

On affixation in Shupamem

Wokwenmendam Nkouo Ninon¹, Ngoungouo Yiagnigni Abass²

Department of African Linguistics, Literature and Civilizations, University of Douala (ninon_mamy@yahoo.fr)

Department of African Languages and Linguistics, University of Yaoundé 1 (abass.ngoungouo@uiniv-yaounde1.cm)

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Abstract

This paper describes the morphological process of affixation in Shupamem, an SVO and noun class systemic Grassfield Bantu language spoken in the West Region of Cameroon. Basically, affixation is a morphological process whereby affixes (prefix, infix or suffix) are attached to a word's stem to form a new word or encode some grammatical properties. Based on a sample of corpus collected from native speakers of this language, the study identified two basic types of affixes which correspond to the two main types of bound morphemes: inflectional and derivational affixes. The formers occur most often with verbs to encode the infinitive mood ([jɪn-]*), tenses (*[pɛ-]*, *[pɪ-]*, *[kàpɪ-]*, etc.), and the iterative verbal aspect (*[-kɛt]*, *[-fɔ]*, and *[-tə]*). Concretely, *jɪndɔp* "hit" is made up of the verbal stem *[-lɔp-]* to which the infinitive prefix *[jɪn-]* is attached. Similarly, *jɪndɔpfɔ* "hit repeatedly" is made up of the verbal stem *[-lɔp-]* to which the prefix *[jɪn-]* (infinitive) and the suffix *[-fɔ]* (iterative aspect) are attached. On the other hand, Shupamem displays some derivational affixes used to create new words in the language. In effect, some nouns can be derived from other nouns, some qualifying adjectives from nouns, as well as some manner adverbs from qualifying adjectives using derivational affixes. This can be illustrated with the noun *pɪn* "dance" from which *ɲgà:pɪn* "dancer" is derived, and the adjective *pý:két* "bad" from which the adverb *pý:kéri* "badly" is derived. In conclusion, this language provides some insightful data that contribute to the appraisal of affixation in Bantu language.*

List of abbreviations and symbols

- SVO: Subject-Verb-Object
- TAM: Tense-Aspect-Mood
- P1: Immediate past tense
- P2: recent past tense
- P3: intermediate past tense
- P4: remote past tense
- Hab. Habitual aspect
- Prog. Progressive aspect
- Prs: Present tense
- F1: Immediate future tense
- F2: intermediate future tense
- F3: Remote future tense
- Mit. Mitigating
- Iter. Iterative

I. INTRODUCTION

Affixation is a widely studied topic in morphology. It refers to a process whereby affixes intervene in the formation of a word. These detachable morphemes can be preposed or postposed to a word stem to derive a new word or mark some grammatical properties. With respect to their positions, affixes subcategorize into prefixes when they precede the word stem, infixes when they are merged with the word stem and suffixes when they follow the root. Regarding their function, affixes are divided into inflectional and derivational. According to Van Goethem (2020), prototypically, a derivational affix is used to change word's category (part of speech) and involves a semantic change. A word inflectional distinction makes up its paradigm, which amounts to the different morphological forms that correlate with different morphosyntactic

functions. In other words and joining the aforementioned claim, inflectional affixes are attached to words to encode some grammatical properties such as tense, aspect, mood, number, gender, and case, among others. The purpose of this paper is to give a comprehensive description of affixation in Shupamem. It is structured into three sections. Section one gives an overview of Shupamem, the language under study. Section two identifies and illustrates the inflectional affixes in Shupamem, in the light of verbs and nouns. Additionally, section three presents the derivational affixes in Shupamem with respect to nouns, adjectives and adverbs. The paper wraps up with the conclusion and references.

II. OVERVIEW OF SHUPAMEM

Shupamem is a Grassfield Bantu language spoken in the Noun division of the West region of Cameroon. The Noun division covers 7687 kilometers with a population of about 455083 people (2005). The Noun division is made up of nine (09) sub-divisions, namely: Bangourain, Fouban, Foubot, Koutaba, Kouoptamo, Magba, Malantouen, Massangam, and Njimom. These sub-divisions share Shupamem as mother tongue and principal means of communication. As per the Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon, Shupamem belongs to zone 9 (East-Grassfield) and bears the code 991. Phonologically, previous studies on this language (Boum 1977, Nchare 2005, 2012) identified twenty-seven consonants: five bilabials, one labio-dental, seven alveolars, four palatals, five velars, three labiovelars and two glottals. They are summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Shupamem consonants chart, adapted from Nchare (2005:43)

Place/manner of articulation	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labiovelar	Glottal
Plosives	p b		t d		k g	kp gb	ʔ
Fricatives	f v		s z	ʃ ʒ	χ		
Affricates					kχ		
Nasals	m	ɱ	n	ɲ	ŋ		
Liquids			l r				
Semi-vowels				j		w	h

As far as vowels are concerned, Shupamem displays eight canonical ones that can be tense or short. These are presented in the table below:

Table 2: Shupamem vowel chart

Positions of the tongues	Front	Central	Back
High	i	ɨ ɤ	u
Mid-high	e	ə	o
Mid-low	ɛ		ɔ
low		a	

Moreover, Shupamem displays three level tones (high, mid, low). It also has some contour tones, the most present in discourse being the rising and the falling tones.

The unmarked sentence structure in Shupamem is SVO, although some syntactic operations (topicalization, focalization, focus formation) can derive otherwise structures. Additionally, as a Bantu language, Shupamem is a noun class language. Nchare (2012) identified 15 noun classes in this language based on the singular/plural pairing. Finally, Shupamem displays three basic tenses (past, present and future) that can be divided in sub-tenses with respect to the remoteness of the action from the time of discourse. Quoting Ngoungou (2021), the present tense of non-stative verbs in Shupamem is always associated with aspect (progressive, habitual and the evidential). The past tense is structured into four tenses: the immediate past (P1) which is not morphologically realized, the recent past (P2) marked by the morpheme |pé-|, the intermediate past (P3) marked by |pí-|, and the remote past (P4) marked by |kàpí-|. Likewise, there exist an immediate future tense (F1) marked by the morpheme |nántwá-|, an intermediate future tense (F2) marked by |náló?-| and a remote future tense (F3) marked by |nántwáóló?-|. Shupamem tense markers are left-adjoined to the finite verbs as illustrated in (2) below:

- (1) a. món ténǎ-nzú péén
 Child Prog-Prs-Eat fufu
 “The child is eating fufu” (Progressive present tense)
- b. món pé-jù péén
 Child P2-eat fufu
 “The child ate fufu” (recent past tense)
- c. món nántwá-jù péén
 Child F1-eat fufu
 “The child will eat fufu” (immediate future tense)

The examples above illustrate the progressive present, the recent past and the immediate future tenses in Shupamem. They are respectively marked by |ténǎ-|, |pé-| and |nántwá-|.

The next section of the paper examines the inflectional affixes in Shupamem.

1. Inflectional affixes in Shupamem

The analysis of Shupamem data revealed some inflectional affixes on verbs and nouns. These are examined in the subsections below.

1.1.1. Verbal inflectional affixes

Verbs in Shupamem inflect for the TAM system. On the one hand, tense markers are affixes that precede the verb

stem to indicate the time of occurrence of an action. The data in (2) and (3) below illustrate the past and the future tense affixes in Shupamem.

- (2) a. món pé-jù péén
 Child P2-eat fufu
 “The child ate fufu” (recent past tense)
- b. món pí-jù péén
 Child P3-eat fufu
 “The child ate fufu” (intermediate past tense)
- c. món kàpí-jù péén
 Child P4-eat fufu
 “The child ate fufu” (remote past tense)
- (3) a. món nántwá-jù péén
 Child F1-eat fufu
 “The child will eat fufu” (immediate future tense)
- b. món náló?-jù péén
 Child F2-eat fufu
 “The child will eat fufu” (intermediate future tense)
- c. món nántwáóló?-jù péén
 Child F1-eat fufu
 “The child will eat fufu” (remote future tense)

In (2) above, the affixes |pé-| (P2), |pí-| (P3) and |kàpí-| (P4) precede the verb stem |-jù| “eat” to encode the recent, the intermediate and the remote past tenses, respectively. Likewise, in (3), the prefixes |nántwá-| (F1), |náló?-| (F2) and |nántwáóló?-| (F3) are attached to the verb stem |-jù| “eat” to encode the immediate, the intermediate and the remote future tenses, respectively.

On the other hand, apart from the habitual and progressive aspect markers that are verb prefixes, the iterative aspect markers appear as verbal extensions, thus, as suffixes. In fact, verbal extension is an integral part of verbal morphology in most Bantu languages. A suffix, more often than not consisting of vowel and consonant, is attached to the verbal stem and modifies the meaning of the basic verb. The most common verbal extensions identified in Bantu languages are applicative, causative, passive, reversive/reciprocal and stative. In Shupamem, only the iterative verbal extensions are realized as suffixes. Consider the data in (4) and (5) below:

- (4) a. món ténǎ-nzú péén
 Child Prog-Prs-Eat fufu
 “The child is eating fufu” (Progressive present tense)
- b. món ká-nzú péén
 Child Hab-Prs-Eat fufu
 “The child (usually) eats fufu” (habitual present tense)

- (5) a. yéén **pé-kùm-fǎ** nshǔtndàp
 thief P2-knock-Iter. door
 “The thief knocked at the door (repeatedly)”
 (iterative aspect).
- b. yéén **pé-kùm-kěť** nshǔtndàp
 Thief P2-knock-Iter. door
 “The thief knocked at the door (repeatedly)”
 (iterative aspect).

In (4.a), the progressive aspect marker is realized as a prefix (**|ténǎ-**) which is attached to the verb stem **|-nǒú|** “eat”. Similarly, the habitual aspect marker is the prefix **|ká-** which attaches to the verb stem **|-nǒú|** “eat”.

In (5.a) on the contrary, the suffix **|-fǎ|** is attached to the verbal stem to bring a semantic nuance to the verb. This is further illustrated in the table below:

Table 3: the iterative verbal extension **-fǎ** in Shupamem

Verbal stems	iterative verbal extension	Verbal stem+verbal extension
láp “hit/beat”	-fǎ	lápǎǎ “hit/beat” (several times)
yáp “share”	-fǎ	yápǎǎ “share to many people”
màʔ “throw”	-fǎ	màʔǎǎ “throw here and there”
kúm “knock”	-fǎ	kúmǎǎ “knock” (repeatedly)
nú: “suck”	-fǎ	nu:ǎǎ “suck” (repeatedly)

Similar to the suffix **|-fǎ|**, the suffix **|-kěť|** is attached to the verbal stems to stress on the repetitive nature of the action described by the verb, as presented in (5.b) above and further illustrated in table 4 below.

Table 4: the iterative verbal extension **-kěť** in Shupamem

Verbal stems	iterative verbal extension	Verbal stem+verbal extension
láp “hit/beat”	-kěť	lápǎǎ “hit/beat” (repeatedly)
jáp “put”	-kěť	jápǎǎ “put” (at many places)
màʔ “throw”	-kěť	màʔǎǎ “throw” (repeatedly)
kúm “knock”	-kěť	Kúmǎǎ “knock” (repeatedly)
nú: “suck”	-kěť	nú:kěťǎǎ ”suck” (repeatedly)

For the verbal extension **|-tǎ|**, it is attached to verbal stems that end in the alveolar sounds **/t/** and **/n/**. Similar to **|-fǎ|** and **|-kěť|**, it indicates that the action described by the verb occurs several times as summarized in the table below:

Table 5: the iterative verbal extension **|-tǎ|** in Shupamem

Verbal stems	Iterative verbal extension	Verbal stem+verbal extension
lě:n “split”	-tǎ	lě:ntǎ “split” (into many parts)
tú:n “cut”	-tǎ	tú:ntǎ “cut” (into many pieces)
pé:n “press”	-tǎ	pé:ntǎ “press” (repeatedly)
gběť “cut”	-tǎ	gběťǎ “cut” (into many pieces)

Finally, the infinitive mood is morphologically encoded in Shupamem verbs by the prefix **|jǐn-**. This is the unmarked form or the bare verb (uninflected) in Shupamem. The prefix **|jǐn-** is attached to the verb stem to indicate the infinitive. This is illustrated in table 5 below.

Table 6: the structure of Shupamem infinitive verb

Prefix	Verb stem	Infitive mood	Gloss
jìn-	-jú	jìnǝú	Eat
jìn-	-tèró	jìntèró	Jump
jìn-	-kà:mó	jìṅkà:mó	Play
jìn-	-fá	jìmfá	Give
jìn-	-kpàʔnǎ	jìmkpàʔnǎ	Test

It appears from all the data above that Shupamem verbs license inflectional affixes, namely prefixes for the tense, aspect (progressive and habitual) and mood (infinitive). Additionally, Shupamem verbs display extensions in form of suffixes to encode the iterative aspect.

1.1.2. Nominal inflectional affixes

Bantu languages in general are noun class languages. The classification of nouns in Shupamem takes into account the plural/singular paradigm. It is observed that some noun classes display affixes that encode gender (singular/plural) and serve as noun classifiers in Shupamem. In the light of the previous studies on Shupamem (Nchare 2012, Njutapmvou 2017, Ngougouo 2021 and Wokwenmendiam 2022), these noun classes behave as follows:

- The noun class 1 is marked by the prefix |m-| in the singular form. Class 2, the plural counterpart of class 1, is marked by the prefix |p-|. These are illustrated in the example below:

- (6)
- m-ón “child”(class 1) → p-ón “children”(class 2)
- m-ùñ “person” (class 1) → p-ùñ “persons” (class 2)

It clearly appears from the above that the noun stems are |-ón| and |-ùñ| for child and person respectively. The prefixes |m-| (singular) and |p-| (plural) are added to these stems to encode the number feature.

Additionally, some nouns belonging to classe 1 and class 2 bear the nasal prefix |n-| or |m-| in the singular form and lose it in the plural form. These are termed class 1.a and class 2.a. Examples of them include the following:

- (7)
- a. n-sàsú “elder”(class 1.a) sàsú “elders” (class 2.a)
- b. m-kpàràʔmu:n “adult” (class 1.a) kpàràʔmu:n “adults” (class 2.a)

The prefixes |n-| and |m-| are attached to the noun stems to encode number. In the same line, some nouns whose singular form is not overtly marked in Shupamem form their plural forms with the prefix |pà-|. They are termed class 1.b and class 2.b and are illustrated below:

- (8)
- a. wǎ “father” (class 1.b) → pà-wǎ “fathers” (class 2.b).
- b. nǎ “mother” (class 1.b) → pà-nǎ “mothers” (class 2.b).
- c. nàʔ “cow” (class 1.b) → pà-nàʔ “cows” (class 2.b)
- d. Nà:nsáráʔ “white man” (class 1.b) → pà-nǎ:nsáráʔ “white men” (class 2.b)

It appears from (8) that all the nouns stems take the prefix |pà-| to inflect for the plural number. Moreover, the noun classes 3 and 4 are marked by the prefixes |mù-| (singular) and |pú-| (plural). They are illustrated in (9) below.

- (9)
- a. mù-mví “goat”(class 3) → pú-mví “goats”(class 4)
- b. mù-mvú “dog” (class 3) → pú-mvú “dogs” (class 4)
- c. mù-ṅgǎp “foul” (class 3) → pú-ṅgǎp “fouls” (class 4)
- d. mù-mgbié “woman” (class 3) → pú-mgbié “women” (class 4)

The nominal inflectional affixes in (9) are the prefix |mù-| (singular) and its counterpart pú- (plural). They are attached to the stems of each noun to encode the number feature and serve as noun classifier. Likewise, the noun class 5 is not marked while its plural counterpart class 6 is marked by the prefix /ṅ-|, |n-| or |m-|, depending on the nature of the following sound. They are illustrated as follows:

- (10)
- a. kùt “foot” (class 5) → ṅ-kùt “feet” (class 6)
- b. tùt “ear” (class 5) → n-tùt “ears” (class 6)

- c. púə “hand” (class 5) —► **m**-buó “hands” (class 6)
- d. pùm “egg” (class 5) —► **m**-bùm “eggs” (class 6)

Although the singular number is not morphologically realized in the noun stems in (10), their plural counterparts bear the prefixes |**ŋ**-|, |**n**-| or |**m**-|, depending on the phonological characteristics of the following sound.

The classes 13 and 14 comprise nouns whose singular form is marked by the prefix |**ji**-|, and the plural form by the prefix |**pi**-|. They are presented as follows:

- (11)
- a. **ji**-mbòkét “the good one” (class 13) **pi**-►
mbòkét “the good ones”(class 14).
 - b. **ji**-mbýkét “the bad one” (class 13) **pi**-►
mbýkét “the bad ones” (class 14).

In (11), the prefixes |**ji**-| and |**pi**-| attach to the nominal stems to encode the number feature.

In a nutshell, some nouns in Shupamem are made up of the stem to which inflectional prefixes are attached to encode number and noun class. The next section examines the derivational affixes in Shupamem.

2. Derivational affixes in Shupamem

A derivational affix is an affix by means of which a new word is derived. The derived word is generally from a different class or has a different meaning from the initial

Table 7: the nominal derivational affixes **ŋgà:-/yǎ-**

Prefix	Noun 1	Noun 2	Gloss
ŋgà:- /yǎ-	Pín “dance”	ŋgà:pín/yǎpín	Dancer/dancers
ŋgà:- /yǎ-	Vú:m “hunt”	ŋgà:vú:m/yǎvú:m	Hunter/hunters
ŋgà:- /yǎ-	Nzié “hunger”	ŋgà:nzié/yǎnzié	hungry person(s)
ŋgà:- /yǎ-	Fà? “work”	ŋgà:fà?/yǎfà?	Worker/workers
ŋgà:- /yǎ-	Juòp “song”	ŋgà:juòp/yǎjuòp	Singer/singers

It should be mentioned that although the grammatical category of the derived words did not change, their semantic interpretation has changed, confirming the derivational nature of these prefixes.

2.2. Adjectival derivational affixes

Some Shupamem qualifying adjectives are derived from nouns through the affixation of the derivational suffix |**-két**|, as illustrated in (13) and (14) below:

- (13)
- a. Ji pâ **pù:**
This be-Prs beauty
“This is beauty!”

one. Shupamem data revealed that nouns, adjectives and adverbs can be formed using derivational affixes.

2.1. Nominal derivational affixes

In Shupamem, nouns can be derived from other nouns by affixation. In effect, the derivational affixes |**ŋgà:-**| (singular) and |**yǎ-**| (plural) are attached to an existing noun to derive a new one with a different semantic interpretation. Consider the examples below:

- (12)
- a. Món-á ná-ŋgù? pīn
Child-my Prs-love dance
“My child loves dancing”
 - b. Món-á pâ **ŋgà:pín**
Child-my be-Prs dancer
“My child is a dancer”
 - c. pón-pá pâ **yǎpín**
Children-my be-Prs dancers
“My children are dancers”

The example in (12.a) displays the noun **pīn** “dance/dancing” whereas those in (12.b) and (12.c) contain the nouns **ŋgà:pín** “dancer” and **yǎpín** “dancers”. It is observed that the prefixes |**ŋgà:-**| (singular) and |**yǎ-**| (plural) are attached to **pīn** whose semantic feature is [-human] to derive **ŋgà:pín** and **yǎpín** with a different semantic feature ([+human]). This is further summarized in the table below.

- b. Ji pâ **pò:két** mèmgbié
This be-Prs beautiful woman
“This is a beautiful woman”

- (14)
- a. Ji pâ **pý:**
This be-Prs badness
“This is badness!”
 - b. Ji pâ **pý:két** mù:n
This be-Prs bad person
“This is a bad person”.

In the data above, the derivational suffix |**-két**| is attached to the nouns **pù:** “beauty” and **pý:** “badness” to derive the

qualifying adjectives **pò:két** “beautiful” and **pý:két** “bad”, respectively. This derivational process leads to the change

of the grammatical category of the derived words and is further illustrated in the table below:

Table 8: the adjectival derivational affix -két

Adjectives		suffix	Adverbs	
ké:nó	“tiredness”	-két	ké:nkét	“tired”
pý:	“badness”	-két	Pýkét	“bad”
púətə	“softness”	-két	púətkét	“soft”
luóp	“fear”	-két	luópkét	“fearful”
vý:	“surprise”	-két	vý:két	“surprising”

A deletion process is noted when the suffix **|-két|** is attached to a noun ending in the vowel sound /ə/ such as **púətə** “softness” which becomes **púətkét** “soft”, and **ké:nó** “tiredness” which turns to **ké:nkét** “tired”.

2.3. Adverbial derivational affixes

Similar to the qualifying adjectives analyzed above, some Shupamem manner adverbs are derived by the affixation of the derivational suffix **|-rí|** to the corresponding qualifying adjectives. In effect, these derived manner adverbs are endpoints of a the derivational process which starts with nouns and proceeds with qualifying adjectives. Consider the date below:

(15)

- a. Jì pá **pù:**
This be-Prs beauty
“This is beauty!”
- b. Jì pá **pò:két** mèmgbié
This be-Prs beautiful woman
“This is a beautiful woman”
- c. Jí mèmgbié pé jì:
pò:kéí

This woman P2 walk beautifully
“This woman walked beautifully”

(16)

- a. Jì pá **pý:**
This be-Prs badness
“This is badness!”
- b. Jì pá **pý:két** mù:n
This be-Prs bad person
“This is a bad person”.
- c. Jí mù:n kàpí jíkét **pý:kéí**
This person P4 talk badly
“This person talked badly”

From the examples above, one notes that the manner adverbs **pò:kéí** “beautifully” is successfully derived from (i) the noun **pù:** “beauty” and (ii) the qualifying adjective **pò:két** “beautiful”. Similarly, the manner adverb **pý:kéí** “badly” is successfully derived from (i) the noun **pý:** “badness” and (ii) the qualifying adjective **pý:két** “bad”. This is further illustrated in the following table:

Table 9: adverb derivational affixes

Nouns	Suffix	Adjectives	suffix	Adverbs
ké:nó “tiredness”	-két	ké:nkét “tired”	-rí	ké:nkéí “tiredly”
pý: “badness”	-két	pý:két “bad”	-rí	Pýkéí “badly”
púətə “softness”	-két	púətkét “soft”	-rí	púətkéí “softly”
luóp “fear”	-két	luópkét “fearful”	-rí	luópkéí “fearfully”
vý: “surprise”	-két	vý:két “surprising”	-rí	vý:kéí “surprisingly”

III. CONCLUSION

The goal of this paper was to analyze and illustrate the process of affixation in Shupamem, a Grassfield Bantu language of the West region of Cameroon. From the analysis of a sample of data from this language, one notes the presence of both inflectional and derivational affixes. The former are used to encode tense (past, present and

future), mood (infinitive) and aspect (iterative). As tense and mood markers, these inflectional affixes are leftbranched to the verb stem. Contrarily, they are right-adjointed to the verbal stem when they encode aspect. As for the derivational affixes, they are attached to some words to derive new ones. Concretely, the prefixes **lɔ̀gà:-|** (singular) and **lɔ̀ǎ:-|** (plural) can be attached to some nouns to derive

other nouns, on the one hand. On the other hand, the suffix |**-két**| can be attached to some nouns to derive qualifying adjectives to which the suffix |**-rí**| can be attached to derive manner adverbs.

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