

Morphosyntactic Analysis of Ibibio Radicals

¹Esther Kalu IDIKA & ²Idara Effiong MOSES

Department of linguistics and Nigerian Languages,

University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria.

estherkidika@gmail.com, idaraeffiongmoses@gmail.com

Abstract

Ibibio is an agglutinating language and words are built up by stringing different morphemes together, often into very lengthy sequences. Some morphemes are meaningful without any attachment (free morphemes) while others (bound morphemes) are glued together with respect to their semantic content. Radicals in Ibibio are mostly bound morphemes which are not capable of occurring alone but require other affixes to come before or after them. Radicals carry the most significant aspects of semantic content and cannot be reduced into smaller constituents. The goal of this paper is to discuss the morpho-syntactic structure of some Ibibio radicals, consider some morphological processes as well as their syntactic configuration in the language. This paper deployed the survey method of research. The data were elicited from five consultants using an audio recorder and also through introspection, given the language competence of the researchers as native speakers. The amassed data were analysed descriptively. Findings show that the major word formation processes employed when combining two radicals or a radical and content word to express a complete thought are compounding, reduplication and affixation. Verbs are also formed by suffixation and nouns by vowel or nasal prefixation while adverbs are formed by reduplication. The reduplication of some radicals does not result in new words but places emphasis, especially where the radical projects an action. It concludes that formation of compound words by combining a radical and a content word generates new concept that makes a meaningful lexical item. Some radicals also create more than one meaning when different affixes are attached to them. This aids in advancing the vocabulary strength of the language as well as give speakers of the language the opportunity of saying a thing in different ways.

1. Introduction

Ibibio is an agglutinating language. Thus, “words are built up by stringing different morphemes together, often into very lengthy sequence” (Ndimele 2008:77). There are different classes of words; radicals, content words, function words, etc. According to Ndimele (2008); a word is the most fundamental unit of grammar of a language. It is a

minimum independent linguistic unit having an identifiable meaning and grammatical function with a fairly consistent phonological shape. It has the capacity of behaving differently depending on the environment. A word can manifest independently or co-occur with other linguistic units to perform a given function in a sentence.

According to Ndimele (2008), words are formed on the basis of phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic information. On the basis of morphological information, every word has its own unique internal structure. It is the internal features/characteristics and functions that aid in the grouping of words into different categories. Also, words are formed through the combination of smaller meaningful morphological units called morphemes. “A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of an utterance which may not exist in isolation” (Ndimele, 2008:9). Unlike words, a morpheme often need the attachment of other grammatical units to complete its meaning. Morphemes are categorised into two major groups: those that can exist independently without being attached to any grammatical unit and those that cannot exist independently without the support of other morphological elements. The independent morphemes are called free morphemes while the dependent morphemes are called bound morphemes. However, Ndimele (2008) opines that, bound morphemes are not full-fledged words but always need roots such as radicals to be made whole.

Radicals or roots, as will be used in this paper, are elements which serve as the primary lexical unit of a word. These carry the most significant aspects of semantic content and cannot be reduced to smaller constituents. Radicals are elements from which other words are derived. Some can occur in isolation while others cannot. The word radical is derived from Latin “radix” which means; “of or pertaining to the root or having root” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Root_\(linguistics\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Root_(linguistics))).

According to Essien (1990), radicals are a set of invariable cores, which are composed of CV or CVC and from which words are formed by an agglutinative process. Content words in nearly all languages contain, and may consist of only radicals, however, sometimes the term "radicals" are also used to describe the word without its inflectional endings. It is a unit of meaning (morpheme) and as such, it is an abstraction, though it can usually be represented in writing as a word would be. For example, it can be said that the root of the English verb “playing” is “play”, since the word is clearly derived from the root form by simple suffixation that does not alter the root in any way.

Since Ibibio is an agglutinating language, there are several morphological processes through which words can be generated. Such processes includes: affixation, compounding, blending, borrowing, reduplication, back-formation, conversion, etc. In this paper, we will be considering affixation, reduplication and compounding.

2. A Brief History of the Ibibio Language

Ibibio is the name of the people and the language they speak. According to Essien (1990), Ibibio is the fourth largest ethnic group after Ígbò, Hausa and Yorùbá. The language has about four million native speakers and it is predominantly spoken in Akwa Ibom State

and is not spoken as an indigenous language outside Nigeria. The Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State where the language is spoken are: Ikono, Ibesikpo, Nsit Ubium, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Atai, Uyo, Etinan, Ibiono Ibom, Mkpát Enin, Ikot Abasi. There are over 10 dialects of Ibibio and they have been classified into six (6) major categories, which are: Southern Ibibio, Northern Ibibio, Eastern Ibibio, Western Ibibio, Delta Ibibio and Riverine Ibibio (Forde and Jones, 1950).

Genetically, Ibibio language is grouped among the Semi-Bantu (Lower Cross) language family which in turn belongs to the (New) Benue-Congo language family the largest language family in Africa (Williamson 1989 in Urua 2007). Ibibio is classified as an agglutinating language because words in the language are built out of long sequence of units, with each unit expressing a particular meaning, in a clear one-to-one way (Crystal, 1991).

3. Methodology

In this study, sixty (60) radicals (see appendix) were obtained through elicitation from five language consultants of Ibibio nativity using an audio recorder. Radicals of different categories were recorded. Several prefixes and suffixes were added to generate different word classes of different content words. The words were properly tone marked for easy pronunciation and proper meaning with the gloss provided in English.

4.0 Processes of Word Formation in Ibibio

These are processes that serve as the productive resource for creating more words and new lexical items in a given language. In every language, the need to create new ideas or words to take care of experiences always exist. In Ibibio, certain word formation processes involving radicals are evident, leading to limitless lexicon in the language. In this section, we shall examine some processes involved in word formation in Ibibio.

4.1 Affixation

According to Ndimele (2001), this is a morphological process of attaching an affix to the root or base of a word. In Ibibio language, prefixes and suffixes are the common positional classification of affixes. Sometimes, abstract nouns are derived from radicals. Such radicals are usually free forms which have affixes attached to them to generate new words. In such cases, the affix may be realized as a syllabic nasal as presented in example 1 below:

Example 1: Nasal Prefixation and their derived nouns

	Radicals	Derived Nouns	Gloss
1.	dáp	n- dáp	a dream
2.	dik	n- dik	fear
3.	dek	n- dek	gainsaying/scorn
4.	sék	n- sék	young/tender

When an affix is attached to a radical, usually a free form, this leads to a change of grammatical category i.e. from verb to noun. Example of deverbalised radicals is illustrated below:

Example 2:

	Radicals	Derived noun	Gloss
1.	Tuuk – “touch”	n-tuuk	premonition
2.	mé – “endure”	i-mé	patience
3.	má - “to love”	i-má	love
4.	nò - “give”	e-nò	gift

However, the morphological status of a word can be altered and new words formed in the process but these follow some constraints which specify or change the values of existing segments. While nouns are derived by means of prefixation, verbs are mostly derived through suffixation as presented below:

Example 3:

S/N	Radicals	Derived Verbs	Gloss
1	Túk	Túkkó	Shake
2	Yám	Yámmá	Brighten
3	Tèk	Tèghe	To go down
4	Tók	Tòhó	Import
5	Séb	Sébé	mess up
6	Fìàñ	Fìàññà	To blow the nose
7	Fíám	Fíámmá	Shrink
8	Bèk	Bèkké	To belch
9	Wán	Wánná	Fight

4.2 Reduplication

Reduplication is used in inflections to convey a grammatical function, such as intensification and in lexical derivation, to create new words. Reduplicated radicals can carry a number of meanings and can be used to denote several contrary meanings. Thus, reduplication is a very productive morphological process in Ibibio. Most of the adverbs and adjectives are formed by this process. Oyebade (1992) asserts that, reduplicated forms are those which could be partially or fully copied from the root and added before or after the root. Reduplicated material is most often found at the beginning of a base, but occurs

also in medial and final positions. The nature of the reduplicated material varies from language to language and construction to construction. Below are examples of partial and complete reduplication of Ibibio radicals:

Example 4: Radicals and their Reduplicated Forms

S/N	Radicals	Reduplicated Forms	Gloss	Word Class
1	Tám	Tátámá	Jump repeatedly	Adverb
2	Dáp	Ndáp ndáp	Dreamy	Adjective
3	Tép	Tétébé	Smelly	Adverb
4	Sèh	nsèké nsèké	Tenderly	Adverb
5	Yák	Ñyákká ñyákká	Lightly	Adverb
6	Dìk	Ndìk-ndìk	Fearfully	Adverb
7	Twèk	Ntwèkké- Ntwèkké	To paint in a disordered manner	Adverb

4.3 Compounding

According to Omachonu (2001), compounding is a process by which new words are formed or derived by combining stems or root morphemes. Compounding is a productive morphological process in most languages. According to Ndimele (2001), it does not only involve stringing together of words from a part of speech. However, words from different parts of speech can also be combined to form compounds. In Ibibio, new words can be formed by combining a radical and a content word as illustrated below:

Example 5: Radicals and Compounding

S/N	Radicals	Compounding	Derived Form	Gloss	Word Class
1.	Wèm	Ù-wèm + éyò 'Life' + 'sun'	Ùwèméyò	Afternoon	Noun
2	Yák	A-yákká + èkà 'Relations' + 'mother'	Ayákkàèkà	Maternal relation	Noun

3	Kwòk	A-Kwòkkó + èbò 'Scrap' + 'bald'	Akwòkkèbò	A person with bald head	Noun
4	Fìṃ	Ifìṃ + úbòñ	Ifìṃúbòñ	Throne	Noun
5	Dìk	Ñ-kpó + ndìk 'Thing' + 'fear'	Ñkpóndìk	Dreadful thing	Noun
6	Sàñ	A-sàñ + Ukèbè 'Container' + 'enema'	Asàñúkèbè	Enema container	Noun
7	Tép	U-tébé + ìnùà 'Smell' + 'mouth'	Utéβínùà	Bad breath	Noun
8	Kpò	Ò-kpó + étáp Rubber' + 'saliva'	Òkpóétáp	Fuming saliva	Noun
9	Nàn	Nàn + ènyịn	Nànènyịn	Be wild	Verb

5. The Importance of Radicals in Ibibio

1. Ibibio radicals help boost the language communication strength by providing various ways through which speakers can present or say a given concept differently, i.e. in the case of synonyms.
2. Paraphrasing is an essential tool in recasting an originally lengthy speech to suit the writer's purpose. Instead of making a lengthy statement, radicals could be reduplicated to shorten long grammatical constructions.
3. Compounding has great advantage in energizing a developing language in the face of language endangerment.
4. Compounding offers speakers of Ibibio various ways which an idea could be expressed. Combining two radicals to express a thought shows the flexibility of the language.

6. Summary and Conclusion

This paper discusses radicals in Ibibio. From the discussion above, radicals in Ibibio are mostly bound roots which are not capable of occurring in isolation but require other bound elements to come before or after them.

It has been observed that all the verbs generated take only suffixes which begin with consonants and almost all end with vowels. Example of what we have are: "ná, ké, kè, ké, má, bé, ñè, ró, pé," etc. and most of these have re-occurred throughout the whole data. All

the derived nouns accept either nasal or vowel prefix to make a complete lexeme. Adverbs in Ibibio are realized from nouns and adjectives by simply reduplicating the nouns or the adjectives, this confirms the position of Essien (2008), as was shown in example (4) above. Reduplication is a very productive morphological process in Ibibio, most of the adverbs and adjectives are formed by this process. In Ibibio, the doubling of these radicals to generate adverbs do not result in new words but it is used to generate emphasis or intensify the action of the verb. This phenomenon helps to boost the vocabulary strength of the language. This particular category of word class offers speakers of the language the opportunity of saying a thing in different ways, depending on the interest.

Radicals are also combined with content words to generate phrases that have substantial meaning distinction. This method of compounding gives Ibibio language the impetus to increase its vocabulary as well as create synonyms for effective communication. This freedom of composition benefits the language greatly, as new words are coined to enrich the vocabulary of Ibibio pragmatic level. Thus, a certain concept can be expressed differently without any form of ambiguity and redundancy. This has ascertained the flexibility of human language.

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