

Verbal-To-Nominal Derivation Patterns in the Tiv Language

¹Ngusaar Ayaka, ²Vanessa Chivir Adzer

^{1,2} Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University,
Makurdi

Corresponding author

Ngusaar Ayaka,

Phone: +2348036097665

Email: ngusaarayaka@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores verbal-to-nominal derivation patterns in the Tiv language. The aim of the study is to investigate the processes involved in the derivation of nouns from verbs in the Tiv language, with a particular emphasis on the morphological patterns and rules that govern such changes. This study used a descriptive research design to analyse noun derivation in Tiv. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with 15 purposively sampled native Tiv speakers in Makurdi. The researcher's intuition as a native speaker was also used to gather data. Secondary data were collected from a review of existing linguistic materials, including journals, published and unpublished texts, and online sources. The analysis of the data was guided by Hockett's Item-and-Process (I.P.) theory. Grounded in Hockett's Item-and-Process (I.P.) theory, the paper identifies core derivational strategies such as prefixation, tonal modification, and morphological shifts. A prominent example includes the addition of the prefix {m-}, which converts the verb *tsaha* (punish) into the noun *mtsaha* (punishment). Similarly, tonal alternation plays a significant role in semantic differentiation, as illustrated by the transformation of *àmbē* (suck) into *ámbe* (crocodile). These examples demonstrate that noun derivation in Tiv extends beyond mere affixation to include intricate tonal and semantic modifications. The findings show that there is structural and semantic complexity inherent in Tiv's morphological system. Derivational mechanisms such as prefixation, infixation, suffixation, and tonal shifts are not only central to word formation but also vital to understanding the syntactic behaviour of derived nouns within the language. This complexity highlights the dynamic and rule-governed nature of Tiv morphology. The study concludes that a deeper exploration of these derivational processes is essential for appreciating the linguistic richness of the Tiv language. The study recommends a further study of other derivations such as verbs, adjectives and other morphological domains, such as verb conjugation and sentence construction, in order to develop a more holistic understanding of Tiv grammatical structure and its broader linguistic implications.

Keywords: Verbal derivation patterns, Nominal derivation patterns, Tiv language

Introduction

Derivation is a fundamental morphological process found in many languages, including Tiv. According to Aronoff and Fudeman (2017), derivation is the process by which new words are formed through the addition of affixes, leading to a change in grammatical category. For example, a verb can be transformed into a noun, as in English where “teach” becomes “teacher.” This process plays a crucial role in expanding the lexicon of a language. In Tiv, verbs serve as a significant source for noun derivation through various morphological strategies. Dressler (2019) asserts that derivation is a key mechanism in word formation, allowing for the expansion and adaptation of a language’s vocabulary to accommodate new meanings and functions.

The process of noun derivation from verbs is central to the structure of language, as it reflects the language’s ability to generate new lexical items and

expand its vocabulary. According to Štekauer and Valera (2019), the lexicon of a language is not static but evolves through derivational processes that enrich vocabulary and enhance communicative efficiency by allowing speakers to create new words from existing ones. In Tiv, verbs primarily indicate actions or states, but through derivation, they can yield nouns that refer to agents, instruments, or results of actions. This transformation is achieved through affixation, tonal modifications, and morphological adjustments that signal a shift in grammatical category. In many cases, the addition of prefixes or suffixes modifies the verb’s meaning, turning it into a noun that conveys a related but distinct concept. For instance, the verb *bume* (meaning “to fool around”) can undergo derivation to form the noun *ibyumegh*, which denotes “foolishness” as a state or quality. This illustrates how the Tiv language systematically employs derivational morphology to create new words while

maintaining a clear semantic link between the base verb and the derived noun. The ability to derive nouns from verbs in this manner demonstrates the flexibility and richness of Tiv morphology, highlighting the language's adaptability to various communicative and expressive needs.

One of the primary morphological processes in Tiv involves the addition of affixes to a verb to form a noun, what is known as affixation. According to Lieber (2018), affixation is a widespread method of word formation that contributes to the productivity of a language's morphology. In Tiv, verbs undergo affixation to generate nouns describing agents, instruments, or outcomes of actions. This process is not merely a mechanical addition of morphemes but a systematic transformation that adheres to the phonological and syntactic rules of the language. For example, the suffix *-er* can be added to *preach* to form an agent *preacher*. Haspelmath and Sims (2022) emphasise that affixation in noun

derivation is often accompanied by other morphological markers, such as vowel changes or tonal modifications, which further differentiate the derived form from its verbal base.

Furthermore, tone plays a crucial role in distinguishing derived nouns from their verbal roots in Tiv. According to Kandybowicz and Torrence (2021), tone is a fundamental aspect of many Niger-Congo languages, influencing grammatical and lexical distinctions. Creissels (2020) notes that languages with a rich morphological system, such as Tiv, often employ tone in addition to affixation to signal derivational changes. In Tiv, tone variations can mark derivational changes, thereby differentiating verbs from their nominal counterparts. For instance, a shift in tonal pattern may indicate whether a word functions as a verb or a noun. For example, *Dāā* (verb)-table, *dáà* (Noun)-traditional game and *dàà* (verb)-push. This demonstrates the complexity and systematic nature of morphological

processes in Tiv. This interplay between morphology and phonology highlights the complexity of noun derivation in Tiv and underscores the importance of tonal distinctions in linguistic structure.

The derivation of nouns from verbs in Tiv is not only a morphological phenomenon but also has semantic implications. According to Lieber and Štekauer (2020), the meaning of a derived noun is closely linked to the meaning of its root verb, yet derivation often introduces subtle semantic shifts. For example, in Tiv, a verb describing an action can be transformed into a noun referring to the agent performing the action, the instrument used, or the outcome of the action. For example words like *tsaha* (punish) which is a verb could become *mtsaha* (punishment) which is a noun. This process reflects the adaptability of the language in capturing various conceptual distinctions through morphology. Tallerman (2023) argues that derivational processes—such as the transformation of

verbs into nouns—are not just structural changes in a language but also reflect how speakers mentally organise and convey meaning. When a noun is derived from a verb, it highlights how people conceptualise actions, agents, instruments, and results within their linguistic system. This process also enhances communicative efficiency by expanding vocabulary and allowing speakers to express ideas more precisely.

The morphological productivity of Tiv illustrates its capacity to evolve and accommodate new lexical needs. According to Audring and Jackendoff (2022), morphological processes such as derivation are indicative of a language's flexibility and ability to generate new expressions. The derivation of nouns from verbs in Tiv demonstrates this adaptability, as speakers utilise morphological patterns to create new words that reflect contemporary experiences and cultural developments. This linguistic dynamism not only preserves the language's

relevance but also strengthens its role in education, literature, and daily communication. This dynamic nature ensures that Tiv remains a relevant and expressive language in various domains of communication. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how nouns are derived from verbs in Tiv language.

Statement of the Problem

The Tiv language, like many others, utilises derivational morphological processes to convert verbs into nouns, an essential feature of its grammatical system. Despite its significance, there remains a limited and fragmented understanding of the specific mechanisms and systematic patterns through which this transformation occurs in Tiv. While some scholars have explored aspects of Tiv morphology, existing studies have not comprehensively accounted for the full range of verb-to-noun derivations. No conclusive claim can

be made that these studies have exhaustively analysed all relevant derivational structures in the language. This lack of detailed and systematic investigation into the processes by which verbs are transformed into nouns presents a notable gap in Tiv linguistic research. Consequently, this study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth examination of the derivational processes involved and by identifying the various nouns derived from verbs in the Tiv language.

Aim and objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to analyse the process of noun derivation from verbs in the Tiv language, examining the morphological rules and patterns that govern this derivational process. The following objectives are slated to:

- i. identify the various nouns derived from verbs in Tiv.
- ii. examine the derivational processes involved in the formation of nouns from verbs in Tiv

Research Methodology

This study used a descriptive research design to analyze noun derivation in Tiv. Primary data were collected through structured interviews with 15 purposively sampled native Tiv speakers in Makurdi. The researcher's intuition as a native speaker proved useful in the gathering and analysis of data. Secondary data were collected from a review of existing linguistic materials, including journals, published and unpublished texts, and online sources. The analysis of the data was guided by Hockett's Item-and-Process (I.P.) theory.

Literature Review

Morphology

Morphology is a fundamental aspect of linguistic study that examines the structure and formation of words. According to Aboh (2019), "morphology is the study of the internal structure of words and the rules by which words are formed in a given language" (p. 5). This perspective highlights the systematic

nature of morphological processes in languages, emphasising that word formation is governed by underlying rules that define how morphemes combine to create meaning. Mugane (2021) asserts that morphology is an essential linguistic component that bridges syntax and phonology, allowing languages to maintain coherence in word formation. This assertion underscores the integrative role of morphology in language, illustrating how morphological structures serve as a crucial link between phonological patterns and syntactic organisation, ensuring that words not only adhere to phonetic principles but also conform to grammatical rules within sentence structures.

The classification of morphology into inflectional and derivational processes is significant in linguistic studies. Yusuf (2018) argues that inflectional morphology involves modifications that indicate grammatical relationships, while derivational morphology results in the creation of new words or word categories.

This distinction is essential for understanding how words change form while maintaining meaning, as inflectional processes alter words to indicate tense, case, number, or agreement, whereas derivational processes contribute to vocabulary expansion by generating entirely new lexemes. Oduro (2020) states that derivational morphology serves as a productive mechanism for lexical expansion, allowing languages to generate novel expressions from existing roots. This view highlights the creative function of derivational processes, demonstrating how languages utilize affixation, compounding, and reduplication to construct new words that accommodate evolving communicative needs, thereby enriching linguistic expression and adaptability.

Derivation

Derivation is a fundamental morphological process through which new words are created by adding affixes to base forms. According to Olúmúyìwá (2019), derivation is the morphological process

responsible for word formation, often involving a shift in grammatical category, such as from noun to verb or adjective to noun. This underscores the role of derivation in expanding the lexicon of a language by facilitating the transformation of words into new grammatical categories. Yusuf and Adebayo (2021) describe derivation as a productive means of forming new lexical items through affixation, compounding, and other morphological modifications. This highlights the diversity of processes involved in derivation, showing that word formation extends beyond affixation to include various structural modifications.

The distinction between derivation and inflection is crucial in understanding morphological structures. Alabi (2017) asserts that "derivational morphemes create new words with distinct meanings, while inflectional morphemes merely modify a word's grammatical properties without altering its core meaning. This suggests that derivation plays a central role

in lexical innovation, whereas inflection serves a grammatical function without generating new lexemes. Lieber (2018) explains that inflection operates within a paradigm, whereas derivation generates lexically independent words." This reinforces the idea that derivational processes significantly contribute to vocabulary expansion, distinguishing them from grammatical modifications that maintain lexical stability.

Noun Formation

Noun formation encompasses the processes through which nouns are created in various languages, reflecting both linguistic structure and cultural nuances. According to Gurdip (2018), "Noun formation encompasses various processes that contribute to the development of nouns through morphological construction" (p. 65). This definition emphasizes that noun formation involves a

range of morphological techniques such as affixation and compounding, which are crucial for expanding the noun lexicon of any language. Additionally, the concept that these processes contribute significantly to noun development underscores their importance in language structure and function.

Morphological processes are integral to understanding how nouns come into being within a language. Adeyemi (2021) states that "morphological processes such as affixation, compounding, and conversion are essential mechanisms through which nouns are formed in a language" (p. 78). This perspective highlights that the richness of a language's noun system hinges on these varied morphological strategies, which allow for the creation of new words. Such an assertion showcases the creativity involved in language use, as speakers manipulate existing words to generate new meanings. Okwudiba (2019) articulates that "derivational morphemes are pivotal

in transforming base words into nouns, facilitating a richer vocabulary” (p. 45). This observation stresses the role of derivational morphemes, indicating that these linguistic tools are fundamental to expanding the vocabulary and enriching language.

The semantic implications of noun formation add another layer to this concept. Adebayo (2020) argues that the meanings of newly formed nouns often extend from their root forms, creating layers of meaning that can reflect societal changes. This quote implies that the evolution of nouns is not only a technical process but is also a reflection of the changing values and experiences of a society, illustrating how language evolves alongside culture. This association between meaning and form highlights the dynamic relationship between language and society. Moyo (2016) suggests that as language evolves, the formation of nouns reflects not only linguistic creativity but also the need to name new objects,

experiences, and concepts. This indicates that the process of noun formation is essential for accommodating new realities and reflects the adaptability of languages in response to their speakers’ needs.

Affixation

Affixation is a fundamental morphological process that plays a critical role in word formation across languages. According to Aboh (2017), affixation is the process of attaching morphemes to a root or base to create new words or modify meaning. This underscores its significance in enriching vocabulary and altering grammatical categories. Similarly, Yusuf and Ajiboye (2022) assert that affixation is a primary means of morphological construction in many African languages, serving both derivational and inflectional functions. This highlights its wide applicability in linguistic systems, particularly in African linguistic structures.

The classification of affixation into different types is essential for understanding its morphological

complexity. Lieber (2018) asserts that affixation can be classified into prefixation, suffixation, infixation, and circumfixation, each serving unique functions in word formation. This classification illustrates the diversity of affixation in language evolution. Mbah and Ugwu (2020) state that prefixes and suffixes are the most common affixation processes, with African languages demonstrating extensive use of both for syntactic and semantic modifications. This underscores the dynamic role of affixation in African linguistic morphology.

Prefixation, a major type of affixation, involves the attachment of morphemes before the root. According to Aikhenvald (2019), prefixation is a productive morphological process in languages where affixes are added to the beginning of root words to alter meaning. This demonstrates the adaptability of prefixes in modifying lexical semantics. Chumbow (2021) notes that prefixation in African languages often encodes tense,

aspect, and derivational meanings, contributing to the functional diversity of morphological structures." This highlights how prefixation serves as a crucial element in grammatical structuring.

Suffixation, another primary affixation process, occurs when morphemes are added at the end of a root. According to Plag (2020), suffixation is a predominant method of word formation, contributing to changes in syntactic category and grammatical function. This emphasizes its role in lexical and grammatical transformations. Bamgbose (2018) states that African languages utilise suffixation extensively in nominalization, adjectivization, and verb derivation, demonstrating its flexibility in word formation. This affirms the relevance of suffixation in diverse linguistic contexts.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Item-and-Process (I.P) theory, developed by Charles F. Hockett. It emphasises the dynamic and transformative nature of language by

focusing on the processes that alter linguistic items to generate new forms and meanings. One of the core tenets of this theory is that linguistic items, such as words or morphemes, undergo various processes to produce different forms within a language. These processes include morphological transformations like affixation, derivation, and inflection, which modify base items to create new grammatical or semantic units. For example, in English, adding the suffix “-ly” to the adjective “quick” produces the adverb “quickly.” The I.P theory explores these transformational processes to understand how languages expand and modify their lexical inventories.

The Item-and-Process (I.P) theory is relevant to the study of derivation of nouns in Tiv language as it provides a clear framework for understanding how root verbs are transformed into noun forms through specific morphological processes. The theory helps in analysing how Tiv utilises affixation, conversion, and other

processes to derive nouns, thereby offering a structured approach to exploring the language’s morphological rules and patterns.

Empirical Review

Ajim and Ugechi (2022) examine analysis of nominalisation processes in the Tiv language. The study seeks to determine the nominalisation processes in the Tiv language, and the classes of words as well as the linguistic units that are nominalised in Tiv. The study adopted the survey method in investigating the facts about the nominalisation process in the language. The study used primary sources of data collection. The primary data were sourced through interview. Structured interview questions were used to elicit the needed data on nominalization from the ten selected adult Tiv native speakers in Makurdi and Gboko in Benue State. A total number of eighty (80) data were gathered and analysed. The theory adopted in the study was Hockett’s (1954) structural theory modified in (2004) whose

models are the Item-and-Process (I.P) and Item-and-Arrangement (I.A). The study found out that the processes through which nominalization occurs in the Tiv language are prefixation, prefixation plus some modifications, tonality and desententialisation (sentence deconstruction). These processes are discovered to be very productive in nominalisation in Tiv. It has also been found out that verb roots and adjectives are the classes of words that are nominalised (lexical nominalisation) in the Tiv language together with sentences (syntactic nominalisation). The study concludes that nominalisation is very essential in word creation and helps in enriching the Tiv language.

Both studies examine morphological processes within the Tiv language, with Ajim and Ugechi specifically investigating nominalisation. While the current study focuses on the derivation of nouns in Tiv. Concentrating on noun derivation, the current study seeks

to provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms involved in transforming verb roots into nouns, thereby contributing to and augmenting the existing body of literature on Tiv morphology.

Damkor, Tyoh and Igbe (2021) examine affixation as a word-derivation process in Tiv. The survey design was used for this study because it could enable the researchers to collect data that were analysed to discover the derivational processes in Tiv affixation. Hence, native speakers of Tiv granted oral interviews to the researchers in order to enable them to collect data for the study. The oral interviews were structured in such a manner that the interviewees were asked pre-determined questions on Affixation as a derivational process in Tiv. The researchers also used their intuitive knowledge of Tiv language to collect data for the study. The collected data were arranged in rows and analysed based on the study's objectives, which were to discover the derivational processes in

Affixation in Tiv. Hockett's theory of Item-and-Arrangement and Item-and-Process was adopted. The study presents the following findings: nouns are derived from verbs by attaching the prefix {m-} to roots, formation of diminutive nouns is by adding the prefix {an-} to roots, and the derivation of nouns from adjectives is done through prefixation and suffixation of roots with {m-} and {-n} respectively.

Both studies examine morphological processes in Tiv, with

Damkor, Tyoh, and Igbe (2021) focusing on affixation as a word-derivation method, while the current study explores the derivation of nouns in Tiv. The key contrast lies in their focus: the former addresses various affixation processes including diminutive formation and derivation from adjectives, whereas the latter concentrates solely on how nouns are derived.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Formation of Nouns from Verbs and the Prefix {m-}

Verbs	Meaning	Prefix	Derivative (Noun)	
tsaha	punish	m-	ṁtsàhà	punishment
tuhwa	curse	m-	ṁtuhwà	curse
pase	confess	m-	ṁpàse	confession
soo	love	m-	ṁsòò	love
pav	divide	m-	ṁpàv	division
koso	save	m-	ṁkósò	saving

gbide	beat	m-	m̀gbídyè	beat
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Source: field work, 2025

existing elements. For instance, the verb *tsaha* ('punish') becomes *m̀tsàhà* ('punishment') with the prefix {m-}, illustrating a clear transformation from action to noun. Similarly, *tuhwa* ('curse') changes to *m̀tuhwà* ('cursing'), and *pase* ('confess') becomes *m̀pàse* ('confession'), showing how the prefix facilitates the nominalisation of actions.

Table 2: Formation of Nouns through Verbs and the Prefix {i-}, Infix {-y/-n-},

Verb	Meaning	Prefix/Infix/Suffix	Derivative (Noun)	Meaning
laha	insult	i-/-y-n	ílyáhàn	insult
hee	embarrass	i-/-y/-n	íhyèèn	embarrassment
pásé	confess	i-/-y-/n	ípyásèn	confession

Source: field work, 2025.

Table 2 reveals that nouns in the Tiv language are formed through various morphological processes, including the addition of infixes and inffixes to root verbs. This analysis confirms the complexity and versatility of Tiv's derivational morphology. For example, the verb *laha* (insult) is transformed into the noun *ílyahan* (insult) by applying the prefix {i-}, infix {-y-n}. This transformation indicates how multiple affixes can work together to derive a noun that expresses a state or quality related to the verb.

Table 3: Derivation of Nouns from Verbs through Prefixation /i/

Verb	meaning	Prefix	Noun Derived	Meaning
er(en)	behave/act	i-	ìèrèn	Behaviour/action
lam	speak	i-	ìlyàm	speech
tuha	insult	i-	ítyuhànèv	insults
sar(en)	desire	i-	ìshàrèn	desire
maa	build	i-	ímyààgh	building (the structure)

Source: field work, 2025

Table 3 illustrates the systematic morphological process of noun derivation from verb roots through prefixation in the Tiv language. The data reveals two primary prefixes functioning as nominalisers: i. The prefix i- demonstrates a productive capacity in deriving abstract nouns denoting states, qualities, or processes, as evidenced in transformations such as *er* (act) → *ieren* (action), *lam*(n) (speak) → *ilyam* ('speech'), and *maa* (build) → *imyaah* (building). This morphological pattern reveals the language's systematic approach to lexical expansion through prefixation, where specific prefixes carry distinct semantic loads and grammatical functions in the derivational process.

Table 6: Derivation of Nouns from Verbs through Tonality

Word	Meaning	Word Class	Noun Derived	Meaning of Derived Noun
àmbē	to suck	Verb	ámbé	crocodile
bēhdè	touched	Verb	béndé	kind of amulet
dūrà	thunder	Verb	dúrá	coccidiosis

dāā	to push	Verb	dàà / dáà	table / traditional game
gbēr	to cut down	Verb	gbér	gallon
jìr	to cook	Verb	jìr	a place
kōr	to sew	Verb	kór / kòr	rope / sasswood
lū	was	Verb	lú	mortar

Source: fieldwork, 2025

The data in Table 6 demonstrates that tonal shifts are central to noun derivation in Tiv, transforming both grammatical class and meaning. For instance, “àmbē” (to suck) becomes “ámbe” (crocodile), while “dūrà” (thunder) changes to “dúra” (coccidiosis), showing how tone redefines semantic roles. These examples highlight tone as a key morphological and semantic device in Tiv noun formation.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are discussed based on the research objectives. This is to ascertain whether the set objectives are achieved. The first objective seeks to investigate the primary derivational processes used in the Tiv language to form nouns from verbs. The study reveals that the Tiv language utilises

several primary derivational processes to form nouns from verbs. Key processes include prefixation, infixation, and tonal variation. For instance, the prefix {m-} is commonly used, as seen in examples such as *tsaha* (to punish) becoming *mtsaha* (punishment) and *tuhwa* (to curse) becoming *mtuhwa* (the act of cursing). Damkor, Tyoh, and Igbe (2021) support this finding, highlighting that affixation plays a crucial role in the nominalisation process in Tiv.

The second objective inquires about the semantics of nouns that are derived from verbs in Tiv. The findings show that semantics of nouns derived from verbs in Tiv demonstrate a clear connection between the action denoted by the verb and the resulting noun’s meaning. For instance, *laha* (insult) becoming *ilyahan*

(insult) reflects a direct semantic link between the action and its nominal form. According to Makar (1994), this semantic consistency is crucial for understanding how Tiv utilises morphological changes to convey specific meanings, underscoring the study's observations.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the complexity and richness of the Tiv language's derivational processes. The derivation of nouns from verbs through mechanisms like prefixation, infixation, suffixation, and tonal variation plays a crucial role in the morphological and syntactic framework of Tiv. The study supports the view that these processes are not only productive but also essential for the dynamic evolution of the Tiv lexicon. The semantic shifts observed, such as *ámbé* from *àmbē* ('crocodile' from 'to suck') and *dúrá* from *dūrà* ('coccidiosis' from 'thunder'), demonstrate how tonal and morphological adjustments can yield new

meanings and enrich the language. It is recommended that future studies explore the interaction between these derivational processes and other aspects of Tiv morphology, such as verb conjugation and sentence structure, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their impact on the language.

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