COINAGE: A PROCESS OF COMPOUNDING IN ÀGÀTÚ

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Abstract

The paper considers the morphology of Àgàtú, taking into consideration coinage as a process of compounding in Àgàtú. This study, therefore, describes Àgàtúcompounding from the view point of coinages and adopts a descriptive method to analyse coinages. The description is based on coinage as a morphological process of compounding in Àgàtú. The data were elicited using a list of novel concepts and interview with native speakers who are bilingual in both English and the language. The data collected were analyzed by describing the data provided by the native speakers. The study establishes that coined words are used as a means of extending the lexicon of the language through the creation of new lexical categories. Such ideas, concepts and institutions are derived through the device of reduplication process, where nominals are compounded to form new lexemes with the status of compound nouns in the language. One morphophonemic rules play out in the compounding and coinage process; elision and insertion; they are employed in the context where unacceptable vowel sequences occur within word boundaries. The research has made a modest contribution to the on-going research on novel concepts (coinages) of Àgàtú. It has also contributed to researches on indigenous Nigerian languages in general, Àgàtú in particular.
Keywords: Àgàtú, coinage, compounding, morphology, process

Introduction

Coinage, (a novel concept) is used to represent foreign concepts, ideas and institutions that were hitherto non-existent in another culture, and the use of this process is for creating new lexemes, especially kinship terms in the language. In Àgàtú, compounding has been used copiously in naming concepts, particularly foreign institutions, ideas, items/objects, and concepts which have been adopted within the host culture and system. This study, therefore, describes Àgàtú compounding from the view point of coinages.

Historically, Àgàtú as a group belongs to one of the several clans of Ìdómà as they were part of the Àpá confederate unit of the famous Kwararafa Empire. The political upheaval and consequent disintegration of the empire led to the dispersal of Àgàtú along the Benue trough. Àgàtú groups may have dialectal differences, but it must be said that the language still maintains socio-cultural unity which is the basis of common identification and collective struggle. Attributes of Àgàtú people include perseverance, self-sustenance, hard work and co-operation. Adegonye (2001) observes that Àgàtú are found in the North Central in the geo-political configuration of the country.

Àgàtú has been classified as an offspring of the Niger-Congo family (now referred to as Benue-Congo) alongside Ìgálà, Àlágò, Yòrúbá and Jukun by Greenberg in 1970. He divides the family into four branches such as; Platoid, Jukunoid, Cross River and Bantoid. Bennett and Sterk (1977) expanded Benue-Congo by adding the eastern branches of Greenberg's Kwa. These branches were grouped together as 'Western Benue-Congo' by Williamson and Blench (2000), and Greenberg's original Benue-Congo was, therefore, renamed 'West Benue-Congo'.

Àgàtú has been classified genetically as a dialect of Ìdómà. Ìdómà is one of the languages from the Idomoid group of the West Benue Congo, which includes Edo and Yoruba. Idomoid languages are spoken in Central Nigeria, where Ìdómà is one of the languages of the Idomoid group spoken by nearly three million people. Àgàtú is spoken indigenously both in Benue and Nasarawa State in central Nigeria. Studies over the years have shown that the language shares a wide variety of linguistic as well as cultural affinity with other ethnic groups in the country, notably: Igala, Ebira, Alago as well as Jukun. However, the most significant linguistic relationship so far is that between the Àgàtú and the Alago languages.

There are researches on the language, but for coinages, there are no available record to show any research effort in the language. This is the motivation for this current research. The objective of this paper is:

1. To investigate coinages as a compound process in Àgàtú.
2. To investigate how these coinages have contributed to the development of the language.

The research covers strictly the Àgàtú dialect spoken in Agatu Local Government Area of Benue State. This study adopts a descriptive method to analyse coinages in Àgàtú. The data for this study were collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data were sourced through structured interview and observation methods, that is, by observing native speakers of Àgàtú as they use the language in their day to day activities. Also, the researcher's native speaker competence in the language was also useful in the collection and elicitation of data in the course of this study.

For the instruments for data collection, West African Language data sheets and framed technique methods were used to elicit data for this study. The collected data were systematically sorted and analysed after due authentication by the language assistants (Àgàtú - English bilinguals) whose competence in the chosen dialect could be verified by any native speaker. This was accounted for by the integrity as well as the validity of data.

The data collected were analysed using the descriptive method of forms produced by the native speakers (the researcher and other native speakers of the language). This was empirically controlled in order to uncover what is obtainable in the language. The work is presented in Àgàtú followed by a morpheme-by-morpheme interlinear (Leipzig) glossing and English translation.

Review of Related Literature
Compounding and Coinage

Compounding can be considered as a special type of derivational morphology. Its main feature in word formation process is attested in many languages including Àgàtú, therefore, it could be said to be a universal linguistic phenomenon. This is reflected in Greenberg's (1963:92) statement that there are considerable number of languages without inflections, perhaps none without compounding and derivation. Compounding and derivations are productive in natural languages, even those without inflections. This shows that most natural languages if not all have compound nouns at least as pointed out by Plag (2003) and Kortman (2005) cited in Omachonu and Onogu (2012). It is pertinent to say that defining compounding is difficult as many scholars have come with many related definitions. Lierber and Stekauer (2009:2-3) explain that difficulty in defining compound hinges on two factors; one, the element that make up compounds in some languages are not free-standing but rather stems and roots standing. Secondly, it is not easy to distinguish between compound words, on one hand and derived words or phrases, on the other. In spite of the difficulty encountered in defining compounding, some scholars and linguists have attempted to describe the phenomenon. What follows is the various attempts at defining the concept of compounding by those scholars.

Compounding takes place when two or more free-forms (words) combine to form a morphological unit. Compounds function like single words, and as such occupy full single grammatical slots in sentence. Compounding is morphological process used to compound words. In words of Fabb (2001:66):

> …a compound is a word which consist of two or more words … compounds are subject to phonological and morphological processes, which may be specific to compounds or may be shared with other structures, whether derived words or phrases… the words in compound retain a meaning similar to their meaning as isolated words, but with certain restriction; for example, a noun in a compound will have a generic rather than a referential function.

Fabb (2001) further mentions that compounding is a phonological process. Although there are many phonological processes that give way to compounding to occur, in IsiZulu, it is a morphological process which has some phonological process intervening within its context (Madondo 2011). Compounding is a technique for word building; the combination of two already existing words. Compounding is a process of joining two or more formally independent roots to form a single word. A compound word is composed of two or more words and the combination of the words constitutes a single word meaning often distinct from the meaning of the individual components. In other words, a compound word has been described as the combination of two or more that has single meaning. Katamba (1993: 29) says 'a prototypical compound is a word made up of at least two bases which can occur elsewhere as independent words'.

In linguistics, a compound is a lexeme that consists of more than one stem. Compounding or composition is the word formation process that creates compound lexemes. Compounding refers to the faculty and device of language to form new words by combining or putting together old words. The meaning of the words interrelate in such a way that a new meaning comes out which is very different from meanings of the words in isolation (Omachonu and Onogu, 2012). In the opinion of Langacker (1972) paraphrased as follows: compounds are lexical units formed by juxtaposing more than one stem. Compound formation tends to follow certain patterns and can often be described by means of derivation rules. He, however, argues that many rules of compound formation turn out not to be very productive, that compounds and other derived lexical items, even those that appear to follow regular derivational rules are capable of taking on special senses that cannot be predicted from the meaning of the morphemes they contain or the rules that derive them.

The term compounding refers to a morphological process in which two or more words are fused to form one complex word, which generally refers to an entity with the features of both former entities. Compounding occurs in complete words, sentences written as single words, sometimes with a hyphen, and sometimes as separate words. In the same vein, Àgàtú compound words, like Ìdọ̀mà can be written in these three ways as observed by Ìdọ̀mà language and Literary Committee (ILLC; 2004). However, for easy identification of such words, it is recommended that compound words in Idoma be written as single words (Umaru, 2016). In terms of pronunciation of compound words, however, there exists a kind of generalization.

Coinage or neologism is a morphological process of creating new words to name previously non-extent objects or phenomenon that result from cultural context. The coined words, according to Ndimele (1999), with the passage of time, gains currency within a speech community. Invented trade names such as Xerox and Kleene for example, are recent additions to the English language (Ndimele, 1999:69). Azziza points out that, in the word formation process, words are coined for items in the culture of the language based on their function and description. Most of these words, according to her, have loan equivalents which are used alongside the coinages. Azziza (2007) cites the following examples in Urhobo.

1i. ékpètì ré ògbòró
    Box of loudspeaker
       'radio'
ii. ékpètì ré ùghé
    Box of spectacle
      'television'

Taking from the above examples 1i and ii, we can deduce a phrase structure. However, coinages can be derived through the process of the compound formation, which is the thrust of this paper.

Omachonu and Onogu (2012) are of the view that compounding is used in Igala to represent foreign concepts, ideas and institutions that were hitherto non-existent in Igala kingdom and culture, and the use of reduplicative nominal compounding for creating new lexemes especially kinship terms in the language. In Igala, compounding has been used copiously in naming concepts, particularly foreign institutions, ideas, items/objects, and concepts which have been adopted within the host cultures and system. The following examples as provided by Omachonu and Onogu (2012) will suffice.

2a. únyí   #   úkọ́chẹ 'school'
   House   lesson
b. únyí   #   ógwù   'hospital'
   House   medicine
c. únyí # dúdú   'prison'
   House   black
d. únyí # ájò   'court'
   House   judgement
3a. òláfíà # áŋóla   'health'
   Fine   skin
b. anyà # ébíjè   'bicycle'
   Horse   iron
c. okò # ójálè   'aeroplane'
   canoe   Sky

d. okó # ánè (okánè)   'train'
   canoe land

4a. a   kólà   # ójò   'preacher'
    AGT.say.word   God

b. a   té # álé (atálé)   'evangelist'
    AGT.put   AGT.go

c. a   kó # ùkò (akúkò)   'teacher'
   AGT. teach instruction

d. a   kà # ájò (akájò) 'judge'
    AGT.say 'judgement'

In addition, reduplicative nominal compounds have been used to derive kinship or family tree terms in the language as shown in (5) below:

5a.   óma # óma   ──────→ óma óma
      Child   child   'grandchild'

b. íye # íye   ──────→ íye   íye
   Mother mother   'grandmother'

c. àtá # àtá   ──────→ àtá àtá
   Father   father   'grandfather'

From the foregoing, it may be plausible to argue that with regard to lexical expansion or creation of new lexical categories or words, particularly for foreign institutions, ideas, items or objects and concepts which were hitherto non-existent in a host language, the use of compounding or equivalent compound word formation to express them as the Igala data above have shown, may be more productive, more natural, and much more motivating than mere borrowing and or transliteration. And by implication, since compounding is a universal phenomenon which is really pervasive in the world's languages, this observation may be applicable to almost all other languages of the world as it relates to lexical expansion through compounding (Omachonu and Onogu, 2012). This has been adopted for use in Àgàtú compound process.

Data Analysis

What follows is the analysis of data of which discussion is focused on coinage and personal names formation through the process of the compounding in Àgàtú. The section is divided into two parts: Coinage and Personal names.

Coinage: A process of compounding in Àgàtú

Compound coined words can be used to indicate entities which were not hitherto designed by a compound in the languages. Coinage is simply the expansion of the lexicon of a language through the creation of new lexical items. In most cases, coinage is triggered by the need for a language to represent foreign concepts, ideas and institution that were hitherto non-existent in the native vocabulary. Such ideas, concepts and institutions are derived through reduplicative nominal compounding for creating new lexemes translation of compound nouns from some language (cf Madondo, 2001). This is exemplified in the following Àgàtú data:

Names of Institutions

7i)   inù   #   ọ̀kpá   ínọ̀kpá
      house   book
          'School'

ii.   Inù   #   ẹ̀chí
      house   medicine
          'hospital'

iii.   Inù   #   nóbì
      house   black

'prison'

iv.   Inù   #   ẹ̀pọ̀
       house   case
            'court of law'

The examples (7i-iv) above exhibit names of institutions that were not present in the native linguistic vocabulary prior to their contact with the language from which the concepts originate, in this case, English language. In most cases, two or more words are combined to form other words.

The following are items or objects that were hitherto alien to Àgàtú culture but have been admitted into the vocabulary. The formation of these items is through concatenating the relevant lexemes to form a new lexeme. Examples (8) exemplifies the process:

8i   úgbọ́   #   ichò   úgbóichò
       train   sky
            'aeroplane'
  ii. úgbọ́   #   ájẹ̀   ugbaje
       train   land
            'train'
 iii. ágọ́dọ́   #   ójè   ágọ́dójè
       bed   iron
            'bed'

As mentioned earlier, there are concepts that were alien to Àgàtú lexical system. The following data (9) are examples of concepts that have been adopted into Àgàtú through compounding.

9i). i. O   kẹ́lá   ọ̀wọ́íchò   okẹ́láọ́wọ́íchò
        AGT.   say word   God
              'preacher'
  ii. O   nwú ọ̀kpá   onwọ̀kpá
       AGT   Teach book
          'teacher'
 iii. O   kà   ẹ́pọ́   okẹ́pọ́
     AGT.   Say case
          'Judge'

Kinship/ Family tree
Reduplicative nominal compounds have been used to derive kinship or family tree terms in Àgàtú. This is shown in example (10i-iii) below.

10i. áyì   #   áyì ⟶ áyáyì

      children   children

          'grandchildren'

  ii. ẹ́nẹ́   #   ẹ́nẹ̀ ⟶ ẹ́nẹ́nẹ̀

       Mother   mother

          'Grandmother'

 iii. adá   #   adá ⟶ adádà

       Father   father

       'grandfather'

The above examples show the use of compound formation in Àgàtú for extension of foreign concepts, ideals/objects and institutions that have non-existence before their contact with some languages, especially English.

Interestingly, deletion; morphophonemic rule is observed to interplay in the formation of coinage as a process of compounding in the context where unacceptable vowel sequences occur within word boundaries. The following examples (14i-viii) show how elision, a phonological process intervenes in coinage process of compounding in the language.

14i) inù #   ọ̀kpá   ínọ́kpá
     house   book
     'School'

ii.   Inù   #   ẹ̀chí
       house   medicine
               'hospital'

iii.   Inù   #   ẹ̀pọ̀
       house   case
          'court of law'

iv.   úgbọ́   #   ichò   úgbóichò
       train   sky
        'aeroplane'

v.   úgbọ́   #   ájẹ̀   ugbaje
       train   land
          'train'

vi.   O   kẹ́lá   ọ̀wọ́íchò   okẹ́láọ̀wọ́íchò
       AGT.   say word   God
               'preacher'

vii.   O   nwú ọ̀kpá   onwọ̀kpá
       AGT   Teach book
               'teacher'

viii. O   kà   ẹ̀pọ́   okẹ́pọ́
        AGT. Say case
               'Judge'

Taking from the data (14i-viii), we observe the elision of certain vowel segments. For instance, the back vowels /u, a, o/ get elided in word boundaries in (i-viii) to ensure that no unwanted vowel sequence makes it to the surface realization of the derived compound, hence, the words are realized as seen in the (i-viii).

Discussions

Evidently, compounding, a morphological process is productive in Àgàtú. The nature of compounds in Àgàtú is such that new words can be formed from existing ones. These could be as a result of words of the same class or two different classes of which both are root words. The structures of compound in Àgàtú are noun + noun, noun + verb and noun + adjective. We observe from the available data that compounds in Àgàtú coinages, largely involves the combination of the open word classes.

Another very interesting aspect of compounding in the language is coinages. Compound coined words are used as means of extending the lexicon of the language through the creation of new lexical categories. In Àgàtú, coinage is used for the representation of foreign concepts, ideas and institutions that were hitherto non-existent in the culture of the language. Such ideas, concepts and institutions are derived with the use of reduplicative nominal compounding for creating new lexemes translation of a compound noun from the language.

It is evident in the analysis of the available data that a phonological rule has proven relevant in the compounding process of Àgàtú, particularly, elision. This rule apply chiefly to ensure conformity of such constructions to the phonotactics of the language as it relates to vowel sequence occurrence in the language.

Conclusion

The research concludes that new words can be formed from existing ones and that Àgàtú compounds could either be a continuation of words that belong to the same class or a combination of words from

different classes. Compounds also select open class words. The study also concludes that coinage which is vital in Àgàtú compounding represents foreign concepts as well as ideas and institutions making entries into Àgàtú. Specifically, these foreign entries are derived through the reduplication of nominal compounds. Lastly, it is concluded that, to conform to the phonotactics of the language, elision play a vital role in Àgàtú compounding.

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