

Ambiguity in the Construction of Verb-based Nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the nominalization of verbs in Bahasa Indonesia, reviews the affixes used to nominalize verbs, and considers the potential for ambiguity in their structure and meaning. This qualitative study used data from news reports on kompas.com and sindonews.com. The results show that some deverbal nouns have ambiguous structures, indicating that the same noun may be derived from both transitive and intransitive verbs, and that the same noun may also be derived from transitive verbs with different derivations. Some noun phrases may show an ambiguous relation between agent and patient. Sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the noun attached to the deverbal noun functions as an agent or a patient because of the tendency to omit the preposition between them. There are three reasons justifying why the preposition in such a construction may be omitted; the function of the prepositional phrase as an adjunct, the semantic roles of the noun and deverbal noun, and the practicality of usage

Keywords: Ambiguity, Nominalization, Agent, Patient, Bahasa Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

In Bahasa Indonesia, verbs are transitive or intransitive ([Sneddon et al., 2010](#)). These verbs are confirmed by the existence of the argument roles needed by the verbs. Clauses with intransitive verbs need only one argument, whereas those with transitive verbs need more than one argument. The important point is that the argument defines its function within the clause. For example,

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the argument needed in intransitive verbs will most likely be a subject that functions as the agent, whereas transitive verbs will need arguments that function as agents, as well as others such as objects or patients. Every language has its own mechanism for defining which argument is needed to function as an agent or a patient (Dixon, 2010).

In Bahasa Indonesia, the role of an argument can be defined by the word order of the clause, in which the argument preceding the predicate may function as an agent, while the one following the predicate may function as a patient. Hence, the argument realization shows the roles of the 'doer' as in the case of argument functioning as an agent, or as the 'recipient' as in the case of argument functioning as a patient. The different argument realizations addressing the agent and patient show how the semantic roles of the verbs are mapped onto the grammatical functions of their agent and patient. As the argument realization shows, the semantic role of the verb; once such semantic roles undergo other grammatical processes, they will affect the process as well. For example, verb constructions that show argument realization may affect the formation of verb-based nominalizations, or deverbal nouns.

The verb-based nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia shows that nominalized forms still behave like verbs internally, as the process of nominalization preserves the agent, patient, and event structure. This shows that nominalization may retain verbal argument structure (Grimshaw, 1990). The fact that Bahasa Indonesia, unlike English, does not have a complex inflectional system and yet preserves argument structure shows that argument structure preservation does not depend entirely on rich case marking or verbal inflection (Grimshaw, 1990). English nominalization, as in the gerund, shows similarity to nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia, as both retain verbal characteristics. However, in many discussions, gerunds are treated as nominalizations and as sources of grammatical ambiguity (Fonteyn, 2016), as the grammatical structure itself may create ambiguity.

In addition to the lighter inflectional system, Bahasa Indonesia has a more complex derivational system and the flexibility of omitting arguments (Sneddon et al., 2010), which makes greater reliance on discourse interpretation. This adds to the notion on why nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia is worth noting. In Bahasa Indonesia, the nominalization of verbs referring to an agent may be formed by attaching the affix *pen-*, and the nominalization of verbs referring to a patient is assigned by the affix *pe-* (Sawardi, 2008). Therefore, the verb *menyuruh* 'to order' can become the noun *penyuruh* 'orderer'—the one who gives an order—and *pesuruh* 'helper'—the one

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who receives the order. The difference between these two nouns lies in their function: *penyuruh* functions as an agent because, semantically, it means someone who gives the order, while *pesuruh* functions as a patient, meaning the one who receives the order.

This phenomenon shows that nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia requires not only a morphological process but also a semantic process, as it is needed to interpret participant roles. Such cases may create ambiguity, which refers to situations that can be interpreted in more than one way because their structure or meaning suggests multiple interpretations (Haegeneman, 1994). In this case, ambiguity arises because the nominalized form may encode different semantic relations derived from the same verbal root (Haegeman, 1994). When the transitive verb may derive different nominalizations depending on whether it refers to the agent or the patient, the nominalization process can also differentiate the derived meaning. For example, the noun *pemberhentian* ‘stop’ can be used in the following sentence:

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1.a | <i>Bis</i>
‘the bus’ N | <i>berhenti</i>
‘stops’ V (INT) | <i>pemberhentian bis</i>
‘bus stop’ N |
| | The bus stops’ (Clause) | | ‘bus stop’ (N) |
| 1.b | <i>Supir</i>
‘The driver’ S | <i>memberhentikan</i>
stops V (TRAN) | <i>bis</i>
the bus N |
| | ‘the driver stops the bus’ (Clause) | | <i>pemberhentian bis</i>
bus stop N |
| | | | ‘bus stop’ (N) |
| 1.c | <i>Bupati</i>
The regent S | <i>memberhentikan</i>
dismisses V (TRAN) | <i>lurah</i>
the head
of the
village |
| | ‘the regent dismisses the head of the village’
(Clause) | | <i>pemberhentian lurah</i>
‘the dismissal of the
head of the village’ N |
| | | | ‘the dismissal of the
head of the village’
(N) |

In 1a, *pemberhentian bis* ‘bus stop’ is a noun phrase (NP) derived from the intransitive verb *berhenti* ‘stop.’ It can also be seen that in 1b, *pemberhentian bis* ‘bus’ is also an NP derived from the transitive verb *memberhentikan* ‘to stop.’ Likewise, the NP *pemberhentian lurah* ‘the dismissal of the head of the village’

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in 1c is another NP derived from the transitive verb *memberhentikan* ‘to dismiss,’ that is, the same noun, although with a different reference.

From the example above, it is shown that without sufficient contextual information, nominalization may allow multiple interpretations because it relies heavily on pragmatic and contextual factors rather than solely on grammatical marking. This shows that nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia operates at the intersection of morphology, syntax, and semantics (Sneddon et al., 2010). Hence, from a linguistic perspective, such ambiguity is theoretically significant, as it shows that nominalization preserves the trace of the verbal argument structure and, at the same time, functions as a noun.

In addition, the case of nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia can position Bahasa Indonesia as an important testing ground for broader cases. The analysis contributes to the discussion of phenomena such as argument structure, nominalization, and ambiguity by demonstrating how they are realized in Bahasa Indonesia. The study also contributes not only to the linguistics of Bahasa Indonesia but also to broader cross-linguistic discussion of the interaction among morphology, syntax, and semantics.

Therefore, it is interesting to note that the nominalization of verbs may be derived from different types of verbs and yet yield the same noun, as shown by the above example of the noun *pemberhentian*. Hence, there is some mechanism that governs the nominalization process, and there are examples that do not fit this mechanism and therefore create ambiguity.

In taking a look at multiple interpretations, let us consider the following NP: *pemukulan polisi* ‘police beating’, *penangkapan jaksa* ‘prosecutor arrest’, *pelaporan ketua* ‘leader report.’ These examples of the nominalization of verbs may suggest ambiguous meanings, as it is not clear who does (to) whom is meant by the phrase. In *pemukulan polisi* ‘police beating’, for example, it is not clear whether it is *pemukulan oleh polisi* ‘the police who does the beating’ or whether it is *pemukulan pada polisi* ‘it is the police who is beaten.’ Such examples provide a basis for considering Bahasa Indonesia as a case study for understanding ambiguity in deverbal nominalization across languages.

To address this issue, many studies have been conducted in morphology and syntax, focusing on verb and nominalization strategies. The ones that shed light on the understanding of agent and patient roles in a clause show that clauses in Bahasa Indonesia acknowledge the differences in nominalization created by different types of verbs, which also define the roles of their arguments (Sawardi, 2008; Oktavianti et al., 2019; Grange, 2015). Argument role refers to the function that a participant plays in an event

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described by the verb of the sentence ([Dixon, 2010](#)). The ambiguity in verb nominalization mostly arises because the argument structure is not always explicitly realized by the syntactic realization ([Dixon, 2010](#)).

Theoretically, world languages may be classified into accusative languages, which treat the subject as an agent; ergative languages, which treat the subject as an object; and languages that have both accusative and ergative characteristics ([Dixon, 1994](#)). This distinction is the mainstay of other studies conducted in this field. Although the distinction is quite clear, some clauses remain indefinable and confusing, as explained by Taher's study on English ([2015](#)) and Grange's study on Bahasa Indonesia's -nya 'affix -nya.' Many other studies that mention nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia ([Zakaria, 2018](#); [Zainuddin, 2016](#); [Suryana, 2017](#); [Suhardi, 1984](#)) mostly discuss strategies for nominalizing verbs, and the ambiguities resulting from such nominalization are left undiscussed. In addition, some studies compare the nominalization in two or three languages ([Karyaningsih, 2020](#); [Oktavianti et al., 2019](#)). Some other studies on Bahasa Indonesia focus on its phonological similarities with other languages ([Aidha et al., 2024](#)) and on how the language is used as a basis for convergence to ease communication ([Ferdiansa et al., 2024](#)). Another study examines how product naming reveals different forms and functions ([Fiorentya & Wijana, 2025](#)). Those articles, though their subject of inquiry is Bahasa Indonesia, do not address how verb nominalization can create ambiguity.

Studies on nominalization ambiguity rely on the major work of [Grimshaw \(1990\)](#), which focuses on argument structures in nominalization. The other study used as the baseline for the work is [Aronoff & Fudeman \(2011\)](#) on derivational morphology and nominalization. Some studies show that, in language learning, grammatical accuracy remains one of the most difficult areas to master ([Guna et al., 2005](#)), and that the choice of pronoun reflects more than just grammatical understanding ([Tsaqifa & Roselani, 2024](#)). Other studies that examine ambiguity based on those works are researching other languages. Those studies focus on the semantic role in nominalization ([Kamareddine & Klein, 2012](#); [Fabregas & Marin 2011](#)). These two studies examine how nominalization tends to produce ambiguity in several European languages, either because the semantic role of the independent properties of the verbal base ([Fabregas & Marin, 2011](#)) or because the hierarchical types of semantic role properties ([Kamareddine & Klein, 2012](#)). Another study by [Varhara & Huyghe \(2026\)](#) on verb-to-noun derivation in French also shows the need for semantic transparency. The study conducted by [Toosarvandani](#)

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(2014) shows that deverbal nominalization in Northern Paiute serves a grammatical function explicitly while retaining the semantic side implicitly.

Despite the number of studies conducted in this area, there is still a question about how the nominalization of verbs in Bahasa Indonesia creates ambiguity in their semantic roles. Hence, this article addresses two notions: whether the ambiguity in the meaning of nominalization of a verb is created by the internal or external structure of the verb, and what the causes of ambiguity in longer constructions are, as in phrases or clauses. To address the issue, this article will discuss the process of nominalization of verbs as the background concepts in understanding the ambiguity. Then it will examine how the nominalization of verbs can create ambiguity in both their structural and semantic roles.

METHOD

The data were taken from news reports on *kompas.com* and *sindonews.com*, collected between January 15th - January 30th 2025. This is done to ensure analytical focus and manageable qualitative analysis. The two online news media were chosen because they represent influential and widely accessed Indonesian news platforms. Restricting the time frame enabled the researchers to examine linguistic features within a clear, bounded time frame. The purposive sampling method was applied in collecting the data with the following criteria 1) the news report was written in Bahasa Indonesia, 2) the news contained instances of nominalization of verbs. 127 data were selected as the study sample. Only 127 data were included in the study's sample because some data in the text represent similar nominalizations with the same meaning and context. Each datum was selected based on its relevance to the nominalization and the ambiguity of the nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia. The 127 data were considered sufficient because recurring nominalization patterns and their ambiguities showed consistency, indicating adequate data saturation for qualitative analysis. [Data collected and coded](#), They were also coded based on their phrase structure to examine their argument realization and on their use in clauses.

The object of this study is the ambiguity of verb nominalization. The analysis was qualitative to examine how each datum conveys meaning. The qualitative method is considered sufficient for analyzing the data because each data point is examined closely to determine how its structure and/or meaning may create ambiguity. Data analysis was conducted by following the steps to ensure its reliability. First, to examine the ambiguity of the noun

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phrase, the phrases are studied to determine the reference meaning of verb nominalization. The same is also done for clauses and sentences to determine the ambiguity of the verb nominalization within them. [Data triangulation](#) was conducted by comparing the linguistic pattern across two different media. Second, for the noun phrase, the data were contrasted to identify patterns in the semantic properties of the verbs and their internal arguments. This was done to confirm the ambiguity in the structure and meaning of the nominalized verb. For data on verb nominalization in clauses or sentences, after determining the meaning of the nominalized verb, the noun's meaning is confirmed by adding a preposition to examine the tendency behind the possible omission of the preposition. This also makes it possible to see how the implied arguments of verbs participate in the semantic properties of verb nominalization. Here, theoretical implementation involved interpreting data using multiple frameworks, including grammatical, semantic, and discourse analysis. Furthermore, the analysis is conducted following a systematic procedure, consisting of data collection, categorization, interpretation, and cross-checking. The nominalizations that created ambiguity are reviewed by checking them against the broader textual context of the news.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Forms of Nominalization of Bahasa Indonesia Verbs

Verbal nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia can be achieved with affixes. This process of nominalization generates meaning based on the verb it derives. There are 6 operations of affixes which transform the verbs into nouns, namely (i) prefix *peng-*, (ii) prefix *pe-*, (iii) suffix *-an*, (iv) confix *per...-an*, (v) confix *peng...-an*, and (vi) confix *ke...-an* ([Moeliono, et.al., 2017](#); [Ekowardono, 2009](#), [Sneddon, et.al., 2010](#)))

(i) Prefix *peng-*

The prefix *peng-* is one of the productive verb nominalizations in Bahasa Indonesia. It comes with the allomorphs *pem-*, *pen-*, *peny-*, *pe-*, and *penge-*, depending on the phonological features of the initial sound of the verb it derives from ([Moeliono et al., 2017](#)). For example, *pem-* is attached to verbs beginning with labial sounds such as /p/ or /b/, as in *pemakai* (*peng* + *pakai*) 'user' or *pembaca* (*peng* + *baca*) 'reader.' *Pen-* is attached to the alveolar sounds like /t/, or /d/; *peny-* is attached to the verbs beginning in alveolar fricative or palatal sounds such as /s/, /c/, or /ð/; *pe-* goes with verbs beginning with nasal or lateral sounds such as /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /w/, or /y/, while *penge-* is attached to one-syllable verbs, and *peng-* as the core morpheme works with other sounds.

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The prefix *peng-* (and its allomorph) occurs with intransitive verbs beginning with *meng-* (and its allomorph), suggesting the meaning of having a habit, as in the verbs' meanings. For example, when the verb *membolos* (*mem* + *bolos*) 'to play truant' is nominalized with *peng-*, it becomes *pembolos* 'the ones with the habits of doing play truant.' It can also occur with transitive verbs beginning with *meng-* (and its allomorph), indicating a person who carries out the activities mentioned in the base, as in *penulis* 'writer' from the verb *menulis* (*me* + *tulis*) 'to write.' Although most of the agents mentioned in the subject of the noun derived by prefix *peng-* are animate, it can occur with an inanimate subject as well, as in the example of *pencetak* 'molder' which comes from the verb *mencetak* (*men*+*cetak*) 'to mold.'

(ii) Prefix *pe-*

The prefix *pe-* has the allomorphs *per-* and *pel-*, depending on the initial sounds of the verbs it attaches to. The prefix *pe-* here is not similar to any of the allomorphs of *peng-*. While prefix *peng-* derives nouns from the verb with prefix *meng-*, prefix *pe-* here derives nouns from the verb with prefix *ber-* as in the example of *pedagang* 'trader' which is a nominalization of verb *berdagang* (*ber*+*dagang*) 'to trade' or *pertanda* 'sign' which comes from verbs *bertanda* (*ber*+*tanda*) 'have a sign'. Both prefixes, *peng-* and *pe-*, are used in nominalizing verbs to indicate that a person carries out the activities mentioned in the base. Some verb nominalizations may result in nouns with similar meanings. For example, the noun *pesaing* 'competitor' can be derived from the verb *bersaing* 'to compete' and *menyaingi* 'to compete' by adding *pe-* to the former to become *pesaing* (*pe*+*saing*) "competitor" and adding *pen-* to the latter to become *pesaing* (Sneddon et al., 2010).

Another important feature of prefix *pe-* is that it can be distinguished from prefix *pen-* (one of the allomorphs of prefix *peng-*) to define the function of the arguments required by the verbs that derive it. Therefore, the noun *penyuruh* 'the one who gives order' is differentiated from the noun *pesuruh* 'the one who receives the order' in the sense that *penyuruh* 'the one who gives the order' refers to the agent and *pesuruh* 'the one who receives the order' refers to the patient, as explained in the introduction part of this article. Hence, prefix *pen-* refers to the actor conducting the action of *meng-* and therefore functions as the agent, as in the example of *penyuruh* 'the one who gives order', *penatar* 'trainer', or *penunjuk* 'indicator,' as it attaches to the verb *menyuruh* 'to give order', *menatar* 'to train', and *menunjuk* 'to indicate,' respectively. On the other hand, the prefix *pe-* indicates the one who undergoes the action and therefore functions as the patient. The corresponding examples are *pesuruh* 'the one who receives the order', *petatar* 'trainee', and *petunjuk* 'indication'. In these examples, the prefix *pe-* relates to the verb beginning with *di-*, which suggests the passive forms of the verb *me-* (Sneddon et al., 2010).

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(iii) Suffix *-an*

Verb nominalization with the suffix *-an* is formed from the verb with the confix *me-...-i* or *me-...-kan*, although it is derived implicitly. For example, the noun *asinan* 'pickles' is not simply taken from the adjective *asin* 'salty' + suffix *-an*, but the adjective *asin* has been formed into a verb by adding *me-...-kan* to become *mengasinkan* 'to make salty/pickles' (Moeliono, 2017; Ekowardono, 2009).

With many verb bases, a noun derived by adding the suffix *-an* serves as the object of the verb's action. Hence, the verbs are most likely transitive. For example, the noun *lukisan* 'picture' refers to what is painted, and *makanan* 'food' refers to what is eaten. This meaning can also have further semantic implications, suggesting that something results from the action, such as *tulisan* 'writing' and *ukiran* 'carving' being the results of *menulis* 'to write' and *mengukir* 'to carve,' respectively.

Another important notion of verb nominalization with the suffix *-an* is that it can occur as the head of a phrase containing prepositions such as *terhadap* 'toward' (Sneddon et al., 2010). Thus, the noun phrase *balasan terhadap surat* 'reply of a letter' expresses the same action as the verb *membalas* 'to reply' as in *dia membalas surat itu* 'he replies to that letter.' In many constructions, however, the preposition can be omitted, becoming *balasan surat* 'reply of a letter' because the meaning it conveys is clear.

(iv) Confix *peng-...-an*

Moeliono (2017) mentions that nouns with confix *peng-...-an* are derived from transitive verbs, while others mention that some intransitive verbs may also become the base for nominalization with *peng-...-an* (Ekowardono, 2009; Sneddon, et al., 2010), as in the example of *penyeberangan* 'crossing' which is taken from the intransitive verb *menyeberang* 'to cross.' However, it is possible to argue that most intransitive verbs can be made transitive through an applicative construction by adding the confix *meng- ... -i*, or through a causative construction by adding the confix *meng- ... -kan*. For example, intransitive *jatuh* 'to fall' may be changed into transitive *menjatuhi* 'to be fallen at' or *menjatuhkan* 'to make someone(thing) fall.' Therefore, it is possible that nominalization with *peng- ... -an* is derived from transitive verbs.

Similar to prefix *peng-*, confix *peng- ... -an* also has six allomorphs: *pem-...-an*, *pen-...-an*, *peny-... -an*, *pe-... -an*, *penge-... -an*, and *peng-... -an*, with the same strategies depending on the initial verb sound. The confix *peng- ... -an* creates nouns with the meaning of action, process, and how an action is carried out, depending on the type of verb used as the base and how it is used in a sentence (Moeliono, 2017). The nouns *pemukulan* 'beating',

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pemberdayaan 'empowerment', and pemberhentian 'dismissal' are derived from the verbs memukul 'to beat', memberdayakan 'to empower', and memberhentikan 'to dismiss'; therefore, these nouns suggest the meanings of 'acting'. Other examples of nouns such as *pembelajaran* 'learning', *penulisan* 'writing', or *pengurusan* 'handling' are derived from verbs that suggest duration or the process; therefore, the meaning of the noun also suggests the meaning of the process.

(v) Confix *per-...-an*

The confix *per-...-an* works the same way as the prefix *pe-*. Hence, it also has allomorphs similar to those of the prefix *pe-*, namely *pe-...an*, *per-...-an*, and *pel-...-an*. As with the prefix *pe-*, nouns derived by confix *per-...-an* are mostly taken from intransitive verbs beginning with the prefix *ber-*, suggesting the meaning of things or the result of the action stated by the verbs (Moeliono 2017). For example, the nouns *pergerakan* 'movement', *percakapan* 'conversation', and *perkenalan* 'introduction' are derived from the verbs *bergerak* 'to move', *bercakap-cakap* 'to converse', and *berkenalan* 'to introduce', respectively. Hence, *pergerakan* means the result of *bergerak*, and *percakapan* is the result of *bervakap-cakap*. Some confix *per-...-an* may occur with transitive verbs, suggesting the meaning of the act of doing what the verbs indicate. For example, the noun *pertolongan* 'help' means the actions of *menolong* 'to help.'

(vi) Confix *ke...an*.

Verb nominalization by adding the confix *ke-...-an* can be formed from intransitive verbs such as *datang* 'to arrive' or *hidup* 'to live' to become *kedatangan* 'arrival' and *kehidupan* 'life', respectively. These deverbal nouns suggest meanings as stated in the base verbs. With the same meaning, some nouns can also be formed from the verb with the prefix *ber-* or *ter-*, as in *berangkat* 'to depart' to become *keberangkatan* 'departure' or *terbatas* 'limited' to become *keterbatasan* 'limitation.' This form of nominalization can also be derived from a compound noun, such as *ikut-serta* 'to participate,' becoming *keikut-sertaan* 'participation.' Some modal verbs can also be the base verb of the nominalization strategy, such as the modal verb of *boleh* 'may' to form the noun *kebolehan* 'ability/permission' or the modal verb of *harus* 'must' to form the noun *keharusan* 'necessity/a must' (Sneddon et al., 2010).

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Ambiguity in Nominalization of Bahasa Indonesia Verbs

Nominalization of verbs often creates ambiguity because when a verb is turned into a noun, the process can obscure the interpretation of the argument (Haegeman, 1994). This ambiguity not only affects the structure but also the meaning, as the meaning of the verb nominalization is carried out in the phrase and clause in which the deverbal noun is embedded.

a. Ambiguity caused by derivational overlap

The first notion of ambiguity refers to ambiguity in its structures, because at this level it highlights the relationship between syntax and its meaning at the short construction, for example, in the noun phrase construction. The nominalization of a verb in Bahasa Indonesia is constrained by the meaning of the verb used as its base, since the lexical operation is derived from the verb. In Bahasa Indonesia, however, nominalizations are not always derived from base verbs. This may have been generated from the base verb's inflectional forms. For example, the base verb of *temu* 'meet/find' can be formed into *bertemu* 'to meet' before it undergoes nominalization to *pertemuan* 'meeting.' The same word, *temu*, can also be used to form *menemukan* 'to find' before it undergoes nominalization to become *penemuan* 'finding' (Moeliono, 2017). Taking a look at the word further, the derived nouns from *temu* clarify whether *temu* is meant to be *bertemu* 'to meet' or *menemukan* 'to find'.

However, not all multi-meaning base verbs can be easily defined by converting them into different verbs with different affixes. Some base verbs are nominalized in the same way, although the derived verbs have different forms and functions. The following examples illustrate that similar nominalization can be generated from both transitive and intransitive verbs.

2. a. <i>mendarat</i> 'to land' INT	<i>mendaratkan</i> 'to land' TRAN	<i>pendaratan</i> 'landing' N
b. <i>berhenti</i> 'to stop' INT	<i>memberhentikan</i> 'to stop/to dismiss' TRAN	<i>pemberhentian</i> 'stop/dismissal' N
c. <i>menyerah</i> 'to surrender' INT	<i>menyerahkan</i> 'to surrender' TRAN	<i>penyerahan</i> 'submission' N

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In example 2, it is clear that the noun (N) resulting from verb nominalization refers to both intransitive and transitive verbs. This occurs because intransitive verbs can be made transitive through the causative construction (Dixon, 2012) by adding the confix *me-...-kan* to the base verb. This morphological process, although affects the construction of the verb as well as its meaning, it does not necessarily affect the N derived from the verb (V) as can be seen in the following examples

3. a. *Pesawat mendarat* ' -- *pendaratan pesawat*
 Plane Subj.A landed V- INT landing N plane N
 'the airplane landed' 'the landing of the plane'
- b. *Pilot mendaratkan pesawat* -- *pendaratan pesawat*
 Pilot Subj.A V-TRANS plane Obj.P landing N plane N
 'the pilot landed the plane' 'the landing of the plane'

Another ambiguity in the structure of verb nominalization lies in nouns derived from different transitive verbs. Some nouns have the same forms, although they are derived from different verbs. The noun *penerangan* 'lighting/explaining' may have different meanings depending on the verb from which it is derived. It means lighting when the base verb is *menerangi* 'to give light', and it means explaining when the base verb is *menerangkan* 'to explain.' On a similar note, the noun *penembakan* 'shooting' may be derived from either the verb *menembak* (seseorang/sesuatu) 'to shoot at someone/thing' or the verb *menembakkan* (*peluru*) 'to shoot out (bullet)'. However, when taken into account, it is more likely that the noun will take a complement in accordance with the verbs *menerangi* and *menembak*, as in the examples *penerangan jalan* 'street lightning' and *penembakan terpidana* 'convict shooting.' The same case applies to the nominalization of verbs with the confix *per-...-an*. The noun *peringatan* 'reminder/commemoration' may be derived from two different transitive verbs: *mengingat* 'to remind' and *memperingatkan* 'to commemorate'. Only when the noun is used with its complement, then it will be able to distinguish its meaning as in *peringatan ibunya* 'her mother reminder' and *peringatan hari Kartini* 'commemoration of Kartini's day'

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b. Ambiguity in its arguments

i. Ambiguity caused by argument omission

The nominalization of verbs (deverbal nouns) may create ambiguity because the relation of the argument following the verb-derived noun may be unclear, with the argument functioning either as agent or theme/patient. For example, in NP *penembakan polisi* 'police shooting', it may mean it is the police who shoots, or it is the police who is being shot.

The basic principles of argument relations rely on the verb or predicate of a sentence. According to [Haegeman \(1994\)](#), the structure of an argument consists of two parts: the internal structure, which is the argument governed by a verb. In most cases, it will be placed in the object function or the theme/patient in argument terms. The second structure is the external structure, which is most likely to take the form of a subject or agent. Structurally, it is the internal structure that creates meaning as shown in the following examples

4. a. I cut my finger
- b. I cut the vegetables evenly

In Example 4, the occurrence of the object affects the subject's thematic role, whereas the choice of the subject does not affect the object's thematic role. In 4a. The choice of my finger makes the subject I become the experiencer, while on 4b. It is clear that the subject I functions as the agent, as the object 'vegetables' suggests.

In a deverbal noun, the meaning of the noun is taken from the base word used as the basis of the nominalization, that is, the meaning of the verb being derived. Therefore, the meaning of the nouns, as well as the argument structure, will resemble those of the verbs. Thus, in X does Y, the verb phrase (VP)-internal NP will be strongly structured, and this will affect the noun derived from the verb. Therefore, if the VP of *menulis buku* 'to write a book' is formed into an NP, the closest possible structure should be *penulisan buku* 'the writing of a book' because the VP-internal NP suggests that meaning. Other examples like *penembakan terpidana* 'the convict shooting', *kenaikan harga* 'the rise of the price' *perkebunan tembakau* 'tobacco plantation' or *peringatan hari Kartini* 'Kartini commemoration day' suggest no ambiguity in the meanings because the NP required by the VP internal argument is inanimate as in *harga*, 'price' *tembakau*, 'tobacco' or *hari Kartini* 'Kartini's Day'.

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Quoting Tomlin's work, [Song \(2001\)](#) gives the example of the animacy hierarchy, stating that the NP that is more animated will precede the NP that is less animated. Since the NP in these examples is less topical because it is inanimate, the tendency for it to function as the patient is also higher. The first example *penembakan terpidana* 'convict shooting' has *terpidana* 'convict' as the NP required by the VP internal construction. Although *the term 'terpidana' 'convict' is animated, its meaning conveys a sense of patient, as its powerless connotation* puts him in the patient position. This can be distinguished from NP *perkebunan Pak Budi* 'Pak Budi's plantation'. This NP shows a clear agent function because semantically, Pak Budi owns the plantation.

Speakers of a language may use a particular nominalization strategy to determine whether the NP following the deverbal noun functions as the agent or patient. [Payne \(2003\)](#) calls this the participant nominalization which is divided into agent nominalization and patient nominalization. Some agent nominalizations can be inferred from their meanings because they generally refer to the characteristics of activities, such as *penulis* 'writer' or *penari* 'dancer'. On the other hand, patient nominalization refers to the patient of nominalized verbs. In English, we are familiar with the noun *employee*, which refers to the patient, whereas the noun *employer* refers to the agent. In Bahasa Indonesia, such a counterpart can also be found in the example of *penyuruh* "the one who gives the order" and *pesuruh* "the one who receives order", *penatar* "trainer" and *petatar* "trainee" as explained in Section 3.1. (ii) above. Hence, in Bahasa Indonesia, the prefix *pen-* indicates a noun functioning as an agent, and the prefix *pe-* indicates a noun functioning as a patient. This is in line with the corpus analysis of *pen-* and *pe-* which shows that although both *pe-* and *pen-* may create agents, patients, or instruments, the semantic roles of *pen-* show that *pen-* is more productive for the instrument, whereas *pe-* shows more productivity for patient nouns ([Denistia & Baayen, 2018](#)).

Such findings are in line with how gerund constructions in English retain verbal properties, including argument realization and aspectual interpretation ([Grimshaw, 1990](#)). This is similar in a way that Bahasa Indonesia nominalization may preserve argument structure while functioning syntactically as nouns. However, nominalization in Bahasa Indonesia is more flexible in omitting the arguments, especially in journalistic discourse where contextual coverability is high.

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ii. Ambiguity resolved via semantic hierarchy

At the clause level, verb nominalization also creates ambiguity in meaning. In the process of verb nominalization, the structure of the arguments is not always as simple as when the verb is used merely as the predicate or at the phrase level. The following example shows that, in a clause, when the verb is derived into a noun, the meaning is not as easily defined as in the original structure, where it relates to the agent and patient.

5. a. *Senior* *menganiaya* *siswa SMK*
 ‘Senior’ Subj.Sg.A. ‘beat’ V.TRAN K student’ Obj. Patient
 ‘Senior beats the SMK student’
- b. *penganiayaan yang dilakukan oleh senior terhadap siswa SMK...*
 ‘Beating’ ‘which is carried out’ ’by’ ‘senior’ ‘to’ SMK student
 Subj.N rel.Cl. P N.agent P O.patient
 ‘The beating committed by senior to SMK student...’

Example 5 shows that when the verb *menganiaya* ‘to beat’ is formed into the noun *penganiayaan* ‘beating’, the clause structure changes to retain the meaning. Thus, it is not always easy to determine whether a noun will take the patient argument, as in the case of the verb at the phrase level. For some ambiguous noun constructions, such as *pemukulan polisi* ‘police beating’, it is unclear whether the police have been hit (*pemukulan pada polisi*) or the police have hit (*pemukulan oleh polisi*). When the phrase is given without context, it is very difficult to define its actual meaning; thus, ambiguity can be cleared by looking at the sentences where the phrase occurs, or even the whole context in which it occurs.

In Bahasa Indonesia, a particular preposition, as in example 5, is often omitted, which results in the noun phrase *penganiayaan siswa SMK* ‘SMK student beating’ and, at the same time, creates ambiguity. Without the context, it will be difficult to define whether it is *penganiayaan terhadap siswa SMK* ‘the beating of the SMK student’ or *penganiayaan oleh siswa SMK* ‘the beating by SMK student’. The following data taken from Kompas.com, shows deverbal nouns used without the preposition (for the sake of analysis, the preposition is given in brackets):

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6. a. *Penganiayaan (terhadap) siswa SMK* 'SMK student beating'
b. *Pengabdian (pada) masyarakat* 'community service'
c. *Penguatan (pada) perempuan* 'women empowerment'
d. *Pelantikan (pada) mantan KSAD* 'inauguration of former KSAD'
e. *Pelantikan (pada) Andika* 'Andika inauguration'
f. *Penghargaan (bagi) Sartono* 'Sartono reward'

The context in which the phrases are used in the sentences shows that the clauses omit the preposition showing beneficiary semantic roles of *terhadap* 'toward', *pada* 'to', or *bagi* 'for.' The existence of these prepositions is determined by the clause's meaning, as provided by the context. Hence, in this sense, there is no ambiguity. However, when the preposition is omitted and the NP is left without its context, ambiguity results. Example 5b is rewritten to illustrate this case. In *penganiayaan (yang dilakukan oleh) senior (terhadap) siswa SMK*, 'the beating (which is committed (by) senior) (to) SMK student', the clause *yang dilakukan oleh senior* 'which is committed by senior' can be omitted because it functions as an adjunct, to give extra information, and all of the prepositions *oleh* 'by' and *terhadap* 'to' can also be removed without affecting the meaning. Hence, it will leave NP of *Penganiayaan siswa SMK* 'SMK student beating.' The same process was applied in the construction of NP with prepositions showing locative semantic roles of *dari* 'from' or *oleh* 'by' and instrument semantic roles of *secara* 'by' or *dengan* 'through,' as shown by the example of data 7 below:

7. a. *Penghargaan (dari) Menteri* 'reward (from) the minister'
b. *Pemberhentian (dari) panglima TNI* 'the dismissal (from) TNI Commander'
c. *Kewirausahaan (oleh) perempuan* 'the entrepreneurship (by) women'
d. *Penunjukan (oleh) presiden* 'the appointment (by) the president'
e. *Pertimbangan (dari) MA* 'the consideration (from) MA'
f. *Pelatihan (secara) online* 'the training (through) online'

In all the examples in 7 above, the prepositions are optional, whether they can be used or not, as the meanings derived are already clear. For example, in 7a. *Penghargaan (dari) Menteri* 'reward (from) the minister' suggests that it is a reward from the minister, as it is typical for ministers to give rewards. The same thing occurs in the other examples, that *pemberhentian panglima TNI* 'the dismissal (from) TNI Commander' suggests that it is the TNI commander

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that is being dismissed. Also in *pelatihan online* ‘the training (through) online’, suggests that it is the training that is conducted online. Hence, the need for the propositions in such phrases is optional. The data from the news report also shows inconsistencies in their use in sentences. Even within the same text, one sentence may use a preposition to introduce the N in the NP, but the other sentences omit the preposition, even though they have the same meaning. Thus, it is understood that the readers in general understand the meaning derived from such phrases.

Some reasons may be used to argue for the optionality of preposition use in such constructions. First, the construction of NP is always related to that of VP, in the sense that the projection schema developed for VP serves as the basis for analysis and can be applied to all categories (Haegeman 1994^[15]). Hence, when a transitive VP takes an NP as its object or complement, the NP also needs a complement to complete its head N. In Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) languages like Bahasa Indonesia, the head noun always precedes its complement. It may take the form of a relative clause or Prepositional Phrase (PP), as shown in sentence 5b above, which is rewritten here as *Penganiayaan (yang dilakukan (oleh) senior) (terhadap) siswa SMK* ‘the beating (which is committed (by) senior) (to) SMK student.’ to SMK students’ in that clause is a PP functioning as an adjunct that is not necessarily needed to complete the clause. Unlike the NP (*siswa SMK*) ‘SMK student’ functioning as an object in sentence 5a, which must not be omitted because without it the sentence is not complete due to the argument function needed by the verb, adjuncts occur in a clause only to give additional information; the arguments do not require their existence of the verb (Haegeman, 1994). In that sense, it allows speakers to omit prepositions because it does not affect the overall meaning created by the context.

Second, semantic roles may contribute to the clarity of the phrase. The function of the different verbs may also serve a different role in deciding the argument needed by the verb. The relationship between agent and object can sometimes be defined by the prototype of the meaning carried by the verb. Based on the animacy hierarchy, when the arguments required by V are animate and inanimate, it is easier to determine that the deverbal noun refers to the patient, as explained in Section i. This problem may arise when both arguments needed by V are animate, which can create ambiguity in the meaning of the deverbal noun. However, for certain nouns, the semantic meaning is clear even when the preposition is omitted. For example, in the NPs *pengeroyokan korban* ‘victim beating’ and *pengeroyokan warga* ‘people

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beating', there is no ambiguity in meaning because the semantic type of N *pengeroyokan* 'beating' is AFFECT, which requires a particular Target that will function as the patient (Dixon, 2010). The word *korban* 'victim' here means the patient targeted by the verb *mengeroyok* 'to beat'; thus, the preposition *pada* 'on', as in *pengeroyokan (pada) korban* 'beating (on) the victim', can be easily omitted. Likewise, the AFFECT semantic type in N *pengeroyokan* also requires the Agent to function as the actor. Semantically, *pengeroyokan* means beating carried out by many people; thus, the word *warga* 'people' in its NP refers to the agent, since *warga* suggests the plural meaning of people. Therefore, the preposition *oleh* 'by' as in *pengeroyokan (oleh) warga* 'beating (by) the people' can be easily omitted as well.

Third, there is a tendency for practicality in the use of Bahasa Indonesia. When the meaning is clearly suggested, unnecessary words are not used. For example, the N *pegolf* 'golf player' is used to refer to *pemain golf* 'golf player' as the verb deriving it is *bermain golf* 'to play golf' (Moeliono 2017^[18]). A more complicated example is the N *asinan* 'pickles' that was not taken from the adjective *asin* 'salty' and suffix -an; instead, it was taken from the verb *mengasinkan* 'to make salty/pickles'. This is another example of how Bahasa Indonesia speakers tend to omit the clearly intended meaning in their utterances. The same reason also applies to the omission of the preposition showing the relation of deverbal nouns with their agent or patient. As the meaning is clearly suggested in the sentence or the text, the tendency to omit the preposition is higher, as speakers want to make the sentence shorter and more practical.

CONCLUSION

The nominalization of verbs in Bahasa Indonesia is morphologically realized by adding six affixes to verbs: the prefix *peng-*, *pe-*, the suffix *-an*, the confix *peng-...-an*, the *per-...-an*, and the *ke-...-an*, along with their allomorphs. The basic rule is that nouns derived from verbs bear the meaning of the verbs; however, the relationship is not always straightforward, as nominalization may be taken not only from the base verbs but also from derived verbs, both transitive and intransitive. This morphological flexibility generates structural and semantic complexity, which then leads to ambiguity in both structure and meaning. Ambiguity in the structure of verb nominalization arises because the same noun can be derived from both transitive and intransitive verbs, and the same noun can be derived from the same transitive verbs with different derivations. It may also occur when referring to a noun functioning as an agent or as a patient. Furthermore, ambiguity extends to the level of semantic

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role assignment. Nominalization of verbs may take an agentive or patientive interpretation, and it is difficult to determine whether the noun attached to the nominalized verb functions as an agent or a patient because there is a tendency to omit the preposition between the noun and the nominalized verb. There are three reasons justifying why the preposition in such construction may be omitted: first, the function of the prepositional phrase in that clause is as an adjunct, hence its existence in the sentence is not an obligation; second, the semantic roles of the noun and deverbal noun may contribute to the clarity of the phrase; and third, the practicality of usage makes the speakers omit unnecessary elements of the clause as long as the intended meaning is understood. Taken together, the ambiguity in the nominalization of verbs in Bahasa Indonesia is mostly an inherent outcome of the morphological processes, argument realization, and pragmatic constraints.

CRedit AUTHOR STATEMENT

Dwi Wulandari: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft Preparation - Editing. **Fx. Sawardi:** Data curation, Reviewing.

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