
Affixation Process in Itu Mbonuso Language

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ABSTRACT

One of the major ways of mastering a grammar of a language is by mastering the processes of word formation in that language. This is so because the mode of word formation is a major influencing factor in the structuring of its grammar. Affixation is a grammatical devise that involves the attachment of morphemes bound or free to the root elements or stem for the formation of new lexical items from existing ones. This paper analysed the forms and structure of affixation in Itu Mbonuso language using different morphological operations. Various forms of word formation strategies involving affixes in the language were applied with the assumption that all languages have their peculiar system in word formation and of course sentence formation as well in which cases are all rule-governed. This paper derived it data from some native speakers of Itu Mbonuso through direct interview and through analysis of the data discovered that there is certainly an affixation process in the Itu Mbonuso language and the processes include: prefix, suffix, infix, circumfix and interfix. These processes are similar to other neighbouring languages in this group.

KEYWORDS: Affixation, Language, Itu Mbonuso

Introduction

Words in most languages of the world are made up of a base which is referred to as the root or stem which has the basic meaning content of the word. For word expansion in any language, there is need for the attachment of appendages, that is affixes. The process of attaching the appendages to a word in order to form new words is known as affixation. Affixation in linguistic is a grammatical device used in the building of new words. It is a very productive morphological process employed by many languages of the world to enlarge their vocabulary/lexicon. In every language, every word has its structure internalised in it; how sounds are arranged in different ways to build up different words with different meanings.

A word refers to the smallest meaningful element of language. Ndimele (1999:7) defines a word “as the minimum independent linguistic unit having an identifiable meaning and grammatical function with a fairly consistent phonological shape”. These words are composed of smaller meaningful units known as morphemes. Katamba (1993:20) describes the morpheme as “the smallest indivisible units of semantic content or grammatical function which words are made of”. That is to say that the smallest difference that occur in the form of a word, correlating with the smallest difference in the meaning of a word or sentence or in grammatical structure is referred to as a morpheme. As such, there is a deep contrast between ‘a word’ and ‘a morpheme’. While a word is the smallest meaningful element of a language, morphemes are the different building blocks that are joined together in the process of word construction. Morphemes could either be bound or free. This shall be discussed later in this paper. The subject of morphemes are treated under morphology as a subfield of linguistics.

What then is Morphology?

Morphology is a subfield in linguistics that is concerned with words. It is the study of words, the formation of words and the relationship that exist between words in a given language. It examines the internal organisation of words and parts of words, such as roots and their affixes (prefix, suffix, etc.). Morphology also looks at parts of speech in relation to the word element therein, auto segmental features that account for meaning difference and the context of language use; its effect on word's pronunciation and meaning. In this paper, the word and its creation shall be examined. Affixation and its different types used in the creation of new words in a language shall be examined, using the Itu Mbon-usọ language as a case study.

The Itu Mbon-Usọ People

Itu Mbon-usọ occupies about 45 square kilometres in the northern axis of Akwa Ibom State. It is one of the four clans that make up the original Ini Local Government Area in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, and the largest amongst them. The other clans are Nkari, Iwerre and Ikpe. The community is an island surrounded by streams and rivers; to the north-west, it is bounded by a river known as “Inyañ Awuwa” (Awuwa River) bordering the clan to Itu Nta. Then to the West, its boundary is at Inyañ Ntanakū ma Ebọ (Ntanakū and Ebọ River) which flows down to Inyañ Ikpe (Ikpe River). Towards the east, the Itu Mbonusọ community is bounded with Abam in Abia State at a river known to the people as Inyañ Ọbọm (Abam River). This river flows down to Oku River at its southern territory. From this point the river flows down to the Enyoñ Creek through Inyañ Ñkana (Ñkana River). They have a population of about 150 thousand people as confirmed by the present paramount ruler of Ini Local Government Area, HRH Ntoong Udo Effiong Akpan, who is also the current clan head of the Itu Mbon-usọ Clan.

The Itu Mbon-Usọ Language

The Itu Mbon usọ language is one of the languages spoken in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. It is spoken by the people of Itu Mbon-usọ clan in Ini Local Government Area of the state with its variants by the people of Mbente (Nkari) and Ibuoro (Iwere) of the same Local Government Area of the state and also in Ukwa, Ito and Idere clans in Cross River State.

The language spoken by the Itu Mbon-usọ people according to the clan head of the area who is also the paramount ruler of Ini Local Government area, Ntooñ Udo Effiong Akpan, is known as Mbon-edem (Great tongue). This he cited Amaku (1976:3) as saying “Efik idighe Mbon-edem idighe Ibibio, mbufo enyime Mbon-edem ikọ okure” (The Efiks are neither Mbon-edem nor Ibibio, accept Mbon-edem and resolve the matter). The Mbon-edem referred to here, points to the entire people in this language group as mentioned earlier both in Akwa Ibom State and in Cross River State. It could also be logical to say that the Efiks are closer to this people because of the similarity in their culture, this similarity goes beyond the culture into the language itself. The intonational pattern, the sound system as well as the structural patterns are very much identical. But for the purpose of this work, we will refer to Itu Mbon-usọ as the people of the Itu Mbon-usọ clan as well as the language they speak. The focus of this paper is specifically the affixation processes that occur in the Itu Mbon-usọ language.

Affixation

Affixation is a morphological process whereby word elements are attached to the stem/root of a word to alter or modify its meaning in some way. In the Linguisticsnetwork.com/tutorials-

morphology/Affixation in English, affixation is defined as “a morphological process by which bound morphemes are attached to a roots or stems to mark changes in meaning, part of speech, or grammatical relationships.” This process can take several forms and perform different functions in a word. From this, it is observed that affixation brings changes in the shape of words thereby enlarging the vocabulary of a given language. Affixation uses affixes to create new words. It is a linguistic process where speakers use in forming different words by adding morphemes, that is, affixes. Affixes are attached at different positions to a word, and thereby modifying the meaning and/or function of that word.

Affix

An affix is a morpheme attached to a root or stem to create, form and build up new words, or a variant form of the same word. Affixes are attached at different positions to a word, and thereby modifying the meaning and/or function of that word. When it is attached at the beginning of the root of a word it is known as prefix, at the middle, infix or the end, suffix. Affixes are classified into two major categories based on:

- The position it occurs;
- its function on the root word;

Positional Affixes

An affix may occur at different position in reference to the root of the word. Such position where an affix occurs around the root word are divided into different categories: They are prefix, suffix. These two are very common in so many languages and in the Itu Mbon-uso language in particular. Other kinds of positional affixes include infix, circumfix and interfix; the interfix is a rare kind of affix and not very common to many languages of the world. Below are some practical examples of these in English language

- i) **Prefix:** Prefix is a word element or particle that precedes the root or stem, e.g., *un-do*, *in* –complete, *re* – write, etc. there are instances of prefixation in Itu Mbon-uso language as the examples below:

Table 1

S/N	Prefix	Root/stem (verb)	Gloss	New word (Noun)	Gloss
1.	ọ	mùm	‘catch’	ọ-mùm	‘traditional torch light
2.	ù-	bòn	(to bear a child as a man)	ù-bòn	Family/lineage
3.	ñ-	kòrì	‘grow’	ñ- kòrì	growth
4.	ń-	bíb	‘ask’	ń- bíb	question
5.	ú-	ñwàm	‘help’ (v)	ú-ñwàm	help (n)
6.	ù-	yàí (adj)	‘fine/beatiful/good’	ù- yàí	beauty (n)
7.	ú-	tóhó	‘praise’(v)	ú- tóhò	praise (n)
8.	é-	kpád	‘ shift gradually’	é- kpád	trunk/ bridge
9.	á-	kpàn	‘dissuade’	á- kpàn	A vessel for carrying load
10.	í-	kwó	‘sing’	í- kwó	Song

11.	m-	fīb	'suck'	m-fīb	Tick
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- ii) **Suffix:** Suffix is a word element or particle that is affixed after the root, some examples in English language include., kind-**ness**, parent-**age**, child-**hood**. The Itu Mbonuso language has suffixation as one process of its vocabulary building as shown in the table below

Table 2

S/N	Root/Stem (verb)	Gloss	Suffix	New word (verb)	Gloss
1.	bìn	Chase	-é	bìné	pursue
2.	sùùk	keep down/ go down	-ó	sùhó	Come/go down
3.	fáák	press in between	-á	fáhá	stucked in between
4.	kam	Accept or accept to do something	-á	kama	hold
5.	wèd	Write	-é	wèré / wèdé	having writings on

- a) **The suffix -dé,** marking reversal

Table 3

S/N	Root/Stem (verb)	Gloss	Suffix	New word (reversal verb)	Gloss
3.	fáhá	to be stuck in between	-dé	fáhádé	to be unstuck
4.	bùhó	bury oneself in water	- dé	bùhó -dé	Unbury oneself out of the water or uproot
5.	wùhó	pin	-dé	wùhó -dé	Unpin

- b) **The suffix -ké:** marking negation

Table 4

S/N	Root/Stem (verb)	Gloss	Suffix	New word (Negation)	Gloss
1.	nám	do	-ké	-nám-ké	- will not do
2.	yéémí	search	-ké	-yéémí-ké	- will not search
3.	sísémè	murmur	-ké	-sísémè-ké	-not murmur

- c) **The suffix -sô,** marking negation

Table 5

S/N	Root/Stem (verb)	Gloss	Suffix	New word (Negation)	Gloss
1.	yéémí	search	-sô	-yéémí -sô	-do not search
2.	teèmì	Cook/boil	-sô	-teèmì-sô	-do not cook

3.	díbé	hide	-sô	-díbé-sô	-do not hide
4.	kpúí	cover	-sô	-kpúí-sô	-do not cover

iii) **Circumfix:** This type of affix occurs in words like *en-light-en* and *em-bold-en*, **ir-regular-ly**, **dis-interest-ed**, **in-value-able**. There are very significant examples of circumfix in ItuMbon-uso language as in the following examples

a) **Circumfix Forming Gerund**

Table 6

S/N	Verb	Gloss	Circumfix	Derived Noun	Gloss
1.	káb	carve out	ń-bí	ńkáabí	the act of carving or scraping out
2.	dóñ	send	ń-ńí	ńdọñí	instigation
3	fád	embrace	m-dí	m fáádí	the act of embracing

b) **Circumfix used in Noun formation**

There are instances where nouns are derived through the process of circumfix as in the examples in the table below:

Table 7: Circumfix Forming a Noun

S/N	Root V	Gloss	Circumfix	Derived Noun	Gloss
1.	kyìn	Refuse	è-é	è- kyìn-é	the act of refusing (refusal)
2.	fùñ	sling (v)	è-ó	è- fùñ-ó	fishing line
3.	búák	Mix	m-hà	m-búá-hà	mixture
4.	yém	Search	ń-mí	ń- yéé-mí	the act of searching for
5.	dúòk	throw away	ń-ńó	ń-dúó-ńó	excessive spending/wastage
6.	kán	roam	ńkí-ná	ńkí-ka-ná	roaming
7.	bén	carry	m-ní	m-beé-ní	the act of carrying (figurative)

iv) **Infix:** Infixation interrupts the root sequence because it occurs inside the root. Ndimele (2007:75) makes it clear that English language does not really have a clear-cut case of infix, but some scholars argue constructively that there are examples of infix in words as **say** and **said**, **see** and **saw**, **bear** and **bore**, etc. It is observed that the internal structuring of the word have changed in order to give rise to a new words. There are some languages with clear-cut examples of infix. Consider the Tagalog examples below from Ndimele (2007:76)

In Itu Mbon-uso language there are some cases of infix in the morphology. This is seen in some cases marking negation and a certain completive aspect. These are marked by the affixes ‘-kẹ-’ and ‘-rẹ-’ respectively. This shall be examined more closely as we proceed.

Table 8: The Infix ‘ke’ Forming Negation

S/N	Root	Gloss	Infix	Derived Form (Negation)	Gloss
1.	Feghede	make it fall	-ké-	-feghe-ke-de	-did not make it fall
2.	dùghòdé	filter	-ké-	-dùghò-ké-dé	-did not filter
3.	bùhòdé	uproot	-ké-	-bùhò-ké-dé	-did not uproot
4.	Fíghédé	unpress	-ké-	fíghé-ké-dé	-did not unpress
5.	tùhòdé	turture	-ké-	tùhò-ké-dé	-did not turture

Table 9: The Infix ‘re’

S/N	Root	Gloss	Infix	Derived Form (Compleitive)	Gloss
1.	tèghèdé	expand	-rè-	-tèghè-rè-dé	-had expanded
2.	sèbèdé	litter	-rè-	-sèbè-rè-dé	-had littered
3.	yírédé	unlock	-rè-	-yírè-rè-dé	-had unlock
4.	dùñòdé	investigate	-rè-	-dùñò-rè-dé	-had investigated
5.	táhádé	waste (economic)	-rè-	-táhá-rè-dé	-had wasted

Conclusion

Affixation as one of the morphological processes plays a very distinctive role in the formation of new words in any language. They are word elements attached before or after or within the main stem of a word that change or modify the meaning in some way. In the Itu Mbonusọ language, affixation is very significant part in enriching the lexicon. The Itu Mbonusọ uses different kinds of affixation in its word formation processes, these include: prefix, infix, circumfix, and the suffix. Like every other language, affixation process is one of the major processes in word formation and it is a common phenomenon used in developing the vocabularies in the language and should not be relegated.

Recommendations

The Itu Mbonusọ Language is yet to be widely researched into, and as such, it is not widely known. It is recommended that the language should attract the interest of researchers because there are many aspects of it that can be explored and used in the language development. The affixation process is one of such aspect that can be explored and is recommended that the productive word creation strategy in this language which has been discovered should be given more attention. There are probably other affixes that may not have been mentioned here because they are yet to be discovered, such should be researched into and made use of. However, readers must always be guided by the fact that mother tongue affects learners understanding of grammatical rules of target language because the two are of different models. Therefore, systematic models of forms and usages peculiar to each language must be painstakingly taken care of by second language learners.

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