



The Morphology of Afenmai Compounds

Beatrice Oreoluwa¹, *Acheoah John Emike²,

¹Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria

²Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Nigeria

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*Corresponding author: Acheoah John Emike

Federal University Birnin-Kebbi, Nigeria

Abstract

This study attempts an incisive investigation of morphological processes in Afenmai, one of the indigenous languages in multilingual Nigeria. The theoretical underpinning of the study is Construction Morphology Theory. The study explores English compounds to explain the morphology of Afenmai compounds – a contrastive linguistics approach. Contrastive Analysis (CA) studies two or more languages, focusing on similarities and differences in their grammars. The findings of this study are crucial: Afenmai compounds abound as different parts of speech; the positions of heads in Afenmai compounds vary, they are derivative morphemes; they carry message-driven tones; and they are formed through different morphological processes including reduplication and calquing.

Keywords: Afenmai, morphology, compound, Construction Morphology Theory, descriptive method

1. INTRODUCTION

Afenmai is part of Edo State of Nigeria. Regions of Edo State that are part of Afenmai include: Akoko-Edo, Etsako West, Owan East and Owan West Local Government Areas of Edo State of Nigeria (cf. Oseni 2003). Different dialects of Afenmai abound, and such dialects are clans-based. Most of these dialects are mutually intelligible.

Lamidi (2004) submits that “despite the numerous works on fields of language study e.g. Banjo, Ojo, Igboanusi, Abuti and Asowata, contrastive morphological studies have not been extensively treated.” Roberto Lado’s (1957) *Linguistics across Cultures* represents the beginning of applied contrastive linguistics of the modern age. Tinuoye (1991) submits that “Contrastive Analysis (CA) is a process by which two languages are compared so as to identify the areas of differences and similarities in their linguistic patterns”. Although there are other dialects of Afenmai as mentioned earlier, this study examines the Agenebode dialect which will suffice in giving the readers useful insights on the morphology of Afenmai compounds.

2. Morphology

Morphology is a linguistic study between phonology and syntax. William O. and Vide de G. V. (2004) posit that “linguists use the term “morphology” to refer to the part of the grammar that is concerned with words and word formation.” A study of compounds in any language is significant because the word is a very vital part of language; words convey meanings apart from accommodating phonemes. Like compounds, words are free morphemes that can belong to different word-classes (parts of speech). Examples of Afenmai words and their English translations are as follows:

- a. ôbō (hand);
- b. élamí (meat); and
- c. ôkogua (bush).

See Matthews (1974), Andrew Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) and Tomori (1977) for useful insights on the morphology of English.

3. Compounds

Compounds are formed by combining free morphemes. The English lexicon provides different orthographies of compounds¹. Bayer (1983) cited in Mathews (1974) classifies compounds:

1. Compound Nouns

- a. Noun + Noun: bath towel; boy-friend
- b. Verb + Noun: pickpocket; breakfast
- c. Noun + Verb: nosebleed; sunshine
- d. Verb + Verb: make-believe
- e. Adjective + Noun: deep structure; fastfood
- f. Particle + Noun: in-crowd; down-town
- g. Adverb + Noun: now generation
- h. Verb + Particle: cop-out; drop-out
- i. Phrase compounds: son-in-law

2. Compound Verbs

- a. Noun + Verb: sky-dive
- b. Adjective + Verb: fine-tune
- c. Particle + Verb: overbook
- d. Adjective + Noun: brown bag

3. Compound Adjectives

- a. Noun + Adjective: card-carrying
- b. Verb + Adjective: fail safe
- c. Adjective + Adjective: open-ended
- d. Adverb + Adjective: cross-modal
- e. Particle + Adjective: over-qualified
- f. Noun + Noun: coffee-table
- g. Verb + Noun: roll-neck
- h. Adjective + Noun: red-brick; blue collar
- i. Particle + Noun: in-depth
- j. Verb + Verb: go-go; make-believe

Scholars hold the view that the semantics of the head of a compound and its constituents is instructive in the classification of compounds. An alternative approach is to classify compounds in terms of the semantic relationship between the compound and its head. For example, in the compound “grinding-machine”, “machine” is the head word. Pius ten Hacken (2017) gives elaborate perspective on compounds:

Linguists distinguish at least three different semantic relations between the head and modifier (s) of compounds.

First, the compound represents a subtype of whatever the head represents. For instance, a “traffic cop” is a kind of cop (the head names the type and the compound names the subtype). These are called “endocentric compounds”.

Second, the compound names a subtype, but the type is not represented by either the head or the modifier in the compound. For example, “Dead head” and “pickpocket” represent types of people by denoting some distinguishing characteristics. There is typically another word, not included in the compound that represents the type of which the compound represents the subtype. In the case of “deadhead” and “pickpocket” this other word is “person” so a “Deadhead” is a person who is an enthusiastic fan of the band “The Grateful Dead”. These are called “exocentric compounds”.

Third, there are compounds in which both elements are heads; each contributes equally to the meaning of the whole and neither is subordinate to the other, for instance, “bitter sweet”. Compounds like these can be paraphrased as both X and Y, e.g., “bitter and sweet”. Other examples include “teacher researcher” and “producer-director”. These can be called “coordinative compounds”.

A third possible mode of analyzing compounds is common with modern traditional grammars prepared by Quirk, Greenbaun, Leech and Svartvik (1972, 1985). In this method, the compounds are analyzed and classified according to the relationships among their constituents when the meaning of the compound is expressed as a phrase or clause. For example:

PHRASES

bee-sting	a sting by a bee
blood-test	a test of blood
swimming-pool	a pool for swimming
windmill	a mill powered by wind
sunrise	when the sun rises

Unlike English compounds, the orthography of Afenmai compounds is less variable. An English word such as “gearbox” can also be written as “gear-box” or “gear box”. This situation is problematic to morphological analysis. Pius ten Hacken (2017, p. 5) notes that “a purely syntactic criterion for the distinction between compounds and phrases can be based on the observation, originally by Postal (1969), that the nonhead of a compound, ... in languages like English, cannot be antecedent of a pronoun ... An explanation for this impossibility is that nonheads of compounds are interpreted in a generic sense. However, proper nouns, which cannot be generic, also appear as nonheads ...” The structure of Afenmai compounds in terms of number of heads, depends on speakers’ mastery of the language and the pragmatics of persuasive speech. This view corroborates Pius ten Hacken (2017, p. 13) who opines that “in general, compounds are not formed in order to combine two components but in order to name a new concept. They are neologisms ...”

4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical anchorage of this study is Construction Morphology Theory. According to Jennifer Ujunwa Okoli et al. (2020, p. 19), the theory “was developed by Riehemann (2001) and Booij (2010a, 2010b, 2013). The theory takes a word-based perspective of analyzing complex words to the morpheme-based approach manifested in the theory of distributed morphology. It claims that these complex words can be represented or outlined in the lexicon of the language, which are abstractly represented in the mind of the native speaker. The theory assumes that a learner starts with learning individual words and when he is acquainted with them, starts coining new words from the abstract lexicon in his mind, which he has been able to store.”

In this study, the descriptive method of data analysis is explored to account for the functions of prosodic features in Afenmai compounds.

5. The Morphology of Afenmai Compounds

The morphology of Afenmai reveals different word formation processes which are examined in this section of the paper:

Reduplication

Reduplication is one of the ways of generating compounds in Afenmai as in:

- | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|------|--------------|-----------------|
| d. | <i>giēgiē</i> | from | <i>gié</i> | (to be tall) |
| e. | <i>gbōmōbgōmō</i> | from | <i>gbōmō</i> | (to kidnap) |
| f. | <i>ōjōjō</i> | from | <i>ōjō</i> | (to be older) |
| g. | <i>ōmōmō</i> | from | <i>ōmō</i> | (to be younger) |
| h. | <i>kàkà</i> | from | <i>kà</i> | (to be strong) |

Nouns can be combined with other nouns or with verbs to form compounds in Afenmai:

- i. *ēbē owēna* (study-book) (noun-noun compound)

Calquing

Afenmai compounds are formed through a morphological process known as calquing. This is a process of reducing a phrase to a word as in:

- j. *ukpōnopa* (white cloth); and

A monosyllabic verb can also be combined with a monosyllabic noun as in:

- k. *lē ēbē* (to have knowledge of books) from *lē* (know) and *ēbē* (book); and
l. *omēmēnōmēmētōtsō* (a mad person that is very mad).

Afenmai compounds that are formed with the combination of adjectives, adverbs and relative pronouns are easily presented as single long words without hyphen, so long as the concept to be expressed is successfully expressed. Pius ten Hacken (2017 p. 14) rightly notes that “in general, it can be said that there are three sources of information that can be used in the interpretation of compounds. One is the lexical entries for the elements that are combined. Then is the rule for combining them which may be equipped with specific conditions. Finally, there is the concept to be named ...”

Causative Verb Compounds

Afenmai compounds operate as causative verb compounds:

- m. *gbōgu*

gbō + *gu*

(beat) (kill)

(kill by beating)

In causative verb compounds, the constituents (root morphemes) show the cause of the situation produced.

Verb Compounds of Occurrence

In Afenmai compounds, there are verb compounds of occurrence which do not reveal the cause of the result produced:

n. *tōfama*

(*tōfà*) + (*mà*)

(forgive) (us)

(forgiven)

In Afenmai, heads of verb compounds can appear at right or left positions as can be seen in the above examples.

Motion Verb Compounds

Motion verb compounds are present in the morphology of Afenmai. Consider:

o. *gbhōlā*

gbhō + *lā*

(hit) (go)

(hit to go)

p. *nàlā*

nà + *lā*

(run away)

In Afenmai, tones play crucial roles in word formation. For example, in verbs, tones depend on tenses. In the present tense, the primary stress is on the first root morpheme of the compound as in:

q. *Oshoke, nà la.*

(*Oshoke*, run away) (present tense).

r. *Oshoke, o nà la.*

(*Oshoke* is running away) (present continuous tense)

s. *Oshoke, o khe nà la.*

(*Oshoke* has/had run away) (present perfect/past perfect)

The morpheme *ô* marks the progressive tense in Afenmai. It indicates the progressive tense while the morpheme *khē* is used in the participle forms of the verb compound⁵. According to Uwalaka (1988), a motion verb compound is “one in which the entity whose location is changed is responsible for the motion depicted in the event.”

Argument-sharing Verb Compounds

Argument-sharing verb compounds are in Afenmai. In such compounds each root morpheme (verb word) contributes its argument to the semantics of the expression as in:

t. *nyēmālē*

nyēmà + *lē*

(cook) (eat)

(cook (properly))

In the above compounds, the argument is clear:

- Food that is half-cooked is not supposed to be eaten; and
- The fact that it is eaten presupposes that it was well cooked.

The above interpretations explain the claim of the Lexicalists who contend that there are deep structure explanations for the meanings of some compounds. See Oha (2008) for tips on head-feature parameter of compound verbs in Igbo.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examines the formation of compounds in Afenmai, with progressive and instructive references to English compounds. Morphological processes in Afenmai facilitate the naming of concepts, and such processes include: calquing, reduplication, the combination of different word-classes to derive words, causative verb compounds, verb compounds of occurrence, motion verb compounds and argument-sharing verbs.

In multilingual Nigeria, Afenmai is a minority language that has not been extensively studied. There is need for more studies in the structure of minority languages in Nigeria. This study is therefore germane and crucial.

Notes

¹. Pius ten Hacken submits:

Nevertheless, we are justified in classifying them as compounds regardless of their conventional spellings because:

First, the stress pattern of the compound word is usually different from the stress patten in the phrase composed of the same words in the same order:

COMPOUND	PHRASE
¹ white House	white ¹ house
¹ funny farm	funny ¹ farm
¹ blackbird	Iblack ¹ bird

Second, the meaning of the compound may differ from that of the compounding phrase. A “blackbird” is specie of bird regardless of its color; a “black bird” is a bird which is black, regardless of its specie. A “trotting-horse” is a kind of horse regardless of its current activity; a “trotting horse” must be s horse that is currently trotting. So, because the meanings of compounds are not always predictable from the meanings of their constituents, dictionaries often provide individual entries for them ...

². The literature is replete with contentious views on the major research issues.

³. There are also cases of adverbs formed by reduplicating a syllable or a word as in *nyànyà* (quickly).

⁴. The orthography of idiosyncratic forms of Afenmai compounds is not predictable.

⁵. The present tense form of the Afenmai verb compound takes a high tone.

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