

THE CONCEPT OF AFFIXATION AND ITS USAGE IN ISOKO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study examined the concept of affixation as an aspect of word formation in the Isoko language. Morphology which concerns forms of words in different uses and construction is explained. It went on to explicate the concept of affixation itself which is a morphological process where bound morphemes are added to free morphemes to form new words and as it relates to the Isoko language. Theoretically, the process is categorized into prefixation, infixation and suffixation; but in the course of this study, it was discovered that prefixes and suffixes abound in the language. These two processes and their usage were discussed extensively and it was discovered that word

The Isoko language is one of the languages in Delta State; a South Western Edoid language spoken in Isoko South, North and part of Ndokwa east local government areas of Delta State of Nigeria. It is also spoken in some parts of Bayelsa State. Being an Edoid language, it means there are close similarities and resemblances between it, Edo and other Edoid languages. In other words, there is close linguistic affinity between the languages referred to as Edoid. It is also classified within Greenberg's Kwa group

of languages of the Niger - Congo African language family, (Sado, 1995:3). Other linguists who have worked on the Edoid languages since then have toed this classification. However, Williamson (1989:15) classified the South-Western Edoid languages to which the Isoko language belongs, within the New Benue-Congo sub – group of the Niger- Congo family. Furthermore, Williamson described it as one of the Pan-Edo group of Languages. The Great Bantu Migration idea of a common source of most Sub-

Saharan African languages gave birth to this large family (Ojaide 2007:3). The root of the language is further narrowed down to a migration from the original Bini Kingdom as a result of the Ogisos dynasty; the tyranny and the oppression of the Ogisos and their quest for land which led to their movement from their present homeland then to other places for succor; hence this present place called Isoko and their language. According to Idase (2005: 17), the Isoko people are “an ethnic nationality made up of people that can historically trace their ancestral roots to the Benin (Aka) kingdom, attested to by the linguistic and cultural similarities that exist between the Isoko people and the Benin (Aka) people”. Yet a few of the Isoko communities or clans have their origins attached to Ibo and Urhobo.

Language is a God - given identity of man. In other words, one is identified by the language he speaks. If you lose it you lose your identity. It plays an all important role in the life of a people. Who is an Isoko man without the Isoko language? Language is the key to the heart of the people. Hence, Kuju (1999:37) emphasized that “it is imperative for each linguistic community to nurture and develop its language and guard against its disappearance or potential disappearance” An extincting language is the one that is seriously threatened and endangered; a language that is seriously crying for revival. The Isoko language is in a state of extinction. Williamson (1990:) cried that you should “use your language or lose your language” There is no nation that could develop without its language.

According to Oye as cited by Umukoro (2016:70), “new economies like Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea were able to develop because they use their indigenous languages as the medium of communication” In consonance, Oluyemisi (2011:13) noted that, “for Nigeria to be relevant in a globalised world, it must place emphasis on rejuvenating and sustaining its indigenous languages..... for Nigeria to be relevant in a globalised world, its indigenous languages must not die” However, according to Idudhe (2002), HMH Isaac Ikime, the Odiologbo of Erohwa Kingdom, recognized this threat about the Isoko language and said “Isoko language is ruined through neglect in teaching, learning and use”. And Idudhe went further to say, “the Isoko language is in ruin and facing the danger of extinction”. Hence, the researchers carried out this research to salvage this aspect of the language by determining the affixes in the language and how they are used.

Linguists have identified four different levels in which human language could be organized and studied such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The morphological aspect is concerned with the forms of words in different uses and construction, (Matthews, 1973). Based on the linguistic approach by this definition, then morphology is a scientific study of words, their structures and functions. It is the relationship that exists among words and their internal structures, (Akmanjian, 2003:12). Hence, for every word there is an internal structure; that is to say, every

language is made of words that are structured. Each language has quite a number of simple and complex words; the simple words cannot be segmented into smaller units while the complex words can. Hans Wolf view about most Nigerian languages as cited by (Williamson, 1984:47) is that “the most difficult problems remaining after the alphabet itself is made is the problem of what can be, or cannot be written as a word”. However, in this language, words could be formed by the manipulation of some free or bound morphemes. As such, the words in Isoko language could be classified into nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs etc, as a result of some morphological processes such as affixation, compounding, borrowing, coinages etc.

The Concept of Affixation

Williamson (1984:47) observed that if we find something that cannot stand alone but needs something else to support it in what precedes or follows it, we may conclude that it is not separate word but a prefix or suffix. Hans Wolf as cited by Williamson (1994:47) described the word as a unit having one or more sounds which can stand alone. Then, affixation is a morphological process where bound morphemes are added to free morpheme to form new words. Simply put, the addition of a prefix, suffix or infix to a word in order to create a new word or inflection is affixation. The free morpheme mentioned above is referred to as the root or base. Mathews (1974:124) referred to it as ‘operand’ and Tomori (1977:32) described it as ‘the core and very heart of the word’.

The bound morpheme which is always attached to the base or root is an affix (Ndimele, 1999:12). Then, the morpheme is the different building blocks that make up a word, (Akmanjian et al :16). It is the smallest unit forming the bridge between sound and meaning in a language. And according to Tomori (1977:16), “though they are the minimal linguistic elements, they carry grammatical and/or semantic implications”. In Lyon (1981:103), “it is the basic unit of grammatical structure, though also seen as minimal forms”. The criterion for identifying morpheme by some scholars is that of meaning. That they have meaning that is identifiable in most cases. Conversely, the meaning of some may not be identified and he cited an instance of ‘ceive’ a Latinate morpheme, which does not have an independent meaning but is recognized as a unit, (Akmanjian et al (16). In addition, katamba (1993:23) is of the opinion that words must be meaningful when they occur on their own, but morphemes need not be. He cited instances of morphemes such as;

Ex (former) as in ex-wife
Pre (before) as in pre-war

to be meaningful, while morpheme as ‘fer’ in words such as ‘infer’, ‘confer’, ‘transfer’ do not convey any identifiable meaning. In all these explanations, it is therefore an established fact that some morphemes are meaningful while others do not possess identifiable meaning.

There are free and bound morphemes; free morphemes could stand on their own and be meaningful but bound

morphemes need other items to realize their meaning. The morpheme is therefore the raw material with which words are formed. For instance, the English word 'looked' is made up of two morphemes – 'look' and 'ed'; where 'look' is a free morpheme because it could be meaningful without co-occurring with any other item. On the other hand, 'ed' is a morpheme that could only be meaningful when it co-occurs with other items. Similarly, in an Isoko word 'ule' (prayer), 'u' is bound morpheme that realizes the noun 'ule', while 'le' (pray) is a free morpheme that could be meaningful alone.

If a free morpheme possesses a dictionary meaning of its own, it is referred to as lexical morpheme. But if it does not have dictionary meaning independently, it is a functional or grammatical morpheme.

Affixation in Isoko Language

In Isoko language, the term affixation is coined '**ofiba**'. Affixation is derivable from prefixes, suffixes and infixes.

Prefixation (Ofiba-emu): Longe and Ofuani (1996:89) described it as "a process by which an affix occurs before the root or base". In other words, the bound morpheme is attached to the base or root word at the back. However, Quirk (1974:98) observed that prefixes in English do not change the word class of the base, but this may not be applicable to the Isoko language. Apparently, word formation is most viable in Isoko language through the process of prefixation. There are quite a number of them such as; a, i, i,

e, e, u, u, o, o, ro, ri, okpo, uma, ubro etc. For example:

a -	zohọ (contribute)	=	azohọ	(contribution)
i -	roro (think)	=	iroro	(thought)
i -	le (pray)	=	ile	(prayers)
e -	ba (undress)	=	ēba	(nakedness)
e -	vbuhre (teach)	=	evbuhre	(school)
u -	du (pound)	=	udo	(mortar)
u -	le (pray)	=	ule	(prayer)
o -	ri (eat)	=	ore	(food)
o -	lele (follow)	=	olele	(disciple, apprentice)

Singular nouns are inflected by replacing the initial vowels of the singular noun forming morpheme such as i, i, for the formation of plural nouns. Some other plural nouns also can be inflected in two places by using any of i-, or i- plural nouns-forming morpheme (Idudhe 1990:130). Again, some nouns could be formed by inserting a prefix to a verb and an adjective. For example;

a. Formation of Plural Nouns by Inflecting Initial Vowel by Replacement

Singular

Plural

ole	(yam)	ile	(yams)	{i}
ozae	(man)	izae	(men)	{i}
orivbo	(banana)	irivbo	(banannas)	{i}
ozivbo	(pepper)	izivbo	(peppers)	{i}
olee	(walnut)	ilee	(walnuts)	{i}
emi	(talk)	imi	(talks)	{i}
abadi	(sea)	ibadi	(seas)	{i}
omọ	(child)	imọ	(children)	{i}
ovra	(bird)	ivra	(birds)	{i}
ose	(father)	ise	(fathers)	{i}

b. Formation of Plurals By Replacing Two Items in the Singular

Singular	Plural	
omote (girl)	imite (girls)	{i-i}
omozae (boy)	imizae (boys)	{i-i}
ayi (woman)	iyae (women)	{i-ae}

c. Formation of Nouns from Verbs by Inserting a Vowel a Vowel at the Initial Position

Verb	Noun
Roro (think)	iroro (thought)
Vboro (announce)	ivboro (announcements)
Ria (stay)	uria (place)
Le (pray)	ule (prayer)
Vbuhre (teach)	evbuhre (school)
Ba (undress)	eba (nakedness)
Da (drink)	eda (party)

d. Formation of Nouns from Adjectives by inserting a vowel at the initial Position

Gaga (strong/hard)	ugaga (power/strength)
Didi (deep)	edidi (the deep)
Vboma (good)	evboma (goodness)
Gheghe (foolish)	ugheghe (foolishness)
	ogheghe (fool)
Fuefu (fat)	ufuefu (fatness)
Loloho (soft)	eloho (softness)

e. Some other words are formed by inserting different prefixes to other words and the process of elision may or may not take place for this process to be completed. Examples are:

i). asij (frequency)

asijakpe	-	asjakpe (ten times)
asijani	-	asjani (four times)
asijava	-	asjava (two times)

ii). Ima (related to person)

imaava	-	imava (two persons)
imaasa	-	imasa (three persons)
imaahre	-	imahre (seven persons)

iii). Ko (every)

kesikesi	-	kesikesi (everytime)
kedekede	-	kedekede (everyday)
koriakoria	-	koriakoria (everywhere)

iv). Okpo (important, big, well-known, heavy)

okpoure	-	okpure (bigtree)
okpooso	-	okposo (heavy rain)
okpooeri	-	okpoeri (big fish)

v). ubi (seed, one, important, weight)

ubioma	-	ubioma - (weighty)
ubioso	-	ubioso - (a drop of rain)
ubiako	-	ubiako - (tooth)

vi). Ubro (part, half, last)

ubroeubu	-	ubrevbu (blouse)
ubrouho	-	ubrohoh (wrapper)
ubroeue	-	ubreue (last child)

Suffixation

Suffixation is an aspect of affixation where morphemes are affixed to the root or stem at the front. Here are some suffixes:

ru	(enter)	-	ru (enter it)
Ri	(eat)	-	riei (eat it)
Ru	(do)	-	rue (do it)
Fa	(flog)	-	fae (flog it)
De	(buy)	-	dei (buy it)

These categories of words have a combination of prefixing and suffixing in this process of words formation. The underlined morpheme is the suffix.

Ru (do)	-	iruo (work)
Ri (eat)	-	eriṣ (eating)
Gu (judge)	-	eguṣ (judging)
Ru (do)	-	eruo (doing)
Ru (enter)	-	eruṣ (entering)
Ri (eat)	-	oriṣ (food)
Du (press)	-	eduṣ (pressing)

Conclusion

From the discussions above, the researchers were able to give cases of prefixes and suffixes in the Isoko language there were no cases of infixes. It was discovered that plural nouns are formed by prefixing verbs, adjectives, and phrases. A large number of words are formed through the process of prefixation. Here are some illustrations:

Verb		Noun formed
Roro (think)	-	iroro (thought)
Le (pray)	-	ile (prayer)
Vbuhre (teach)	-	evbuhre (school)

Adjectives		Noun formed
Gaga (strong)	-	ugaga (power)
Loho (soft)	-	eloho (softness)
Vbovboma (good)	-	evboma (goodness)

Phrases		Noun formed
Bru ozie (judge case)	-	obruozie (judge)
Fa akọ (brush teeth)	-	ofakọ (toothbrush)
Ru iruo (do work)	-	oriruo (worker)

As for some of the suffixes, to coin a new word a prefix is also involved. That is there is a prefix attached and a suffix. However, the process of word

formation through affixation is predominantly at the level of prefixation.

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