

'Abbreviated nouns' in African languages: a morphological, semantic and lexicographic perspective

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This article focuses on morphological and semantic analysis as well as lexicographic treatment of a specific type of compound noun whose initial part is a so-called 'abbreviated noun', which in the case of Zulu is *-so-* or *-no-* and in Sepedi is *ra-* or *ma-*. It will be argued that these nouns have become grammaticalised forms which have lost their status as fully fledged lexical items, and have, through metaphorical usage and a subsequent process of desemanticisation, been reanalysed as grammatical units used productively to coin new words. A semantic continuum will be postulated representing the semantic range, or even shift, of these abbreviated nouns from the original meanings 'father/mother of', as one extreme through 'owner of' or 'having special skills/characteristics' to 'occupation' as the other extreme. Finally, various suggestions will be made for the alternative lexicographic treatment of transparent versus non-transparent forms, according to a transparency continuum.

Introduction

The aim of this article is firstly to present a morphological and semantic analysis of a specific type of compound noun which occurs in African languages, and secondly to focus on the lexicographic treatment of this type of compound noun.

In a morphological analysis of the nouns under investigation, it will be shown that the initial part is a so-called 'abbreviated noun',¹ which in the case of Zulu is *-so-* or *-no-* and in Sepedi is *ra-* or *ma-*. All these compounds occur in class 1a/2a, for example:

- (1)
Zulu
usomashibhini
 u-so + (a)mashibhini
 cl.pref.1a-father + shebeen
 'shebeen owner'
usomabhinisi
 u-so + (a)mabhinisi
 cl.pref.1a-father + businesses
 'businessman/woman,
 owner of businesses'

- unompempe*
 u-no + (i)mpempe
 cl.pref.1a-mother + whistle
 (lit. owner of the whistle)
 'referee'
unozinti
 u-no + (i)zinti
 cl.pref.1a-mother + sticks
 (lit. owner of the sticks, i.e.
 goal posts)
 'goalkeeper'

- Sepedi**
ramapuku
 ra + mapuku
 father + books
 (lit. father/owner of books)
 'librarian'
raditshetele
 ra + ditshetele
 father + money
 (lit. father/owner of money)
 'rich/wealthy person'

- mmaletlotlo*
 mma + letlotlo
 mother + money/assets
 (lit. mother/owner of
 money/assets)
 'treasurer'
mmarobala
 mma + robala
 mother + sleep
 (lit. mother/owner of
 sleep)
 'prostitute'

Although linguists agree in principle that **-so-/ra-** and **-no-/ma-** derive from words referring respectively to 'father' and 'mother' in Zulu and Sepedi, different opinions on the morphological status of these abbreviated nouns will be discussed.

In order to shed more light on the morphological status of these abbreviated nouns, a semantic analysis becomes essential. From a semantic point of view it will therefore be argued that **-so-/ra-** and **-no-/ma-** have become grammaticalised forms which no longer function as independent nouns. A semantic continuum representing the gradual semantic range of these abbreviated nouns will be postulated.

Finally, suggestions will be made for the lexicographical treatment of abbreviated nouns, taking into account the relative number of such nouns occurring in a particular language, as well as the transparency of such nouns on a transparency continuum.

A morphological analysis of abbreviated nouns

As far as Zulu is concerned, Doke (1973:81), Van Eeden (1956:720) and Van Warmelo (1931:35) agree that **-so-** basically means 'father' and is derived from the 'old Bantu form' *uyihlo* 'thy father',² the equivalent of which is *wiso* in a language such as Lamba (Doke, 1973:81). The sound change from **-hl-** to **-s-** is not unusual in Zulu if, for instance, one considers a case such as *iso*, the singular form of 'eye' and *amehlo* which is the plural, 'eyes'.

The feminine counterpart of **-so-** is the abbreviated noun form **-no-** in Zulu. It primarily means 'mother', according to Van Eeden (1956:721). Both Doke (1973:81) and Van Eeden (1956:721) presume that **-no-** originates from, or is related to, *unyoko* 'thy (your) mother'. This argument is supported by Van Warmelo's (1931:35) comment that in *unyoko*, 'thy mother', the final syllable clearly contains the possessive **-o**, 'yours', and that, for instance, the Lamba version

of *unyoko*, 'thy mother', is *noko* (lit. mother-yours).

A similar situation prevails in the Sotho languages in the sense that a considerable number of nouns in Class 1a are formed with the prefixes **ra-** 'father of' and **(m)ma-** 'mother of'. In many instances the resultant noun is a common noun indicating some person or animal; in the majority of cases, however, the noun is a proper name, the names in **ra-** being masculine, those in **ma-** feminine. Compare the following Southern Sotho examples cited by Doke and Mofokeng (1974:92,93):

(2)

Southern Sotho

Common nouns in **ra-**:

<i>rakhali</i>	'my paternal aunt'
<i>ralehlakana</i>	'Bushman; father of reeds'
<i>ralihlare</i>	'doctor; father of medicines'
<i>ralinku</i>	'owner of sheep'
<i>rangoako</i>	'baboon; father of beetles'
<i>rapiiso</i>	'gnu; father of the assembly'

Common nouns in **ma-**:

<i>manko</i>	'person with a big nose'
<i>malepera</i>	'goat; mother of the upright tail'
<i>malinakana</i>	'swallow; mother of little horns'
<i>mamashalane</i>	'small iron pot; mother of sterility medicines'

Proper Names:

<i>Ratjeka</i> (masc.)	'Father-of-threats'
<i>Raphoka</i> (masc.)	'Father-of-dew'
<i>Malitaba</i> (fem.)	'Mother-of-affairs'
<i>Raboroko</i> (masc.)	'Father-of-sleep'

Before dealing with abbreviated nouns in Sepedi, the forms **mma-** and **ma-** should first be considered. Ziervogel and Mokgokong (1975:784), for instance, regard **mma-** versus **ma-** merely as alternatives:

MA- ... [first member of noun compounds, alt. often **mma-**]

Kriel and Van Wyk (1989:119), however,

lemmatise **ma-** stating that it is an abbreviated form of **mma-** meaning 'mother of'.

In the case of **rra-** and **ra-**, no examples of **rra-** have been found in Sepedi dictionaries, except for instances such as *rra*, *rrago* and *rragwe* which all denote kinship. For Sepedi, therefore, the focus will only be on abbreviated nouns with **ra-** in this article.

It is interesting to note that although Koopman (1984:95) does not disagree with Doke's view on the origin of **-so-** and **-no-**, he prefers to regard **-so-** and **-no-** as class 1a formatives. In a later article Koopman (1992:98) goes one step further by terming **-so-** and **-no-** 'extra' prefixes, which are always preceded by a class 1a (or 3a) prefix.

From a synchronic point of view, Koopman (1992:99) argues that whereas the lexical meaning 'father of' sometimes occurred in older words, it has disappeared completely in adoptives³ such as:

Zulu

- (3a) *usomashibhini* (< *amashibhini* 'shebeens')
'shebeen owner' (< *amabhizinisi* 'businesses')
- (3b) *usomabhizinisi*
'businessman/woman, owner of businesses'
- (3c) *unobhala* (< *-bhala* 'to write')
'secretary'
- (3d) *unompempe* (< *impempe* 'whistle')
'referee'
- (3e) *unondweba* (< *indweba* 'whistle')
'referee'
- (3f) *unozinti* (< *izinti* 'sticks')
'goal keeper'

Koopman (1992:98) therefore questions the Dokeian approach of considering words containing **-so-** and **-no-** as compounds, and prefers to interpret them as nouns with 'extra' prefixes.

In this regard it is noteworthy that Poulos and Louwrens (1994:18) give the following examples of the prefixal element **ra-** in Sepedi, which according to Ziervogel and Mokgokong (1975: 1082) derives from *rra wa*, 'father of':

Sepedi (Poulos & Louwrens, 1994:18)

- (4a) *ramotse*
(lit. the owner of the kraal) 'headman'

(4b) *ramaatla*

(lit. the owner of strength) 'strong person'

Poulos and Louwrens (1994:18) describe **ra-** as a prefixal element that means 'master of' or 'owner of' and indicate that such a derivation is 'commonly used to name a person or thing in terms of a unique or prominent characteristic which is typical of or which can be associated with the particular referent.'

As far as the morphological aspects are concerned, it can be concluded that linguists do acknowledge the existence of a specific type of compound noun introduced in Sepedi and Zulu for example by **-so-/ra-** or **-no-/ma-**. Linguists also agree in principle on the origin of **-so-/ra-** or **-no-/ma-** — that they are words referring to 'father' and 'mother' respectively. They disagree, however, in respect of the current grammatical/morphological status of **-so-/ra-** and **-no-/ma-** as 'abbreviated nouns' as contrasted with extra prefixes or 'prefixal elements'.

In the following paragraphs the abbreviated nouns will be investigated from a semantic point of view, and it will be argued that synchronically they have been reduced to **productive derivational prefixes**.

A semantic analysis of abbreviated nouns

It is significant that the tendency in some of the given examples to interpret **-so-** or **ra-** as 'the owner of', is in accordance with Claudi and Heine's finding (1986:313) that in Ewe, a West African language belonging to the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo family (spoken by approximately two million people in Ghana, Togo and Benin), the noun *tɔ* which means 'father' has 'come to be used to express 'the owner of something'....

In other words, in Ewe, *tɔ*, 'father', has come to be used metaphorically in the sense of **an owner is a father**, as is suggested by examples such as the following:

Ewe (Claudi and Heine, 1986:313)

(5a) *xɔ sia tɔ*

lit. house this father

'the owner of this house'

(5b) *sɔ -tɔ*

lit. horse-father

'horse owner'

(5c) *dɔ -tɔ*

lit. work-father

'employer' ('work owner')

(5d) *kpovi-tɔ*

lit. stick-father

'policeman' ('stick owner').

By means of these examples, Claudl and Heine (1986:313) demonstrate that the one semantic feature of the concept 'father' that has been singled out, is that of 'owner'. The result is that the fully fledged lexical item *tɔ*, 'father', has been reduced to a derivational suffix, namely *tɔ*, 'owner of', which is used productively in the formation of new words.

Claudi and Heine (1986:313) continue by saying that when a specific lexical item is made the vehicle of metaphorical transfer, its meaning tends to be drastically reduced. In fact, only those semantic elements will survive which are transferred to the metaphorical topic (that is, the more abstract word — 'owner' in this instance). What we observe here is 'the same as what happens in the case of desemanticisation.'

This process of desemanticisation or 'semantic bleaching',⁴ as it has also been described, is a key concept in grammaticalisation theory, according to which a lexical item is simplified semantically to such an extent that a single basic semantic element remains.

It is a process which has already been attested in the development of certain other morphemes in Zulu. For example, Poulos (1986:288ff) has shown how the diminutive suffix *-ana*, which is a grammatical morpheme in a language such as Zulu, has developed from a fully fledged lexical item, namely a noun stem **-yana* which still occurs in many Bantu languages and which expresses the meaning of 'child'.

Similarly, the abbreviated nouns *-so/-ra-* in Zulu and Sepedi respectively have become grammaticalised forms that no longer function as independent nouns, but are usually compounded with a noun, as illustrated in the following examples:

Zulu

(6a) *u-so + (i)khaya*

cl. pref.1a-abbr.N + N

'the head of the house/kraal-head/owner of the family'

Sepedi

(6b) *ra + mapolase*

abbr.N + N

'owner of farms'

Although *-so/-ra-* are often regarded by traditional grammarians as 'fossilised' forms, they are in fact used productively to coin new words. For instance, *-so/-ra-* may be combined productively with adoptives or other nouns to indicate specialised occupations or skills such as:

Zulu

(7a) *usokhemisi/ese*

'pharmacist'

(7b) *usosayense*

'scientist'

(7c) *usonhlalakahle*

'social worker'

(7d) *usolwazi*

'professor'

Sepedi

(7e) *ramaleme*

'linguist'

(7f) *rakrosari*

'grocer'

Similar examples from isiNdebele are:

IsiNdebele (Jiyane, 1994:32)

(8a) *usomapala*

'goalkeeper'

(8b) *usongonda*

'psychologist'

From these examples it becomes clear that the notion of having special skills or characteristics, or even an occupation, is being conveyed. The question now arises whether we are dealing with the conceptualisation of another metaphor here, such as **an owner of expertise is a father**, by analogy with the conceptual metaphor **an owner is a father**. This is difficult to say.⁵ Nevertheless, it should be fairly clear by now that some type of semantic reduction has taken place in the development of the original forms **-so-/ra-** meaning 'father'.

Turning now to the abbreviated noun forms **-no-/ma-**, in Zulu and Sepedi respectively, it would seem that here we might also be dealing with a process of desemanticisation, as in the case of **-so-/ra-**. Here too, the specific semantic feature of the concept 'mother' that has been chosen is somebody like an 'owner' or 'possessor of'. By analogy, the conceptual metaphor here would thus be: **an owner is a mother**, as intimated in the following examples:

Zulu

- (9a) *u-no + (i)mpempe*
cl.pref.1a-mother + whistle
(lit. owner of the whistle)
'referee'
- (9b) *u-no + (i)zinti*
cl.pref.1a-mother + sticks
(lit. owner of the sticks, i.e. goal posts)
'goalkeeper'

Sepedi

- (9c) *mma + letlotlo*
mother + money/assets
(lit. mother of money/assets)
'treasurer'

The situation in Xhosa, as exemplified by Thipa (1989:123-125), would confirm the metaphor in Zulu postulated above. Consider the following Xhosa examples with **-no-** that all include the meaning 'owner of...':

Xhosa (Thipa, 1989:123-125)

- (10a) *unovenkili*
'shop owner'

- (10b) *unoteksi*
'taxi-owner'
- (10c) *unoshibhini*
'shebeen owner'

Another concept well attested in the use of **-no-**, is that of femininity.⁶ In Zulu, **-no-** often appears in the personal names of females,⁷ such as the following:

Zulu

- (11a) *uNomasonto*
(female name)
- (11b) *uNomkhubulwana*
'princess of heaven'

Other examples expressing femininity are:

Zulu

- (12a) *unonina*
'woman'
- (12b) *unokhanula*
'one's actual mother'
- (12c) *unomlandwana*
'girl who has had an illegitimate child'

Sepedi

- (12d) *mmalehufane*
'jealous woman'
- (12e) *mmasebotsana*
'fair lady'

The fact that **-no-** in Zulu seems to be associated with more than one of its semantic features, namely 'owner', 'female sex' and so forth, is not unusual according to Claudi and Heine (1986:314). They illustrate this use with the Ewe example of the noun *nɔ*, 'mother', is used metaphorically as **a suffering person is a mother**, as in:

Ewe (Claudi and Heine, 1986:314)

- (13a) *dɔ -nɔ*
lit. sickness-mother
'sick person'
- (13b) *gkú-nɔ*
lit. eye-mother
'blind person'

or as a **female animal is a mother**, as in the following examples:

Ewe (Claudi & Heine, 1986:314)

(14a) *sɔ -nɔ*

lit. horse-mother

'mare'

(14b) *ha -nɔ*

lit. pig-mother

'sow'

The noun *nɔ*, 'mother', in Ewe has therefore, through metaphorical usage, been reduced to the properties 'a suffering person' and 'a female animal' that are 'presumed to be characteristic of the relevant nominal concept' (Claudi & Heine, 1986:314).

Thus far it is clear from the semantic analysis of these 'abbreviated nouns' that in the majority of

cases the original meaning of 'father' or 'mother' no longer prevails. In fact it is difficult to find examples still denoting this concept. In addition to 'father' or 'mother' a range of meanings relating to 'owner of an object' or 'having special skills/characteristics' or even 'occupations' are observed. Any attempt to categorise the meanings, let alone to postulate a line of semantic relationship is arbitrary and open to challenge. However, taking into consideration Seiler's thesis (1994:33) that the 'continuum is a construct serving the purpose of putting some order into a variety of facts', we nevertheless believe that a continuum or gradual semantic range can be postulated from an extreme endpoint 'father/mother' via 'owner of objects/skills' to a semantic value of 'mere occupation'. One can even attempt to find examples suggesting intermediate stages. Consider the suggested continuum given in Table 1.

Table 1 Towards a Semantic Continuum

Father/Mother	Owner of objects or special skills/characteristics	Occupation
ZULU <i>usobantu</i> 'father of the people', 'Bishop Colenso' <i>unobantu</i> 'mother of the people'	SEPEDI <i>radimilione</i> 'multimillionaire' <i>ramapolase</i> 'owner of farms', 'farmer' <i>ramotse</i> 'headman', 'mayor' <i>rammotoro</i> 'owner of a motorcar' <i>mmapelo</i> 'obstinate person' <i>mmalehufane</i> 'jealous woman' <i>ramahlale</i> 'scientist' <i>ramaleme</i> 'linguist' <i>ramaano</i> 'one who plans', 'person of ideas' <i>Ramaatlaohle</i> 'Almighty', 'All-powerful' ZULU <i>usomapulazi</i> 'owner of farms' <i>usokulunga</i> 'All-Righteous One' <i>usosayense</i> 'scientist'	SEPEDI <i>ramalahla</i> 'coal trader' <i>radihlapi</i> 'fishmonger' <i>radinama</i> 'butcher' <i>radinkgwa</i> 'baker' <i>rakhefi</i> 'café keeper' <i>rakrosari</i> 'grocer' <i>ralebenekele</i> 'shopkeeper' <i>ralefaufau</i> 'astronaut' <i>radino</i> 'liquor trader' ZULU <i>usonkanyezi</i> 'astronaut' <i>unobhala</i> 'secretary'
	SEPEDI <i>ramaatla</i> 'father of strength' <i>mmasebotsana</i> 'fair lady' ZULU <i>usomandla</i> 'father of strength' <i>usokhaya</i> 'head of the house' 'owner of the family'	

Father/Mother	Owner of objects or special skills/ characteristics	Occupation
	SEPEDI <i>ramelao</i> 'attorney' <i>radipalo</i> 'accountant' <i>mmaletlotlo</i> 'cashier (woman)' <i>rameno</i> 'dentist' <i>radifeisi</i> (in sport) 'boxer' <i>ramatswele</i> (in sport) 'boxer' <i>radinku</i> 'sheep farmer' <i>radikgomo</i> 'cattle farmer' <i>raseteiene</i> 'stationmaster' <i>raposo</i> 'postmaster' <i>rammaraka</i> 'market master' ZULU <i>usolwazi</i> 'professor' <i>unompempe</i> 'referee'	

An element of semantic **shift** can also be linked to the categories postulated in Table 1. Firstly, as has been mentioned above, in the majority of cases the original meaning of 'father' or 'mother' no longer prevails. Secondly, it is possible that the general (over)use of **-so-/ra-** and **-no-/ma-** can lead to a reinterpretation of 'owner of' to something indicating mere occupation. The informants consulted for Sepedi and Setswana, whilst still regarding *rakhefi* as the 'owner of the café', concede that *radinama* is merely a 'seller of meat'. Compare also the following examples in support of this viewpoint, taken from Kriel (1976:351).

- (15)
- radi'hlapi**, n., 'fish-monger'
 - radi'kgomo** n., 'cattle farmer'
 - ra'di'kgwa**, n., 'forester, ranger'
 - rasera'pa**, n., 'gardener'
 - ra'tente**, n., 'tent-dweller'
 - ratlhwekišo**, n., 'sanitary inspector'

So far, we have focused on semantic aspects of abbreviated nouns without taking into consideration the gender **opposition** between **-so-/ra-** as primarily referring to **male** and **-no-/ma-** referring in principle to **female**. The next logical step is thus to determine whether in the derivation/creation of

abbreviated nouns there exists a **consistent semantic opposition** (in terms of male versus female) between **-so-/ra-** on the one hand and **-no-/ma-** on the other.

One **extreme** approach is to attempt to draw a strict line between male or female involvement. This means that if the abbreviated noun in question involves a male person, only **-so-/ra-** will be used, and if it refers to a female person, only **-no-/ma-** will be employed. This view is strongly supported in principle by the informants consulted for Sepedi and Setswana. In most cases both informants had little hesitation in **freely substituting ra-** with **ma-** and vice versa in instances such as *ramatlotlo/maletlotlo* 'treasurer', *ramelao/mamelao* 'lawyer', and so forth **depending on male or female involvement**.

They were, however, uncertain about the **female** participant in cases such as *radifeisi*/?*madifeisi* boxer. Likewise they were very hesitant in approving abbreviated nouns for the **male** participant in instances such as *mmapelo*/**rapelo* 'obstinate person'. The fact that they are reluctant to accept words such as ?*madifeisi* or **rapelo* could be interpreted as meaning that the use of **-so-/ra-** or **-no-/ma-** is not fully productive.

However, these seeming limitations on productive use of **-so-/ra-** versus **-no-/ma-** do not affect the productivity claim. It could be more satisfactorily explained in terms of the differing **traditional roles** performed by males and females. A word such as *Ramaatlaohle* 'God' or *uSomandla*, 'Almighty', has a unique male reference in the Christian religion. For this reason **Mamaatlaohle* will be unacceptable, since no female reference has traditionally been associated with God in the Christian religion. So, for example, it is not surprising that the participant in a male dominated sport such as boxing will be derived by the masculine strategy **-so-/ra-** — for example *radi-feisi* (*difeisi* 'fists') and not **madifeisi*.

The same argument could be used for *mmar-obala* 'woman of loose morals, prostitute', or *unonina*, 'woman', referring to females, since the concept of 'male prostitution' is scarcely known in Sepedi culture. Thus it is not uncommon that a traditionally male function will result in formations with **-so-/ra-** while a traditionally female function will result in compounds with **-no-/ma-**. The same argument could be presented for the selection of the feminine **-no-/ma-** for the matron of a hospital as *mabookelo* (*bookelo* 'hospital') and not **rabookelo*.

This line of argument could be maintained for *radihekethe* 'conductor' (*dithekethe* 'tickets'), *ralebenekele* 'shopkeeper' (*lebenkele* 'shop'), *raselaga* 'butcher' (*selaga* 'butchery'), *ramelao* 'lawyer' (*melao* 'laws'), and so forth since these have traditionally been male dominated occupations. However, when the situation of an altogether new sport, **women's boxing**, was sketched, or the increased use of **female conductors** was envisaged, informants were quite prepared to accept words such as *madifeisi* and *madithekethe*. So it can be safely concluded that the choice of **ra-** versus **ma-** is gender sensitive in Sepedi and Setswana. It is also productive but the fully productive use of both **ra-** and **ma-** is limited by traditional male/female roles.

The issue of what determines the choice of **ra-** versus **ma-** is further complicated if one takes into consideration Doke and Mofokeng's reference (1974:93 in a footnote) to Jacottett's observation

that 'at initiation, girls assume masculine names in **ra-**, which they sometimes keep as women.' This is, therefore a case of a female being referred to as **ra-** instead of **ma-**.

The other **extreme** approach could be to argue that the selection of **-so-/ra-** versus **-no-/ma-** is totally arbitrary and Sepedi examples such as *ramatlotlo/maletlotlo*, 'treasurer', and Zulu examples such as *usosiba/unobhala*, 'secretary', could be analysed for their range of application. This would imply, for example, that a female treasurer could be referred to as *maletlotlo* or *ramatlotlo* whilst a male treasurer might be called *maletlotlo* or *ramatlotlo*. Ziervogel and Mokgokong (1975: 808) formulate this issue rather clumsily when introducing **mma-** by saying that it forms the

... first part of compound nouns, usually with reference to feminine **although often not**; mmakgoši, mmatlatome, mmangwane, mmamašianoke // [see individual words].
(own bold)

The informants consulted for Sepedi and Setswana, however, rejected the use of *mamatlotlo* for a male treasurer or *ramatlotlo* for a female treasurer without hesitation. In the case of Zulu it is interesting to note that **-so-/no-** appear to be **less gender sensitive** than **ra-/ma-** in Sepedi and Setswana. In this regard Poulos and Msimang (1998:40) state that in Zulu **-so-** and **-no-** are quite productive 'even in instances where **-no-** has nothing to do with the female nor **-so-** with the male sex', for example:

Zulu

- (16a) *unozinti*
'goalkeeper'
- (16b) *usomugqa*
'linesman'
- (16c) *unondweba*
'referee'
- (16d) *unompempe*
'referee'
- (16e) *usosiba*
'secretary'
- (16f) *unobhala*
'secretary'

Examples such as *unozinti* and *unondweba* which were derived by **-no-** instead of **-so-** clearly indicate neutrality in respect of gender since 'goalkeeper' normally denotes male participation. It is also worthwhile comparing the use of **-so-** in the Zulu examples in (3a) and (3b) with those of **-no-** in the Xhosa examples of (10a) to (10c).

Lexicographical treatment of the so-called abbreviated nouns

For the lexicographer, morphological and semantic analysis of 'abbreviated nouns' as has been done in the previous paragraphs, is not the end point of his/her labour — it is merely the beginning or prerequisite for good lexicography. The question is how should the lexicographer decide on inclusion or omission of these words from the dictionary? Traditionally, abbreviated nouns, like other lemmas, were included in dictionaries 'as they crossed the compiler's way', cf. Snyman (1990:Preface). Such a lexicographic approach often results in the omission of even frequently used words that are most likely to be looked up by the target user of the dictionary. An alternative approach, within the physical limitations of a paper dictionary, is required to ensure that the user will find the abbreviated nouns he/she is looking for. Frequently used abbreviated nouns i.e. with a high total count in the corpus should be considered as candidates for inclusion since the target user is most likely to be confronted with them in his/her engagement with the target language. Thus in order to include the abbreviated nouns most likely to be looked for, we believe that a sound lemmatisation strategy should be based on two principles: (a) the **productivity** of **-so-/ra-** and **-no-/ma-** as a derivation strategy and (b) the **degree of transparency**.⁸

Productive affixes result in the formation of an infinite number of words while **unproductive** affixes have a limited number of derivations as a result. From a lexicographic perspective the situation regarding the lemmatisation of 'abbreviated nouns' is very similar to that of the

lemmatisation of adjectives in Sepedi as described by Gouws and Prinsloo (1997:47):

In planning the macrostructure for a specific lexical category the first step will be to determine whether a limited or an unlimited number of lexical items, i.e. words or stems, are dealt with. The terms 'limited' and 'unlimited' will be used in a rather oversimplified way. Say, for example, that nouns, verbs, reflexive forms of verbs, etc. are unlimited in that an infinite number of such forms occur while subject concords are limited in that there is only a maximum of 15.

Firstly the lexicographer should query the corpus to find an overall impression of the number of 'abbreviated nouns' in the particular language. If it is found that only a **limited number** (50 to 100) of these words occur in the particular language, they can all be lemmatised with proper treatment. This is the most user-friendly option. The user of such a dictionary will be confident that (s)he will find all 'abbreviated nouns' simply by looking them up in the appropriate alphabetical position. For disjunctively written languages such as Sepedi and Setswana, the full word should be lemmatised under 'M' or 'R', as in Kriel (1976:301).

(17)

m'male'tlotlo, n., 'cashier (woman)'

radi'hlaplapi, n., 'fish-monger'

For conjunctively written languages the lexicographer has to decide on a strategy: for example (a) full form minus the class1a/2a prefix; (b) second noun of the compound, with a reference to the abbreviated noun form, or (c) simply the second noun of the compound with no reference to the abbreviated noun form. Consider the following examples from the *Zulu-English Dictionary* (1972) where the authors opted for all three strategies:

(18a)

-Sobantu (uSobantu, ... oSobantu) n.

[<-so- + abantu, lit. Father of the people.] ...

-sokhaya (usokhaya, ... osokhaya) n. [<i(li)khaya.]

Kraal-head, owner of the family. ...

-Somandla (uSomandla, ... oSomandla) n.

[<amandla.]

The Almighty; all-powerful one.

-nompempe (unompempe, ... onompempe) n.

[<-mpempe.]

Referee, umpire (i.e. the owner of the whistle).

(18b)

-mpempe (impempe, ... izimpempe) n. [mpe.

>unompempe.]

... Reed whistle

(18c)

-dweḡa (indweḡa, ... izindweḡa) n. [dweḡa.]

Whistle.

If, however, it is found that an **unlimited number** (hundreds or even thousands) of these words are found in the corpus, transparent ones should first be separated from non-transparent ones. There are no clear-cut borders between transparent, semi-transparent and non-transparent/idiomatic 'abbreviated nouns', especially if one moves from left to right through Table 2 below. It can, however, be argued that one is

dealing with a **Transparency Continuum** with extreme endpoints **Transparent** and **Idiomatic**.

Non-transparent words should be dealt with first for inclusion and treatment in the dictionary. If the non-transparent words are limited in number, lemmatise them all without hesitation. If, however, the non-transparent words are unlimited in number, use frequency counts from the corpus as a cut-off mechanism for including or excluding a word.

The **transparent** words should be dealt with next. If the transparent words are limited in number, lemmatise them all. If, and this is normally the case, the transparent words are unlimited, resort to the formulation of guidelines in the front matter as in (19a) supported by a guide entry in the central text as in (19b).

(19a)

(In the guidelines to the dictionary):

If a word which begins with *(m)ma-* or *ra-* is not found in the central text, you are probably dealing with the meaning 'owner/keeper/expert of' — try to find it under the form without *(m)ma-* or *ra-*. Example: *ralebenekele* → look up under *lebenekele* 'shop', thus *ralebenekele* 'shopkeeper/shop-owner'.

Table 2: Transparency Continuum

Transparent	Semi-transparent	Non-transparent/Idiomatic
SEPEDI <i>rakhefi</i> 'café keeper' <i>rakrosari</i> 'grocer' <i>ralebenekele</i> 'shopkeeper' <i>mmagakesome</i> 'sluggard' <i>raposo</i> 'postmaster' <i>radimilione</i> 'multimillionaire'	SEPEDI <i>mmabohlale</i> 'cunning person' <i>maijase</i> 'one who usually wears an overcoat' <i>Ramaatlaohle</i> 'God' <i>rankudikae</i> 'sheep farmer'	SEPEDI <i>raborokgwana</i> 'despised person' <i>mmarobala</i> 'prostitute'
ZULU <i>usozimali</i> 'millionaire' <i>usokhaya</i> 'kraal head', 'owner of family'	ZULU <i>usohwazi</i> 'professor' <i>usonkanyezi</i> 'astronaut' <i>unobhala</i> 'secretary'	ZULU <i>unonina</i> 'woman'

(19b)

(In the central text in the alphabetical position, e.g. *ra-*):

ra- used in compounds to indicate father of, owner/keeper/etc.

(In the central text in the alphabetical position, e.g. *ma-*):

(*m*)*ma-* used in compounds to indicate mother of, owner/keeper/etc.

For words in the semi-transparent category, either the policy for transparent compounds or the one for non-transparent ones can be followed. Usually the latter is more user-friendly.

Conclusion

In summary then, an investigation into the development of grammatical structures such as *-so-/-no-* in Zulu and *ra-/ma-* in Sepedi has shed more light on the shift in meaning that these 'abbreviated nouns' have undergone. We have shown that they have become grammaticalised forms that have lost their status as fully fledged lexical items and have, through metaphorical usage and a subsequent process of desemanticisation, been reanalysed as grammatical units which are in fact used productively to coin new words. Therefore synchronically, the abbreviated nouns *-so-/-no-* and *ra-/ma-* have been reduced to **productive derivational prefixes**.

A semantic continuum representing the semantic shift of these abbreviated nouns has been postulated. The continuum illustrates the semantic range or even semantic shift from the original meanings 'father/mother of', on the one extreme of the continuum, through 'owner of' or 'to have special skills/ characteristics' to 'occupation' on the other extreme.

An investigation into consistent semantic opposition in terms of male versus female in the derivation or creation of abbreviated nouns, has revealed less gender sensitivity in the case of *-so-/-no-* in Zulu, compared to *ra-/ma-* in Sepedi.

Finally we have paid attention to a lexicographic lemmatisation strategy of the 'abbreviated nouns', taking into account the relative

number of occurrences in the particular language, as well as the degree of transparency of such nouns. Various suggestions for the alternative lexicographic treatment of transparent versus non-transparent forms, according to a transparency continuum, have been made.

Notes

- For the purposes of the argument presented in this study, we shall use Doke's term 'abbreviated noun' (1973:81) when referring to *-so-*, *-no-* etc. although these forms have become grammaticalised as will be shown later.
- Van Warmelo (1931:35) points out that *uyihlo* has the possessive suffix *-o* 'yours'. Meinhof (1932:190) also proves the phonological case by means of the following example:
B. *-xike* 'father' ... Z. *u-so* 'father of ...' e.g. *usomfazi* 'father of one's wife' (*umfazi*)
UB. *-pika* > Z. *-fisa* 'hide'
UB. *xiko* > Z. *iso*, *amehlo* 'eye, eyes'
According to Doke (1973:81) the equivalent of *uyihlo* 'thy father' is *wiso* in Lamba.
- A term used generally to refer to 'words which have been taken from another language and assimilated both morphologically and phonologically to Zulu' (Koopman, 1992:99).
- The term 'semantic bleaching' has been used in numerous studies (see Givón (1984) and Poulos (1986)) to refer to this process.
- Here we are specifically referring to instances of [+human] or class 1a nouns, in contrast to [-human] or class 3a nouns, as Koopman (1992:98) calls them, which do not seem to conceptualise possession.
- There are many [-human] examples in the language which incorporate *-no-* and the feature of femininity, e.g.

unomthebe

'queen termite'

unondlini

'good milking cow'

unobathekeli

'(female of the) Wood Owl'

However, others do not convey any such feature, e.g.

unogolantethe

'white stork'

unomacaceni

'species of flat-fish, rock cod'

unomaweni

'aloe nitens, growing over precipices'

A detailed study of the origins of **-no-** would need to be done in order to explain the various semantic connotations that have evolved in examples such as the above. It would, for example, have to be investigated whether one is dealing with one and the same **-no-** form or whether there are more than two **-no-** forms involved, with different origins.

7 Incidentally **-no-** also appears in male names such as Shaka's praise name *uNodumehlezi*, 'he who is famous even when simply sitting' (Poulos & Msimang, 1998:40), but this is not a common phenomenon.

8 Transparency refers to the extent to which the meaning of a compound word reflects the sum of the meaning of its components, e.g. *shopkeeper* is the 'keeper' of a 'shop' — transparent; *figurehead* is not the 'head' of a 'figure' but a 'leader' — non transparent; *Ramaatlaohle* 'Father of all power', 'God' — semi-transparent.

9 Note that there is no relation between this Transparency Continuum and the Semantic Continuum postulated above. So, for example, words such as *radimilione* 'multimillionaire' and *rakhefi* 'café keeper', are grouped together in the Transparency Continuum while they represent extremes in the Semantic Continuum.

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