

A Descriptive Analysis of Particles in Edo Basic Clauses

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Abstract

The present paper concerned the modifying scope of particles otherwise known as functors in the Edo language. The motivation for the study was to determine the constituents that are modified by the selected particles in Edo basic clauses. The constituents under studied were sentential and lexical constituents. The objectives of the paper include to determine the semantic definition of particles in Edo, ascertain the scope of their modification when used in Edo basic clauses among others. The data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources; native speakers living in Evbareke quarters, Uselu and Ogida, Benin City and Edo literature texts. The data collected consisted of particles or functors in the language. The particles were applied in Edo basic clauses to ascertain their grammatical functionality as well as their modifying scope. The study found out that particles in Edo have descriptive and lexical meanings which are actually partial translations of the overall grammatical content of the particles investigated. That is, some particles were translatable in English using one word (this we termed lexical meaning) while others needed to be translated using several words (this we termed descriptive meaning). Also, it was established that particles in Edo are of three categories with respect to the scope of their grammatical modification in Edo basic clauses, namely; clausal, nominal and verbal modifiers. Clausal particles modified the whole clause, nominal particles modified the noun of the NP and verbal particles modified the verb of the VP. The study concluded that a semantic study of Edo particles in areas such as pragmatics and semantics will open up new information with implications of the role and reference operations within the Edo basic clause as well as establish a typology of the grammatical functions of particles in Edo basic clauses.

Keywords: *Edo particles, modifiers, scope of modification*

Introduction

According to Omoregbe and Agharuwa (2016), "particles generally consist of a group of functional words which do not fit into the available number of word classes in grammar, i.e. nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Although their grammatical definition and description seems to suggest certain properties which are related to adjectival, conjunctive, prepositional and adverbial operators. Omoregbe and Agharuwa (2016) further claim that "particles are seen as linguistic items that the individual use in regulating speech and communicating different realities. The fact that particles do not belong to any of the word classes in grammar does not however mean that they are meaningless". This therefore indicates that the morphemes referred to as particles in Edo grammar are basically used to moderate the semantic output of an Edo basic clause where the particles occupy identifiable syntactic slots. It is also argued in Richards, Platt and Weber (1985:208) that a particle is a word that does not belong to one of the main classes of words. It is invariable in form and typically has grammatical or pragmatic meaning. Particles therefore can be defined as text moderators whose grammatical purpose is to effect a change in the overall syntactic or semantic information output in a

syntactic construction. By this, it means that in Edo, particles can perform a function where the modification's output is purely grammatical or semantic.

This paper carries out an investigation of the particles in Edo with a view to not only ascertaining their syntatico-semantic operations but also to establish the scope of modification that these particles exhibit in Edo basic clauses. The current paper is divided into four sections. Section one presents an overview of the language of study which is the Edo (Bini) language. In section two, the methodology adopted for the present study is discussed. As for section three, the data for the study is presented, analyzed and discussed. This is followed by the section which concludes the study which is section four. The references come at the end of the paper.

Language of study

The Edo language is spoken in the present day Edo state which was formerly a part of the old Bendel state in the old Midwestern region of Nigeria. The linguistic neighbours of the language are Yoruba to the west and Igbo to the east. Other Edoid languages lie to the south and west of the Edo linguistic zone.

The Edo language is a developing language which is currently used in schools and colleges, media houses, religious institutions and the mass and entertainment media. The Edo language belongs to the Kwa subgroup of the Niger-Congo phylum. Elugbe's (1989) classification divides the Edoid group into four subgroups namely; Proto Delta Edoid, Proto South-Western Edoid, Proto North-Central Edoid, and Proto North-Western Edoid. The Edo language is classified here as a member of the Proto North-Central Edoid group. Elugbe classified the Edo language in the Edoid language family tree as Edo (Bini).

Methodology

The present study relied on oral and documented data collected from primary and secondary sources. The oral data which made up the primary data were elicited from competent native speakers who live in Evbareke, Ogida and Uselu quarters of Benin City. The data were collected from residents that are fifty years old and above. The data were collected by means of a question and answer method and also through unannounced recordings of conversational discourses in meetings, markets, bus parks and family time. The data collected were recorded using a voice recorder which were then written down for organization and categorical analysis. The data selected for analysis were of two categories namely; phrases and clauses where the particles were employed.

The framework adopted for analysis is the Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT) which comes under descriptive theoretical frameworks. BLT is a framework that employs traditional grammar terminologies in describing the intricacies of a language's grammar. The BLT was propounded in Dixon (1997). It is argued in the literature that BLT is traditional grammar minus its 'bad features'. Bad features here refer to the prescriptive nature of traditional grammar. Interestingly, BLT allows the researcher to borrow terminologies from explanatory frameworks such as Generative Grammar but also ensuring that the focus remains on the

documentation and description of grammar using more familiar traditional grammar terminologies such as nouns, verbs, phrase, clause, among others.

The BLT is adopted for this study because it satisfies the research need of presenting a descriptive analysis of the referential scope of particles in Edo basic clauses.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data collected for this study revealed that Edo particles are capable of modifying some individual constituents in the Edo clause as well as the entire clause. These particles are of three types: clausal modifiers, nominal modifiers and verbal modifiers. Clausal modifiers modify the entire clause, (i.e., they affect the overall interpretation of the clause). Nominal modifiers modify the nominals or pronominals in the clause (i.e., the information they provide is exclusive to the nominal or pronominals) while verbal modifiers modify the verbs in the clause.

Edo particles as clausal modifiers

The particles that modify the whole clause in Edo are termed clausal modifiers. They are neither restricted to modifying the nouns nor the verbs. Some examples of clausal particles in Edo are *rà* ‘question particle’, *mà* ‘question particle’, *té* ‘almost’, *té* ‘question particle’, *ghí* ‘not’, and *má* ‘not’. The presence of these particles in a clause changes their semantic information in the entire construction. For example, positive constructions become negative constructions, affirmative constructions become indicative constructions, declarative constructions become interrogative constructions and so on. Consider the data in 1-5 below:

- 1(a). *Òsàzẹ̀ lẹ̀ èvbàré.*
Osazẹ̀ cook-prs-sing food.
Osazẹ̀ cooks food. ‘Osazẹ̀ cooks/is cooking the food.’
- (b). *Òsàzẹ̀ lẹ̀ èvbàré rà?*
Osazẹ̀ cook-prs-sing food QM?
Osazẹ̀ cook food QM ‘Is Osazẹ̀ cooking the food?’

In the data above, (1a) is a declarative statement which changes to a Yes/No question with the introduction of the sentence final particle *rà* in (1b). Simply, the construction changes from making a statement to asking a question by virtue of the presence of *rà*. Also see the examples below:

- 2(a). *Úyì gbé úzò vbè úgbó.*
Uyi kill-pst-sing antelope in farm.
Uyi killed antelope in farm. ‘Uyi killed an antelope in the farm.’
- (b). *Úyì té gbé úzò vbè úgbó.*
Uyi almost kill-pst-sing antelope in farm.
Uyi almost killed antelope in farm. ‘Uyi almost killed an antelope in the farm.’

In (2a), the information provided in the active voice is that of certainty i.e. it is affirmed that ‘Uyi killed an antelope’. However, in (2b) the particle *te* ‘almost’, changes the entire information structure of the interpretation in (2a) into the indicative construction in (2b) connoting that the action was almost done. The particle *té* can also be used as a Yes/No question marker (QM) as evident in 3a-b below:

- 3(a). *Òsàsú dé ùkpòn.*
Osasu buy-pst-sing dress.
Osasu bought dress. ‘Osasu bought a dress.’
- (b). *Té Òsàsú dé ùkpòn?*
QM Osasu buy-pst-sing dress?
QM Osasu bought dress? ‘Did Osasu buy a dress?’

In the data above, (3a) is a declarative sentence but the presence of the question particle in (3b) makes the construction an interrogative construction marked with the notion of doubt.

4. (a). *Àmèzè bọ òwá.*
Ameze build-pst-sing house.
Ameze built house. ‘Ameze built a house.’
- (b). *Àmèzè má bọ òwá.*
Ameze not build-pst-sing house.
Ameze not built house. ‘Ameze did not build a house.’

Data entry (4a) certifies that the agent ‘Ameze’ built a house. However, in (4b), the particle *má* which is placed immediately after the NP negates the declaration indicating that Ameze did not build a house. It is important to state here that negative particles can modify clauses, nominals as well as verbs. This alternative modification has to do with the context of situation. It could be said that Uyi and not Ameze built the house, this will be nominal modification. It could also read that Ameze sold a house and the emphasis here being on the verb, shows verbal modification. However, the *ma* ‘not’ presented in (4b) negates the entire clause and not just the verb or the noun. Examples include the following:

5. (a). *Ímádé khiè ìmótò.*
Imade sell-prs-sing car.
Imade sell car. ‘Imade sells/is selling a car.’
- (b). *Ímádé ghí khiè ìmótò.*
Imade not sell-pst-sing car.
Imade not sold car. ‘Imade no longer sells cars.’
- (c). *Ímádé ghí khiè ìmótò rà?*
Imade not sell-pst-sing car QM
Imade not sell car QM ‘Is Imade no longer selling cars?’

Data entries (5a-c) above show how particles can completely modify a clause from being an affirmative construction in (5a), to being a negative construction in (5b) with the use of ‘*ghí*’ and to becoming an interrogative construction in (5c) with the use of the two particles ‘*ghí*’ and ‘*rà*’ occurring in the different positions in the clause as indicated.

Edo particles as nominal modifiers

The particles in this category modify nominals only in the Edo clause. These particles include the following: *má/ghí* ‘not’, *rà* ‘or’, *khín* ‘become’, *hía* ‘all’, *óghé* ‘of’, *ùsún/èsó/ávbé* ‘some’, *né* ‘that’. These particles provide information about the nominals in clauses. The grammatical information provided by these particles include ownership, states, affirmation, among others. Examples of the use these particles in Edo clauses are presented in data 6 below:

6. (a). *Òfẹ̀n nè Òsàsú gbé nódè wíá.*
Rat that Osasu kill-pst-sing yesterday smell-prs-sing.
Rat that Osasu killed yesterday smells. ‘The rat that Osasu killed yesterday smells.’

In (6a), the *né* particle is used as a relative marker to avoid the repetition of *ofẹ̀n* ‘rat’. This particle does not modify the clause or the verb it only relativizes the noun *òfẹ̀n* ‘rat’. Therefore, it is a nominal modifier.

- (b). *Ùsún èrhán nè Ímádé kòkó yé tẹ̀kpú.*
Some woods that Imade gather-pst-sing be-prs-pl short.
Some woods that Imade gathered are short.
‘Some of the woods that Imade gathered are short.’

The particle in (6b) is *ùsún* ‘some’ which modifies the noun *èrhán* ‘wood’. It only marks the woods and not the gathering nor shortness of the woods. *Ùsún* ‘some’ is therefore, a nominal particle.

- (c). *Ékpò óghé Àdésúwà dé fi ùvún nà.*
Bag of Adesuwa fall-pst-sing in hole this.
Bag of Adesuwa fell in hole this. ‘Adesuwa’s bag fell inside this hole.’

The particle in (6c) is *óghé* ‘of’ which indicates the fact that the bag belongs to Adesuwa. The particle modifies the nominal by indicating its ownership.

- (d). *Àrrióbá gùòghò òwá hía nì rré Èdó fòó.*
Government break-pst-sing house all that they-be in Edo finish.
Government broke houses all that are in Edo finish.
‘The government has completely demolished all the houses in Benin.’

In (6d) *hía* ‘all’ complements the noun *òwá* ‘house’. The particle marks the nominal that is destroyed and not the act of the destruction itself. *Hía* ‘all’ is therefore a nominal modifying particle.

- (e). *Ímádé khín òmò nè è ghí mwéé ègbé.*
Imade become child that it not have-pst-sing family.
Imade become child that has no family.
‘Imade had become a child without a family.’

The particle here is *khín* ‘become’. It connotes transformation i.e. it indicates a change of state from one form to another. In this case, it indicates the absence of what used to be, i.e. the family of Imade.

Edo particles as verbal modifiers

The particles in this category modify the verbs in a clause. Some of these verbs modifying particles in Edo are: *ghí/má* 'not', *ghá* 'will', *ghá* 'continuous action particle', *né* 'already/perfect aspectual marker', *kàkàbó* 'very well', *ghé* 'do not', *gbè* 'well', *fùá* 'throw away (of solids and singular items)', *kùá* 'throw away (of liquids and plural/mass items)', etc. These particles often occur in preverbal and post verbal positions. The constructions below show the use of verb modifiers in Edo clauses:

- 7(a). *Òzó má bọ néné òwá.*
Ozo not build-pst-sing the house.
Ozo not built the house. 'Ozo did not build the house.'

In (7a), the negator *má* 'not' modifies the action of the verb. It shows that the action was not done. We have already mentioned before now that the negator *ma* 'not' can modify a clause, nominal or a verb. In the case of (7a), it is used as a verbal particle because it negates the action expressed by the verb. Consider the next example:

- (b). *Ímádé ghá dẹ ímótò.*
Imade will buy-prs-sing car.
Imade will buy car. 'Imade will buy a car.'

The '*ghá*' particle in (7b) above modifies the verb by showing that the action expressed by the verb *dẹ* 'buy' is yet to happen. The particle is used to show future tense in Edo which means that the action expressed by the verb is yet to take place.

- (c). *Òsàsú tàlọ gbé.*
Osasu talk-prs-sing much.
Osasu talks much. 'Osasu talks too much.'

In (7c), the particle '*gbe*' is used to modify the verb. It shows the degree of the action that is expressed by the verb in this case, the talking too much of the agent nominal *Òsàsú*.

- (d). *Íyè tùè àmẹ èrhẹn kùá.*
Mother throw-pst-sing water fire away.
Mother threw fire water away. 'Mother threw the hot water away.'

The '*kua*' particle is used to mark the directionality and quantity expressed by the verb *tue* 'pour'. It is however a verbal particle because it modifies the verb in the clause.

- (e). *Úyi kpèé néné èmà èsésè.*
Uyi play-pst-sing the drum well well.
Uyi played the drum well well. 'Uyi played the drum very well.'

The particle '*esese*' in (7d) above is used to show the skillful input in an action. It shows the degree of expertise in the action carried out. The particle is a verbal particle because it tells how the action is performed in terms of skillful input.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper examined the modifying character of particles in Edo. The study showed that particles in Edo can be classified into three classes: clausal particles, nominal particles and verbal particles. Clausal particles consisted of the particles that modified the grammatical information of entire clause; nominal particles modified nouns only while verbal particles modified verbs only. However, their grammatical significance with reference to regulation of utterance makes them a phenomenon worthy of in depth linguistic analysis. This study has only examined the modifying nature of Edo particles. Further studies on the distribution of these particles in clauses as well as their functions in clauses will reveal more about the nature of Edo particles. This will form the focus of another study.

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