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2. **Ijah Gideon Akase**, Department of Languages and Linguistics, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.- **Auto-Criticism in Aminata Sow Fall's Ex-pere De la Nation – Political Model for National Development.....20**
3. **Maiyaki M. Mejida**, Department Of History, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. - **History, Purposeless?.....32**
- ✱ 4. **Samiat Olubunmi Abubakre**, Department of Language and Linguistics Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. - **A Comparative Study of the Functions of Compounding in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Language Experience 46**
5. **Chikada Daniel James**, **Radio Drama As A Tool For Societal Development: A Paradigm Of Nasarawa State Hausa Popular Theatre Radio Comedy – Alaku.....60**
6. **Abdullahi Adamu Sulaiman & Umar Aliyu**, Department of Religious Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. **The Influence of Islam on Arabic Language Institution and Yorùbá Novelists: A Postcolonial Discourse.....73**
7. **Gideon S. Omachonu**, Department of Languages and Linguistics Nasarawa State University, Keffi. **The Teaching of Oral English in Nigerian Schools: A Case of the Blind Leading the Blind.....81**

8. **William S. Onogu**, Dept. of Theatre Arts Kogi State University, Anyigba. *The Teaching of Oral English in Nigerian Schools: A Case of the Blind Leading the Blind*.....81
9. **Umelo Ojinmah Ph.D**, Associate Professor of Literature Department of English Nasarawa State University, Keffi. *"African And African Literary Criticism and Global Cultural Dynamics: Prescriptive Eurocentric Criticisms"*91
10. **Chinedu C. Chukueggu, Ph.D**, Department of Fine Arts And Design, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. *The Biafra Dispensation and The Civil War Propaganda 1967-1970: The Uche Okeke Approach*.....97
11. **Dr. Olanrewaju A. Olumoh**, Conflict In The Aristocratic Realm: The Emir of Ilorin and His Chiefs, 1995 – 2008... 111
12. **Elias Darlington Anzaku, Ph.D** Delusions of terrorism and the Challenges of Economic Development.135
13. **Dr. Regina Acholonu**, Department of Mass Communication, Nasarawa State University, *The Role of The Broadcasting Media in the Promotion Of Peace in Nigeria 2008*.....153
14. **Mallam Al-Bishak (M.O.N.)**, Senior Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi. *Towards A More Functional Definition Of Drama – A 'Reductionist' Appraisal*.....166
15. **Dr Chioma O.C. Chukueggu**. Department Of English Rivers State University of Education Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt. *Diglossia and Code Switching In*

**Nigeria: Implications For English Language
Teaching and Learning.....**

180

16. **Dr. M. G. Hamza** The Contribution of *Sibawaihi*
to Arabic Phonetics: Some Remarks185
17. **Abraham Mbachirin (PhD)**. Dept of Religious Studies
Nasarawa State University, Keffi. *Corporate Salvation:
Arguing From Biblical And African Perspectives.....*197
18. **Amango A. Kudu**. Department of History Nasarawa State
University Keffi. *The Vanishing Role of Taboos in defining
Gender Boundaries: A Critique of the Impact of Christianity
on Rukuba Society.....*224
19. **Amin Zaigi Ngharen** Cash Crop Production in Akwanga
During The Colonial Period238
- 20 **Amirikpa Oyigbenu (Ph. D)**, Department of English
Nasarawa State University, *Re-configuring African American
Women Citizenship and Feminist Identity: Phillis Wheatley
to Rosa Parks.....*252

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE FUNCTIONS OF COMPOUNDING IN HAUSA, IGBO AND YORUBA LANGUAGES

Samiat Olubunmi Abubakre

ABSTRACT

Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria. They are part of the most widely spoken languages in Africa. Compounding is a very productive morphological process in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. We want to show in this paper, the crucial role of the process of compounding in the lexicon of the three languages. In doing this, we survey how compounding enriches the languages and enhances communication in terms of the expression of new concepts and ideas. We also show that the functional relationship between the phonology and the morphology of the languages contribute to the word formation process. This study also justifies that most African languages have internal capabilities for lexical expansion and do not always borrow words from other languages. The theoretical orientation of the study is situated in descriptive linguistics. Our conclusion is that compounding is a universal process of language development that is found across languages, although it manifests varying features. We therefore suggest that more indigenous Nigerian languages should be study and use in order to explore the various language development processes that will enable them to meet the present challenges of information technology.

1. Introduction

Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the three major indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria and they are part of the most widely spoken languages in Africa.

Hausa belongs to the Chadic language family of Afro-asiatic phylum and it is the most important and most widely spoken in the language family. It is spoken by the Hausas as well as people of Fulani ancestry who established political control over Hausa land at the beginning of 19th century. Hausa is spoken in Northern Nigeria and the neighbouring Republic of Niger and Sudan. Hausa has about 24 million speakers (Sani, 2001).

Igbo also belong to the Kwa language family and has about 17 million speakers. The Igbo land is divided into two by the River Niger. The bigger half falls on the East of the River Niger and is known as the Eastern Igbo which include the entire states of Nigeria; Abia, Anambra, Enugu and Imo states. The smaller part falls on the west of the river and is referred to as Ika Igbo which include the Igbo speaking areas of Delta state (Ogbalu, 1972)

Yoruba is spoken in the Southwestern part of Nigeria and the speaking states include Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun Lagos, among others. It is also spoken in the South-east sections of Togo. Yoruba belongs to the Yoruboid class of Kwa language family of Niger-Congo phylum with an upwards of 20 million speakers (Arokoyo, 2006).

These languages namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba function as lingua franca in the communities where they are spoken. The languages are also used for commercial, informational and governmental purposes. They are used in schools and media houses. This study is a descriptive analysis of compounding in the languages. Our aim is to examine some features of compounds that are peculiar to each of the languages that have helped in the development of the languages.

2. Defining Compounding

Compounding is a morphological process that is common to human languages. Virtually all languages attest compounding and use it to form new words. It requires the joining of different lexical items to form a new word. Napoli (1996) refers to compounds as words

that contain more than one morpheme. From this definition, we can infer some very important information. First is the fact that before a word can be called a compound, it must contain more than one lexical morpheme or word. This is why Spencer (1995) says that compounding is prototypically the concatenation of words to form other words.

Another vital fact is that the morphemes that are to be joined together must be lexical morphemes. Lexical morphemes are morphemes that fall under free morphemes, they carry the 'content' of messages we convey and are under the lexical categories of nouns, adjectives and verbs.

According to Spencer (1995) "Compounds are often lexicalized and they are often subject to semantic drift of a kind associated with stored words which means that their meaning becomes non-compositional or even totally idiosyncratic. Therefore, the precise meaning usually depends on pragmatic facts". This means that the meaning of the compound may not necessarily correspond to the meaning of the two or lexical items being joined together, that is the meaning of the compound is somehow hidden.

Bold 3. The Structures of Compounding in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba

Compounding as a morphological process is used in the formation of new words in languages. Lexical expansion is an aspect of language development and language development is an index of national development. It is imperative therefore to develop our indigenous languages in order to meet the challenges of the present technological advancement.

One of the steps in this direction is to examine the internal facilities in developed languages to ascertain whether they can withstand the needs of speakers in expressing new ideas and concepts that will facilitate smooth communication. In this section, we will examine the features and structure of compounding in the three languages under consideration.

One of the most important features of compounding is that it must contain more than one lexical morpheme. This can be seen from the examples given below from the three languages under study.

Hausa

- | | | | | | |
|----|-------------------|---|----------|---|-----------------|
| a. | aboki | + | kashewa | → | abokinkashewa |
| | 'friend | | intimate | | intimate friend |
| b. | riga | + | sanyi | → | rigarsanyi |
| | 'cloth | | cold | | |
| | cardigan/sweater' | | | | |
| c. | kudi | + | gida | → | kudingida |
| | 'money | | house | | house rent |
| d. | jirigi | + | sama | → | jiriginsama |
| | 'vehicle | | sky | | 'aeroplane' |

Igbo

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------|---|-----------|---|-----------------|
| a. | Íjè | + | ómá | → | Íjèómá |
| | Journey | | good | | 'safe journey' |
| b. | Ónyé | + | nsó | → | Ónyé-nsò |
| | 'person | | holy | | 'Saint' |
| c. | Ózí | + | ómá | → | Ózíómá |
| | 'message | | good | | 'good news' |
| d. | Ónyé | + | újò + ólú | → | Ónyé-újò-ólú |
| | 'person | | fear work | | 'a lazy person' |

Yoruba

- | | | | | | |
|----|--------|---|----------|---|------------|
| a. | owó | + | orí | → | ówóorí |
| | 'money | | head | | brideprice |
| b. | ojó | + | òla | → | ojóòla |
| | 'day | | tomorrow | | future |
| c. | àya | + | oba | → | ayaba |
| | 'wife | | king | | 'Queen' |
| d. | a | + | rí +ogbó | → | arúgbó |

'agent person' see old-age 'elderly'

True compounds are limited to only lexical categories. That is, words such as nouns, adjectives and verbs. However, other compounds may be combination of different lexical categories. Consider the examples below:

Hausa

a. Noun Adjective
 ruwa + sanyi → ruwansanyi
 'water' 'cold' 'cold water'

b. Adjective Noun
 dogo + yaro → dogonyaro
 'tall' boy tall boy'

Igbo

a. Noun Verb
 ùwé + nwùdà → ùwénwùdà
 'cloth' goes down gown'

b. Noun Noun
 éhí + óhja → éhí óhia
 'cow' bush 'buffalo'

Yoruba

a. Noun Noun
 Omo + àlè → omaàlè
 'child concubine' bastard'

b. Verb Noun
 dé + adé → dádé
 'wear' crown wear a crown'

There are also come very few cases where we find prepositions combining with nouns to form compounds.

Igbo

a.	Preposition	Noun		
	ímé	+	úlò	→
	'in		house	
				ímúlò
				room

Yoruba

a.	Preposition	Noun		
	èba	+	òkè	→
	'beside		top	
				èbákè
				'mid high'

Among the lexical categories, nouns are the most productive class in compounding.

There are phonological processes that apply to compounds. These processes are largely due to the combination of the two or more words. There are changes that occur both at the segment and at the level above the segment (supra-segment). At the level of the supra-segment, it is tone that is affected because the languages under consideration are tone languages. While some compounds maintain the tones in the words that are combined, in some there are variations. It should be noted that Yoruba and Igbo attest three level tones, high, mid and low, while Hausa however attests two level tones, high and low.

Hausa

a.	yaro	+	mota	→
	'boy		car	
				yaronmota
				'driver's mate'

Igbo

a.	ógbè	+	àká	→
	'a whole		hand	
				ógbáàká
				'arm'
b.	mkpúru	+	ósísí	→
	'seed		tree	
				mkpúròòsísí
				'fruit'

Yoruba

a.	gbà 'take	+	owó hand	→	gbowó 'shake hand'
b.	ogún 'twenty and	+	ejo eight	→	ogójo 'one hundred sixty'
c.	da 'contribute	+	opé thanks	→	dúpé 'thanksgiving'

Note 4. Comparing the Functions of Compounding in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba

1. Gender Marking

In Hausa compounds, the insertion of the suffix /-n/ or /-r/ helps to indicate gender, masculine or feminine. Masculine noun takes /-n/ while feminine takes /-r/ as in the examples below:

a.	bàbá 'father	+	gídá house	→	bàbángídá father of the house/bread winner'
b.	uwa 'mother	+	gida house	→	uwargida housewife'
c.	abi 'something	+	Magana phone	→	abinmagana microphone'
d.	fitílà 'electric bulb'	+	hanya 'road'	→	fitilarhanya 'street light'

Note 2. Plural Marking

a.	úmù 'children	+	nwányi woman	→	úmù-nwányi women
b.	úmù 'children	+	àgbóghò girl	→	úmù-àgbóghò girls
c.	úmù 'children	+	nná father	→	úmù-nná kinsmen'
d.	úmù	+	ádá	→	úmù-ádá

3. Noun Formation

Most nouns that are combined in the languages under consideration also form new nouns with the compounds. As earlier mentioned, nouns are the most productive lexical category in the formation of compounds. All the languages under consideration attest this function.

Yoruba

- a. omo + òdò → omoòdò
'child side househelp'
- b. òkú + okò → òkúkò
'corpse vehicle 'disabled vehicle'
- c. aya + oba → ayaba
'wife king 'Queen'

4. Verb Formation

The compounds of verb and noun usually end up being verb phrases especially in Yoruba as shown in the examples below:

Yoruba

- a. gbé + omo → gbómo
'carry child carry (a) child'
- b. gbá + owó → gbowó
'take money collect money'
- c. dé + adé → dádé
'wear crown 'wear a crown'

5. Observation and Conclusion

Our discussion would not be complete if we fail to discuss our observation on the functional relationship between some

phonological processes and compounding, a morphological process, in each of the languages under study. It is the interaction of the processes that enhance the well-formed structures. The phonological processes include assimilation, deletion, insertion and coalescence. The three languages exhibit the interaction of the phonological and morphological processes in different ways. For instance, Yoruba is affected by only assimilation, deletion and coalescence. Hausa only have insertion affecting it, while Igbo is affected by deletion and assimilation. A brief definition of each of the processes is in order before we proceed to the exemplification of its interaction with compounding.

Assimilation is a process whereby contiguous segments influence each other by becoming more alike. In other words segments do adapt to their environments. It is a change of one sound to another because of the influence of neighboring sound(s).

Deletion is a process by which sound segments are removed or elided. It is possible for one or more sounds to be dropped or removed in speech and even in compounds. Consonants as well as vowels can be deleted.

A language may add segment(s) to word(s) in order to break unallowed sequence or cluster. When an extraneous segment that is not there in the original word is introduced, this process is known as insertion. This concept is also referred to as epenthesis.

It is possible for two different segments to fuse together and become one. The two different segments are quite different from the one they become (fused segment), but this segment they become usually have the features of the fused or coalescence ones. This process is known and referred to as coalescence. We will now consider these processes in the three languages.

Segment insertion in Hausa

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------|---|-------|---|-----------|
| a. | gida | + | mota | → | gidanmota |
| | 'house | | car | | 'garage' |
| b. | uwa | + | gida | → | uwargida |
| | 'mother | | house | | housewife |

c.	mai	+	gida	→	maingida
	'owner		house		house owner/head of the house'
d.	abi	+	wuya	→	abinwuya
	'something		neck		necklace'
e.	riga	+	nono	→	rigarnono
	'cloth		breast		bra'
f.	rigar	+	sanyi	→	rigarsanyi
	'cloth		cold		cardigan/sweater'
g.	gida	+	sarki	→	gidansarki
	'house		king		'palace'

On a closer look, one notices the insertion of the allomorphs (affixes) /-n/ and /-r/ in the Hausa compounds. Hausa has two gender, masculine and feminine which are morphologically and grammatically distinguished in the singular only. The "linker" as it is called by Hausa linguists, has two forms; /-n/ (a contraction of na and used for masculine) and /-r/ (also a contraction of na but used for feminine nouns).

Wherever two lexical morphemes are brought together in Hausa, there is the insertion of the suffixes /-n/ and /-r/ which are for masculine and feminine respectively in order to make the words grammatical.

Igbo language also features different phonological processes during the formation of compounds. Below are some examples:

Segment deletion in Igbo

a.	nyinyà	+	íbu	→	nyinyíbu
	'horse		load		donkey'
b.	ímé	+	úlò	→	ímulò
	'in		house		room
c.	isé	+	àtó	→	isáto
	'five		three		eight'

Assimilation in Igbo

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------|---|--------|---|-------------|
| a. | áká | + | ekpè | → | ákéèkpe |
| | 'hand | | left | | lefthand |
| b. | ògbè | + | áká | → | ógbááká |
| | 'a whole | | hand | | 'arm' |
| c. | mmiri | + | ozuzo | → | mmiróòozuzo |
| | 'water | | shower | | rain' |
| d. | mkpúru | + | ósisi | → | mkpuroosisi |
| | 'seed | | tree | | fruit' |

Similarly, in the process of forming new words through compounding, we observe the following phonological processes in Yoruba. Consider the example below:

Coalescence in Yoruba

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------|---|-------------|---|-------------------|
| a. | ogún | + | èjì | → | ogoji |
| | 'twenty | | two | | forty' |
| b. | gbó | + | ìró | → | gburoo |
| | 'hear | | sound | | hear from someone |
| c. | a | + | rí + ogbó | → | a Rúgbó |
| | 'agent | | see old-age | | elderly person' |
| d. | ogún | + | èta | → | ogóta |
| | 'twenty | | three | | sixty |

Deletion in Yoruba

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------|---|-------------|---|-------------------|
| a. | ìdí | + | okò | → | ìdikò |
| | 'base | | vehicle | | motorpark' |
| b. | èbá | + | odò | → | èbádò |
| | 'beside | | down | | mid-low |
| c. | jé | + | ogún | → | jogún |
| | 'eat | | inheritance | | 'inherit' |
| d. | gbé | + | omo | → | gbómo |
| | 'carry | | child | | 'carry (a) child' |

Assimilation in Yoruba

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------|---|-------------|---|--------------------|
| a. | ará | + | oko | → | arooko |
| | 'citizen | | farm | | 'rustic/farm folk' |
| b. | omo | + | eran | → | omoeeran |
| | 'child | | goat/animal | | 'stubborn child' |
| c. | ogbà | + | èwòn | → | ogbèewòn |
| | 'garden | | prison | | 'prisonyard' |
| d. | ìgbà | + | ewe | → | ìgbèewe |
| | 'time | | young | | 'youthful days' |

It must be added also that compounds can be written as single words or as two words that can be hyphenated and some times, ordinary spaces are put between them, depending on the language. The following examples illustrate:

Hausa

- | | | | | | |
|----|------|---|---------|---|----------------------------|
| a. | sabo | + | shekara | → | sabonshekara/sabon-shekara |
| | 'new | | year | | 'new year' |
| b. | yaro | + | mota | → | yaronmota/yaron-mota |
| | 'boy | | car | | 'driver's mate' |

Igbo

- | | | | | | |
|----|----------|---|----------|---|--------------|
| a. | ákpátí | + | ozu | → | ákpátí-ozu |
| | 'box | | corpse | → | 'coffin' |
| b. | ugbó | + | mmiri | → | ugbó-mmiri |
| | 'vehicle | | water | → | 'boat/canoe' |
| c. | ókwu | + | ómá | → | ókwù-ómá |
| | 'word | | good | | 'truth' |
| d. | dí | + | ntà | → | dí-ntà |
| | 'husband | | hunt | | 'hunter' |
| e. | ónyé | + | nkùzì | → | ónyé nkùzì |
| | 'person | | teaching | | 'teacher' |

f.	ónyé ámumá	+	ámumá	→	ónyé
	'person		prophecy		'prophet'
g.	úmù 'children	+	nwóke man	→	úmù-nwóke 'men'

¶ We have been able to show in this paper that compounding plays a very crucial role in the lexicon of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. It is a very productive morphological process in the three languages. Compounding enriches the languages and enhances communication in terms of the expression of new concepts and ideas. Our suggestion is that more indigenous Nigerian languages should be studied and used in order to meet the present challenges of information technology.

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