

# An Analysis of Dholuo Portmanteau Morph: Redefining the Portmanteau Morph

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## Abstract

This study deals with the analysis of portmanteau morph as found in Dholuo language. The work is divided into introduction which deals with the background of Dholuo language and the attempt to build the need for the study which is hinged on the idea that the concept of portmanteau as used in the linguistics books is not adequate to capture Dholuo grammar. A lot of data is generated and analyzed to prove the fact that there is need to redefine the portmanteau morph. The study entails Lexical morphology approach which provides us with the means of describing a number of morphological phenomena in an illuminating manner, with the word rather than the morpheme playing a pivotal role (Katamba, 1993,p.111).Lexical morphology is more in tune with the word based models of traditional, pre-structuralist approaches to morphology and modern word-and-paradigm morphology. The analysis of Dholuo portmanteau morph is also done within the theoretical frame work of lexical morphology, inflectional morphology and derivational morphology, this broader approach would help to capture the morphological behavior of the portmanteau morph.

## Introduction

The Luo dialect, *Dholuo* is the eponymous dialect of the Luo group of Nilotic languages, spoken by about 6 million Luo people of Kenya and Tanzania, who occupy parts of the eastern shore of Lake Victoria and areas to the south. Dholuo is mutually intelligible with Alur, Lango, Acholi and Adhola of Uganda. Dholuo and the aforementioned Uganda languages are all linguistically related to Luwo, Nuer, Bari, Jur chol of Sudan and Anuak of Ethiopia due to common ethnic origins of the larger Luo peoples who speak Luo languages.

It is estimated that Dholuo has 90% lexical similarity with Lep Alur (Alur), 83% with Lep Achol (Acholi), 81% with Lango, and 93% with Dhopadhola (Adhola). However, these are often counted as separate languages despite common ethnic origins due to linguistic shift occasioned by geographical movement.

When we divide a word into morpheme, we focus on strings of sounds that are meaningful regardless of whether they constitute syllables at the phonological level (Katamba, 1993,p.35).it is Preferable to view morphemes as being represented or realized or manifested by morphs (Mathews, 1974).The term portmanteau morph is used to refer to cases where a single morph simultaneously represents a bundle of several different grammatical elements

(Katamba, 1993,p.36). Katamba's definition of a portmanteau morph is pegged on the English morph *-s*. This entails the same string of sounds which cumulatively represent several morphemes. The *-s* ending in English verbs (e.g walks) signals three morphemes simultaneously, namely, third person, present tense and singular number. A separate morph would be needed to represent each morpheme. This shows just how abstract morphemes are as opposed to morphs. Morphemes themselves are not composed of sounds but they are represented by morphs which are made up of sounds. Katamba's definition does not seem to capture Dholuo morphs which may play several different grammatical roles but do not necessarily occur simultaneously. Morphemes are to morphs what lexemes are to word forms. Morphemes and lexemes are the abstract entities found in the lexicon while morphs and word forms are physical entities found in speech or writing. There can also be situation where different grammatical words are represented by the same word forms. This is referred to as syncretism. It is a result of neutralization. This is where the same form is used to represent distinct morphological concepts. The concept of syncretism does no capture Dholuo morphs fully as it is a concept based on English morphs, attempt to define Dholuo portmanteau morph is therefore very fluid. There are different types of morphemes such as the roots which are the irreducible core of a word with absolutely nothing else attached to it (Katamba, 1993,p.41).The roots which are capable of standing on their own are called free morphemes e.g. in Dholuo we have *guok* (dog).The bound morphemes are the roots incapable of occurring in isolation. The affixes are the morphemes which only occur when attached to some other morpheme or morphemes such as roots or stem or base. My analysis presents data that tries to put one morph namely: *ruok* into perspective and determine its different realizations in different contexts and whether the definition of portmanteau adequately captures this particular Dholuo morph.

### Theoretical Framework

Lexical morphology provides us with the means of describing a number of morphological phenomena in an illuminating manner, with the word rather than the morpheme playing a pivotal role.(Katamba, 1993, p.111).Lexical morphology is more in tune with the word based models of traditional, pre-structuralist approaches to morphology and modern word-and-paradigm morphology.(Hockett, 1954,1958).The centrality of words is enshrined in the stipulation that the output of each layer of derivation must be a possible word in the language. So, lexical rules must be structure preserving. The output of a layer of derivation cannot violate the well-formedness constraints on words. This model is important to this study because Dholuo word *ruok* can be dealt with as a word on its own which is the emphasis of lexical morphology. According to (Katamba, 1993, p.112) the word is also a key unit for another reason: there are morphological processes whose input is normally a word and not just a morpheme. These processes include compounding. Affixation processes that have fully formed words as their input such as the rules that prefix *re-*(meaning a gain) and the rule that suffixes *-ly* (Katamba, 1993) and conversion which changes the word class of preexisting word without any overt change in shape of the input. Another important theoretical approach to this discussion is the concept of inflectional morphology and derivational morphology. Affix morphemes can be divided into two major functional categories, namely derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. This reflects recognition of two principal word building processes: inflection and derivation. Derivational morphemes form new words either by changing the meaning of base to which they are attached; by changing the word classes that the base belongs to (Katamba, 1993). Inflectional morphemes do not change referential

or cognitive meaning. Inflectional morphemes are only able to modify the form of a word so that it can fit into a particular syntactic slot. The analysis of Dholuo portmanteau morph is done within the theoretical frame work of lexical morphology, inflectional morphology and derivational morphology.

### Discussions and Analysis

#### The morph *-ruok* showing reflexive

The morph *ruok* can be used in Dholuo language to show the reflexive. In such a case it is used as a suffix which is an attachment after the root word (Katamba, 1993). The use of *ruok* as a suffix and as a reflexive is shown in the following examples:

i) *Luok-ruok*-bathing oneself.

In the above example the root morpheme is *luok* which means bathing and the suffix morpheme *ruok* gives it the reflexive feature.

ii) *Wir-ruok*.

The above example has the root morpheme *wir* which would mean “rotate” or in another pronunciation it would be “to smear”. The addition of the morph *-ruok* would give you *wirruok* which means “to rotate oneself” or as in another pronunciation it would mean “to smear oneself”.

iii) *Mos-ruok*.

In the example above the root morpheme *mos* means “greetings”, and the addition of the suffix morpheme *ruok* it would mean “greeting one another”.

#### 1) The Morph *Ruok* Used as an Adverbial

The morph *ruok* can also be used as an adverbial especially when it comes after the verb that it modifies. The morpheme *ruok* in this context is used as an adverb of degree which shows the degree of a little bit. e.g.

vi) *Oringo ruok*  
*o-ringo ruok*  
 he/she-runs-abit/slightly

v) *Otedo ruok*  
*o-tedo ruok*  
 He/she-cooks a bit/slightly.

The morph *ruok* can also be used to modify the adjectives showing some bits of degree e.g.

vi) *Chiemo mit ruok*.  
 Food sweet a bit/somehow/  
 vii) *pii liet ruok*.  
 Water hot a bit/slightly/somehow.

#### 2) The use of *Ruok* as Bound Morpheme

In Dholuo language the morph *-ruok* can also be used as a bound morpheme. The bound morphemes are the roots incapable of occurring in isolation (Katamba, 1993). When the morph *ruok* is used in this manner it cannot be isolated from the root word in the sense that any attempt to do so would render the root meaningless and nonexistent. The examples are shown in the data below:

viii) *Ng'ongruok*.

The a above word means “chameleon”. Any attempt to isolate the morph *ruok* would give you *ngong-ruok* where *ng’ong* would not retain the word for chameleon.

x) *Winjruok*. (agreement)

In the a above word any attempt to isolate the suffix *-ruok* would change the meaning from “agreement” to a totally different meaning since *winj* means “listen” and *winjruok* is an agreement totally different from “listen”

xi) *Wuondruok*

In the above word the meaning is “pretense” and if the suffix morph *-ruok* is isolated then we get a totally different word from what was initially meant. The word *wuond* means “cheat” and when you add *-ruok* then the whole word changes and it becomes “pretense” and therefore the word *wuondruok* cannot have its morphs isolated.

### Conclusion

From the above discussion we realize that the data from (i) to (iii) shows that the morph *-ruok* is used to show reflexive while the data from (vi) to (vii) shows that the morph *-ruok* can be used as an adverbial of degree. The data from (viii) to (xi) shows that the morph *-ruok* can also be bound to the root words. This study therefore forms a departure from Katamba’s definition of a portmanteau morph as referring to cases where a single morph simultaneously represents a bundle of several different grammatical elements (Katamba, 1993,p.36). Dholuo morph *-ruok* is functioning as portmanteau in the given data from (i) to (xi) as it represents a bundle of several different grammatical elements but not necessarily simultaneously.

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