

A Comparative Analysis of Lexical Prepositions in the Ibibio and Igbo Languages

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Abstract: This paper aims at comparing the lexical prepositions of the Ibibio and Igbo languages. Its objectives are to identify what constitute lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo and highlight the similarities and differences between Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions. The Ibibio data used for analysis were elicited from two Ibibio native speakers whereas Igbo data were obtained through introspection. The Ibibio and Igbo data were analysed descriptively. The findings of the research reveal that the lexical prepositions obtainable in Ibibio are *ke* ‘to, in, for, at’, *mme* ‘with’, *ano* ‘from’, and *ito/nto* ‘from’. In Igbo, some of the lexical prepositions include: *na* ‘to, in, at, from’, *maka* ‘for’, and *gbasara* ‘about’. The similarity observed between Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions is that they both occur before a Noun Phrase (NP), that is, they take NP as their complement. In terms of their differences, the preposition ‘to’ is marked in Igbo but is unmarked in Ibibio. The preposition ‘with’ is overtly marked in Ibibio with *mme* but it is implied in Igbo constructions. Another notable difference between Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions is that the English preposition ‘from’ inflects for number in Ibibio but such feature is absent in Igbo. The paper recommends that further comparative researches should be carried out on other types of preposition like the category incorporated prepositions, and other word classes between Ibibio and Igbo in particular and other African languages in general.

Keywords: lexical prepositions, Ibibio language, Igbo language, African languages

1. Introduction

There are numerous words that exist in a language and these words perform different functions either lexical or grammatical. For ease of reference, scholars grouped words into lexical categories. The number of lexical categories or word classes differs across

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languages. For example, English recognises seven functional parts of speech (Eyisi & Okolo, 2015), Ibibio's parts of speech is classified into five broad categories (Essien, 2008), and Igbo has seven parts of speech (Uba-Mgbemena, 2009).

Adposition is an umbrella term for preposition and post-position. Preposition comes before a noun phrase whereas post-positions come after a noun phrase. English, Ibibio, and Igbo have prepositions but some languages like Urdu, Hindi and Japanese have postpositions. In this work, the major focus is on prepositions.

Preposition is one of the parts of speech present across languages. Preposition is derived from the Latin word *praepone* which means 'to place in front of'. It comes in front of a Noun Phrase (NP). In essence, preposition performs grammatical functions in a language as it helps to show the location of a noun. However, a preposition is any word or sequence of words which maintains a grammatical relationship between nouns or noun-equivalent (which could be an infinitive, pronoun, or phrase) in the objective case. This implies that preposition precedes a noun or its equivalent. In other words, nouns and noun-equivalent form the complements of a preposition (see Bussman, 1999; Mbah, 1999; Ndimele, 1999; Udemmadu, 2012; Eyisi & Okolo, 2015).

In this study, our major concern is to examine lexical prepositions (prepositions that can stand on their own in a construction) in Ibibio and Igbo with the view of determining their similarities and differences. This study will help in appreciating the lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo. Prepositions in Igbo have received attention from scholars more than their counterparts in Ibibio. Nonetheless, there appear to be only two prepositions proper in Ibibio. These are *ke* and *mme* (Essien, 2008). In this research, the researchers will look at the data obtained in Ibibio constructions to ascertain if they will support Essien's claim or refute it.

However, there is a debate concerning how many prepositions that exist in the Igbo language. Some scholars have argued that *na* is the only preposition in Igbo (Green & Igwe, 1963; Emenanjo, 1978, 2010; Ezikeojiaku, 1989). In as much as *na* is the only preposition in Igbo, there are other ways the notion of preposition is realised in the Igbo language such as serial verb construction, complex verbs, and extensional suffixes (see Emenanjo, 2010).

On the other hand, some scholars believe that *na* is not the only preposition in Igbo. In this school of thought, *maka* 'for', *banyere* 'about', *gbasara* 'concerning', *beluso* 'except', and *tupu* 'before' are prepositions in Igbo (Mbah, 1999; Uba-Mgbemena, 2009; Udemmadu, 2012; Mmadike, 2016). In this study, the researchers concur with the later view that holds that *na* is not the only preposition (lexical) present in the Igbo language.

Comparing the prepositions of Nigerian languages is not the wont of many researchers. Attempts have been made to compare the prepositions of French and Igbo (Elomba & Okolie, 2010), Spanish and Igbo (Uchechukwu, 2010), German and Igbo (Uchechukwu &

Ezeora, 2010), but to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no known research has been done in comparing Igbo and Ibibio lexical prepositions. This research problem necessitated the conduct of this research. The research work is designed to achieve these purposes: to identify lexical prepositions in Ibibio, to identify lexical prepositions in Igbo, to highlight the similarities between lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo; and to highlight the differences between lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo.

In studying prepositions, there are prepositions that are represented with a free morpheme; some are implied i.e. affixed to a root verb whereas another lexical class can function as a preposition in a construction. In Igbo for instance, aside prepositions that stand on their own lexical preposition there exist other ways in which prepositions can be realised including bound preposition, which appears in '-rV' form, and the category incorporated prepositions (see Mbah, 1999). In delimiting the scope, the main focus in this paper is the lexical prepositions obtainable in the Ibibio and Igbo languages.

The significance of this work abounds. This work will add to the existing works in comparative linguistics (syntax in particular). It will also reveal the point of convergence and divergence that exists in Ibibio and Igbo preposition, which will aid in the formulation of rules or principles about Nigerian languages in particular and African languages in general.

The Ibibio data used in this research work were obtained from two Ibibio native speakers (the use of two persons was done to ensure validation of data), whereas the data for Igbo came from introspection. The data were collated and analysed descriptively.

The Ibibio language belongs to the Benue-Congo language sub-family of the Niger-Congo family. Ibibio also belongs to the Lower Cross group and is referred as Ibibiod. Ibibio speakers are mainly found in Akwa Ibom state (Essien, 2008). On the other hand, Igbo belongs to the West Benue Congo (formerly called the Eastern Kwa) of the Proto Benue-Congo phylum. Its speakers are seen in south-eastern part of Nigeria which comprises Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo states. Speakers of Igbo can also be found in Rivers and Delta states.

The tone marking convention used in this work is that of Welmers and Nwachukwu. This tone marking convention has been extensively used by Mbah (1999). This convention uses only two diacritics to represent three tones, namely the acute mark for the high and step tones and grave accent for the low tone. It marks only the first in a series of similar tones. When the pitch contrast is reached, it marks the first of the series of contrasting tone(s). It uses a rising acute diacritic mark for both high and step tones with the following condition. If two consecutive acute marks appear, then the second is a step tone (Mbah & Mbah, 2010).

2. Literature review

As has been stated in the introductory part of this work, researches on prepositions in Igbo tend to be higher in number than those conducted in Ibibio. Scholars have examined prepositions in different languages from different perspectives. Some of these works include: Mbah (1999), Essien (2008), Emenanjo (2010), Elomba & Okolie (2010), Uchechukwu (2010), and Mmadike (2016).

Mbah (1999) in his research on prepositional phrase sets out to study the nature of the Igbo prepositional phrase. He observes, using X-bar theory, that apart from *na*, other lexical prepositions occur in Igbo like *maka* 'for', *banyere* 'about', *gbasara* 'concerning'. He further discovers that in Igbo, there are prepositions which cannot stand independently as lexemes. This kind of preposition he refers to as 'bound preposition'. This is realised through the '-rV' suffix. In addition, Mbah (1999) discovers another form of preposition known as the category incorporated preposition, which refers to those lexical categories which bind into a compound in the process of which one of the elements loses its categorial status by analysing its meaning. In as much as Mbah (1999) and this work Igbo prepositions are examined, they differ in the sense that the former examines only Igbo prepositions whereas the latter compares Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions.

Essien (2008) in his study of Ibibio preposition, using the descriptive approach, aims at studying Ibibio prepositions. He observes that there are two proper prepositions in Ibibio: *ké* and *mmè*. According to him, *ké* is typically used before inanimate NPs and can mean 'at, in, on'. Another feature of *ké* as observed by Essien (2008) is that the preposition loses its vowel in vowel elision especially where the following noun begins with a higher vowel than itself. On the other hand, *mmè* 'with' typically occurs before human NPs and semantically marks the comitative relationship. Essien's work differs from this present work in the aspect that the present work does not only look at Ibibio prepositions but also Igbo prepositions.

Emenanjo (2010) in his study on the expression of prepositional notions in Igbo aims at identifying other ways of realising prepositions in Igbo. The paper reveals that *na* is the only preposition in Igbo. With a descriptive approach, the finding of his paper reveals that although Igbo has only one preposition, it uses extensional suffixes, complex verbs, and serial verb constructions to express prepositional notions. The researcher then concludes that in Igbo, prepositional notions are functionally more expressed by verbs and the verbal system. In as much as Emenanjo (2010) and this work Igbo prepositions are examined, they differ in the sense that the former examines only Igbo prepositions whereas the latter compares Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions.

Another contribution to the study of Igbo preposition is made by Uchechukwu (2010) where he examines the categorial status of verbids in Igbo grammar. The research sets out

to know the prepositional notions embedded in verbids in the language. By adopting a descriptive method, he discovered that verbids in the Igbo language are not fossilised elements that have verbal attributes since they cannot be inflected like verbs nor can they be combined with auxiliary verbs as is the case with other verbs in the language. In Igbo, he observes that the unverbial attributes of these verbids are simply prepositional. The paper concludes that the so-called verbids in the Igbo language should appropriately be recognised as prepositions. In as much as Uchechukwu (2010) and this work examine Igbo prepositions, they differ in the sense that the former examines only Igbo prepositions whereas the latter compares Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions.

In a comparative study of French and Igbo prepositions, Elomba and Okolie (2010) aim at ascertaining how Igbo realise prepositions present in French. Through a descriptive analysis, they observe that the number of prepositions in French exceeds that of Igbo. They discover that the French preposition *à*, which means ‘to’ is realised in Igbo as *karia*, *ga-*, *-re*, *-nye*, *ruo*, *igwu* in different context. The finding of their paper reveals that a good number of French prepositions are replaceable by *na* in Igbo, either on itself or in junction with affixes. They conclude that prepositions in French are much more multifarious, distinct and diverse than in Igbo. But this does not constitute a handicap to the Igbo language in any way since what it lacks in number can be taken care of by the polyvalence and versatility of the few prepositions to play more than one role. The research of Elomba and Okolie (2010) and this present work are similar because both examine Igbo prepositions but they differ in the sense that the present research does not compare French and Igbo preposition but Ibibio and Igbo prepositions.

In Mmadike’s (2016) study on Igbo prepositions, the objective is to determine if there are other preposition(s) in Igbo other than *na*. Mmadike (2016) observes that *na* is not the only preposition in Igbo. Other prepositions like *banyere*, *gbasara*, *tupu*, and *maka* exist in the language. In an attempt to make his work to be peculiar, he conducts a syntactic constituency tests on the behaviour of prepositions in Igbo which he achieves using preposition stranding, pied-piping, wh-movement and sentence fragments test. From his analysis, he observes that Igbo does not allow prepositional stranding i.e. a situation whereby a preposition is left behind after its complement has been moved. This situation can be remedied with pied-piping i.e. a situation whereby the preposition is moved together with its complement. Another finding of the paper is that prepositions in Igbo can also be moved with the wh-marker in a wh-movement. The paper then concludes that in addition to *na* ‘in, on, at’, *tupu* ‘before’, *màkà* ‘for’, *bànyere* ‘about, against’, and *gbasara* ‘about’ exhibit the same properties as heads of their respective phrases, case-mark their complements, can be fronted with their complements as wh-phrase and can also be used as sentence fragments. In as much as Mmadike (2016) and this work examine Igbo

prepositions, they differ in the sense that the former examines only Igbo prepositions whereas the latter compares Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions.

3. Data presentation and analysis

Lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo are grouped into free and bound. In this section, free and bound lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo will be presented and analysed. The similarities and differences in the prepositions of the two languages will be highlighted as well.

3.1 Ibibio lexical prepositions

Here, the researchers will present the free and bound prepositions present in the Ibibio language.

3.1.1 Free prepositions in Ibibio

3.1.1.1 *anọ* 'for' and *ke* 'for'

- (1) a. *Ánye ámà átèm ánọ mien.*
he pst cook for I
'He cooked for me.'
- b. *Á-dò ké òtak mími.*
Aux-it for sake my
'It is for my sake.'

From the above examples, it is evident that Ibibio uses *anọ* and *ke* to mean 'for'. *Ke* is in line with Essien (2008)'s claim that it is one of the prepositions used in the Ibibio language but instead of functioning only as 'at', 'on' or 'in', it also functions as 'for'. What can be deduced from the above data is that *anọ* is used before the objective form of 'I' whereas *ke* precedes an attributive pronoun 'my'.

3.1.1.2 *ito/nto* 'from'

- (2) a. *Ñnyin í-to ufòk-abási idi*
we pl-from house-god coming
'We are coming from the church.'
- b. *Á-mí ò-to Esá Èkpo*
Aux-I sg-from Esa Ekpo
'I am from Esa Ekpo.'

From the Ibibio word for 'from', it can be seen that preposition inflects for number in (2a) and (2b). The prefixes *i-* and *n-* were attached to the root word 'to', which implied 'from' in Ibibio. From the data, the prefix *i-* is used for third person plural noun or pronouns whereas *n-* is used as the first singular marker.

3.1.1.3 *ke* 'at'

- (3) *Ákpàn aké àka nwèd ké Oxford*

Akpan pst go book at Oxford

‘Akpan studied at Oxford.’

In (3), the observation of Essien (2008) that *ke* in Ibibio means ‘at’ is supported.

3.1.1.4 zero morpheme representation of ‘to’

(4) *Àmi ñ-kà ufok-abási*

I pres-go house-god

‘I am going to church.’

In (4), it is evident that Ibibio does not morphologically represent ‘to’ in its construction. The direction of the agent is implicitly decoded.

3.1.1.5 *mme* ‘with’

(5) *Ùkó a-bà mmé èté*

Uko Aux-his with father

‘Uko is with his father.’

From the example above, Ibibio uses *mme* to mean ‘with’. A closer look at the example suggests that *mme* denotes ‘following’ or ‘accompanying.’ In essence, it is used when someone is walking with someone.

3.1.2 Bound prepositions in Ibibio

3.1.2.1 *-kama* ‘with’

(6) *Ètté àdó a-kama nwèd mmi*

man the Aux-with book my

‘The man is with my book.’

From the example above, Ibibio uses *ákámá* to mean ‘with’. *Akama* is mostly used when someone is in possession of an inanimate object. The morpheme *-kama* is suffixed to the auxiliary verb *a-*.

3.1.2.2 *-mbiaha* ‘about’

(7) *Ñwèd ado à-mbiaha mièn*

book the Aux-about I

‘The book is about me.’

In the above data, Ibibio uses *-mbiaha* to denote ‘about’. *-mbiaha* is suffixed to the auxiliary verb *a-*.

3.2 Igbo lexical prepositions

3.2.1 Free lexical prepositions in Igbo

3.2.1.1 *maka* ‘for’

(8) a. *Ó sì-ri ñri maka m*

he/she cook-pst food for I

‘He/she cooked for me.’

b. *Ó bù maka ihì m.*

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it Aux for sake my
 ‘It is for my sake.’

From the above examples, it is evident Igbo uses *maka* to denote ‘for’. Just as it is the case with prepositions, the prepositions in the above data precede a noun phrase.

3.2.1.2 *na/n* ‘from, to, at’

(9) *Anyí* *sì* *n’* *ùlò* *ùkà*
 we come(Pres) from house church
 ‘We are coming from the church.’

(10) *Ákpàn* *gu-ru* *àkwukwọ* *n’* *Oxfórd*
 Akpan study-pst book at Oxford
 ‘Akpan studied at Oxford.’

(11) *Àna* *m* *àgá* *n’* *ulò* *ùkà*
 Pres I go to house church
 ‘I am going to church.’

In examples (9), (10), and (11), the prepositions: ‘from, to, at’ are realised with *na*. If the complement of the preposition begins with a vowel, *na* is written as (n’) but if the complement begins with a consonant, *na* is written in full.

3.2.1.3 *gbasara* ‘about’

(12) *Ákwukwọ* *ahù* *bu* *gbasára* *m*
 book the Aux about I
 ‘The book is about me.’

In the above example, *gbasara* with (Low High High) tone functions as a preposition whereas if the tone is all low, it functions as a verb.

3.2.2 Bound preposition in Igbo

In the Igbo language, bound preposition is realised with a -rv marker. In most cases, the -rv bound preposition denotes the prepositional notion of ‘for’ in the language. For example:

(13) a. *Ádá* *sì-i-ri* *m* *ńrì*
 Ada cook-for-pst I food
 ‘Ada cooked for me.’
 b. *Òbí* *sù-u-ru* *m* *ákwa*
 Obi wash-for-pst I cloth
 ‘Obi washed for me.’

From the above examples, the -rv preposition comes before the past tense marker. In the 13(a&b), it can be seen that the ‘r’ of the prepositional notion was elided. For further illustrations, see Mbah (1999).

3.3 Similarities in the lexical prepositions of Ibibio and Igbo

The similarity between Ibibio and Igbo prepositions is that they occur before a noun phrase. More so, both Ibibio and Igbo have different ways of showing ‘with’ i.e. in possession of an inanimate object and in accompaniment with someone. Ibibio uses *mme* and *akama* to denote these respectively whereas Igbo uses *ji* and *so*.

3.4 Differences between Ibibio and Igbo prepositions

The identified differences between Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions are shown as the following.

Table 1. The identified differences between Ibibio and Igbo lexical prepositions

S/N	Ibibio	Igbo
1.	Prepositions inflect for number.	There is no prepositional inflection.
2.	The prepositional notion, ‘to’ is not morphological represented.	‘To’ is morphologically marked with (<i>na/n’</i>).
3.	Bound prepositions are suffixed to an auxiliary verb.	Bound prepositions co-occur with the root verb and a past tense marker.
4.	The preposition ‘about’ appeared as a bound preposition in the language.	‘About’ appeared as a free lexical preposition.
5.	The number of free lexical prepositions is lesser than its Igbo counterpart.	Free lexical prepositions are greater in number than those of Ibibio.

4. Summary of findings, conclusion and recommendations

4.1 Summary of findings

From the analysis in this work, it was observed that aside *ke* and *mme*, which Essien (2008) identified as the proper prepositions in Ibibio, this paper discovered that other prepositions are obtainable. *Ke* and *ano* mean ‘for’ in the language, which was not observed by Essien. More so, in some cases where a BE verb is present in a construction such as *akama* ‘with’, *ambiaha* ‘about’, the verb is prefixed to the morpheme denoting a bound lexical preposition. In some cases like *nto/ito* ‘from’, these prepositions inflect for numbers. The prefix ‘i-’ denotes plural whereas ‘n-’ marks singularity.

The similarity between Ibibio and Igbo prepositions is that they occur before a noun phrase. More so, both Ibibio and Igbo have different ways of showing ‘with’ i.e. in possession of an inanimate object and in accompaniment with someone as seen in (7) and (8).

In addition, lexical prepositions exist in Igbo such as *maka* ‘for’, *gbasara* ‘about’, *na* ‘in, to, at’, etc. One striking thing that was observed in the data was that in some constructions, the preposition is explicitly shown in Ibibio but it is not so in Igbo. Conversely, the preposition ‘to’ is marked in Igbo but it is not morphologically represented in Ibibio.

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Prepositional inflection is present in Ibibio but absent in Igbo. These identified differences might be because Ibibio belongs to the lower cross group whereas Igbo belongs to Kwa.

4.2 Conclusion

The Ibibio and Igbo languages have lexical preposition. In Ibibio, there are *ke*, *ano*, and *mme* because they are the only free lexical prepositions that do not change their forms in the Ibibio language. Other prepositional elements like *akama*, *nto/ito*, and *ambiaha* are bound lexical prepositions because they either have the verb attached to them or they inflect for number. In Igbo, however, free lexical prepositions like *maka*, *na*, and *gbasara* are present. In the case of with, there is no separate word that means 'with'. Therefore, this study has established that there are free and bound lexical prepositions in Ibibio and Igbo. There also exist some similarities and differences between Igbo and Ibibio prepositions.

4.3 Recommendations

The researchers recommend that researchers should conduct further comparative study of category incorporated preposition as well as prepositional phrase between Ibibio and Igbo in particular and other languages in general. More so, a comparative study like this is needed between other African languages so as to ascertain the areas of convergence and divergence between the compared languages. This will help in ascertaining the different parametric variations existing between and among African languages.

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