

Affixation in Agwuagune

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to draw attention to the grammatical functions of affixation in Agwuagune and its relevance in the grammatical analysis of the language. The process of affixation will be examined under such verbal categories as negation, tense and aspect. Related nominal categories like number and person will also be investigated. The paper concludes with the generalization that affixes are useful grammatical units that mark phonological, morphological as well as syntactic relationships in the language.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Agwuagune language is spoken by a population of about 15,000 (1991 census) in the political unit of Egiplpa clan of the present Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State. It comprises the people of three major communities of Agwuagune, Okurike and Itu-Agwuagune. The Language has been classified by Faraclaus (1989) as a north-central language of the Upper Cross sub-group. The Upper Cross sub-group belongs to the Delta-Cross group, which together with Bendi belongs to the Cross River sub-branch of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-congo subfamily of languages.

No discussion of affixes will be complete without reference to the analysis of word formation, which is termed morphology. Lyons (1968:194) observes that morphology deals with the internal structure of words. He argues that words that exist in a language can be divided into component units, some of which have some kind of independent meaning, while others do not. Robins (1989:182) defines morphology as the study of words. Words are made up of components, which can be isolated from the stem. Ndimele (1999:39) defines the stem as the part of the word, which an inflectional affix is structurally added. This is different from the root, which he says is usually the heart of the word, which carries the core meaning of the word. In other words, the root is the base form of a word, which cannot be further analysed without loss of the word's identity. The root cannot be further divided into smaller meanings units. All these elements are morphemes. Morphemes are either bound or free. They are bound if they cannot occur on their own and have meaning and are free if they can occur on their own, and make distinctive sense. For instance, the word *jumped* is formed from a combination of *jump* and the morpheme */-ed/*, whose grammatical function is to indicate past tense. *Jump* is a word in addition to being a morpheme. It is a free

morpheme because it has a semantic value while */-ed/* is a bound morpheme because it has no meaning on its own. The bound morphemes are also referred to as affixes. They may occur word-initially as the */-un/* in *undo*. When affixes occur before free morphemes they are known as prefixes. When they occur at the end of the word such as */-ish/* in *foolish* */-ful/* as in *joyful* they are known as suffixes. There is a third type, not normally found in English but fairly common in some other languages, for example Efik (Mensah 2001a). This is called an infix, and as the term suggests, it is an affix, which is inserted within the word.

There are many examples of affixation in English but we are concerned about this morphological process in the Agwuagune language. In the following analysis, we shall discuss the relationship between affixation and negation in the language under focus.

2.0 AFFIXATION AND NEGATION IN AGWUAGUNE

Negation as a concept involves an intricate blend or interface of the key levels of language analysis. This justifies why Essien (1990) defines it as '...

syntactic and phonological devices by which a positive proposition is derived or said to be untrue or by which a positive imperative order is prohibited'. Similarly, Crystal (1987:23) views it as '...a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of a sentence's meaning'. From these definitions, a general conclusion can be made namely that when a proposition in an affirmative statement or command is reversed, the expression acquires a contrary sense with the introduction of corresponding negative affixes and related phonological processes. In this way, the structure loses its positive value and then said to be negated (Mensah 2001a). In Agwuagune, the process is basically inflectional, that is, it concerns the way in which morphemes vary in order to express

grammatical contrasts in sentences (Crystal, 1987:90) the inflectional process is through affixation, involving prefixation and suffixation. In what follows we shall examine how negation is signaled in Agwuagune through these processes.

2.1 Negation in Imperative Order

Negation in Agwuagune is strictly a verbal process attached to the root of the verb to trigger negation. In most cases, the /ge-/ morpheme alternates with /gbe-/ which is its variant form (allomorph and is particularly evidenced in the speeches of the younger generation of Agwuagune speakers).

Verb		Negative Variant	
1(a) ji	'eat'	géjiji	'Do not eat'
(b) gbúnò	'open'	gégbùgbùnò	'Do not open'
(c) pigi	'hold'	gépìpigi	'Do not hold'
(d) nàrà	'take'	génánàrà	'Do not take'
(e) nyi	'give'	gényinyi	'Do not give'

The imperative negative or prohibitive in Agwuagune is formed by a win process of affixation and reduplication whereby the morpheme /gé-/ is prefixed to the root of the verb, which is doubled or reduplicated. Reduplication here affects the CV of the root. While some influence part the root others reduplicate the whole root. In Agwuagune, the direction is mostly to the right. Observe that the vowel of the negative marker /gé-/ always carries a high tone.

2.2 Negation in Declarative Sentences

In short utterances in Agwuagune the negative form is formed by dropping the suffix /-ni/ in the positive equivalent.

- 2 (a) N-fù-nì - 'I have come'
 (b) N-fù - 'I have not come'
- 3 (a) I-gòrò-nì - 'We have agreed'
 (b) I-gòró - 'We have not agreed'
- 4 (a) N-ji-ni - 'I have eaten'
 (b) N-ji - 'I have not eaten'

This is a case of the deletion of the tense aspect morpheme in a simple declarative sentence forms. However, the allomorphs of the personal marker, which are prefixes, remain unchanged. It is to be noted that the action of negation here is directly linked to the verbs. Essien (1990) suggests in Ibibio that the phonetic shapes of the affixes depend on the syllable structure of the verb root. The superimposition of the rising tones in 2(b) and 4(b) facilitates lengthening, which is an important phonological feature of negation in Agwuagune. A look at negation with the third person 'it' will clarify this as it occurs in Agwuagune.

- 5 (a) E-néneb - 'It is good'

- (b) E-neb - 'It is not good'
- 6 (a) E-fófòb - 'It is hot'
 (b) E-fob - 'It is not hot'
- 7 (a) E-sàsàrà - 'It is long'
 (b) E-sàrà - 'It is not long'

Here, the negative forms are derived through the deletion of a reduplicated part of the root verb, which occur in the declarative form of the sentence, with the infix being dropped. There is also lengthening in vowel sound in 5(b) and 6 (b) respectively as indicated by superimposition of the rising tone.

2.3 Negation in Interrogative Sentences

Affixation also plays a crucial role when a negative question is asked.

- 8 (a) A-ji-ní? - 'Have you eaten?'
 (b) A-sà-ji? - 'You have not eaten?'
- 9 (a) U-dà-nì - 'He has slept'
 (b) U-sù-dà - 'He has not slept'

Note that the verb is central to the positive and negative expressions. Observe the deletion of the tense marker and the vowel harmony between the concord marker and the negation marker. The negation marker in this case interlocks the subject concord marker and the root verb.

3.0 AFFIXATION AND PERSON IN AGWUAGUNE

Person is a grammatical category that indicates participant roles in a speech or discourse. Three persons have been traditionally distinguished in the Agwuagune language just as in most world's languages. These are the first person or the speaker, the second person or the addressee and the third person or the object of discourse. Each can be singular or plural and there are corresponding pronouns to denote them. In Agwuagune, we have the following persons:

10	Person	Singular	Plural
(a)	1 st Person	nám (I)	nòrò (we)
(b)	2 nd Person	nô (you)	núngò (you)
(c)	3 rd Person	áyè (he, she) é (it)	émò (they) é (they)

Essien (1990 :75) observes that in Ibibio, when personal pronouns act as subjects of verbs in non-imperative sentences, there must be agreement between the subject and the verb. This agreement is known as *concord*. He therefore refers to these prefixes that indicate the person and number of the subject on the verb as *concord* or *personal markers*.

In Agwuagune, there are clear personal markers, which are used as prefixes or allomorphs of the concord. These are as follows:

	Person	Singular	Prefix	Plural	Prefix
11 (a)	1 st Person	nám	n	nórò	i
(b)	2 nd Person	nô	á	núngò	núngò á
(c)	3 rd Person	áyè	ú	émò	émò á

the second and the third person plural forms do not change but are used in combination with the prefix /a/.

12 (a) émò á - wà - ni - 'They have gone'

S Sc V Asp

The sound /o/ in émò is deleted in utterances and thus pronounced

(b) ém - á - wà - ni.

The second /o/ of núngò is equally deleted in the utterance

(c) Núngò a - boni - ni - 'You are welcome'

S Sc V T

Which is pronounced thus:

(d) Núng a - boni - ni

In this regard, we can formulate a rule that is /o/ Ø [c -v], interpreted as the vowel /o/ becomes elided in the environment between a consonant and a vowel. Observe that the plain low tone of the deleted vowel sound has merged with the high tone of the following vowel sound to produce a gliding effect.

The person marker takes the form of a vowel prefix for all persons except the first person singular which takes the form of a syllabic nasal /n/. This is one of the common features of African languages.

13 (a) n - fè - ni - 'I am back'

Sc V T

4.0 AFFIXATION AND NUMBER IN AGWUAGUNE

In number, we are concerned with whether an item is plural or singular. The use of affixation and number is not common in Agwuagune, the plural morphemes are not generally affixal but are human specific, that is elements with [+ Human] features. The following words and their plural forms will show this clearly. The changes in prefixation in the first set of words are inflectional morphemes as they are used.

14	Singular	Plural	Gloss
a)	òsòm	ásòm	'person'
b)	ónúròm	ánéròm	'man'
c)	wónúròm	banéròm	'boy'
d)	ónegwa	ánéba	'women'
e)	ónùm	inùn	'chief'

Agreement in persons and number with the prefix to the verb is indicated by the prefixes *u* and *emo a*

15 (a) Idám ú - jì - ni béjìjì - 'Idam has eaten (food)'

S V Asp

(b) Idám mà Eko émò a - jì ni béjìjì - 'Idam and Eko have eaten'

S Sc V Asp

5.0 AFFIXATION AND TENSE IN AGWUAGUNE

While the category of person is universal in every language performance in that there must be a speaker and an audience, the category of tense is not. Tense, is a grammatical category that grammaticalizes time reference by making use of indicators or operators which mark the relationship between the time an utterance is made concerning that situation. The latter situation is usually the present moment. Comrie (1976:2) and Lyons (1968:308) identify the various types of tenses found in natural languages. Lyons (1968) calls it a three-way opposition of past, present and future while Comrie (1976) simply recognizes it as that of present/past and future.

The Agwuagune tense system corresponds to the classical tripartite system of past, present and future and as will be seen in the examples below there are affixes corresponding to each of the tense types.

Present Tense:

16 (a) n - i - n - jì - 'I am eating'

Sc+T V

b) a - rá - jì - 'You are eating'

Sc T V

Past Tense

17 a) n - jì - ni - 'I ate'

Sc V T

b) a - jì - ni - 'You ate'

Sc V T

Future Tense

18 a) m - i - n - jì - 'I will eat'

T+ Sc V

b) m - à - jì - 'You will eat'

T+ Sc V

Note the use of the suffix /-ni/ to indicate past tense. The prefix /min/ and /ma/ in the future tense, are a combination of /m/ for the tense and /n/ and /a/ as the personal markers. The inserted morpheme /i/ in /min/ serves as an epenthesis.

6.0 AFFIXATION AND ASPECT IN AGWUAGUNE

Graddol et al (1987) say that aspect is concerned with the way an action is viewed. The perfective aspect in English is represented, by a form of the auxiliary 'have' plus the past participle form of the verb.

19 a) u - jèghè - ni nwèt - 'He has/had written a letter'

Sc V Asp

The progressive aspect in English is represented by a form of the auxiliary 'be' plus the present participle form of the verb.

b) ú - rú - jèghè nwèt - 'He is/was writing a letter'

Sc Asp V

Lastly, we can mark the verb for the passive voice in English by the use of a form of the auxiliary 'be' plus the past participle

form of the verb. Let us consider the English sentence: The letter was written:

Agwuagune has no passive voice. Such an expression in Agwuagune would simply be given as:

19) émò a - jèghè - nì nwèt - 'They wrote the letter'
 S Sc V T

From the other examples, however, it is clear that Agwuagune does have perfective and a progressive aspect but no passive voice. Again the use of affixation is an important phenomenon in marking tense in the language. In the perfective aspect of the verb, the prefix or personal marker /u-/ is used to represent the person *he* and the suffix /-ni/ is used to indicate the perfective aspect. In the progressive aspect, the prefix/personal marker /u/ is usually combined with the prefix /ru/.

Conclusion

So far, the paper has analysed and described the process of affixation, in relation to some verbal and nominal categories in Agwuagune. It discovers that two types of affixation-prefixation and suffixation are predominantly invoked in the grammatical analysis of the language, and that apart from performing some grammatical functions these bound morphemes can also bring about phonological processes like tonal alteration, assimilation, elision, deletion and so on, thereby justifying the link between the core units of grammar.

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