

Aspect of Compounding and Affixation in Bassa-Nge

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ABSTRACT

This paper delves into the complex and fascinating realm of word formation in language, with a particular emphasis on compounding and affixation in Bassa-Nge. By exploring the intricacies of these morphological processes, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how words are formed, modified, and used in communication. The study examines the theoretical foundations of compounding and affixation, tracing their evolution and development in the Bassa-Nge language. It also investigates the cognitive, social, and cultural factors that influence the use of these word formation strategies, highlighting their significance in shaping the lexicon and grammar of Bassa-Nge. This paper investigates various aspects of compounding and affixation, including types of compounds: phonologically conditioned, endocentric, exocentric, and numerical compounds. It also explains the affixation processes present in the language: prefixes, infixes, and suffixes, and their effects on word meaning. Although English barely makes use of infixes, Bassa-Nge lends itself to this process of affixation. Morphological analysis is carried out to break down words into their constituent morphemes to understand their internal structure, meaning, and relationships. Hockett (1954)'s Item and Arrangement and Word and Paradigm models are employed in the morphological analysis. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of word formation strategies in language, providing valuable insights for linguists, language teachers, and language learners.

Keywords: compounding, affixation, morphology, Bassa-Nge, word

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an explication of the aspect of compounding and affixation as morphological processes in the Bassa-Nge language. This is hinged on the fact that morphology is a tenet of linguistics among others like phonetics, phonology, semantics, syntax, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. It deals with word formation. Also, the most basic concept of morphology is the concept of "word" (Haspelmath and Sims 2013:15). This is why Olagunju (2021) argued that "Words are the oxygen and carbon dioxide with which languages breathe. Without words, no language is complete, and without word formation processes like compounding and affixation, words cannot be formed in any language."

Morphological processes (word formation processes), also referred to as morphological patterns or morphological systems by some linguists such as Haspelmath and Sims (2013:34), are changes that occur in words when they are found in certain environments or placed side-by-side with other words or when the formation of words is realized.

This study titled "Aspect of Compounding and Affixation in Bassa-Nge" seeks to bring to light these word formation processes in the language. That is, how words in Bassa-Nge are formed through compounding and affixation.

Compounding is the creation of new words by joining two free morphemes. Compounding is important because all languages use it. According to Olaoye (2009:9), "A compound is a unit consisting of two or more bases." There is no one formal criterion that can be used for a general definition of compounds in English. We

Affixation, on the other hand, is when a bound morpheme is added to a base or root word. An affix is a bound morpheme, meaning it cannot function as an independent word. The three major types of affixation are examined, namely: prefix, infix, and suffix, which are also called affixes.

Affixation is a process; an affix is the morpheme (the smallest unit of a language that carries meaning – the building blocks of words) added to a base or root word to form new words.

Ferdinand de Saussure, who revamped linguistics in the 19th century and tailored it towards the history of languages, proposed that linguistics should focus more on synchronic analysis; that is, describing language as a whole at a particular point in time. Through this, linguistics took another route during the Structural Linguistics era and influenced the pattern of practice of language teaching methodology in the 20th and 21st centuries.

As an indigene of Bassa-Nge, putting out this study would ensure the language is well documented for future use or reference. The Bassa-Nge language exhibits various morphological processes such as reduplication, affixation, conversion, and compounding to create new words and modify their meanings. These processes play a significant role in the structure and evolution of the language, allowing speakers to express a wide range of ideas and concepts.

In addition, in projecting morphological process operation in the Bassa-Nge language, and conceding that the operations of human communication reveal the phenomenon of language universality, we accept that there are some regular and natural processes involved in word formation across languages. Some schools of thought and many scholars of morphology argue that the actual principles and processes determining the derivation and existence of basic linguistic forms vary with languages.

The Bassa-Nge

The Bassa-Nge is an ethnic group in Nigeria that traces its history back to 1805. They originally inhabited Gbara, which was formerly the capital of the Nupe Kingdom. The Bassa-Nge migrated from their homeland in Bida due to a dynastic feud around 1820. They were formerly the largest of the Nupe groups, with a population of about 15,000 in 1820 before they dispersed throughout Nigeria. They speak two languages: the Nupe-Tako dialect of the Nupe language of the Volta-Niger languages and the Bassa-Nge (or Bassa-Nupe) dialect of the Basa language in the Kainji languages (all part of the Niger-Congo and Benue-Congo group of West African languages).

They belong to the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo family. The Bassa-Nge traditional ruler is called Etsu, unlike the Etsu Nupe in Nupe. The language is not similar to that of the Bassa Nkomo, though they live in the same geographical area. The Bassa-Nge can be found near the Niger River and the confluence of River Benue. They live in Bassa Local Government and the majority reside in Lokoja.

Professor Nadel, in his book “A Black Byzantium,” argued that “the Nupe Kingdom reached its zenith during the reign of Etsu or King Mu’azu (1778–1795) and that after his death in 1795, there was a dynastic struggle for the legitimate successor to the throne, and that the claim of Jimada was disputed by his cousin Majiya II.”

This, according to Professor Nadel, led to the split of the kingdom into two parts. He said while Jimada reigned in Gbara, the ancient city capital, Majiya II built for himself a new capital in Raba. Nadel further said that it was as a result of the inter-tribal war between the forces of Jimada and Majiya II that a group of over 15,000 people, who now call themselves Bassa-Nge, migrated from Gbara.

The Bassa (Nge) were simply known and called Bassa, a shortened form of the Nupe sentence “BA BO SA,” meaning “here is nice” or “here is beautiful” or “here is suitable.” The question that naturally follows is “for what?” and the answer naturally is “for settling down or for living in.” The present Etsu of Bassa-Nge in Bassa is Brig. Abu Ali. One among the children of the incumbent Etsu Bassa-Nge, Col. Muhammad Abu Ali, was the

soldiers. The Bassa-Nge people have their traditional ruler at Gboloko, and the traditional ruler title is called "Etsu Bassa-Nge." The present Etsu of Bassa-Nge in Bassa is Rtd. Brig. Abu Ali.

The Problem

Bassa Nge is one of the languages of the minority in Kogi State of Nigeria. As a result of this development, little or no attention has been paid to studying the language, and this poses a risk of endangerment and possible extinction of the language. It is on this premise that this current research takes a step forward by bringing to light how compounding and affixation aid word formation in Bassa Nge. The morphology and morphological processes involved in Bassa Nge are understudied by the indigenous native speakers of the language and linguists.

As noted by Olagunju (2021), appeals had been made by specialists, educationalists, and linguists such as Tinuoye (1991) and Banjo (1995) on the need for more research works in the field of linguistics, especially as it concerns indigenous languages in Nigeria for rescue from extinction. The goal of this study is to break new grounds on word formation processes, with focus on compounding and affixation in Bassa Nge.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to explicate the aspects of compounding and affixation in Bassa Nge. Its specific objectives are to:

1. Explore the significance of compounding and affixation in the grammar and vocabulary of Bassa Nge.
2. Analyze the ways Bassa Nge combines morphemes to form new words.
3. Examine the process of compounding and affixation in Bassa Nge.

Theoretical Orientation

This work presents a critical appraisal of the theory of verbal compounding proposed by Selkirk (1981). According to her, verbal compounds are "endocentric adjective or noun compounds whose head adjective or noun (respectively) is morphologically complex, having been derived from a verb, and whose non-head constituent is interpreted as an argument of the head adjective or noun." Selkirk presents her theory of verbal compounding as part of a more general theory of compounding. The latter theory, in turn, is presented to illustrate basic assumptions of her still more comprehensive theory of word structure. For Selkirk (1981:248), then, the term "verbal compound" "simply designates a group of compounds classified according to the type of semantic relation one has between the head word and the non-head word."

Also, it hinges on compounding and affixation as part of the morphological process of word formation in Nigerian languages. The fact that words form the basis of morphology cannot be ignored. This being said, it means all spoken languages of the world should have morphology.

As established, without words there is no morphological process (compounding and affixation), and without these morphological processes, there will be no complete words.

Two models of Hockett's (1954) three approaches, supported by Atkinson (1982), were employed:

1. **Items and Arrangement (IA):** which involves only the assumption that there exist morphs, and these morphs are arranged in particular ways in accordance with the tactical rules of the language.
2. **Word and Paradigm:** which is couched entirely in terms of word forms. Thus, every language has a system of morphemic variations, which is correlated with a parallel system of variation in the environment.

Crystal (1967) built upon Hockett's concept of Items, emphasizing...This same approach was further expanded by David Crystal (2008:314), where he posits:

"Morphological analysis may take various forms. One approach is to make a distributional study of the morphemes and morphemic variants occurring in words (the analysis of morph-tactic arrangements), as in item- and arrangement models of description. Another approach sets up morphological processes or operations, which see the relationships between word forms as one replacement (e.g., replace the /e/ of take with the /ã/ of took), as in item- and process models."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs the descriptive survey research design. Data were elicited from a population of twenty-five respondents in Lokoja and Emiwo speech communities through random and purposeful sampling techniques. Respondents were selected using demographic variables of sex, age, religion, and level of education. Fifteen males and ten females were interviewed. These subjects were divided into two groups: one consisted of those who have been exposed to formal English learning and could speak and use Bassa Nge language correctly. Group two comprised those who have no formal education but could use the language correctly. Each subject was required to speak freely on tape about compounding and affixation and provide numerous examples in the language.

In addition to this, the primary method of data collection was employed to elicit information from available previous studies in the language. The elicitation instrument used for the collection of data in this research was a face-to-face interview to elicit free conversation from the respondents. The production was recorded on audio tape and written down with pen and jotter for the purpose of retention on the part of the researchers. Data are descriptively transcribed and translated into English for better understanding.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Compounding in Bassa-Nge

Compounding is a morphological process in which two or more separate words are combined to form a new compound word. The meaning of the new word is not entirely predictable based on the components that make up the word. Different lexical categories can be combined to form compound words. There are noun-noun compounds, adjective-noun compounds, noun-verb compounds, verb-verb compounds, adjective-adjective compounds, etc. When the two compounded words are in the same category, the derived compound will be in that same category.

Compounds are particularly interesting linguistic constructions for a number of reasons. First, they constitute an anomaly among grammatical constructions because they are "words," but at the same time exhibit a type of "internal syntax." Compounds, furthermore, represent a contact point between several crucial linguistic and non-linguistic notions such as syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships, syntax and morphology, and linguistic knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. As for the relationship between syntax and morphology, it has often been observed that compounds are the morphological constructions that are closest to syntactic constructions, to the extent that there is no general agreement on which component of the grammar is responsible for their formation.

David Crystal's perspective on compounding views it as a crucial word formation process where two or more morphemes (or words) combine to create a new, single word. This process is a common way for languages to expand their vocabulary and create words with new or nuanced meanings. However, compounds are divided into five types:

1. Phonologically conditioned
2. Endocentric
3. Exocentric
4. Numerical

Phonologically Conditioned

This refers to a type of compound word where the combination of two words is influenced by phonetic factors such as sound changes or assimilation.

1. átìn (hair) + ítì (head) = átìn ítì – “hair on the head”
2. ání (song) + íku (war) = ání íku – “war song”
3. ko (sing) + ání (song) = ko ání – “singing”
4. ágèdè (banana) + gbọ̀rọ̀n (long) = ágèdè gbọ̀rọ̀n – “plantain”
5. lẹ̀m (orange) + báká (bitter) = lẹ̀m báká – “lime orange”
6. ìyá (year) + woro (new) = ìyáworo – “new year”

Endocentric Compounds in Bassa-Nge

This type of compound has a central, dominant element (the “endocenter”) that determines the overall meaning and category of the compound. In other words, the endocenter is the head or core of the compound, and the other elements are modifiers or attributes that provide additional information. The following examples illustrate endocentric compounds:

1. ìnjìní (oil) + jùrù (red) = ìnjìní jùrù – “palm oil”
2. chígbọ̀ (wood) + ìnọ̀ (fire) = chígbọ̀ìnọ̀ – “firewood”
3. ìgì (child) + ìnzághì (female) = ìgì ìnzághì – “daughter”
4. ìgì (child) + bágì (male) = ìgì bágì – “son or male”
5. nugùchí (elder) + bágì (male) = nugùchí bágì – “elder brother”
6. nugùchí (elder) + ìnzághì (female) = nugùchí ìnzághì – “elder sister”
7. wogí (younger) + bágì (male) = wogí bágì – “younger brother”
8. nìmsaá (older person) + bágì (male) = nìmsaá bágì – “old man”
9. nìmsaá (older person) + ìnzághì (female) = nìmsaá ìnzághì – “old woman”
10. wogí (younger) + ìnzághì (female) = wogí ìnzághì – “younger sister”
11. nnọ̀kọ̀ (meat) + chígbọ̀ (wood) = nnọ̀kọ̀ chígbọ̀ – “body”
12. íku (corpse) + ju (bury) = íkuju – “burial”

In example (i), ìnjìní (oil) is the endocenter (the central or dominant element), while jùrù (red) is the modifier because it provides additional information about ìnjìní (oil). In essence, compound words that give additional information to the endocenter are modifiers.

Exocentric Compounds in Bassa-Nge

According to Olagunju (2021), these compounds do not contain an element that functions as the semantic head, which is modified by the non-head element.

1. tù (send) + ítù (work) = tùitù – “send an errand”
2. bá (come) + gì (eat) = bá gì – “come eat”

Numerical Compounds in Bassa-Nge

Based on the study at hand and the data available below, these should be referred to as numerical compounds. Having established the definition of compounding as “a morphological process in which two or more separate words are combined to form a new compound word,” it is safe to consider the data below as numerical compounds because they are about numbers.

1. kpáko (two hundred) + gubá (two) = kpáko gubá – “four hundred”
2. kpáko (two hundred) + gutá (three) = kpáko gutá – “six hundred”

4. kpáko (two hundred) + gutsù (five) = kpáko gutsù – “one thousand”

Affixation in Bassa-Nge

Affixation is the process whereby an affix is attached to a base, which may be simple (as in full, the base to which -ness is attached to yield fullness), or complex (like meditate, the base to which pre- is attached to yield premeditate). Languages that make no use of affixation at all are hard to find. In Vietnamese, where most morphs are free, bound morphs with relatively abstract meanings such as ‘not’ or ‘agent’ appear in some complex words of Chinese origin (Nguyen, 1987). However, these complex words are structurally just like others that are classified as compounds (containing only roots); besides, abstractness of meaning is not generally regarded as a sufficient reason by itself to classify a bound morph as an affix. Vietnamese is thus arguably a language with no affixation.

Logically, an affix could be attached after, before, or inside its base. All these possibilities, in fact, occur, although not with equal frequency. Other morphological processes have been brought under the umbrella of affixation too, as will be illustrated.

According to McCarthy (2006) in Herman (2015), affixation is the process for a bound morpheme that is attached or joined before, after, or within a base. It may involve a simple structure (as in happy, the base to which -ness is attached to yield happiness), or a complex structure (as in unhappy, the base to which un- is attached to yield unhappiness). The affixes are classified into prefix, infix, and suffix, but in general, there are no infixes in English. The study of affixes belongs to morphology. According to Booij (2005:4), morphology is the sub-discipline of linguistics that studies word formation. From the definition above, the researchers assume that morphology is one of the linguistic fields that studies the word formation process.

Prefixation in Bassa-Nge

Prefixation is the process of adding a prefix at the left edge of a base word, thus deriving a prefixed word.

Prefix “á”

1. + shè (lie) = áshè – “No wonder!”
2. á + bọ (where) = ábọ – “Dirty person/irritating”
3. á + gá (that) = ágá – “Visitor”
4. á + bá (sour) = ábá – “Male genital”
5. á + chuku (stick) = áchukù – “Bone”

Prefix “e”

1. é + ro (think) = ẹro – “Wild mango; also known as ọgbọno soup”

Prefix “ì”

1. ì + gọ (talk) = ìgọ – “Word”
2. ì + gị (eat) = ìgị – “Child”
3. ì + bé (come) = ìbé – “Breast”

Infixation in Bassa-Nge

Infixation in Bassa Nge is very productive, unlike in the English language, where it is very unproductive.

According to Yule (2006:58), “it is an affix that is incorporated inside another word.” Although in English, an infix can be created by inserting words in between other words, it seldom makes sense. However, in Bassa

Nge, when an infix is incorporated, it makes absolute sense. Interfixation can be found in numbers in Bassa Nge and sometimes in other words.

1. guwo (ten) + bé (plus) + inì (one) = guwo bé inì – “eleven”
2. guwo (ten) + bé (plus) + gubá (two) = guwo bé gubá – “twelve”
3. wogí (fifteen) + dì (minus) + inì (one) = wogí dì inì – “fourteen”
4. wogí (fifteen) + bè (plus) + inì (one) = wogí bè inì – “sixteen”
5. wogí (fifteen) + bè (plus) + gubá (two) = wogí bè gubá – “seventeen”
6. guwo (ten) + bè (plus) + gutá (three) = guwo bè gutá – “thirteen”
7. éshí (twenty) + dì (minus) + gubá (two) = éshí dì gubá – “eighteen”
8. éshí (twenty) + dì (minus) + inì (one) = éshí dì inì – “nineteen”
9. éshítá (sixty) + bè (plus) + guwo (ten) = éshítá bè guwo – “seventy”
10. ébo (appreciation) + gá (that) + bo = ébo gá bo – “however”

In the above examples, ‘dì’ (minus) in examples (iii, vii, and viii) translates directly to English from Bassa Nge. For example, wogí dì inì (“fourteen”) means “fifteen minus one,” and éshí dì gubá (“eighteen”) means “twenty minus two.”

Suffixation in Bassa-Nge

Suffixation is a process of adding an affix to the end of other morphemes to form a word. According to Willey (2006, p.103), a suffix is a group of letters added to the end of the base word. It frequently signifies the part of speech and sometimes adds meaning. Redwoods (2007, p.11) states that a suffix is a word ending. It is a group of letters you can add to the end of a root word. A root word stands on its own as a word, but you can make new words from it by adding endings. In conclusion, a suffix is something added to the end of a word or base word to make a new word. Adding suffixes to words can change or add to their meaning, but most importantly, they show how a word will be used in a sentence and what part of speech the word belongs to.

Examples below depict how suffixation works in Bassa Nge:

1. áfí (time) + nì (lick) = áfínì – “leaf”
2. árí (since) + lo (continuous marker) = árì lo – “forever”
3. bá (count) + gí (eat) = bágí – “male”
4. agò (hand) + lo (use) = agò lo – “right”
5. agò (hand) + pì = agò pì – “left”

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study investigates Compounding and Affixation in Bassa Nge, which are part of the morphological processes of language. Compounding allows language to create new words that convey specific meanings, often with unique connotations. Affixation, on the other hand, is a productive process in many languages, enabling speakers to create new words and convey nuanced meanings.

Based on the data available to the study and the analysis so far, the following are the major findings:

1. Bassa Nge lends itself to compounding (combining two or more stems to form new words) and affixation (attaching affixes to stems to modify meaning), among other morphological processes.
2. The language results in loan translation or calque rather than having a specific or equivalent word for certain concepts. For instance, in examples (19) of Human Needs and Fruits: Plantain – ágèdè gbòròn. In example 19, ágèdè means “banana,” while gbòròn means “long.” It results in a descriptive nature (calque) of the fruit (figuratively, “long banana”) rather than a direct translation.
3. This study proves that compounding and affixation are very effective in the language for word formation. For example, the suffix pì is added to the root or base word (agò – hand) to derive a word for “left” – [agò

4. Compounding and affixation are fundamental processes in word formation that enable languages to create words. Understanding these processes provides valuable insights into the structure and evolution of languages, with practical implications for language teaching, linguistic research, and natural language processing.

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