

A Morphological analysis of Ngamo place names

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the derivation and compounding of Ngamo place names within the framework of lexical morphology. Unstructured interview and observation are used as methods of data collection for the study. The paper reveals that minus formation is used where the derived form is achieved by shortening the vowel of word final position. Zero derivation formations are used to derive Ngamo place names from personal names and idiophones. Adverbial and nominal compounds demonstrate four different adverb-base compound and nine different noun-base compounds respectively.

Keywords: Ngamo language, place names, compounds, derivation.

Introduction

Ngamo is a West Chadic language spoken in the south and west of Potiskum, Yobe State (Newman, 1977). Ngamo called themselves as Ngàmò, Ngôi Ngàmò (m.), Àn Ngàmò (f.), Ngàmaayè/Ngàmàayà (pl.). Hausa called them Gamo (m./f.) Gamawa (pl.). Fulani and other tribes around such as Ngizim, Karekare, Bole and Bade called them Ngàmò (m./f./pl.). They are the settlers in some areas of Fafa and Soro Districts of Darazo Local Government of Bauchi State. They are also settlers in some areas of Guduku, Jigawa and Barwo Districts of Nafada Local Government and in some areas of Dukku and Jamari Districts of Dukku Local Government of Gombe State. More so, they are the settlers in some areas of Bara District of

Gujba Local Government, Damagum, Daura and Ngelzarma Districts of Fune Local Government, they are also settlers in areas and some areas of Chana, Dozi, Dotto, Fika, Gana, Ganga, Godowoli, Gudi, Janga, Maluri, Ngeji, Ngalda, Soyo and Shembire Districts of Fika Local Government of Yobe State. Ngamo people are descendants of Gudi, Gamari, Gana, Biyo, Daba, Gosho, Jokre, Jombor, Kadi, Lewe, Bara, Dozi and Zobo hills. Others include Dotto Ja, Dotto Fara, Banga, Bengre, Bogoma, Dirjogo, Diri, Dirshukla, Gasoro, Gozombi, Kaisami, Kanda, Karte, Kawa, Kolom, Kurbi, Mele, Njabi, Shula, Tagoi and Bekande hills in an area of South and West of Potiskum.

Ngamo language is classified into two major dialectal groups namely Gudi and Yaya dialects. The dialects are sharply distinctive from each other in phonology, morphology and lexicon so that they could be misinterpreted as separate languages. There are also two sub-dialects known as Dotto and Janga of Ngamo which are nearly similar to Gudi dialect (Gashinge, Janga-Dole & Goge, 2004: iii). However, the criterion used to justify grouping the two groups as dialects of one language is the presence of fairly mutual intelligibility between them. The percentage cut off point suggested by Morris Swadesh (1955) was 81% on a 215 wordlist and 86% on a 100 wordlist (Gadaka, 2023:8).

Although information on Chadic languages spoken in Yobe State has increased especially when Yobe State Languages Research Project emerged in the last decade, but our knowledge on Ngamo language today almost comes entirely from the works of (Schuh 1978, 1982, 1984, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2004, 2003a, 2003b, 2001 etc.) which are all linguistic based. Some copies of comparative studies on grammatical aspects of the language were found to include (Gashinge 1993), (Samuel 2007), (Zulyadaini 2008), (Gadaka 2008 & 2015)¹. This research is based on the morphological source and structure of Ngamo place names in on the ancient hills and in their place of present destination in Gombe, Bauchi and Yobe States of North-eastern Nigeria. The research will be beneficial to students, teachers and researchers such as linguists, anthropologists, archaeologists, sociologists and geographers.

Research methodology

The researcher used text books, journals, dissertations, internet facilities and theses on Ngamo and other language studies on either morphology or place names to obtain data. Also tape recorder and handset facilities were used to record interviews and discussions as material source of data for the study. The researcher used unstructured interview and observation as

¹ We are grateful to Galka Mohammed Akuya and Edward Gali Yusuf for the numerous discussions, encouragement and advice at different stages during the write up of this paper. We are responsible for any short coming of the paper.

methods of data collection for the research. Questions were presented to the respondents in an informal and relaxed atmosphere, where some valid and significant data about Ngamo place names were gathered. Such questions were presented to the respondents in a face-to-face encounter.

The interview was done in two different categories, depending on age of the respondents. Twenty (20) respondents within the age category of 18-50 years provided data about place names on the ground. Moreover, thirty (30) respondents within age category of 50 years and above provided data about place names on the hills. The population of this study comprised of all Ngamo native speakers of Bauchi, Gombe and Yobe States of North-Eastern Nigeria. Being that it will not be possible to have the responses of the entire population, it has become necessary to select a sample population from the general population for their representation. Therefore, the researcher used fifty (50) native speakers of Ngamo Language in the area of study as research respondents.

However, the researcher also visited the villages of Gamari, Janga-Na'ako, Bana Aba, Bana Gamji and some other villages around to cover Gudi, Janga, Dotto, and Yaya dialects of Ngamo language. These trips to above mentioned places and beyond have given the researcher the opportunity to conduct interviews with Ngamo natives on the place naming system in their respective language area. The major aim was to collect required data and to verify the correctness of the data gathered for the research. The researcher gathered one hundred and sixty (160) Ngamo place names on the ground and one hundred and sixteen (116) Ngamo ancient places on the thirty-five (35) hills. The analysis for this research was done based on the lexical morphology. Whereas various forms of derivation and compounding identified were itemized and numbered for the purpose of easy understanding of the research result.

Abubakar (2001) discusses morphology as divided into lexical morphology and inflectional morphology. Lexical morphology is further subdivided into derivation and compounding. He describes two major categories of compounds in Hausa language, which are nominal compounds and adverbial compounds; while derivation involves formation of new words from existing lexeme by the use of derivational affix whereby the derived word acquires different grammatical class from its base form. He discusses on the morphological processes in Hausa extensively which are affixation (prefix, infix and suffix), reduplication (partial and complete) and modification which has ten sub-processes. Abubakar, (2001) is adopted as a model of approach for this research because of the fact that his work discusses morphological classification extensively as regards to Hausa language. As such, it has been

discovered that our data for the study will accommodate the structural aspect discussed in it.

Derivation

The term derivation involves the formation of a new word from an existing lexeme by use of derivational affix, the result of which is that the derived word acquires a different grammatical class from its base form (Abubakar 2001:21). Based on our data, Ngamo used the derivation as a source of place names from existing lexemes by the use of derivational affix. Therefore, in this section we shall study the formation of Ngamo place names under the following sub-headings.

Subtraction

Otherwise known as ‘minus formation’ is one of the modification processes where the derived form is achieved by deleting part of the base (Abubakar 2001:14). In Ngamo language all place names were derived from common noun of things around the place or things applicable to the place by shortening the vowel of the final syllable. This derivation is presented in example (1):²

Example 1:

	Base form		Derived form
a.	Gòoshòò ‘stone’	→	Gòoshò ‘a place on the Gana hill’
b.	Jàngaa ‘red muddy soil’	→	Jànga ‘a general name to one of the Ngamo dialect area’
c.	Kandaa ‘barren place’	→	Kanda ‘a village name under Godowoli district in Fika emirate’
d.	Gaarii ‘valley’	→	Gaari ‘a village name under Gudi district in Gudi emirate’
e.	Kurmìi	→	Kurmì

² Citations are in the standard orthography developed for Ngamo and based on that of Hausa, plus diacritics marking tone and vowel length: Grave accent = low tone (è); high tone left unmarked (e); circumflex tone = falling tone (ê); hachek = rising tone (ë); long vowel are marked with double of it (ee) (Schuh 2005a).

	‘thickly-wooded gully’		‘a village name under Janga district in Fika emirate’
f.	Fàalii		Fàali
	‘burrow-pit’		‘a village name under Xozi district in Gudi emirate’

From the forgoing examples, we can see the subtraction of shortening the vowel of the final syllable /oo/ → /o/, /aa/ → /a/ and /ii/ → /i/. Another form of the above Ngamo place names derived their sources from the names of some notable trees of the place named as exemplified below:

Example 2:

	Base form		Derived form
a.	Dèonii ‘tamarind tree’	→	Dèmi ‘a place name on the Dotto hill’
b.	Kùshii ‘baobab tree’	→	Kùshi ‘a place name on the Gudi and two Dotto hills’
c.	Me’eshii ‘locust-been tree’	→	Me’eshi ‘a place name on the Jokre hill’
d.	Shùklàa ‘fig tree’	→	Shùklà ‘a place name on the Gudi and Lewe hills’

2.1.2 Zero derivation

This is zero process which does not delete, subtract or reduplicate part of a word to another without changing its form. Some Ngamo place names derived their sources from the personal names of the founder of the village/town without changing its form as can be exemplified below:

Example 3:

	Base form		Derived form
a.	Zàyi ‘personal name’	→	Zàyi ‘a village name under Chana district in Fika emirate’
b.	Fùusàami ‘personal name’	→	Fùusàami

			‘a village name under Dotto district in Gudi emirate’
c.	Baldè ‘personal name’	→	Baldè ‘a village name under Xozi district in Gudi emirate’
d.	Baushè ‘personal name’	→	Baushè ‘a village name under Ngelzarma district in Ngelzarma emirate’
e.	Àbàrè ‘personal name’	→	Àbàrè ‘a village name under Fafa district in Darazo emirate’

Another form of zero derivation in the process of the formation of Ngamo place names without changing its form is from idiophone words indicating the nature of the place. It has been observed that most of these names found on the hills as exemplified in (4) below:

Example 4:

	Base form		Derived form
a.	Kolkol ‘indication of small and strong’	→	Kolkol ‘a place name on the Vara hill’
b.	Kolom ‘indicating falling of something into a hole’	→	Kolom ‘a name of popular Janga hill’
c.	Shul ‘indicating the highness of something in bar shape’	→	Shul ‘a name of stone beside Gana hill’
d.	Maram ‘indication of barren place’	→	Maram ‘a place name on Kaxi hill’
e.	Falau ‘indicating long distance upward’	→	Falau ‘a village name under Gudi district in Gudi emirate’

Compounding

The term compounding is a process by which a noun, an adjective, or a verb made of two or more words or part of words, written as one or more words, or joined by a hyphen (Hornby, 1948). It has been observed that compounding is one of the most important aspects of word formation in Ngamo language. Ngamo used compounding as a tool for the formation of place names. Ngamo involved the use of adverb + noun compound, noun + noun compound, Bana + name compound, title + name compound, Baa-/Daa- + name compound, Baaba + name compound and Hausa based compound to form its place names as can be discussed under the following sub-headings.

Adverb + Noun compound

This sub-category of Ngamo place names is composed of adverb plus noun compound. The adverb in this form is specified by the characteristics of the places. This can be seen in the examples presented in (5) below:

Example 5:

Adverb + Noun		Compound	Gloss
a. Gàa + Shinge 'area' + 'thorn fence'	→	Gàashinge	'a village established with in the thorn fence'
b. Gàa + Dàakà 'area' + 'fodder-grass'	→	Gàadàakà	'a town established in the area with fodder-grass'
c. Gàa + Laazi 'area + 'cassia shrub'	→	Gàalaazi	'a town ward in an area with <i>Cassia goratensis</i> shrubs'
d. Gàa + Dàana 'area' + 'red-flowered trees'	→	Gàadàana	'a village established in an area with many red-flowered silk cotton trees i.e. <i>Bombax buonopezense</i> '
e. Gòdò + Elì 'hole' + 'ground'	→	Gòdòwòlì	'a town established beside the valley'

Another form of this compound place names is by the way of compounding of adverb *Boo-* 'edge of / verge of something' plus a noun compound. This can be illustrated in (6) below:

Example 6:

Adverb + Noun		Compound	Gloss
a. Bòo + Gàrgàr 'edge' + 'thorn fence'	→	Bòogàrgàr	'a village established in the edge of thorn fence'

b.	Bò + Faali 'edge' + 'burrow-pit'	→	Bòofaali	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
c.	Bò + Gaanuwa 'edge' + 'thorn fence'	→	Bòogaanuwa	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
d.	Bò + Hoti 'under' + 'sun shines'	→	Bòohoti	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
e.	Bò + Janga-dèi 'verge' + 'red mud hole'	→	Bòojanga-dèi	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
f.	Bò + Goomà 'verge' + 'market'	→	Bògoomà	'a place name in the Janga dialect area'
g.	Bò + Zaaži 'edge' + 'porcupine'	→	Bòzaaži	'a place name on the Kaxi hill'

This is another form of compound place names which is used by the way of compounding adverb *Be-* 'behind something' plus a noun compound. This can be seen in (7) below:

Example 7:

	Adverb + Noun		Compound	Gloss
a.	Be + Gòoshò 'behind' 'a mountain'	→	Begòoshò	'a place name on the Gana hill'
b.	Be + Bìiri 'behind' 'a rock'	→	Bebìiri	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
c.	Be + Kàndè 'behind' 'a valley'	→	Bekàndè	'a name of unpopular Janga hill'

Another form of this compound place names is by the way of compounding of adverb *Kaa-* 'on something' plus a noun compound. This can be seen in (8) below:

Example 8:

	Adverb + Noun		Compound	Gloss
a.	Kàa + Yaayà 'on' 'sand'	→	Kàayaayà	'a village name under Shembire district in Gudi emirate'
b.	Kàa + Banò 'fix' 'house'	→	Kàabanò	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
c.	Kàa + Barkò 'on' 'granite'	→	Kàabarkò	'a place name on the Gudi hill'
d.	Kàa + Boožà	→	Kàaboožà	'a place name on the Gudi hill'

- ‘on’ ‘top’
 e. Kàa + Diiri → Kàadiiri ‘a place name on the Gudi hill’
 ‘on’ ‘top’

Noun + Noun compound

In some places, people prefer to settle in groups apart than collective, though people accept one name as a village. In such situation people identify the parts by indication as exemplified in (9) below:

Example 9:

Noun + Noun	Compound	Gloss
a. Daaxè + Xinkiri ‘Daxe’ + ‘top’	→ Daaxè-xinkiri	‘Daxe village side located on the top of a hill’
b. Daaxè + Bàna + Abà ‘Daxe’ + ‘founder Aba’	→ Daaxè-bàna-abà	‘Daxe village side founded by a person called Aba’
c. Daaxè + Gòogòdò ‘Daxe’ + ‘under’	→ Daaxè-gòogòdò	‘Daxe village side located on the ground surface’
d. Daaxè + Gijàajà ‘Daxe + ‘personal name’	→ Daaxè-gijàajà	‘Daxe village side founded by a person called Gijaja’

Another kind of the above indication exists between one village to another in order to explore their relationship and differences. In such situation, a word or two are added for specification as exemplified in (10) below:

Example 10:

Noun + Noun	Compound	Gloss
a. Jànga + Siiri ‘janga’ ‘major’	→ Jànga Siiri	‘Janga town marked the major’
b. Jànga + Xòle ‘Janga’ ‘minor’	→ Jànga Xòle	‘Janga town marked the minor’
c. Jànga + Màaro ‘janga’ ‘personal name’	→ Jànga Màaro	‘Janga village name founded by a person called Maro’
d. Jànga + Malàm Garbà ‘janga’ ‘personal name’	→ Jànga Malàm Garbà	‘Janga village name founded by a person called Malam Garba’

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|----|---|---|----------------|--|
| e. | Jànga + Ngàruurù
'janga' 'personal name' | → | Jànga Ngàruurù | 'Janga village name founded by
a person called Ngaruru' |
|----|---|---|----------------|--|

Bana + Name compound

This sub-category is concerned with Ngamo place names comprising a common noun *Bana* 'village of' plus a personal name of great person who might be founder of the village. This can be seen in example (11):

Example 11:

	Bana + Name		Compound	Gloss
a.	Bàna + Dauyà 'village of...' 'Dauya'	→	Bàna Dauyà	'village name founded by a judge'
b.	Bàna + Gàmjî 'village of...' 'Gamji'	→	Bàna Gàmjî	'village name founded by a person called Gamji'
c.	Bàna + Abà 'village of...' 'Aba'	→	Bàna Abà	'village name founded by a person called Aba'
d.	Bàna + Waayò 'village of...' 'Wayo'	→	Bàna Waayò	'village name founded by a person called Wayo'
e.	Bàna + Ûsaku 'village of...' 'Usaku'	→	Bàna Ûsaku	'village name founded by a person called Usaku'
f.	Bàna + Googè 'village of...' 'Gooqe'	→	Bàna Googè	'village name founded by a person called Goge'

This is another form of the above sub-category that concerned Ngamo place names comprising a common noun *Bani* 'family of' plus a personal name of great person who might be household of the family. This can be seen in example (12) below:

Example 12:

	Bani + Name		Compound	Gloss
a.	Bàni + Àbaawà 'family' 'personal name'	→	Bàni Àbaawà	'a family name'
b.	Bàni + Bàrde 'family' 'personal name'	→	Bàni Bàrde	'a family name'

- c. Bàni + Màmàadò → Bàni Màmàadò ‘a family name’
 ‘family’ ‘personal
 name’
- d. Bàni + Ngèdè → Bàni Ngèdè ‘a family name’
 ‘family’ ‘personal
 name’

Baa- + Name compound

Some places obtained their names from the compound words that comprised the name of person of greater age, experience and authority. These names have an indication (title) of elderliness *Baa-* for male or *Daa-* for female plus the personal name to make a place name as can be seen in example (13):

Example 13:

Baa- + Name		Compound	Gloss
a. Bàa + Batò ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàabatò	‘a village founded by elderly person called Batò’
b. Bàa + Beeli ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàabeeli	‘a village founded by elderly person called Beli’
c. Bàa + Baawà ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàabaawà	‘a village founded by elderly person called Bawa’
d. Bàa + Dawà ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàadawà	‘a village founded by elderly person called Dawa’
e. Baa + Sulè ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Baasulè	‘a village founded by elderly person called Sule’
f. Baa + Wàayò ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Baawàayò	‘a village founded by elderly person called Waayo’

This is another form of the above process Ngamo place names formation that have an indication (title) of elderliness *Daa-* ‘mostly added to the female names initial’ plus the personal name to make a place name as can be seen in example (14) below:

Example 14:

Daa- + Name		Compound	Gloss
a. Dàa + Wòrko ‘elder’ ‘personal name’	→	Dàawòrko	‘a village founded by elderly person called Worko’

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|----|--|---|----------|--|
| b. | Daa + Xèeko
‘elder’ ‘personal name’ | → | Daaxèeko | ‘a village founded by elderly person called Xeko’ |
| c. | Dàa + Niski
‘elder’ ‘personal name’ | → | Dàaniski | ‘a village founded by elderly person called Niski’ |

Baaba + Name compound

This sub-category of Ngamo place names employ a common noun *Baaba* a respectful term used for addressing a person who is elderly enough plus a personal name of founder of the town/village. This place names are presented in example (15):

Example 15:

	Baaba + Name		Compound	Gloss
a.	Bàabà + Naanà ‘elderly’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàabà Naanà	‘a village founded by the most elderly person called Nana’
b.	Bàaba + Dàlà ‘elderly’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàaba Dàlà	‘a village founded by the most elderly person called Dala’
c.	Bàaba + Aji ‘elderly’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàaba Aji	‘a village founded by the most elderly person called Aji’
d.	Bàaba + Cittè ‘elderly’ ‘personal name’	→	Bàaba Cittè	‘a village founded by the most elderly person called Citte’

Title + Name compound

This sub-category of Ngamo place names is related to the personal names of the greatest person of the community which might be the founder of the settlement. It is composed of title of traditional leadership plus personal name of the title holder who ruled in a particular place to refer to the name of a town/village as exemplified in (16) below:

Example 16:

	Title + Name		Compound	Gloss
a.	Tinjà + Mazàm ‘youth leader’ ‘personal name’	→	Tinjà-Mazàm	‘a village founded by the (male) youth leader called Mazam’

b.	Mà'ì + Duwà 'village head' 'personal name'	→	Mai-Duwà	'a village founded by the village head called Duwa'
c.	Lambà + Gudi 'ward head' 'place name'	→	Lambà-Gudi	'a village founded by the ward head of Gudi'
d.	Mà'ì + Àbaashì 'village head' 'place name'	→	Mai-Àbaashì	'a village founded by the village head called Abashi'
e.	Lambà + Diisà 'ward head' 'personal name'	→	Lambà-Diisà	'a village founded by the ward head called Disa'
f.	Mà'ì + Lambà 'village head' 'title'	→	Mai-Lambà	'a village founded by the village head called Lamba'

Hausa compounds

Some place names originated from Hausa, being the language of wider distribution all over West Africa and remain dominant language throughout the northern Nigeria. This can be seen in example (17):

Example 17:

	Word + Word		Compound	Gloss
a.	Daaxi + n + Koowa 'enjoy' 'for' 'everyone'	→	Daaxin koowa	'a village that human right of its citizens is highly protected'
b.	Tsaamiya + r + Huutu 'tamarind' 'of' 'resting'	→	Tsaamiyar huutu	'a village founded beside the tamarind tree which passenger take rest along their way'
c.	Saabo + n + Feegi 'new' 'of' 'plot'	→	Saabon feegi	'a village founded in a newly cleared place'
d.	Saabo + n + Laayi 'new' 'of' 'street'	→	Saabon laayi	'a village with well-structured streets'
e.	Mài + Zàabi 'owner' 'guinea fowl'	→	Mài zàabi	'a village founded by a person who have many guinea fowl'
f.	Sabon + Rijjiya 'new' 'well'	→	Sabon rijjiya	'a village founded in a place where a new well was constructed'

Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher wishes to point out that this study is a first attempt of its kind to make an analysis of *toponyms* in Ngamo language area. The report of ethno-historical findings from a survey made during the field work of this research disclosed that Ngamo people settled on Gudi hill, Gàràri hill, Gàna hill, Lèwe hill, Xòdzi hill, Kàxi hill, Vára hill and many others. Later they migrated to establish towns and villages of their present destination on the ground. The research analysed the data collected from the field based on the morphological source and structure. It pointed out that most of Ngamo place names are compound based. It has been found that subtraction, zero derivation, adverb + noun compound, noun + noun compound, Bana + name compound, title + name compound, Baa-/Daa- + name compound, Baaba + name compound and Hausa words compound were discovered. Finally, it has been observed that there is no any descriptive work on the place names of Ngamo language. This is the first work done on place names of the language. Hence it is our hope that this work will stimulate researches on various linguistic fields of the language by scholars of Chadic languages in the future.

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