A Study of the Morphological Process
in Berom Language

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Abstract

This study presents a descriptive analysis of the Berom language morphological process. Data were sourced from related studies in Berom and other languages and from the intuitive knowledge of the writers who are native speakers of the language. Data analysis reveals that the morphological process in Berom is composed of affixation and compounding. The study also shows that the language has two inflectional prefixes: **be**- & **n**- that are used to mark plural noun and a derivational prefix: **n**- that is used for nominalization. Furthermore, the paper reveals that compounding in Berom can be simple or complex and asserts that simple compounding may generate a different word class while complex compounding realize nouns.

Keywords: Affixation, Berom, Compounding, Inflection, Morphology, Nominalize, Prefix

1. Introduction

A lot of linguists have discussed morphological constructions in terms of process. Morphological process is any of the operations by which the forms of words are derived from their roots (Tomori, 2005; Grimes, 2005; Mathews, 1997). In langauges generally, new words can be derived from the root of existing words in any of the following processes: affixation, compounding, reduplication, clipping or suppletion. As far as the morphological process is concerned however, every language has its own system for the derivation of new words. In the view of Mathews (1997), of these morphological operations, the most widespread throughout the languages of the world is affixation.

1.1 History and Geographical Location of Berom

Although the history of the Berom people is still not very comprehensive, Pwajok (1991) posits that the Berom migrated from Egypt after an invasion and settled around Lake Chad before they arrived Nigeria and Plateau state. The meaning of the word Berom has always been linked with the name of the Berom mystical ancestors and the word designates the language and the ethnic group of the people. Gwom (1992) confirmed that the word Berom means *the sent away*. It is presumed that the founding fathers, who were either called *worom* or *orom* (a singular form of the speaker), migrated a very long time ago from old Gobir Empire of Sokoto state to Plateau State and settled in Kabong and Riyom villages where history has confirmed that their earliest men supposedly lived. Sansi (1980) also asserted that the tribe and speakers were called *Shosho* which was a nick name derived from *Sho* their conventional word for salutation. The Berom people have been described as a small but politically prominent people who live in central Nigeria (Gwom, 1992). Predominantly, the speakers are located in the core Jos Plateau and down the low plains of Kaduna State. With a population of over 500,000 speakers, the Berom language is spoken in parts of Plateau and Kaduna States (Gwom, 1992). The language was the predominant ethnic group in the former Jos division of Plateau State. With the division of the Jos province however, the Beroms are still significantly represented. In fact, a recent survey in the *Plateau Times Magazine* has confirmed that Berom is the largest single ethnic group in Plateau state and it is significantly represented in Jos North, and constitutes the majority in Jos South, Barkin Ladi and Riyom Local Government Arears.

Gwom (1992) distinguishes seven (7) intelligible dialects in Berom language; which are spoken in the eleven districts of Berom. These districts are: Bachi, Du, Fan, Foron, Gashish, Gyel, Heipan, Kuru, Ropp, Riyom and Vwang. This work is limited to the Du dialect of the Berom language and all words cited herein are from the dialect.

1.2 Classification of Berom Language

The Berom language has been classified under the family of Niger – Congo. In his classification of African Languages, Greenberg (1966) sub classified Berom as a member of the Benue – Congo of the Niger – Kordofanian phylum. The language has a very close affinity with the Bantu language group and shows some traces of the Niger-Congo affixes. Gwom (1992) states that the language has thirteen noun classes marked by prefixes which

conforms with the typical features of noun-class system of Bantu languages.

The Berom language strictly maintains a basic word-order of Subject – Verb – Object (SVO) throughout its grammar in main declarative sentences. This is confirmed in Pwajok (1987) and illustrated in the following sentence:

(a) Ma sei rugu.

I /*Agrsg TM* buy/ shirt

S   V   O

I bought a shirt.

(b) Simi i kus ndok mɛ.

Simi /*Agrsg TM* wash/ cloths her

S   V   O

Simi is washing her cloths.

2. The Morphological Construction in Berom

The morphological construction in Berom language involves two main processes: affixation & compounding. Within these processes, each has been subcategorized as shown in Figure 1 below.
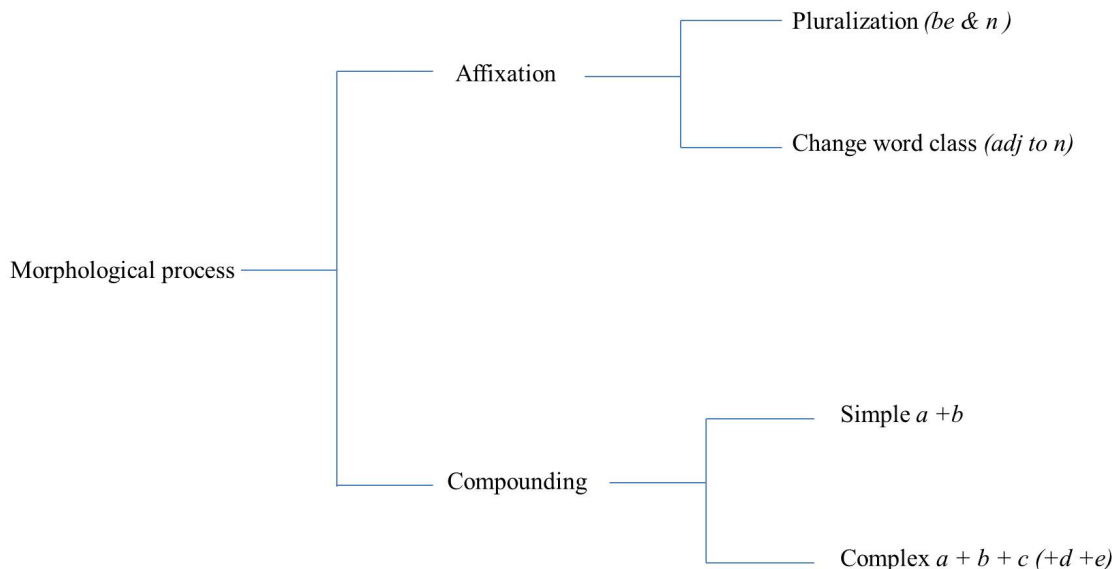

Figure 1. Morphological Construction in Berom

2.1 Affixation

From Figure 1 above, the Berom language operates only one type of affixation which is prefixation. This shows that other processes of word formation like suffixation that is found in English are not applicable in Berom. Thus, the scheme for affixation in Berom has been provided in Figure 2 below:
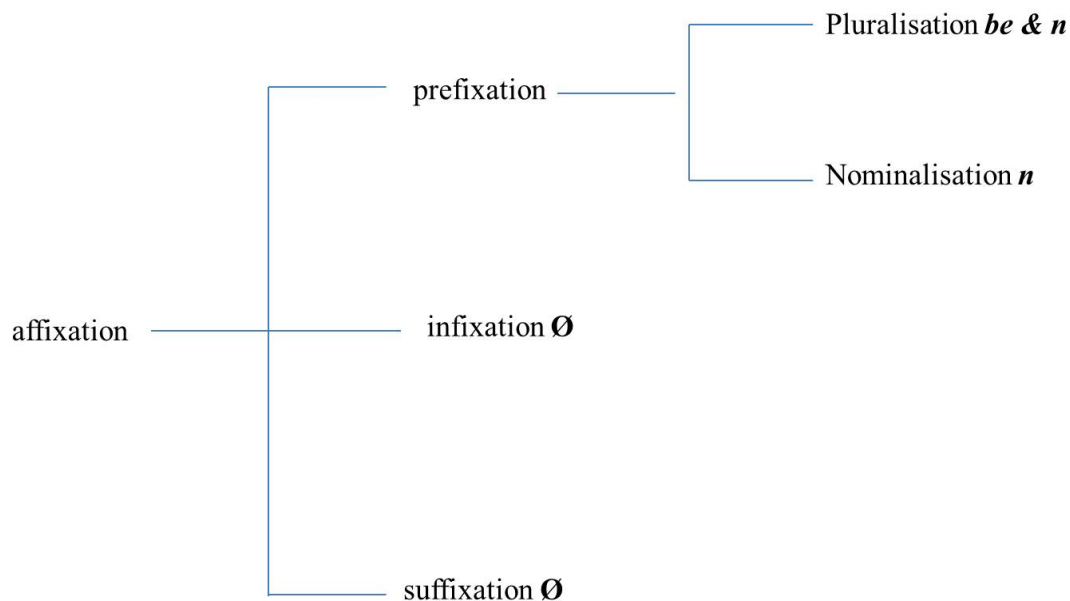

Figure 2. Affixation in Berom

From Figure 2 above, prefixation is the only process of affixation that exists in Berom langauge. Furthermore, 2 segments *n-* and *be-* are placed before nouns to generate new words. While the segements *n-* and *be-* are used as inflections to mark plural, *n-* is used to change the word class of adjectives to nouns as shown in the following:

2.1.1 *n* + noun to Mark Plural

The segment *n-* pluralizes a certain category of nouns that are concrate or abstract when it is prefixed to them as shown in the following examples:

a) shi   →   nshi

    plate   plates

b) shwɛ   →   nshwɛ

    sense   senses

c) mi → nmi

blood   blood (quantified)

d) lɔ → nlɔ

house   houses

Note: The concrate nouns in this category can either be countable or uncountable.

2.1.2 *be* + Noun to Mark Plural

As a plural marker, the morpheme *be-* attaches with only nouns that are said to be concrate and countable as shown below:

a) gwa → begwa

brother   brothers

b) yis → beyis

eye   eyes

c) nen → benen

sin   sins

d) zal → bezal

ridge   ridges

e) val → beval

breast   breasts

f) yin → beyin

tooth   teeth

Note: the segment *be-* can not be merged with abstract or uncountable nouns to mark their plural.

2.1.3 *n* + Adjective to Nominalize Adjectives

Unlike in 2.1.1 above where the nasal prefix *n-* marks the plural of certain category of nouns, the morpheme *n-* changes the word class of a segment in this section. The segment *n-* nominalizes adjectives as examplified in the sentences below:

a.   tong (fool)   →   ntong (foolishnes)

      Sɔ mɔ a si tong   Your son is a fool.

   A duna ntong mɛ i nuyel bemwad   He displayed his foolishness before the crowd.

b.   ta (sweet)   →   nta (enjoyment)

      Pyei mwo a ta.   The food is sweet.

Mi wɔk ki nta hwong i lama lɔ.   I am having a little enjoyment behind the house.

c.   tyang (well)   →   ntyang (well- being)

      Yini pwɔl tyang a.   Did you (pl) sleep well?

In ma ra bwol mwo mi kyɔ se ntyang.   If I follow your steps, my well-being will improve.

3. Compounding

Basically, a large number of Berom words are morphologically derived through compounding. Compounding in Berom can be simple or complex. Simple compounding in Berom is categorized into nine while complex compounding is categorized into five.

3.1 Simple Compounding

Simple compounding in Berom requires the combination of two words from separate word classes. Two of these grammatical classes: noun and verb; however allow the combination of words from within the same class. From the structure in Figure (1) above the combination of the word categories can generate the following words:

3.1.1 Noun + Adjective

Noun and adjective are combined in that order to generate new word but the meaning of the derived word is not realized from the combination of the independent words. The descriptive function of the adjective shifts to connotation as shown in the following:

a.	**yei**	+ **pyeng**	→	**yeipyeng**
	heart	white	→	joy
b.	**pɔlɔ**	+ **lis**	→	**pɔlɔlis**
	day	long	→	long life
c.	**bwol**	+ **pyeng**	→	**bwolpyeng**
	leg	white	→	superstitious
d.	**yei**	+ **tsiru**	→	**yeitsiru**
	heart	black	→	saddist

(Pwajok, 1991)

3.1.2 Noun + Noun

Two lexical nouns in Berom are conjoined to form a new root. Compounded words in this category are mostly nouns that are abscribed to human beings and their institutions. When an animate noun appears as the first noun, the derived word exhibits no semantic change from the independent meanings of the nouns. But when the preceeding noun is inanimate, the meaning of the realized word does not reflect the combined words as shown in the following:

a.	**ngo**	+ **hei**	→	ngohei
	mother	bush		farmer (female)
b.	**da**	+ **lɔ**	→	**dalɔ**
	head	home		breadwinner (male)
c.	**fwa**	+ **dyam**	→	**fwadyam**
	stone	money		wealthy
d.	**hwai**	+ **gul**	→	**hwaigul**
	son	breeze		wayward son/ bastard
e.	**lɔ**	+ **basa**	→	**lɔbasa**

	home		read		school

f.	**hwa**	+	**lɔ**	→	**hwalɔ**	
	woman		home		housewife	

g.	**gwom**	+	**shot**	→	**gwomshot**
	chief		case		**judge**

h.	**nta**	+	**yei**	→	**ntayei**
	enjoyment		heart		sweetheart

i.	**nta**	+	**gwi**	→	**ntagwi**
	enjoyment		firmament (heaven)		God's joy

3.1.3 Verb + Noun

In this group, active verbs are conjoined with concrate nouns to generate new words. In most cases the meaning of the realized word is not a reflection of the independent meanings of the combined words as shown below:

a.	**wuna**	+	**to**	→	**wunato**
	join		head		unite

b.	**rangas**	+	**gwi**	→	**rangasgwi**
	burn		sun		dream

c.	**tes**	+	**to**	→	**testto**
	hit		head		to practice islam

d.	**di**	+	**lɔ**	→	**dilɔ**
	see		house		a traditional wedding rite

3.1.4 Noun + Verb

A combination of these categories of words naturally has the meaning of the independent words embedded in the meaning of the derived word as depicted in the following:

a. **nu**   + **ha**   → **nuha**

    mouth   talk   opinion

b. **bwɔk**   + **basa**   → **bwɔkbasa**

    book   read   textbook

c. **hwong** + **yɔm**   → **hwongyɔm**

    girl   stress   impoverished girl

d. **ngo**   + **yɔm**   → **ngoyɔm**

    mother   stress   impoverished woman

3.1.5 Verb + Verb

This is an exceptional case of word formation in Berom. It is exceptional in the sense that when the two verbs are brought together the end result is a nominal term as examplified below:

a. **rei** + **yɔm**   → **reiyɔm**

    eat   stress   poverty

3.1.6 Verb + Preposition

The Berom verb *rei* combines with a few categories of prepositions to generate words and the realized words maintain a verbal status as seen in the following:

a. **rei**   + **jei**   → **reijei**

    eat   outside   flirt

b. **rei**   + **nuyel**   → **reinuyel**

    eat   ahead   progress

c. **rei**   + **lama**   → **reilama**

    eat   behind   regress

3.1.7 Noun + Preposition

The noun + preposition combination is one of the processes of nominalization in Berom. This word class combination is very rare as indictaed in the example below:

a. **da** + **manjei** → **damanjei**

    head   outside   ward leader

3.1.8 Pronoun + Preposition

In this category, the Berom pronoun *mwad* combines with the preposition to form a new word and the product of the derived word changes to a noun as examplified below:

a. **mwad** + **nuyel** → **mwadnuyel**

    someone   ahead   leader

3.1.9 Pronoun + Verb

Here, the Berom pronoun *mwad* combines with only active verbs to generate new words. Thus, the merging of the pronoun *mwad* with an action verb nominalizes the verb as revealed in the following examples from Sansi, 1980:

a. **mwad** + **tolo** → **mwadtolo**

    someone   sew   tailor

b. **mwad** + **jɛk** → **mwad jɛk**

    someone   write   secretary

c. **mwad** + **ra** → **mwadra**

    someone   follow   believer

d. **mwad** + **testo** → **mwadtesto**

    someone   hit   head muslim

e. **mwad** + **sele** → **mwadsele**

    someone   help   helper

3.2 Complex Compounding

In Berom, complex compounding has the same syntactic and semantic behaviour of a noun

and they are all formed with an overt imperative subject and verb. Consequently, we have identified five sentential compound formations in Berom which are examplified below:

3.2.1 N + N + N + V + N Formation

This formation is composed of a combination of four nouns and a verb in order to realize a new word. The derived word turns out to be a noun as indicated by the English noun *mosque* below:

duk + **wusal** + **bemwad** + **tes** + **to** → mosque

room   fellowship   people   hit   head

3.2.2 N + N + N + V Formation

In this category, three nouns are conjoined with a verb to create a new word. The English word *church* has been used below to explain how this is realized in Berom.

duk + **wusal** + **bemwad** + **ra** → church

room   fellowship   people   follow

3.2.3 N + V + N + N Formation

Here, the verbal item appears amist three nouns as shown below:

bwok + **basa** + **da** + **gwi** → bible

book   read   head   heaven

3.2.4 N + N + V Formation

In this formatiom, a new word is generated as a result of the merging of two nouns and a verb.

mwad + **gufa** + **sangal** → head

someone   stone   sit

3.2.5 N + V + N + V + N Formation

This type is composed of three nouns and two verbs which are merged to form a noun based word as shown below:

bwok + **basa** + **bemwad** + **tes to** → koran

book   read   people   hit head

4. Conclusion

The morphological process of Berom is composed of affixation and compounding. Two inflectional prefixes: **be-** and **n-** are used to generate plural nouns while as a derivational prefix, the segment **n-** changes the class of words from adjective to noun. Compounding in Berom is simple and complex. From the data we presented and analyzed in this study, we have concluded that simple compounding has the following structure: N+N, N+Adj, N+V, N+PP, V+N, V+V, V+PP, Prn+PP, Prn+V while complex compounding is a composition of a string of nouns and a verb. Also, while the derived word in simple compounding may take the word class of either of the merged-words or assumes a different word class the derived words in complex compounding however, assume the word class status of a noun.

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