

The study of suffixation in Waja language plural formation

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Abstract

This paper investigates and describes the process of suffixation in plural formation in Waja, a language spoken predominantly in Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State. Languages may form plurals through different inflectional or derivational strategies; in Waja, plural formation largely occurs through suffixation. The study adopts a descriptive approach to data analysis, drawing insights from Nida's (1985) principles of descriptive linguistics. The research identifies nine plural markers used in suffixation processes in Waja: *-i*, *-ni*, *-di*, *-ri*, *-wa*, *-ba*, *-ma*, *-ndi*, and *-ngi*. These markers occur as affixes in the language, typically with nouns and, to a lesser extent, adjectives. Examples include: *bàkórò* 'donkey' → *bàkóri* 'donkeys' (*-i* marker); *gónò* 'ant' → *gòní* 'ants' (*-i* marker); *msâm* 'lion' → *msâmdí* 'lions' (*-di* marker); *nyàngí* 'monkey' → *nyandí* 'monkeys' (*-ndi* marker); *prá* 'question' → *prândí* 'questions' (*-ndi* marker); *lèe* 'answer' → *lèndí* 'answers' (*-ndi* marker); *bàfátò* 'tiger' → *bàfátùní* 'tigers' (*-ni* marker). The study further observes that some markers - particularly *-i*, *-di*, *-ndi*, and *-ngi* - are more productive than others. In conclusion, the paper recommends further research into pluralization processes in Waja, with a focus on productivity and distribution patterns of plural markers.

Key word: Documentation, pluralisation, suffixes, morphology, plural marker, affixes, derivation.

Introduction

Pluralisation is a system of word formation where root, base, or stem and in fact, word is manipulated to arrive at a plural form. Plural formation normally serves as a unified matter, which makes languages under technical studies by linguists on their morphological processes. Each language exhibits a specific plural formation pattern. Some languages exploit reduplication pattern, some affixation outline under inflection and derivation processes, Umar (2023). In such instances word remains the heart of any language whose different forms are initially formed from their roots/bases, it remains the essential unit of linguistics investigation in the field of morphology. Uncountable studies have been recorded in respect of plural formation by individuals and scholars which implies word covered and uncovered plural forms for pluralisation techniques in all languages. A given language may make plural forms of nouns by various inflections, through the addition of affixes among other. Therefore, this work deems to investigate and describe the affixation process of Plural formation in a Waja language that is spoken predominantly in Balanga local Government of Gombe State. The system of plural formation of nouns and adjective will take the heart of the work. Even though, some aspects of verbs and adverbs plural formations processes may be partially considered.

The Waja people are believed to have arrived their present settlement in the 11th century from Yemen (Middle East) along with other tribes like Tera, Lunguda, Awak, Jarah, Tula, Bachama and others. Research into the early history of Waja reveals that they migrated from the Middle East precisely “Yemen” and passed through Egypt to Ngazargamu in Yobe State and had a stopover at Kukawa down to Shani all in the present Borno State. They arrived with (Dele-Dalawaja) and the Lunguda people and settled at Wa’anda before relocating to present Waja Chieftdom. In fact, it is worth mentioning that the migration was in sequence one after the other (History of Waja Chieftdom).

Waja, also known as Nyan, Wiyau, Wiyaa, or Wuya, is one of the Savanna languages of eastern Nigeria. Dialectical differences between *Deruwo* Hills Waja (Wajan Dutse) and *Waja proper* Plain Waja (Wajan Kasa) are slight. The *Wiyàà* (*Wajan Kasa*), is spoken in almost ten settlements, including Talasse (main settlement that is home to the Emir of Waja). And *Derúwò* (*Hill Waja* or *Wajan Dutse*), which is mostly spoken in Degri. Putoki, Kulani, and Sikkam. The district head named after the language as Bala-Waja. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Waja_language

Greenberg (1963) asserts that the language is classified as one of the members of Niger-Congo Atlantic group of the family of languages in the Adamawa eastern. Nevertheless, Laima (2003) in Aliyu (2013) affirms that Waja people can be found in the present day Waja chieftdom that is located in Balanga local Government in southeastern part of Gombe

State. It shares boundaries with Yamaltu Deba Local Government to the North. And to the South it is bordered by Adamawa State, it also shares boundaries with Kaltungo Local Government at the West. In addition, Balanga shares boundaries with some parts of Borno State at the East. It lies within latitude 1.35 and 8.3 north and longitude 8.270 from south. However, it forms roughly a rectangle some 60km in length and 32km in breadth as well as 682km in area. It is situated at the South East corner of Gombe State. However, 2006 census confirmed that 1,626 km² (628 sq mi) with a total of 212,549 population of the entire Balanga local Government. Specifically, numbering 144,000, native speakers (en.m.wikipedia.org).

Aspect of pluralisation is intensely study by various scholars in 20th and 21st century in respect of the works reviewed. Its study involved many researchers in the field of linguistics, locally and internationally, this showcase that, the area is not firsthand. For instance, the following are some of the contributors of pluralisation in the linguistics domain; Newman (1972), Mukoshy (1978), Lieber (2009), Omachonu (2011), Zeki (2011), Salim (2013), Binder (2014), Albirini (2014), Moro (2018), Næss (2018), Smith (2018), and Franz (2020) to mention but few. All aforementioned and classical works paid attention on various languages, which include; Hausa, Alorese, Aiwoo, Fulfulde, Hebrew, Kanuri, German, English among others and it served as a source of motivation and focus to this current research. These studies suggest that there is a gap as far as aspects of Plural formation in Waja language is concerned. Which is really a problem to the aspect of plural formation studies in the Waja language and the language documentation. Therefore, this research intends to fill in the gap and conduct its research on the study of plural formation in the Waja language.

Methodology

The method of data collection uses primary and secondary sources of data collection. Visitation to research area has been arranged regularly and interview is properly utilized for data collection alongside the use of a recorder as instrument for the research. Five (5) native informants were engaged to help the researcher in collecting data. This unstructured interview covers nominal plural words which was carefully selected in such a way that covered the objectives of the study in the analyses process

This research uses simple random sampling technique, as sampling approach depending age, 70% of the respondents are from 40years and above, while the remaining 30% are from 40years and below. The respondents comprises 53% males and 47% females of

different ages which are subjected to unstructured interview and non-participant observation. The research recorded twenty two (22) respondents throughout.

Data presentation and analysis

The available and adequate data identified for plural formation in Waja language is associated with affixes under the morphological process of word formation. Affixation is a process of adding morpheme to the base or root of the word either in the beginning, middle or at the end to generate another meaning which could be plural and many others. Plural formation in Waja language enjoyed suffixation more than other processes of pluralisation as focused in this paper. Suffixation is the process of adding morpheme at the end of the base or root to form another meaning. Such process is absolutely reliable in Waja language. In this view, this research has able to identified nine plural markers for suffixation processes in the Waja language which is illustrated best of Nida (1952) descriptive model.

Plural markers

The suffixes plural markers identified in Waja language are as follows;

- (1) *-i, -ni, -di, -ri, -wa, -ba -ma -ndi,, -ngi,*

In this context, all of the morphemes identified for plural making in the Waja language are illustrated in this paper, while undertaking this study, the researcher discovered that these markers are commonly used and understood by the various native speakers of the language. This relates to those found in the communities domiciled in the Waja hill and plain Waja located in Balanga Local Government of Gombe State.

Suffixes process of plural forms

A suffix is a morphological process whereby a morpheme is attached to the end of a stem to form a plural form. Most of the plural formations in the Waja language are realized through suffixation as in the following illustration.

The following are examples of noun pluralization in the Waja language.

Table 1. –í Suffix

S/N	Base form	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
1.	<i>neera</i>	‘honey’	<i>neerì</i>	‘honey’ ‘Frogs’
2.	<i>làmcà</i>	‘Frog’	<i>làmcì</i>	‘Frogs’
3.	<i>bàkorò</i>	‘donkey’	<i>bàkòrí</i>	‘donkeys’
4.	<i>Gonò</i>	‘ant’	<i>gònì</i>	‘ants’
5.	<i>sîndò</i>	‘tsetse fly’	<i>sîndì</i>	‘tsetse flies’

It is pertinent at this point to note that the realization of the plural form is achieved not only by the addition of the morpheme –í but also by the change of the previously existing morpheme at the end of the word.

In the (1), it indicates suffixation of the plural maker –í. The noun base *nera* ‘honey’ is suffixed to realise the plural *nerì* ‘honey’. The singular suffix –á attracts the low tone which is changed to –í with high tone pattern. Though the word structure maintained two syllables structure. That is to say –á is deleted and suffixed with –í morpheme. In (2) above, the plural suffix –í which is used in as the singular base form final position of *làmcá* ‘Frog’ to form the plural form *làmcì* ‘Frogs’. The final vowel diphthong –á was deleted and replaced with the plural marker –í and the disyllable structure is maintained along with the tone pattern. (3) above also indicates suffixation process of plural formation. The noun base ‘*bàkorò*’ ‘donkey’ is suffixed with morpheme –í after deleting the final vowel –ò for plural formation. The singular suffix ò which attracts the low tone pattern is changed to high tone pattern. The first and the second syllable maintained their tone; low and high respectively. The plural become ‘*bàkòrí*’ ‘donkeys’. That is to say –ò is deleted and suffixed with –í. At the (4) above, suffixation of the plural maker –í is evidently seen. The noun base *gonò* ‘ant’ is suffixed to realise the plural *gonì* ‘ants’. The singular suffix –ò has a low tone which is changed to –í morpheme with high tone pattern. Though the word structure maintains two syllables. That is to say –ò is deleted and suffixed with –í. (4) indicated suffixation of the plural maker –í. The noun base *sîndò* ‘tsetse fly’ is suffixed to realise the plural *sîndì* ‘tsetse flies’. The singular suffix –ò has a low tone which changes to –í with high tone pattern. Though the word structure maintains two syllables. That is to say –ò is deleted and suffixed with –í. linguistically.

Table 2. -dí Suffix.

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural Form	Gloss
1.	<i>laa</i>	‘house’	<i>làdí</i>	‘houses’
2.	<i>nyinò</i>	‘road’	<i>nyìndí</i>	‘roads’
3.	<i>Msâm</i>	‘lion’	<i>Msâmdí</i>	‘lions’
4.	<i>Kùme</i>	‘night’	<i>kùmdí</i>	‘nights’

Under (1) above, the monosyllabic structure with long vowel and high tone “*lá*” ‘house’ suffixes with *-dí* morpheme to form the plural “*ladi*” ‘houses’. The process indicates relegation of long vowel *-aa* to short *-a* and changed the tone pattern to low, also the syllable structure changes to disyllabic. (2) above, indicates suffixation of the plural maker *-dí*. The noun base *yínò* ‘road’ is suffixes *-di* to realise the plural *yindí* ‘births’. The singular base vowel *ò* with low tone pattern is deleted and suffixed with the morpheme *-dí* with high tone pattern. However, the word structure maintains disyllabic structure. In (3) above, *msâm* ‘lion’ is a noun base singular with fallen tone. It is pluralized by adding the morpheme *-dí* to the root where the monosyllabic changes to a disyllabic structure. Also in the process, the fallen tone of the base is maintained and attaches to the morpheme *-dí* to obtain the plural form *msâmdí* ‘lions’. (4) above, showcases suffixation of the plural maker *-dí*. The noun base *kume* ‘night’ is suffixed to realise the plural form *kumdi* ‘nights’. The singular vowel *-e* with a low tone is replaced and suffixed with the morpheme *-dí* with high tone pattern. However, the word structure maintains its disyllabic structure. At this junction, it is pertinent to know that, truncation is a productive form before the suffix *-dí* in the realization of plural making.

Table 3. -ndi Suffix

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural Form	Gloss
1.	<i>.joree</i>	‘time’	<i>jòrendí</i>	‘times’
2.	<i>pra</i>	‘question’	<i>prândí</i>	<i>prândí</i>
3.	<i>lèe</i>	‘answer’	<i>lèndí</i>	‘answers’
4.	<i>kene</i>	‘iron’	<i>kèndí</i>	‘irons’
5.	<i>bànti</i>	‘trouser’	<i>bàntindí</i>	‘trousers’

In (1) above, suffixation of the plural maker *-ndí* is realized. The noun base *jore* ‘time’ is suffixed to realised at the plural *jòróndí* ‘times’. The singular vowel *-é* which attracts the high tone pattern is substituted by inserting the morpheme *-ó* and the suffixed *-ndí*. However, the word structure changes to tri-syllabic structure and the tone pattern changes from HH to LHH respectively. In (2) above, the plural form *prândi* ‘question’ was generated from the monosyllabic base *prá* ‘question’, where by the plural morpheme *-ndí* is added to the base form. This changes the tone pattern from H to FH and the monosyllabic structure improved to disyllabic structure. Also in (3) above, the plural form *lèndi* ‘answers’ emerged from *lèe* ‘answer’ monosyllabic noun base with long vowel. One vowel is deleted through the processes, and the suffix *-ndí* is added to the root. The base changes to two syllable structure. So also, in (4) above, the *-ndi* plural marker is added to the base *kéné* ‘iron’ to form the plural *kènéndí* ‘irons’. The tone HH changed to LHH while the base changes to a tri-syllabic structure. Finally, in (5), the *-ndi* plural marker is added to the base *bànti* ‘trouser’ to form the plural *bàntindí* ‘trouser’. The tone LH changes to LHH while the base changes to a tri-syllabic structure.

Table 4 -ri Suffix

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural Form	Gloss
1.	<i>biyâu</i>	‘skin’	<i>bìyari</i>	‘skins’
2.	<i>pwâlâu</i>	‘mouth’	<i>pwâlàrì</i>	‘mouths’
3.	<i>pòdòu</i>	‘bone’	<i>pòdòrì</i>	‘bones’
4.	<i>yàkâu</i>	‘boundary’	<i>yakorì</i>	‘boundaries’

Here in (1) above the plural suffix *-ri* is added to the singular base form final position *bìyâu* ‘skin’ to form the plural form *bìyari* ‘skins’. The depth vowel *-âu* narrowed to singular morpheme and the tone pattern changed to high tone while the syllable structure changes to tri-syllabic. In (2) above, the plural suffix *-rì* is added to the singular base form final position *pwâlâu* ‘mouth’ to form the plural form *pwâlàrì* ‘mouths’ after narrowing the depth vowel *-âu* to singular morpheme and the tone pattern changes to low tone, at the same time, the syllable structure changes to tri-syllabic structure. In (3) above, the plural suffix *-ri* is added to the singular base form final position *pòdòu* ‘bone’ to form the plural form *pòdòrì* ‘bones’. The syllabic structure changes to tri-syllabic structure from disyllabic after narrowing the long vowel *-òu* to short form *-ò* morpheme and the tone of the base form was maintains. Finally, in (4) above, the plural suffix *-rì* is added to the singular base form final position *yàkâu* ‘boundary’ to form the plural form *yakorì* ‘boundaries’. The depth

vowel -*âu* is narrowed to a singular morpheme -*o*, also the syllabic structure is changes to a tri-syllabic structure.

Table 5 -*ni* Suffix.

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural Form	Gloss
1.	<i>swàrè</i>	‘bag’	<i>swarnì</i>	‘bags’
2.	<i>bàfatò</i>	‘tiger’	<i>bàfatùni</i>	<i>bàfatùni</i>
3.	<i>gèlèwà</i>	‘camel’	<i>gèlewàni</i>	‘camels’
4.	‘camels’	‘kettle’	<i>càini</i>	‘kettles’
5.	‘kettles’	‘wing’	<i>toroni</i>	‘wings’

Here in (1) above there is suffixation of the plural maker -*ní*. The noun base *swàrè* ‘bag’ is suffixes with -*ní* for the pluralform *swárnì* ‘bags’. The final morpheme -*è* of the base form was deleted in the process and the tone pattern changes from LL to HL respectively. In (2) above, it indicates suffixation of the plural maker -*ní* after replacing the final morpheme -*ò* with -*ù* morpheme. The noun base *bàfatò* ‘tiger’ is suffixes to form the pluralform *bàfatùni* ‘tigers’. The tone pattern changes from LHL to LHLH respectively and the syllabic structure changes to four syllabic. In (3) above, it indicates suffixation of the plural maker -*ní*. The noun base *gèlèwà* ‘camel’ is suffixes to form the pluralform *gèlewàni* ‘camels’. The tone pattern changes from LLL to LHLL respectively. Also in (4) above, it indicates suffixation of the plural maker -*ní*. The noun base *cái* ‘kettle’ is suffixes with -*níto* form the pluralform *càini* ‘kettles’. The tone pattern changes from fallen tone to HL respectively and the syllabic changes to disyllabic. In (5) above, it indicates another suffixation process of plural formation. The noun base *tòrongù* ‘wing’ is suffixes with morpheme -*í* after deleting the final morpheme -*u*. The singular suffix -*u* has a low tone pattern changes to high tone, though the first and second syllabic maintains their tone; low and high respectively. The plural become *toroni* ‘wings’.

Table 6. -*angi* Suffix.

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural form	Gloss
1.	<i>dàrè</i>	‘cap’	<i>dàrangì</i>	‘caps’
2.	<i>chukuré</i>	‘hut’	<i>chùkùrangí</i>	‘huts’
3.	<i>làmanè</i>	<i>làmanè</i>	<i>làmangì</i>	‘covers’
4.	<i>sîi</i>	‘grass’	<i>sîyàngí</i>	‘grasses’
5.	<i>pîi</i>	Poem	<i>piyàngì</i>	‘poems’

In (1) above, the plural suffix *-ngì* is added to the singular base form final position *dàré* ‘cap’ to form the plural form *dàrángì* ‘caps’. The final morpheme *-è* is deleted and suffixes the plural marker *-ángì*. The syllabic structure change to tri-syllabic. And the tone pattern changed from LL to LHL respectively. In (2) above, the plural suffix *-ángì* is added to the singular base form final position *chúkúré* ‘hut’ to form the plural form *chùkùrángì* ‘huts’. The final morpheme *-è* is deleted and suffixes the plural marker *-ángì*. The syllabic structure change to four-syllable. And the tone pattern changes from HHH to LLHH respectively. Also, in (3) above, the plural suffix *-ángì* is added to the singular base form final position *làmanè* ‘cover’ to form the plural form *làmángì* ‘covers’. The final morpheme *-è* is deleted and suffixes the plural marker *-ángì*. The syllabic structure maintained tri-syllable. And the tone pattern changed from LLL to LHL respectively. Additionally In (4) above, the plural suffix *-ángì* is added to the singular base form final position *sîi* ‘grass’ to form the plural form *sîyàngì* ‘grasses’. The syllabic structure change to tri-syllabic. There is also an insertion of the morpheme *-y* before the plural maker *-ángì* during the processes. Moreover, in (5) above, the plural suffix *-ángì* is added to the singular base form final position *pîi* ‘poem’ to form the plural form *piyàngì* ‘poems’. The syllabic structure change to tri-syllabic, there is also a case of insertion of the morpheme *-y* before the plural maker *-ángì* during the processes.

Table 7. -ba Suffix.

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural Form	Gloss
1.	<i>rungè</i>	‘visitor’	<i>rungbà</i>	<i>rungbà</i>
2.	<i>bàsinte</i>	‘friend’	<i>bàsinba</i>	‘friends’
3.	<i>bàpùm</i>	‘neighbor’	<i>bàpumba</i>	‘neighbors’
4.	<i>bàpimè</i>	‘deep person’	<i>bàpimbà</i>	‘deep persons’
5	<i>nùrè</i>	‘woman’	‘woman’	‘women’

Here in (1) above, the plural suffix *-ba* is added to the singular base form final position of *rúngè* ‘visitor’ to form the plural form *rúngbà* ‘visitors’. The final phoneme *è* was deleted before suffixes the plural marker while the syllabic structure and tone pattern is preserved. In (2) above, the plural suffix *-ba* is added to the singular base form final position of *bàsinté* ‘friend’ to form the plural form *bàsinbá* ‘friends’. The final morpheme *té* was deleted before the addition of the plural marker. The syllabic structure and tone pattern is however preserved. Also in (3) above, the plural suffix *-ba* is added to the singular base form final position of *bàpùn* ‘neighbor’ to form the plural form *bàpùnbá* ‘neighbors’. The

syllabic structure change to tri-syllabic and tone pattern changed from LL to LHH respectively. In (4) above, the plural suffix *-ba* is added to the singular base to form the final position of *bàpímè* ‘deep person’ to form the plural form *bàpímbà* meaning ‘deep persons’. The final phoneme *è* was deleted before adding the plural marker. The tri-syllabic syllable structures remain and the tone pattern is also preserved. Moreover in (5) above, the plural suffix *-ba* is added to the singular base form final position of *nùrè* ‘woman’ to form the plural form ‘*núrba*’ ‘women’. The final morpheme *è* was deleted before the plural marker and the syllabic structure change to tri-syllabic. The tone pattern changed from LL to HL respectively.

Table 8. -wa Suffix.

S/N	Base Form	Gloss	Plural form	Gloss
1.	<i>nurcangà</i>	‘bride’	<i>nurcangawá</i>	‘brides’
2.	<i>kurù</i>	‘old man’	<i>kùrùwá</i>	‘old men’
	<i>kûwèè</i>	‘thief’	<i>kuwwâ</i>	‘thiefs’

As showcase in (1) above, the tri-syllabic structure *nurcangà* ‘bride’ undergoes plural process by adding suffix *-wa* to form *nurcangawá* ‘brides’. Here the base change to a four-syllabic structure. The attached morpheme has a high tone. Under (2) above, the disyllabic structure word *kurù* ‘old man’ suffixes with *-wa* to form the plural *kùrùwá* ‘old men’ in the Waja language. The HL tone pattern changed to LLH and the syllabic structure change to tri-syllabic structure. In (3) above, the plural forms *kuwwâ* ‘thiefs’ is generated from the singular *kûwèè* ‘thief’. The plural marker has a fallen tone - *wâ* after deleting the final morpheme - *èè*.

Conclusion

This paper identifies nine plural markers for plural formation in the Waja language. The paper describes the markers identified for pluralisation purposes. The plural markers treated suffixation process. Therefore, the markers are; *-i, -ni, -di, -ri, -wa, -ba -ma -ndi, -ngi*. which have been exemplified one after the other as; *bàkórò* ‘donkey’→ *bàkórí* ‘donkeys’, *gónò* ‘ant’→ *góní* ‘ants’ for *-i*, marker. *msâm* ‘lion’→ *msâmdí* ‘lions’, *nyàngí* ‘monkey’→ *nyandí* ‘monkeys’ for *-ni*, marker. *prá* ‘question’→ *prândí* ‘question’, *lèè* ‘answer’→ *lèndí* ‘answers’ for *-ndi* marker, *swàrè* ‘bag’→ *swární* ‘bags’ *bàfàtò* ‘tiger’→ *bàfàtùní* ‘tigers’ for *-ni* marker, *nurcangà* ‘bride’→ *nurcangawá* ‘brides’ *kùrù* ‘old man’→ *kùrùwá* ‘old men’ for *-wa* marker, *chiyate* ‘brother’→ *chiyamà* ‘brothers’ *kwâ* ‘youth’→ *kwatmà*

‘youths’ for **-ma** marker etc. The markers that are dominant in terms of nominal plurals are; **-i**, **-ni**, **-di**, **-ri**, **-ndi**, and **-ngi**. However, in some instances before the plural form take its hape fully it must be accompanied by insertion of morpheme as seen in example 4 a and b **jóré** ‘time’ **jòróndí** ‘times’ **chókrók** ‘tall’ **chókróndí** ‘tall peoples’ respectively.

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