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On the Reality of the Adjectival Category in Edo

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Abstract

Previous works on Edo lexicon did not only recognize the adjectival category as a distinct word class but split it into pure and derived adjectives. This paper reviews relevant existing literature on the Edo adjective and their assumptions against the backdrop of evidence from the analysis of the internal structure of constructs assumed to be adjectives in the language. The paper demonstrates that, contrary to claims in the previous studies, there exists no basic lexical item that expresses the adjectival concept in the language. What obtains is the consistent adaptation of clausal/phrasal or complement constructions by Edo native speaker to express the adjectival concepts employed in nominal modification. A decomposition of the constituent structure of the Edo noun phrase assumed to be computed from a nominal c-commanded by an adjective is in reality an output governed by series of modification processes whose surface realization has before now been misinterpreted as adjectives that qualify Edo nominals.

Keywords: Edo; adjectives; complements; syntactic adaptation.

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1. Introduction

This paper re-examines the adjectival category in Edo¹. It provides a different analytic perspective to this lexical class and seeks to show that there are no canonic adjectives in the language.

Adjectives are words that are used to qualify nouns in languages (Abney 1983; Omoruyi 1986; Imasuen, 1993; Baker 2004; Payne Huddleston and Pullum, 2010; Omoregbe and Aigbedo 2012, etc.). Adjectives usually occur close to the nouns they modify, i.e. before the noun in head-last languages and after the noun in head-first languages. Adjectives are part of the nominal complement that provide additional information about the noun they modify.

The data for this study is drawn from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include formal and informal recordings from Edo native speakers. More data was collected in different speech situations such as family discussions, storytelling, ceremonies, religious sermons and personal interactions. This data were recorded, transcribed and adjectival forms therein were isolated and analyzed to ascertain their lexical status. The secondary sources include published works such as Omoruyi (1986) Agheyisi (1986), Imasuen (1993), Omoregbe (2003), Omoregbe and Aigbedo (2012), etc. which have attempted to examine the adjectival category in Edo grammar.

This study presents evidence to show that besides the non-existence of classificatory distinction between the so-called derived and underived adjectives in the language, Edo adjectival

¹ Edo is spoken in present-day Nigeria with over one million native speakers (2006 National Population Census) mostly found in seven Local Government Areas (Egor, Oredo, Ikpoba-Okha, Orhionmwon, Uhumwode, Ovia South-West and Ovia North-East) of Edo State. The language is also spoken natively by migrant groups in other areas outside Edo State such as Akotogbo, Idoani, Okitipupa and Akure in Ondo State, and in Oza N'Ogogo in Delta State (Imasuen 1998:40). Edo is a Kwa language of the Edoid family (Elugbe, 1989) and the New Benue Congo family (Williamson and Blench, 2000).

expressions are complex structures which have internal computations similar to the illustrations of Omoruyi (1986:294).

The remaining parts of the paper are organized as follows: section 2 reviews the assumptions of previous studies on Edo adjectival class. Section 3 presents the Edo adjectival system as forms of complement constructions. More evidence is presented in section 4 to support the argument that Edo adjective is a complex form composed of isolatable components with meanings that are different from those of the entire word.

2. Assumptions of Previous Studies

Previous studies on Edo adjectival category are few. Only Omoruyi (1986) has devoted its thrust to a detailed analysis of the Edo adjective. Agheyisi (1986), Imasuen (1993), Omoregbe (2003), and Omoregbe and Aigbedo (2012) simply examine the adjectival category as one of components of Edo grammar.

Agheyisi (1986:xx) mentions that adjectives “generally designate qualities of substantives”. She claims that they are “predominantly ideophonic” in Edo, having underived forms such as in example (1).

1. a) *dán* ‘evil, bad’
- b) *kékàn* ‘bare’
- c) *mòsèè* ‘very beautiful’
- d) *hiéré* ‘very quiet and peaceful’
- e) *máá* ‘good’

Agheyisi further claims that a derivational process in the language produces adjectives from stative verbs with the introduction of the affix “ne”, as in example (2).

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2. | Verb | Derived adjectives |
| | a) <i>nwèrèn</i> ‘to be thin’ | <i>nénwèrèn</i> ‘thin’ |
| | b) <i>khèrhé</i> ‘to be small’ | <i>nékhèrhé</i> ‘small’ |

- c) m̀̀sé ‘to be beautiful’ ǹ̀m̀̀s̀̀s̀̀ ‘beautiful’,
 (Agheyisi, 1986:xxi)

The analysis propose (at least) two types of adjectives in the language: derived and underived adjectives. The assumption is acceptable only on the premise that there is no available data to prove otherwise. However, there is evidence from additional data on Edo to suggest that this account may be an inadequate description of Edo adjectival system.

Omoruyi (1986:283) sees adjectives as words that qualify nouns. Given that they show the “attributes of persons and objects”. Omoruyi’s (1986:284) thrust was “to investigate how adjectival concepts are expressed in Edo and how some iconic adjectives are derived from other categories”. In what he calls the adjectivisation process in Edo, adjectival verbs (i.e. stative verbs) are used mainly in the expression of adjectival concepts and they become “pure adjectives” (p. 286). Examples of such adjectival verbs are as in example (3).

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 3. a) k̀̀n ‘foolish’ | f) bàá ‘red’ |
| b) d̀̀n ‘brave’ | g) kp̀̀l̀̀ ‘big’ |
| c) vb̀̀ ‘wide’ | h) kh̀̀rh̀̀ ‘small’ |
| d) màá ‘good’ | i) d̀̀nmwí ‘deep’ |
| e) kh̀̀úá ‘heavy’ | |

(Omoruyi, 1986:288).

He argues that “pure adjectives” are formed from these verbs through the process of relativisation that inserts the relativiser *ne*. His illustrations are presented as in example (4).

- 4.a) S₁[òkhùò S₂[òkhùò l̀̀r̀̀] ònà khín] (Base)
 woman woman run-pst this-one be

- b) S₁[òkhùò S₂[ò lẹ̀rẹ̀] ònà khín] (Pronominalisation)
 woman she run+pst this-one be
- c) S₁[òkhùò S₂[nè ó lẹ̀rẹ̀] ònà khín] (Rel. Insertion)
 woman that she run-pst this-one be
- d) S₁[òkhùò S₂[nó lẹ̀rẹ̀] ònà khín] (Elision)
 woman that-she run+pst this-one be
 (Omoruyi, 1986:294)

(4a) to (4d) presume that the adjectives contain, at least, two words which become three by the insertion of the relativiser, *nè* ‘that’ and later reduced by the compounding of the relativiser and the pronoun *ò*. This kind of explanation does not really capture the process that is involved in the computation of the expression in Edo but only gives an account of the derivation of relative clause constructions in the language, i.e. by the insertion of the relative marker, *ne*, between a noun and a following sentence or phrase in order to derive the output that describes such nouns.

This study agrees with Omoruyi’s (1986) analysis of Edo adjectives as being internally composed of sub-elements put together in some order to express adjectival concepts. It, however, differs from Omoruyi’s analysis on two grounds: 1) recent data on Edo does not indicate or show the existence of single-word adjectives (whether canonic or derived) in Edo, and 2) the internal mechanism used by Edo native speakers when expressing adjectival concepts in the language vary considerably from those in (4). We shall return to this in section 4.

Imasuen (1993:7–8) recognizes derived and underived adjectives. He argues that Edo adjectives (*unia eni*) are mostly derived from state verbs “through the process such as reduplication”. He lists adjectives such as *nófùà* – ‘white’, *nókàrò* – ‘first’ and *nógihínròn* – ‘seventh’ as examples of adjectives that seem to be derived. He is however silent on the nature of the

derivation process of reduplication, and the verbs from which they are derived. His examples such as *dán* – ‘bad’ and *èsi* – ‘good’, appear to be underived forms.

In similar fashion, Omoregbe and Aigbedo (2012:138), in their description of the agreement relations within the noun phrases in Edo, think that underived adjectives are rare in the language. Their examples of the few “attested real adjectives” in the language include those in example (5).

5. a) *ógbòn* as in *éwù ógbòn*
 ‘new’ ‘a new shirt’
- b) *kpàtàkì* as in *òkpiá kpàtàkì*
 ‘important’ ‘an important man’

Although Omoregbe and Aigbedo (2012) saw these examples as words in the language, their observation that the single-word adjectives are not common provides a revealing pointer to the fact that these forms may not actually exist, further justifying this study.

3. Edo Adjectives as Adjectival Complement Constructions

Adjectives in Edo are generally considered to be single lexical units in the language (Agheyisi 1986; Omoruyi 1986; Omoregbe and Aigbedo 2012). Derived adjectives are assumed to have been formed from stative (or state) verbs. In this section, a different view to the study of Edo adjectives is presented. A consideration of the following (presumed) adjectives in (6) may be a good start.

6. Underived Adjectives:
- a) *ógbòn* as in *Ùkpó ógbòn*
 ‘new’ ‘year new’
 ‘new year’

b) khérhé 'small'	as in	àmè khérhé water small 'little water'
c) dán 'evil/bad'	as in	òmwa dán person evil/bad 'an evil/bad person'
d) èsì 'good'	as in	òmwa èsì person good 'a good person'
e) èkhùè 'shame'	as in	èmwí èkhùè thing shame 'a shameful deed'

The forms in 6 are generally assumed to be underived given that they are individual lexical items which cannot be further deconstructed into smaller lexical components unlike those in example (7).

7. Derived Adjectives:

<i>Verb</i>		<i>Adjective</i>	
a) zùró be-foolish		nòzùró foolish	as in òmó nòzùró child that-is-foolish 'A foolish child'
b) khùá be-heavy		nòkhùá heavy	as in èrhán nòkhùá wood that-is-heavy 'a heavy wood'
c) tán be-tall		nótán tall	as in òkpià nótán man that-is-tall 'a tall man'

- | | | | | | |
|----------------|-------------|-------|----------------|---------------|--|
| d) bà | nọ̀bà | as in | èbè | nọ̀bà | |
| be-red/lighten | red/lighted | | paper | that-is-red | |
| | | | 'a red paper' | | |
| | | | | | |
| e) tẹ̀kpú | nétẹ̀kpú | as in | èrhán | nétẹ̀kpú | |
| be-short | short | | wood | that-is-short | |
| | | | 'a short wood' | | |

The examples in 7 are said to be derived adjectives in Edo, since they can be further analyzed into composite units. They are believed to have been derived from verbs, in addition to the relativiser *ne* and the pronoun (which may be absent as in 7e) through a derivational process such as in 4. The change from *nó* (as in 7a – d) to *né* (as in 7e) is occasioned by the respective occurrence and non-occurrence of the pronoun *o* as one of the component units in the forms. Examples 6 and 7 represent the so-called adjectives in the language, as well as their use in the Edo noun phrase structures. In the following sub-section, we present an alternative interpretation of examples (6) and (7).

3.1. Canonic Adjectives in Edo

The presumed “pure” adjectives in the language (such as those in 6a–e,) appear so only from a surface interpretation. A careful observation of these forms shows that they are either verbs or nouns, and not adjectives. In Edo, nouns are usually described in relation to other nouns or verbs with which they occur. A careful analysis of these forms reveals that they are complex structures involving computations that are either a combination of two nouns or a noun plus a verb, as in example (8).

- | | | | | | |
|-------|-------------|---------|---|------------|------------|
| 8. a) | ùkpó (óghé) | ógbòn | → | ùkpó | ógbòn |
| | year | poss-of | | year | of-newness |
| | | newness | | 'new year' | |

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| b) | àmẹ khèhé | → | àmẹ khèhé |
| | water be-small | | water is-small |
| | | | ‘little water’ |
| c) | òmwa (óghé) édàn | → | òmwa dàn |
| | person poss-of evil | | person of-evil |
| | | | ‘evil person’ |
| d) | òmwa (óghé) èsì | → | òmwa èsì |
| | Person poss-of good(ness) | | person of.goodness |
| | | | ‘a good person’ |
| e) | èmwi (óghé) èkhùè | → | èmwi èkhùè |
| | thing poss-of shame | | thing of-shame |
| | | | ‘a shameful thing/deed’ |

The examples in 8 suggest cases of nominals being qualified by verbs (as in 8b) and by nouns (as in 8a, c - e). In each instance, the head noun possesses qualities expressed by the co-occurring category. This corresponds to what Owolabi (1976) refers to as genitive constructions in Yoruba. However, a further observation of the examples in question shows that they are not simple noun-noun or noun-verb constructions, but complex constructions that function as complements of the noun with which they occur. The expanded forms can be further expanded to show that, originally, these are complement expressions (or relative phrases/clauses) as illustrated in (9a - e).

9. a) ùkpó nè ò rè óghé ógbòn
 year that 3SG be of newness
 ‘a new year’

- b) àmè nè ò khèhé
water that 3SG be-small
'little water'
- c) òmwá nè ò rè óghé édan
person that 3SG be of evil
'an evil person'
- d) òmwá nè ò rè óghé èsì
person that 3SG be of goodness
'a good person'
- e) èmwí nè ò rè óghé èkhùè
thing that 3SG be of shame
'a shameful thing/deed'

What example (9a-e) reveals is that the so-called underived Edo adjectives only appear so on the surface. However, a careful examination shows that they are internally composed of several units that make them complement constructions, making the phrases in which they occur to be complex structures. Edo adjectives are therefore syntactic components which do not belong to a morphological class. This gives credence to Welmers' (1973:274) warning that in Niger-Congo languages, one should be "suspicious of 'adjectives'", given that many of what seem to be adjectives may actually not be computations that can further be broken down.

3.2. Derived Adjectives in Edo

Edo has been described as "a verb based language"² (Omoruyi, 1990:105). This, it seems, accounts for the occurrence of verbs in the internal structures of most of the adjectival forms in the

² This is so, because "other word classes such as nouns, adjectives and adverbs can be derived from verbs" (Omoruyi, 1990:105)

language. Most of the presumed adjectives are said to have been derived from verbs. The data in this study show that the formation of Edo adjectives is not a simple case of derivation from verbs, neither are they relativised forms by the insertion of *ne*, but that they are complement phrases (or clauses) that have been reduced in form by several internal processes. First, we examine the internal structures of the so-called derived adjectives and later, the internal processes that lead to their formation. The different internal forms that have been observed are discussed in the following subsections.

3.2.1. *ne* + pronoun + verb

Under careful observation, a number of the so-called derived adjectives have this *ne*-pronoun-verb complement phrase formation underlyingly. This shows that they are actually complement phrases (or clauses) which only appear as single derived forms on the surface. The examples in (10) illustrate this.

10. a) òkpià nè ò kónrèn → òkpià n_ ò kónrèn → òkpià nòkónrèn
 man that 3SG be-foolish-PRF man that-is-foolish
 ‘foolish man’
- b) òmó nè ò dín → òmó n_ ò dín → òmò nòdín
 child that 3SG be-brave child that-is-brave
 ‘a brave child’
- c) èrhán nè ò tón → èrhán n_ ò tón → èrhàn nòtón
 wood that 3SG be-hot wood that-is-hot
 ‘a hot wood’
- d) òwá nè ò yó → òwá n_ ò yó → òwà nòyó
 house that 3SG be-high house that-is-high
 ‘a high/tall building’

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- e) èbé nè ọ vbórò → èbé n_ ọ vbórò → èbè nọvbórò
 leaf that 3SG ripe+perf leaf that-is-ripen
 ‘a ripe leaf’
- f) òkhùò nè ọ khọ → òkhùò n_ ọ khọ → òkhùò nọkhọ
 woman that she be-hostile woman that-is-hostile
 ‘a hostile woman’
- g) ọmọ nè ọ víé → ọmọ n_ ọ víé → ọmọ nọvíé
 child that 3SG cry child that-is-crying
 ‘a crying child’
- h) ùvbí nè ọ tẹkpú → ùvbí nè _ tẹkpú → ùvbì nétékpú
 girl that 3SG be-short girl that-is-short
 ‘a short girl’
- i) ìkhùò nè ìràn mòsé → ìkhùò n_ ì víé → ìkhùò nìvíé
 women that they be-beautiful women that-are-beautiful
 ‘beautiful women’
- j) àgbọ̀n nè à yé → àgbọ̀n n_ à yé → àgbọ̀n nàyé
 world that one be-in world that-one-lives-in
 ‘present world’

It can be observed in (10i-j) that the plural pronouns are retained in their original forms. The apparent adjectives in these examples are complement phrases or clauses which are perceived as adjectives only in rapid speech. The forms end with verbal elements³ because the occurring verbs are intransitive, requiring no object NP, as

³ The occurrence of the RV-suffix (see Omoregbe, 2013) which in this case marks the perfective aspect as in *-rèn* in *nọkọ̀n-rèn* ‘that is foolish’ (in 10a) and *-rò* in *nọvbó-rò* ‘that is ripen’ (as in 10e) further show that the verbs in these forms are actually functional in the language and can be marked for tense, aspects, etc.

against those in §3.2.2 below where the transitive verbs select object noun complement.

3.2.2. ne + pronoun + verb + noun

Where the verb in the complement clauses is transitive, it takes an appropriate object NP as part of its transitivity requirement (see Omoregbe 2003, 2013; Yuka and Omoregbe, 2011), hence they end in nouns. Let us consider (11a-j) as examples:

11. a) òvbi-mwé nè ò rè òkhùò → child-my that she be woman
 òvbimwé n_ òkhùò → òvbi-mwé nókhùò
 child-my that-is-woman 'my female child'
- b) òkpià nè ò rè òmàè → òkpià n_ òmàè → òkpià nómàè
 man that 3SG be old-person man that-is-old 'an old man'
- c) òmọ nè ò rè íghó → òmọ n_ íghó → òmọ níghó
 child that 3SG be money child that-is-money 'a valuable child'
- d) ìmòsè nè ò rè ébò → ìmòsè n_ ébò → ìmòsè nébò
 beauty that 3SG be white-man beauty that-is-white 'very beautiful'
- e) ùvbí nè ò rè érónmwò → ùvbí n_ érónmwò → ùvbì nérónmwò
 girl that 3SG be bronze-cast girl that-is-bronze 'a black beauty (girl)'
- f) òmọ nè ò rè ògiè → òmọ n_ ògiè → òmọ nógiè
 child that 3SG be royalty child that-is-royalty 'well respected child'
- g) íyé nè ò rè íyé → íyé n_ íyé → íyé níyé
 mother that 3SG be mother mother that-is-mother 'a true mother'
- h) òsè nè ò rè éghiàn → òsè n_ éghiàn → òsè néghiàn
 friend that 3SG be enemy friend that-is-enemy 'unfaithful friend'

In examples (11a – h), besides the deletion of the vowel in *ne*, other intermediate words such as the pronoun *o* – ‘he/she/it’ and the verbs *rè* – ‘to be’ and *rré* – ‘to be in’ are out rightly deleted. This multiple segment deletion is part of the reduction strategy of the Edo native speakers’ rapid speech realization of the complement constructions. The Edo adjectival expressions correspond fairly well with the concept of “attributive constructions” (Baker, 2004:192). Note that examples such as those in 11i – h are mostly used as appellations to the personalities being described. This appellation, not withstanding, remain complement expressions that have been shortened in rapid speech.

The status of the expressions in (11) is not different from those of the sub-ordinate clauses in the following Edo complex sentences in (12).

12a) Èdèdè, nè ò rré Ùsèlú, wú.
 Old-woman that 3SG be-in Uselu die
 ‘The old woman that lives in Uselu is dead.’

b) Èdósà gbé òfèn nè ò hín àkhé nè ò rré òtótò ágá
 Èdósà kill.pst rat that 3SG climb pot that 3SG be-in under chair
 ‘Èdósà killed the rat that climbed the pot under the chair’

These examples further support the thesis of this paper, given that Edo native speakers will recognize them as complex sentences. The complexity of the forms in (12a & b) is obviously like those in examples (9, 10 and 11), and consequently like those of every other adjectival forms in Edo. This reveals that Edo native speakers employ complex complement constructions as a strategy for expressing adjectival concepts in the language.

4. Internal Processes in Edo Adjectival Construction Reduction

The internal modification within the complement constructions has been presented in such a way that it seems like a case of random segment deletion. This section presents a series of modification processes which this study considers are involved in the derivation of complex complement constructions in Edo. These include:

- 13a) Pronominalization: the derivation of pronouns from or in relation to nouns in previous reference.
- b) Segment deletion: the deletion of a segment (sound or word forms) whose semantic value can be accommodated by morphemes resistant to economy-driven deletions.
- c) Contraction: where forms (mostly in speech) are merged for the purpose of economy motivated shortening.

These processes occur gradually, ultimately deriving surface realizations observed in the rapid speeches of Edo native speakers. Consider the serialization process in example (14), which is a reflection of the processes in (13).

14.a) Base form:

Èfòsà dé òkó, né òkó kpòlò, né òkó mòsé.
Efosa buy.pst canoe that canoe be-big, that canoe be-beautiful

b) Pronominalisation:

Èfòsà dé òkó, né ɔ̄ kpòlò, né ɔ̄ mòsé.
Efosa buy.pst canoe that 3SG be-big, that 3SG be-beautiful

- c) Segment deletion:
Èfòsà dé òkó, n_ ò kpòlò, n_ ò mòsé.
Efosa buy.pst canoe that 3SG be-big, that 3SG be-beautiful
- d) Contraction:
Èfòsà dé òkó, nòkpòlò, nòmòsé.
Efosa buy.pst canoe that-is-big, that-is-beautiful
- e) Final (rapid speech) utterance:
Èfòsà dé òkó nòkpòlò, nòmòsé.
Efosa buy.pst canoe that-is-big, that-is-beautiful
'Efosa bought a beautiful big canoe.'

Note that the relativiser insertion rule of Omoruyi (1986) presented in example 4, above, is not included here. The reason for this exclusion lies in the assumption that relativisation in Edo is a totally different process employed in the language for generating embedded clauses and for relating them to the nouns that they complement. The so-called relativiser “*ne*” is therefore *ab initio* a property of the complement construction. It is not a morpheme that is inserted at the point of deriving non-existent adjectives, neither is it a derivational affix as argued in Agheyisi (1986).

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper presents a re-consideration of the Edo adjectival system. It reviews the existing assumptions on the subject matter and presents an alternative view to the explanation of how Edo native speakers conceive of and express the qualities of nouns. Given the existing classification of adjectives as a word class in the language, the paper argues that there is no basic lexical item in Edo that expresses the adjectival concept; rather a group of items (i.e. complement clause/phrase) perform this task. Contrary to existing assumptions that there are “pure” and “derived” adjectives in Edo, this paper argues that one should rather talk about complement

clauses or phrases, or adjectival constructions, in reference to nominal qualification.

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