

Morphological Processes in the Igbo Language: Towards Enriching L2 Learners' Vocabulary

Emeribe Mary Joy

Email: joyito26@yahoo.com

Mbagwu, Ugochi R.

Email: ugojesu@yahoo.com

Department of English Language and Literature
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri

Abstract

Languages are often classified according to their morphological types- isolating, agglutinating and inflecting languages. No language however, is entirely of one type. A language may be predominantly isolating but have traces of agglutination or inflective. Igbo language belongs to an agglutinating language because grammatical relationships and word structure are indicated by free combination of elements. The paper discussed morphological processes in Igbo language. The discussion highlighted the various types of morphological processes evident in the language- affixation, borrowing calquing, clipping, compounding and reduplication. The paper argued that by showcasing and identifying the various morphological processes in the Igbo Language, it will enrich the vocabulary of language students. The paper also highlighted some of the morphological problems of Igbo learners of English language. The paper concluded that English morphology be taught systematically in our schools in order for students to internalize the rules and their exceptions.

Introduction

In the lexicon where all lexical items are stored, there are rules which govern word formation processes in language. The mental dictionary of a language which contains all existing words of a language is neither static nor exhaustive in content. It keeps enlarging and changing because language itself is organic. No language is known to possess a complete lexical content or a definite number of words in its lexicon. Hence, we say that language is both creative and productive in its system. This is the domain of morphology in language study. Let us then glance through experts' opinion on the concept for a better grasp of the subject matter.

Morphology, according to Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) refers to the study of form or forms. It refers to the mental system involved in word formation. It is a branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structures, and how they are formed. A major way in which morphologists investigate words, their internal structure, and how they are formed is through the identification and study of morphemes. Morphology as a field of study is generally divided into two major sub-fields; one is concerned with the process of inflection and the other with word formation (Osuagwu, Dike, Nwaozuzu, Nwogu and Okoro, 1997). Word formation on its own part can further be divided into two small subfields, namely, derivation and composition.

In our bid to study the processes in Igbo language, we are to examine the ways in which new words are made and the ways of using old forms to get new meanings. The study on the former will be concerned with lexical morphemes; it discusses ways of expanding the lexicon by making new word forms, sometimes to express new meanings, sometimes, to express existing meanings. The latter on the other hand, focuses attention on new meanings instead of new forms. There is of course overlap with the strategies for making new forms, most of which give rise to new meanings.

Derivation / Inflectional Morphemes

A major way in which morphologists investigate words and their internal structure and how they are formed is through the identification and study of morphemes (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011). Morphemes are often defined as the smallest linguistic pieces with grammatical functions. Morphemes can be used to form new words mainly through derivation and used to inflect verbs and nouns by means of inflectional affixes. Affixes are bound morphemes which can only occur meaningfully when attached to their roots. Morphemes such as *anuri*, *happy*, *nwoke*, *man*, *papa*, *father*, *aka*, *hand*, among others can stand on their own as independent words. Such morphemes are called free morphemes. Free morphemes have been defined as the minimal unit of grammar that is meaningful. There are other characteristics of morphemes which Osuagwu et al (1997), posit that distinguish them from other grammatical units.

- i. a morpheme is not identical with a syllable.
- ii. a morpheme may consist of only one phoneme.
- iii. a morpheme may be realized in more than one phonemic way.
- iv. the different ways which a morpheme is realized are in complementary distribution.

On the other hand, morphemes like *ghi*, indicating negation, *beghi*, *ra*, meaning *past ga*-indicating *futurity*, *chara*, indicating completion, *li and ri*, indicating intensity, are always attached to free morphemes or free forms. It entails that bound morphemes depend on the form to which they are attached to derive meaning.

Morpheme and Morph

Morpheme, according to Haspelmath & Sims (2010) can be defined as the smallest meaningful constituents of a linguistic expression. It is a minimal linguistic piece with grammatical function. In the analysis of words, it is usual to separate them into two parts. These two distinct parts into which words can be segmented are called morphs. For instance, *biaghi* has two morphs, *bia* + *ghi* meaning, not come. The term morph, as Aronoff & Fudeman (2011) state is sometimes used to refer specifically to the phonological realization of a morpheme. For example, the English past morpheme that we spell *-ed* has various morphs. It is realized as [t] after the voiceless [p] of *jump* *j/jumped*/, as [d] after the voiced [d] of *wed*/*wedded*/. We can also call these morphs as allomorphs or variants. The appearance of one morph over another in this case is determined by voicing and the place of articulation.

The English regular plural morpheme */-z –s-iz/*, this plural morpheme occurs */-s/* in words ending in */p t f θ/* that is, after voiceless sounds that are not sibilants or voiceless alveolar, palatals and affricates. */iz/* occurs only after */s z d ʒ t ʃ j/*. These are voiced and voiceless sibilants. It does not occur after voiced fricatives and affricate */iz/* occurs after all other voiced consonants not mentioned and occurs after all vowels. It does not occur after voiced fricatives and affricates. Examples – *box* is realized as *boxes* in the plural form, *glass* is also realized as *glasses* in the plural form.

Igbo verbs in the Context of Morphology

Before the morphological processes of Igbo verbs are considered, the vowel harmony and the rules of the vowel harmony must be understood. The Igbo vowels are eight in number which are A, E, I, Ị, O, Ọ, U, Ụ. For easy comprehension and according to their rule, they are divided into A and B groups of four. The vowels in group, A which is called the Otu Ụdamfe, because the vowels in the group have light sound, is made up of A, Ị, Ọ, Ụ. The vowels in the B group, which is called Otu Ụdaarọ, because they have heavy sound is made up of E, I, U, O. According to the rule, all the vowels that are contained in any infinitive word in Igbo must come either from A group or from the B group which are also called the Minus Advanced Tongue Rule (-ATR) and the Plus Advanced Tongue Rule (+ATR).

The summary of the Igbo vowels and their groups can be seen thus: Ụdaume ị n'asụsụ Igbo A, Ị, Ọ, Ụ, E, O, I, U. Otu Ụdamfe Otu Ụdaarọ. Some examples in Otu Ụdamfe are: Ịchi, Ịsụ, Ịmi, Ịkụ, Ịdụ, Ịzụ, Ịkwụ, Ịrụ, Ịlụ, Ịñụ. Some examples Otu Ụdaarọ are: Idi, Idu, Izi, Iri, Ichi, Ibi, Iti, Ikwu, Igwu, Iji.

All the mentioned verbs and other carefully chosen regular verbs follow the same morphological processes and influence the sentences in which they appear in as such.

Explanation of Terms

Clipping

Clipping is the shortening of polysyllabic words without regard to derivation. This reduction process becomes possible because of a single syllable usually the one bearing the main stress. If a word can be identified in a rather closely restricted context, the remaining syllables can be dropped because they are redundant and then clipping results (Okolo and Ezikeojiaku, 1999). It is a morphological process in which words are fragmented, thereby taking the fragments to represent the whole.

Compounding

This is a process in which new words are formed or derived by combining stems or root morphemes. In compounding the two words or morphemes to form a compound word, they must have equal morphological status. According to Omachonu (2001), this process which requires the joining together of different lexical items to form new words does not necessarily require the change of class of the words so combined.

Borrowing/Loanword

Words from one language are borrowed or loaned as lexical items in another language. Languages need to borrow for lexical expansion so as to cope with new functions and to meet up with challenges of current developmental needs in technology and science. Besides, borrowing is the productive effect of language association or linguistic contact among languages. Borrowing should be seen as a regular morphological process in every language. According to McGregor (2009), borrowing is the process of incorporating into one language words from another, It is perhaps the most common source of new words. Words that have been borrowed are called loanwords.

Reduplication/ Infixation

Another process of affixation is infixation or reduplication. The process is very common in Igbo language. Here, an infix is inserted in the middle of a reduplicated form. It is also known as morphophonemic linking element. This is a process whereby a part or a whole is copied and attached to the stem either at the beginning or at the end. Reduplicative, according to Omachonu (2001), are forms which are either partially or fully copied or added before or after the root.

Blending

Blending is a morphological process where two separate morphemes or words are joined together to form a word. If there are two vowels in each of those separate morphemes, one of such vowels is dropped before the new word is realized. For instance, nwo + oke, become nwoke, o is dropped.

Acronyms

Acronym as Syal and Jindal (2007) posit is formed by joining together the initial letters (or sometimes a little larger parts of other words and is pronounced as a word. The difference between acronym and an abbreviation is that the latter may be formed from the initial letters in a phrase and is read letter by letter, e.g. IBM, BA, M.Sc, and so on, while the former is formed from the letter of each word and is normally pronounced as a word e.g UNESCO, IMSU, ONU

Data presentation and analyses

Ways of Making New Words:

This section deals with the various ways of realizing the morphological processes with their corresponding Igbo examples. These include: Clipping, Blending etc.

i. Clippings

Nwa'ka'ego	Nwa'ka'	God surpasses money
E'me'r'ibe'ole	E'me'ri'be	what have I done to people?
Chi'ma'ramkpa'm	Chi'ma'	God is aware of my need
Chi'bueze	Chibu	God is king
Chimdinma	Chidi	my God is good
Chinualamogu	Chinua	may God fight for me
Chimsomaga	Chisom	My God is with me
Ginikanwa	Ginika	what is more precious than a child?
Uzoçhukwuamaka	Uzoamaka	God's road is fine

ii. Blending

nwo+ oke	nwoke	man
afọ + ime	afime	pregnant
di+ ike	dike	strong
añya + ñwu	añyañwu	sunshine
uzọ + amaka	uzamaka	road is fine
ozọ+ emena	ozemena	may it not happen again
ulọ+ elu	ulelu	upstair
ulọ+ ala	ulala	bungalow
nwa+ eke	nweke	child born on eke day
nwa+ afọ	nwafo	child born on afọ day
nwa + orie	nworie	child born on orie day

iii. Loan /borrowed

One ekwu tu	onekwulu	one who dies in place of another
Mugu	onye nzuuzu	one who is gullible or easily deceived
Ashebi	umuada yi' o'tu akwa	uniform attire in ceremony
Osikapa	from Hausa	rice
Agboro	from Hausa	tout
chinchị	from Hausa	bedbug
banza	from Hausa	rubbish
ahụekere	from Hausa	goundnut
koboko	from Hausa	whip
waka	from Hausa	abuse
ichafo	from Hausa	headtie
ayo	from Yoruba	onions
oga	from Yoruba	master
dada	from Yoruba	lock- hair
wuruwuru	from Yoruba	deception
ashoke	from Yoruba	a special type of cloth
akpati	from Yoruba	box
wahala	from Yoruba	trouble
onuku	from Igala	fool
ekpo	from Calabar/Ibibio	masqured
saraka	from Chad	generous

Source: (Nhazi Asusu Igbo)

iv. Acronyms / abbreviations

DGZ	dere gawazie	and so on
ONU	Onye Nche Uka	Church warden
ONI	Ome N' ala Igbo	Igbo customs and traditions

Ways of using old forms to get new meaning: compounding, reduplication, Derivation/ Inflection, Interfixation and Suffixes.

v. Compounding/ blending

Nwa+ akwukwo	nwakwukwo	student/pupil
Onye+ nkuzi	onyenkuzi	teacher
Ndi+ oshi	ndioshi	thieves
Oshi+ ite	oshite	cook
Di +mgba	dimgba	wrester
Ulo + akwukwo	uloakwukwo	school
Isi+ akwukwo	isiakwukwo	brainy
Oje + mba	ojemba	tourist

vi. Reduplication/ Interfixation

Eri (eating) stem (m) Interfix (erimeri) derived (food)
 Aka (length) stem (l) interfix (akalaka) derived(long)
 Egwu (playing) stem (r) interfix (egwuregwu) derived (play)
 Mba (state of spreading) stem (da) mbadamba derived (width)

Ngwo- ngwo		pepper soup
Anya- anya		looker
Omume		behaviour
Ngwa ngwa		quickly
Mmiri- mmiri		watery
Aja, a-aja		sandy
Oso-oso		hurriedly
Ātā m + ātā	ātāmātā	(act of chewing)
ānū m+ anū	ānūmanū	(act of drinking)
èkwu + m	èkwumekwu	(act of talking)
āsū + m	āsūmāsū	(act of speaking)
édé + r-	éderedé	(act of writing)
éti--+ reti	etimetí	(act of shouting)

vii. Derivation: Verbs to Nouns

Je'	oje	goer
ri'	ori	eater
shi'	oshi	cook
ta'	ota	chewer
ri	oriiri / erimeri	food
sie	osisi	cooking
chie	ecichi	ceremony
tie'	otito	praise
mee	mmemme	celebartion
jee'	e'je'meje	touring
yọ'	ayiyọ	(begging)

viii. Inflectional /Gerund

ri (eat) Iri	(to eat) (infinitive), eri(eating)(participle) oriri (gerund)
chaa' (ripe)	ì'cha' (to ripe)
we'ba' (take in)	iweba (to take in)
bia' (come)	na-abia (to come)
chọ' (find)	ta (to find)
chụu' (hunt)	a'chụ (to find)
ayọ (beg)	ayọ (to beg)
da' (fall)	ì'da' (to fall)
mụ' (learn)	ì'mụ' (to learn)
nụ' (hear)	inụ (to hear)
pụ' (leave)	opụpụ (exodus)

kụ'(plant)	Ọkụkụ (planting)
gã (go)	Ọgigã (touring)

ix. Inflections: Negations/ Suffixes

Ọ Bia + ghi	he/she did not come.
O' Kwu+ ghi	he/she did not say.
O' mme + ghi'	he/ she did not do
O' kwu+ghi'	he/she did not say
Me' + re'	mere (did)
O' mee' + la'	mee la (has done)
O ri + ghi	(did not eat)
Pu + Ọ	puo (imperative Leave)
Je' + ghi	jeghi (did not go)

It is generally recognized that languages have a lot in common, but we must equally be aware that there are parametric variations despite this acclaimed common core. Although it is believed that there are some regular and natural processes involved in word formation across languages, the actual principles and processes determining the derivation and existence of such basic linguistic forms vary with languages. What we have seen of Igbo morphological process so far is enough proof.

Particular attention is paid to those processes that are most productive in the language: clipping, compounding, reduplication, affixation, borrowing, interfixation, derivational and inflectional. The morphological processes examined appeal more to universal constraints; the differences being merely superficial. For instance, unlike English, Igbo lends itself more to derivational than inflectional morphology. Also, in the case of acronyms, Igbo has limited number; however this appears more in abbreviations than in real acronyms.

Morphological Problems of Igbo Learners of English Language

- i. **Language Contact:** Language contact is the synergy between two or more languages in communication within a given linguistic community. According to Weinreich in Anidi "two languages can be said to be in contact if they are used alternately by the same person"(8)
- ii. **Inconsistency in the language:** inconsistencies are inherent in the target language (English language). This inconsistency is caused by the poly systemic nature of English. For ESL learners, the plural of knife, calf and thief are knives, calves, and thieves respectively. They now wonder why the plural of chief shouldn't be *chieves? Similarly, if the plural of box is boxes, why is * oxes not the plural of ox? Inconsistency could also be noticed in the formation of past tense in English. For example, killed is the past of kill but * eated is not the past of eat. This inconsistency has a serious implication in the learning of English by ESL learners. It is often difficult for them to master all the exceptions there are to the numerous rules that exist in English.
- iii. **Over generalization and the misapplication of rules:** In most cases, ESL learners over generalize or misapply certain morphological rules for example, he/she can form * insulting based on his or her knowledge of the fact that instructive could be formed from instruct. These factors are usually the aftermath of the ignorance of certain restrictions.
- iv. **Interference:** Most errors especially the ones that have to do with suffixation, conversion and pronunciation are made as a result of the influence of the L₁ of the subjects on English. In this case ESL learners tend to insert suffixes where there should be none or omit certain suffixes as a result of its absence in their language.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, we have been able to highlight some types of morphological processes evident in Igbo Language. This included affixation, borrowing, clipping etc. The paper has also attempted to identify some morphological errors in the English of ESL learners of English language. It has also been revealed that the causes of these errors include inconsistency inherent in English language itself, over generalization of rules, misapplication of rules to L₁ interference. On this basis, certain recommendations are made to minimize the error. The following are the recommendations.

- i. The teaching of morphology should be taken seriously by those in charge of drawing the syllabus.
- ii. English morphology should be systematically taught in our schools so that the pupils/students will be in a position to master most of the rules and their exceptions.
- iii. There is need to ensure that those who teach English language in our schools are specialists in English.
- iv. Seminars and conferences should be organized for teachers on the teaching of English morphology.

References

- Akande .T.A. "Morphological Errors in the English usage of some Nigerian Learners: causes and Remedies <http://ww.academic.edu>
- Aronoff, M. &Fudeman, K. *What is Morphology?* (2011). West Sussex: Wiley- Black Publishers. *GCE, JAMB*. Onitsha: A.c Global Publishing
- Haspelmath, M. & Sims, A.D (2010). *Understanding Morphology*. London: Hodder Education Learning. *Linguistics (NJALL)* 54-65.
- McGregor, W. B. (2009).*Linguistics: An Introduction*. New York : Continuum International Publishing
- Okafo, C.U. & Eweluwa, U.(2012). *Nhazi Asusu Igbo Maka Ule Sinio Sekondiri na Kolege, WASSCE, NECO*
- Omachonu, G. S. (2001). 'Igala Morphological Processes' in *Nsukka Journal of African Languages*
- Osuagwu, B.I.N, Dike, G.A., (et'al) (1997) *Fundamentals of Linguistics*. Owerri: Colon Concepts Ltd.
- Syal, P & Jindal, D.V. (2007) *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language, Grammar and Semantics*. Delhi: PHI