

Tonological Analysis of Igbo Prefixes

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ABSTRACT

This paper which studies the tonological analysis of Igbo prefixes draws its data from the standard Igbo and uses a descriptive approach in its analysis of data. The study shows that tone is an essential factor in Igbo prefixes since it is the tone that gives meaning to each prefix in Igbo. Such categories of Igbo prefixes identified based on their grammatical functions (infinitive, agentive, gerund, negative and progressive markers) and manner of production (oral and nasal prefixes) largely depend on tones in order to work, be meaningful and function effectively in Igbo. The researcher equally observed that the tone of Igbo oral/nasal prefixes is determined by their grammatical functions and context. Based on the grammatical functions, the study shows that infinitive marker prefixes, “i- and i-” and the negative marker prefixes, “a- and e-” in Igbo are always on high tone while the agentive marker prefixes, “m-, n-, o- and o-” and the gerund marker prefixes, “o- and o-” are always on low tone. Context determines the tone of progressive marker prefixes which runs in a particular order depending on the following verb root. When the verb root that the prefix is attached to is a high-tone one, then the prefix takes a low tone but if the verb root is a low-tone one, the prefix assumes a high tone. The study equally proves that Igbo prefixes which comprise single consonants and vowels which are bound morphemes bear tones and form syllables in the context of words.

Keywords: Morpheme, affixation, prefix, tone, tone bearing unit, infinitive

INTRODUCTION

Growth which is an important feature of language is only made possible through the formation of new words and by so doing; languages accommodate new ideas, concepts and others. Different languages of the world have different ways of forming words not only to enrich their languages but to accommodate innovations in the society. These word formation processes which are the major concern of morphologists in language studies include affixation, compounding, blending, re-duplication and so on. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis is on affixation as it concerns prefixes. Affixation is a process of forming new words by the addition of affixes in a language. Affixes such as prefixes, infixes, suffixes and others are usually bound morphemes since they cannot be in isolation and be meaningful. Not only that in Igbo, they must occur with verb stems but they must also have tone marks in order to make them clearer and more meaningful to the readers and hearers. These tone marks are also very important in affixes because some affixes are similar orthographically, but when they are tone marked, one will be able to differentiate one from the other. It is on this note that the author deemed it necessary to carry out a tonological analysis of Igbo prefixes. Igbo is one the languages that belong to the Benue Congo family of languages. The tone marking convention used in this paper is that all the tones are marked. This paper comprises four sections. This first section is the introduction followed by the theoretical background which forms the second section. The third section is the analysis of data while the fourth section is the summary of findings and conclusion.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research work is to carry out a tonological analysis of Igbo prefixes, while the specific objectives are to –

- i. Find out the relevance of tone on Igbo prefixes.

- ii. Examine the different categories of prefixes in Igbo with the tones associated with each of the categories.
- iii. Find out the determinants of tones of Igbo prefixes.

Research Questions

The following research questions are structured based on the objectives of this study:

- i. What is the relevance of tone on Igbo prefixes?
- ii. What are the different categories of prefixes in Igbo and the tones associated with each of them?
- iii. What are the determinants of tones of Igbo prefixes?

Igbo Language

Igbo is one of the indigenous languages in West Africa that belongs to the Benue Congo Family. It is spoken by the South Eastern people of Nigeria which comprise people from such states as Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Delta and Imo. Based on the population of the speakers, Igbo is classified as one of the three major Nigerian languages. The Language has many varieties based on the geographical location of the speakers but standard Igbo which is the one investigated in the present research is the variety that is taught at the different levels of education and equally used when people from different Igbo varieties come together. The term, Igbo refers to the language as well as the ethnic group that owns the language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher gathered data for this study from a total number of ninety (90) adult male and female Igbo native speakers within the age range of 20 – 65 years during association and club meetings where the people from different Igbo speaking States gathered and consequently used standard Igbo in their speeches. The research population comprises 45 male and 45 female Igbo native speakers across the six Igbo speaking states (Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, Anambra, Delta and Imo) in the South East region of Nigeria in West Africa. The researcher observed and listened to their speeches; tape recorded and transcribed the relevant data which she used for the analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research work is anchored on previous studies done on the area related to the research topic under investigation. These previous researches are reviewed below so as to serve as sources of light to the topic under discussion and to show the gap in knowledge which the researcher uses this study to fill.

According to Babarinde (2009), affixes refer to bound morphemes that occupy various structural positions each time they are attached to the verb roots. From the author's definition of affixes, one can see that roots are mandatorily required by affixes in the morphological process of forming words. Affixes are classified based on two different criteria: according to their position in the word and according to their functions in the structure of phrases or sentences (See Ndimele 1999 and Zapata 2007). According to the authors, based on their position in the word, such classes of affix as prefixes, infixes, suffixes and others abound.

In terms of the roles these affixes perform in different languages, Ndimele (1999) and Zapata (2007) classify them into derivational affixes (derivational morphemes or derivations) and inflectional affixes (inflectional morphemes or inflections). Ndimele (1999) goes further to say that a process in morphology which requires attaching affixes to the roots or bases of words is referred to as affixation.

Oghiator (2011) while citing Aronoff and Kristen (2008) claims that in English, some affixes can be attached to two or more parts of speech/form classes. For them, an example of such an affix is “-ish” which may be attached

to lexical items that are nouns as in childish, bookish, girlish and prudish, adjectives such as oldish and smallish, verbs like ticklish. From the examples given by the authors, one can see that the affix, “-ish” is a derivative one which performs the derivative function of forming adjective from noun and verb respectively. Moreover, unlike Igbo affixes which are attached only to the verbs as we shall see later, the English affixes as we saw in the examples above can be attached to the nouns, adjectives or verbs.

In terms of prefixes, Xhina (2014) while quoting (Quirk, 1985, pp.1540-1546) identifies some categories of English prefixes to include prefixes of attitude such as pro-,anti- contra-,counter- and co-), reservative and deprivative such as dis-, un- and de-, prefixes that mark negatives such as a-, un-, dis-, non-, pejorative ones like crypto-, mal-, pseudo- and mis-, prefixes which serve locative functions fore-, sur-, circum-, mid-, retro-, over-, intra-, out-, sub, supra-, super-, ultra-, inter-, under-), time and order prefixes such as fore-, pre-, ex-, noe-, ante- and post-and repetition prefixes such as re- as in such words as rebuild, and re-write.

Mensah (2010) in his study of Efik prefixes observes that conditions such the stem’s phonology, form class of the stem and the semantic value of the prefixes determine the position of the prefixes. The author also claims that the structure of prefixes in Efik vary depending on agreement which is also based on the principle of vowel harmony.

Concerning the functions of prefixes, Oghiator (2011) in his comparative study of English and Ukwuani observes that in English and Ukwuani prefixes help for derivative purposes as shown in these examples:

English:

Here is the information formatted into a clear table.

Language	Prefix	Root	Root Meaning / Part of Speech	Derived Word	Derived Meaning / Part of Speech
English	em-	bitter	Noun/Adjective	embitter	Verb
English	em-	power	Noun	empower	Verb
English	en-	slave	Noun	enslave	Verb
Ukwuani	o-	de	Verb ("to write")	ode	Noun ("writer")
Ukwuani	o-	zaa	Verb ("to sweep")	oza	Noun ("cleaner")

Source: Adapted from Oghiator (2011).

Maduagwu (2009) in a study of negative morphemes (affixes) in Ògbahù dialect of Ìgbò identifies four variants which are allomorphic to include Á ... ho (for negatives which are indicative and infinitive), Á ... na (for negative plural imperatives), Á ... nà (for negative which shows present perfective tenses) and Í ... na (for negative which show singular imperative). Based on the author’s findings, it is evident that in the dialect studied; these four variants of the same morpheme perform different grammatical functions in the dialect of Ògbahù Ìgbò.

From the foregoing review, it is clear that prefixation is a viable tool for creating new words which help to accommodate new ideas into languages and consequently helps to enrich the languages in question. Having reviewed the roles that prefixes perform in some languages, it is also important to note that in some tone languages, tone has a crucial role to perform in prefixes as shown in the following review.

Rhycroft (1980) in the study of Ndebele tone observes that Ndebele people employ prefixal high tone in all forms of nouns that belong to type A (the nouns which have low tones in their vocative usage). The author uses the following examples for illustration: ábántu (people) ábántwana (children).

Newman (1984) as cited in Newman (1986) observes that in Hausa, nouns which indicate someone's origin or nationality are formed by attaching a prefix *ba-* with an intrinsic low tone as evident in this example: *bàkátsíne* 'a Katsina man'.

Moreover, Newman in his (1986) study says that, Hausa has a "ma-" prefix with an intrinsic tone which is high and that it serves as agentive noun markers. The author gives example like this: *ma'rubuucf i' i* writer, *ru'buuta'* to write.

Adapted from Newman (1986)

Based on the whole reviewed studies, there is no evidence of studies in the tone of prefixes in the standard variety of Igbo. It is based on this gap in knowledge that the researcher uses this research to fill the gap in knowledge.

Igbo Prefixes: An Overview

Prefixes are affixes which are attached before the root/base of words during a particular word formation process which is called affixation. Prefix is one of the affixes that is extensively used in Igbo speech community by Igbo speakers in the formation of new words. The process of attaching prefix(es) to root/base of lexical items is known as prefixation. Igbo people find prefixation as a viable way of forming new words within affixation process. This process of forming new words in Igbo is a careful and pain-staking process since it has underlying rules which must be followed to arrive at well-formed lexical items.

In Igbo speech community, there are different categories of prefixes used by the language users and these categories are strictly tied to the Igbo language rules in terms of phonology and morphology. This implies that both the patterning of the speech sounds and the organization of the morphemes in lexical items are based on the phonological (vowel harmony and tone) and morphological rules of the language.

In the speech community in question, the data gathered show that prefixes can be categorized based on their grammatical functions and the way they are produced. Below is a discussion of the different categories of Igbo prefixes and the tones associated with them.

Categories of Igbo Prefixes based on their Grammatical Functions

Based on the functions that prefixes perform in the grammar of the Igbo language, they can be classified into infinitive, agentive, gerund, negative and progressive marker prefixes. Just as pointed out earlier, the prefixes acquire their semantic value not only through the morphemes stringed together but the tones associated with them. The discussion below concerns each of the categories of the prefixes as identified above.

Infinitive Marker Prefixes and their Tone

In Igbo, infinitives are formed with vowel morpheme prefixes, "i'" and "i'." Either of these vowels is attached before a verb root to create an infinitive verb.

Infinitives are formed by prefixation process but based on the data gathered for this study, the choice of either of the vowel morphemes identified earlier, "i'" or "i'" by the speakers is strictly based on the vowel harmony rule in the language. The vowel, "i'" prefix is attached to -ATR vowels (vowels produced with retracted tongue root: e, i, o, u) while "i'" is affixed to the verb roots with +ATR vowels (vowels produced with advanced tongue root: a, ɪ, ɔ, ʊ). Examples from the data collected are shown below:

	Prefix	Verb Root	Infinitive Verb	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss
1.	i'-	ké	i'kē	to tie	Ọ́ gàrà i'kē jí n'ọ́ba'.	He went to tie yam tubers in the barn.
2.	i'-	kè	i'kè	to share/divide	Ha' gàrà i'kè àlà. ha'.	They went to share their land.

3.	í-	bé	í'bē	to peel	Úchè chòrò í'bē òròma'.	Uche wants to peel an orange.
4.	í-	bè	í'bè	to cut	A'chòrò m̀ í'bè á'nụ́ á'hù ụ́zò àtọ́.	I want to cut the meat into three.
5.	í-	sí	í'sí	to cook	Úchè gàrà í'sí n'rí ná bé A'da'.	Uche went to cook in Ada's house.
6.	í-	gwú	í'gwū	to dig	E'zè chòrò í'gwū ó'lùlù.	Eze wants to dig a pit.
7.	í-	gwù	í'gwù	to swim	I'bè biàrà í'gwù m'mírí.	Ibe came to swim.
8.	í-	sò	í'sò	to follow	Èmé'ká chòrò í'sò n'né' ya' ga'a' á'hí'á.	Emeka wants to follow his mother to the market.
9.	í-	ga'	í'gā	to go	A'chòrò m̀ í'gā á'hí'á.	I want to go to the market.
10.	í-	pí	í'pī	to carve	Ọ́ dí'ghí m'fè' í'pī ọ́dụ́.	It is not easy to carve a pestle.
11.	í-	pì	í'pì	to press out (as in breadfruit)	N'né' m' gàrà í'pì ụ́kwà.	My mother went to press out breadfruits. (from the head)
12.	í-	kwọ́	í'kwọ́	to wash (as in hands)	Úchè gàrà n'èzí í'kwọ́ á'ka'.	Uche went outside to wash her hands.
13.	í-	kwọ̀	í'kwọ̀	to carry (on the back)	N'né' Èzè chòrò í'kwọ̀ yà n'àzụ́.	Eze's mother wants to carry him on the back.
14.	í-	sụ	í'sụ	to cut down (as in grasses)	N'na' Ibè gàrà í'sụ á'hí'á n'úgbō yá.	Ibe's father went to his farm to cut down some grasses.
15.	í-	sù	í'sù	to tie	Nné' m' kwùrù ụ́gwọ́ màkà í'sù í'chàfù yá.	My mother paid in order to tie her scarf.

From the above examples, one can see that in Igbo, the infinitive prefixes, “í-” and “í'-” are always on a high tone both in isolation and in construction. This is evident in examples 1- 12 in the words, “í'kē, í'kè, íbē, , í'sí, í'gwū, í'gwù, í'sò, í'gā, í'pī, í'pì, í'kwọ́, í'kwọ̀, í'sụ and í'sù”.

Also important to note here is that high -tone verb roots change to down step on the prefixation of “í-” or “í'-” during infinitivisation process in Igbo. This is shown in examples 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, and 14 in the words “í'kē, íbē, í'sí, í'gwū, í'gā, í'pī, í'kwọ́ and í'sụ”. On the other hand, low-tone verb roots maintain their low tone when the infinitive prefix maker “í-” or “í'-” is affixed to them as evident in nos. 2, 4, 7, 8, 11, 13 and 15 in the words, “í'kè, í'bè, í'gwù, í'sò, í'pì and í'kwọ̀”.

Moreover, because of the interesting behaviour of tone in Igbo compound verbs during infinitivisation process, the researcher deems it necessary to discuss infinitive marker prefixes and tone in compound verbs as one can see below based on the data:

S/no.	Infinitive Marker Prefix	Compound Verbs	Infinitive Verb Formed	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss
16.	í-	bì+nyé'	í'bìnyè	to lend	A'chòrò m̀ í'bìnyè I'bè é'gō.	I want to lend some money to Ibe.
17.	í-	mà+nyé'	í'mànyè	to measure into	Ọkè'ké chòrò í'mànyè	Okeke wants to measure the

					òsìkà'pá' a'hù n'è'fé're'.	rice into a plate.
18.	ì'-	bà+nye'	ì'bànyè	to enter	U'chè chòrò ì'bànyè n'í'mé' ó'lùlù.	Uche wants to enter into the pit.
19.	ì'-	kù'+nye'	ì'kūnyē	to sow (as in seed)	N'ne' m' gārà ì'kūnyē m'kpūrū n'ú'gbō.	My mother went to the farm to sew some seeds.
20.	ì'-	gwó'+kó'	ì'gwōkō	to mix up	Àdà' chòrò ì'gwōkō jí' nà àkí'dì.	Ada wants to mix up yam and beans.
21.	ì'-	ti+nye'	ì'tīnyē	to put	Ọ' gārà ì'tīnyē é'gō n' ụ'lō àkù.	S/he went to the bank to deposit some money.

Examples 16 – 21 explain the issue of infinitive prefixes and tone in compound verbs in Igbo. When an infinitive marker, “i- or ì-” is prefixed to compound verb roots consisting of low and high tones respectively, the high tone will assume the features of the low tone preceding it and consequently changes to a low tone thus making the structure a high low low- tone one. This is evident in examples 16 – 18 above in the words, “ì'binyè (to lend), ì'mànyè (to measure into) and ì'bànyè (to enter).”

On the other hand, when an infinitive prefix is affixed to compound verb roots whose two verb roots are on high tone, it will change the two high tones on the compound verb roots to down step but the high tone on the infinitive marker will be retained. The illustration of this case is shown in nos. 19–21 above in the words, “ì'kūnyē (to sow), ì'gwōkō (to mix up) and ì'tīnyē (to put).”

The above examples equally show that infinitive prefix markers “ì-” and “i-” in Igbo are always on a high tone when they are prefixed to either high-tone or low-tone verb roots. Examples: ì'kē (to tie), ì'kè (to share), ì'binyè (to lend), ì'tīnyē (to put) and others.

Also important to note is that infinitive prefixes are attached to only the verbs in Igbo thus making them infinitive verbs. All the examples above illustrate the above statement.

Agentive Marker Prefixes and their Tone

Agentive marker prefixes refer to those bound morphemes which are affixed before the verb roots to form agentive nouns. In Igbo, there are some prefixes that when they are affixed to verb roots, the result will be agentive nouns. It is this category of prefixes that we refer to as agentive marker prefixes in Igbo. In the language of our study, the morphemes, “m-, n-, o- and ọ-” are used as agentive marker prefixes to form agentive nouns as we can see in the following examples:

	Prefix	Verb Root	Agentive noun	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss
22.	m-	bé'	mbe'	ladder	E'zè nwèrè mbe' .	Eze has a ladder.
23.	m-	pá'	mpa'	carrier (as in mpa mmanụ)	Mpa' m'má'nụ' bàrà nà m'má'nụ' m'.	Mpa mmanụ (a type of ant) entered my oil.
24.	n-	gwu'	ngwu'	digger	N'nà m' zùtàrà ñgwu' .	My father bought a digger.
25.	n-	kwò	ñkwò	grater	E'nwèrè ñ ñkwò m' jì é'kwo' àbàchá'.	I have a grater which I use to grate tapioca.

26.	ò-	chụ'	òchụ' (dịka n'òchụ nwaanyị)	womanizer	E'zè bù òchụ' nwa'anyị.	Eze is a womanizer.
27.	ò-	je'	òje' (dịka n'oje ozi)	messenger	U'chè bù òje' ó'zí.	Uche is a messenger.
28.	ò-	tí'	òtí' (dịka n'oti igba)	drummer	I'bè bù òtí' igbà.	Ibe is a drummer.

From the above examples, it is evident that all the agentive marker prefixes are always on low tone as we can see in words such as m̀be', m̀pa', ñgwu', ñkwò, òchụ', òje' and òtí' (ladder, carrier, digger, grater, womanizer, messenger, and drummer). Moreover, one can see from the examples that the tone of the verb roots which the agentive marker prefixes are attached to do not change. This implies that they maintain their inherent tones after the prefixation process.

Gerund Marker Prefixes and their Tone

Gerund marker prefixes are those prefixes which when added to verb roots form gerunds (nouns formed from verbs). In Igbo, gerund markers are prefixes and these prefixes are only two in number, “o- and ọ-.” These are evident in examples below:

S/no.	Prefix	Verb Roots	Gerunds	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss
29.	ò-	ri+ri	òrírí	eating	Òrírí n'rí, ó'tù ùgbòrò n'ụ'bòchì a'dí'ghí m'mā.	Eating food once in a day is not good.
30.	ò-	gwu'+gwu'	ògwu'gwu'	digging	Ogwugwu ili adighi mfe.	Digging grave is not easy.
31.	ò-	gwù+gwù	ògwùgwù,	swimming	Ogwugwu mmiri bù oke ọrụ.	Swimming is a difficult task.
32.	ò-	lì+lì	òlìlì	burying	Olili ozu na-eri nnukwu ego n'ala Igbo.	Burying a corpse takes a lot of money in Igbo land.
33.	ò-	lụ'+lụ'	òlụ'lụ'	marrying	Ọlụlụ nwunye chọrọ amamihe.	Marrying a wife requires wisdom.
34.	ò-	kwu'+kwa'	òkwu'kwa'	Sewing	Ọkwukwa akwa bù ezigbo akaọrụ.	Sewing is a good handiwork.
35.	ò-	lù+lù	òlùlù	fighting	Ọlụlụ ọgụ jọrọ njo.	Fighting is bad.
36.	ò-	sù+sù	òsùsù	tying (of scarf)	Ọsùsù' ịchàfù bù ó'ke' ó'rụ.	Tying scarf is a tedious work.

From the above examples, we can see that the gerund marker prefixes, “o- and ọ-” are always on a low tone, whether they are attached to low-tone verb roots or high-tone verb roots. This is evident in such words as, “òrírí, ògwu'gwu', ògwùgwù, òlìlì, òlụ'lụ', òkwu'kwa', òlùlù and òsùsù (eating, digging, swimming, burying, marrying, sewing, fighting and tying (of scarf) respectively). (Refer to examples 29-36) above.” In terms of the verb roots that these prefixes are attached to, their inherent tones are maintained when the words formed are in isolation. For instance in the words, “òrírí, ògwu'gwu', òlụ'lụ', òkwu'kwa'” (eating, digging, marrying and sewing), each of the verb roots is inherently a high-tone one and the prefixation of the prefixes, “o- or ọ-” did not make their tones to change. In the words, “ògwùgwù, òlìlì, òlùlù and òsùsù” (swimming, burying, fighting and tying) which have low-tone verb roots inherently did not change after the addition of the prefixes.

Negative Marker Prefixes and their Tone

In Igbo, apart from the common suffix, “-ghị” which is used as a negative marker, prefixes such as, “a- and e-” are used as negative markers where the statement is an instruction/order or where one wants to give somebody an advice. In both cases, the prefix, “a-” is used when a verb root to which the prefix is attached contains a vowel which is produced with advanced tongue root (+ATR) (a, i, o, u). On the other hand, when the verb root which the prefix is attached to, contains a vowel produced with retracted tongue root (-ATR) (e,i,o,u), then the prefix to be used is, “e-.” The following examples show how negative marker prefixes are used to give instruction in Igbo when attached to the verb roots:

S/No.	Prefix	Verb Root	Suffix(es)	Word formed	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss
37.	á-	ga'	-la'	á'gālā	not to go	A'gwàrà m' Òkè'ké' á'gālā ọ'rụ' é'chí'.	I told Okeke not to go to work tomorrow.
38.	á-	gwa'	-la'	á'gwālā	not to tell	Ọ' sị' m' á'gwālā yá' é'zị' ọ'kwū.	He told me not to tell him/her the truth.
39.	á-	kò	-kwà + là	á'kòkwàlà	not to cultivate	Ézè gwàrà I'bè á'kòkwàlà ọ'rụ' n' àlà yá áhụ ọzọ'.	Eze told Ibe not to cultivate on that his land again.
40.	é-	sí'	-la'	ésīlā	not to cook	N'né Úchè gwàrà yá ésīlā n' rí' táátà.	Uche's mother told her not to cook food today.
41.	é-	gwù	-la	é'gwùlā	not to swim	Ńnà m' gwàrà m' é'gwùlā m' m' rí'.	My father told me not to swim.
42.	é-	sò	-là	ésòlā	not to follow	Ńné I'bè sị' yá ésòlā m' gá áhị'.	Ibe's mother told him not to follow me to the market.
43.	é-	ré	-lá	érēlā	not to sell	Ézè sị' m' érēlā àlà áhụ.	Eze told me not to sell that land.

From the examples above, (nos.37 – 43) one can observe that the tone of negative marker prefixes is always high. The prefixation of the negative prefix marker (á- or é-) to high-tone verb roots in Igbo changes the high tone in the verb root to a down step. The high tone in the suffix that follows the verb root equally changes to a down step. This is evident in nos. 37, 38, 40 and 43 in the words, “á'gālā, á'gwālā, ésīlā and érēlā.” (Not to go, not to tell, not to cook and not to sell – Gloss). In a situation where by a negative marker prefix is affixed to low-tone verb roots, the prefix retains its high tone. The low-tone verb roots and the following suffix equally retain their low tone. This is evident in examples 39, 41 and 42 in words like, “á'kòkwàlà, é'gwùlā and ésòlā.” (Not to cultivate, not to swim and not to follow – Gloss).

At this juncture, it is also worthy to note that sometimes the language users leave off the suffix in giving advice as in these words, “ákò, égwù and ésò and so on used in sentences as follows: Ọ' sị' gị' kọ' ọ'rụ' n' àlà áhụ, ákò. (If he tells you to cultivate on that land, do not cultivate.) Úchè sị' gị' gwù' m' m' rí', égwū. (If Uche tells you to swim, do not swim.)

Progressive Marker Prefixes and their Tone

In the formation of progressive verbs in Igbo, prefixes like, “á- and é-” are used. In the prefixation of either, “á- or é-”, the vowel in the verb root is considered to know whether it belongs to the advanced tongue root vowels (+ ATR (a, i, o, u)) or vowels produced with retracted tongue root (-ATR (e,i,o,u)). The prefix, “á-” is prefixed to +ATR vowels while the prefix “é-” is prefixed to –ATR vowels. This implies that the vowel harmony rule is strictly adhered to as we can see in the examples below:

S/No.	Prefix	Verb Root	Word Formed	Gloss	Sentence	Gloss
44.	a-	pí	àpí	carving	Òkéké nà-àpí ọ́dū.	Okeke is carving a pestle.
45.	a-	gá	àgá	going	E'zè nà-àgá áhí'á.	Eze is going to market.
46.	a-	kò	ákò	cultivating	Íbè nà-ákò ọ́rū.	Ibe is cultivating.
47.	a-	bù	ábù	singing	Úchè nà-ábù a'bù.	Uche is singing a song.
48.	e-	sí	èsí	cooking	Ánà m' èsí n' rī.	I am cooking food.
49.	e-	kwú	èkwú	talking	Àmáká nà-èkwú ókwú.	Amaka is speaking/talking.
50.	e-	gwù	égwù	swimming	Òbí nà-égwù m' m' rí.	Obi is swimming.
51.	e-	tì	étì	cracking	Íbè nà-étì akí.	Ibe is cracking palm kernel.

From examples 44 – 51, one can see that the tone of the progressive marker prefixes runs in a particular order depending on the following verb root. If the verb root that the prefix is affixed to is a high-tone, then the prefix takes a low tone but if the verb root is a low-tone one, the prefix assumes a high tone. Low-tone prefixes with high tone verb roots are shown in examples 44, 45, 48 and 49 in the words, “àpí, àgá, èsí, and èkwú” (carving, going, cooking and talking) respectively while the high-tone prefixes with low-tone verb roots are evident in examples 46, 47, 50 and 51 in the words, “ákò, ábù, égwù and étì” (cultivating, singing, swimming and cracking) respectively.

It is worthy to note that all progressive verbs in Igbo require an auxiliary verb to be grammatical. The auxiliary verb they take is “na” (is). Then a hyphen (-) is used to join it with the main verb which is the progressive verb. This is evident in the examples above (41-51). An exception is the case of first person’s singular which does not take a hyphen as a result of the structure of the language under study.

Categories of Prefixes Based on their Production

On the other hand, prefixes can be classified based on the way they are produced. Based on this criterion, the data shows that there are two types of prefix: oral and nasal prefixes in the language of our study.

Oral Prefixes

Oral prefixes are those prefixes that are produced with the velum/soft palate raised up to block off the nasal cavity so that air passes only through the oral cavity during their production hence the name oral prefixes. Oral prefixes in Igbo comprise only vowel speech sounds like “a-, e-, i-, i-, o- and ọ-” as in these words, “àpí, égwù, íkè, ígā, òrírí and òlùlù” (carving, swimming, to tie, to go, eating and fighting) as in the above sentences 44, 50, 1, 9, 29 and 35 respectively.

Nasal Prefixes

Those prefixes that are produced with the velum/soft palate lowered in such a way that it blocks off the oral cavity so that air passes only through the nasal cavity are referred to as nasal prefixes. The only nasal prefixes we have in Igbo are, “m- and n-” as in examples 22- 25, “m̀bé, m̀pá, ñgwú and others” (ladder, carrier, digger and others) above. Also important to note here is that nasal prefixes are syllabic nasals in Igbo as we can see in examples 22-26 above. In the examples, “m, m and n” are syllabic nasals respectively.

The Tone of Igbo Oral and Nasal Prefixes

The tone of Igbo oral and nasal prefixes is determined by the functions and context of the prefixes. For instance, when “i-”, or “i-,” is performing the function of infinitivization as already discussed, the tone is usually a high one as evident in examples 1-21 above. When “o-” or “ọ-” is performing the function of gerund marker, the tone is always low. Moreover, when “m” or “n” is functioning as agentive marker, the tone is always a low one as one can see in the examples 22-24 above.

In terms of context as a determining factor for tone, in progressive marker prefixes, if the verb root that the prefix is affixed to is a high-tone one, then the prefix takes a low tone but if the verb root is a low-tone one, the prefix assumes a high tone.

Concluding this study without discussing the features of these Igbo prefixes should be an incomplete study since some of the features of these prefixes determine the tones associated with these prefixes. Bearing this in mind, the features of Igbo prefixes are discussed hereunder.

Features of Igbo Prefixes

Igbo Prefixes are Attached to Only the Igbo Verb Roots

Igbo prefixes are attached to only the verb roots. No other parts of speech other than the verbs accept prefixes in Igbo. For example, in the words: *í'rí* (to eat), *ngwu'* (digger), *òzùzù* (training) and others, "*rí*", *gwu'*, and *zù*" are verb roots to which the prefixes, "*i-*, *n-* and *o-*" are affixed respectively.

Vowel and Nasal Speech Sounds Constitute the Igbo Prefixes

Igbo prefixes comprise vowel and nasal speech sounds which are usually syllabic in nature. The vowel/oral prefixes include, "*a-*, *e-*, *i-*, *ì-*, *o-* and *o-*," while "*m-*, and *n-*" are nasal prefixes.

Igbo Prefixes are Tone-Bearing Units

Igbo prefixes are tone-bearing units in the context of words. In words where prefixes are found in Igbo, they always bear tone marks. This is evident in all our examples above (nos. 1-51) where all the prefixes bear tone marks.

Igbo Prefixes are Usually Syllables in the Context of Words

Igbo prefixes form separate syllables in words where they occur. In such words as, "*í'gā* (to go), *ñkwò* (grater), *òrí'rí* (eating), and *àpí* (carving), each of the prefixes, "*ì-*, *n-*, *o-* and *a-*" in each of the words respectively form separate syllables. These words have already been used in sentences in nos. 9, 25, 29 and 44 above respectively.

Igbo Prefixes are Bound Morphemes

In Igbo, prefixes cannot be in isolation and be meaningful. This implies that all Igbo prefixes, (*a-*, *e-*, *i-*, *ì-*, *o-*, *o-*, *m-*, *n-*) are bound morphemes. They always need verb roots to attach themselves in order to be meaningful. For instance, in words like, "*íkwo*" (to wash hands), *òlùlù* (fighting) and others, "*ì-* and *o-*" at the word initial position of the two words respectively are bound morphemes since they need to be attached to verb roots in order to be meaningful.

Only a Single Prefix is Hosted by Igbo Words at Once

Unlike Igbo suffixes, only a single prefix is usually attached to Igbo verb roots where necessary. No Igbo word has been found to contain more than one prefix at once. So, no matter how lengthy an Igbo word is, it can only host a single prefix. All the examples above can attest to this statement.

Igbo Prefixes have only Vowel (v) or Consonant (c) Syllable Structure

The syllable structure of prefixes in Igbo is either vowel (v) or consonant (c). Examples of vowel (v) syllable structure prefixes are, "*a-*, *a-*, *e-*, *e-*, *ì-*, and *i-*" as in such words as *apí* (carving), *aga* (going), *ekwu* (talking), *esi* (cooking), *ìkúnye* (to sow), *ìgwọkọ* (to mix up) and *itinye* (to put)." On the other hand, *m-* and *n-* prefixes form the consonant (c) syllabic structure as these examples: *mpa*, *ngwu*, *nkwo* and others. (carrier, digger, grater and so on.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This section provides the summary of findings and the conclusion of the work as highlighted below.

Summary of Findings

Based on the data analysed for this study, there are evidences that tone is a sine qua non for Igbo prefixes. Such categories of Igbo prefixes identified based on their grammatical functions (infinitive, agentive, gerund, negative and progressive markers) and manner of production (oral and nasal prefixes) largely depend on tones in order to work effectively in the language investigated. This is because; Igbo prefixes bear tones which are the major determinants of the meanings of structures in the language.

The researcher equally observed that the tone of Igbo prefixes whether oral or nasal is highly determined by their grammatical functions and context. Based on grammatical functions, the study shows that infinitive marker prefixes, “i- and i-” and the negative marker prefixes, “a- and e-” in Igbo are always on a high tone while the agentive marker prefixes, “m-, n-, o- and o-” and the gerund marker prefixes, “o- and o-” are always on a low tone.

The issue of context applies to the tone of progressive marker prefixes which runs in a particular order depending on the following verb root that the prefix is attached to. If the verb root that the prefix is affixed to is a high-tone one, then the prefix takes a low tone but if the verb root is a low-tone one, the prefix assumes a high tone.

Conclusion

Prefixation as an affixation method of forming words is relevant in Igbo Morphology but it is only activated through tones. One can imagine a bound morpheme (prefix) that is attached to a verb root without tone. There is no doubt that the meaning will not be there and the communicative purpose will be lost. The implication of this is that tone cannot be separated from Igbo prefixes since it is the tone that gives them their meanings more especially in context. So, the importance of tone in Igbo prefixes cannot be over-emphasized.

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