

ASPECTS OF WORD-FORMATION IN BETTE

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Abstract

Folk languages are rapidly dying out. This is largely traceable to the influence of the major languages and particularly the English language which has become a dominant medium of communication even among the folk. More so, scholars hardly investigate unwritten languages, and as a result, there is obvious dearth of literature on them. Hence, it is the belief of the author that linguistic data for the study of these dying folk languages must come from the indigenous speakers of the languages following an accurate and detailed description of individual languages. The examples that are discussed here are taken from Bette. Although still a folk language, Bette is a dominant language of the largest ethnic group in the northern part of Cross River State. The discussion is neither a comparative nor contrastive analysis although, the word formation process in English would be used as parameter to examine the morphological process in Bette

Origin and Language Situation in Hette.

Bette Adieutim Unwandor originated from the Bantu in south Central Africa and settled at foot of the Cameroun mountain, a part of which is today Obudu. The Bette language therefore, is of the Bantu stock and a sub-group of the Ekoi. The word Bette stands for both the name of the ethnic group and its language. Ottenbergfl 968:59], notes that there are as many as thirty-eight languages spoken in northern part of Cross River state. But since Obanlikwu, Boki, Igedde, and Bewkwara are descendants of Bette, it may therefore, be posited that these languages are dialects of Bette, and their morphological process and structure follow the same pattern. In the course of migration, they moved with their language and settled in their present location. Watters[1999:78], a scholar in Bantoid, remarks that with the passage of time, Bette assimilated the speech habits of their closest neighbours and has changed characteristically both in structure and intonation. These changes are reflected in morphological and grammatical structure of the language. After a careful study of the grammatical structure of the language, Atsu[1989:79], observes that the main characteristics of the Bette language

...are the use of tense to distinguish the immediate from the remote past, habitual tense- past, present and future- the employment of a tense to indicate relative and interrogative sentences, the use of the tones **to** differentiate tenses and an individual tone which is fixed for every word.

The grammatical structure of Bette is akin to many other folk languages. It is organized based on the tense system. The tense system according to Tomorif 1977:51], is a feature of the clause that relates the organization of the clause to the non-linguistic concept of time. This organization is not exclusive to the verbal group and the adverbial adjuncts, but the verbal group is the part of the clause where the system of tense is principally organized and realized. It sees tense as being paradigmatically of three tense-past, present, future based mainly on morphological criteria.

The lexicon of Bette language which contains all the exiting words is very dynamic and in-exhaustive in content. The lexicon enlarges and changes on daily basis because of the vigorous communication activities of the folk. Because of its morphological structure and intonation variation, Bette is both creative and productive in its system. The study of the morphological structure of a language is the domain of morphology and a definition of the term 'morphology' may give the reader a better understanding of the subject matter. Morphology is the meaningful combination of sounds to form words. It is the study of the smallest significant units of grammar known as morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning in any language, and are therefore, regarded as its building blocks at level of syntax. The morpheme according to Tomorif 1977:152], is the minimal linguistic element that carries the grammatical and semantic meaning. It is in base form and is not

words in Bette which function originally as prepositions. As a result, speakers of the language resort to using nominal items, especially parts of the body as prepositions as in the following examples.

Word	Gloss	Prepositional item
Lislii	head	on
Lifung	stomach	in, inside
Item	back	behind
Iviism	front	before
Kubei	leg	under
Kubuo	hand	side

Conjunctions in Bette are fewer compared to English. Apart from "le" and "likorye" which function inherently as conjunction in Bette, there are hardly other noticeable ones. The word class of conjunction belongs to the closed system of functional morphemes which creates no room for the addition of new words or morphemes. Most bound morphemes constitute a group of suffixes as discussed above, but some examples of free morphemes in Bette include;

Bette	English
Fei	write
Gwu	kill
Too	wash
Undi	person
Umbuo	water
Bibu	cloud
Kushia	book

Hound morphemes

these are morphemes which cannot occur in isolation and still retain their meanings, but can only be recognised when joined to other morphemes especially base morphemes as in the following example

AtungkvuomaIe[deafness]

[atiung] + [akwum] + [ale]

base	suffix	suffix
	[derivation]	+[inflection]

In the above example, the derivational and inflectional suffixes are bound morphemes. They derive their full meaning only from the base. Fagge[2004:11], describes a bound morpheme as a grammatical morpheme because it can occur with many lexical items in a grammatical structure. Bound morphemes cannot occur alone in a sentence except when attached to the base or stem. Yulef 1996:115], classifies bound morphemes into two types following the functions that such affixes perform in word-formation—derivational and inflectional morphemes. Derivational morphemes are used to form new words. As earlier noted, Bette as it is spoken today is a refined dialect of *Kubble*. *Kubble*, a highly idiomatic and metaphorical language, is still spoken among some ethnic groups of the Bantu. Most Bette words are derived from the language-kubble[Ashipu,2005].

Inflectional morphemes are used to form new words in Bette, but only to show aspects of the grammatical function of a word. Inflectional morphemes in Bette are limited in number and (they do not change the word class of a word. Unlike English, inflectional morphemes in Bette are used to change the base form of a word from singular to plural as in the following example.

Singular	Plural
kipamfyam]	bipamfyams]
kidemfchair]	bidemfchairs]

ukib[bone]	bikib bones
kashuaf matchet]	lislma matchets
kishor[toad]	bshor toads]

It may be noticed from the above examples that while the process of converting words from singular to plural in English is by suffixation[as in books], it is remarkably different in Bette. To change a word from singular to plural in Bette requires a change in the initial consonant or vowel. However, this process is different from that of pre-fixation in English.

Morphological processes are instrumental to the dynamism of the language, for they are responsible for creating more words and new lexical terms in the targeted language. There is no limit to which new words can be formed in a language. There are several morphological processes through which words maybe formed. One of them is affixation. The process of affixation takes the following forms—pre-fixation, inter-fixation, and supra-fixation. Pre-fixation involves the addition of an affix at the initial position of a word either to change its word-class or to indicate aspects of the grammatical function of the words[Quirk,R&Greenbaum,1989J. In the following examples, morphemic items that are added to the base have changed them from verbs to nouns.

	Verb	Noun	Meaning
a a	giaflocate]	aagiale	location
III	gio listen	uugiole	listening
ku	tor[pain	kutor	pa m
ki	nde[see]	kinde	seeing
ki	gioale[hear]	kiogioale	hearing

Supra-fixation This is a derivational process by which an affix is not represented by the normal sound e.g. consonant or vowel, but by what is called prosodic feature, such as tone, stress or intonation[Todd,1987:18]. Most African languages are highly tonal and meanings are derived from the tonal variation of the .lexical items. Hence, like all other Bantu languages lexical items in Bette derive their meanings from their tonal variation. Although two words may have the same spelling, they may be pronounced differently and hence, mean two different things. Armstrongf 1969:21] who wrote extensively on the Bantu languages describe the tone of the Bette language as

.. .terraced system with two basic tones, high and low plus down-step or lowered high or often called mid tone. The tones are usually shown as high or down-step or mid or low. There may be a run-down of several "midst" or down-step on different pitches in the same utterance.

It is this tonal difference that perhaps enables the Bette speakers to form new words from the existing ones. If the language was operating on a one- to-one relationship, it would have a limited usage. Like the English stress and emphasis, the tonal variation of the language enables a word to be used in more than one place. Let us illustrate with the following examples,

Bette	English
-akwa	knife[for cutting]
akwa	bridge .
akwa-a	question: Has he caught you?
akwa	we stay[short form of Akwagiobe]

Apart from the punctuation marks and the addition of the letter"a" order to elongate the word [as in example three above] the meaning of each of the words is realised in the context in which is it used. Although the spellings are almost the same, the different meanings are realised from the tonal variation. Intonation may play such a fundamental role in word-formation that Nketia[1974:43], has this to say in relation to this aspect of linguistic study.

Aspects of Word-Formation in Bette

As linguistic events surrogate languages deserve the attention of linguists, for the study of these can throw some light on people's conception of the phonology of their languages and the element that they consider significant, which provides good material for general study of the structure of the language or of stylistic usages within the languages and the problem of social behaviour stimulated by particular use of language.

Reduplicative: There is some similarity between reduplication as a process of word formation and supra-fixation. While supra-fixation may occur only at word level, reduplicative which takes place at word level in Bette may give rise to a phrasal structure. Oyebade [1992:69], in an attempt to distinguish between two forms of reduplicative says,

Reduplicative are forms which are either partially or fully copied from the root and added before or after the root. Partial reduplicative involves copying only the consonant or the vowel and putting this in prefixal position or adding it to the root in suffixal position...reduplication involves total copying of the root word.

Illustrated thus:		There are two forms of reduplication—partial and full reduplication. Their difference may be
Bette	English	
Kunyong	time	Reduplication kunyong[always]
Kibang	what	kibang-bang[what]
Ugong	line	ugong-gong[line-by-line]
Kishi	black	kishi-shi-shi[black-adjectival]
Likwob	tall	likwob-likwob[tall-adjectival]
Atie-tie	difference	atie-tie-tie[difference-by type]
Lizie	year	lizie-lizie [year by year] tan-li-taii [
Litan	walk	walking] zi-li-zi [eating food
Zi	eat	

(calquing and Clipping

These are two forms of morphological processes that work together and they are common in Bette. While calquing is a process of nominalization which involves uniting or reducing a whole phrase or even a sentence to form a single noun, Banner [1999:46] says that clipping is a way of word coining by shorting the base. There are two types of clippings--back clipping and front clipping. These processes are common forms of human names and other items as exemplified thus:

Bette	Clipping	English
Bekwagioabe	Ugioabe	we live to hear from (hem
Itengia-uteng-lebendi	Utengian	the oldest man who owns people
Unimagiokukuie	g	God hears
Begwuliwhuye	Agio	No one laughs at death
Begbaunimkushuye	Liwu	No one walks faster than God
Bekwalekukaye	Ushuye	one lives at his own will
Kiyungwumaye	Kukaye	No one blames God

Compounding: Compounding is a process of combing two or more free morphemes of equal semantic status to form one word or to describe process. Mori [2001:16], defines a compound as a word composed of two or more words constituting a single a word with a full meaning. According to Mathews [1974:57], the process of compounding requires the joining together of different lexical items to form new words, does not necessarily require the change of the class of the compound. The process of compounding in Bette is done through noun to noun collocation, which means that the two bases that are compounded to form a word are free morphemes Some examples are provided below:

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Bette	English
Utsu-umbukpe	hunter
l)nw-an-udiong-be	toe
Ukim-kigbe	drummer
Utim-itie	weaver
Utan-ikwa	carver
Udiong-buo	finger

The compound words in Bette are free morphemes which can be used in separate contexts. However, they have lost their individual existence for the purpose of compounding.

Loan words

Sociologists have asserted that when the population of speakers of a language expands, the language has extensive usage and expands beyond its initial boundary. There is the tendency that such speakers who reside outside their immediate environment adopt the speech habits of the local inhabitants and hence, acquire a new vocabulary[Howard,2000:5]. Another reason that may account for the expansion of a language, and therefore, the acquisition of a new vocabulary is trade. Locke[2001:13] remarks that when traders buy and sell, they sell their language. This explains why there is a large number of Tiv and Hausa words in Bette language. The Tiv in the northern part of Nigeria are the closest neighbours of the Bette and the earliest trade partners of Bette are the Hausa who came through the Tiv land.

In the course of their trade relations, the Bette traders borrowed some Hausa words, particularly those of the items that were used during business transactions. They have become integrated into the Bette lexicon, such the Bette speakers do not border about their origin. Some of the Hausa words in the Bette lexicon are provided below:

Hausa	Bette	English
riga	aliga	shirt
wondo	uwatido	trouser
saburu	ushabul	soap
gado	agodo	bed
sisi	shishi	six-pence
aiki	aki	word
akawu	akawu	clerk

With the advent of western education during which there was mass school enrolment, English language was now widely spoken. In the absence of local dialectal alternative, the Bette speakers adopted some English words to techniques, tools and personal items commonly used by the English. Some examples of English words in the Bette language include:

English	Bette
school	ushukwul
pen	upeun
pencil	ukaishuel
soldier	shogia
teacher	itisha
court	ukoto
table	itebul

Comparing borrowed English words with Hausa words, the reader discovers that the Hausa words have become much more native to the Bette language. This because the Bette have had much earlier contact with the Hausa than the European explorers. Hence, the words have been in use as Bette speakers have lost memory of their own local descriptive words for certain techniques, tools and particular terms.

In conclusion, it is important to state that not much has been done to document the Bette language. Some of the reasons arise from the difficulties inherent in the large number of dialects of the language, variations in the intonation and numerous different punctuation marks used to transcribe and differentiate the pronunciation of one word from the other. Even when the language is transcribed

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and written, only very few native speakers can read the language. This is because they are not familiar with the orthography of the language. This accounts for a great dearth of written literature on the Bette. However, in this paper, we have taken an excursion into the language of Bette in order to discover its morphological patterns. We found this very important because the study of any language begins with its morpheme, the smallest unit of meaningful utterance. It is the hope of this author that this noble effort will galvanize researchers' interest into the study of this folk language.

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