

## VERBS, VERBO-NOMINALS AND NOMINAL-VERBS IN NOUCHI: A SYNTACTIC-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** The sentence is a system of relations forming a higher unit whose objective is to communicate. The sentence is made of grammatical elements which are word categories: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, etc. These word categories are essential constituents of the sentence. In Nouchi, alongside these classical types of words, verbo-nominal and nominal-verb words coexist as an integral part of the discourse in this language. These words have different structures and forms and fulfil syntactic functions similar to the noun and the verb but with a particular grammatical functioning. The present analysis has enabled us to list them by determining their origins, structures and syntactic-semantic behaviours in the Nouchi sentence.

**Keywords :** verbs, verbo-nominal, nominal-verb, syntax-semantics, Nouchi

## VERBES, VERBO-NOMINAUX, NOMINO-VERBAUX EN NOUCHI : UNE ANALYSE SYNTAXO-SÉMANTIQUE

**Résumé :** La phrase est un système de relations formant une unité supérieure avec pour objet de communiquer. De cette dernière, sont rattachés des éléments grammaticaux qui sont des catégories de mots : noms, verbes, adjectifs, adverbes, prépositions, etc. qui sont des constituants indispensables de la phrase. En nouchi, à côté de ces espèces classiques de mots, coexistent les verbo-nominaux et les nomino-verbaux partie intégrante du discours dans ce parler. Ces mots présentant diverses structures et formes, remplissent des fonctions syntaxiques analogues au nom et au verbe mais avec un fonctionnement grammatical particulier. La présente analyse a permis de les répertorier en déterminant leurs origines, leurs structures et leurs comportements syntaxico-sémantiques dans la phrase en nouchi.

**Mots clés :** verbes, verbo-nominaux, nomino-verbaux, syntaxico-sémantique, nouchi

### Introduction

Characterized by an internal structure, the sentence is a set of interconnected elements governed by grammatical elements whose objective is to communicate a coherent message. (Meillet 1908 cité par L. Melis et P. Desmet (2000 : 6). For this purpose, the whole thought of mankind is built around the sentence. As a higher unit, the sentence is both complete and autonomous. It is made up of numerous constituents of which the immediate ones are syntactic categories (P. Gherasim, 2010: 290). From these immediate constituents we have the word species: nouns, verbs, adjectives,

adverbs, prepositions, also called parts of speech. In Nouchi, a mixed variety of local and French languages, these word species are well attested and effectively participate in the construction of discourse. However, alongside these universal categories, we note in Nouchi the presence of other species of words linked to the verb and used in the formation of the sentence. But, they have particular morphosyntactic and semantic behaviours. These are *nominal-verbs* and *verbo-nominal*. Here, the noun and the verb, which are two distinct entities, seem to merge in this speech to form syntactic features of certain words, which gives the impression that these two categories refer to one and the same category. However, this is not the case. The observation of the corpus of reference shows that in Nouchi, nominal-verbs are units of a nominal nature that can appear as a verb in a sentence; whereas verbo-nominals (or verb-nouns) are units of a verbal nature that can be nominalized, thus assuming the status of a noun. How can we characterise these particular lexical elements? Are they variable in tense, person, gender or number, like in French? What about the Nouchi verb itself? One may also wonder whether these changes from nouns to verbs and from verbs to nouns have indeed an impact on the original meaning of the terms concerned. These are important questions that we will try to answer in this reflection. The aim of this article is to describe the functioning of verb-nouns/nominal-verbs in Nouchi and to see their syntactic-semantic implications as part of speech. This involves listing them by determining their origins, and then looking at their structures and semantic behaviour in Nouchi verbal constructions. Before doing so, a presentation of the theoretical framework and the methodology are necessary.

## 1. Theoretical framework, research hypotheses and study data

This section presents the theoretical framework, the hypotheses to be tested and the study data from the methodology.

### 1.1. Theoretical framework

This study is part of variationist linguistics, a sociolinguistic approach that deals with the correlation between language and society. Since languages are living entities, they do not remain static. They evolve with time and social mutations, which are usually at the basis of the creation of sociolects or identity languages like Nouchi in Côte d'Ivoire. Variationist approach is an analytical tool used to examine the variation of language. The variation is analysed according to whether it occurs in time (diachronic variation); according to whether it is linked to space (diatopic variation); according to whether it occurs in society (diastatic variation) or according to enunciative or discursive situations (diaphasic variation). As an oral and hybrid code, Nouchi is precisely a result of the variation of French in the Ivorian context. It is an unstable urban language etymologically formed from the Manding words *nou*, 'nostril' and *chi* 'hair' (N. J. Kouadio 1990, 2006, N. J. Kouacou 2015, J. C. Dodo 2015). Initially conceived for cryptic purposes, Nouchi will gradually break out of this straitjacket to achieve a vehicular function. Lexically, Nouchi is the result of a mixture of several living languages (French, local Ivorian languages, foreign European languages (English, Spanish, German)) and numerous fabricated or purely invented words). This configuration gives a complex character to the lexicon of this language and reveals many particularities. At the grammatical level, these peculiarities are

apparent and relate to various linguistic phenomena such as nominal-verb/ verbo-nominal. Besides, the Nouchi verb itself has a singular characterisation. These word forms are perceived as elements of the lexicon and are used productively in Nouchi.

The present work is therefore concerned with the description of variation and will be oriented towards a morphosyntactic approach. The semantic aspect will also be used to analyse the content of the words and the relationships of meaning between them.

### **1.2. Research hypotheses and data of study**

Relating to questions raised in the introduction, the following hypotheses can be put forward:

- Nouchi verb has a singular characterization ;
- Nominal-verbs and verbo-nominals function as grammatical categories and could be derived from or inspired by Nouchi's borrowed languages, mainly French ;
- As they are the result of lexical creation processes, we admit that the transformations of verbs into nouns and of nouns into verbs have an impact on the form and meaning of the original terms.

The data to be analysed and interpreted in this work was collected using two methods of investigation: documentary research and semi-directive interviews (conducted with our informants). These two methods made possible the collection of a considerable amount of data from our informants and through sources of information and linguistic data (scientific works, sites promoting Nouchi ([www.nouchi.com](http://www.nouchi.com)), musical supports and Ivorian satirical newspapers<sup>1</sup> using Nouchi. The analysis of the data allows to gather:

- General information on Nouchi and its use;
- Oral productions in Nouchi (lexis and utterances) produced by speakers of Nouchi in real communication situations;
- Audio and video data;
- Written data.

This methodological approach resulted in the constitution of a vast field of data representative of different communication situations and grouping together common Nouchi lexis and utterances. From this analysable data, we identified the terms that seem to be verbs, verbo-nominals or nominal-verbs to constitute the reference corpus. Then, based on the observation, we identified the different points of analysis to carry out this work.

## **2. Data analysis and interpretation**

In this part, we will describe the formal and syntax-semantic characteristics of the verb, verb-nominals and nominal-verb of Nouchi from a corpus of reference.

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<sup>1</sup> *Gbich !, Go Magazine.*

## 2.1. *The Nouchi verb*

Nouchi verbs are not identified by their endings like French infinitive endings "er", "ir" and "re", respectively of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd groups. The Nouchi verb is characterised by a very particular configuration.

### 2.1.1. *Verbs with an open final syllable*

There is no infinitive verb form with a closed syllable in Nouchi because of the usual elision of the final [r] (N. J. Kouacou 2015: 280-282). The verbs in that language are generally open-syllable infinitive verbs of various origins:

- **Nouchi verbs of French origin :**

French-derived verbs are of various forms and are mostly turned into another meaning when they are used in Nouchi (J.-B. Atsé N'cho, 2016: 4).

*bomber* [bɔ̃be] / CVCV: "to take, to seize, to catch"

*showffer* [ʃofe] / CVCV: "to indulge in bamboo"

*fini* [finished] / CVCV: "to kill, to ruin"

*wet* [muje] / CVCV: "to be afraid, to hesitate"

*sciencer* [sjäse] / CVCV: "to observe, to think"

*tirer* [tire] / CVCV: "to be well dressed"

*taper* [taper] / CVCV: "to call"

*travail* [travaje] / CCVCVCV: "to distribute money graciously"

- **Nouchi verbs of English origin:**

Nouchi verbs of English origin « *se verbalisent (pour la plupart) par l'ajout d'une désinence infinitive (le -er notamment) du français au radical des mots* » (J.-B. Atsé N'cho, 2016 : 5)<sup>2</sup>.

*djober* [ʃobe] / CVCV from English "job": "to work"

*schooler* [skule] / CCUCV "to attend"

*enjailler* [ãjæe] / VCVV from English "enjoy" means "to love"

*flo* [flo] / CCVV: "to leave" from "flow" [fləʊ] "to flow, to circulate"

- **Nouchi verbs of Ivorian origin:**

Nouchi verbs which are borrowed from Ivorian languages very often end in vowels (Idem: 3) :

*bara* [bara] / CVCV: "to work"

*brimougou* [brimugu] / CCVCVCV: "to rape, to sexually assault"

*kôrô* [kɔ̃rɔ] / CVCV: "to sleep"

*kouman* [kumã] / CVCV: "to speak, to talk"

*sutra* [sutra] / CVCCV: "to help"

*sri* [sri] / CVCV: "to catch"

*tolo* [tolo] / CVCV: "to slap"

*djèguè* [ʃegɛ] / CVCV: "to wash, make clear"

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<sup>2</sup> "are mostly verbalised by adding an infinitive inflectional (the -er in particular) to the word stem" [Our translation] (J.-B. Atsé N'cho, 2016 : 5).

- **Nouchi verbs of unknown or purely fabricated origin**

These verbs come mainly from the Ivorian "ghetto" and have no fixed origin. « Ils sont créés de façon spontanée pour répondre à un besoin immédiat de communication. Ils deviennent alors des mots « fabriqués » qui se verbalisent par l'ajout d'une désinence infinitive du français à un radical nouchi » (Idem: 6).

"They are created spontaneously to meet an immediate need for communication. They then become 'created' words that are verbalised by adding a French infinitive to a Nouchi stem" (idem6) [Our translation]

*béhou* [beu] / CVV: 'to leave

*djagailler/jagailler* [ʒagaje] / CVCVCV: "to smoke the cigarette

*debalou* [debalu] / CVCVCV: "to steal, to rob

*gbailler (gbayer)* [gbaje] CVCV: "to speak, to play

*gbô/gbor* [gbɔ] / CV "to eat

*gbôlô* [gbɔlɔ] / CVCV: "to break, to break"

*gbra* [gbra] / CCV: "to remove, to remove from a position

*grigra* [grigra] / CCVCCV: "to manage, to get out of one's own way

*kèner* [kene] / CVCV: "to sell, to bargain

*kpa* [kpa] / CCV "to seize, catch"

As it has been observed so far, Nouchi verbs of French origin are generally marked by the verbal ending -er. The same is true for verbs of English origin. They are often nouns transformed into verbs with the suffix -er. Verbs of Ivorian origin do not have an -er ending<sup>3</sup>. The latter have open forms ending in an oral or nasal vowel. As for the series of slang verbs or purely invented verbs, they admit both verbal forms ending in er and verbal forms with various verbal endings.

### 2.1.2. Some irregular forms

Although the open syllable is a characteristic of Nouchi verbs, there are some irregularities in verbs with closed final syllables (N. J. Kouacou 2015).

- *dai/daye* [daj] / CVC: "to intoxicate, to get drunk" from the English "die" [daɪ] which means "to die";
- *douffe* [duf] / CVC: "to die" derived from the English adjective duff [dʌf] meaning something that doesn't work;
- *disap*<sup>4</sup> [dizap] / CVCVC: "to disappear, go astray, run away" borrowed from the English "disappear" [ˌdɪsəˈpiə] with the same meaning;
- *Floflow* [flow] / CCVC: "to leave" in Nouchi, it refers to the English verb "to flow" [fləʊ] which means "to flow, circulate".

These observed closed-syllable verbal irregularities are mostly derived from English. This explains their particular form. Although they are distorted, they retain their original morphological backbone.

<sup>3</sup> It is possible to encounter some rare cases

<sup>4</sup> This verb means, in some context, *to hide* in Nouchi.

The important point to note is that, apart from verbs of purely slang or unknown origin, the vast majority of verbs used in Nouchi are marked by semantic shift. This is more visible with verbs of French origin (*bomber, chauffer, être décalé*, etc.). The verbs of English origin, with a few exceptions, do not move away from their original meaning as exemplified in the verbs above. Some verbs are borrowed verbs, nouns or adjectives that have undergone a deformation of their meaning (formal distortion) before taking on a new connotation. A second important level of characterization of the Nouchi verb is related to the invariability of the verb.

## 2.2. *Noun, verb and the notions of verbo-nominal/nominal-verb*

One of the major distinctions that can be made between noun and verb in many languages (such as French and English) is that the noun refers to a continuous reality over time, while the verb refers to a single, ephemeral reality. Thus, noun and verb appear in these languages with distinct sets of affixes.

Les premiers présentent les distinctions genre-nombre, connu-nouveau, topic-focus et les seconds les distinctions de temps comme présent, futur, d'aspect comme perfectif, imperfectif, et de voix comme transitive, intransitive, causative et réfléchie. Cette distinction entre nom et verbe se maintient même quand des noms sont transformés en verbes (et employés comme prédicats) et quand les verbes sont nominalisés (et utilisés comme arguments). Tous deux gardent leurs caractéristiques internes propres, alors qu'ils n'assument qu'extérieurement quelques-unes des caractéristiques de l'autre catégorie (S. N. Bhat, 1997 : 54).

The former present the distinctions gender-number, known-new, topic-focus and the latter the distinctions of time as present, future; of aspect as perfective, imperfective, and of voice and transitivity, intransitivity, causative and reflexive aspects. This distinction between noun and verb is maintained even when nouns are transformed into verbs (and used as predicates) and when verbs are nominalized (and used as arguments). Both keep their own internal characteristics, while they only assume externally some of the characteristics of the other category (S. N. Bhat, 1997 : 54). [Our translation]

Another thing, the opposition verb/noun emanates from the fact that the verb functions by relation while the noun does not function by relation. To be attached to another concept, the noun needs an affix, usually a genitive. It is therefore clear that the verb and the noun are two distinct categories, each with its own specific functioning. However, in the context of collocation or lexical creation, these two categories seem to merge to form specific word forms. We are referring here to verbo-nominal and nominal-verb (N. J. Kouacou 2018). Dubois et al, defined verbo-nominal and nominal-verb as « *associations habituelles d'un morphème lexical avec d'autres au sein de l'énoncé, abstraction faite des relations grammaticales existant entre ces morphèmes* » (Dubois et al., 1994: 91)<sup>5</sup>. It is a question of word combination, in other words the frequent association of two words with each other in a privileged way. In this sense, C. Gledhill (2008: 1) points out that « *une expression verbo-nominale est une collocation lexicale consistant en la séquence Verbe + Nom (VN). Cette notion inclut des formules figées (faire peur) et des 'expressions' prédicatives (faire la fête), mais non des 'constructions' plus*

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<sup>5</sup>"common associations of a lexical morpheme with others within the utterance, disregarding the grammatical relations existing between these morphemes" [Our translation].

*variables (faire un gâteau)* » (C. Gledhill, 2008 : 1)<sup>6</sup>. Vetulani (2003: 163) states that verb-noun collocations are distinct and autonomous units in the language that have specific meanings and can be used to translate very specific realities. Thus, he specifies the features of these word forms as follows: «*Dans les collocations verbo-nominales, les deux éléments constitutifs (c.-à-d. un verbe, suivi ou non d'une préposition et un nom abstrait, accompagne ou non d'un modifieur sous forme d'un adjectif ou d'un adverbe) constituent ensemble une expression prédicative*» (Vetulani, 2003 : 163)<sup>7</sup>. In contrast to verbo-nominals which are complex but have a formal type, nominal-verbs are simpler to define but belong rather to the domain of language subversion. Indeed, they fall within the framework of purely fanciful lexical creation. Here, the noun is taken directly as a verb and as such it plays the role assigned to this value. Having shed light on the notional content of these species of words, it is now necessary to see how they function or how they are characterised in Nouchi.

### 2.3. Characterization of Nouchi verbo-nominal/ nominal-verb words

Verbo-nominals and nominal-verbs constitute a specific class of words that are an integral part of Nouchi speech. We will first look at verbo-nominals and then nominal-verbs.

#### 2.3.1. Verbo-nominal or noun-verbs in Nouchi

In Nouchi, some verbal units can be nominalized and have the status of a noun. This is the case of verbo-nominal or verb-nouns. These verbs are either directly translated into nouns with a shift in meaning, or they are associated, by postposition, with morphemes (determiners or pronouns). The association gives lexical units referring to a single reality or a unit of meaning. The common structural forms recorded in the analysis corpus are the following: Det. + V → N ; Pron. + V → N; V- V → N.

- **The structure Det. + V → N:**

This nominal structure consists of a verb followed by a determiner to form a (single) unit of meaning; the determiner can be an article, a pronoun or a possessive adjective.

- (1) *Il a fait son gâtair* "He denigrated/tormented it".
- (2) *C'est in (un) laisse, faut damer* "It's a joke, don't take it seriously".
- (3) *Lui là c'est in galéré, dame de lui* "That one is a wretch, don't worry about him".
- (4) *Ya son gué dedans* "He has his share in the share, gain."

In the above examples, the terms *gâtair*, *laisse*, *gué* and *galéré* are verbal units with the conjugated forms at the surface. But in the context of the above examples they are not.

<sup>6</sup> "a verb-noun phrase is a lexical collocation consisting of the sequence Verb + Noun (VN). This notion includes fixed formulas (make afraid) and predicative 'expressions' (have a feast), but not more variable 'constructions' (make a cake)" [Our translation]

<sup>7</sup> "In verb-noun collocations, the two constituent elements (i.e. a verb, followed or not by a preposition, and an abstract noun, accompanied or not by a modifier in the form of an adjective or an adverb) together constitute a predicative expression" [Our translation]

In (1), the unit *gâtait* is the third person singular imperfect conjugation of the verb 'gâter'. Here, *gâtait*, although it is in a conjugated form, constitutes with the possessive adjective *son* a nominal entity referring to a unit of meaning. "To spoil is to alter, to spoil. It is also to compromise, to thwart the success of something. Thus, the noun *gatait* is a fixed use that expresses the fact of discrediting someone, of giving a bad account of him. This noun is always placed as an object of the verb in the sentence. In statement (2), the conjugated verb form *laisse*, derived from the verb "to let". It is nominalized through the indefinite article *un* (one) with which it forms a unity of meaning. In (un) *laisse* translates into Nouchi a joke, an amusement, something to be ignored or not to be taken seriously. The segment *C'est* in (un) *laisse* is a fixed construction in Nouchi. In (3), *galérer* is a French verb of polysemic nature which can mean "to live on episodic work without having assured resources, to toil for a small profit, to work hard, etc.". In Nouchi, *galérer* is mostly used pejoratively as a noun (*un galérer*) and it is used to denote "an unemployed person, a destitute person, a person having a miserable life, etc.". Example (4) shows that the word *ford* is a truncation of the verb "to cure". Because of this truncated form, the verb "to heal", which has become *ford*, takes on a new meaning: "to give, to give someone a tip, or to give someone his share". The unit "gué" can move from a verb to a nominal category and be used as such in Nouchi without any declension. As a noun, *gué* means "a share, a benefit" and remains formally fixed regardless of the context of use. Thus, in Nouchi one can say:

*Je gué, tu gué, il/elle gué* "I give, you give, he/she gives" but also  
*Mon gué, ton gué, son gué*, i.e. "my share, your share, his/her share".

This process of verbal nominalization in Nouchi also applies to expressions from English, Spanish and unknown origin. Example:

- (5) *Show-là est calé, ça sera gâté* "The dance party is confirmed, we're really going to have fun.
- (6) *Est-cé [ese] c'est rentré dans ton comprendo* "Did you get it right?" Literally "Did it enter your understanding?".
- (7) *C'est in (un) flôkô* "It is a lie".

Here, *show* in (5) is an English verb meaning "to show, to make see, etc.". Without affixation, it becomes a noun meaning party, a dance party. *Comprendo* in (6) derives from the Spanish verb "comprender" [kprndɛr] which means "to understand". The form *comprendo* is the Spanish conjugation of the above verb in the first person singular in the present tense. In Nouchi, *comprendo* is used in a fixed form where it is usually nominalized with a possessive. In this case, it translates "understanding, comprehension". The term *flôkô* [flɔkɔ] (7) is a unit of unknown origin generally used as a verb to translate the fact of lying: (8) *Ils l'ont flôkô pour daba son djèhè* "They fooled him to ruin him financially". However, the verb *flôkô* can also have a nominal function (*un flôkô*), as in example (7), to mean a lie, a flattery. In these two cases, there is no formal variation.



- **The structures  $V + V \rightarrow N$  and  $V-V \rightarrow N$**

The structuring  $V + V \rightarrow N$  accounts for the addition of two distinct verbs functioning as a noun; whereas the nominal structure form  $V-V \rightarrow N$  consists of the doubling of the same verb. Example:

(9) Arrête tes sciences de *brimougou* 'Stop your acts of sexual aggression'.

(10) *C'est donnant donnant* (It's a give and take) 'It's a profile, a mutual, reciprocal gain'.

The word *brimougou* in example (9) is formed from *bri*, a truncation of the verb "brigander" meaning "to abuse, to mistreat" and *mougou*, a Dioula noun meaning "powder". But in Nouchi, *mougou* means to sleep with a woman. How can this transfer of meaning be explained? In fact, it is well known in Africa that in order to obtain a cereal semolina by hand, one uses a pestle to pound the grains in a mortar. Hypothetically, the (repeated) pounding of the pestle in the mortar would be assimilated to the movement of coming and going during sexual intercourse, hence the name *mougou* to reflect this analogy. The combination of the words *bri* and *mougou* (*brimougou*) refers to sexual rape. In statement (10), we note the reduplication of giving, present participle of the verb "to give", marked by the determiner zero. In Nouchi, *donner donner*<sup>8</sup> is a noun that contains the idea of a profit, a sharing that must be mutual or reciprocal. The structure of this word is  $V-V \rightarrow N$  like the French expression *pousse pousse*<sup>9</sup>, meaning 'a pram, a buggy'.

It follows from these examples that the nominal structure  $V-V \rightarrow N$  characterises redoubled verbs which take on the status of a noun, whereas the structure  $V + V \rightarrow N$  is the one that involves two different verbs which join to form a noun like in French *laissez-passer*.

- **Other more complex verbal nominalization structures**

More complex structures of verbal entity nominalization can be found in Nouchi. The following nominal expressions are more telling.

(11.a) *Les nous mange*<sup>10</sup> (Lit. : The eaters) "witches".

(12) *Un billet de tais-toi* "10.000 F CFA"

(13) *Les business, c'est perdi perdi gagné gagné* "In business, it is luck (or risk). You can either lose or win.

*Nous mange*<sup>11</sup>(11) is a fixed verbal form formed by *nous* and the verb *manger* (to eat) appearing in the first singular person in the present tense. This verbal form with the structure Pron. + V (Present tense) appears nevertheless as a noun to designate "the sorcerers" in Nouchi. The pronoun *nous* is plural, but the noun formed with it can be used in the singular as well as in the plural. Thus, in Nouchi, we can say:

<sup>8</sup> This word is a Nouchi word borrowed from Ivorian popular French.

<sup>9</sup> In Nouchi, we mean by *pousse pousse* a type of wheel barrow made in wood called "wotro".

<sup>10</sup> In Cote d'Ivoire, Guere people are also referred « nous mange ». Because, according to legend, they are eaters of the flesh of human beings.

<sup>11</sup> This expression refers also to wobe people from the western part of Cote d'Ivoire. Those people were once presented as eaters of the flesh of human being. It is out of expansion that the expression *nous mange* appears to designate sorcerers that many consider as eaters of souls.

(11.b) *C'est un nous mange* "He/she is a witch"

(11.c) *C'est des nous mange* "They are witches".

In example (12) *Un billet de tais-toi* refers to the sum of 10,000 CFA francs. This fixed expression with the structure Det + N + Prep + V + Pron appears on the surface as a nominal phrase with a conjugated verb (*tais-toi*), but in reality it is a complex noun that refers to a precise and unique notion: 10,000 F CFA. Indeed, the 10,000 F CFA note is the heaviest banknote of the CFA currency after which there is no other one. This name would come from the fact that this banknote is supposed to be used to easily corrupt (or buy the conscience) of people attracted by easy gain. *Perdi perdi gagné gagné* en (13) appears as a nominal expression with the following internal structure: V-V + V-V → N. This term is used in Nouchi to express the effect of chance or fate. Used very often in the context of games or business, it describes something that can be unfavourable or favourable, in other words, failure or success.

### 2.3.2. Nominal-verbs or noun-verbs in Nouchi

These are units that are nominal in nature but can function as verbs in a predicative construction. Dumas refers to nominal verbs as « ... *un autre moyen interne d'enrichissement du vocabulaire, un type de dérivation qui ne suppose aucun changement au niveau de la forme, de la structure du signifiant, mais des modifications expressives et sémantiques au niveau de la mise en discours de ces mots, sous-tendues par leur emploi grammatical* » (F. Dumas, 2008 : 121)<sup>12</sup>. Thus, all the noun-verbs observed in Nouchi are marked by semantic shift. Among the noun-verbs, some can vary morphologically. But, others retain their morphology regardless of the tense, person, gender and number. Let us consider the following examples:

#### 2.3.2.1. Invariant noun-verbs

In Nouchi, some nouns are able to be conjugated without any formal variation of the stem of the conjugated term. This can be observed with terms of French and Ivorian origin. Examples:

- **The invariable forms with French words**

(14) *Faut djèguè*<sup>13</sup> ça prope (clean) "You have to wash it well".

(15) *Go-là l'a cadénas pou daba son anhan [nãã]* "The girl bewitched him to ruin him financially".

(16) *Ils ont train go là* "They raped the girl.

(17) *Quand yè (j'ai) zié môgô là en mêmé temps mon ker est chaud* "When I looked at the man's attitude, it made me angry right away".

(18) *Djo, si tu le moyen pas faut dit* "My friend, if you can't handle it, you have to say so.

<sup>12</sup> "... another internal means of enriching the vocabulary, a type of derivation which does not imply any change in the form or structure of the signifier. But the expressive and semantic modifications in the discourse of these words are underpinned by their grammatical use" [Our translation].

<sup>13</sup> *djèguè* which is from Dioula origin means poison. In nouchi, that word has various meanings. It can either mean, according to the context, to wash, to rebuke or to have a beautify skin or to look beautiful.

- (19) *Lui (il) se chaud sur lanhan là, quand on était là bara on l'a pas vu* «He is all excited about the money received and yet when we were working we didn't see him.»  
 (20) *Son dagbolo gaz trop* His *dagbolo* gas too much "His mouth smells bad.

The observation of each of those sentences shows that the units *djèguè*, *cadéna*, *train*, *gester*, *zié*, *erreuré*, *moyen*, *chaud*, *gaz* fulfil individually a predicative function and therefore appear here as verbs. However, these words taken as verbal predicates are originally nouns by their very nature. This can be testified from the following examples:

- *djèguè*, 'to wash' in Nouchi comes from the Dioula name 'djèguè' which means 'fish'.

- *cadéna*, "to bewitch", refers in its true meaning in French to "a mobile lock".

- *train*<sup>14</sup> translates into Nouchi as an act of rape, whereas in French it refers to a series of wagons pulled by a locomotive. According to N. J. Kouacou (2015: 286), 'The term *train* is a unit whose meaning has been disguised here. (...) It is known that a train is an engine with several carriages. Thus, the verb *train* is used in Nouchi to translate the rape of a woman by several people.

- *zié* is the deformation of "eyes", a masculine plural of the word eye. If in French the term *zié* (eyes) is a noun referring to the organ of sight, in Nouchi this word is an invariable verb that translates "the fact of looking".

- *moyen*, refers to "can" and "be capable of" in Nouchi, But, in standard French, it means something which serves as an intermediary or something which enables something to be done".

- The unit *chaud* expresses the fact of being excited or stimulated by something, whereas in its original meaning it refers to heat.

- As masculine noun, the term *gas* becomes a verb without the help of an affix to the lexical base of the word (Cf 20). Indeed, the unpleasant odour of the mouth is so strong that it emerges as a gas. Gas here refers to an unpleasant smell, nauseating, etc.

From the above, it is clear that there is a resemantisation of terms in their transition from noun to verb. In examples (14), (15), (16), (17), (18), (19) and (20), apart from *djèguè* which seems to be in the infinitive, *moyen*, *cadéna*, *train* and *zié* seem to be conjugated respectively in the past and present tenses. Nevertheless, they remain morphologically invariant. In Nouchi, these noun-verbs belong to a category of nouns that can appear as verbs without ever varying, i.e. they remain as such whatever the tense, the aspects or the mode of conjugation. *djèguè*, *moyen*, *cadéna* can be qualified as neutral and integrate the category of invariable verbs. It is impossible to hear in Nouchi: Je *djèguèserai*, On *djèguèsait*, etc.; Je *moyenai*, Tu *moyeneras*, Ils *moyennent*, etc.; Il *cadéna*, Nous *cadénations*, ils *cadénaraient* or others. These forms do not exist with invariable verbs like *djèguè*, *moyen* and *cadéna*, etc. The same applies to nouns such as *mort*, *papayer*, *gaz* in the above examples:

<sup>14</sup> Indeed, very often, the rape of women is done in groups, which depicts the notion of wagon. This analogy comes mainly from the effect of force or aggressiveness deployed in the circumstance of rape. Indeed, since the act of rape is a sexual abuse, those who engage in it naturally do so in a brutal and rapid manner for not risking being pinned down, hence the expression *train* to translate rape or sexual aggression into Nouchi.

- **Invariable forms with words of Ivorian origin**

Nouns used directly as verbs without inflection also derive from Ivorian languages. These predicate nouns are also subject to semantic shift discussed earlier with Nouchi words deriving from French terms. As an example, let us consider the following statements:

- (21) *Je suis wôrô* "I am tired".
- (22) *Tu te fongnon mais on te calcule pas* " Tu t'exposes mais personne s'intéresse à toi? "
- (23) *Go qué tout le monde gninin là, c'est elle qui te fait yôhi* "That girl that everybody sleeps with, she's the one who scares you! "
- (24) *Faut le kpokpo [kpokpo] il va prendre mon lalé* "You have to convince him to buy my mobile phone. "
- (25) *Je su (suis) dji*. "I am invulnerable".

The words *wôrô*, *fongnon*, *gninin* and *kpokpo* are originally nouns from local Ivorian languages and used as verbs in Nouchi. It is important to note that in the above-mentioned sentences, these nouns function as verbs. The term *wôrô* (21) is also a noun of Dioula origin and refers to 30 F CFA. But in Nouchi ? *wôrô* is used to express the fact of being tired. This latter meaning comes from the expression *wôrô-wôrô*<sup>15</sup>, a Nouchi reduction referring to the often tired and aged-looking communal taxis that serve the Ivorian population in transport. Here, *wôrô* is the object of an improper derivation. In that, it is used directly as a verb. In example (22), the term "fongnon" is a Dioula<sup>16</sup> noun meaning "the wind". In Nouchi, *fongnon* means to show off. This word evokes the idea of someone who strives to appear without being noticed just like the wind (*fongnon* in Dioula) which blows without being seen by eyes. It thus passes from the nominal category to the verbal category without any derivational transformation. Of Bété<sup>17</sup> origin, *gnrin* (23), very often realized as *gninin* by modification, is a noun. In Nouchi, this lexeme appears sometimes as a noun where it actually designates the "female sex" (e.g.: *Lui, c'est gnrin [nrɛ] i cherche* "He is interested by sex (relating to sex)"); sometimes it appears as a verb, as in example (23), to express the fact of making love. Thus, the term *gnrin* [nrɛ] fulfils both nominal and verbal functions without any variation in the word base. The unit *kpokpo* from example (24) is a noun of Baule<sup>18</sup> origin meaning 'the mortar' (used to pound or grind food, especially tubers). Since anything that is pounded is easy to manipulate, the noun *kpokpo* becomes by analogy a verb in Nouchi which translates "to manipulate, convince or coax". It is used as a verb and not as a noun in Nouchi. In (25); the item *dji* derives from the Nouchi pronominal form "se dji" which is a truncation of the Dioula noun "nanssidji" meaning a magic potion. In Nouchi, *sedji* means to make oneself invulnerable, invincible.

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<sup>15</sup> The designation *wôrô-wôrô* as "a type of transport vehicle" comes from the fact that in the past, the price of taxi transport in Abidjan was "30 F CFA". Over time, the term *wôrô*, which became *wôrô-wôrô* by reduction, came to be used as the name of communal taxis, despite the fact that prices have now risen to between 200 and 300 CFA francs depending on the distance.

<sup>16</sup> Gur Language from Côte d'Ivoire.

<sup>17</sup> Kru Language from Côte d'Ivoire.

<sup>18</sup> Kwa language from Côte d'Ivoire.

## 2.3.2.2. Variable noun-verbs

The conjugated nouns here have a formal variation of the stem of the conjugated term. This applies to French nouns marked by semantic shift. As examples, we can have:

- (26) *Yè (je vais) le systèmer* quoi "I'm going to trick him (to deceive) to the point where he will be surprised."  
 (27) *Si tia erreuré, yè prende pou toi* "If you dare to confront me, I will make you regret it."  
 (28) *Faut gester tia voi* (see) "You must dare, you will see."  
 (29) *Faut sciencer go là* "You have to look at (observe) this/that girl."

The units *systèmer*, *erreuré*, *gester* and *sciencer* cover each a predicative function in view of their syntactic positions in the occurrences in (26-29). However, they are originally nouns. Unlike the previous forms, the conjugated nouns here are invariable. Indeed, in examples (26), (27), (28) and (29) the terms *systèmer*, *erreuré*, *gester*, and *sciencer* are nouns whose use as verbal predicates leads to a change of their morphology. Indeed, to become verbs, the nouns "gesture", "error" take the verbal suffix -er in the infinitive: *gester* and *erreurer*. They are marked here by the ending -é in the past tense as is the case with *erreuré* (Si tia/tu as erreuré...). Their conversion into verbs leads to a change of their content:

- in Nouchi, *systèmer* is "to deceive, to steal, to swindle someone" whereas in its original meaning "système" (system) refers to "a set ordered of scientific or philosophical notions";
- *erreuré* means "to dare or the fact of daring" in Nouchi. This noun verb comes from the French noun "erreur" (error), which in standard French refers to the fact of mistaking;
- *gester* "to dare, to gesticulate, to move" in Nouchi jargon, derives from the French noun "geste" (gesture) referring to the movement of the body;
- *sciencer* "to look at, observe, reflect, think" in Nouchi is actually a "coherent body of knowledge relating to a specific domain".

These can be classified as verbs with -er endings which are likely to vary in Nouchi. This also applies to nouns of English origin: *bisnesser* 'to do business'; *djober* 'to work'; *schooler* 'to attend, to study (in an educational institution)'. These English nouns, through the process of suffixing -er to them, are converted into Nouchi verbs.

With noun-verbs susceptible to variation, the suffix -er can also be used to transform more complex elements into verbs (N. J. Kouacou, 2015) such as:

*couptêter* : coup-tête + -er / structure : N + N + Suf[er] → V

*jédèjamber* : leg games + -er / structure : N + Prep + N + Suf[er] → V :

- (30) *Faut le couptêter* "You have to give him a head butt."  
 (31) *Si i la jédèjambé yè daba lui couché* "If he makes the slightest movement (the slightest mistake) I will beat him to death."

The term *couptêter* in (30) is composed of the nouns *coup* "a quick and more or less violent shock of a moving body" and *tête*, part of the body, suffixed with the verbal affix -er to obtain a verb. *Couptêter* is "to give a blow of head" in Nouchi. *Jédèjamber*

in the statement (31) has a more complex structure which forms a verb from two nouns linked by a preposition, the whole suffixed by *-er*. In Nouchi, this word literally refers to the movement of the legs, the steps of the feet. But, it should be understood precisely as the fact of moving, or the action of daring to do something.

These nouns conjugated with the suffix *-er* are distinguished from another type formed with the affix *-ter*. In French, it is rather the suffix *-té* with words such as *beauté* (beauty), *nouveauté* (novelty), *chretiennté* (Christianity) which derived respectively from "beau" (beautiful), "nouveau" (new), "Chretien" (Christian). In Nouchi, the suffix *-ter* also converts nouns into verbs. Example:

(32) *Onhon* (we'll) *piéter* "We'll walk."

(33) *Faut faroter pour montrer ton poids* "You have to be seen to show what you are worth".

Here we have:

"Foot" (noun) "end part of the lower limb" + **-ter** → *piéter* (verb) "to walk".

"Faraud" (noun) "boastful, pretentious" + **-ter** → *faroter* (verb) "to show off excessively, exhibitionism".

### 3. Discussion

The observation of the corpus of reference shows that nouchi verbs are generally verbs with open syllables coming from different sources. Those verbs have a rich background from French (See 2.1.1.). The corpus presents some irregular verbs with closed syllables mainly borrowed from English. These have a change of meaning. For example: *être daye* [daj] (to be dead)<sup>19</sup>; *douffe/duff*<sup>20</sup> [dʌf]; *disap* [dizap] (disappear" [dɪsə'piəŋ]), etc. Beside the verb which is a classical grammatical category, the analysis of the corpus allows us to note two original and interesting grammatical operations (nominal-verbs and verbo-nominals) in terms of their structure and syntactic-semantic functioning (2.3.).

The concept of verb-nouns, which concerns the nominalization of verbs, is a more general process attested in many languages. In standard French, for example, we have nominal units with the structures V + V; Prep + V; V + Prep + N, etc. These are respectively the cases of *laissez-passer*, a permit to enter or circulate on a given territory, issued by an authority; *pourparlers*, a masculine plural noun which designates a discussion, a conversation with a view to reaching an agreement; *laissé-pour-compte*, a person rejected by a social group, etc. The analysis of the corpus usually reveals internal structures such as: Det. + V → N; Pron. + V → N; V-V → N. Another relevant remark is that the nominalization of verbs in Nouchi takes place on conjugated verb forms, whereas it usually takes place on the infinitive of the verb as observed in French. The phenomenon of nominal-verbs is an atypical form of lexical-semantic and grammatical creation observed in Nouchi. If the phenomenon of verbal nominalization is a linguistic reality accepted in many languages, the phenomenon of nominal-verbs or conjugated verbs seems to be an intrinsic reality of Nouchi. In fact, this process is

<sup>19</sup> *To be dead* in English has been changed into *to be drunk* in nouchi. Because, according to nouchi speakers when somebody is drunk he is considered as a dead person.

<sup>20</sup> The adjective *duff* means worthless, not working properly or defective in English. When something is worthless, it is of no use. So, Nouchi speakers believe that a dead person is of no use, That's why they refer to *duff* (*douffe* in nouchi) as a dead person or somebody who has passed away.

not observed in the French system nor in local Ivorian languages and moreover neither in other Nouchi loan languages. Here, the noun merges with the verb and can assume the same functions as the latter. In this context, the noun/verb opposition seems to be neutralized. This principle is strangely attested in rare languages such as Munda<sup>21</sup>. In his study on Verb-noun polarity in Munda languages, D. Bhat (1997) shows the absence of distinction between verb and noun in Munda language. He argues that:

Les langues munda font état d'un fort degré d'indistinction nom-verbe. Les mots désignant des notions verbales comme "donner", "frapper", "manger", etc. ainsi que ceux qui réfèrent à une notion nominale comme "oiseau", "serviteur", "arbre", etc. peuvent librement servir de prédicat les uns comme les autres et peuvent prendre les divers affixes de temps, d'aspect, de mode, de voix, de personne, etc. (D. Bhat, 1997 : 52).

Munda languages exhibit a high degree of noun-verb indistinction. Words denoting verbal concepts such as 'give', 'knock', 'eat', etc. as well as those referring to a nominal concept such as 'bird', 'servant', 'tree', etc. can freely serve as predicate as well as taking various affixes of tense, aspect, mode, voice, person, etc. (D. Bhat, 1997: 52). [Our translation]

This means that in the Munda language system, the verb and the noun have the same sets of affixes. They can, for example, be predicates and thus link patients or agents to the events to which they refer. Also, they can function, according to Bhat, with suffixes of tense, aspect and mode or take possessive and number marks and be put in transitive, intransitive, causative, reflexive, etc. The conception of verb-nouns as observed in Munda languages and described by Bhat summarizes the noun and the verb in one and the same category. In Nouchi, the verb and the noun are quite distinct but are likely to be amalgamated through the phenomenon of verbo-nominal / nomina-verbs.

## Conclusion

As a hybrid and instable language, Nouchi from Ivory Coast is full of many grammatical particularities to be explored. This analysis has allowed us to note that Ivorian Nouchi verbs are not classified according to their ending as in French with the infinitive endings "er", "ir" and "re", but are generally verbs with an open syllable in the infinitive. Those verbs come from various origins. Thus, they copy forms from French, local Ivorian languages and English, in addition to that, they typically create forms that can be distinguished. The class of verb-nouns, which is in fact verbal nominalization, is a very productive phenomenon in Nouchi. The verbs that enter into the formation of this kind of word have the particularity of appearing in a conjugated form (in various tenses and persons) where truncated forms (e.g.: *ford*) or inflected forms (e.g.: *gatait*, *galéré*) are often observed. Those truncated or conjugated forms function also as nouns (*mon gué*, *son gatait*, *un galéré*). As for nominal-verbs, they are to be presented as fanciful and subversive processes. Noticed as direct transformations of nouns into verbs (with or without inflectional marks), these words can be designated as conjugated nouns. In the process of changing grammatical category, these predicate nouns also have the property of undergoing a change in meaning, which adds a second degree of singularity to those grammatical elements in Nouchi. Verbo-nominal and especially nominal-verb constitute a field of study that needs to be

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<sup>21</sup> A language spoken in some regions of India.

explored, since, to the best of our knowledge, there is little work in this area. Since the functioning of Nouchi verb is different from the traditional functioning of verb, our interest in this work was to make known these two particular linguistic phenomena and to describe their syntactico-semantic functioning from their form and context of use.

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