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## **Agglutinating in Kanuri Language: A descriptive analysis**

**Abstract.** Language typologists classify languages as Agglutinative, Synthetic, Polysynthetic, Analytic, Fusional, Isolating, etc. This paper grew out of a concern as to in which of these type the Kanuri language could be classified. In this paper we attempt to explicate that Kanuri language belongs to the agglutinative type. The agglutinative nature of the Kanuri language is characterised by its verb morphology, which is complex and difficult to understand without a mastery of the intricacies of Kanuri morphology and phonology. The study shows that a single finite verb form in Kanuri is composed of three morphemes, while in other types of verbs it comprises four morphemes. In forming a derivative or compound verb in Kanuri, it is evident that the Kauri verb could accommodate up to seven morphemes.

### **Introduction**

In the typological classification of languages, particularly from the morphological perspective, the notion of the agglutinating type provides a viable framework for the description of individual languages. Next to agglutinating are Analytic, Synthetic, Polysynthetic, Fusional, Isolating, Inflectional, etc. Some of these share certain features in common by definitions. This may be one of the reasons some linguist criticize this type of classification as incoherent and useless (cf. Anderson, S.A. 1985 and Spencer, A. 1991).

A language in which words consist of several morpheme glued together is called Agglutinative language. The term was first introduced by Wilhelm von Humboldt in 1836 to

classify languages from morphological point of view. The term was derived from the Latin word *agglutinare*, which means ‘to glue together’

Some language typologies describe languages in which a word consists of only one morpheme as an analytic or isolating language, and observe that such languages have no inflections. An extreme isolating, or analytic, language makes limited use of processes of word-formation (cf. Anderson 1985).

In synthetic languages a word may consist of more than one morpheme, while polysynthetic is described as a highly synthetic language in which words could be very complex and sometimes constitute a full clause. These dictate the fact that a language could be classified anywhere on this scale (i.e. as consisting of several, one, or more than one morpheme in its single word).

Noting that this kind of classification of languages into such morphological groups enjoys little support among scholars as it is seen as incoherent and useless (Anderson, S.A. 1985; Spencer, A. 1991). Logically speaking, there should be nothing wrong with such a grouping. In principle, what they exercised is an advancement of knowledge and understanding of the study of language typology, that, agglutinating is the primary type of word formation, and that the other types are mere deviations from it. In fact, some language typologists have made observation that there has yet been observed no purely analytic or purely polysynthetic language. This observation lies on the fact that various lexical categories in languages behave in varying ways. For example, Japanese language could be classified as analytic because its noun can not accommodate inflectional morphemes. However, it could be also classified as extremely synthetic because it has a complex system of verb inflection.

Although the morphological classification of languages in this order is not coherent and useful in the sense of the 19<sup>th</sup> –century linguists, it still makes sense to say that it moves from the incoherent towards a must useful conceptualizations of language structures.

## Agglutinating in Kanuri Verbs

The Kanuri verb is characterised by several morphological and phonological features and changes. These lead to the classification of the verbs into two classes (Cyffer, 1991, 1998 and Hutchison 1981). There are two verb classes in the present day Kanuri language.

- (i) Verb Class I, which carries the suffix + *kin* in its first person singular progressive form,
- (ii) Verb Class II, which carries the suffix + *ngin* in its first person singular progressive form. The Kanuri Verb Class I are few in number, with not more than one hundred and fifty (cf. Hutchison 1981). The verbs in Class II are unlimited in number.

All other verbs that are borrowed into Kanuri will morphologically take the class II form.

Thus, Verb Class I is a closed class, while Class II is an open class.

## The Morphemes in Verb Classes I and II

The Kanuri Verb Class I and II differ with regard to the number of morphemes that make up their members. The verbs in Class I are made up of three morphemes in their finite form, while the verbs in class II are made up of four morphemes in their finite verb form. This is exemplified below:

### Morphemes in Verb Class I

3 <sup>rd</sup> .person	pl	verb root	1st/2 <sup>nd</sup> person	tense/aspect
		bu	k	in > bukin 'I eat'
		bu	m	in > bumin 'you eat'
s		bu	---	in > ziwin 'she eats'
		bu	ye	in > buiyen 'we eat'
		bu	w	in > buwin 'you (pl) eat'
s	+a	bu	---	in > zawin 'they eat'

Even though there are five morpheme positions indicated in the above illustration of Verb Class I, the number of morphemes making up the verb varies depending on whether the verb is in first, second, or third person singular or plural form.

## Morphemes in Verb Class II

mc	3 <sup>rd</sup> .person	pl	v. root	1st/2 <sup>nd</sup> person	tense/ aspect
tul			n	k	in > tulngin 'I wash'
tul			n	m	in > tullumin 'you wash'
tul	s		n	---	in > tuljin 'he/she washes'
tul			n	ye	in > tulnyen 'we wash'
tul			n	w	in<tulluwin 'you(pl) wash'
tul	s	+a	n	---	in > tulzain 'they wash'

The above illustration shows that in addition to the verb root, person and tense morphemes, there is also what we call the meaning carrier (mc) in Verb Class II. This totals up to six morphemes in Kanuri Verb Class II. Every finite verb in Kanuri must contain (a) verb root, (b) person or the subject morpheme and (c) the tense or aspect morpheme. These are the three compulsory elements of the Kanuri verbs. This entails that a single verb in Kanuri language may constitute a full sentence. The verb *tulngin*, for instance, can mean 'I am washing'. The verb *bukin* could express the meaning 'I am eating'. In fact these are characteristics of agglutinative language. In Kanuri language, when the subject of a sentence is a pronoun and is in no way questioned, focused, or emphasised, the subject pronoun is only manifested inside the given verb form in the sentence and not independently stated. That is why we often hear Kanuri speakers saying: *lenyen* 'we are going' instead of *ande lenyen*, if the subject pronoun *ande* 'we' is not questioned, focused, or emphasised (cf. Hutchison 1981). This kind of flexibility is a feature of agglutinative languages. If we further observe other verb forms in the Kanuri language, more features of the agglutinative nature of the Kanuri language can be captured and revealed.

## The Derived Verb Forms

Certain morphemes can be added to the finite verb to alter its meaning. All verbs that are formed in this way are called derived verbs. These are derived from the finite verb forms. Considering the finite verb as Form I, the derived verb forms in Kanuri are: the applied Form

II, the passive Form III, the causative Form IV and the intensive Form V. Each of these verb forms has a specific morpheme and must be morphologically glued to the verb. Take only the applied form II for examples:

Applied form II

Verb class I **yir** – or **yikkə** –

Dutəkin ‘I sew’ > **yirdutəkin** ‘I sew upon’

Ladəkin ‘I sell’ > **yikkəladəkin** ‘I sell to’

Verb class II – **gə**

Dungin ‘I drive away’ > **dugəkin** ‘I drive towards’

A further examination of other verb form could still reveals the extension of the number of morphemes within the verb paradigm.

### The Compound Verb Forms

In the compound verb form, more than one derived morphemes are added to the finite or the derived verb form. For instance, the compound verb *yitayirwawafugəkinba* ‘I will not make it ripped repeatedly’ is made up of eight morphemes.

Yita	yir	ba	bafu	gə	k	in	ba
Cau	app	inte	v.root	app	per	t/asp	neg.

This feature of agglutinating several morphemes to form a word or unit in Kanuri is observed not only in its verb but also in its nouns or nominal expressions. The Kanuri word or unit *Kakkadəwanyisodəlanga* ‘if it were in my particular books’, is a nominal expression which constitutes seven morphemes.

Kakkadə	wa	nyi	so	də	lan	ga
Book.	pl.	pos.	all Inc.	det.	Loc.	If

### Conclusion

In summary, this paper captures the typological characteristics of the Kanuri language in the morphological perspective and found that the language uses agglutination extensively. It

formed word by joining several morphemes together. Kanuri language forms a derivative, compound words or nominals by putting together several morphemes each of which expresses a single definite meaning. These lead us to the conclusion that Kanuri is an agglutinative language. What has reached centre-stage here is a fresh appreciation of the study of language typology. The paper offers informative data for linguists of the 21st century who are interested in capturing cross-linguistic similarities and differences between Kanuri and other languages.

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