

Derivational Affixes in Igbo: Pedagogic Implications

Ojukwu, Chika Kate (Ph.D)

Department of English and Literary Studies

University of Nigeria, Nsukka

chika.ojukwu@unn.edu.ng 08038580252

and

Chidi-Onwuta, Gift (Ph.D)

Use of English Unit,

Michael Okpara University Of Agriculture, Umudike

giftonwuta@yahoo.com, +234 7035002859

Abstract

The Igbo and English languages are genetically disparate and as such, are characterised by differences in the derivational processes. Such characteristic differences may pose learning and usage problems to an Igbo-English bilingual following the assumption of the proponents of the strong version of contrastive analysis. The thrust of this study was to highlight derivational affixation features of the Igbo languages, with a view to predicting areas of learning difficulty to an Igbo English bilingual using hierarchy of difficulties and situating language universals. The data were collected using recorded verbal utterances of native speakers and literatures in Igbo grammar and analysed using the descriptive research method. The work revealed that Igbo has derivational affixes: prefixes, interfixes, and circumfixes as found in some world languages. The prevalence of these affixes in the Igbo language is a good data to situate or support claims on language universals. The study further revealed that prefixes in Igbo are used in deriving infinitives, present participles (inflections), and nouns from verbs and verbal nouns (derivations). In English, however, they are used to express negation, degree or size, attitudes, position, time location and order. Using Prator's level 3 hierarchy of difficulty (interpretation), the study found that the Igbo English-bilingual has to reinterpret his familiar prefixes to the English suffixes which are used to achieve the same purposes in English.

Keywords: *Learning difficulty, Morphology, Affixation, derivational affixes, pedagogic implications.*

Introduction

An inquiry into the phenomenon of word formation is an indispensable linguistic inquiry. It reveals convergence, creativity and instances of language universals. Morphology, the study of word formation, is a crucial level of language research with two genres: inflectional and derivational morphology. Inflectional morphology deals with the forms of the lexeme that are determined by syntactic environment (Aronoff and Fudeman, 2011). Inflectional forms yield to grammatical processes of forming past tense, plural, present progressive, leaving the word class and the core lexical meaning of the roots they are attached to unchanged. Derivational morphology, however, studies how new lexemes are formed from existing ones. This genre of morphology is class-changing. Another difference according to Wakweya (2017) is that the derived word can change its placement in a sentence but the inflected form maintains a specific position in a given syntactic context. This study discussed majorly, the derivational affixes with a little reference to inflectional processes where necessary. Derivational morphology involves the process of adding to the root, subtracting from it, and making it up. For the purpose of this study, we are not concerned about those derivational processes that do nothing to the root. We are concerned to highlighting those processes that add and make up to the root. Affixation is thus, the process of adding affixes (bound morphemes) to existing stems, roots, or base morphemes in order to form new words or change the meaning and word-class of existing ones. It is one of the productive ways of word building in both the English and Igbo languages. Babarinde (2009, p.58) states that, "affixation comprises prefixation,

suffixation, interfixation, infixation”. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2001, p. 102) include “Circumfixation”. It is a concatenative (combinatory) morphological process with compounding, i.e., they are processes that involve ordering of two morphemes, one after another. Non concatenative morphology include; Reduplication, internal modification, conversion, and back formation. These morphological processes are of great importance to linguists and as well, have attracted their interest and discussion because through their investigations, various language structures are interfaced and areas of structural differences that will constitute learning difficulties are highlighted. The main claim of structural linguists, according to Brown (2007), is that languages can differ from each other without limit, and that no preconceptions could apply across languages. From this principle emerged the desire and rush to engage in the descriptions, comparisons and contrast of world's languages. In describing the features and forms of a particular language, matching those features and forms with those of the target language (English) helps to uncover areas of structural contrast. Prator (1967) makes a classification of six categories of difficulty applied to both the phonological and grammatical levels. These six categories, rated in ascending order of difficulty, are used to predict areas of learning difficulty to L2 learners. Prator's six categories or levels of difficulty include: transfer, coalescence, under-differentiation, reinterpretation, over-differentiation, and split. The language teacher, bridges every gap L2 learners are predicted to face in L2, bearing in mind areas of contrast between the L2's first and target languages.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the strong version of contrastive analysis (CA) advanced by Wardhaugh (1970) for analysis. This sub-theory of contrastive analysis is found relevant because it provides systematic and scientific basis for predictions of difficulty through CA. This theory is premeditated on the claim that the barrier to second language learning is the interference of the first language system with the second language system, and that a systematic study and description reveal areas of linguistic contrast which consequently, enables an analyst to predict difficulties to a learner. Although the study is not a comparative one, the description of derivational affixes, using English as a base language, highlights those Igbo affixational features that are at variance with English. Such features, significantly, are of much pedagogic importance to both the teacher and students as facilitation or inhibition of L2 learning are dependent on them.

Literature Review

Affixation

Affixes according to (Ndimele, 1999), are morphemes placed around another morpheme (stem). Classification of affixes follow two criteria: their positions with respect to roots and their functions after placement. Based on these parameters, affixes in Igbo are majorly classed into five (prefix, interfix, suffix, suprafix, and circumfix) (Mba, 2012). Prefixes occur before the root, suffix after the root, suprafix is superimposed on the segments, circumfix around the morpheme and interfix between two identical morphemes or roots, mainly to verb roots except on few cases where interfixes break two noun roots, example

ùwà	world	ùwàtùwà	eternity
àkwà	bridge	àkwàtákwà	great man
mkpu	anthill	mkputamkpu	elevation

The Igbo Derivational Affixation

Derivation is the process whereby new words are formed from existing words (Agbedo,

2000, p 87). It consists in adding to a root or stems, an affix or affixes to change the word class of the root. In Igbo, only the prefix, interfix and circumfixes are used in derivation of words. Other affixes modify the form of the roots (inflectional). The three affixes have the tendency to change the grammatical category of words in Igbo.

Prefixation in Igbo

Prefixation in Igbo is verb based (Agbedo, 2000), no other word class undergoes this kind of morphological processes. The prefix is a major word class-changing affix in Igbo. In English, however, prefixes denote a sense of negation thus changing polarity from positive to negative (Adebileje, 2013). Examples:

il	logical	illogical
un-	common	uncommon
in-	advertent	inadvertent

In Ibibio, a language spoken in the South-South part of Nigeria, prefixes, as Josiah (2004, p.4) notes, are used to mark pluralization. Examples:

(a) édidém: "king":	ndidém: "kings"
(b) óboón: "chief"	mboón: "chiefs"
(c) àkpàràwà: "young man"	mkpàràwà: young men

Omoniyi (1990, p.5) also identified derivational functions of the prefix in Edo, a member of the Edoid group spoken also in South South part of Nigeria. In the language, many simple verbs permit the derivation of nouns through the prefixation of oral vowels to them. Such nouns are called deverbal nouns. Examples:

tótà	sit	ìtótà	sitting
khìè	mourn	akhiè	mourning
giè	laugh	òghié	laughing

The illustrations above reveal that prefixes are derivational in the one hand, and inflectional on the other, in many African languages.

Interfixes in Igbo

Interfixes divide morphemes into two equal parts in such a way that the part before the interfix is repeated after it. Anagbogu, et al. define interfix as “an affix which occurs in the middle of a word in such a way that on both sides of it, there are identical morphemes” (2001, p.102). Interfixes in Igbo are used to derive nouns from verbs or new nouns from nouns. Examples

Verbal root	interfixes	Derived word	Gloss
gwu 'play'	r	egwuregwu	drama
kwu 'talk'	r	ekwurekwu	quarrel
ogo height	l	ogologo	length

The illustration above shows that the morphological structure in which interfixation applies in Igbo is as follows:

prefix + verb root + interfix + verb root

Circumfixation

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyman (2007, p.81) define circumfix as, “morphemes that are attached to a base morpheme both initially and finally.” Anagbogu, et al. see circumfix as “that which is structured as a frame with an affix at each end” (2001, p.102). The circumfix is an affix whose occurrence is less wide spread than that of the prefix and the suffix. It has different grammatical functions in languages where they are attested. According to Anagbogu et al, the following Malayan example is given: Pe – an is the frame of a Malayan circumfix. A verb root is inserted into the above frame to derive an abstract noun, example,

pe -rasa-an ‘act of feeling’.
ke -adil -an ‘fairness’

Mbah (2012) observes that the kind of root or stem that may host the circumfix varies from language to language. In Igbo, circumfixes are discontinuous as in many other world languages and braches into two parts, the head-which is the initial part of the affix and the end affix-which may change its form (Mbah, 2012, p. 5). Examples:

rú 'work' àrùm working
chè 'think' èchem thinking/thought

Methodology

This study uses a descriptive research design since the aim of this work was to highlight the derivational affixation processes in Igbo with a view to situating language universals and predicting areas of learning difficulty to Igbo English-bilingual. A descriptive research design involves gathering data that describes events and then organizing, tabulating, depicting and describing the data collected. According to Eze, “...any study which seeks merely to find what is and describes it is descriptive” (1999, p.69). The examples used by the researcher were therefore, purposively selected from various sources, including textbooks, journals, articles and observed verbal utterances of native speakers of Igbo language and annotated using descriptive research approach.

Data presentation and analysis

Prefixes in Igbo

Prefixes in Igbo perform the following grammatical functions:

(a) Prefixes {i-/ì-} for deriving infinitive

Prefixes	Verb Roots	Derived Words	Translated Forms
í	sī (cook)	ísī	to cook
ì	gbá (kick)	ìgbā	to kick
ì	zà (sweep)	ìzà	to sweep

Infinitives are formed in Igbo by prefixing the vowel prefixes i-/ì as illustrated above. Although infinitives are inflectional, highlighting them shows the prevalence of derivational and inflectional processes in the language.

(b) Prefixes {-a/-e} for deriving present participle

The prefixes {-a/-e} are used to derive present participle/continuous tense.

Examples,

Prefixes	Verb Roots	Derived Words	Gloss
à	gá (go)	àgá	going
è	mé (do)	èmé	doing
à	ṙṙ(drink)	àñṙ	drinking

(c) Prefixes {-n/-m} for deriving nouns from verbs

Prefixes	Verb roots	Derived words	Gloss
ń	kṙ	ńkṙ	Firewood
ń	má (beautify)	ńmá	beauty

Following from the table above, the syllabic nasal /ń/ and /m/ are used to derive nouns from verb roots.

(d) Prefixes {-o/-o}{-n/-m} for deriving noun classes from verbs

Examples,

Prefixes	Verb Roots	Derived Words	Gloss
ń	rí (eat)	ńrí	food
o	rṙ(work)	orṙ	work

Noun class is derived from the verb by the use of prefixes as shown above

(e) Syllabic nasal prefixes {-m/-n} for driving verbal noun

There are cases where we have syllabic nasals {-m or -n} as prefixes that are attached to a compound verb or verbs with enclitics to form verbal nouns.

Examples,

Prefixes	Compound Verb	Derived Words	Gloss
m	wéṙṙ(take out)	mwéṙṙ	taking out
ń	ríchá (finish food)	ńríchá	finishing food

In addition to the grammatical functions of prefixes in Igbo, Emenanjo (1978) identifies four processes of derivation of verbal derivatives to include:

(i) prefixation and suffixation, examples

Prefixes	Verb Root	Suffixes	Gloss
m	je 'go'	m	ńjèm 'journey'

(ii) prefixation and partial reduplication

Prefixes	Verb Root	Derived word	Gloss
e-	me 'do'	emume	ceremony or festival

(iii) Prefixation and full reduplication

Prefixes	Verb Root	Suffixes	Gloss
ó	chú 'pursue'	óchuchu	termination

Interfix in Igbo

Anagbogu, et al., define interfix as “an affix which occurs in the middle of a word in such a way that on both sides of it, there are identical morphemes” (2001, p. 102). Examples in Igbo language according to Anagbogu, *et al.* include:

Words	Interfixes	Gloss
ègwù-r-ègwù	-r-	play/sport
ńgò-rì-ńgò	-rì	winding road
águ-m- águ	-m-	Literature
Ákàràkà	-r-	Destiny

In example above, -r-, -rì-, -m- and -r- are all interfixes joining two stems with the same sounds and meaning

Circumfixation

Another aspect of derivation in Igbo to be presented is Circumfixation. As reviewed earlier, circumfix is a combination of a prefix and a suffix that attach to a base simultaneously to express a single meaning or category. The circumfixal frame in the Igbo language according to Anagbogu et al. is a/e – mu.

Examples,

Circumfixes	Derived words	Gloss
èsí...ńrí	è-sí mú ńrí	act of cooking
àgá... íjè	à-gá- mụ - íjè	act of walking
èyí... égwụ	e-yí m égwụ	act of frightening

Other circumfixal frames that enclose the roots or stems in Igbo are: à--m, é --m as in:

kwa 'sew'	à -kwa-m akwa	
	a-sew-ing-cloth	-act of sewing
ri 'eat'	é -ri-m ihe	
	a eat ing something	-act of eating something.

Prediction of Areas of Learning Difficulty to an Igbo English Bilingual

From the review and data presentation above, it is established that prefixes are used in deriving infinitives, nouns from verbs and verbal nouns in Igbo. Prefixes in English, however, are used to express negation, degree or size, attitudes, position, time, location and order, e.g.

il-	logical	illogical
multi-	national	multinational
anti-	thesis	antithesis
post-	natal	postnatal
pre-	fight	prefight

Using Prator (1967) level 3 hierarchy of difficulty based on notions of transfer, (reinterpretation) the Igbo English bilingual would encounter difficulty in expressing position, time, negation, attitudes, and size, He has to reinterpret his familiar negative marker 'ghi' (not) which is suffixed to Igbo roots/stems to English prefixes (un-, il-, im-,) which are prefixed to roots. Igbo uses prefixes to mark present progressive (ga 'go' : aga going) while English uses suffixes to achieve same purpose (-ing). The Igbo English bilingual has to reinterpret his prefix a- to the English present progressive marker (-ing).

Nouns are derived from verbs in Igbo by prefixing nasal affixes (m-/-n-), example kú 'hit' : íkú 'firewood' while nouns are formed from verbs by suffixing noun affixes (-ness, -er, -ment, etc), example: educate: education. The Igbo English bilingual again, would need to reinterpret his familiar nasal noun prefixes to the English noun suffixes. These areas of morphological contrasts must be highlighted and bridged in the target language learning by the learner and the teacher. Circumfixation takes same frame and pattern in both English and Igbo languages. There would be no inhibition in learning circumfixes by an Igbo learner of English. The learner, following Prator's level 0 hierarchy (transfer), simply transfers (positively) the affixes from his first language to the target language(English). English does not have interfixes, so the learner does not encounter such items in the target language, following Prator's level 2 hierarchy of difficulty (under differentiation).

We are inclined to support the view of the proponent of contrastive analysis (Lado, 1957) that pedagogy is more effective and even useful when similarities and differences between L1 and L2 are taken into account. Highlighting areas of structural differences between the Igbo and English languages is of great value and can be a useful tool for teaching, material preparation, design of linguistic and cultural content of textbooks, diagnosis of learning difficulties and preparing language testing.

Conclusion

The study which attempted to highlight derivational affixes in Igbo with a view to predicting areas of learning difficulty to an Igbo English bilingual and supporting language universals, revealed that Igbo has derivational affixes: prefixes, interfixes, and circumfixes which change the word class of the root/stem they are attached to as found in some world languages. The prevalence of these affixes in the Igbo language is a good data to situate language universals. The study further revealed that prefixes in Igbo are used in deriving infinitives, present participles (inflections), nouns from verbs and verbal nouns (derivations) while in English, they are used to express negation, degree or size, attitudes, position, time location and order. Using Prator's level 3 hierarchy of difficulty (interpretation), the Igbo English bilingual has to reinterpret his familiar prefixes to the English suffixes which are used to achieve same purpose in English.

References

- Adebelah, A. (2013). A Comparative Description of Affixation Processes in English and Yoruba for *ESL Pedagogy*. 3, (10) 176-1763
- Agbedo, Chris. (2000) *General Linguistics: An Introductory Reader*. Nsukka: ACE Resource Konsult.

- Anagbogu, Philip. (1990) *The Grammar of Igbo Nominalization*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company.
- Anagbogu, Philip, Mbah, M. B and Eme, C. A. (2001) *Introduction to Linguistics*. Awka: J.F. C. Limited.
- Arnoff, M & Fudeman, K. (2011). *What is Morphology?* Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell
- Babarinde, Sanmi. (2009) *Morphology: Its Basics and Application*. Nsukka: Paschal Communication, 2009.
- Ballard, Kim. (2001) *The Framework of English: Introducing Language Structures*. China: Palgrave Publishers Ltd.
- Brown, E. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Corder, S. P. (1973) *Introducing Applied Linguistics*. London: Hutchinson.
- Encyclopaedia Americana International Edition Volume 16*. (2004) USA: Scholastic Library Publishing, Inc. Danbury Connecticut.
- Emenanjo, Nolue. (1983) "Verb Derivational Morphology". In P.A. Nwachukwu . (Ed.) *Readings on the Igbo Verb*. Onitsha: African FEP Publishers Limited.
- Eze, Anthony. (1999) *Practical Approach to Research Methods and Statistics in Education, Management and Social Sciences*. Onitsha: Onwubiko Printing and Packaging.
- Finegan, Edward. (2004) *Language: Its Structure and Use*. (4th Ed.) USA: Wadsworth.
- Fries, Charles. (1945) *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Fromkin, Victoria, and Rodman, and Hyman, (2007) *Introduction to Language*. London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Josiah, U. (2004). Patterns of pluralization in ibibio. *Research Gate*. Available @https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286568040_
- Kari, E. (2015). Parasyntesis in Degema: Simultaneous affixation and concomitant prefixation. *LASU 4*, (2), 8-23
- Lado, Robert. (1957) *Linguistics Across Cultures*. Ann. Abor: University of Michigan press.
- Mbah, B. M. (2006) *GB Syntax: Theory and Application to Igbo*. Enugu: St. John Afam Publication.
- Mbah, B.M. (2012). Circumfixation: Interface of morphology and syntax in Igbo derivational morphology. *Research Gate 5*, (6) 1-8
- Ndimele, O.M. (1999). *Morphology and syntax*. Port Harcourt: Emhai Printing Press
- Okeke, Chukwuma. (2008) History of Morphology. In B.M Mba & E.E Mba.(eds). *History of Linguistics and Communication* (A Festschrift in Honour of Professor P.A Nwachukwu) p.105-106.
- Osuagwu, Bertram, Nwozuzu, G. I., Dike, G. A., Nwaogu, V, N. and Okoro, L. C. (1997) *Fundamentals of Linguistics*. Owerri: Colon F. C. Concepts Limited.
- Prator, C. (1969). Hierarchy of difficulty. Unpublished classroom lecture. University of California, Los Angeles. Retrieved from www.hrmar.com/journal on 3rd July, 2012.
- Ukwuegbu, C., Okoro, O., Idris, A.U., Okebukola, F.O., Owokade, C.O. and Okebukola,(2002) P. *Catch up English Language for SSCE/UME*. Lagos: MegavonWA Limited.
- Wardhaugh, R. (1970). The contrastive analysis hypothesis. A paper presented at the fourth annual TESOL convention, San Francisco, California.
- Wakweya, M. (2017). Inflectional morphology in Mecha Oromo. *Academic Journals 8*, 102-114
- Yule, George. (1996) *The Study of Language*. (2nd Ed.). USA: Cambridge University Press.