



# Analysis of Nominalization Processes in Urhobo

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**ABSTRACT.** Nominalization which is a fundamental process in morphology and syntax, and which involves the derivation of a noun or noun phrase from another grammatical category occurs in Urhobo. The phenomenon of nominalization in Urhobo is explored here with the objective of unpacking its mode of operations, because the derivation can often be illusive. The general principles of derivational morphology which deals with word formation in syntax serve as the theoretical approach for this paper. Data gathered from different word classes in Urhobo were used to form nominals. The analysis indicates that nominalization processes in Urhobo are very productive: nominals were derived from verb, adjective, adverb, and prepositions. The derived nominals perform both grammatical (subjects, objects and complements) and derivational functions. Morphological and syntactic derivations consist of affixation, compounding, reduplication and zero derivation (i.e., conversion) which are evident in the language; every noun in Urhobo begins with a vowel and the choice of the right vowel to affix during nominalization is based on the + and - ATR (vowel harmony system) of Urhobo. Therefore, this article encourages further specialized linguistic inquiry into nominalization as a vital aspect of language structure.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language, a complex and dynamic system, serves as the primary vehicle for human communication and thought. Its remarkable capacity for expressing intricate ideas and abstract concepts hinges on various linguistic mechanisms that allow for the manipulation and transformation of meaning.

Nominalization stands out among the mechanisms as a crucial and pervasive process. At its core, nominalization involves the derivation of a noun or a noun phrase from a word belonging to a different syntactic category, most commonly a verb or an adjective as the case may be. This transformation is not merely a superficial change in word form. Rather, it represents a profound morphological, syntactic and semantic reorganization, enabling actions, states, or properties to be concretized and treated as entities or concepts of its own having its identifiable meaning.

The study of nominalization is so significant in linguistic inquiry for several reasons. (i) it offers a wide window into the morphological richness of a language, revealing the different types of morphological processes that operate and are employed in formation of nouns; (ii) it provides critical insights into the syntactic flexibility of a language, demonstrating how once-verbal or adjectival predicates can be integrated into noun phrase positions, thereby expanding the grammatical possibilities for word and sentence constructions; (iii) semantically, nominalization reflects how languages abstract events or qualities into discrete concepts, allowing for their reference, quantification, and participation in complex propositional structures other than formal meaning. This ability to reorganize complex ideas into nominal forms is a fundamental cognitive processing that represents a concise packaging of information in communication.

In different comparative analyses concerning morphological mutations in Urhobo by Idialu (2022), Uwasomba & Okiemute (2024) posit that there are many ways morphological mutations can be done in the language such as affixations, clippings, reduplication, and blends, which demonstrate an active system of word formation process, making the presence of derivational processes a strong possibility and unique for morphological analysis in the Urhobo. Regardless of the various morphological processes that are involved, the nominalized forms in Urhobo are expected to perform the fundamental syntactic functions typically associated with nouns and noun phrases in the language. The ability of a derived form to occupy these positions is a key diagnostic for identifying nominalization.

Nominalization in Urhobo is often suffused with intricacies which have neither been properly accounted for nor described. Therefore, this paper is set out to study the general theoretical landscape of nominalization in Urhobo, outlining the complex intricate morphological processes that are involved, its common types and its syntactic roles and typical semantic content in the language. Subsequently, it studies the potential manifestations of the theoretical principles within the Urhobo language, drawing inferences from broader linguistic characteristics.

According to Ejobee (2019), the name Urhobo is generic in nature which is used to refer to both the people and their language. Research has shown that

the Urhobo is as rich as the Africa culture both in structure and in content (Ejobee 2018: pp 46). In other words, “there is nothing in the Africa language that is not found in the Urhobo although there may be variations in dimensions, discussions and analysis”. Urhobo language is an indigenous African language and a prominent member of the Southwestern Edoid group, which belongs to the larger Niger-Congo language family. It is spoken extensively by a significant population primarily in Delta State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Ejobee 2021).

### **DEFINING NOMINALIZATION**

Nominalization is common in the languages of the world which involved the conversion of other lexical categories to a noun. The resultants of these conversions include personal names and participant nouns, namely: agent, patient, location, as well as collectives and abstract nouns. In other words, nominalization is the derivation of a noun or noun phrase from another part of speech. Onose (2007) says that nominalizations are transformational structures derived from another word class and capable of existing under the NP node. He adds that these transformations could be sentential, clausal or phrasal in nature in the Urhobo language. This transformation allows concepts that typically express actions, states, or attributes to be re-categorized as entities or propositions (Lieber 2016). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, nominalization refers to both the process by which complex nouns are created and to the complex nouns that are derived by that process. The process often involves the formation of nouns from other parts of speech, most commonly from a verb or an adjective. Artemis (2019) reviews the work of Grimshaw (1990) on nominalization, where he introduced an important correlation between particular types of nominalizations and the readings associated with the nominal forms, such as Event and Referential. The article discusses criteria that may be used to distinguish between the two readings and the limitations of the criteria. It further offers a selective discussion of how different approaches to nominalization implement Event and Referential readings. Shinzato (2020) works on “Focus-to-Predicate concord construction called kakari joshi which correlates with predicate conjugational that create special effects which results in nominalization processes. He observes that this concord phenomenon, is concerned with its evolution from original to the transformed form that has its functional disposition and semantic differences. Furthermore, he posits that the syntactic constructions bear relevance functions such as clefts and nominalizations in Japanese language. According to Arcodia and Basciano (2018), Sino-Tibetan is a highly diverse language family in which a wide range of morphological phenomena and profiles may

be found. The family is generally seen as split into two major branches, i.e., Sinitic and Tibeto-Burman, but while Sinitic is a fairly homogeneous group in terms of morphology, the so-called Tibeto-Burman branch of the family includes isolating languages like Karen languages with transparent and regular agglutinative morphology (Lolo-Burmese, Tibetic, and Boro-Garo), but also paradigmatically complex languages, with elaborate argument indexation and transitivity management systems. However, in some languages morphological complexity is mostly a conservative trait. Some notable morphological phenomena in modern Tibeto-Burman languages are verb stem alternation, peculiar nominalization constructions, and long sequences of prefixes, which in some languages (Chintang) may even be freely permuted without any relevant change in meaning. Also, while Sinitic languages are normally taken to be a prototypical example of the (ideal) isolating morphological type (with virtually no inflection, stable morpheme boundaries, no cumulative exponence, and no allomorphy or suppletion), phenomena of strong reduction of morphemes, blurring of morpheme boundaries and fusion between root and suffix, and nonconcatenative morphology, as well as allomorphy and (proto-)paradigmatic organization of morphology, are attested in some Chinese dialects, mostly concentrated in an area of Northern China (Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Hebei, and Shandong provinces). Moreover, 'Altaic-type' agglutinative morphology, including case marking, is found in Sinitic languages of the so-called Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund, in this case, the development of agglutination, as well as other typological traits.

Yongxian (2020) says that in the study of morphology, viewing it from what he labels as 'collective' and 'abstract nouns' posits that the collective noun is normally used in connection with number and plurality in reference to a plurality presented as a homogeneous group of entities. This can be relevant for inflectional morphology where it can be shown to flank markers for coding number in some languages. While the abstract makes general reference to processes of nominalization from different source classes, especially verbs and adjectives. In the abstract, which is the nominal domain, verbal properties like tense and argument structure are partially lost while new nominal properties are acquired. Although the morphological processes covered by the two labels apparently depict different conceptual domains, there is in fact an area where they systematically overlap, namely with deverbal nouns denoting an abstract or concrete, iterated or habitual instantiation of the action referred to by the verbal base, which can be conceptualized as a collective noun. Fábregas and Marín (2022) say that the term nominalization refers to a specific type of category-changing morphological operation that produces nouns from other lexical categories, most productively verbs and adjectives. By extension, nominalization is also seen and used to refer to the

resulting derived nouns from any other lexical class. In Romance languages, nominalization generally involves addition of a suffix to the base word order than a noun to have the nominal forms (cf. Italian *generoso* ‘generous’ > *generosità* ‘generosity’), and such suffixes are called nominalizers. However, there are also cases of nouns built from other categories without any overt nominalizer (cf. Spanish *inútil* ‘useless’ > *inútil* ‘useless person’); descriptively, this process is called conversion. According to Fábregas and Marín, nominalizations can be divided in several classes depending on the variety of semantic and syntactic factors. These factors could be the type of entities that they denote or the ability to introduce arguments. They identified the following as different classes of nominalization: (a) complex event nominalizations, which come from verbs, which can be combined with some temporal and aspectual modifiers, and have the ability to introduce at least an internal argument; (b) state nominalizations, which denote states associated to the verbs that serve as their bases; (c) participant nominalizations, which denote different types of arguments of the base word, such as agents, resulting objects, locations or recipients; and (d) quality nominalizations, coming from adjectives and more restrictively from verbs, which denote a set of properties related to their base word. They argue that nominalizers impose different types of restrictions to their base words: such as aspectual restrictions (individual-level vs. stage-level, (a) telicity, dynamicity, etc.), argument structure restrictions (agent vs. non agent, different types of internal arguments), morphological restrictions (for instance, selecting only verbs that belong to a particular conjugation class), and finally conceptual restrictions (for instance, showing a strong preference bases for belonging to a particular conceptual domain).

## **THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO NOMINALIZATION**

To discuss nominalization further, it is essential to first establish a common theoretical understanding of this linguistic phenomenon. Nominalization is a pervasive process across the world's languages, allowing for the transformation of predicates (verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc.) into nominal expressions. This process enables speakers to package complex events or properties into manageable syntactic configurations in noun-like units.

There are theoretical issues concerning nominalization which is typically arising from the stem and the question of how to account for this pervasive phenomenon. Within generative grammar, both syntactic and lexicalist approaches have been proposed for the analysis of the subject matter. The study of nominalization has been a central topic in various linguistic theories. Some of the theories are discussed below:

**Lexicalist Approaches:** Proponents of this view, such as Chomsky, argue that derived nominals are formed in the lexicon through word-formation rules. They are considered new lexical items, distinct from the grammatical category from which they are derived. This approach emphasizes the morphological and semantic idiosyncrasies that often accompany / associated with nominalization.

**Transformational/Syntactic Approaches:** Proponents of this view proposed that nominals are derived syntactically from an underlying clausal structure via transformations and generative grammar. This approach highlights the systematic relationship between grammatical category and its corresponding nominal form, particularly for "event nominals."

**Construction Grammar:** This framework views nominalizations as specific grammatical constructions (form-meaning pairings) that speakers learn and use in expressive morphology. It emphasizes that both regular and idiosyncratic patterns are stored as constructions in communication. Also, the issue of nominalization has also been of interest within cognitive and functional frameworks. Summarily, the aforementioned theories are fundamentally traceable to the theory of 'derivational morphology'. Note that all the theories are applicable and relevant to the analysis of the data for this study which can be observed under data analysis. Therefore, this research considers all these issues and the extent to which nominalization processes are workable in the Urhobo language

## **METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative method of data collection was adopted for the study. This is because, the qualitative research method according to Tenny (2022) is a type of research approach that explores and provides deeper insights into rigorous interrogation which this study tilts to. The data for the study was gathered through structured interviews of open-ended interactions by the researchers where data was elicited from sixty-five (65) native speakers of the Urhobo. These sixty-five (65) persons were spread across both sexes whose age falls between 20 yrs. and 75 yrs. This was done by the researchers through personal interviews method where questions and interactions were employed. This was carried out in six dialects of Urhobo which include: Abraka dialect, Agbarho dialect, Agbon dialect, Oghara dialect, Ughelli dialect and Orogun. Dialect. Of these (65) native speakers, the random sampling method was adopted/used where average of (10) people were contacted in each of the dialects. The data was subjected to analysis using both lexical and transformational approaches. The descriptive approach was not left out in the analysis of the data gathered. The descriptive approach according to Crystal, (2015) is aimed at giving a comprehensive, systematic, objective and precise

account of patterns of the language use which Urhobo needs at this documentation stage.

### DATA PRESENTATION/ANALYSIS

This study presented and analyzed data under the following sub-headings in order to examine and account for the different morphological /syntactical processes that are involved in nominalization in Urhobo. The data are presented in tabular forms as follows for a clear view:

Table 1. The Affixal/ Deverbal Processes

Root form of the verbs	progressive form of the verbs	The nominalized form of the words
kpo (v) 'go'	o kpo 'he/she is going'	ukpo (n) 'going'
mua (v) 'squeeze'	o mua 'he/she is squeezing'	omua (n) squeezing
cho (v) 'steal'	o cho 'he/she is stealing'	echo (n) 'stealing'
dja (v) 'pepper'	o dja 'it is peppering'	edja (n) 'pepperish/peppering'
nya (v) 'walk'	o nya 'he/she is walking'	onya 'walking'
vo (v) 'fetch'	o vo 'he/she is fetching'	evo 'fetching'
dje (v) 'drive'	o dje 'he/she is driving'	edje 'driving'
nyavwe (v) 'cut'	o nyavan 'he/she is cutting'	enyavwon 'cutting'
bo (v) 'float'	o bo 'he/she/it is floating'	ebo 'floating'
geri (v) 'push'	o gere 'he/she is pushing'	egerẹ 'gushing'
teye (v) 'beat'	o teyo 'he/she is beating'	eteyo 'beating'
momo (v) 'borrow'	o momo 'he/she is borrowing'	emomo 'borrowing'
jo (v) 'send'	e jo 'he/she is being sent'	ejo 'sending'
mọ (v) 'bear'	o mọ 'it is bearing'	emọ 'bearing'
va (v) 'shout'	o va 'he/she is shouting'	ova 'shouting'
viẹ (v) 'cry'	o viẹ 'he/she is crying'	oviẹ 'crying'
ta (v) 'talk'	o ta 'he/she is taking'	ota 'talk or talking'

ve (v) ‘promise’	o ve ‘he/she is promising’	ive ‘promise or promising’
kọn (v) ‘plant’	ọ kọn ‘he/she is planting’	ẹkọn ‘planting’
biẹn (v) ‘slice’	ọ biẹn ‘he/she is slicing’	ẹbiẹn ‘slicing’
kporọ (v) ‘wet’	ọ kporọ ‘he/she is wetting’	ẹkporọ ‘wetting’
bọvwẹ (v) ‘blow’	ọ bọvwẹ ‘he/she is blowing’	ẹbọvwẹ ‘blowing’
bro (v) ‘cut’	o bro ‘he/she is cutting’	ebro ‘cutting’
chiyi (v) ‘tread’	o chiyi ‘he/she is treading’	echiyi ‘treading’
chọrọ (v) ‘penetrate’	ọ chọrọ ‘he/she is penetrating’	ẹchọrọ ‘penetrating’
dede (v) ‘welcome’	o dede ‘he/she is welcoming’	ededede ‘welcoming’
di (v) ‘block’	o diẹ ‘he/she is blocking’	edio ‘blocking’
fu (v) quench	o fuẹ ‘he/she is quenching’	efuo ‘quenching’
kunu (v) ‘quarrel’	ọ kọn unu ‘he/she is quarreling’	unukọn ‘quarreling’
kpa (v) ‘vomit’	ọ kpa ‘he/she is vomiting’	ọkpa ‘vomiting’
kpare (v) ‘lift’	ọ kaprọ ‘he/she is lifting’	ẹkparọ ‘lifting’
kpen (v) ‘peel’	ọ kpen ‘he/she is peeling’	ẹkpen ‘peeling’
kpọ (v) ‘dry’	ọ kpọ ‘he/she/it is drying’	ẹkpọ ‘drying’
ma (v) ‘mould’	ọ ma ‘he/she is moulding’	ẹma ‘moulding’
me (v) ‘plait’	o me ‘he/she is plaiting’	eme ‘plaiting’
rọ(v) ‘swallow’	ọ rọ ‘he/she is swallowing’	ẹrọ ‘swallowing’
sa (v) ‘shoot’	ọ sa ‘he/she is shooting’	ẹsa ‘shooting’
nene (v) ‘follow’	o nene ‘he/she is following’	enene ‘following’
ni (v) ‘look’	o nẹ ‘he/she is looking’	eno ‘looking’
nọ (v) ‘ask’	ọ nọ ‘he/she is asking’	ẹnọ ‘asking’
nuvie (v) ‘open’	o nuvie ‘he/she is opening’	enuvie ‘opening’
nyo (v) ‘hear’	o nyo ‘he/she is hearing’	enyo ‘hearing’
pho (v) ‘jump’	o pho ‘he/she is jumping’	epho ‘jumping’

yọre (v) ‘hold’	ọ yọra ‘he/she is holding’	ẹnyọrọ ‘holding’
shẹ (v) ‘sell’	ọ shẹ ‘he/she is selling’	ẹshẹ ‘selling’
shi (v) ‘bury’	o shiẹ unu ‘he/she is burying’	esho ‘burying’
tọ (v) ‘dig’	ọ tọ ‘he/she is digging’	ẹtọ ‘digging’
wan (v) ‘pass’	ọ wan ‘he/she is passing’	ẹwan ‘passing’
sane (v) ‘select’	ọ sana ‘he/she is selecting’	ẹsanọ ‘selecting’
sivwi (v) ‘save’	o sivwẹ ‘he/she/it is saving’	esivwo ‘saving’
tuọ (v) ‘chew’	ọ tuọ ‘he/she is chewing’	ẹtuọ ‘chewing’

Ejibee and Ifesieh (2026)

Table 4.1 above shows that affixational processes are very productive in word formation processes in the Urhobo language. This is because the processes are very flexible and dependable. Here, we presented the root forms of the verbs, the progressive forms and the nominalised forms. The three forms are presented as to account for the different forms and to differentiate the derivational processes that are involved in the language. However, our focus is on the verb forms and the nominal forms. All the nominal forms are deverbal form of the verbs and they are all prefixational. In other words, the root word of the verb attracts the addition of a prefix to form the nominals. Note that all nouns in the language begin and end with a vowel.

All the nominal forms can function in any position as nouns in the structural pattern of the language. The following are some examples of such structural patterns in the language

Ukpo ọyen ọshare ta kpahe na  
 Home is man talk about the  
 ‘Home is what the man is talking about’

Ejo ọyen owian rọyen  
 Sending is work his  
 ‘Sending is his hobby’

Ota ọyen ọvwọ ria emu  
 Talk is what eat food  
 ‘He eats with talking’

Ẹcha rọyen fiẹ emu kẹvwẹ  
 Coming his mean something me

'His coming means a lot to me'

Ovię ọyen ada mre  
 Crying is what see  
 'He delights in crying'

In all the structures above, the nominals are occupying the position of the subject which is a noun in the sentences which accounts for the deverbal form of the verb that is functioning as a noun in the structures. By implication, the verb for jo 'send' changes to ejo 'sending' which is a noun. The grammatical category has changed and the meaning of the word has also changed including its function. The nominal form is indicating the function of an agent than being a verb or an action word of 'send'.

The data presented have different forms of the prefixes that are attached to the verbs to form the nominal counterparts. Usually, the Urhobo language has seven vowels and these seven vowels are divided into two sets of vowel harmony which include: + (plus) and - (minus) ATR. The + ATR vowels are: i, u, e, o while the -ATR vowels are: ɛ, ɔ. 'a' which is the seventh one is neutral vowel which can occur in both sets. These seven vowels of these two sets can be attached as a prefix to any of these verb roots to form the nominal counterparts. The choice of the right vowel to be attached to form the nominal is based on the vowel(s) that made up the root word. In other words, it is the vowel of the root of the word that determines the variant of the set that will be attached. This is part of the internal structure of the word in word formation processes. This analysis is observed in following data as indicated on table 1 above: efuo 'quenching', epho 'jumping' esho 'burying', ẹshe 'selling', ẹtọ 'digging'. It is the vowel of the root of the words that determines the attachment of "e" or "ẹ" as the right prefix to derive the nominals.

Table 2. The Affixal/ Deverbal Processes (Circumfixation)

Root form of the verbs	progressive form of the verbs	The nominalized form of the words
fi (v) 'spray'	o fię ' he/she is spraying'	efio (n) 'spraying'
fi (v) 'relate'	o fię ' he/she is relating'	efio (n) 'relating'
fi (v) 'leak'	o fię ' he/she is leaking'	efio (n) 'leaking'
fi (v) 'blockage'	o fię ' he/she is spraying a house'	efio (n) 'plastering'
si (v) 'write'	o się 'he/she is writing	esio (n) 'writing'
mi (v) 'press'	o mię 'he/she is pressing'	emio (n) 'pressing'

bi (v) ‘push’	o biẹ ‘he/she is pushing’	ebio (n) ‘pushing’
mu (v) ‘carry’	o muẹ ‘he/she is carrying’	emuo (n) ‘carrying’
shu (v) capsize’	o shuẹ ‘he/she is capsizing’	eshuo (n) ‘capsizing’
su (v) ‘lead’	o suẹ ‘he/she is leading’	esuo (n) ‘leading’
so (v) ‘sing’	o sua ‘he/she is singing’	esuo (n) ‘singing’
re (v) ‘eat’	o ria ‘he/she is eating’	eriọ(n) ‘eating’

Ejabee and Ifesieh (2026)

Another way of creating nominalization in Urhobo is through circumfixation process. Circumfixation is a morphological process of the combination of prefix and suffix to the base to form a new word. This study presented the table with different forms of the words and how they can be manipulated to create new concepts which are nouns. The last column to your right on the table above is instances of the nominal forms created or derived in the Urhobo language. The bound morpheme ‘e’ is attached to the beginning of the root word and ‘o’ at the word final to form/have the nominalised form of the words. The nominalised forms can always occupy the place of an NP position and function as a noun. The nominals are agentive nouns used to indicate the subject of the predicate. For instance, the structures below demonstrate the agentive roles of the nominalized forms;

Emuo rẹ oghwa na obevwe  
 Carrying of load the tiring  
 ‘Carrying of the load is tiring’

Eshuo rẹ okọ na ke ayen ufuoma  
 Capsizing of boat the give them peace  
 ‘The capsizing of the boat gave them peace’

Efio rẹ ayan ghwa ota re  
 Relating of them bring talk come  
 ‘Their relationship has caused problem’

Emuo carrying, eshuo ‘capsizing’ and efio ‘relating’ are examples of the derived nominal through the process of circumfixation wherein the derived forms are functioning as nouns in the Urhobo. The progressive forms of the verbs on the other hand are presented here to show the different forms which are quite different from the nominalized forms. Upon a close look at the nominalized and the progressive forms, one observes that in the progressive forms, there is an introduction of pronouns which are ‘o’ and ‘o’ which are separately written from the verb forms unlike the nominalized ones that are written together. Also, there is an attachment of ‘e’ and ‘a’ as suffixes to the

root word to indicate the continuous form of the verb. The choice of ‘e’ and ‘a’ is also based on the vowel harmony system of the language. The progressive form of the verbs as presented above cannot occupy the place of an NP in the structure of the language as demonstrated in the examples above.

Table 3 De-adjectival Process

Root form of the Adjectives	The nominalized form of the words
bu (adj) ‘many’ obuebun (adj) ‘plentiful’	obuebun ‘plenteous’
brabra (adj) ‘bad’	ebrabra ‘bad ones’
bi (adj) ‘black’	ibiebi ‘blackish’
djoma (adj) ‘harsh’	omadjo ‘harshness’
fo (adj) ‘white’	efuafo ‘white ones’
fori (adj) ‘necessary’	ofori necessary
kpuko (adj) ‘backward’	okpobuko ‘backwardness’
puepue (adj) ripen	epuepue ripen ones
gaga (adj) ‘strong’	ogaga ‘stronger or strong one’
gidigidi (adj) eager	ogigidi ‘eagerness’
grogro (adj) ‘tall’	ogrogro ‘taller or tall one’
ghogho (adj) ‘happy’	aghogho ‘happiness’

Ejobee and Ifesieh (2026)

This study gathers that through the de-adjectival process, nominalization can be formed. Table 3 presents the adjectival forms of the words and the de-adjectival forms. The de-adjectival (nominalized) forms attract the introduction of a prefix to have the derived nominalized form of the words as demonstrated on the column for nominals in table 3. The attachment of the prefixational process changes the grammatical class of the adjectives to nouns like the case of the deverbal as discussed above. The nominals are agentive nouns stating the condition of the agents. The difference between the deverbal and de-adjectival is that both belong to different grammatical categories.

Table 4 De-adverbial Process

Bear form of the Adverbs	The nominalized form of the words
jiro (adv) praisely	ejiro praiser
godogodo (adv) loosen	ogodogodo 'looser'
guṣoṣo (adv) love	eguṣoṣo 'lover'
ghware (adv) cheatly	oghware 'cheater'
kueku (adv) cheaply	okueku 'cheaper'
jṣḍe(adv) 'jokely	ojṣḍe 'joker'
keke (adv) 'compress	okekeke 'compressor'
kidia (adv) 'seat'	ekidia 'seater'
koke (adv) 'given'	okoke 'giver'
jẹ (adv) 'chosen'	ojẹ-emu 'chooser'
hra (adv) 'scatter'	ohrasa 'scaterer'

Ejobee and Ifesieh (2026)

Data presented in table 4 is similar to what was presented and analysed in table 3. In other words, this paper gathers that through the process of de-adverbial, nominalization can be formed in the Urhobo. Table 4 presents the adverbial form of the words and the de-adverbial forms. The de-adverbial (nominalized) forms also attract the introduction of a prefix to have the derived nominalized form of the words. The attachment of the prefixational process changes the grammatical class of the adverbs to nouns. The nominals are functioning as complementizers. In other words, they are descriptive nouns.

Table 5. The Reduplication Process

Root of the Word	The nominalized Reduplicated Form of the word
gbe (v) 'dirty',	ogbegbe'dirty one'
eha (v) 'play'	oheha 'player'
zighi (adj) 'scatter'	ozighighi 'rough'
bun (n) 'many'	obuebun 'plenteous'
bokṣ (adj) 'flesh'	obobokṣ ;fleshy'
keke (adv) 'compress	okekeke 'compressor'

gha (v) ‘forbid’	oghegha ‘someone who forbids’ or ‘forbidder’
ghare (v) ‘share’	ogharoghare ‘someone who forbids’ or ‘sharer’
gberi (v) ‘underline	ogberugberi ‘someone who underlines’ or ‘under-liner’
gho (v) ‘entertain’	eghaghō ‘entertainment’
gho (v) ‘entertain’	ogheghaghō ‘entertainer’
hworo (v) ‘drum’	ohworihworo ‘someone who drums’ or ‘drummer’
hwe (v) ‘laugh’	ohwehwe ‘someone who laughs’ or ‘laughter’
vwere (adj) ‘sweet’	ovwevwere ‘sweeter’

Ejabee and Ifesieh (2026)

Reduplication is another way of deriving nominalization in Urhobo. According to the data gathered for this study as it appears on table 5 indicates that nominalization process in the language is done through both partial and complete reduplication processes as demonstrated on the table. Take for instance, ɔbɔbɔkɔ ‘fleshy’, bɔ is the copied morpheme and in ɔvwewwere ‘sweeter’ vwe is the copied morpheme which are examples of partial reduplication and while in ɔhwehwe ‘someone who laughs’ or ‘laughter’ and ogbegbe ‘dirty one’ the whole root words are copied which are example of full reduplication among others.

The first colon of table 5 presents the root words and their grammatical categories which are verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc. When these root words were reduplicated and nominalized, the grammatical categories changed to noun performing an agentive function in the NP structure. The nominals are used to categorize and describe state of the nouns. Note that before the reduplication of the root words, there is also the attachment of prefix. This is so because every name in the Urhobo language begins and ends with a vowel. As such, and in other to have the words nominalized after they are reduplicated, a prefix vowel maker has to be inserted or attached to the word to form the nominals. This is done to conform to the syllabic structure of the language in terms of naming things.

Apart from the prefixational process as analyzed above, there are other morphological processes in nominalization as presented on table 5 above such as infixation and replacive morphemes. Infixation is a morphological process where a morpheme is inserted in-between two identical roots to interrupt the sequence of the root word. This is observed in the word obuebun ‘plenteous or many’ as the nominal derived from bun ‘many’ the root word. The insertion of the sound or morpheme ‘e’ in obuebun is used to nominalized the word. Replacive morpheme on the other hand, is a morphological process

where morpheme is postulated to account for the problematic internal alternation in words that are associated sounds classifications. This sounds' classification is connected to vowel harmony in the Urhobo language. In deriving nominals in the Urhobo language, replacive morpheme serves as one of the ways as observed and demonstrated in table 5 above in the following words: ɔghɛgha 'forbidder' which is derived from the root word gha 'forbid'. There is a replacement of 'a' with 'ɛ' in the second syllable to derive the nominal form of the word 'ɔghɛgha'. Similarly, in the words ogberugberi 'someone who underlines', the vowel 'u' was used to replace the vowel 'i' to form the nominal. That also occurred in ɔghɛghaghɔ 'entertainer' where the vowel 'e' was used to replace the vowel 'o' while in ɔheha 'player' the vowel 'e' was used to replace the vowel 'a' etc. in order to derive the nominals. The process of this vowels replacement in the language, where a vowel replaces the other to form whatever grammatical process is referred to as vowel alternation and the vowel that replaces the other is seen as the stronger counterpart of the vowel in the sounds classification. In other words, those vowels that replace the other are referred to as the +ATR

### THE COMPOUNDING PROCESS

Urhobo, like many languages, forms compound words by combining two or more lexical items to form a new word. This compounding process can also be used to derive nominals in Urhobo. The following data in table 6 below serve as examples of compound words and their nominalized forms:

Table 6

Root of the Word	The nominalized Compounded Form of the word
djɛ (v) 'run' + onɛ (n) run	onɛdjɛ 'race'
dje (v) 'show' + phia (v) 'open'	odjephia 'showcasing'
dju (v) 'blow' + fu (v) 'oof'	odjofu 'breath seizer'
mudia (v) 'stand' + ga(adj) 'strong'	edudiaga 'a name'
ɔgba (adj) 'power' + owian (v) 'work'	ɔgbowian 'someone who labours' or ' great labourer'
ɔgba (adj) 'power' + avwro (v) 'argue'	ɔgbavwro 'someone who argues', or ' an argumetator'
ɔgba (adj) 'power' + iroro (v) 'think'	ɔgbiro 'someone who thinks' or ' a philosopher'
ɔgba (adj) 'power' + ota (v) 'talk'	ɔgbota 'someone who talks' or ' talkative'

oḡba (adj) ‘power’ + efian (v) ‘lie’	oḡbefian ‘someone who lies’ or ‘ great liar’
oḡba (adj) ‘power’ + esian (n) ‘story’	oḡbesian ‘someone who tells’ or ‘ story teller’
oḡbu (adj) ‘might’ + ebe (n) book	oḡbuebe ‘someone who knowledgeable’ or ‘ intellectual’
oḡbu (adj) ‘might’ + ine (n) ‘sings’	oḡbuine ‘a great singer’
oḡbu (adj) ‘might’ + igho (n) ‘wealth’	oḡbuigho ‘a wealthy person’

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The combination of these lexical items is done across different grammatical categories, namely nouns, verbs and adjectives. This shows how nominalization operates to create a rich and diverse lexicon in the language. The different independent root words and their grammatical categories are indicated in the first colon of the table. The resultant compounds are on the second colon of the same table. Onẹdẹ ‘race’ and Odjephia ‘showcasing’ are examples of event nominals while others are examples of complementizers and manners. The nominals state the nature of the event and describe the manner of the nouns.

Table 7. Zero Derivation

Bear form of the Root Words	The nominalized form of the words
obotọ (pp) ‘down’	obotọ ‘downwardness’
obenu (pp) ‘up’	obenu ‘upwardness’
obaro (pp) ‘front’	obaro ‘upward’
obuko (pp) ‘back’	obuko ‘backward’
akọkọ (pp) ‘by-side’	akọkọ ‘side’
ukpe (n) ‘bed’	ukpe ‘bedroom’

Ejabee and Ifesieh (2026)

Zero derivation, or conversion, is a process where a word changes its grammatical category without any overt change in its phonemic form. This is a productive process in many languages. It is also present in the Urhobo. The above examples in Urhobo demonstrate the shift and conversion of the stems functioning as nouns in certain syntactic contexts. This means that the same phonetic form represents both prepositions and the nominal forms. The usage of these words in the language requires careful attention to the syntactic environment and the semantic interpretation of the words. On table 7 above, the grammatical categories are indicated before the nominal forms. Upon a close look at the data, one observes that there is a shift in both the meaning and the grammatical category. Because of the intricacies and nature of this

zero morphologically realization, this article present side by side alternative structures of the following sentences to demonstrate the context and usage of these data to show their meaning differences and the shift in their grammatical category as follows:

Ọ kẹrẹ oboto rha He/it near down he go 'He/it is near down' downward'	Oboto ọyen ọ Downwardness is 'He is going backward'
Ẹdia obuko ọyen ọ pha yerẹ akpọ rha Position back is he his he live life go 'He stays at the back' backward life'	obuko ọyen ọ backwardness is 'He is lives
Oma rẹ akọkọ rẹ uwepvwi na Body of side of house the 'It is by the side of the house'	Akọkọ ọyen ọ pha side is he/it stay 'It is by the side'

In the alternative structures above, it is explicit that all the structures to the left are used to express preposition indicating places and occupying prepositional position in the sentences while the ones to the right express nominal forms of the same word functioning as a noun. This is replicated in all the examples. Therefore, zero derivation and shift semantic implications is a powerful and economical way to create new nominals in the Urhobo.

## FINDINGS

The analysis shows that Urhobo is abounding in nominal derivation; they can be done through different morphological/syntactic processes such as affixal, reduplication, compounding among others. It was observed that the formed nominals are functioning as either stating the state of the agent, location, event or manner of the formed nouns. The paper reveals that every noun in the Urhobo begins with a vowel and also, the choice of the right vowel to affix is based on the + and - ATR (vowel harmony system) of the language, as shown under 4.1 above.

## CONCLUSION

Nominalization is an intrinsic and dynamic linguistic process, essential for lexical enrichment and the construction of complex syntactic structures in the natural language. In Urhobo, a prominent Southwestern Edoid language of Nigeria, the mechanisms for forming nouns from other grammatical categories are undoubtedly present and active, contributing significantly to the expressive power and creation of new lexical items in the language.

Drawing upon universal linguistic principles, this study explored different potentials for the derivation or creation of nominalizations through affixal, compounding, reduplication and zero derivation (conversion) or contextualization in Urhobo due to its general morphological /syntactic characteristics. The categorizations of the nominalized forms function as subjects, objects, or complement within a sentence. This underscores the critical role of nominalization in Urhobo grammatical architecture.

Ultimately, the description of nominalization in Urhobo has been empirically investigated wherein the understanding of how nouns function as lexical heads in Urhobo indirectly points to how nominal structures are perceived and integrated within the language's syntactic framework. Given the common morphological strategies in Niger-Congo languages, affixation is a highly flexible mechanism for nominalization in Urhobo. This would involve the attachment of specific prefixes, suffixes, circumfixes, to verbal, adverbial, adjectival and prepositional roots to form nouns. The choice of affixes to be attached is basically determined by the phonological properties of the verb stem or by the specific semantic category of the resulting noun as demonstrated in our analysis.

Although the investigation of nominalization in Urhobo has been handled exhaustively here through the qualitative research approach, some of the submissions could be subjective because qualitative research often relies on the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. However, efforts were made to attain analytical saturation thereby limiting subjectivity. Two (2) dialects, i.e., the standard varieties, Agbarho and Agbon, were deployed in addition to some other four, namely Abraka, Oghara, Orogun and Ughelli out of others. Therefore, other researchers can work on other varieties Urhobo not mentioned in this work.

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