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Lexical Derivation Strategies in Esan

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Abstract

Some aspects of the grammar of Esan have been studied but works on lexical derivation strategies of the language are rare. In recognition of the fundamental role of the lexicon in formal description of a language, this study examines Esan lexical items and the various morphological strategies employed to derive them. The study is based on the Ubiaza dialect given the premise that it exhibits linguistic characteristics which portray it as one of the earliest varieties of the language. The study employs the Ibadan word-list of 400 basic items as instrument of data elicitation and three Esan native speakers as consultants. Findings show that Esan uses concatenated and non-concatenated strategies in lexical derivation with the concatenated typology being more productive than the non-concatenated. The study concludes that such studies are avenues for documenting aspects of Esan grammar and, by extension, Edoid languages in general.

Keywords: lexical items; Esan; morphological derivation; (non-) concatenated strategies; Edoid.

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1. Introduction

This work examines the derivation of words in Esan. Its motivation is premised on the fundamental role of the lexicon in formal description of natural language and the dearth of studies on the morphology of Esan, an Edoid language (Elugbe (1989)). This study takes cognizance of previous relevant studies on the language such as those on its sound system (Ejele 1982, 2003; Osiruemu 2005, 2010) and those on its writing system (Okojie and Ejele 1987; and Ikoyo-Eweto 2013). The study is based specifically on the Ubiaza dialect of Esan given Osiruemu's (2010) position that the dialect exhibits linguistic characteristics which portray it as one of the earliest varieties of the language. This study is therefore aimed at documenting one of such early varieties to enhance linguistic research on Esan language.

The grammar of a language is the native speaker's intuitive knowledge about the lexicon and rules for combining linguistic items to derive acceptable/well-formed constructions based on the features of items in its lexicon. Although linguists may disagree on the precise form the grammar of human language may take, an adequate theory of grammar is expected to include phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic components. Of these levels of linguistic analyses, this work falls within that of morphology which is concerned with the study of the internal structure of words.

Elson and Picket (1976) states that every language has a lexicon in which certain stretches of sounds are associated with meanings. According to them, words, which are units in the lexicon, are basic to the discussion of the grammatical pattern of any language. Further in this regard, Halle (1973) states that:

Speakers of a language normally possess knowledge not only about the words of the language but also about the composition and structure of the words ...

He explains further that since a grammar is the formal representation of what a speaker knows about his/her language, it must therefore reflect in some fashion facts like those mentioned above. Thus, it is generally assumed in linguistic studies that natural language grammars include lists of morphological descriptions as well as rules of word formation.

1.1. Word formation

Word formation or formation of words refers to the composition of items which may constitute the vocabulary of a language. The latter is a body of items from which speakers of a given language select words with which they generate larger utterances in the language. Strategies of word formation have sometimes been described as involving a simple change of lexical categories or the derivation of complex words. Egbokhare (1990) states that although it is necessary to observe the patterns of word formation of a language, its implication for orthography is crucial as it is necessary to know what morphological relationship exists between two words in order to determine if they should or should not be separated in the writing system of the language.

1.2. Concatenated and non-concatenated processes of word-formation

Efforts abound in the literature on the distinction between concatenated and non-concatenated processes of word formation (McCarthy 1971, Lieber 1988, Katamba 1993). Concatenated processes of word formation are those in which morphemes are strung together in sequence or linearly to form words. Such processes are said to be usually amenable to simple discovery procedures. On the other hand, with non-concatenated processes, morphemes are not linearly combined and derived structures are not amenable to the methods of recurrent partials. Both structures are said to be found occurring together in the same language. The terms 'configurational'/'Non-configurational' have been proposed as

alternative to the terms concatenated/non-concatenated by Lieber (1988), who attempts to justify the question of the suitability of these alternative terms.

1.3. Data elicitation

This study employed the Ibadan Wordlist of 400 Basic Items as the instrument of data elicitation. Three adult native speakers of Ubiaza variety of Esan served as consultants, and the data was elicited through direct interview method.

2. Strategies of word formation in Esan

Available data evidence shows that the processes of word formation in Esan may be grouped into the concatenated and the non-concatenated.

2.1. Concatenated processes in Esan

The concatenated processes of word formation in Esan include but may not be fully restricted to affixation. Affixation involves the addition of a bound morpheme to a root with or without a change in the grammatical category of the output when compared to the root. Two processes of affixation, namely prefixation and suffixation occur in Esan as concatenated processes of word formation.

2.1.1. Prefixation

Esan features morphemes which take the shape of the seven oral vowel phonemes of the language, i.e. /i, e, ε, u, o, ɔ, a/. Each morpheme functioning as some kind of nominal prefix attaches to the beginning of a verb which serves as root/stem to derive a noun. The process is therefore a type of nominalization. Data presented in (1) below illustrate instances of this process in Esan.

<i>Nom-prefix</i>	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Noun</i>
1. ì-	khilèn → to play	ikhilèn 'playfulness'
2. é-	kpā → to vomit	ékpā 'vomit'
3. è-	fè → to be rich	èfè 'wealth'
4. á-	fè → to urinate	áfè 'urine'
5. ú-	nè → to run	únè 'race'
6. ó-	balo → painful	óbàlò 'pain'
7. ò-	ghàlè → to divide	òghàlè 'knife'

As regards the meaning implications of these nominal vowel prefixes, the most obvious generalization is that they derive nouns from verbs. Specifically {ì-} tends to derive abstract nouns from verb roots; {ò-} is agentive; {á-} has an indefinable reference to "anything/anybody"; {ó-}, {é-}, and {è-} express the result of an action, process or state denoted by the verb root; while {ú-} appears to be an instrumental prefix which plays a role in the realization of a process. Since verbs in Esan bear an all low tone in citation, the logical explanation as regards the tone borne by Esan prefixes is that they come with their individual level tones. All the prefixes are productive in the language. The free morpheme **gbè** is also prefixed to nouns to form verbs as illustrated in (8) to (11).

<i>verb</i>	<i>noun</i>		<i>verbal derivative</i>
8. gbè	úhì	→	gbúhì
	advise		'to advice/warn'

9.	gbè	údè	→	gbúdè
		admonition		‘to admonish’
10.	gbè	ítòn	→	gbítòn
		dirt		‘to be dirty’
11.	gbè	úbì	→	gbúbì
		slap		‘to administer a slap’

The free morpheme {gbè} means ‘to administer’. It loses its low toned vowel segment to the process of vowel elision when combined with a noun. The derivative is of the verbal category, and it appears only bi-syllabic nouns in Esan combine with this morpheme.

2.2.2. Suffixation

This involves affixes that attach to the end of the root morpheme to form a new word. Reduplication and compounding as they occur in Esan are better treated as suffixation processes because they involve the copied item being attached to the tail end of the root.

Reduplication: A simple definition of this process is that it involves the repetition of all or a part of a root morpheme in the formation of a lexical item. However, the intricacies of this process have attracted much attention. Some theorists view it simply as constituent copying (Katamba 1993) while others see it as a case of ordinary affixational morphology (Borselow and McCarthy (1984:25). Egbokhare (1990) explains that only a view that treats reduplication as a morphological process is tenable. In his words,

... all morphological processes are essentially meaning based processes which involve the combination of two or more morphemes indifferent functional relations (e.g. stem + formation). Defining reduplication simply as a process of repetition or fusion ignores this fact and reduces

reduplication to a mere formal strategy rather than the morphological process which it is.

This treatment of reduplication is supported by Marantz (1982) who defines it generally as

... a process relating a base form of a morpheme or stem to a derived form that may be analyzed as being constructed from the base via affixation of phonemic materials which is necessarily identical in whole or in part to the phonemic content of the base form.

Reduplication may be total or partial depending on whether all the phonemic materials of the stem or part of it are affixed. However, the view in this work is that reduplication is always total underlyingly. In some cases, a phonological process such as vowel elision, in particular, reduces one of the morphemes thereby making reduplication appear partial superficially. Where this reduction is absent, the process manifests fully as total reduplication. These facts are illustrated in examples (12) to (16).

Noun: Total Reduplication

- 12a. àmèàmè
'water'
- b. ízèízè
'rice'
- c. íkhwôíkhwô
'women'

Partial Reduplication

- àmâmè
'all water'
- izîze
'all rice'
- íkhwîkhwô
'all women'

Pronoun:

- 13a. ìmèìmè
'I only'

- ìmîmè
'me'

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| b. ùwèùwè
'you only' | ùwúwè
'you' |
| c. ìbhàìbhà
'you (pl.)' | ìbhíbhà
'only you (pl.)' |
| d. èlèèlè
'they only' | èlélè
'them' |

Verb:

- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 14a. yènyèn
'press' | yènyèn
'press(intensely)' |
| b. lònlòn
'drain' | lònlòn
'to drain (emphatic)' |
| c. dùèdùè
'scatter' | dùèdùè
'scatter (emphatic)' |

Adverb:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 15a. édèédè
'day' | édédè
'every day' |
| b. éghèéghè
'time' | éghèghè
'every time' |
| c. wánáwáná
'now' | wánáwáná
'immediately' |

Adjective:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 16a. yànyànò
'murky' | yànyànó
'murky (emphatic)' |
| b. gònógònò
'bent' | gònógònó
'crooked' |
| c. sònòsònò
'irritating' | sònósònó
'irritating (emphatic)' |
| d. nàghànàghà
'watery' | nàghànàghá
'watery (emphatic)' |

From the data presented in examples (12) to (16), five word classes namely noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, and adjective are affected by the process of reduplication in Esan. Vowel elision occurs consistently with words that display vowel sequences across word boundary. Thus the final vowel of the first root morpheme is elided. When the morpheme begins with a consonant segment, as described by the structure of most adjectives in the language, elision does not occur. In instances where elision occurs, re-syllabification is triggered and the C element re-associates with an adjacent syllable as evident in nouns and verbs which satisfy the structural description required for the process to occur.

Reduplication in Esan usually denotes quantity in nouns; and emphasis/intensity in verbs, adverbs and pronouns. While emphasis is also included in the interpretation of adjectives, a more interesting development is that idiophones, i.e. words whose meanings are claimed to be related in sound to the items to which they refer, are derived.

Compounding:

This process involves the combination of roots of the same or different word classes for the derivation of new words called compound words. However linguists explain this phenomenon in different ways. Lyons (1977) defines compounds as words whose stems are formed by combining two or more stems, with or without morphological modification. Jespersen (1942) perceives a lexical combination as a compound word if the meaning of the whole cannot be logically deduced from the individual meanings of the elements. Egbokhare (1990) points out that lexical combination that does not exhibit the property of atomicity cannot qualify as a compound word.

In Esan, compound words are formed through more than one type of combination of free morphemes as illustrated in the (17).

noun + noun compounds

	noun	noun	→	derived noun
17a.	àmè	éviè	→	àméviè
	water	crying		'tears'
b.	ómòn	ókò	→	ómókò
	child	motar		'pestle'
c.	úmèlèn	êbô	→	úmélêbô
	salt	whiteman		'sugar'
d.	ómòn	òkpíà	→	ómòkpíà

Egbokhare's treatment of noun + noun compounds in Emai is true of what obtains in Esan. In his treatment, all compound nouns are derived from the associative construction and compounding involves two stages. This is adapted for our description to suit what obtains in Esan.

$[_{NP} N_1-AM-N_2]$	→	$[_{NP} N_1 - \emptyset - N_2]$	→	$[_N N_1 + N_2]$
alienable		inalienable		compound
associative		associative		noun
construction		constructive		

By this treatment, underlying all compound nouns is the alienable associative phrase. The alienable phrase is first converted into the inalienable phrase through the deletion of the associative marker {-ósi-} to derive the compound noun. Also following compounding, the removal of nasality from an otherwise nasalized vowel segment, which Egbokhare termed the 'nasality erasure rule' applies to erase the nasality of the final vowel of N_1 . There is also the deletion of the final vowel of N_1 . Thus the compound noun **àméviè** is assumed to have been derived as follows:

Underlying Form: àmè # ósi # éviè
 water AM cry

AM deletion: àmè # ø # éviè

Nasality erasure: àmè # éviè

Vowel elision from N₁: áméviè (compound noun output)

verb + verb compound

	verb	Verb		derived verbal
18a.	riè	ré	→	rièré
	take	come		'to bring'
b.	riè	ché	→	rièché
	take	away		'to remove'
c.	riè	ró	→	rièró
	take	hang		'to hang'

verb + noun compounds verbs

	verb	verb		derived verb
19a.	tà	otà	→	tótà
	say	word		'to speak'
b.	gbè	ìkhènlèn	→	gbìkhénlén
	beat	play		'to dance'
c.	lè	ébàlè	→	lébàlè
	eat	food		'to eat food'
d.	òn	àmè	→	ànmè

In the compounds illustrated in (18) to (19), the final v element of the root verb is elided after compounding to derive the compound verb, e.g.

Underlying: tà # ótà

Compounding: tà # ótà

Vowel elision: {t ø ota}

Surface realization: tótà (compound verb)
'to speak'

The data in (19) gives a slightly different picture due to the nasality of the initial vowels of the input root words. Nasality in the proposed Esan writing system is represented with the 'n' alphabet, as is done for some other Edoid languages.

Noun + adverb compounds

	noun	adverb		derived noun
20a.	íkhièn fly	ásòn night	→	Íkhiásòn 'mosquito'
b.	úwâ house	ékélè inside	→	ékówâ 'room'

As with other compounds, vowel elision applies to the final *v* element of the initial component of the compounds of noun + adverb. In the second compound (20b), the ordering of the constituents is reversed to give an adverb-noun sequence. In addition, the phonological process of coalescence occurs to derive the half open back vowel /ɔ/ from the half-close front vowel /ɛ / of ékélè and the high back vowel /u/ of úwâ.

Descriptive associative compounds: These are constructs considered to be combinations of more than two root morphemes. Egbokhare refers to the process that derives them as *descriptive associative noun phrase reduction*, which he defines as the lexicalization of a descriptive noun phrase. However, the fact that such constructions exhibit atomic structure like other words, unlike their phrasal counterparts, is not in dispute. Some of the compound words are presented in (21).

The nominal outputs and the process that derives them have also been referred to as de-verbalized verbs and de-verbalization respectively (Elugbe 1984). These are illustrated below in (22).

	circumfix	root verb	→	gerund
22a.	-ú...mìn-	lèlè to eat	→	lèúlèmìn 'eating'
b.		sànsàn to jump	→	sàúsànmìn 'jumping'
c.		nàndànàdò to lick	→	nàndòúnánòdòmìn 'licking'
d.		gbèngbè to write	→	gbènúgbèmìn 'writing'

This process is also attested in Edo and Emai (Egbokhare 1990). The difference is only in the details of the segments which constitute the derivational morphemes.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined derivational strategies employed by Esan native speakers in the formation of words in the language. The examination was conducted under the two divisions of concatenated and non-concatenated processes of word formation. Prefixation and suffixation were considered as concatenated, while circumfixation was regarded as the sole non-concatenated process in the language. Reduplication and compounding were considered as sub-processes of suffixation. Available data showed that prefixation derives nouns from verbs, and verbs from nouns; while suffixation derives emphatic adjectives from adjectives. Reduplication derives nouns from nouns, emphatic verbs from verbs, emphatic adverbs from adverbs, and ideophones from adjectives. Compounding on the other hand derives nouns and verbs from combinations of words from both grammatical categories. Gerundive nominalizations are

derived from verb roots. The study has provided useful information on documentation of aspects of morphology of Esan grammar. The effort no doubt would serve as invaluable reference to further studies on the grammar of Esan and Edoid languages in general.

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