noun incorporation. Although I do not totally agree with Attinger’s view as I expressed it above, the comparison of Sumerian compound verbs with noun incorporation in other languages might be able to shed valuable light on the understanding of the former.

4. Typological Data of Noun Incorporation and Sumerian Compound Verbs
4.1. Lexical Compounding

The type of noun incorporation of the greater interest to us here is what Mithun (1984) calls “lexical compounding,” the basic type in her theory of noun incorporation. According to Mithun (1984, 848-856), in “lexical compounding” a noun stem and a verb stem are combined to form an intransitive verb denoting a name-worthy, unitary activity. The incorporated nouns, losing their
individual salience both semantically and syntactically, have no syntactic status of their own, so they bear no case-markers—although semantically they may indicate the type of patient, location, or instrument involved in the event or state. The incorporated nouns do not refer to specific entities; in other words, they are not modified or marked for definiteness or number. The degree of cohesion between the constituents of a compound generally reflects the overall morphological character of the language in question. In some cases, constituents retain their formal identity as separate words; this is called “juxtaposition,” a phenomenon observed in many languages of the world: e.g., Mokilese (Oceanic) ko “grind” + oaring “coconut” > “coconut-grind” (Mithun 1984, 849); Kusaian (Oceanic) srasre “raise” + po “hand” > “surrender”; and Fijian (Oceanic) taro-gi “ask” + sotia “soldier” > “enlist” (Mithun 1984, 852). In other cases, constituents become fused, are considered single words by speakers, and are subjected to all regular word-internal phonological processes; this is called “morphological compounding” (Mithun 1984, 854). Here is an example (4) from Walmatjari (an Australian language), pina “ear” + karri “to stand” > literally means “to ear-stand,” in other words “to hear, to listen.” This example is very interesting because the derived verb pina-karr is transitive, which is, in turn, constructed with a direct object (Hudson 1978, 53; cf. Mithun 1984, 855).14

(4) kuyi-ngu ma-Ø-nya pina-karriny-a wanyjirri-rlu
    animal-ERG MR1-3sgS-3plO ear-stand-PAST kangaroo-ERG
    “The kangaroo heard them”

4.2. Incorporation of Instrumentality

Givón (1984, 128f.) points out that instrumentality is one of the more common semantic features that can be incorporated into the verb—either semantically or morphologically. To illustrate the morphological incorporation of stereotypical instrumentals into the verb stem, Givón gives the following verbs containing *ma- (the old root for “hand,” now extinct) in Ute (an Uto-Aztecan language).

(5) ma-cugwa-
    “to press to”
ma-coy-
    “to squeeze,” “to knead”
ma-ca'wa-
    “to extend the hand”
ma-yaakwi-
    “to cause to sink into”
ma-viceku-
    “to slap”
ma-goy'a-
    “to choke”
ma-rogoma-  
"to create"

ma-ru’nə-  
"to rub on," "to spread," "to anoint"

Example (6) is taken from Takelma, (a now extinct Penutian language spoken in California): the verb stem tlayag- "to find" can be combined with several body part terms that denote instrumentality in a loose sense (Sapir 1990, 542 [228]).

(6) al- "face" + tlayag- "find" > “to find, to discover, to get sight of”
    s’in- “nose” + tlayag- “find” > “to smell” (tr.)
    daθ- “ear” + tlayag- “find” > “to discover by hearing, to hear all of a sudden”
    gel- “breast” + tlayag- “find” > “to think about, to recall to mind”

4.3. Discontinuous Compounds

Certainly, from the formal point of view, Sumerian compound verbs are not exactly juxtapositions of the nominal and verbal constituents, nor do they compound these constituents morphologically, because verbal prefixes occur between the nominal constituent and the verb stem in finite verbal constructions. In this respect, Classical Tibetan offers one of the most interesting cases for the Sumerologist. Tibetan permits morphemes such as the verbal prefix and the negative particle to intervene between the nominal constituent and the verb, while keeping their semantic unity intact: for instance, mgo-khor “head” + “turn around” (lit., “have the head encircled”) means “to become confused” (7a); the present prefix N- (7b) and the negative particle mI- “not” (7c) occur between the noun and verb (Beyer 1992, 106f. with note 8).15

(7a) mgo-khor
(7b) mgo-Nkhor
(7c) mgo-mi-Nkhor

The following example (8) is from Lahu (Matisoff 1981, 307-9, cited in Mithun 1984, 853f.). Again note the location of the negative particle when it occurs with the compound verb ni-ma hā, meaning “to be sad”: it is reported that while an adult places the negative particle mā immediately before the verb hā, as shown in example (8a), children tend to treat compounds as unitary verbs, as shown in example (8b), placing the negative particle before the noun.
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(8a) ni-ma mâ hā
heart not wretched
“I’m not sad”

(8b) mâ ni-ma hā
not heart wretched
“I’m not sad”

4.4. Sumerian Compound Verbs: Lexical and Discontinuous
I find our Sumerian compound verbs to be analogous to the aforementioned examples. The lack of formal unity of the constituents, in other words, a discontinuity between the noun and verb elements, should not obscure their compounding nature. Thus, however loose their physical connection may be as compared with typical cross-linguistic data of noun incorporation, this is the way for Sumerian—which has a limited verbal lexicon—to form semantically new (but often basic) verbs. For instance, šu “hand” is the most frequently used body-part noun, and in general, its compounds express activities which involve hands in one way or another: e.g., šu—ti “to accept,” šu—tak4 “to send” (Civil 1990), šu—ûr “to erase.” Similarly, the igi-compounds express visual activities and experiences: e.g., igi—bar “to look at,” igi—du8 “to see.” So, gir “foot” too occurs in the expressions of ambulatory motions: e.g., gir—gub “to step in/on/out.” gēštu “ear” indicates mental activities: e.g., gēštu—gar “to pay attention, to be concerned,” gēštu—u18- lu “to forget,” and zū “tooth” occurs in the expressions of using or showing the teeth: e.g., zū—gaz “to chew” (Volk 1995, 175), zū—bir9 “to laugh” (Michalowski 1998, 68).16

5. Morphosyntax of Sumerian Compound Verbs.
5.1. Nominal Constituents of Compound Verbs
Now a close examination of the nominal constituents of the compound verbs is in order. Compare the following contrasting examples. Each pair (9a and 9b; 10a and 10b) consists of a prototypical Sumerian compound verb and a non-compounding, regular syntactic construction. Example (9a) contains â—è “to take care” while (9b) á-POSS-(ABL)—è “to escape from someone’s hands.”

(9a) guruš-ra dam dumu-ni á mu-un-da-an-è
workman-DAT wife children-his arm-ABS CP-n-COM-n-R
“For the workman, I take care of his wife and children” (Hoe and Plow Debate 140)17
In example (9a), the noun á “arm” and the verb è function together as a semantic unit, meaning “to take care of.” The noun á, unspecified as to its possessor, occupies the Absolutive position whatever its semantic role may be. The comitative infix -da- in the verbal chain goes with the noun phrase dam dumu-ni “his wife and children,” which is the semantic object of composite predicator á—è. In Example (9b), the noun á takes the possessive pronominal marker -bi, and the ablative infix -ta-, here written -ra- in the verbal chain (an allomorph of -ta- in intervocalic position) (Civil 1973, 27), goes with the noun phrase á-bi, thus meaning “from their arms/hands.” In other words, the noun á is fully specified: the possessive pronominal marker indicates whose arms are concerned and the case marker designates its syntactic function.

Example (10a) contains šu—du₈ “to hold” while (10b) šu-POSS-LT—dab₅ “to hold in the hand.”

(10a) šu 2-a-na gir ba-da-ra šu bi-in-du₈  
hand 2-her-LOC dagger sword hand-ABS CP-LT-n-R  
“She held the dagger and the sword in her two hands” (Eridu Lament 5,5 = Segment B 9)¹⁹

(10b) lugal-e muḫaldim-gal nu-me-a gir šu-né ba-an-dab₅  
king-ERG cook-chief NEG-be-NOM dagger hand-his-LT CP-n-hold  
“The king, although he was not chief cook, held the dagger in his hand” (Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven, Meturan Segment D 49)²⁰

In (10a), the adverbial phrase šu 2-a-na “in her two hands,” marked by the possessive pronoun and the locative case, specifies where she held the dagger, thus clearly indicating that the šu of šu—du₈ is desemanticized. Compare example (10a) with a regular syntactic construction of example (10b), where the action of “holding something in the hand” is expressed with the verb dab₅ and the adverbial phrase šu-ni, which should rather be read šu-né, namely, šu-ni “his hand” marked by the locative-terminative -e.

Such sharply contrasting pairs are not numerous, but these examples are sufficient to point out the characteristic properties of the nominal constituents of typical Sumerian compound verbs: (1) they take no modifying morpheme, bound or free; (2) they occupy the absolutive position no matter what their
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semantic roles may be; and (3) they have lost their semantic saliency, thus semantically incorporated into the newly derived composite predicators.

There are, however, some variations where bound and/or free morphemes, such as the pronominal possessive marker and the adjective, occur between the nominal and verbal constituents. I have selected five examples to illustrate these variations, which are examples (11) to (13c).

Example (11) contains gu—šub “to neglect.” The 2nd person singular possessive pronominal marker –zu is attached to the noun gu “neck.” Here, the pronominal marker refers to the agent of the activity.

(11) inim a-ra-dug₄-ga-gu₁₀ gu-zu la-ba-an-šub-bé-e[n] word CP-you-speak-NOM-my neck-your NEG-CP-n-R-NONPAST:2SG “You should not neglect what I tell you” (Inana’s Descent to the Netherworld 118)²¹

Example (12) contains á—ág “to give instructions.” The possessive pronominal marker -bi is attached to the noun á “arm.” Unlike the previous example of gu—šub, it does not refer to the agent of the action. Here, the nominal constituent á functions as the head of a genitive construction (anticipatory genitive).

(12) urú-gu₁₀ gul-gul-lu-ba á-bi ḫé-im-ma-an-ág-es city-my destroy-destroy-NOM-its-GEN arm-its MP-CP-n-R-PAST:3PL “They commanded the destruction of my city” (Ur Lament 162)²²

Certain adjectives habitually occur with certain compound verbs. For example, igi—bar “to look at” typically occurs with the adjectives zi “true” or ḫūl-la “joyous.” Example (13a) contains zi, and example (13b) ḫūl-la. These adjectives are placed between the noun igi and the verbal chain.

(13a) sag-gi₆-ga-ni-šè igi zi mu-ši-in-bar head-black-his-TER eye true CP-TER-n-R “He looked kindly at his black-head people” (Song of the Hoe 21)²³

(13b) ḫuṭu igi ḫūl-la ḫé-mu-e-ši-bar-bar-re ḫūl-la eye joyous MP-CP-you-TER-R-R-NONPAST:3SG “Utu will look joyously upon you” (Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 95)²⁴
These adjectives are better understood as adverbs in function to the composite predicator, as suggested by many scholars. This interpretation results from a proper observation of the process of a noun and a verb forming a semantic unit where the nominal element loses its semantic saliency. Yet, example (13c) betrays the fact that zi and ḫūl-la are actually modifying the noun igi. The third person singular possessive pronoun is attached to the igi ḫūl-la “joyous eye.”

(13c) [an] lugal-e igi ḫūl-la-ni mu-un-ši-bar-bar-re
An king-ERG eye joyous-his CP-n-TER-R-R-NONPAST:3SG
“King An looks around joyously” (Nanse A 253)

The nominal constituents of these examples demonstrate that they can be modified and therefore, they can be, in a sense, specific. As far as my data are concerned, these variations do not seem to occur randomly, but are limited to certain compound verbs. The membership to this group is much smaller than that of the prototype group.

5.2. Unique Characteristics of Nominal Constituents

Why do these variations take place? Akkadian influence and deterioration of knowledge of Sumerian grammar might have played part but do not provide a satisfactory answer to this question, since they do not explain the specific uneven distribution of variations. Rather, the variations seem to me to reflect the unique nature of Sumerian compound verbs: namely, the double character of the nominal constituent. It is “unique” because it does not conform to the cross-linguistic generalization of noun incorporation, in which the nominal constituent loses both semantic and syntactic saliency. As we have seen already, the nominal constituent of Sumerian compound verb is semantically incorporated to form a new lexical item. However, on the other hand, it holds its syntactic status occupying the absolutive position. Therefore, it can regain its semantic independence in some constructions, thus allowing its referentiality to be manipulable. This might be an explanation for the forming of a less prototypical, secondary group of Sumerian compound verbs. And also, it might be a reason why it is difficult to distinguish compound verbs from non-compounding, regular syntactic sentence constructions from the viewpoint of morphosyntactic marking.

Notes

1 This article is, based on my Ph.D. dissertation, Sumerian Compound Verbs with Body-Part Terms, The University of Chicago, 2000 (UMI 9978038), a revised version of my lecture at the
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2 ETCSL 1.8.2.1. The number is the composition’s catalogue number in J. A. Black, et al. 1998—.

3 Compounds with verbs dug₄ and ak are not dealt with in this paper. For an exhaustive study of the dug₄-compounds, see Attinger 1993; for the ak-compounds, see PSD A/III, 76-115.

4 Shibatani & Bynon 1995, 19: “Typological studies define a domain of inquiry, which in a truly functional approach is defined conceptually, assemble possible language structures corresponding to the domain, and then draw cross-linguistic generalizations.”

5 Delitzsch 1914, 70f.; Deimel 1923, 56f.; Jestin 1943, 49; Falkenstein 1949, 119-128; Sollberger 1952, 119-122; Salonen & Siro 1958, 34-39; Postgate 1974, 35-40; Thomsen 1984, 269-272; Attinger 1993, 179-182; Edzard 2003, 142-150, where his comments on my dissertation about Sumerian compound verbs are found.

6 The above mentioned su—ti “to accept” consists of the noun su “hand” and the verb stem ti, whose Akkadian lexical counterpart is lequ. I know of no European language which routinely uses a compound to express the basic idea of receiving. Yet, European languages are not totally devoid of compound verbal lexemes of this kind: for example, the French verb maintenir, borrowed by English at the end of the 13th century, etymologically contains a noun main “hand” and a verb tenir “to hold” (Hagège 1978, 62f.).

7 ETCSL 1.8.1.4.

8 ETCSL 1.6.2.

9 ETCSL 2.2.3.

10 For the variants of pre-radical /m/n/b/∅, see Gragg 1972. For a traditional interpretation of -n- and -b-, which takes them as the ergative or absolutive marker depending on the conjugation type of the verb, see Thomsen 1984, 147-152 and Edzard 2003, 84-89. See also Coghill & Deutscher 2002. For a view of /Vowel + n/ and /Vowel + b/ as variants of /ni/ and /bi/, see Wilke 1988, 35-40 and Edzard 2003, 98 and 102. Note also Yoshikawa’s (1977) different view of -n/-b-. For various theories about /m/, see Thomsen 1984, 172-174, and most recently Edzard 2003, 92-112. Pre-radical /m/, /n/, and /b/ still have many uncertainties not only formally but also functionally. Further research will be needed.

11 ETCSL 2.4.2.18.

12 ETCSL 1.3.2.

13 Alternatively we could view them more precisely as “noun stripping” as P. Michalowski points out in his forthcoming grammar of Sumerian, because “in such constructions the nouns are ‘stripped’ of their affixes but remain as separate phonological entities; the nouns are backgrounded but remain as independent words.” For this paper, however, setting aside the difficult issue of phonological cohesion for another occasion, I will consider noun stripping as a kind of incorporation and make no attempt to distinguish these two types of constructions in the following discussion; see Mithun 2000, 920f.

14 It clearly shows that verbs derived by lexical compounding do not necessarily have intransitive meanings. Cf. Mithun 2000, 919, example (14) and Mithun 2000, 920, example 20 (16), where the derived verbs are also transitive, but the former is termed classificatory noun incorporation and the latter noun stripping.

15 Transliteration after Beyer 1992, 5 (capitalization of a phoneme indicates that it undergoes
regular morphophonemic changes according to phonological environment).

16 As for the meanings of each constituent, I follow Civil’s (1976, 149) view: “Internal etymologies are implied in the compounds, but they have no value whatsoever for predicting the meaning of the item. The verb šu — ti may well be ‘die Hand nähern,’ and šu — tag, ‘die Hand berühren lassen,’ but this fact is a trivial consequence of the compounding process and contributes only retrospectively to the understanding of the meaning.” Moreover, there are quite a few verbal constituents whose meaning cannot be determined with certainty. In such cases, to pinpoint the exact meaning of the verbal part of the compounds is beyond our capacity. Cf. Krecher 1987, 79-81, and Krecher 1993.

17 ETCSL 5.3.1.
18 ETCSL 2.1.5.
19 ETCSL 2.2.6.
20 ETCSL 1.8.1.2.
21 ETCSL 1.4.1.
22 ETCSL 2.2.2.
23 ETCSL 5.5.4.
24 ETCSL 1.8.2.3.
26 Compare an example of ditransitive construction (a) and that of compound verb (b).

(a) en-me-er-kár-ra ṇen-ki-ké₄₆ gēštu mu-na-an-sum  
Enmerkar-DAT Enki-ERG ear-ABS CP-him-n-give
“Enki gave wisdom to Enmerkar” (Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta 420)

(b) ama dumu-ni-ir igi nu-mu-un-ši-bar-re 21  
mother-(ERG) child-her-DAT eye-ABS NEG-CP-n-TER-R-NONPAST:3SG
“Mother does not look at her child” (Isbi Erra E 41)

In example (a), “Enki” is the Agent-Ergative and gēštu “wisdom” (lit. “ear”) the Patient-Absolutive; the receiver of wisdom Enmerkar has the dative case-suffix, which is the Beneficiary-Dative. In example (b), “mother” is the Agent-Ergative; igi “eye,” the nominal constituent of the compound verb igi-bar “to look at,” is the Patient-Absolutive; and dumu-ni-ir “her child” with the dative case-marker is the Oblique argument, which is the semantic (logical) object of igi—bar. See also Zólyomi 1999, 216f.

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