

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MORPHOLOGICALLY CONSTRUCTED AGENT NOUNS IN FRENCH AND YORUBA

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Summary: It is widely believed that a very large number of word forms in many languages are traceable to the outputs of morphological processes which broadly include affixation, compounding and reduplication. In this paper, we carry out a comparative analysis of agent noun formation rules in French and in Yoruba using Lexeme-Base Morphology model. Our findings show that while French employs suffixation and compounding, Yoruba makes use of prefixation and reduplication. The study also reveals that both languages demonstrate similar phonological, syntactic and semantic traits relating to the agent noun production.

1. Introduction

The nature of a morphologically formed agent noun has generated theoretical arguments among derivational morphologists. While some argue that only humans can stand as agents, some others believe that both humans and objects have agentive properties as far as morphology is concerned. For instance, Fillmore [1968: 24] posits that agentive formation has to do with «the case of the typically animate perceived instigator of the action identified in the verb». According to this view, while French words such as *investigateur* ‘investigator’ and *boxeur* ‘boxer’ are agent nouns, words like *brûleur* ‘burner’ and *adoucis-sant* ‘softener’ are mere instrument nouns because they do not refer to human beings but to inanimate objects. On the ground of this argument, while the Yoruba *awako* ‘driver’ and *apeja* ‘fisherman’ are agent nouns, *abe* ‘razor’ and *agbégilódò* ‘timber carrier’ will be considered as mere instrument nouns. The Fillmorean argument was retained by Rosenberg [2008] in her thesis on French agentive formations. On the contrary, Cruse [1973], Benveniste [1975], Aronoff [1976] and several others have argued that the issue of animacy and inanimacy is outside the scope of morphology and should be left to the domain of semantics. Aronoff [1976: 284], for example, argues on the English agentive suffix *-er* that «whether a given instance of the agentive WFR X-er names an animate, inanimate, material, immaterial entity is independent of the rule itself: it is ascribed to pragmatic factors».

In this paper, our orientation will be that the line between animate agent and inanimate agent is outside the primary scope of morphology. Therefore, we integrate both animate and inanimate agentive formations into a framework with five different semantic interpretations: animate agentivity, inanimate agentivity, instrumental agentivity, professional agentivity and partisan agentivity (see [Owoeye 2009, 2011, 2013] for details on this position). As a theoretical framework, we adopt the Lexeme-based Morphological (LBM henceforth) analysis of word formation. For material, we rely largely on the inventory of agent nouns as contained in *Le trésor de la langue française informatisé* (TLFi

henceforth) for French and *A Dictionary of the Yoruba Language* published by University Press PLC, Ibadan (DYL henceforth). With the central objective of testing the universality of the grammar of natural languages, we shall compare the responsiveness of both French and Yoruba languages to the agentive word formation rules and point out their grammatical principles and parameters as they relate to phonological, syntactic and semantic dimensions of agent nouns construction. It must be noted from the onset that few comparative and contrastive works have been done on the morphology of French and Yoruba (see [Soyoye 1989, Oshounniran 2010], for example). Nevertheless, we are not aware of any works that have compared the agent noun formation processes in the two languages. The present study is therefore an attempt to fill the supposed gap.

2. Theoretical Framework

The majority of the morphological theories formulated towards the end of the 20th century are either morpheme-based or lexeme-based, described in French by Fradin [2003] respectively as *Morphologie Morphémique Combinatoire* ‘Combinatory Morpheme-based Morphology’ and *Morphologie Lexématique Classique* ‘Classical Lexeme-based Morphology’. The primary distinction between the two lies in the conception of the linguistic status of «the smallest significant unit» and the combinatory processes of morphological constructions. While morpheme-based theories adopt the morpheme as the smallest unit, lexeme-based models see the lexeme as the smallest unit. Consequently, the former orientation considers the formation of complex words as a simple concatenation of morphemes, while the latter relies on Word Formation Rules (WFR), also known as Lexeme Formation Rules (LFR) or Lexeme Construction Rules (LCR). We settle for the framework of LMB in the analysis we will later embark on in this work.

Our choice of LBM, which Kerleroux [2003: 12] called «*une unique innovation théorique*» ‘a unique theoretical innovation’, is based on the perceived analytical advantage it has over the morpheme-based analysis. In LBM, the lexeme is considered to be the smallest unit on which word formation rules operate before complex words are formed. The major advantage of LBM appears to be its multidimensional approach to word formation. LFR are taken to be processes through which complex lexemes are selected according to phonological, syntactic and semantic characteristics of the base lexeme. This selection, which is a process of input and output, utilizes the phonological, syntactic and semantic properties of the base lexeme to produce another lexeme itself possessing its own phonological, syntactic and semantic properties. This is unlike the Morpheme-based morphology where word formation is taken to be a simple fusion of morphemes. To define the lexeme, the distinction between it and «word form» established by Matthews [1974: 62] appears useful. According to Matthews, the word form is an independent unit containing the morphosyntactic properties functioning as the atom of syntax, i.e. the units found in sentences. As for the lexeme, it is the abstract correlate of the word form; the morphological unit that is devoid of inflectional marks. In French, for example, *dansent*, *dansais*, *dansé*, *dansa* (conjugated forms) are four distinct word forms (with

inflectional properties) of a base lexeme *DANSER* (the infinitive form of the verb ‘to dance’). From the base lexeme *danser* other complex lexemes such as *danse* ‘dance’, *dansant* ‘dancing’ and *danseur* ‘dancer’ can be constructed by derivation. An example from Yoruba is *KÓ* (the infinitive form of the verb ‘to learn’) which is the base lexeme for the derivation of other complex lexemes such as *ikéko* ‘learning’, *akéko* ‘learner’, *ikékojádé* ‘graduation’. Unlike the morpheme-based orientation, which is a grammar of Item and Arrangement, LBM is a grammar of Item and Process [Matthews 1974] or of Word and Paradigm [Aronoff 1976].

Having established the theoretical framework of our study, our task henceforth will be to carry out a comparative analysis of the agent noun formation processes in French and Yoruba. To start with, we do a theoretical and empirical survey on those processes in each of the two languages beginning with French in alphabetical order.

3. Agent Noun Formation in French

In standard French, agent nouns are formed through two major morphological processes which are derivation and compounding. In the case of derivation, only suffixation is involved. Going by the account of Dubois and Dubois-Charlier [1999], there are about eleven suffixes that produce agent nouns in French. We reproduce in Tab. 1 the list of these suffixes as well as examples from TLFi:

Tab. 1. Agentive suffixes in French

Suffixes	Examples from TLFi
-aire	<i>gestionnaire</i> ‘administrator’, <i>vacataire</i> ‘part-time lecturer’
-ant	<i>conquérant</i> ‘conqueror’, <i>récitant</i> ‘narrator’
-er	<i>linger</i> ‘linen house boy’, <i>messenger</i> ‘messenger’
-eron	<i>bûcheron</i> ‘woodcutter’, <i>forgeron</i> ‘blacksmith’
-eur	<i>gagneur</i> ‘winner’, <i>footballeur</i> ‘footballer’
-ien	<i>gardien</i> ‘guard’, <i>technicien</i> ‘technician’
-ier	<i>canotier</i> ‘boater’, <i>giletier</i> ‘vest maker’
-iste	<i>étalagiste</i> ‘window dresser’, <i>moderniste</i> ‘modernist’
-logue	<i>astrologue</i> ‘astrologist’, <i>morphologue</i> ‘morphologist’
-oir	<i>éteingnoir</i> ‘extinguisher’, <i>grattoir</i> ‘scraper’
-ot	<i>grouillot</i> ‘messenger’

From the examples listed in Tab. 1, it can be seen that the various suffixes attach predominantly to verbs and scarcely to two other lexical categories which are adjectives and nouns. For instance, *moderniste* is formed with the suffix *-iste* attaching to the adjective *modern*. Also, *footballeur* came to being as a result of the suffix *-eur* adding to the noun base *football*. As for verb base, *grattoir* is a systematic combination of the verb *gratter* and the suffix *-oir*. It must be noted, however, that no agent noun can be formed directly from either an adjective or a noun; only a verb can serve as base for the formation of agent

nouns in French. Where there are adjectival or nominal bases, as in the case of *moderniste* and *footballeur*, they only serve as bases on the surface. Though not a matter of discussion in this work, the exploration of the deep structure involved in their construction, according to Owoeye [2013], will reveal that each of such agent nouns needs an external verb or verbal phrase before it is formed.

In the case of French agentive compounding, Rosenberg [2008] found out that there are 1,125 compound agent nouns in TLFi. In her study on French agentive formation, she proposes a unifying LFR which she formulates as [VN/A/Adv/P]_{N/A}. According to her, the rule is made up of three different argument structures as can be viewed from Tab. 2:

Tab. 2. Agentive compounding in French

Compounding Structure	Argument	Examples from TLFi
[VN]a	N is an internal argument of V	<i>Abaisse-langue</i> ‘tongue depressor’, <i>porte-bébé</i> ‘baby carrier’, <i>porte-parole</i> ‘spokesperson’
[VN]b	N is an external argument of V	<i>coupe-jarret</i> ‘assassin’, <i>croque-mort</i> ‘pallbearer’, <i>gratte-papier</i> ‘office assistant’
[VN/A/Adv/P]	N/A/Adv/P is a semantic adjunct of V	<i>réveille-matin</i> ‘alarm clock’, <i>pète-sec</i> ‘tyrant’, <i>lève-tard</i> ‘late riser’, <i>songe-creux</i> ‘visionary’

A = adjective, Adv = adverb, N = noun, P = preposition V = verb

From the examples in Tab. 2, it is evident that no agentive compounding can take place in French without a verb. In every agent compound, the base is a verb which attracts a noun, an adjective, an adverb or a preposition. However, since nouns are involved in all the three argument structures identified, it can be presupposed that VN agent compounding would be more productive than any of VA, VAdv, VP. Going by the theoretical and empirical evidence that have been presented, one can safely posit that all morphologically constructed agent nouns in French, either by derivation or by compounding, have their root in verbs.

4. Agent noun formation in Yoruba

In Yoruba, agent nouns are formed using two morphological processes which are derivation and reduplication. Under derivation, Yoruba constructs agent nouns through prefixation, and under reduplication the language engages mainly a pattern whereby a verb phrase is completely reduplicated (see [Pulleyblank 1990, Awobuluyi 2008]).

According to Pulleyblank [1990: 978], there are three suffixes and one reduplication pattern involved in the formation of agent nouns in Yoruba as can be seen in his examples adapted below:

1. *a-*: *apànià* ‘murderer’, *apeja* ‘fisherman’, *akòwé* ‘writer’, *akorin* ‘singer’, *aségità* ‘woodseller’

2. *ò-*: *òsìsè* ‘worker’, *òjísè* ‘messenger’
3. *olù-*: *olùkò* ‘teacher’, *olùfè* ‘lover’, *olùsò* ‘guardian’, *olùkòrè* ‘harvester’
4. *Jagun* *jagun* ‘warrior’, *kólékólé* ‘burglar’, *pejapeja* ‘fisherman’, *béribéribí* ‘executioner’, *jèdijèdì* ‘piles’.

From the four instances above, the prefixes involved, in the case of derivation, are *a-* (mid tone form of the vowel [a]), *ò-* (low tone form of the vowel [o]) and *olù-* (mid tone form of the vowel [o], consonant [l] and low tone form of the vowel [u]). In the case of reduplication, only verb phrase reduplication is employed. The examples above show that the base of a typically constructed agent noun in Yoruba is a verb phrase rather than a simple verb. For instance, *a-* is added to *-pànià* ‘to kill a person’, *-peja* ‘to kill fish’, *-kòwé* ‘to write book’ to form *apànià*, *apeja* and *akòwé*. However, Awobuluyi [2008: 23] gave few examples such as *ata* ‘pepper’, *abe* ‘razor blade’ and *adé* ‘crown’ as agent nouns formed with the prefix *a-* added to simple verbs *ta* ‘to sting’, *be* ‘to peel’ and *dé* ‘to cover’ respectively. It is also worthy of note that the last of Pulleyblank’s examples on reduplication confirms our earlier position that morphological agentivity is not restricted to human agents. *jèdijèdì* is not a human agent but a sickness that is agentive in the way it inflicts pain on humans.

In addition to Pulleyblank’s three agentive prefixes explored hitherto, Awobuluyi [2008] identified three others which are *à-* (low tone form of the vowel [a]), *ì-* (low tone form of the vowel [i]) and *ò-* (low tone form of the vowel [o]):

- à-* *àgbè* ‘farmer’, *àfòpiná* ‘flying insect’, *àfòmó* ‘parasite’
- ì-* *ìgbálẹ̀* ‘broom’, *ìkànsó* ‘hammer’, *ìsáná* ‘matches’, *ìfoyín* ‘toothbrush’
- ò-* *òmólẹ̀* ‘builder’, *òdàlẹ̀* ‘a perfidious person’, *òbàyéjẹ̀* ‘corrupt person’, *òmùtí* ‘drunkard’, *òtẹ̀lẹ̀mùyẹ̀* ‘secret police’, *òkòsẹ̀* ‘apprentice’

A check through the DYL shows that agent nouns constructed using each of all the six prefixes and one reduplication pattern hitherto mentioned abound in Yoruba language. It must however be noted here that only *a-* and the verb phrase reduplication are considered to be highly productive in Yoruba [Awobuluyi 2008]. The two processes are so productive that it is assumed that each of them, to a large extent, resists morphological blocking from each other. For example, the following pairs are attested:

- adaran/ darandaran* ‘herdsman’
- afági/ fágifági* ‘woodcarver’
- akorin/ korinkorin* ‘singer’
- apani/ panipani* ‘murderer’
- agbani/ gbanigbani* ‘deliverer’
- apẹ̀gàn/ pẹ̀gànpẹ̀gàn* ‘gossip’
- apeja/ pejapeja* ‘fisherman’

Apart from the six prefixes and one reduplication pattern that have been identified by Pulleyblank and Awobuluyi, evidence from DYL shows further that the prefix *oní-* together with its five allomorphs *alá-*, *elé-*, *ẹ̀lẹ̀-*, *oló-* and *óló-* can be used to produce agent nouns in Yoruba. Examples are given in Tab. 3:

Tab. 3. Agentive *oní-* and its allomorphs in DYL

Prefixes	Examples
<i>oní-</i>	<i>onibàrà</i> ‘beggar’, <i>onibàtà</i> ‘show-maker’, <i>onijà</i> ‘fighter’, <i>onijó</i> ‘dancer’, <i>onirikísí</i> ‘conspirator’, <i>onisòwò</i> ‘trader’, <i>oniyànjẹ</i> ‘cheat’
<i>alá-</i>	<i>alábojútó</i> ‘inspector’, <i>aládiyẹ</i> ‘poulterer’, <i>alágbàsọ</i> ‘interpreter’, <i>alákàrà</i> ‘beans cake seller’, <i>alála</i> ‘dreamer’, <i>alàletà</i> ‘retailer’, <i>alàrinà</i> ‘match-maker’
<i>elé-</i>	<i>elédèméjì</i> ‘prevaricator’, <i>elékuru</i> ‘seller of <i>ekuru</i> ’, <i>elélùbó</i> ‘yam flour seller’, <i>elépo</i> ‘palm-oil/ petrol seller’, <i>eléru</i> ‘swindler’, <i>elétùtù</i> ‘propitiator’
<i>ẹlẹ-</i>	<i>ẹlẹbẹ</i> ‘pleader’, <i>ẹlẹpà</i> ‘ground-nuts seller’, <i>ẹlẹgàn</i> ‘despiser’, <i>ẹlẹja</i> ‘fishmonger’, <i>ẹlẹkọ</i> ‘pap seller’, <i>ẹlẹrọ</i> ‘engineer’, <i>ẹlẹsẹ</i> ‘sinner’, <i>ẹlẹwà</i> ‘beans seller’
<i>oló-</i>	<i>olófin</i> ‘law-giver’, <i>olófofó</i> ‘tale-bearer’, <i>ológùrọ</i> ‘bamboo-wine seller’, <i>olórin</i> ‘singer’, <i>olóroró</i> ‘vegetable oil dealer’, <i>olówu</i> ‘cotton dealer’
<i>ọlọ-</i>	<i>ọlọgèdẹ</i> ‘banana seller’, <i>ọlọpẹ</i> ‘thanks giver’, <i>ọlọrẹ</i> ‘giver’, <i>ọlọsẹ</i> ‘soap seller’

In the reasoning of Awobuluyi [2008: 10], though, *oní-* is not to be taken as a simple prefix, in as much as it can further be divided into two meaningful units of *o* and *ní*. According to him, *o-* means *eni* ‘someone’ and *ní-* is a verb ‘to have’. From his analysis, therefore, the prefix *oní-* means ‘someone who has’ as can be seen in the examples below:

<i>oní-ilé</i>	→	<i>onilé</i>	‘someone who has a house’
<i>oní-aya</i>	→	<i>aláya</i>	‘someone who has a wife’
<i>oní-eyẹ</i>	→	<i>ẹlẹyẹ</i>	‘someone who has a bird’
<i>oní-owó</i>	→	<i>olówó</i>	‘someone who has money’
<i>oní-ọlá</i>	→	<i>ọlọlá</i>	‘someone who has riches’

Be that as it may, it is clear that the examples in Tab. 3 do not share the same morphological and semantic properties with those in Awobuluyi’s scenario. Morphologically, the prefix *oní-* in the examples shown in Tab. 3 cannot be meaningfully segmented following Awobuluyi’s analysis. For instance, the prefix *oní-* in *onijà* cannot be semantically segmented into *o-* ‘someone’ and *ní-* ‘to have’ because *onijà* does not mean ‘someone who has fight’ but rather ‘someone who fights, a fighter’. We therefore argue that the *oní-* in Tab. 3 is not only agentive, but also a single prefix with five allomorphs which are phonologically conditioned. Our argument here coincides with the position of Taiwo [2011: 95] who distinguishes between two kinds of *oní-*. While the first aligns with that of Awobuluyi, the second corresponds with the agentive *oní-* that we are concerned with here. It must be noted that the agentive *oní-* only directly attaches to a noun with an initial consonant. When the noun base begins with a vowel, it becomes *alá-* (initial vowel [a]), *elé-* (initial vowel [e]), *ẹlẹ-* (initial vowel [ẹ]), *oló-* (initial vowel [o]) and *ọlọ-* (initial vowel [ọ]). Also when the

noun begins with a vowel [i], *oní-* is retained but the initial vowel [i] of the base lexeme is elided as in *onijà* (*oní-ijà*). The vocal vowel [u] and all the nasal vowels of Yoruba have been found not to begin any word in standard Yoruba (see [Awobuluyi 2008: 4]) and that is why *olú-*, though an agentive prefix itself, cannot be said to be an allomorph of *oní-*. The argument can also be predicated on the fact that while *oní-* and its various allomorphs attach predominantly to noun bases, the agentive *olú-* attaches to verb bases.

Having explored the various morphological means by which agent nouns are formed in Yoruba, as previously done in the case of French, the next segment of this study will be devoted to a comparative analysis of the responsiveness of both languages to agent nouns formation processes.

5. Comparative analysis

Taking into account the theoretical framework of this study, the analysis that will be done here is based on the multidimensional nature of word formation process. We shall therefore analyse the phonological, syntactical and semantic principles and parameters that are identifiable when the formation of agent nouns in French and Yoruba are placed side by side. We begin with the phonological dimension.

5.1. Phonological Dimension

The phonological dimension of built words in LBM is concerned with the phonemic display at the junction between the base lexeme and the affix or between the two separate lexemes in compounding and reduplication. In the case of French and Yoruba, the construction of agent nouns has to surrender to phonological demands in few cases.

In both French and Yoruba, most of the agentive affixes (suffixes in the case of French and prefixes in the case of Yoruba) attach easily to verb bases without much phonological constraint. For the French suffixes that attach predominantly to verb bases, they attach freely to the stem of verbs with *-er*, or *-re* ending, but with phonological constraint only when a verb base ends in *-ir*. For instance, the verb bases for the agent nouns *remontoir* ‘winder’, *affinoir* ‘refiner’, *prétendant* ‘pretender’ and *détendeur* ‘regulator’ are *remonter* ‘to wind’, *affiner* ‘to refine’, *prétendre* ‘to pretend’ and *détendre* ‘to regulate’, respectively. For the nouns to be formed, one only needs to remove the verb endings *-er* and *-re* and then add the suffixes *-ant*, *-eur* and *-oir* to the stem of the verbs as the case may be. However, in the case of verbs with *-ir* ending, the stem of the verb appears insufficient for most of the agent nouns constructed with such verbs. For example, *adouçissant* ‘fabric softener’, *convertisseur* ‘converter’, and *polissoir* ‘polisher’ are agent nouns formed from the verbs *adoucir* ‘to soften’, *convertir* ‘to convert’ and *polir* ‘to polish’, respectively. It can be seen that there is need for the introduction of a phonologically conditioned element *-iss-* in between the stem of the verbs and the respective suffixes *-ant*, *-eur* and *-oir*. In the case of Yoruba, there are no phonological constraints in the junction between the agentive prefixes and their verb bases. Consequently, the prefixes attach freely to the verb phrase as can be seen in *apeja* ‘fisherman’, *àfòmó* ‘parasite’, *ikànsó* ‘hammer’, *òjísé* ‘messenger’, *òmólé* ‘builder’, *olúkó* ‘teacher’. In these examples, each of the six prefixes *a-*, *à-*, *ì-*, *ò-*, *ó-*, *olù-* attaches to its base with-

out any visible phonological constraint. In a similar vein, the junction between the two words, both in French agentive compounding and in Yoruba agentive reduplication, appears not to be constrained phonologically. In the French compound *porte-parole* ‘spokesperson’, for example, the third person singular indicative form of the verb *porter* ‘to carry’ is taken and then hyphenated with the noun *parole* ‘speech’. This is the pattern that all French agentive compounds follow, even when the argument of the verb base is an adjective, an adverb or a preposition as in *pète-sec* ‘tyrant’, *lève-tard* ‘late riser’, *songe-creux* ‘visionary’. The case of Yoruba reduplication is more phonologically open in the sense that verb phrases are completely reduplicated, without any iota of constraint, to form agent nouns as in *jẹ̀dìjẹ̀dì* ‘piles’, *gbómogbómọ* ‘kidnapper’, *kólékólé* ‘burglar’ and *jagunjagun* ‘warrior’.

While the above analysis shows that only French is remotely phonologically constraint when verbs are physically involved in the construction of agent nouns (*cf.* the only case of *-ir* verbs), evidence from both TLFi and DYL reveals that both languages are characterised by phonological constraints when affixes attach to noun bases on the surface. In the case of French, phonological constraint is not prominent as only the suffix *-ien* is predominantly involved. Before this suffix is added to any noun ending with *-ique*, this ending must be replaced with the element *-ic-* at the junction between the base and the suffix. This can be seen in these examples: *acousticien* ‘acoustician’, *cybernéticien* ‘cybernetician’, *mécanicien* ‘mechanic’, *politicien* ‘politician’, *rhétoricien* ‘rhetorician’, *statisticien* ‘statistician’, *technicien* ‘technician’, *tacticien* ‘tactician’, *théoricien* ‘theoretician’ which are formed on the noun bases *acoustique*, *cybernétique*, *mécanique*, *politique*, *rhétorique*, *statistique*, *technique*, *tactique* and *théorique* respectively. The case of Yoruba is more prominent as the five prefixes *alá-*, *elé-*, *elẹ-*, *oló-*, *olọ-* are considered to be allomorphs of the prefix *oní-* as a result of their phonological characteristics. Where the noun base begins with a consonant or vowel [i], *oní-* is used as in *onibàrà* ‘beggar’, *onibàtà* ‘shoemaker’, *onijà* ‘fighter’, *onijó* ‘dancer’. However, where the noun base begins with any of the vowels [a], [e], [ɛ], [o], [ɔ], *oní-* has to give way to *alá-*, *elé-*, *elẹ-*, *oló-*, *olọ-* respectively. From the foregoing, therefore, it can be argued that both French and Yoruba subject the construction of agent nouns to phonological constraints.

5.2. Syntactic Dimension

As far as the syntactic dimension of agent noun formation in French and Yoruba is concerned, the two languages share similar principles to a reasonable extent. In French, agentive suffixes attach largely to either verbal or nominal bases and remotely to adjectival bases. Likewise, the Yoruba agentive prefixes attach exclusively to either verbal or nominal bases. As far as affixation process is concerned, therefore, the only difference between the two languages is that while few French agent nouns are formed using adjectival bases, none of Yoruba agent nouns is found to have been constructed on an adjectival base lexeme. Outside of affixation, while French engages compounding in agent nouns construction, Yoruba settles for the process of reduplication. Tab. 4 provides a vivid view of the syntactic similarities and dissimilarities between French and Yoruba agent noun formation.

Tab. 4. Syntactic dimensions of agent nouns formation in French and Yoruba

Languages Syntactic dimensions	French	Yoruba
NB affixation	<i>gestionnaire</i> ‘manager’, <i>tacticien</i> ‘tactician’, <i>caissier</i> ‘cashier’, <i>analogue</i> ‘analogue’, <i>morphologue</i> ‘morphologist’, <i>messager</i> ‘messenger’, <i>footballeur</i> ‘footballer’	<i>onijó</i> ‘dancer’, <i>oníwasù</i> ‘preacher’, <i>alàkàrà</i> ‘beans cake seller’, <i>elépo</i> ‘palm-oil/petrol seller’, <i>elégàn</i> ‘despiser’, <i>olórin</i> ‘singer’, <i>ològèdè</i> ‘banana seller’
VB affixation	<i>adorant</i> ‘worshipper’, <i>doubleur</i> ‘doubler’, <i>laminé</i> ‘laminator’, <i>devancier</i> ‘precursor’	<i>aditẹ̀</i> ‘intriguer’, <i>àgbẹ̀</i> ‘farmer’, <i>òsèlú</i> ‘politician’, <i>olùdámọ̀ràn</i> ‘counselor’, <i>ọ̀dàlẹ̀</i> ‘backbiter’, <i>olùdari</i> ‘leader’, <i>ikànsó</i> ‘hammer’
AB affixation	<i>centraliste</i> ‘centralist’, <i>pacifiste</i> ‘pacifist’, <i>vitaliste</i> ‘vitalist’
VN/A/Adv/P compounding	<i>ouvre-boite</i> ‘bottle opener’, <i>pète-sec</i> ‘tyrant’, <i>lève-tard</i> ‘late riser’, <i>songe-creux</i> ‘visionary’
VP/VP reduplication	<i>pejapeja</i> ‘fisherman’, <i>ghanigbani</i> ‘deliverer’, <i>dánàdánà</i> ‘highway robber’, <i>bẹ̀rìbẹ̀rì</i> ‘executioner’

NB = nominal base, VB = verbal base. AB = adjectival base, VP = verbal phrase, VN = verb-noun, A = adjective, Adv = adverb, P = preposition

From Tab. 4, it is evident that eight suffixes (*-aire*, *-er*, *-eron*, *-eur*, *-ien*, *-ier*, *-iste* and *-logue*) are attachable to noun bases to form agent nouns in French. In the same vein, the examples in the table show that while four suffixes (*-ant*, *-eur*, *-ier* and *-oir*) can accept verb bases, only one suffix (*-iste*) is attachable to an adjective base. In the case of Yoruba agent nouns, while the prefix *oní-* as well as each of its five allomorphs *alá-*, *elé-*, *elẹ̀-*, *oló-* and *oló-* attaches exclusively to noun bases, the remaining prefixes (*a-*, *à-*, *ì-*, *ò-*, *ọ̀-* and *olù-*) attach to verb bases. The table also shows that both French agentive compounding and Yoruba agentive reduplication depend largely on verb base. In this case, every French compound agent contains an initial verb followed by a noun, an adjective, an adverb or a preposition. However, the initial verb phrase is reduplicated to form reduplicated agent nouns in Yoruba. In a reduplicated agent, the verb phrase is made up of a verb and a noun. Looking at it from the forego-

ing, therefore, it can be said that both French and Yoruba share close syntactic characteristics as far as morphologically constructed agent nouns are concerned.

5.3. Semantic Dimensions

Going by Owoeye [2013]'s classification of semantic interpretation of morphologically constructed agent nouns, as has been remarked earlier in this work, every agent noun will bear an animate, an inanimate, a professional, an instrumental or a partisan coloration. The comparative analysis that we shall do under this heading will be based on this polysemic characteristic of morphological processes. To start with, we present in Tab. 5 examples of constructed agent nouns in French and Yoruba in line with the five semantic interpretations:

Tab. 5. Semantic dimensions of agent nouns formation in French and Yoruba

Languages Syntactic dimensions	French	Yoruba
Animate agent	<i>aboyant</i> 'barker', <i>mendiant</i> 'beggar', <i>épouseur</i> 'suitor', <i>vacancier</i> 'holidaymaker', <i>touriste</i> 'tourist', <i>gagnepain</i> 'bread winner'	<i>abanijé</i> 'slanderer', <i>apeniléjọ</i> 'accuser', <i>òpùró</i> 'liar', <i>olúparí</i> 'finisher', <i>olóre</i> 'giver', <i>elédèméjì</i> 'prevaricator', <i>pẹ̀gànpẹ̀gà</i> 'backbiter'
Inanimate agent	<i>absorbant</i> 'absorbent', <i>ramollissant</i> 'softener', <i>basculeur</i> 'upending device', <i>catalyseur</i> 'catalyst', <i>datier</i> 'date palm', <i>garde-feu</i> 'fireguard'	<i>adébipani</i> 'appetizer', <i>agbégilódò</i> 'timber carrier', <i>apeji</i> 'rain protector', <i>aporó</i> 'antidote against poison', <i>jèdijèdí</i> 'piles'
Professional agent	<i>gestionnaire</i> 'manager', <i>fabricant</i> 'fabricator', <i>mécanicien</i> 'mechanic', <i>cliqueur</i> 'stereotypist', <i>menuisier</i> 'carpenter', <i>frigoriste</i> 'refrigeration engineer', <i>phonologue</i> 'phonologist', <i>vigneron</i> 'wine grower'	<i>afági</i> 'carpenter', <i>afárí</i> 'barber', <i>akunòdà</i> 'painter', <i>alágbàfọ</i> 'laundrer', <i>aránsọ</i> 'tailor', <i>òsèlú</i> 'politician', <i>onidiri</i> 'hairstylist', <i>aláta</i> 'pepper seller', <i>eléran</i> 'butcher', <i>olóşẹ</i> 'soap seller', <i>jagunjagun</i> 'warrior'
Instrument agent	<i>dialyseur</i> 'dialyser', <i>balancier</i> 'pendulum', <i>frottoir</i> 'friction strip', <i>grattoir</i> 'scraper', <i>chauffe-bain</i> 'water heater'	<i>abẹ</i> 'razor', <i>agbégilódò</i> 'timber carrier', <i>igẹrun</i> 'clipper', <i>iyarun</i> 'comb', <i>ipeku</i> 'animal trap', <i>idè</i> 'chain', <i>igérin</i> 'iron saw'
Partisan agent	<i>hellénisant</i> 'hellenist', <i>sectateur</i> 'partisan', <i>isolationniste</i> 'isolationist', <i>urbaniste</i> 'urbanist'

Tab. 5 shows that while French is full of examples of each of the five semantic interpretations of constructed agent nouns, the Yoruba language can only morphologically account for four of them. A check through the DYL gives a sense that partisan agent nouns in French and other Indo-European languages such as English are simply analytically explained out in Yoruba as can be seen from the following four examples:

English	Yoruba
autocrat	<i>ẹnití nfi agbára sè jòba</i>
catechist	<i>ẹnití nkòni nipa ìberè àti ìdáhùn</i>
democrat	<i>ẹnití kò fẹ́ kí ọba nikan se aláṣe ilú</i>
monotheist	<i>ẹnití ógba ọlórún nikan soso gbó</i>

The reason for the above scenario may not be unconnected with the fact that most of the partisan agent nouns in Indo-European languages have their source in either Latin or Greek. Since the Yoruba language does not share affinity with Latin or Greek, partisan agent nouns have to be interpreted analytically instead of a single word equivalent in the language. Except in the case of partisan interpretation, however, both French and Yoruba seem to have many things in common as far as the semantic dimension of morphologically formed agent nouns is concerned.

As can be seen in Tab. 5, the French agentive suffix *-oir* is monosemic as it forms only instrument agent nouns. Similar scenario exists in Yoruba where the prefix *ì-* constructs only instrument agent nouns. Also, just as the French suffix *-ier* is used predominantly to form professional agent nouns, the Yoruba prefix *oni-*, together with its five allomorphs *alá-*, *elé-*, *ẹlé-*, *oló-* and *ọlọ-*, form almost exclusively professional agent nouns as well. In the same vein, both the agentive compounding in French and the agentive reduplication in Yoruba are polysemic. From the foregoing analyses, it implies that both French and Yoruba share a lot of similarities as they relate to semantic dimension of morphologically constructed agent nouns.

6. Conclusion

What we set out to do in this work was to theoretically and empirically find out the areas of grammatical principles and parameters between two languages taking the morphologically constructed agent nouns as a case study. Theoretically, the adoption of the LBM approach helped us to do a multidimensional study of the processes involved in the construction of these nouns in both languages. Empirically, the inventory, TLFi and DYL, gave us a wide range of examples of this type of complex nouns in the two languages. The results of the study reveal that both languages rely heavily on morphological processes to form agent nouns. Also it has been discovered that both languages share similar grammatical principles as they relate to the phonological, syntactic and semantic dimensions of word formation processes. It must be noted, however, that each of the two languages has its own areas of parameters that make them grammatically distinct from each other. For example, while French relies on suffixation and compounding to form complex agent nouns, Yoruba makes use of prefixing and reduplication to form the same category of nouns. Finally, we suggest further

comparative and contrastive morphological studies in the two languages in order to discover wider areas of grammatical principles and parameters between them.

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