

## The Iḅani pronominal system

Ebitare F. Obikudo  
Department of Linguistics & Communication Studies,  
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

### Abstract

*This paper describes the pronominal system of Iḅani, an endangered Eastern Ijọ dialect spoken in Nigeria, West Africa, which consists of the personal, reflexive, reciprocal, demonstrative, interrogative, and indefinite pronouns. Personal pronouns exhibit the grammatical categories of person, number, gender, and case. A three way gender distinction based on sex and humanness is attested in the third person singular pronoun. Personal pronouns have long and short forms that correspond to free and bound pronouns respectively. Short forms are obligatory and non-emphatic while long forms perform contrastive and emphatic functions. The bound forms of the singular object pronouns function as possessives with specific nouns that are associated with parts of the body and familial relationships thus expressing inalienability. There are special forms for the first, second, and third (masculine) persons singular pronouns in the accusative case that are used when these pronouns are preceded by a bound subject pronoun or when they precede vowel-initial words. An uncommon feature exhibited by the long personal pronouns is that they may be segmented into person and number morphemes. Iḅani also distinguishes between singular and plural adnominal and pronominal demonstrative pronouns in the proximal forms. The adnominal and pronominal distal demonstratives are morphologically identical to the third person singular neuter pronoun **ani** and do not indicate number in their reference. The neutral behavior of **ani** within the pronominal system affirms its status as a non-person in the speech act. The complexity of the Iḅani pronominal system makes it a likely problem for language learners and thus worthy of investigation.*

**KEYWORDS:** Iḅani, Ijọ, pronouns, inalienability, gender and demonstratives.

### 1. Introduction

Iḅani (ISO code: iby) pronounced [iḅàní] is an Eastern Ijọ dialect that belongs to the Ijoid group of the Niger-Congo phylum (Jenewari, 1989; Williamson and Blench, 2000). Eastern Ijọ consists of Nkọrọ and a mutually intelligible dialect cluster that comprises Kalabari, Kiriķe, and Iḅani. Iḅani is spoken in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, West Africa, specifically in Bonny and Opobo/Nkọrọ local government areas of Rivers state. The Iḅani people operate a monarchy system and the community is made up of the towns and villages that constitute the Bonny and Opobo kingdoms. Within the Iḅani speech community, there is a shift from the use of Iḅani which is the mother tongue to an emergent variety of Igbo that is spoken only within the community. This shift was facilitated by trade activities in the Niger delta region in the nineteenth century when Bonny Island was a major commercial centre for the export of goods and also of slaves. Igbo served as a language of trade and of evangelism (Bẹreṣiri, 1975;

Benamaisia, 1997). Slaves of Igbo origin who were not strong enough to be sold off remained on the island and naturalized as citizens. The dominance of Igbo led to the emergence of a variety that is known as Bonny Igbo or Opobo Igbo. Over the years, there has been a major shift from speaking Iḅani to Bonny/Opobo Igbo. The linguistic situation is precarious and the dialect is endangered. As a result, not much literature is available in Iḅani. Presently, there are rising interests in the revitalization of the Iḅani dialect. This, however, is not the thrust of this work.

This paper is a linguistic description of the pronominal system of Iḅani. There are two reasons why this study is necessary. First, in languages generally, the pronominal system is most unlikely to undergo change in the face of endangerment because it is usually a small closed class (Obikudo, 2012), hence, it makes for a good linguistic analysis. Secondly, although pronouns have always been defined as belonging to a group of closed class words (Dixon, 2010; Velupillai, 2012), this view is changing with current realities in the modern world. According to Lauscher et al. (2022, p. 1221), "the world of pronouns is changing – from a closed word class with few members to an open set of terms to reflect identities", creating complexities in pronominal systems. This observation by Lauscher et al., is an indication that even the pronominal system is not safe. Although the Iḅani pronominal system has remained a closed class, it presents complexities that may pose a problem to language learners and is thus worthy of investigation.

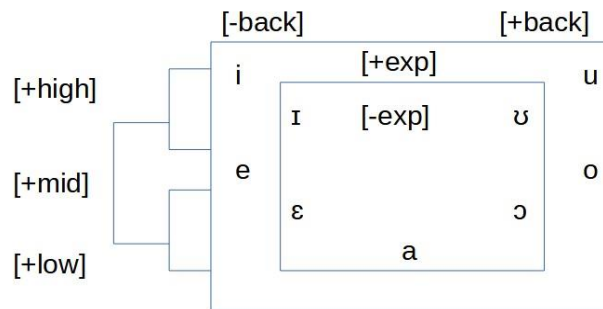
Typically, pronouns make reference to participants in the speech act. They are used to refer anaphorically to either nouns or noun phrases. They also reflect such grammatical categories as number, case, and gender. Pronouns may be classified according to their function and usage. In this work, six sub-classes of pronouns are identified and discussed namely, personal, reflexive, reciprocal, demonstrative, interrogative, and indefinite pronouns.

## **2. A brief overview of the Iḅani sound system**

Iḅani operates a level tone system consisting of a low and a high plus a downstepped high tone. The low tone is not marked in the orthography, while the high tone is marked with an acute accent (á) and the downstepped high with a macron (ā). The consonant system consists of twenty five phonemes that include four nasals /m n ɲ ŋ/, ten plosives /p b t d k g kp gb k<sup>w</sup> g<sup>w</sup>/, one implosive /ɓ/, one affricate /dʒ/, five fricatives /f v s z h/, three central approximants /r j w/, and one lateral approximant /l/. The orthographic representations of the consonants are identical to their phonetic representations except for /ŋ<sup>w</sup>/, /k<sup>w</sup>/, /g<sup>w</sup>/, /ɓ/, /dʒ/, /j/ which are written with the symbols nw, kw, gw, ɓ, j, and y respectively.

There are nine vowels that make up the Iḅani vowel system /i ɪ e ε a ɔ o ʊ u/ represented by the orthographic symbols i, ɪ, e, ɛ, a, ɔ, o, ʊ, and u respectively. These nine vowel phonemes are divided into two harmonic sets based on the size of the pharynx, which may be expanded or narrowed by either advancing or retracting the root of the tongue thus producing expanded ([+exp]) and non-expanded ([-exp]) vowels, otherwise known as wide and narrow vowels respectively. The wide vowels are written

with plain letters while the narrow vowels are written with a subdot or a vertical stroke underneath the plain letter. The phonemic vowel chart below show that /i e o u/ are [+exp] while /ɪ ɛ ɔ ʊ/ are [-exp]. Vowels of both sets do not co-occur in simple words and in some cases across morpheme boundary. However, /a/ is considered an opaque vowel because it co-occurs with both sets of vowels.



*Figure 1: A phonemic chart of Iḥani vowels*

### 3. Iḥani pronouns

The pronoun class in Iḥani is the second largest group in the nominal class after the noun. We can distinguish the personal, reflexive, reciprocal, demonstrative, interrogative, and indefinite pronouns which will be discussed in the following subsections.

#### 3.1 Personal pronouns

The personal pronouns exhibit the grammatical categories of person, number, gender, and case. It is this attribute of the personal pronoun that distinguishes it from the other pronoun types. In terms of person, we have the first, second, and third persons. In other words, there are three participants in the speech act – the speaker or addresser who is the first person, the addressee or the entity being spoken to, who is the second person, and the third person, that is, "some person or thing which is neither speaker nor addressee" (Dixon, 2010, p. 190). In terms of number, we recognize the singular and plural pronoun forms. The third person singular pronoun marks a three-way gender distinction based on sex, distinguishing between feminine, masculine, and neuter and a two-way gender distinction based on humanness – human and non-human. The feminine and masculine forms mark human reference (except for cases of personification as in folklore) while the neuter form marks non-human reference. In terms of case, the pronouns may be nominative (functioning as the subject of the sentence), accusative (functioning as the object of the sentence), or genitive (expressing possession or a sense of belonging).

There are two forms of personal pronouns in Iḥani, the short and long pronouns (Fomḥo, 1975; Benamaisia, 1997). The short forms correspond to bound pronouns while the long forms correspond to free pronouns. Bound pronouns typically attach to

a predicate and may be an obligatory component of the predicate. For languages with obligatory bound pronouns, free pronouns are likely to be used sparingly for the purposes of contrast, emphasis, or in copula complement or verbless clause complement function (Dixon, 2010). In Iḅani, the short pronouns can never be omitted. They are obligatory in all functions, whenever they appear. Apart from the third person singular neuter pronoun, all other personal pronouns have short forms. The short personal pronouns or bound pronouns may function as the subject and object of sentences. They are used in non-emphatic situations, that is, when the subject or object is not being emphasized. The short forms are all monosyllabic as seen in example (1) below. According to Dixon, (2010), "... pronouns are amongst the most frequently used words in any language making them particularly susceptible to phonological reduction" (p. 192). Bound pronouns develop out of free pronouns and are often a shortened form of the free pronouns. In Iḅani, they are derived by retaining the first syllable of the free pronoun while dropping the rest. The result is a V, CV, or N as seen in example (1).

- (1)
- |    |     |     |   |      |
|----|-----|-----|---|------|
| a. | a,  | i/í | '1 <sup>st</sup> person singular'           | (V)  |
| b. | í/í |     | '2 <sup>nd</sup> person singular'           | (V)  |
| c. | á   |     | '3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular feminine'  | (V)  |
| d. | o/ó |     | '3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular masculine' | (V)  |
| e. | wá  |     | '1 <sup>st</sup> person plural'             | (CV) |
| f. | ó/ó |     | '2 <sup>nd</sup> person plural'             | (V)  |
| g. | n   |     | '3 <sup>rd</sup> person plural'             | (N)  |

Tone plays a crucial role in some Iḅani personal pronouns where it distinguishes between two pronoun forms as seen in example (1). For instance, the third person singular masculine pronoun and second person plural pronouns have the same short form that can only be distinguished by tone. While the third person singular masculine pronoun bears a low tone (o/ó), the second person plural bears a high tone (ó/ó). In addition, the bound pronouns *i/í*, *í/í*, *o/ó*, and *ó/ó* harmonize with the vowels of their host (which is either a noun or a verb) in a construction. This is not the case for the free pronouns which are not restricted by vowel harmony in their occurrence. For a more detailed illustration, we shall examine the personal pronouns based on their case functions.

### 3.1.1 Nominative case: Subject pronouns

Both free and bound pronouns may function as the subject of a sentence. The free forms function as the subject of the sentence two environments; in emphatic utterances where the pronoun is being emphasized or contrasted with another entity and as copula complements. It is also the preferred form when the following word begins with a vowel. The bound forms occur elsewhere.

- First person singular* – Free form: **iri**      Bound form: **a**
- (2)
- |    |     |       |     |          |                  |                        |
|----|-----|-------|-----|----------|------------------|------------------------|
| a. | iri | finyé | má  | fĩ-m     | 'I ate the food' | (emphatic/contrastive) |
|    | 1SG | food  | DEF | eat-FACT |                  |                        |
| b. | míē | Ø     | iri |          | 'It is I'        | (copula complement)    |

	DEM	COP	1SG	
c. a	fĩnyẹ	má	fĩ-m	'I ate the food'
	1SG food	DEF	eat-FACT	

*Second person singular* – Free form: **írí**                      Bound form: **í, ị**

(3) a.	írí	nji	kuú-m	'You caught fish'	(emphatic/contrastive)
	2SGfish		catch-FACT		
b.	míē	∅	írí	'It is you'	(copula complement)
	DEM	COP	2SG		
c.	ị	wáří	mú-áří	'You are going home'	
	2SGhouse		go-PROG		
d.	í	mingi	bú-bẹm	'You will drink water'	
	2SG water		drink-FUT		

The bound form of the second person singular pronoun in the nominative case harmonizes with the vowels in the following word. It is **i** when it occurs with [+ exp] vowels as in example (3c) and **ị** when it occurs with [- exp] vowels as in example (3d). The same applies to the third person singular masculine pronoun as seen in examples (5c & d) and the second person plural pronoun in examples (8c & d).

*Third person singular feminine* – Free form: **áří**                      Bound form: **á**

(4) a.	áří	ibí-m	'She is good'		
	3SG.F	be.good-FACT			
b.	míē	∅	áří	'This is she (her)'	(copula complement)
	DEM	COP	3SG.F		
c.	á	duḃá-m	'She is big'		
	3SG.F	be.big-FACT			
d.	*á	ibí-m	'She is good'		
	3SG.F	be.good-FACT			

The example in (4a) indicates the use of the free pronoun before a vowel-initial word. The use of the bound form in this environment will be ungrammatical as seen in example (4d). This also applies to the short form of the third person singular masculine pronoun.

*Third person singular masculine* – Free form: **ori**                      Bound form: **o, ọ**

(5) a.	ori	ibí-m	'He is good'		
	3SG.M	be.good-FACT			
b.	míē	∅	orí	'This is he'	(copula complement)

	DEM	COP	3SG.M	
c.	o		ḃó-ḃem	'He will come'
	3SG.M		come-FUT	
d.	ọ		tụwọ má sị́-áři	'He is calling the child'
	3SG.M	child DEF	call-PROG	

*Third person singular neuter – anị*

(6)	a.	anị	sóóró-áři	'It is falling'
		3SG.N	fall-PROG	
	b.	anị	ḃurụ́-m	'It is rotten'
		3SG.N	be.good-FACT	

*First person plural – Free form: wámị̀nị* Bound form: wá

(7)	a.	wámị̀nị	mú-áři	'We are going'
		1PL	cook-PROG	
	b.	míē	∅ wámị̀nị	'This is we (us)' (copula complement)
		DEM	COP 1PL	
	c.	wá	naá-mám	'We have heard'
		1PL	hear-PFV	
	d.	wá	ḃó-áři	'We are coming'
		1PL	cook-PROG	

*Second person plural – Free form: ọ̀mị̀nị* Bound form: ọ́, ọ̀

(8)	a.	ọ̀mị̀nị	ákí-m	'You took it'
		2PL	take-FACT	
	b.	míē	∅ ọ̀mị̀nị	'This is you' (pl.) (copula complement)
		DEM	COP 2PL	
	b.	ọ́	naá-mám	'You have heard'
		2PL	hear-PFV	
	c.	ọ́	ḃó-áři	'You are coming'
		2PL	cook-PROG	

*Third person plural – Free form: nnị* Bound form: n

(9)	a.	nnị	ḃó-áři	'They are coming'
		3PL	come-PROG	

b. mīē	Ø	nnīī	'This is them'	(copula complement)
DEM	COP	3PL		
c. n	fī-áṛī		'They are eating'	
	3PL eat-PROG			
d. n	ḥó-mám		'They have come'	
	3PL come-PFV			

The vowels of the free forms do not harmonize with the vowels in the following word. In (2a & 8a), the long pronoun forms co-occur with the [- exp] vowels in the following word and with [+ exp] vowels in example (7a & 9a).

### 3.1.2 Accusative case: Object pronouns

As earlier mentioned, both free and bound pronouns function in the accusative case. Free pronoun forms function as the object of the sentence in emphatic or contrastive contexts, while bound pronouns may be used in other environments. However, there is another form of the object pronoun that is used when the pronoun precedes a word beginning with a vowel or is preceded by a bound subject pronoun. These special forms are derived from the first and second persons singular and the third person singular masculine pronouns only by affixing a monosyllabic suffix -ye to the short forms of these pronouns. The suffix bears the same tone as its host. All other persons utilize their free forms in these contexts.

<i>First person singular</i> – Free form: ɪrī			Bound form: i, ɪ	Special form: iye
(10) a.	ɪrī	ɪrī sīī-m	'You called me' (emphatic/contrastive)	
	2SG	1SG call-FACT		
b.	ɪrī	i nimí-m	'You know me'	
	2SG	1SG know-FACT		
c.	ɪrī	ɪ sīī-m	'You called me'	
	2SG	1SG call-FACT		
d.	ɔ	iye arí-m	'He saw me'	
	3SG.M	1SG see-FACT		

In example (10d), the bound pronoun still harmonizes with the vowels of the verb even though there is an intervening pronoun. The special form does not participate in vowel harmony.

<i>Second person singular</i> – Free form: ɪrī			Bound form: í, ɪ	Special form: íyé
(11) a.	árī	ɪrī yíi-m	'She gave birth to you'	
	(emphatic)			
	3SG.F	2SG give.birth-FACT		

- b. ári í yíi-m 'She gave birth to you'  
3SG.F 2SG give.birth-FACT
- c. ori í dọghú-m 'He looked for you'  
3SG.M 2SG look.for-FACT
- d. ọ íyé kíká-m 'He resembles you'  
3SG.M 2SG resemble-FACT

*Third person singular feminine* – Free form: **ári** Bound form: á

- (12) a. wámìṅì ári arí-m 'We saw her'  
1PL 3SG.F see-FACT
- b. ori á ọ̀lẹ̀má-m 'He loves her'  
3SG.M 3SG.F love-FACT

Example (12a) is a case of the free pronoun preceding a vowel-initial word.

*Third person singular masculine* – Free form: **ori** Bound form: o, ọ Special form: oye

- (13) a. nnì ori nimí-m 'They know him'  
3PL 3SG.M know-FACT
- b. ọ̀ o dighí-i 'Come and look at him'  
come 3SG.M look.at-IMP
- c. ári ọ nẹngí-m 'She is older than him'  
3SG.F 3SG.M surpass-FACT
- d. ọ oye arí-m 'He saw him'  
3SG.M 3SG.M see-FACT

*Third person singular neuter* – **anì**

- (14) ári anì arí-m 'She saw it'  
3SG.F 3SG.N see-FACT

*First person plural* – Free form: **wámìṅì** Bound form: wá

- (15) a. á wámìṅì kuru-ári 'She is waiting for us'  
3SG.F 1PL wait-PROG
- b. ori wá síí-m 'He called us'  
3SG.M 1PL call-FACT

*Second person plural* – Free form: **ómìṅì** Bound form: ó, ọ

- (16) a. nnì ómìṅì arí-m 'They saw you'  
3PL 3SG.M see-FACT
- b. nnì ó fóm-bẹm 'They will beat you'



3PL 3SG.M

beat-FUT

c. *nni ó*                      *síí-áři*                      'They are calling you'  
3PL 3SG.M                      call-PROG

*Third person plural* – Free form: **nni**                      Bound form: n  
(17) a. a *nni nimí-m*                      'I know them'  
1SG 3PL      know-FACT

b. *áři n dọghụ-áři*                      'She is looking for them'  
3SG.F      3PL      look.for-PROG

There are free forms for all three persons, both in the singular and plural, and bound forms for all the pronouns except for the third person singular neuter pronoun. All free pronouns retain identical forms in the nominative and accusative cases. All the bound pronouns except for the first person singular retain identical forms in the nominative and accusative cases. In many languages, bound pronouns function as a separate grammatical word that attaches to something else to form a phonological word. The subject and object short pronoun forms in Iḅani form a phonological word with the host, which is either a noun or a verb, via vowel harmony agreement and tonal assimilation. The bound pronoun assimilates the vowel harmony feature of the host while spreading its tone to the first syllable of the host.

The forms of the free pronouns in the singular nominative and accusative case are a combination of the bound pronoun forms and *ri/ri* while the bound forms combine with **m̄ni/n̄i** in the plural nominative and accusative case. Although these low tone morphemes have no meanings on their own, their addition to the bound pronoun forms indicate that they are grammatical morphemes that signify a number distinction between singular and plural. In most languages, pronouns cannot be segmented into person and number morphemes (Dixon, 2012). Therefore, this is a unique occurrence in Iḅani where **ri/ri** signal a singular reference, **m̄ni/n̄i** signal a plural reference, and the bound forms signal person. This implies that the free pronouns may be segmented into person and number morphemes.

Table 1: Segmentation of free pronoun forms into person and number

Person		Number	
1 <sup>st</sup> person	ì	rì	singular
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	í	rí	
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	á	rì	
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	o	ri	plural
1 <sup>st</sup> person	wá	mìnì	
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	ó	mìnì	
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	n	nì	

Based on Dixon (2010), we can identify the main features that distinguish between the free and bound pronoun forms in Iḡanì as listed below.

- i) A free pronoun consists of at least two syllables but a bound pronoun is always monosyllabic.
- ii) A free pronoun is both a grammatical word and a phonological word. A bound pronoun is a grammatical word but not a distinct phonological word. It forms a phonological word with its host and thus has the status of a clitic.
- iii) Free pronouns function in emphatic and contrastive contexts while bound pronouns function elsewhere.
- iv) Free pronouns may be segmented into person and number morphemes but not bound pronouns.
- v) Free pronouns do not participate in vowel harmony agreement unlike bound pronouns.

### 3.1.3 Genitive case: Possessive pronouns

Possessive pronouns express the notion of belonging, that something or someone belongs to a person or persons. The first, second, and third (masculine) persons singular possessive pronoun forms in Iḡanì are identical to their special object pronoun forms (see examples 18a – c). The form of the third person singular neuter pronoun **anì** remains unchanged. The other possessive pronoun forms are derived via vowel replacement, the last vowel (ì) of the long form is deleted and replaced with **a** (as seen in examples 18d – g).

(18) Possessive pronouns

- |                |                       |
|----------------|-----------------------|
| a. iye dukọ    | 'my chewing stick'    |
| b. íyé gógo    | 'your (sg.) namesake' |
| c. oye diri    | 'his book'            |
| d. ára nangwọ  | 'her friend'          |
| e. wámịna wári | 'our house'           |
| f. ọmịna diri  | 'your (pl.) book'     |
| g. nna dáa     | 'their father'        |

The bound singular object personal pronouns can function in the genitive case with specific nouns. These nouns are mostly those that are associated with parts of the body and familial relationships thus expressing inalienable possession (example 19).

- (19) a. ị búọ 'my leg'  
b. á nyíngí 'her mother'

There are independent possessive pronouns in Iḅanị and they are derived in two ways;

(i) the singular independent possessive pronouns are derived via a combination of the short pronoun forms and **nyé** 'thing'. They include, **inyé** 'mine', **inyé** 'yours' (sg.), **onye** 'his', **ányé** 'hers', and **ani nyé** 'its'.

(ii) The plural independent possessive pronouns are derived by combining the long pronoun forms with **nyé** 'thing'. They include **wámịna nyé** 'ours', **ọmịna nyé** 'yours' (pl.), and **nni nyé** 'theirs'. In both cases, **nyé** undergoes vowel lengthening. Table 2 sums up the personal pronouns and their various forms.

Table 2: Iḅani personal pronouns

Person	Number	Gender	Case							
			Nominative		Accusative			Genitive		
			Short form	Long form	Short form	Long form	Special form	Short form	Long form	Independent form
1st	SG		a	iri	i, i	iri	iye	i, i	iye	inye
	PL		wá	wámini	wá	wámini		wá	wámina	wámina nye
2nd	SG		í, í	iri	í, í	iri	iyé	í, í	iyé	inye
	PL		ó, ó	omini	ó, ó	omini		ó, ó	omina	omina nye
3rd	SG	Masc.	o, o	ori	o, o	ori	oye	o, o	oye	onye
		Fem.	á	ari	á	ari		á	ara	anye
		Neuter		ani		ani			ani	ani nye
	PL		n	nini	n	nini		n	nna	nini nye

### 3.2 Reflexive pronouns

There are two ways of expressing the reflexive in Iḅani:

i) By the addition of **ḅu gḅoru**, a compound consisting of **ḅu** 'self', 'body' and **gḅorú** 'whole', to the personal pronouns. Together, they express the notion of 'one's self'. This reflexive form combines with the bound singular object pronoun forms and the free plural pronouns. In the case of the plural pronouns, however, **ḅu** is deleted but its meaning is still implied. The form of the first person plural differs slightly. Instead of **wámini**, we have **mína** which is a shortened form of the possessive pronoun. In all the forms, the pronouns precede the compound. The tones of the compound word also vary according to the tone of the personal pronoun. With high toned first syllable pronouns, the first two syllables of the compound bear high tones also, while in pronouns with a low toned first syllable, the compound bears low tones throughout as in the cases of the second and first persons singular respectively.

The reflexive form of the third person singular neuter pronoun takes a slightly different form from the others. It combines with **ḅu** 'self' alone to express reflexivity (see example 24). This is the only way reflexivity is expressed in the third person singular neuter pronoun. Note that when **ḅu** 'self' alone combines with the plural personal pronouns, it expresses reciprocity (see section 3.3)

*First person singular:* ị bụ gbọrụ 'myself'

(20) ị bụ gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'I did it myself'  
1SG self whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*Second person singular:* ị bụ gbọrụ 'yourself'

(21) ị bụ gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'You did it yourself'  
2SG self whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*Third person singular masculine:* ọ bụ gbọrụ 'himself'

(22) ọ bụ gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'He did it himself'  
3SG.M self whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*Third person singular feminine:* á bụ gbọrụ 'herself'

(23) á bụ gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'She did it herself'  
3FSG self whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*Third person singular neuter:* anị bụ 'itself'

(24) anị bụ anị mịẹ-m 'It did it itself'  
3SG.Nself 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*First person plural:* mína gbọrụ 'ourselves'

(25) mína gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'We did it ourselves'  
1PL whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*Second person plural:* ọmíni gbọrụ 'yourselves'

(26) ọmíni gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'You did it yourselves'  
2PL whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

*Third person plural:* mína gbọrụ 'ourselves'

(27) mína gbọrụ anị mịẹ-m 'They did it themselves'  
3PL whole 3SG.Ndo-FACT

ii) The second way of deriving reflexive pronouns is by the addition of the morpheme **ḡaránā**, a form that expresses the notion of 'self'. The high-high-downstep tone pattern on the reflexive morpheme **ḡaránā** is maintained when occurring with a high tone pronoun as in the first and second persons plural pronouns, but when occurring with a low tone pronoun as in the first person singular and third person plural, the first syllable assimilates to the low tone of the preceding pronoun thus becoming low-high-downstep. It combines with the bound singular pronouns, while the plural pronouns are reduplicated. For the first person plural, it is the short form that is repeated, while for the second and third persons plural, the long forms are followed by the short forms. This reduplication process is employed to denote plurality.

*First person singular:* ị ḡaránā 'myself'

(28) ị ḡaránā mú-m 'I went myself'  
1SG self go-FACT

*Second person singular:* í ɓaránā 'yourself'

- (29) í ɓaránā mú-m 'You went yourself'  
2SG self go-FACT

*Third person singular masculine:* ɔ ɓaránā 'himself'

- (30) ɔ ɓaránā mú-m 'He went himself'  
3SG.M self go-FACT

*Third person singular feminine:* á ɓaránā 'herself'

- (31) á ɓaránā mú-m 'She went herself'  
3SG.F self go-FACT

*First person plural:* wá wá ɓaránā 'ourselves'

- (32) wá wá ɓaránā mú-m 'We went ourselves'  
1PL 1PL self go-FACT

*Second person plural:* ɔmɪnɪ ɔ ɓaránā 'yourselves'

- (33) ɔmɪnɪ ɔ ɓaránā mú-m 'You went yourselves'  
2PL 2PL self go-FACT

*Third person plural:* nnɪ n ɓaránā 'themselves'

- (34) nnɪ n ɓaránā mú-m 'They went themselves'  
3PL 3PL self go-FACT

### 3.3 Reciprocal pronouns

To express reciprocity or mutual action, only the plural personal pronouns are combined with the monosyllabic morpheme **ɓú** 'self'. In addition, the first and second person plural pronouns are doubled. With the first person plural, the long form is preceded by the short form, while the long form of the second person plural is reduplicated. All the morphemes retain their original tones.

*First person plural:* wá wámɪnɪ ɓú

- (35) wá wámɪnɪ ɓú árí-bɛm 'We will see one another'  
1PL 1PL self see-FUT

*Second person plural:* ɔmɪnɪ ɔmɪnɪ ɓú

- (36) ɔmɪnɪ ɔmɪnɪ ɓú árí-bɛm 'You will see one another'  
2PL 2PL self see-FUT

*Third person plural:* nnɪ ɓú

- (37) nnɪ ɓú árí-bɛm 'They will see one another'  
3PL self see-FUT

### 3.4 Demonstrative pronouns

Demonstratives are deictic expressions that indicate the relative distance of a referent in a speech situation viz-a-viz the speaker's location at the time of the utterance (Diessel, 2013a). The primary function of demonstratives is to point to an entity or entities in the situation of discourse (Dixon, 2012). Demonstratives may be classified into adnominal and pronominal (Diessel, 1999, 2013b). Adnominal demonstratives co-occur with the nouns they modify while pronominal demonstratives function as independent pronouns that can substitute for a noun or noun phrase.

The demonstratives in Iḥani express a simple two-way distance contrast between referents that are close to the speaker as against referents that are far away from the speaker. We can identify pronominal demonstratives and adnominal demonstratives. Adnominal demonstratives include **mīē** 'this', **mīnā** 'these', and **ani** 'that'/'those'. **Mīē** is a singular adnominal proximal demonstrative and refers to a single entity that is close to the speaker while **mīnā** is a plural proximal demonstrative that references more than one entity that is close to the speaker. On the other hand, there is only one distal demonstrative **ani** that references both singular and plural entities that are away from the speaker. Whereas the proximal demonstratives are number-sensitive, the distal demonstrative is neutral to number marking. All adnominal demonstratives precede the nouns they modify.

#### (38) Adnominal demonstratives

- |             |                  |
|-------------|------------------|
| a. mīē tūwọ | 'this child'     |
| b. mīnā áwọ | 'these children' |
| c. ani tūwọ | 'that child'     |
| d. ani áwọ  | 'those children' |

The proximal pronominal demonstratives have different forms from the proximal adnominal demonstratives and include **mīmā** 'this', and **māā** 'these' while the distal pronominal demonstrative, **ani** 'that'/'those', retains the same form as the distal adnominal demonstrative. Again, while the proximal demonstratives distinguish between singular and plural referents, the distal demonstrative is neutral to the number of referents.

- |           |              |                |
|-----------|--------------|----------------|
| (39) mīmā | ibi-rń       | 'This is good' |
| SG.DEM    | be.good-FACT |                |

- |          |              |                  |
|----------|--------------|------------------|
| (40) māā | ibi-rń       | 'These are good' |
| PL.DEM   | be.good-FACT |                  |

- |          |              |                          |
|----------|--------------|--------------------------|
| (41) ani | ibi-rń       | 'That/those is/are good' |
| DEM      | be.good-FACT |                          |

In Iḥani, the singular proximal demonstratives do not exhibit gender distinction but number only unlike some sister Ijoid dialects such as Bumo, Kalabari, Nembe, and Nkoro (Jenewari, 1979; Obikudo, 2012, 2022; Williamson, 1972) that exhibit both. Table 3 below is a summary of the types of demonstratives in Iḥani.

Table 3: Iḥani demonstratives

	Adnominal	Pronominal
Proximal, singular	míē	mímā
Proximal, plural	mínā	māā
Distal, neutral	ani	ani

It can be observed from table 3 that the forms for the distal adnominal and pronominal are morphologically identical with the form for the third person singular neuter personal pronoun, **ani**, which retains the same form in the nominative, accusative, and genitive cases. Bhat (2013) reports that out of 225 languages investigated, only 18 languages presented cases where the third person pronouns were related to remote demonstratives. This uncommon occurrence is present in Iḥani as the data presented reveals that the form of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular neuter pronoun is identical to the distal demonstrative.

Bruce (1984) states that in the Alambak language of Papua New Guinea, the same number and gender suffixes are used for third person pronouns and demonstratives while Dixon (2010) opines that in languages that lack a third person pronoun, "the functional roles covered by 3<sup>rd</sup> person in other languages are likely to be taken over by demonstratives, or classifiers, or other grammatical forms" (p. 190). These observations reveal that the third person may not be a person (as in a participant in the speech act) but a form used to express the non-person in the speech act. The neutral behavior of **ani** fits this description. It is the only personal pronoun that lacks a bound form and does not harmonize with a host, and as a demonstrative pronoun, it is neutral to number.

### 3.5 Interrogative pronouns

Interrogative pronouns are used to ask questions pertaining to a person or a thing. According to Velupillai (2012), they are "pronouns used to form content questions" (p. 141). The forms of the interrogative pronouns in Iḥani are closely related to 'what' and 'who' which form the base of the derived pronoun. The identified forms are discussed below.

(42) **tɛ/tɛny** 'what'

The base form of this morpheme is **tɛ**, but it combines with **nyé** 'thing' in order to limit its reference to non-human nouns. It occurs post-nominally in a sentence.

a. ani tɛnyé 'What is that?'  
DEM what.thing

b. á tɛ goo-ári 'What is she reading?'  
3SG.F what read-PROG



(43) **tẹ sáa** 'when'

This compound consists of two morphemes, **tẹ** 'what' and **sáa** 'time', that interrogate the time of verbal action carried out by the entity being referenced.

a. á            tẹ      sáa      bọ-m            'When did she come?'  
3SG.F      what   time   come-FACT

(44) **tẹ yọọ** 'where'

This is a compound that consists of **tẹ** 'what' and **yọ** 'place'.

a. í      tẹ      yọọ      mú-áṛì            'Where are you going?'  
2SG   what   place   go-PROG

(45) **tẹnga nyẹ** 'which'

This is a compound word that consists of three morphemes, **tẹ** 'what', **nga** 'corner', 'part', or 'side', and **nyẹ** 'thing'. Together, these morphemes form a compound that asks a question which implies that there is a choice to be made between two or more things. The object of the question is always a non-human noun.

a. tẹnga      nyẹ      i      nyẹẹ            'Which is mine?'  
what.part   thing   1SG   thing

(46) **tụwọ, tẹapụ** 'who', 'whose'

**Tụwọ** is used in asking questions concerning identity and in expressing possession. The pronouns refer to a single entity. On the other hand, **tẹapụ** is a compound made up of **tẹ** 'what' and **apụ** 'people' and refers to plural entities. These interrogatives reference only human nouns.

a. **tụwọ**      bọ-áṛì            'Who is coming?'  
who      come-PROG

b. **tẹapụ**      bọ-áṛì            'Who (plural) is coming?'  
what.people   come-PROG

c. **míē**      **tụwọ** **tụwọ**            'Whose child is this?'  
SG.DEM   whose   child

d. **mínā**      **tẹapụ**      **awọ**            'Whose children are these?'  
PL.DEM   what.people   children

(47) **tụwọ nyẹ** 'whose'

This is also a compound consisting of two words, **tụwọ** 'who/whose' and **nyẹ** 'thing'. It specifies human reference only and also marks possession.

a. **mínā**                      **anyị** **tụwọ** **nyẹ**            'Whose eggs are these?'  
PL.DEM   egg   who   thing

### 3.6 Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are used to make generic reference and do not refer to a specific person or thing. In most languages, the forms of indefinite pronouns are either closely related to the interrogative pronouns 'who' and 'what', or to the generic nouns 'person' and 'thing' (Haspelmath, 2013). In Iḅani, the morphological forms of the indefinite pronouns are related to the generic nouns **ḅó** or **kíní** meaning 'person' and **nyé** meaning 'thing'. Fomḅo (1975, p. 79) identifies two indefinite pronouns meaning 'anything' and 'anybody'. These are examples of nominal indefinite pronouns. Two more nominal indefinite pronouns are identified in this study. The list of nominal indefinite pronouns thus include, **ḅenyéḅenyé** 'anything', **ḅeḅóḅeḅó** 'anybody'/'anyone'/'nobody', **nyé mámgba** 'everything', and **kíní mámgba** 'everyone'/'everybody'.

The indefinite pronouns **ḅenyéḅenyé** 'anything' and **ḅeḅóḅeḅó** 'anybody'/'anyone'/'nobody' are both reduplicated compounds consisting of the morphemes **ḅe** 'that', **nyé** 'thing' and **ḅó** 'person'. The morpheme **ḅe** 'that' is a conjunction used to introduce that-clauses after a verb. The compounds **nyé mámgba** 'everything' and **kíní mámgba** 'everyone'/'everybody' are derived from a combination of **kíní** 'person' and **nyé** 'thing' with the quantifier **mámgba** meaning 'all'/'every'.

- (48) a. a ínē ḅenyéḅenyé dughó-biēgha 'I cannot say anything'  
1SG ABL anything say-FUT.NEG
- b. a dughu-ghá sī ḅeḅóḅeḅó éghéré-ẹ 'I don't want anybody to speak'  
1SG want-NEG COMP anyone speak-IMP
- c. kīnī mámgba akpa nyana-m 'Everyone has a bag'  
person every bag have-FACT
- d. nyé mámgba sóóró-mám 'Everything has fallen'  
thing every fall-PFV

In addition to the nominal indefinite pronouns mentioned above, the expressions **tumḅó** meaning 'person' and **tumini** 'people' can also be used to make indefinite reference.

- (49) a. tumḅó ḅó-mám 'Somebody has come'  
person come-PFV
- b. tumini ḅó-mám 'Some people have come'  
people come-PFV

The morphological structure of these special expressions can be analyzed as **tum** + **ḅó** and **tum** + **miní**. This strengthens the evidence presented on table 1 that posits **miní** as marking plural in the free pronoun forms.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study investigated the pronominal system of Iḅani, an endangered Eastern Ijọ dialect. Six sub-classes of pronouns that function anaphorically and deictically were identified; personal, reflexive, reciprocal, demonstrative, interrogative, and indefinite. The personal pronouns exhibit the grammatical categories of person, number, gender, and case. Earlier works (Fomḅo, 1975; Benamaisia, 1997) identified long and short personal pronouns that have been reanalyzed as bound and free pronouns respectively based on certain grammatical and phonological features of both pronouns identified in this work. Although in most languages, bound pronouns make fewer distinctions than free pronouns (Dixon, 2012), number is fully marked in both free and bound pronouns in Iḅani, making a dual distinction between singular and plural. Also, a three-way sex-based gender distinction is marked on the third person singular free and bound pronouns.

There are no honorific pronouns and the commonly attested feature of inclusive/exclusive person distinction that is uncommon in languages of Africa (Cysouw, 2013), is also absent in Iḅani. However, the free personal pronouns may be segmented into person and number morphemes which is an uncommon feature in most languages (Dixon, 2012). Inalienable possession is expressed via the bound singular object personal pronouns that ordinarily do not function in the genitive case. Vowel harmony is typically a long distance assimilatory process that this is attested in the pronominal system where the bound pronouns still agree with their host verbs or nouns despite intervening segments.

Iḅani distinguishes between adnominal and pronominal demonstratives in the proximal forms. It also marks number in the proximal demonstratives. The adnominal and pronominal distal demonstratives are morphologically identical and do not distinguish between singular and plural referents. It is worth mentioning here that the third person singular neuter pronoun has only one form in the nominative, accusative, and genitive cases, ani, that is identical to the distal demonstratives. The neutrality of ani to the grammaticalization processes in the pronominal system confirms its status as a non-person in the speech act.

Both morphological and phonological processes interact in the Iḅani pronominal system. Morphological processes include reduction or final clipping as observed in the derivation of the bound personal pronouns, compounding which is indicated in the derivation of reflexive, reciprocal, interrogative, and indefinite pronouns, and reduplication which is used in deriving indefinite, reciprocal, and plural reflexive pronouns. On the other hand, we observe vowel harmony assimilation, vowel replacement, and vowel lengthening as phonological processes. In addition, vowel-initial words provide the phonetic environment for the occurrence or non-occurrence of certain pronoun forms. Although, these processes may pose a problem for language learners, they illustrate how morphological and phonological derivations can interact within the domain of the pronominal system, giving rise to grammatical forms that perform anaphoric and deictic functions.

---

**Abbreviations**

-	affix
Ø	empty category
1, 2, 3	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> person
ABL	ability
C	consonant
COMP	complementizer
COP	copula
DEF	definite article
DEM	demonstrative
F	feminine
FACT	factative
FUT	future
IMP	imperative
M	masculine
N	neuter (e.g. SG.N singular neuter); syllabic nasal
NEG	negation, negative
PFV	perfective
PL	plural
PROG	progressive
SG	singular
V	vowel

---

References

- Benamaisia, E. F. (1997). *A grammatical description of the Iḅani language* (Unpublished undergraduate thesis). University of Port Harcourt.
- Beręsiri, D. I. (1975). *Iḅani para ibudie (Teach yourself Iḅani)*. C. S. S. Press.
- Bhat, D. N. S. (2013). Third person pronouns and demonstratives. In M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (Eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <http://wals.info/chapter/43>
- Bruce, L. (1984). *The Alambak language of Papua New Guinea (East Sepik)*. Pacific Linguistics.
- Cysouw, M. (2013). Inclusive/exclusive distinction in independent pronouns. In M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (Eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <http://wals.info/chapter/39>
- Diessel, H. (1999). *Demonstratives: Form, function, and grammaticalization*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Diessel, H. (2013a). Distance contrasts in demonstratives. In M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (Eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.
- Diessel, H. (2013b). Pronominal and adnominal demonstratives. In M. S. Dryer & M. Haspelmath (Eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.
- Dixon, R. M. W. (2010). *Basic linguistic theory*, volume 2. Oxford University Press.
- Dixon, R. M. W. (2012). *Basic linguistic theory*, volume 3. Oxford University Press.
- Fombō, A. (1975). *Iḅani bībī dawo diri*. Port Harcourt: Rivers Readers Project.
- Haspelmath, M. (2013). Indefinite pronouns. In M. S. Dryer and M. Haspelmath (Eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. <http://wals.info/chapter/46>
- Jenewari, C. E. W. (1979). Gender in Kalabari. *Kiabàrà: Journal of the Humanities*, 2, 69-89.
- Jenewari, C. E. W. (1989). Ijoid. In J. Bendor-Samuel (Ed.). *The Niger-Congo languages* (pp. 105-118). University Press of America.
- Lauscher, A., Crowley, A., & Hovy, D. (2022). Welcome to the Modern World of Pronouns: Identity-Inclusive Natural Language Processing beyond Gender.

---

In *Proceedings of the 29th International Conference on Computational Linguistics* (COLING 2022) (pp. 1234- 1245). Association for Computational Linguistics.

Obikudo, E. F. (2012). The Nkọrọọ pronominal system. In O-M. Ndimele (Ed.). *Language, literature and communication in a dynamic world: A festschrift for Chinyere Ohiri-Aniche* (pp. 511-527). The Linguistic Association of Nigeria and M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd.

Obikudo, E. F. (2022). *The gender system of Nkòròò (Kìrikà)* (Conference presentation). 4th Symposium on West African Languages (SyWAL2022), September 21-23, University of Naples, Italy.

Velupillai, V. (2012). *An introduction to linguistic typology*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Williamson, K. (1972). *Pronouns, articles, and demonstratives of Nembe Ijọ* (Paper presentation). The Round Table Meeting on the syntactic role of pronouns, Department of Nigerian languages, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Williamson, K. & Blench, R. (2000). Niger-Congo. In B. Heine & D. Nurse (Eds.). *African languages: An introduction* (pp. 11-42). Cambridge University Press.