

# Reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ

---

<sup>1</sup>Friday UDE & <sup>2</sup>Aniefon AKPAN

Department of Linguistics & Nigerian Languages

University of Uyo, Uyo.

<sup>1</sup>[udefriday@yahoo.com](mailto:udefriday@yahoo.com), <sup>2</sup>[daniels.mmefon@gmail.com](mailto:daniels.mmefon@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Reduplication is one of the numerous linguistic processes that have contributed to the expansion of the lexicon of languages. As a language phenomenon, reduplication has been attested to be productive in languages such as Yorùbá, Hausa and Swahili. In languages such as Ibibio, reduplication plays emphatic roles. This study is concerned with the reduplication process in the Itu Mbon Usọ language spoken in the northern part of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Two basic types of reduplication are observed in the language: full and partial. It shows that reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ is productive. The full reduplication of nominal in the language changes the grammatical category of the word to adjective. The study also reveals that reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ is used for emphasis, humour and contrast. In addition, phonological processes such as deletion and weakening are observed.

## 1. Introduction

Reduplication is one of the common morphological processes that have been attested in some language of the world such as Ibibio, Yorùbá, and Hausa. Reduplication can be used to mark grammatical or semantic contrast through the repetition of all or part of the base to which it applies (O'Grady and Archibald, 2000). This assertion is illustrated in (1) below.

Reduplication in Hausa (Zabairu, 2013:118)

- |    |    |           |                     |
|----|----|-----------|---------------------|
| 1. | a) | yaro      | 'a boy/child'       |
|    |    | yaro-yaro | 'young man'         |
|    | b) | nama      | 'meat'              |
|    |    | nama-nama | 'meaty/partly meat' |
|    | c) | wari      | 'odour'             |
|    |    | wari-wari | 'smelly'            |

Semantic contrast is marked in the Hausa example provided above in (1). In the grammatical aspect, reduplication may change the verb tense or word class of the word which is produced from the reduplication. Reduplication plays emphatic roles in most languages and also reflects the richness and uniqueness of languages.

Kauffman (2015) notes the functionality of reduplication in languages and summarises that reduplication creates plurality, amplify word meaning, modify verb tenses, (by extension – create novel lexical items) in order to portray tangible or intangible aspects of life. This is observed in the Hausa example provided below in (2).

2	a)	batu	‘issue’
		batutuwa	‘issues’
	b)	cuta	‘disease’
		cututtuka	‘diseases’
	c)	aji	‘class’
		ajujuwa	‘classes’ (Zabairu, 2013:119)

The phenomenon of reduplication has been established in languages such as Hausa, Yorùbá (Zabairu, 2013) and Ibibio (Essien, 2008) and we therefore seek to extend the result of the previous works in the aforementioned languages to Itu mbon usọ, a language spoken in the northern part of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Itu Mbon Usọ is classified under Ibibio language umbrella (Essien, 1990; Urua, 2007) under the Lower Cross group of Niger Congo Phylum.

There are not many linguistic research reports in the Itu Mbon Usọ language except Akpan (2008) that was available as at the time of this research. Akpan (2008) did a preliminary segmental inventory investigation in the ItuMbonUso language and concluded that Itu Mbon Usọ language has seven (7) phonemic vowels (i, e, ε, u, o, ɔ, a) and fourteen (14) phonemic consonants (b, t, d, k, kp, m, n, ny, ñ, f, s, l, j, w). This work will therefore build on these phonemic inventory provided by Akpan (2008).

This paper is organised in the following structure. In section 2, the forms of reduplication in languages are reviewed and section 3 provides a description of the reduplication process in Itu Mbon Usọ.

## 2. Forms of Reduplication

Reduplication cuts across diverse parts of speech but is dominantly observed in nouns and verbs. As a morphological process, it shows productivity in some language and unproductive in others. Productive reduplication is a process in which the reduplicated word is functional. That is, the reduplicated word belongs to a novel word class and not in the word class which its root word is identified. In unproductive reduplication, the reduplicated word remains in the word class of its root word and is employed mostly for emphasis.

Some languages show form of productive reduplication while others indicate both productive and unproductive reduplication. Robino (2013) survey of reduplication in about 368 languages of the world indicates that 85% show forms of productive reduplication. Out of the 368 languages, 277 languages show both full and partial reduplication while 35 languages indicate only complete reduplication.

Two basic forms of reduplication have been attested in languages: Full and partial reduplication (Inkelas & Zoll 2005; Stolz et al. 2011). There are languages which exhibit full and partial reduplication; others show only full reduplication. Full reduplication copies all the language properties of the root word whereas in partial reduplication, part of the root word (element, sound, morpheme, syllable) is copied. Full and partial reduplication is attested in the Ibibio, Hausa, and Yorùbá languages as observed below in (3);

Partial reduplication in Yorùbá

- |   |    |      |              |
|---|----|------|--------------|
| 3 | a) | lo   | ‘to go’      |
|   |    | lilo | ‘going away’ |
|   | b) | ta   | ‘to sell’    |
|   |    | tita | ‘for sale’   |
|   | c) | je   | ‘to eat’     |
|   |    | jije | ‘edibe’      |

Full reduplication in Yorùbá

- |    |        |  |
|----|--------|--|
| d) | omo    | ‘child’                                  |
|    | omoomo | ‘grand child’                            |
| e) | iya    | ‘mother’                                 |
|    | iyaiya | ‘grandmother’                            |
| f) | ile    | ‘house’                                  |
|    | ileile | ‘house by house’ (Zabairu, 2013:118-120) |

Partial reduplication in Ibibio (Essien, 2008:105)

- |    |          |  |
|----|----------|--|
| g) | dép      | ‘buy it’   |
|    | déédép   | ‘buy it’ (instead of requesting for a free item) |
| h) | fèghé    | ‘run’  |
|    | fèéfèghé | ‘run’ (instead of walking)                       |
| i) | bòm      | ‘break’  |
|    | bòóbôm   | ‘break it’ (instead of preserving it)            |
- (Essien, 2008:105)

Apart from the two basic forms of reduplication observed in languages, there is another type of reduplication known as triplication. This phenomenon has been observed in Swahili although in rare language situations (Novotna, 2000). The triplication copies the language properties of the word as in *fofofo*– ‘completely’ (restricted usage) in Swahili. Triplication is also observed in languages such as Ewe, Shipibo, Twi, Mokilese, Min Nan (Hokkien), Stau (Gates, 2016). This work shall only focus on the two basic types of reduplication: full and partial.

We investigate the reduplication process in Itu Mbon Usowith the aim of establishing the productivity or unproductivity of reduplication in the language as the

research would indicate. We will also consider the morpho-phonological processes inherent in this word formation process.

### 3. Methodology

The data for this research were collected through the elicitation process. A constructed wordlist of hundred words was generated and given to three native speakers of the language to provide the equivalent form of the English words in Itu mbon usọ. There are three varieties of Itu Mbon Usọ spoken in Ini Local Government Area viz; *obot-itu*, *usuuk-itu* and *Iwere*. *Obot-itu* is spoken by inhabitants of the upper part of Itu Mbon Usọ community, *usuuk-itu* is spoken by the inhabitants of the lower part of the area and *Iwere* is spoken by *Nkari* and *Iwere*. The data used for this research is from *ussuk-itu* dialect because majority of the Itu Mbon Usọ people speak and understand this dialect.

### 4. Reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ

Reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ is realised through partial or full copying of the word element, syllable, or root word with its tonal properties. It cuts across various word classes including nouns, verbs, and adjectives as shown in §4.1. The data collected for this research indicates two types of reduplication in Itu mbon usọ; full and partial reduplication which are discussed in §4.1:

#### 4.1 Full Reduplication

Full reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ is realised through the complete copying of the root word. It reduplicates the root word with little (in connected speech) or no change to the structure of the word. Examples of full reduplication are provided below in (4):

4. a)	ímá	love
	ímá-ímá	love
b)	ìdìòk	bad
	ìdìòk-ìdìòk	badly
c)	ùtó	yellow
	ùtó-ùtó	yellowish
d)	èbretík	black
	èbretík-èbretík	blackish
e)	ídáp	sleep
	ídáp-ídáp	sleepy
f)	ùwák	plenty
	ùwák-ùwák	plentiful
g)	èkpàd	bag
	èkpàd-èkpàd	baggy
h)	óbúúd	shame
	óbúúd- óbúúd	shameful

In Itu mbon usọ, the reduplicated forms of the base words copies all the phonological features of the base form as observed in 4(a)-4(h). There are phonological processes in

fully reduplicated words in Itu Mbon Usɔ which are discussed in §4.2.2. Most words in the noun class that are reduplicated produce lexical items to the adjective class as seen in 4 (g, h). In 4(a), the reduplicated form shares the semantic features with the base word with a little difference in the intensity of the word. The base form and its reduplicants are used in sentences below in (5) to indicate the syntactic information of the word.

	<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
5.	a) Àfɔ̀ñ é sè àdè èbrètík èbrètík	His cloth is blackish
	b) Ébéd é sè àdè èbrètík	His goat is black
	c) Nnó nwèd òkòrò kènkèn	Give me the book one by one
	d) Nnó nwèd òkòrò kèn	Give me one of those books
	e) Yák mmó dí ìbàìbà	Let them come in twos
	f) Yák òwòm ìbà édí	Let two of them come

The root words are reduplicated with their tone as observed above in (5). Morphologically, full reduplication is productive in the Itu Mbon Usɔ language; some of the fully reduplicated words belong to new word classes, hence, reduplication enriches the word stock in Itu mbon usɔ.

In Itu Mbon Usɔ, adjectives that are reduplicated are not productive morphologically; they are employed for emphatic purposes in the language as illustrated in (6):

6.	a)	ùtó	yellow
		ùtó-ùtó	yellowish
	b)	ùwák	plenty
		ùwák-ùwák	plenty (Intensified)
	c)	àkùkwǎ	wicked
		àkùkwǎ-àkùkwǎ	very wicked

#### 4.2 Partial Reduplication

Partial reduplication in Itu Mbon Usɔ involves the reduplication of parts of the word as observed below in (7). This linguistic process is not productive because it is the semantic domain of the word that is extended; the word class of the new word remains unchanged.

7.	a)	bàk	be early
		bàbák	be early
	b)	nám	do
		nánám	do
	c)	fèhé	run
		fèfèhè	run
	d)	bìòm	carry
		bìbìòm	carry

e)	téémì	cook
	tétéémì	cook
f)	mèn	swallow
	mèmén	swallow

Partial reduplication in Itu Mbon Usòis used for emphasis and contrast unlike full reduplication which is productive as observed in §4.1. There are some phonological processes observed in the data provided in (7); these processes are discussed below in §4.4. Reduplication also plays semantic roles in Itu Mbon Usòas discussed below in §4.3.

### 4.3. Semantic Roles of Reduplication in Itu Mbon Usò

Reduplication creates humour, contrast and intensity within certain word contexts which can be used for entertainment or specification. In Itu mbon usò, these features have been observed and are discussed below.

#### 4.3.1. Humour and Word Play

Kauffman (2015) notes that reduplication is used as a medium of informal wordplay preferred over dry straight forward discourse with the aim of conveying humor and playfulness. In Itu mbon usò, the above assertion by Kauffman occurs in few linguistic situations as observed in the data obtained for this research. This is illustrated in the following words in (8) below:

8.	a)	ìkpùré	short;
		ìkpùré -ìkpùré	shortish
	b)	èkpàd	bag;
		èkpàd-èkpàd	baggy

The reduplicated forms in (8) are used to convey humor among people of the same age. This is illustrated below in (9). There are other scenarios in which the reduplicated words can be used against an elderly person. In this context, it will not be employed for playful purposes but rather for disrespectful purpose.

	Sentence		Gloss
9.	a) Àfǎń èsè àdè èkpàd-èkpàd	-	His cloth is baggy
	b) Ánye'édí'ìkpùré-ìkpùré ówó'	-	He is a shortish person

In 8(b), the word “èkpàd” simply denotes ‘bag’ which signifies a big, airy soft container in a generic sense. When reduplicated, the meaning of the base form of the word “èkpàd” is extended towards a linguistic item whose referent form fits the semantic features of the base form of the reduplicated word. In 8(b), the reduplicated form of “èkpàd” is used for mocking. The person wearing the cloth is mocked for wearing a cloth that is big.

#### 4.3.2. Emphasis

Reduplication in Itu Mbon Usòcan also be used for emphasis; to indicate the intensity of a word. This is illustrated below in (10):

- |     |    |        |          |
|-----|----|--------|----------|
| 10. | a) | féhè   | run      |
|     |    | féféhé | speed up |
|     | b) | sóp    | be fast  |
|     |    | sósóp  | hasten   |

In (10)a, the base form of the word *féhè* means ‘run’ and the reduplication of the base form intensifies ‘run’ to mean ‘speed up’. The base and reduplicated forms in (10) are used in sentences in (11) to indicate how the word is used.

		<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
11.	a)	Èkà ésié été ènyé féhè dí	His mother says that he should come quickly
	b)	Èkà ésié été ènyé féféhè dí	His mother says that he should come (without hesitation)
	c)	Sóp dí ché mkpó	Come quickly and see
	d)	Dí ché mkpó, sósóp	Come and see something; hasten

The sentence provided in 11(c) shows the base word *sóp* used within a clause whereas the reduplicated form *sósóp* is used after the main clause in 11(d).

#### 4.3.3 Contrast

Reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọis also used to indicate contrast as observed in example (12) below. Contrast in Itu Mbon Usọreduplication is used for focus and specificity to ensure clarity in communication.

- |     |    |        |       |
|-----|----|--------|-------|
| 12. | a) | tá     | chew  |
|     |    | Tátáá  | chew  |
|     | b) | díbé   | hide  |
|     |    | dídíbé | hide  |
|     | c) | wét    | write |
|     |    | wúwét  | write |
|     | d) | brě    | play  |
|     |    | bibrě  | play  |
|     | e) | tìé    | sit   |
|     |    | tìtìé  | sit   |

In example 12a, *Tátáá* – ‘chew’ (with emphasis) implies that the recipient should chew the edible rather than swallowing it. In 12(f) *tìtìé* – ‘sit’ is emphasized in contrast to any other body position.

#### 4.4 Phonological Processes

Phonological processes such as deletion, weakening and epenthesis are observed in reduplication in Itu mbon usọ. These processes are observed in vowels and consonants as discussed below.

#### 4.4.1. Deletion

The consonant sounds that are deleted in the reduplication process as observed in (13) include nasal and velar sounds. The deletion occurs at the word final position in a CVC syllable structure of the root word. This is illustrated below in 13 (a & b):

13.	a)	bàk	be early
		bàbák	be early
	b)	nám	do
		nánám	do
	c)	féhè	run
		féfèhè	run
	d)	mèn	swallow
		mèmén	swallow
	e)	ìkpùré	short;
		ìkpùré-ìkpùré	shortish
		ìkpùríkpùré	shortish

The above examples in (13) indicate that the reduplicants are light syllables except in 13(e). In 13(a)-13(b), whose root word has a CVC syllable structure, the final consonant is deleted in its reduplicated form. There is a tonal replacement in the second syllable and deletion of the final consonant in 13 (a)&(d). The low tone in the root word has been replaced with a high tone. In 13(c), the syllable structure of the word *féhè* – ‘run’ is CVCV, the last syllable - CV is deleted in the reduplicated form. In 13(e), the vowel at the word boundary is deleted when used in a connected speech. This is in accordance with vowel height constraint that governs this process. Hence, in a monosyllable CVC structure, the final consonant is deleted and the last syllable deleted in a disyllable word when reduplicated.

#### 4.4.2. Consonant Weakening

Consonant weakening within the reduplication processes in Itu Mbon Uş occurs at intervocalic position. The consonant weakening occurs in complete reduplicated words as observed in (14 c).

14.	a)	ídáád	madness
		Ídáád-ídáád	madly
		ídááíídáád	madly
	b)	ébéd	goat
		ébéd-ébéd	goatish
		ébérébéd	goatish
	c)	íbád	mathematics
		íbád-íbád	mathematical
		íbáííbád	mathematical



In (14), the consonants –voiced alveolar plosive is weakened to an alveolar tap on the surface form. This phonetic realization is attributed to the intervocalic position occupied by the voiced alveolar plosive in a connected speech. The reduplicated forms of the base words are used in the sentences below in (15);

	<b>Sentence</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
15.	a)    Ásáńá ntè ébéérébéd	He walks like a goat
	b)    Áwàd ntè ídààrìdààd	He drives like a mad person

The above lexical items in example (15) show the weakening of the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ at the intervocalic position in fast speech. The voiced alveolar plosive /d/ is weakened to the alveolar tap /ɾ/.

#### 4.4.3. Vowel Epenthesis

Urua (2007) defines vowels epenthesis as a situation where a vowel is inserted in a word. In Itu mbon usọ, it is observed that vowel breaks the consonant clusters in the reduplicated word. This is illustrated in example (16) below;

16.	a)	wét	write
		Wúwét	write

The initial consonant of the base word is copied in the reduplicated word as observed above in example (16). To break the consonant cluster that would have occurred in the reduplicated words, a vowel is inserted to form a light syllable – CV structure.

## 5. Conclusion

Semantically, reduplication in Itu Mbon Usọ is used for conveying humour, emphasis, intensity, focus and specificity. Morphologically, this linguistic process is productive when fully reduplicated. From the available data for this research, it was observed that words from the nominal word class are dominantly employed for full reduplication which produced novel lexical items in the adjective word class while the verbal word class is mostly used for partial reduplication. In fully reduplicated words, consonant sounds occurring at word boundary (mostly voiced alveolar plosives) are weakened to alveolar tap at intervocalic positions. In addition, consonants and syllables (in disyllable structure) at word boundaries are also deleted in partial reduplication.

## References

- Essien, O. E. 2008. *A grammar of the Ibibio language*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Inkelas, S. and Zoll, C. 2005. *Reduplication: Doubling in Morphology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gates, J. P. 2016. *Verbal Triplication Morphology in Stau (Mazi Dialect)*. Transactions of the Philological Society.

- Kauffman, C. 2015. Reduplication reflects uniqueness and innovation in language, thought and culture. Omniglot - Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems & Languages. Accessed 5 February, 2017. [www.omniglot.com/language/articles/reduplication.htm](http://www.omniglot.com/language/articles/reduplication.htm)
- Novotna, J. 2000 Reduplication in Swahili. *Swahili forum VII*, 57-73
- O'Grady, W. and Archibald, J. 2000. *Contemporary Linguistic Analysis*. Toronto: Addison Wesley Longman
- Rubino, Carl. 2009. Reduplication: form, function, and distribution. In B. Hurch (Ed.), *Studies on Reduplication*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 11-30.
- Stolz, T., Stroh C. and Urdze, A. 2011. *Total reduplication: the areal Linguistics of a potential universal*. Berlin: AkademieVerlag, StudiaTypologica 8.
- Urua, Eno-Abasi 2000. *Ibibio Phonetics & Phonology*. Cape Town: Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS).
- Yu, A. 2008. Two patterns of reduplication in Washo. In: *Proceedings of BLS*, 34.
- Zabairu, H. 2013. Nominal reduplication in Hausa and Yorùbá. *INJOTER*. Vol 1. No 1. Pp 116-121.