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EXPLORING WORD FORMATION IN THE CHIBOK VARIETY OF GARO: A MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the major word formation processes in Chibok, an endangered variety of the Garo language, spoken in the South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. The study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design, and the data are collected from Chibok speaking villages, namely, Renggua, Karawen, and Dompai. The data were elicited through structured interviews with elderly native speakers, and analysed to identify the word formation in Chibok. The findings reveal several processes, such as, affixation, derivation, compounding, blending, clipping, reduplication, conversion, borrowing, onomatopoeia, and calquing. These processes demonstrate the morphological richness and structural characteristics of Chibok variety. The study contributes to the documentation and linguistic description of Chibok and helps to address the existing gap in Garo morphology and word formation processes.

Keywords: Chibok, Garo language, Word formation, Morphology, Language documentation, Endangered language, Morphological processes.

1. Introduction

India is one of the linguistically diverse countries in the world, with a rich variety of languages spoken across its different regions. Garo language is one of the indigenous languages spoken in Northeast India, particularly in Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, and West Bengal. In Meghalaya, the Garo Hills region is predominantly inhabited by Garo speaking communities. The Garo language comprises several distinct varieties. According to Playfair (1909) and Milton Sangma (1983), Garo has eleven varieties, namely A·we, Chisak, Matchi, Am·beng, Matabeng, Me·gam, Atong, Ruga, Chibok, Gara Gan·ching, and Dual.

Chibok is one of the varieties of the Garo language and is considered an endangered variety because the number of speakers is fewer than one hundred speakers. The Chibok speaking community is primarily settled along the banks of the Bogai River in the South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. Compared with speakers of other Garo varieties, Chibok speakers are found in a relatively small number of villages, such as Renggua, Karawen, Dompai, Galwang Gitok, Bolchimda, Bakata, Rangmai, and others. In today's generation, the younger generations of Chibok are shifting towards A·we, which is regarded as the Standard Garo variety. This shift has contributed to the declining intergenerational transmission of Chibok. Only the speakers of the

older generation generally retain greater proficiency in Chibok, even some middle-age elderly speakers have limited ability to use the variety fluently.

Generally, word formation refers to the processes through which new words or lexical items are formed within a language. It constitutes an important area of morphological study; because it provides insight into the structural and functional properties of a language. Crystal (1985) defines the term as referring to “the whole process of morphological variation in the constitution of words, i.e. including the two main divisions of inflection and derivation” (p. 524). Languages create a way to various morphological processes and word formation rules to create a new lexical item and expand their vocabulary.

Despite its linguistic significance, the Chibok has received a limited scholarly attention. Till date, research on Chibok variety has primarily focused on language documentation and phonological aspects, while its morphological structure remains largely unexplored. In particular way, there's a significant gap in research, concerning the word formation processes in Chibok variety. By looking at the endangered status of the variety and the ongoing shift among younger speakers towards Standard Garo, the systematic documentation and analysis of its morphological structures are both necessary and crucial.

According to Grierson (1903), Garo language is a section of the Bodo-Garo group of languages, which in turn, Bodo-Garo is a branch of a Tibeto-Burman group of languages. Tibeto Burman is a family of Tibeto-Chinese family. In this way, therefore, Chibok is a part of Tibeto Burman language group.

The present study therefore aims to investigate the major word formation processes found in the Chibok variety of Garo. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the principal processes involved in word formation, to describe the morphological structures underlying these processes, and to analyse the functions and meanings of the resulting forms. By examining these aspects, the study intends to contribute to the documentation and linguistic description of Chibok, and to enhance the understanding of the morphological diversity of the Garo language.

2. Literature Review

Angela W Ingty (2008), in her unpublished work *Garo Morphology: A Descriptive Analysis* provides a descriptive account of the morphological structures of Garo with particular reference to the A·we variety. The study describes and analyses both inflectional and derivational processes in Garo. Although the study discusses various morphological structures too and it provides a limited analysis of the word formation processes and rules in Garo.

Dorothy R Marak (2017), in her unpublished work *Word Formation in A·chik with Reference to the Am·beng Variety* examines the word formation rules and processes found in the Am·beng variety of Garo. Am·beng is one of the major and widely spoken varieties among the Garo community. The study primarily focuses on the structural patterns and rules involved in word formation processes in Am·beng variety.

Dokatchi Ch Marak (2025), in her article *Documentation of the Chibok Variety of the Garo Language* presents a linguistic documentation of the Chibok variety of Garo. The study primarily presents the general information about the Chibok speaking community and its language. The author reports that Chibok has eighteen consonantal phonemes and six vowels, similar to the A·we variety. From a morphological perspective, Chibok is described as an agglutinative language. The study also states that Chibok follows a SOV word order like other Garo variety.

Changchang R Sangma (2026), in his research work *A Comparative Phonology of A·we and Chibok Varieties of Garo* examines a comparative analysis of the phonological systems of A·we and Chibok. The study reports that the Chibok has seventeen consonantal phonemes, whereas A·we has eighteen. The author explores that both varieties have six vowel phonemes. The author further observes that Chibok exhibits a greater number of diphthongs than A·we.

A review of the existing literature indicates that there is a significant gap in research on the morphology and word formation processes of the Chibok variety. While the morphological structures and word formation processes of A·we and Am·beng have received attention from previous scholars, but the Chibok has received comparatively less investigation in this area. At present, only the two major studies specifically concerning Chibok have been identified. One is focuses on language documentation, while the other examines its comparative phonology in relation to A·we, which is standard variety of Garo.

The existing literature thus demonstrates the need for further systematic research on the morphology of Chibok, particularly its word formation processes. In view of the endangered status of the variety and the limited research conducted on its morphological structure, the present study undertakes an investigation of the major word formation processes in Chibok. The present study seeks to address this research gap by examining the morphological structures, processes, functions, and meanings associated with word formation in the Chibok variety of Garo.

3. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research design to investigate the word formation processes of the Chibok variety of Garo. The study is based on primary linguistic data collected from the three Chibok speaking villages in the South Garo Hills district of Meghalaya, namely, Renggua, Karawen, and Dompai. The participants in the study are primarily elderly native speakers of Chibok aged above 25 years. The elder speakers were selected as the major consultants because the younger generation has limited knowledge and cannot speak their variety.

The data were collected through structured interviews. The questions for interview were prepared in Standard Garo (A·we), and were used to elicit corresponding words, expressions, and linguistic structures in Chibok. The collected data were subsequently examined and analysed to identify the major word formation processes. Every examples presented in the study will be transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to accurately represent the phonological forms of the Chibok variety. The analysis will focus on the structure, function, and meaning of the word formation processes identified in the collected data.

5. Word Formation Processes in Chibok

This section examines the major word formation processes identified in Chibok. The processes discussed include affixation, derivation, compounding, blending, clipping, reduplication, conversion, borrowing, onomatopoeia, and calquing. The illustrative examples presented below are based on the data collected from Chibok speakers and illustrate the ways in which new words and grammatical forms are formed.

5.1. Affixation

Crystal (1985) says, “The morphological process whereby grammatical or lexical information is added to a stem is known as affixation” (p. 16). Affixation, therefore, refers to the morphological process of forming a word or grammatical form by attaching an affix to a root or stem. Affixes may occur as prefixes, suffixes, or infixes. The Chibok data demonstrate the use of affixation, particularly in the expression of grammatical categories such as tense.

For example,

<u>tsaʔ</u>	+	<u>dzok</u>	=	<u>tsaʔdzok</u>
eat	+	PST	=	ate

<u>tsaʔ</u>	+	gan	=	<u>tsaʔgan</u>
eat	+	FUT	=	will eat

In these examples, the root tsaʔ ‘eat’ combines with the suffixes -dzok and -gan to express past and future tense respectively. The addition of these grammatical morphemes to the verbal root indicates that Chibok makes use of morphological affixation to express the grammatical meanings. The presence of such forms

also suggests that the Chibok has agglutinative characteristics in which grammatical morphemes can be attached to roots or stems to express distinct grammatical functions.

5.2. Derivation

According to Crystal (1985), “Derivational affixes change the grammatical class of morphemes to which they are attached; they also usually occur closer to the root morpheme than do inflections” (p.138). Derivation, therefore, is a word formation process in which a new lexical item is formed from an existing root or word through the addition of a derivational affix. Unlike inflectional affixation, derivation may result in a change in the lexical meaning or grammatical category of the base word.

For example,

<u>tsaʔu</u>	+	<u>gipa</u>	=	<u>tsaʔugipa</u>
steal	+	NOMZ	=	thief

<u>tsaʔa</u>	+	<u>ni</u>	=	<u>tsaʔani</u>
eat	+	NOMZ	=	food

In the first example, the verbal root tsaʔu ‘steal’ combines with the suffix *-gipa* to form tsaʔugipa ‘thief’. Secondly, the suffix *-ni* is added to the root tsaʔa ‘eat’ to form a new lexical item tsaʔani ‘food’. The addition of the suffix changes the grammatical category of the base from a verb to a noun and produces a new lexical meaning. These examples demonstrate that derivational morphology in Chibok can be used to form nouns from verbal roots.

5.3. Compounding

Compounding is the process of forming a new lexical item by combining two or more independent words or roots. The resulting compound generally has a meaning that is related to, but not necessarily identical to, the meanings of its individual components.

For example,

<u>tsi</u>	+	<u>darai</u>	=	<u>tsidarai</u>
water	+	cliff	=	waterfall

Here, tsi means ‘water’ and darai means ‘cliff’. The combination of these two elements is tsidarai refers to a waterfall or a structure associated with collecting or providing water, particularly one traditionally made of bamboo in remote villages.

Another example is nok^hant^hai ‘bachelors’ dormitory’

<u>nok</u>	+	<u>p^hant^hai</u>	=	<u>nok^hant^hai</u>
house	+	bachelor	=	bachelors’ dormitory

In this example, *nok* means ‘house’, while p^hant^hai refers to ‘bachelors’. The compound nok^hant^hai refers to a ‘bachelors’ dormitory’.

A further example is *soɲnok* ‘kingdom’.

<u>soɲ</u>	+	<u>nok</u>	=	<u>soɲnok</u>
village	+	house	=	kingdom

In this compound, *soɲ* means ‘village’ and *nok* means ‘house’. However, their combination *soɲnok* has the lexical meaning ‘kingdom’. This example demonstrates that the meaning of a compound may extend beyond the literal meanings of its individual constituents in Chibok variety.

5.4. Blending

According to Rajimwale (2006), “Blends are deliberate formation in which the compound words are blended by removing at least one element of the original segments” (p. 38). Blending is a word formation process in which parts of two or more words are combined to form a new lexical item. Unlike compounding, blending generally involves the reduction or partial deletion of one or more of the source words.

The Chibok data provide the following examples:

haʔa	+	gisi	=	haʔgisi
soil	+	dry/dead	=	desert
balwa	+	k ^h aʔsin	=	balk ^h asin
air	+	cold	=	cool/cold air
roʔoŋ	+	aʔk ^h ol	=	roŋʔk ^h ol
rock	+	hole	=	cave

These examples demonstrate that blending in Chibok involves the combination and phonological reduction of elements from two source forms to create a single lexical item.

5.5. Clipping

According to Crystal (1985), “...clippings are reductions of longer forms, usually removing the end of the word, but sometimes the beginning, or both beginning and ending together” (p. 1). Clipping, thus, is a word formation process in which a longer lexical item is shortened by removing one or more of its segments, while the shortened form retains the basic meaning of the original word.

The following examples illustrate clipping in Chibok:

tsaʔt ^h oa	=	t ^h oa	‘good taste’
bolt ^h ela	=	t ^h ela	‘branches of a tree’
bol ^h urau	=	k ^h urau	‘heartwood of a tree’

In these examples, the initial element of the longer forms is omitted, resulting in shorter forms that retain the semantic content of the original expressions. These forms therefore illustrate the use of clipping as a word shortening process in Chibok.

5.6. Reduplication

Reduplication is “a term in morphology for a process of repetition whereby the form of a prefix/suffix reflects certain phonological characteristics of the root” (Crystal, 1985, p. 407). Reduplication, therefore, is a morphological process in which a word or morpheme or part of a word is repeated to express a particular lexical or grammatical meaning. Reduplication may involve the repetition of an entire word or only a partial of it.

The Chibok data contain examples of partial and complete reduplication.

goip^hrakp^hrak

In this example, the element *p^hrak* is repeated. The repetition expresses the meaning ‘single single’ or ‘one by one’.

waltsip saltsip

In this expression, the element *tsip* is repeated, and the expression refers to ‘day and night’.

tsrap tsrap

This is an example of complete reduplication because the entire form *tsrap* is repeated, and the expression refers to a ‘full branch of fruits on a tree’.

These examples demonstrate that reduplication in Chibok may involve either the repetition of a particular segment or the complete repetition of a lexical item.

5.7. Conversion

According to Yule (1985), “A change in the function of a word, as for example when a noun comes to be used as a verb (without any reduction), is generally known as conversion” (p. 55). Conversion therefore is a word formation process in which a lexical item changes its grammatical category or word class without undergoing any formal morphological change. The same form may therefore function as different parts of speech depending on its syntactic context.

The following examples illustrate conversion in Chibok:

aṇado	naṇṇa	k ^h aṇsara
I	you-DAT	love
‘I love you’		
k ^h aṇsara	gana	oṇṇa
Love	blind	COP
‘Love is blind’		

In the first sentence example, *k^haṇsara* functions as a verb meaning ‘love’, while in the second sentence, *k^haṇsara* functions as a noun meaning ‘love’. Thus, the same lexical form occurs as a verb in the first example and as a noun in the second.

Another example is:

tsaṇu-gipa	reṇbaeṇa
steal-NOMZ	come-PROG-PRS
‘A thief is coming.’	

bimai	tsaṇu-gipa	oṇṇa
3SG	steal-NOMZ	COP
‘He is a thief’		

In the first sentence, the word *tsaṇugipa* functions as a noun, but in the second sentence, the same word *tsaṇugipa* functions as an adjective. These examples demonstrate that the grammatical category of a lexical form can be determined by its syntactic context without any formal change in its structure.

5.8. Borrowing

Borrowing is the process by which a language adopts lexical items or other linguistic elements from another language or dialect. Rajimwale (2006) defines borrowing as “the term refers to a process through which words and others linguistic element are added from other language and dialect” (p. 39).

The Chibok data indicate that the language has borrowed lexical items from both Indo-Aryan languages and English. Examples of words borrowed from Indo-Aryan languages include:

hatt ^h i	‘elephant’
bagan	‘garden’

badzi	‘time of a clock’
somoi	‘time’
badzar	‘market’

Chibok has also borrowed a number of words from English. Some of these borrowed forms have undergone phonological adaptation to fit the phonological system of Chibok. Examples include:

bas	‘bus’
dakdol	‘doctor’
notis	‘notice’
hotel	‘hotel’
t ^h ebil	‘table’

These examples demonstrate that lexical borrowing has contributed to the expansion of the Chibok vocabulary. The borrowed forms may retain their original meanings while undergoing phonological or morphological adaptation in the recipient language.

5.9. Onomatopoeia

According to Rowe & Levine (2023), “Words that are considered onomatopoeic are supposed to be mimicking the sound made by some agent or situation” (p. 265). Onomatopoeia thus is a word formation process in which words or expressions imitate or resemble sounds associated with particular actions, objects, or events. Such forms are created through the linguistic representation of naturally occurring sounds.

For example:

sk^higipa chatrok^ho t^hap in^hile dokata
‘A teacher beats his student’

In this sentence, the word t^hap represents or imitates the sound associated with beating. It therefore functions as an onomatopoeic expression. Such examples indicate that onomatopoeia is not restricted to everyday natural sounds but may also occur in expressions associated with traditional cultural practices.

5.10. Calquing

Yule (1985) define calquing, “A special type of borrowing is described as loan-translation or calque. In this process, there is a direct translation of the elements of a word into the borrowing language” (p. 52). A calquing is a word or expression formed by translating the individual components of an expression from one language into another, rather than directly borrowing the original form. In other words, calquing involves the literal or structural translation of an expression while using the lexical resources of the recipient language.

The following examples illustrate calquing in Chibok:

p ^h riŋ	+	nam	=	p ^h riŋnam
morning	+	good	=	‘good morning’
wal	+	nam	=	walnam
night	+	good	=	‘good night’
attsi	+	nam	+ sal	= attsinamsal
birth	+	good	+ day	= ‘happy birthday’
sai	+	nokgipa	=	sainokgipa
write	+	owner	=	‘author’

These examples demonstrate that the Chibok forms certain expressions by translating the component meanings of expressions from English into Chibok, rather than directly adopting the foreign expression, the

individual elements are translated and combined according to the lexical and grammatical resources of Chibok. This process illustrates the role of calquing in the development and expansion of the Chibok lexicon.

6. Conclusion

The present study has examined the major word formation processes found in the Chibok variety of Garo. Based on the qualitative and descriptive analysis of data collected from Chibok speaking villages, the present study identifies the ten major processes, such as affixation, derivation, compounding, blending, clipping, reduplication, conversion, borrowing, onomatopoeia, and calquing. These processes demonstrate the diverse morphological strategies employed in Chibok to form new lexical items, and express grammatical and semantic meanings.

The analysis shows that the affixation plays an important role in expressing the grammatical categories such as tense, while derivation can change both the grammatical category and meaning of a base form. Compounding and blending both contribute to lexical expansion through the combination or reduction of existing forms. Clipping provides the shortened lexical forms, whereas the reduplication functions through the repetition of whole or partial forms. Conversion further demonstrates the flexibility of Chibok lexical items as a single form may function as different word classes depending on its syntactic context.

The study also demonstrates that the Chibok vocabulary is influenced by the language contact. The Chibok borrowed words from Indo-Aryan languages and English with some phonological adaptation. Onomatopoeia reflects the representation of sounds associated with actions and cultural practices, while calquing demonstrates the formation of expressions through the translation of components from another language.

Overall, the findings highlight the morphological richness and structural diversity of Chibok. Since Chibok is an endangered variety with declining intergenerational transmission and has received limited scholarly attention, the documenting its word formation processes is particularly crucial. The study therefore contributes to the documentation and linguistic description of Chibok and provides a basis for further research on its morphology, lexicon, syntax, and other aspects of its grammatical structures.

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