

## **The Morphology of Nouns in English and Kanuri Languages**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is a comparative analysis of the morphology of nouns in English and Kanuri. Data on the processes that are used in the formation of nouns in the two languages are presented and analysis carried out on the similarities and the differences that exist between them. The findings show that the languages both use the processes of affixation (prefixation and suffixation), compounding, conversion, and reduplication in the formation of nouns. However, the processes of blending, acronymy, clipping, and vowel change are used in English but not in Kanuri.*

### **Introduction**

This work is a comparative analysis of the morphology of nouns in English and Kanuri. It is aimed at presenting the processes used in the formation of nouns in the two languages and pointing out their similarities and differences. English and Kanuri are two distinct languages from two distinct environments. English belongs to the Germanic family of the Indo-European phylum, while Kanuri is a member of the Saharan branch of the Nilo-Saharan phylum of the

African languages (Greenberg: 1966). English language is a widely spoken language in many parts of the globe and because of its acceptance throughout the world, it is used as one of the official languages of some major international organisations such as the UNO, the WHO, ECOWAS, NAM, UNESCO, OPEC, the EU and the AU.

Kanuri, on the other hand, is the language spoken by the Kanuri people who reside along the shores of the Lake Chad, in Borno and Yobe states of Nigeria. The language is also spoken in parts of Niger Republic, Republic of the Cameroon and Chad. In addition, there are Kanuri people in the diaspora in Sudan, Libya, Saudi Arabia and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in terms of usage the language is taught in some primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, specifically in Borno and Yobe states Shettima (2005). Kanuri is used as a language in some local and national radio stations like the Borno Radio Television, Yobe Broadcasting Corporation and Radio Nigeria. The comparison of the linguistic structures of the two languages, therefore, becomes imperative because of the importance of English in the lives of Nigerians and Kanuri, one of the indigenous languages with millions of speakers in Nigeria.

### **The Morphology of English Nouns**

The morphological processes used in forming English nouns include affixation, compounding, reduplication, conversion, blending, clipping, acronym, and vowel change. Each of these processes is explained and exemplified below.

### **Affixation**

Affixation is a process of adding prefixes or suffixes to root words or base words in order to form new words (Okeke et al: 2009). The additions realised initially is called prefixation and at the end is referred to as suffixation.

### **Suffixation**

The process of suffixation can be used to form nouns in English. Bound morphemes are suffixed to base words or free morphemes in the formation of nouns.

### **Noun Formation Using the ‘-s’ Plural Suffix and its Variants**

The plural form of nouns in English is formed by attaching an ‘-s’ suffix and its variants to the base noun. Examples are:

<b>Noun (singular)</b>	<b>Noun (plural)</b>	<b>noun (singular)</b>	<b>noun (plural)</b>
boy	boys	bus	buses
book	books	class	classes
brush	brushes	family	families
life	lives	mango	mangoes
knife	knives		tomato
tomatoes			

### **Formation of Possessive Nouns through Suffixation**

Possessive nouns are realised through the process of suffixation in English by attaching apostrophe (-') and ('-s') and ('-s') and apostrophe (-') in order to form singular and plural possessive cases respectively. Examples are:

<b>Singular Noun Possessive</b>	<b>Possessive Form</b>		<b>Plural Noun</b>
Musa	Musa's	boys	boys'
man	man's	dog	dogs'
dog	dog's	sister	sisters'

### **Formation of Nouns from Verbs and Nouns from Adjectives**

English nouns can be formed through suffixation by attaching '-er', '-or', '-ant', '-ar', '-ist', '-ment', '-ion', '-tion', '-sion', '-ence', '-dom' to verbs. The suffixes describe the action or occupation of people or uses of things. Nouns can also be derived by attaching suffixes such as '-ity', '-ty', '-y', '-ice', '-ness' to adjectives. Both are exemplified below.

<b>Verb</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Noun</b>
sing	singer	capable	capability
act	actor	loyal	loyalty
beg	beggar	pure	purity
inform	informant		good
goodness			
establish	establishment		honest
honesty			
examine	examination		useful
usefulness			
exist	existence	novel	novelty
free	freedom	just	justice
repress	repression	fair	fairness

### **Formation of Agentive Nouns from Nouns and Feminine from masculine nouns**

Agentive nouns in English can also be formed from some nouns through suffixation. Similarly, some nouns are derived from masculine ones by attaching 'ess', '-ss', '-ress' and '-ion' suffixes. These are exemplified as follows.

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Agentive Noun</b>		<b>Masculine</b>
<b>Feminine</b>			
agent	agency	lion	lioness
king	kingdom	waiter	waitress
pirates	piracy	poet	poetess
candidate	candidature	host	hostess
leader	leadership	prince	princess
hero	heroism		hero
heroine			
boy	boyhood		

### **Prefixation**

English nouns are also formed through the process of prefixation. The prefixes 'co-'(together), 'tele-'(from afar), 'anti-'(against), 'ex-'(former), 'tri-'(three), 'mal-'(amiss) can be attached to some nouns in order to form new nouns. Examples:

<b>Prefix Formed</b>	<b>Root</b>	<b>Noun Formed</b>	<b>Prefix</b>	<b>Root</b>	<b>Noun</b>
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co- pilot	=	co-pilot	ex-	president	ex-
president					
co-author	=	co-author	ex-	wife	ex-wife
tele-vision	=	television	auto-	pilot	auto-pilot
anti-Christ	=	antichrist		mal-	nutrition
malnutrition					
anti-body	=	antibody	tri	angle	triangle

### **Compounding**

A compound word consists of at least two bases which are both words or at any rate, roots, not morphemes (Katamba:1993). Different classes of words can be put together in order to form new words. This is exemplified below.

### **Noun plus Noun and Adjective Plus noun**

Some examples of nouns formed through compounding include the linking of two nouns and the linking of adjectives and nouns. Examples are:

<b>Noun</b>		<b>Noun</b>		<b>Compound Noun</b>
tea	+	pot	=	teapot
class	+	room	=	classroom
wall	+	paper	=	wallpaper

<b>Adjective</b>		<b>Noun</b>		<b>Compound Noun</b>
black	+	board	=	blackboard
white	+	chalk	=	white-chalk
sweet	+	heart	=	sweetheart
short	+	hand	=	shorthand

### **Noun plus Gerund and Verb Plus Noun**

Nouns and gerunds; and verbs and nouns can be joined together in forming compound nouns. Some examples are:

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Gerund</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>
sight+	seeing	= sightseeing
book+	binding	= bookbinding
data+	processing	= data-processing
soul+	searching	= soul-searching

<b>Verb</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>
pay	+ slip	=payslip
work	+ load	=workload
pick	+ pocket	=pickpocket
cut	+ throat	=cutthroat

### **2.1.2.5 Verb plus Adverb and Adverb Plus Noun**

Compound nouns can also be formed from verbs and adverbs and from Adverbs and nouns. Examples are:

<b>Verb</b>	<b>Adverb</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>
die+	hard	=diehard
set+	back	= setback
make+	up	=makeup

<b>Adverb</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>
in	+ mate	=inmate
by	+ path	=bypath
fore	+ knowledge	=foreknowledge

### **Clipping or Deletion**

Okeke et al (2009) define clipping as a process of word formation in which one or more syllables are subtracted from a word. The deletion can be at the beginning, end or at both ends of a word. Examples are:

<b>Input</b>	<b>Output</b>	
omnibus	bus	(clipping at the beginning)
aeroplane	plane	(clipping at the beginning)
gasoline	gas	(clipping at the end)
hippopotamus	hippo	(clipping at the end)
refrigerator	fridge	(clipping at both ends)

### **Blending**

According to Langacka (1968), blending is a process of word formation in which parts of two words are combined in such a way that their separation cannot be meaningful. Some examples are:

<b>Word</b>		<b>Word</b>		<b>Noun Formed</b>
motor	+	hotel	=	motel
television	+	broadcast	=	telecast
electronic	+	execution	=	electrocution
modulator	+	demodulator	=	modem

### **Acronym**

Bauer (1983:237) defines an acronym as a word coined by taking the initial letters of the words in a title or phrase and using them as a new word....in order to form short names of



international organisations, associations and government agencies. Some examples of such nouns in English are:

<b>Input</b>	<b>Output</b>
Radio Detecting and Ranging	Radar
Oil Producing and Exporting Countries	OPEC
Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	AIDS

### **Reduplication**

According to Robins (1964:168), reduplication is 'a particular type of grammatical formation whereby a part or a whole of a word is repeated in the same word'. The repetition of an entire base of a word is referred to as total reduplication, or some part of it as partial reduplication. Examples of nouns formed through this process are:

- walkie-talkie (partial)
- goody-goody (total)
- see-saw (partial)
- wee-wee (total)

### **Vowel Change**

Vowel change, according to Katamba (1993), is a process of word formation in which there is a change of the vowel in the root resulting from derivation or inflection of words. This can be seen in the following words where there is change in the vowels from singular to plural nouns and from adjectives to nouns.

<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>Nouns</b>
foot	feet	broad	breath
tooth	teeth	long	length

## **Conversion**

Conversion is a process whereby a word is made to change its word class without the use of affixes (Okeke: 1999). Aronoff and Fudeman (2005) point out that noun can be formed from verb through the position of the stress in the word. When the stress falls on the final syllable, the word is a verb but when it falls on the first, it is a noun. Examples are:

<b>VERB</b>	<b>NOUN</b>
ConTEST	CONtest
exPORT	EXport
transPORT	TRANSport

verbs can also become nouns depending on their grammatical function in the sentence. This is exemplified using some verbs in English.

1.) I love you. (verb)

Love for each other is what we need in Nigeria. (noun)

2.) We spy on them every day. (verb)

I am a spy in the Nigerian Police Force. (noun)

There are some phrasal verbs that can function as nouns in the English sentence. Examples are:

1.) Please, take away these cars from here. (verb)

This is a take away from Murna Hotel. (noun)

2.) Print out two copies for me. (verb)

This is a print out of the original document. (noun)

Adjectives such as 'poor', 'rich' 'sick' etc can also be converted to function as nouns. Examples can be seen in the sentences below:

- 1.) The rich people should help the poor. (adjective)  
The rich should help the poor. (noun)
- 2.) The sick people should be given extra care by the government. (adjective)

### **The Morphology of Kanuri Nouns**

Just like in English, there are various processes that are employed in the formation of nouns in Kanuri. The following are the processes of noun formation in the language.

#### **Affixation**

Kanuri nouns are formed through affixation. Both processes of prefixation and suffixation are used in the formation of nouns in language.

#### **Prefixation**

There are different prefixes that are used in forming nouns in Kanuri language. They are presented below:

#### **The Prefixes 'kər-' and 'nəm-'**

The prefix 'kər-' can be attached to some nouns in the realisation of abstract nouns while 'nəm-' can be attached to both nouns and adjectives. Examples are:

<b>Prefix</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Abstract Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
Kər-	mai (king)	kərmái	(kingship)

Kər-	malem(teacher)	kərmáləm	(teachership)
Kər-	músələm (muslim)	kərmúsələm	
	(muslimhood)		

<b>Prefix</b>	<b>Noun/Adjective</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
	nəm-sháwà(adjective)	nəmsháwà	beautiffulness
	nəm-kimè(adjective)	nəmkimè	redness
	nəm-bàtti (adjective)	nəmbàttí	ugliness
	nəm-kwángá(noun )	nəmkwàngá	manliness
	nəm-sáwà(noun)	nəmsáwà	friendship

### **Suffixation**

Suffixation is also used in Kanuri in the formation of nouns. The suffixes are presented and exemplified below.

### **The Suffixes ‘-wa’ and ‘ti-’ and ‘ri-’**

The plural form of nouns in Kanuri is realised through suffixation. The suffix ‘wa’ can be affixed to base nouns in the realisation of their plural forms while ‘ti-’ and ‘ri-’ can be used with names of persons or titles of chiefs to derive nouns that denote names of places or towns. These are exemplified below:

<b>Singular Noun</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Plural Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
fèrò (girl)	-wa	fèròwá	girls
kákkədə (book)	-wa	kàkkədəwá	books
fátò (house)	-wa	fàtòwá	
houses			

<b>Root</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
Bulama(Ward Head)	-ri	Bulamari	Bulama's palace
Fànnà(name)	-ri	Fànnàrí	town named after Fanna
Bukar	-ti	Bukarti	town named after Bukar
Limán	-ti	Limanti	town named after Liman

### **The suffixes '-be' and '-mi'**

In Kanuri, the possessive case is marked by the suffix 'be' attached to nouns. It is used for both singular and plural nouns. The suffix '-mi' on the other hand is attached to names of women in order address people after their mothers. It (-mi) simply means 'son of'. Examples are:

<b>Root</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Possessive Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
Bùtáli	-be	Bùtálibè	Butali's
Jòhn	-be	Jòhnbè	John's
kàrì	-be	kàribè	dog's

Examples for plural possessive nouns are:

tadawa	-be	tadawabe	boys'
ferowa	-be	ferowabe	girls'
keriwa	-be	keriwabe	dogs'

<b>Root</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Noun Formed</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
Fànnà	-mi	Fànnàmì	son of Fanna

Aisà	-mi	Aisàmì	son of Aisa
Yàgàrà	-mi	Yàgàrà mí	son of Yagana

### **The Suffixes ‘-ma’ and ‘-wu’ and ‘-ram’**

‘-Ma’ can be attached to verbs and some nouns in the formation of agentive nouns in Kanuri. The suffix ‘-wu’ is used with some verbs in order to form some nouns in their plurals forms and ‘-ram’ can be attached to verbs in order to derive nouns that denote names of places or things.. Examples are:

<b>Root</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
fátò (house)	-ma	fàtòmá	land lord/lady
kúlò (farm)	-ma	kùlòmá	farmer
búnyì (fish)	-ma	bùnyì má	fisherman
:			
<b>Verb</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
bàrè (farm)	-wu	bàrèwu	farmers
lètə (travel)	-wu	lètəwu	travellers
fàrtə (dance)	-wu	fàrtəwu	dancers
mátə (search)	-wu	mátəwù	searchers
<b>Verb</b>	<b>Suffix</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
zəbtə (come down)	-ram	zəbtəràm	lodge
gòtə (take)	-ram	gòtəràm	a handle
fərətə (sweep)	-ram	fərətəràm	broom

### **Conversion**

This is a process of word formation in which a word belonging to a particular class comes to function in another class without any addition to its structure. There are instances in Kanuri where a male name of some things or animals is the same as the female ones. Some such examples of conversion in Kanuri are:

<b>Input</b>	<b>Output</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
Kóró (male donkey)	kóró	female donkey
Fər (male horse)	Fər	mare
Zòlí (mad man)	Zòlí	woman
Kàlimò (male camel)	kàlimò	female

### **Compounding**

As explained earlier, the process of compounding involves the bringing together of two stems or root words in the formation of new words. Examples in Kanuri are:

### **Noun plus Noun and Noun plus Verb**

Two nouns can be joined together in order to form compound nouns. Also nouns and verbs can be used in deriving compound nouns. These are exemplified below.

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Noun</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>	
<b>Gloss</b>			
kúli (insect) bee	kəmààn (honey)	Kúlikəmààn	honey
dàwù (neck)	ngáshò (a stork)	Dàwu-ngàshó	a kind of dress

ngúdi (poor) rogue	kam(person)	ngùdikám	a
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<b>Noun</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
dàwù (neck) meningitis		kəri (to turn)	dàwùkəri
sùrò (stomach)		zau (pain)	sùròzáu stomach pain
kàrəgə (heart) burn	wár (burn)	kàrəgəwár	heart- burn
kàm (person) murderer	cèjí (kill)		kàmçèjí

### **Noun plus Adjective and Verb plus Verb**

Compound nouns can also be formed by joining nouns and adjectives and also verb and verb. For example:

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Adjective</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
kàrwà (wind)	kìmè (red)	kàrwà-kìmé	storm
kàrəgə (heart) sadness		kùttá (sad)	kàrəgəkùttá
kàrəgə (heart) heartedness	cíbbù (hard)	kàrəgəcíbbù	hard- heartedness

<b>Verb</b>	<b>Verb</b>	<b>Compound Noun</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
yùwùm(buy) trading	lədə	(sell)	yùwùm-lədə





The data in the previous section shows that both similarities and differences exist in the processes used in the formation of nouns in the two languages.

### **Similarities**

The processes of **affixation (prefixation and suffixation), compounding, conversion and reduplication** are all employed in the formation of nouns in both English and Kanuri.

**Affixation:** Both suffixation and prefixation are used in the formation of nouns in the two languages. For example, Plural formation in both English and Kanuri are achieved through suffixation. Examples are:

<b>ENGLISH</b>		<b>KANURI</b>	<b>GLOSS</b>
boy	boys	tadatadawa	boys
house	houses	fatofatowa	houses
ox	oxen	dalodalowa	oxen
thief	thieves	boruwuboruwuwa	thieves

Possessive forms of nouns in English and Kanuri are also realised through suffixation. Suffixation is also applied in both English and Kanuri in forming nouns from verbs. Examples are:

<b>ENGLISH</b>	<b>KANURI</b>
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<b>verb</b>	<b>noun</b>		<b>verb</b>	<b>noun</b>	
<b>gloss</b>					
play	player	gawo (enter)	gaworam	entrance	
act	actor	biske (play)	biskeram	play	
ground					
beg	beggar	fəratə (sweep)	fəratəram	broom	

In both English and Kanuri, some nouns are formed from others through suffixation. Examples:

<b>ENGLISH</b>		<b>KANURI</b>			
<b>Nouns</b>	<b>nouns</b>	<b>nouns</b>	<b>nouns</b>	<b>gloss</b>	
agent	agency	Aisa	Aisami	named after Aisa	
king	kingdom	Fanna	Fannami	named after Fanna	
hero	heroism	Shehu	Shehuri	Shehu's palace	

Some abstract nouns in English are derived from adjectives; and feminine nouns are derived from masculine nouns through suffixation. Examples are:

<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>nouns</b>
good	goodness
loyal	loyalty
just	justice

<b>Masculine</b>	<b>feminine</b>
host	hostess
lion	lioness
poet	poetess
hero	heroine

**Prefixation** is also used in the formation of nouns in the two languages. These are exemplified in the words below:

<b>prefix</b>	<b>noun</b>	<b>prefix</b>	<b>noun</b>
co-	co-author	auto-	automobile
pre-	pre-determiner	ex-	ex-premier
bi-	bicycle	tele-	telephone
anti-	antivirus	mal-	malnutrition

<b>prefix Noun</b>	<b>Noun formed</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
kər-mái (king)	kərmái	kingship/leadership
kər-maləm (teacher)	kərmaləm	teachership/tutorship
nəm-kəji (sweet)	nəmkəji	sweetness
nəm-sháwà (beauty)	nəmsháwà	beautifulness

In sum, therefore, the process of affixation (prefixation and suffixation) is used in both English and Kanuri as a process of noun formation.

**Compounding:** the process of compounding is also used in both English and Kanuri in the formation of nouns. There are six (6) different combinations of classes of words used in English and five (5) in Kanuri. Examples for English are:

**Noun + noun** e.g. teapot, cashbook

**Adjective + noun** e.g. sweetheart, shorthand

**Noun + gerund** e.g. witch-hunting, name-dropping

**Verb + noun** e.g. payslip, pickpocket

**Verb + adverb** e.g. diehard, drawback

**Adverb + noun** e.g. inmate, offspring

Compounding in Kanuri is exemplified as follows:

**noun + noun** e.g. ngudikam (a rouge), bukalur (light brown colour)

**noun + verb** e.g. kamceji (murderer), surofu (stomach upset)

**noun + adjective** e.g. karwakime (storm), shimkæli (jaundice)

**verb + verb** e.g. manæmbui (daily bread), yadæmkude (rumour)

**noun + adverb** e.g. shinba (blindness), yangeba (cholera)

**Conversion:** Conversion is a process of word formation in both English and Kanuri. For example, verbs can be made to function as nouns. Examples are:

I **love** you. ('love' used as a verb)

**Love** is blind. ('love' used as a noun)

We **broke through** the gate. ('break through' a phrasal verb)

We made an easy **break-through** in the research. ('break-through' used as a noun)

Adjectives can also be converted to nouns in English. Examples:

He is **rich**. ('rich' used as adjective)

The **rich** also cry. ('rich' used as noun).

Verbs can also change to nouns through stress shift. e.g.

<b>Verb</b>	<b>Noun</b>
conTEST	CONtest
PerMIT	PERmit
ConVERT	CONvert

Similarly, conversion is used in Kanuri in order to form some nouns. For example, the adverb 'ku'(today) can be converted to a noun meaning 'day'. Another example can be seen in the use of the word 'fær' (a horse) and 'fær' (a mare), where there is

conversion of the noun 'fær' a male horse to 'a mare', a female one.

**Reduplication:** both total and partial reduplication are used in the formation of nouns in English. The following words exemplify this:

Goody-goody (total reduplication)

Wee-wee (total reduplication)

Sew-saw (partial reduplication)

Zig-zag (partial reduplication)

The process of reduplication is also used in Kanuri in the formation of nouns.

Chim-chim (gall bladder) = 'chim' means bitter

Kawu-kawu (metal bangles won by twins) = 'Kawu' means twins

Tadatada (manlike) = 'tada' means boy

### **Differences**

The processes of **blending**, **acronym**, **clipping**, and **vowel change** are used in the formation of nouns in English, but are not used in Kanuri. Examples in English are:

- (i) blending e.g. gas + alcohol = gasohol  
Motor + hotel = motel
- (ii) acronym e.g. NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organisation  
Radar = Radio Detecting and Ranging
- (iii) clipping e.g. 'bus' from 'omnibus', 'flue' from 'influenza'
- (iv) vowel change e.g. man-men, foot-feet, goose-geese

## **Conclusion**

Four (4) areas of similarities and four (4) areas of differences in the processes of noun formation in English and Kanuri are found. Areas of similarities are **affixation, compounding, conversion** and **reduplication**, while areas of differences are **blending, deletion or clipping, acronymy**, and **vowel change** which are used in English but not used in Kanuri. There is no noun formation process that is used in Kanuri but not used in English.

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