# A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF EFIK PROVERBS

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## ABSTRACT

Proverbs are important aspects of verbal discourse within the socio-cultural contexts in which knowledge, ideas and emotions are communicated. They reflect the people's social and cultural orientations, philosophy, worldviews, as well as psychological and literary make-ups that generally depict the experience of life. The language of proverbs is commonly figurative, colourful, pithy, grammatically insightful and condensing the wisdom of experience. In this study, we attempt the morphological and syntactic description of proverbs in Efik, a Lower-Cross language spoken predominantly in Southern Cross River State, Nigeria. Proverbs are morphosyntactic constructions of different kinds, structures and functions, with their unique grammatical peculiarities. We investigate the internal structure of Efik proverbs and highlight their grammatical relevance in an attempt to accentuate an aspect of the Efik language and culture which is daily put out of prominence and active use, given that Efik proverbs mainly thrive in oral tradition. Our aim is to arrest the loss of this inherited knowledge and attempt to preserve a valuable part of the Efik linguistic, literary and cultural heritage.

**Key words:** proverbs, morphology, syntax, Efik, language and culture

## *RESUMEN ABSTRACTO*

*Los proverbios son aspectos importantes del discurso verbal dentro del contexto socio cultural en que se comunican el conocimiento, las ideas y las emociones. Reflejan las orientaciones culturales y sociales, la filosofía y visión del mundo de la personas tanto como la formación literaria y la sicología que generalmente caracterizan las experiencias de la vida. El lenguaje de los proverbios es comúnmente figurativo, de colorido, profundo, gramaticalmente introspectivo y que condensa la sabiduría de la experiencia. En este estudio tratamos la descripción morfológica y sintáctica de proverbios en Efik, un lenguaje de menor clase hablado predominantemente en el Estado Sureño de Cross River, en Nigeria. Los proverbios son construcciones morfosintácticas de diferentes tipos, estructuras y funciones, con relevancia gramatical en un intento de acentuar un aspecto del lenguaje y la cultura Efik que a diario pierde prominencia y uso activo, debido a que los proverbios en Efik subsisten primordialmente gracias a la tradición oral. Nuestra meta es detener la pérdida de este conocimiento heredado e*

*intentar preservar una valiosa parte de la literatura y herencia cultural de la lingüística Efik.*

**Palabras clave:** *Proverbios, sintaxis, Efik, lenguaje y cultura*

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Introduction

Proverbs are constructed out of strings of words and affixes that exist in a language, and hence constitute higher grammatical units than phrases, clauses and sentences. Salzmann (1998) maintains that proverbs are pithy saying that contain generally accepted truth. According to him, "…it is the voice of the old-age authority and collective wisdom of a particular society" (p. 261). In other words, it is not the user of the proverbs who speaks but the experience of the many generations that have gone before. In this way, the use of proverbs remains a veritable tool for traditional education and the transmission of social, cultural, and historical values and information. The use of proverbs pervades all facets of human activities and perception, and as Andah (1982) poffers, "…it's a major determinant of the images with which people face one another and all the problems of life" (p. 3). Our traditional leaders of thoughts, and men of wisdom, use proverbs as a form of literary expression to warn, encourage, admonish, mock, advise, console and generally establish the verbal convention that is significant to the social order, given some social, cultural and historical circumstances. Unfortunately, these values are fast disappearing as they are no longer being transmitted to the present

generation. In this way, an enriching aspect of the Efik (and by extension African languages) is facing a crisis of extinction.

Although Salzmann (1998) has contended that "…the substance of a proverb does not lie in its style or syntax but the message it communicates" (p. 261). We argue that the message cannot be isolated from the style and syntax because they give expression to and endow the proverb with its essential character. The grammatical description of Efik proverbs has long been ignored in the few studies on Efik proverbs. Our claim in this paper is that Efik proverbs contain enormous morphosyntactic information which is invaluable in giving significant insights into the native speaker's grammar. This study aims to encourage the promotion and sustenance of a part of the Efik linguistic legacy given the challenges of global communication. In the discussion that follows, we examine the typology of Efik proverbs.

Typology of Efik Proverbs

In this study, we categorize Efik proverbs into two broad classes: the proverb-riddle and the conventional proverb. According to Umoh (2007), proverb-riddle is analogous to a coin with two faces. It is a two part saying which combines the attribute of both the riddle and proverb. Salzmann (1998) argues that proverb-riddles are

> …puzzling questions based on some unexpected connections with a solution that is to be guessed. They serve as a good example of oral folklore that is constantly renewing itself. They are favourite form of entertainment between teams of individuals, both young and adult. (p. 261)

In Efik, this form of genre is usually employed in story-telling and moonlight plays. It is used to spice the story in the beginning, intermittently and at the end of the

narration. Every proverb-riddle, just like a main story begins with a call by the narrator or any member of the audience and a general response by the audience, of the traditional formulae:

1(a) call:             Ékọñ ńké-éé
 (b) response:      Ñké ékọñ àbàsì

      As an opening formula, it is a formal courtesy by the narrator of a story to use it to draw every listener's attention and evoke an air of calmness. It is re-echoed at regular intervals to obtain attention, concentration and participation. Examples of proverb-riddles in Efik include:

2(a) riddle:     Ọ-dúọk  ńtọñ ké ńtọñ  é-tiènè.
                 3-SG pour ashe Aux ashe  3SG-follow
                 'He who pours ashes is followed by the same ashes'

 (b) answer:   Á- súá  éyèn ówó   í-nyéné-ké  ésìé.
                 3SG hate child person 3SG-has-NEG his
                 'He who hates another person's child is childless'

3(a) riddle:     Ń-tém ńtém mbèn úsùñ ń-kpì ébót ókpó.
                 1SG-cut grass side road 1SG-stab goat bone
                 'I laboured by the side of the road and cut the goat's leg'

 (b) answer:   Ń- díá údíá úfọk  ówò  ń-  sìn   útóm ń-dí-nám
                 1SG-eat food house person 1SG refuse work 1SG-PAST- do
                 'I ate someone's food and refused to participate in his work'

      Children are taught and brought up through a social learning process by this folk culture. The structure of Efik proverb-riddles generally reflects a cause-and-effect relationship, putting people at the centre of its focus and emphasizing values and value systems. These proverb-riddles just like other forms of oral literary genres in Efik are

poetic and rhythmic. This is because the tune of the answer is based on the tone and rhythm of the riddle. Importantly, the syllables of the answer correspond to the syllables of the riddle.

The type of language use in proverb-riddles, according to Salzmann (1998) sharpens the wits of children and helps them to explore various aspects of the vocabulary and the cognitive code of the mother tongue. This implies that proverb-riddles can enhance the child's ability to speak his language accurately, automatically and creatively by being able to identify and integrate properly with his language community. Umoh (2007) has also opined that proverb-riddles can provide raw materials for language teaching. Children can attain mastery of a language with such verbal duels.

On the other hand, we describe conventional proverbs as those that are common in everyday conversational experience. The meaning may be expressed literarily, philosophically or metaphorically. Unlike the proverb-riddles, conventional proverbs do not require the use of puzzles that need to be unraveled. The basic tenet of this medium lies in the expression of meaning within a given social intercourse. Again, the context of its application is wide-ranging unlike the proverb-riddle that is restricted to story telling or moonlight plays (mbrĕ ọfiọñ). Within the Efik socio-cultural contexts, proverb-riddle is seen as a property of children, while conventional proverbs are the preserve of the elders. This is because only elders are permitted by social convention to use proverbs in both formal and non-formal settings. Children can only learn but cannot utilize proverbs while conversing with elders.

In this study, we focus mainly on the structure of the conventional proverbs since they are found to be grammatically rich and informative. In the discussion that follows, we examine some features of Efik proverbs.

## Features of Efik Proverbs

In this section, we identify the stylistic features that are commonly associated with Efik proverbs, and which gives it its distinctiveness. Proverbs are usually expressed in short, succinct and clear language, whose meanings may be transparent or opaque:

4(a)  Ímá édí óbìó.
      love aux nation
      'Love makes a nation'

(b)   Ókúk édí àkpàráwà.
      money aux youth
      'Money makes a man'

(c)   Ówó édí ínyéné
      person aux wealth
      '(Having) people constitute wealth'

These proverbs generally embody universal truth and "…imaginable rules and regulations considered by the society as necessary for its continued existence as a functioning unit" (Andah, 1982, p. 3). They use metaphors to elaborate their contents. Meaning is grounded to reality through the embodied experience of human beings. The concepts of *love*, *money* and *people* are pervasive and very central in defining the mindset of an average Efik person, and so are given unique metaphorical profile here which has cultural relevance. The vocabulary of proverbs is typically poetic, making use of rhyme, rhythm and sound-symbolism to create the desired effect:

5(a)    Ówó    á-  kpá ké mmọ̃ñ,
         person 3SG-die in water
        ọ-nwọ̃ñ mmọ̃ñ
        3SG-drink water
        'If someone drowns, he drinks water'

(b)     Ówó    á- tíát  úkót ọ-  nọ  éfík, éfík  ó- kpón
        person 3SG-open leg  3SG-give hynia hynia 3SG-expand
        'If someone opens his leg for hynia, the ailment expands.

    In 5(a), the rhyme pattern is used to symbolize a physical notion *mmọ̃ñ*

'water/river', which contributes to the overall effect. In (b), a network of association is

built by the repetition of the word *éfík* 'hynia' at different points, which are formally

linked to achieve aesthetic effect, sometimes to compel a listener to consider their

possible meaning relations (Crystal, 1997, p. 74).

    The use of poetic diction and vivid images are other poetic characteristics of Efik

proverbs. These are grandiose, elevated and unfamiliar language, which are not common

in everyday discourse:

6.      Érén  òwò  í-   trĕ   -ké brùsái
        Man person 3SG-stop-NEG flirt
        'A man cannot stop flirting'

    Webster (1996) maintains that the use of poetic diction is an attempt to fix

language through a vocabulary which results in a closed and eventual stale form of

writing. They are read and understood according to historical relevance. The use of

*brusai* (an archaic form for 'flirt') is no longer attestable in modern Efik vocabulary but

because languages change in the course of their development, certain vocabularies also

change through history. Webster (1996) further believes that such vocabularies, which

are outside the margins of conventional discourse push meaning to its limit in a particular historical moment, thus shifting the signifier towards a new signified.

Efik proverbs can be divided into two parts that balance each other, often displaying parallel syntax and rhythm, and links of rhyme and alliteration (Crystal, 1996):


7(a)  E- da ifiọk e- men nnunuñ koro nnunuñ a-  da ifiọk o- dobi
      3PL-use skill 3PL-carry mangrove CONJ mangrove 3SG-use skill 3SG-heavy
      'It is skills that is used to carry the log of mangrove because it uses skills to be heavy'

(b)   Kpúkprú ùsèn é- nyènè ínọ úsèn kíét é-nyènè  ényéné ínwáñ
      every    day 3SG-have thief day one 3SG-have owner  farm
      'Everyday is for the thief. One day is for the owner of the farm'.


In 7(a), the two parts of the proverb are joined together by a subordinator *kórò* 'because' implying that they are both subordinate clauses of a complex sentence. In (b), the expressions are clearly two simple sentences. Efik uses tonal features to alternate classes of even and changing tones, and also organize the words into rhymical units. In the examples above, we observe that some words are repeated to achieve some phonetic or phonological effects. The use of simile and metaphor is a major stylistic feature of Efik proverbs:


8(a)  Sóp ntè ídàñ, nyọnì ntè ékwòñ
      fast as  arrow delay as   snail
      'Be as fast as the arrow or be as slow as the snail'

(b)   A-kan   eka   okukip esio
      3SG-win mother cover pot
      'A pot cover that is mightier than its (containing) pot

The example in 8(a) uses simile to establish contrast of movement of two objects that are essentially different. The speed of the arrow is contrasted with the slowness of the snail to create certain structural foregrounding. In (b), an object has been applied to another creating an effect of sameness that is not literally applicable. A cover of a pot is said to be greater that the pot it is meant to cover. This is clearly a metaphorical effect. The use of pun or word play is also a poetic feature of Efik proverbs:

9(a)    Ófǫñ ǫfiǫñ ǫ-  fǫn  ké ǫfiǫñ
           cloth moon 3SG-good for moon
           'The moonlight dress is only suited for moonlight (season).

(b)    É-kébé  úkébé ǫ-   tǫrǫ  ùkébè ésìé
        3SG-inject enema 3SG-porch enema his
        'What one takes as purge is what is excreted'.

In the examples above, phonetic mix ups and linguistic creativity which are entertaining and amazing, are employed as a way of reinforcing meaning in the proverbs.

## The Morphology of Efik Proverbs

Words that exist in a language consist of elements known as morphemes, the minimal meaning unit of meaning or grammatical function (Yule, 1991). Morphemes are principally free or bound. Free morphemes contain core elements of meaning because they can stand on their own and make sense. Bound morphemes on the other hand, do not have independent existence. They have semantic content only in the context of free morphemes, and are concerned with grammatical processes which signal categories such as tense, aspect, mood, person, number and negation. Such bound morphemes are said to be inflectional while those that signal the creation of new words from existing ones are

derivational morphemes. We have morphs when morphemes are realized phonetically or phonologically.

Efik proverbs have a rich system of inflection as exemplified by the inflectional capabilities of concord affixes in signaling the various verbal categories in relation with the root verb:

10(a)  Éyén ké é- brĕ yé èkà ntè í- dí- túá -há túá
child AUX 3SG play PREP mother like 3SG FUT cry NEG EMP
'The child is playing with his mother as if he will not cry'

(b)  Sé ákámbá ówò é- tié dé tié ó- kút, éyénọwọñ í- dá -há dá í-kút
what big person 3SG sit ES EMP 3SG see child 3SG stand NEG EMP 3SG see
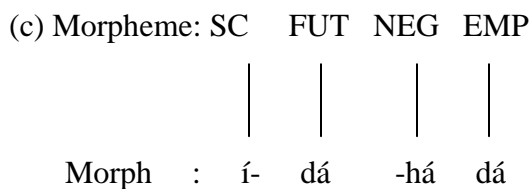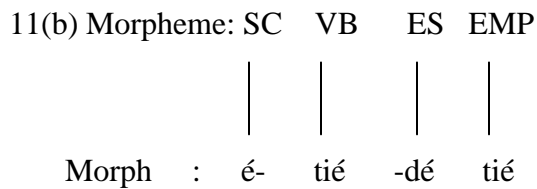'The thing an elder sits down to see cannot be seen by a child who is standing'.

The constituent *í- dí- túá -há túá* 'He will not cry (*cry* emphasized)' in 10(a) and *é- tié -dé tié* 'He sits down (*sit* emphasized)' as well as *í- dá -há dá* 'He cannot stand (*stand* emphasized) in 10(b) are agglutinative in nature. This means that they are long polymorphic words in which each morpheme corresponds to a single lexical meaning or grammatical function (Spencer, 1991). They consist of just one root and a number of affixes indicating concord of person, negation, extensional suffixes, and emphasis or focus. A cursory examination of the structure of *í- dí- túá -há túá*, for instance reveals that it is made up of the third person singular marker, future tense marker, root verb, negation marker and emphasis. We can represent this analysis graphically as follows:

11(a) Morpheme: SC  FUT  VB  NEG  EMP

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Morph    :    í-    dí-    túá    -há    túá
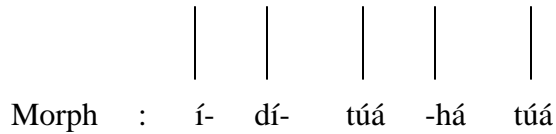
It is on the basics of this kind of correspondence that Katamba (1993) argues that an agglutinating language tends to display a more or less one-to-one matching of morphemes with morphs. These morphemes form a collocation to make up a sentence, whose meaning is encoded by a single word, the verb root.

       In 10(b), the constituent *é-tié -dé  tié* has the following morphemes: the subject concord prefix, verb root, extensional suffix and the emphasized root, while the constituent morphemes of *í- dá  -há  dá* are the third person singular marker, root verb, negation marker and the emphasized root. These can be illustrated graphically in 11(b) and (c) respectively:

11(b) Morpheme: SC    VB      ES    EMP

Morph    :    é-    tié    -dé    tié

(c) Morpheme: SC     FUT   NEG   EMP

Morph    :    í-    dá    -há    dá

      Each morpheme carries only one sense or a single meaning. It is the respective verb roots that have been built up to accommodate other constituents of the sentence like the subject, and the corresponding morphemes which now acquire complete thoughts.

Another morphological process found in Efik proverbs is the phenomenon of lexical borrowing, where words of other languages are adopted and adapted phonologically to copy the Efik sound system:

12(a)  Áníe  é-  ké- kéré  ké    Órón é-  yé- nyéné lọyà?
        Q   3SG ASP think COMP  Oron 3SG FUT have loya
        'Who would have thought that the Oron (people) will have a lawyer'

(b)     Àbàsì  í-  sìn  ké  Ókúsá íbọñ
       God   3SG deny NEG okusa kolanut
       'God cannot deprive (the) Hausa people of kola nut'

(c)     Ówó í-dá -há éfík í-nék mmọnì nkìm
      person 3SG use NEG hynia 3SG mmoni nkim
      'One does not use hynia to dance (mmoni nkim).

In 12(a)-(c), the forms, *lọyà* 'lawyer', *Ókúsá* 'Hausa' and *mmọnì nkìm* (an Ejagham maiden dance that involves constant rhythmic body movements with time and space) are respectively borrowed from English, Hausa and Ejagham languages. The motivation for the kind of borrowing in 12(a) is that the concept of a lawyer was non-existent in the Efik cultural vocabulary, and there was no appropriate referent to express it, hence the recourse to the linguistic resources of English. The form is actually integrated to follow the pronunciation of English, though its sounds have been simplified to reflect local flavour. In the course of the development of Efik however, the vocabulary was expanded to accommodate indigenous forms as *áyárá íwàt* (lit. one who wears wig) for the referent *lawyer* and *ébíéré íkpè* (lit. one who judges) for the referent *judge*. The borrowed forms in 12(b) and (c) are as a result of cultural contact between the Efik with the Ejagham and Hausa as a result of trade concerns. While the form *Ókúsá* has gained

currency in the Efik lexicon, *mmọnì nkìm* has not. The general trend in borrowing in Efik is that it mostly affects nouns.

The use of extant and archaic forms is another peculiarity of the morphology of Efik proverbs. Some of these forms are non-existent in the lexicon, while others are specialized usages which are not common in the daily communication situation:

13 Érén òwò í- trĕ -ké brùsái
  Man person 3SG-stop-NEG flirt
  'A man cannot stop flirting'

(b) Àmì ń- dí bárí, àmì ń- dí ówá
  PRO 1SG be bari PRO 1SG be owa
  'I am all and all'

(c) Ú- mé n-kàk á- nám íbókpót ákprák
  3SG-patience 1SG-tire 3SG do corn burst
  'Sustained patience causes the corn to burst'

In 13(a), the lexeme *brùsái* is no longer attestable in Efik if at all it was an entry in its lexicon. Our assumption arises from the fact that the clustering of /br-/ is rare. Apart from such evidence as *brĕ* 'play' and *brí* 'spray (e.g a mat)', this sound is not commonly found in Efik. We contend that the form may have been coined as a slang initially, and has been sustained in this proverb in the course of the development of the Efik language, and has stuck. In (b), the forms *bárí,* and *ówá* constitute the opening formulae of greetings in Ékpè and other social discourse. The initiator chants *óyé bárí,* to arrest the attention of his audience, who respond with *ówá* as an acknowledgement of the greeting and as a way of recognition accorded the initiator. In (c), the lexeme *ákprák* is basically ideophonic, representing the bursting sounds of a roasted corn on fire. The meaning of

the word is derived directly from the sound that is associated with it. The use of these archaic and irregular forms are however limited to very few proverbs.

Reduplication of words, particularly at the initial position of the sentence is also a morphological feature of Efik proverbs:

14(a)  Ófiọ̃ ọfiọ̃ á-    tàk    ké    ùyài
       moon moon 3SG remain PREP beauty
       'It is only the moon that is permanently beautiful'

(b)    Òfọ̃ ọfọ̃ é-  díp ówó
       cloth  cloth 3SG hide person
       'It is only cloths that hide one's nakedness'

(c)    Ńdísímé ńdísímé ọ-    duọk    ọkpọ ékpòròkò
       fool       fool    3SG throw away bone stockfish
       'It is only a fool that throws away the bone of (a) stockfish'

The reduplicative effect is a lexical device to convert a declarative sentence to a cleft construction. If the initial nouns in 14(a)-(c) were not reduplicated, we would have simple statements, but where they are, the statements are made to become cleft structures. Another effect of the reduplication is the covert realization of an adverb which modifies the respective subject nouns, and the introduction of the complementizer, which links the two subordinate clauses in each sentence. There is also an instance of another kind of reduplication where an entire phrase is repeated, not for emphasis but as successive motion or repeated action:

15.    Sík sàñ,  sík sàñ,  ọ-  bọ    ówó  itie
       shift a little, shift a little 3SG collect person seat
       'Excessive consideration for others may deprive one of his positions'

The expression *sík sàñ* 'shift a bit' is a verb phrase, which is reduplicated to reflect continuity of the movement which could be endless. Another type of reduplication exists which affects only post initial constituents:

16(a)  Úkó  ésít ésít, ùfèp  ésít ésít
       Courage bit bit  cowardice bit bit
       'Every heroic deed requires a little compromise'

(b)    M- má  ń- dèp mmà, ń- dí  tǫ-tǫi
       1SG PAST  1SG rain ASP  1SG be  drop
       'I have finished raining, I am now drizzling'


The kind of reduplication in 16(a) is said to have an augmentative meaning as it signals

the reduction of frequency or intensity of an action. It also functions as a derivational

process here by by making an adjective to act as an adverb in the sentence. In (b),

reduplication indicates continuation, frequency or repetition of the situation. This process

reduplicates the first CV of the root verb. Essien (1990) argues "…that reduplication of

this kind is induced by the syllabic structure of the base" (p. 68).  He stated that in Ibibio,

in a CVC structure, the final consonant of the root is deleted, and if the root consists of

more than one syllable then the second syllable is deleted, while in the CV, there is no

deletion of segment.  This is also applicable to Efik, as we can see in 16(b).

The use of taboo forms and expressions is equally prevalent in Efik proverbs.

Such forms are forbidden by social convention and mostly pertain to expressions which

relate to excretion, sex/genital organs, illness, and supernatural concepts among others:


17(a)  Ífúó  í- bíét  -ké  ándítǫrǫ
       feces 3SG resemble NEG depositor
       'Feces does not resemble its depositor'

(b)    É-kébé  úkébé  ǫ-  tǫrǫ  ùkébè ésìé
       3SG-inject enema 3SG-porch enema his
       'What one takes as purge is what is excreted'

(c)  Ékpọrọ á-   dàhà é-   nyéné ókúk ówò
     penis   3SG erect 3SG have   money person
     'It is the rich (man) that has regular erection'

(d)  Á-náná   ísò  òbùt  ntè  mkpá
     3SG lack face shame like death
     'As shameless as death'


The taboo forms in 17(a)-(d) *ífúọ* 'feces', *tọrọ* 'excrete', *ékpọrọ* 'penis' and *mkp*á 'death are highly distasteful, offensive and irrational and do not accord the principles of the society any sense of decency. Outside their use in proverbs, euphemisms have been developed as milder and acceptable alternatives for these forms to cope with their social restrictions in daily communication situations. *Íkọt, k*á*, ídém érèn* and *édé/ébé éfèp* are the corresponding euphemisms for these taboo words, which make them more tolerable to the social discourse and human consciousness. According to Fakoya (2007), the imagery contained in sexually explicit proverbs like 17(a)-(d) can only be effective if they are deployed in a conversational situation involving interlocutors co-constructing the discourse with sufficient cultural objectivity. A number of factors such as age, sex, subject matter and conversational dynamics usually come to play in utilizing these sexually-grounded proverbs.

Another morphological phenomenon that is a dominant tendency in Efik proverbs is nominalization, where a verb is converted to a noun or nominal expression by prefixation:


18(a)  Ọ-  fọn  ú-  tọrọ,    ọ-  fọn  ándí-tọrọ
       3SG good 3SG excrete 3SG good doer excrete
       'If it is good for cholera, it is also good for its victim'

(b)     Á-  má ánwàn ówò   á- kàmà    mkpá ísǫn
        3SG- love wife person 3SG owe     death debt
        'One who is having an illicit affair with another person's wife is on a death
        sentence'


The forms *ú-tǫrǫ* 'cholera', *ándí-tǫrǫ* 'victim of cholera' in 18(a) as well as á-*má*

'lover' and *m-kpá* 'death' in (b) are all nouns which are derived from the following verbs;

*tǫrǫ* 'excrete', *má* 'love' and *kpá* 'die'. The nominalizing prefixes, *ú-, ándí -, á-* and *m-*

either identify the referent most closely related to the action of the verb or specify the

doer of the action identified by the verb. We agree with Urua (1990) that such verbs

which are the post lexical elements are reintroduced into the lexicon for nominalization

by prefixation. These prefixing affixes have some tonal implications. This is, however,

beyond the scope of the present study. In the following analysis, we examine the

syntactic structure of Efik proverbs.



The Syntax of Efik Proverbs

Proverbs are made up of words that exist in a language, which are strung up to

form larger grammatical units like phrases, clauses and sentences. In the discussion that

follows, we examine the internal syntax of Efik proverbs in the light of these higher units

of grammar


*Proverbs as phrases*

Phrases are maximal projections with heads. They may be modified by elements

such as complements, adjuncts, specifiers and so on, which complete their meaning. A

few proverbs in Efik are clearly phrases, particularly the noun phrases:

19(a)  Ókpóhó kíét á-  wák   ékìkèrè
       penny   one 3SG many thought
       'One penny with many thoughts'

(b)    Nnàn ényìn ínwáñ
       blind  eye   bare
       'A bare-eyed blind (person)'

(c)    Ùtèrè úfọk-íkpò
       vulture funeral house
       'A funeral house vulture

(d)    Ówó yè ésìé
       person with his
       'Everyone with his own (style)

In 19(a)-(d), the initial nouns, *ókpóhó* 'penny', *nnàn* 'blind (person)', *ùtèrè* 'vulture' and

*ówó* 'person' respectively constitute the heads of the NPS. They are all post modified by

various elements, which agree in number with them. In (a), the head N is post modified

by the numeral *kíét* 'one' and the prepositional complement, *á- wák    ékìkèrè* 'with many

thought'. In (b), the head N, *nnàn* 'blind (person) is post modified by the adjective, *ényìn*

*ínwáñ* 'bare-eyed'. In (c), the head N, *ùtèrè* 'vulture', is postmodified by another N, *úfọk-*

*íkpò* 'funeral house'. In (d), the head N, *ówó* 'everyone' is postmodified by prepositional

complement, *yè ésìé* 'with his own'. There are other NPs which the head nouns do not

occur in head-initial positions. They function as relative constructions:

20(a)  Á- kán èkà    ókùkìp èsiò
       3SG-win  mother cover  pot
       'The pot cover that is greater than its (containing) pot'

The head of the overall NP is the N *ókùkìp èsiò* 'pot cover' is premodified by the verbal adjective *kán*, which is in its comparative form and the N, *èkà* (lit. mother) 'pot'. The relative clause is introduced by the complementizer, which is covert in 20(a), and the construction contains a headless correlative. However, in 20(b), the complementizer or demonstrative which is overt is the subject of the matrix clause:


(b)     Ókùkìp èsiò émì ó- kpón -dé a- kán èkà èsiò
        cover   pot   DEM 3SG big  ES 3SG-win  mother pot
        'The pot cover that is greater than its (containing) pot'


The entire free relative *émì ó- kpón -dé a-kán èkà èsiò* 'that is greater than its (containing) pot' occupies the subject position in the matrix clause. Interestingly, the N, *ókùkìp èsiò*, 'pot cover' functions as the head noun of the matrix clause and occurs sentence initially. Efik proverbs can also constitute VPs and APs. Proverbs which are VPs are mostly imperative constructions, while proverbs in the form of APs are mainly motion adjectives as we can see in 21(a) and (b) respectively:

21(a)   Kòp èdèm ìbà  ńdién ó- búp ńták
        hear  side  two  before 3SG ask reason
        'Hear from both sides before you pronounce judgement'

(b)     Sóp ntè ídàñ, nyọnì ntè ékwòñ
        fast as  arrow delay as   snail
        'Be as fast as the arrow or be as slow as the snail'

In 21(a), the VP has the V, *kòp* 'hear' as its head, which is complemented by the NP *èdèm ìbà* 'both sides', the conjunction *ńdién* 'before' and a further VP *ó- búp ńták* 'pass judgement'. In the case of 21(b), it displays similar types of two APs, whose adjectives separately constitute the heads of the phrases. They are complemented by adverbs and nouns respectively.

*Proverbs in sentence types*

In the analysis that follows, we examine the interaction of the various sentence types in Efik with proverbs. We investigate mainly the major sentence types and the implication for tense aspect, and mood:

*Interrogative sentences*

These are sentence types with the semantic correlation of question just like the declarative and imperative sentences are semantically related to statements and commands respectively. A question is a direct way of eliciting information from a respondent. It may ask whether a hypothesis is true or request for a particular piece of information. Questions in natural languages may be divided into yes-no question, wh-question, echo vs non echo question, and negative vs affirmative question. According to Rivero (1978), the basis of such division may be either functional or formal. The functional approach may point to the different purpose the speaker may have in mind or draw attention to the characteristic linguistic and situational context of each question type, while the formal approach is a more decisive categorization of questions that relies lexical and grammatical features that mark functional differences. The response to this kind of question has a formal structure. In Efik proverbs, the most prevalent question type is the wh-questions, which have wh-words as interrogative specifiers. They are so-called because in English, they characteristically begin with the form wh-. In Efik, such question words include *nsò* 'what', *ánié*, 'who', *mmọñ* 'where' and so on as we can see in the following proverbs:

22(a)   Nsò ké   ówó   á- díá úbọk á-   tàk   ké   ínùá?
        Q  AUX person 3SG eat hand 3SG remain PREP mouth
        'What can one eat for his hand to remain permanently in the mouth?'.

(b)     Àniè ọ-   fiọk   mkpọñ?
        Q    3SG know  tomorrow
        'Who knows tomorrow?'

(c)     Nsò í-   tíé ntè ùkémé?
        Q   3SG be like  ability
        'What is like (having) ability?'

One kind of movement that is relevant in the derivation of wh-word from declarative is known as the move-α rule. The general claim within GB theory is that the wh-item which appear at clause initial position are originated at a more abstract level, D-structure within the clause through the application of  move-α rule. Going by this assumption, 22(a) is generated from the declarative sentence in 23:

23      Ówó   á- díá nsò úbọk á-   tàk   ké   ínùá
        person 3SG eat  Q  hand 3SG remain PREP mouth
        'What can one eat for his hand to remain permanently in the mouth?.

The movement of the wh-word from its original position within the declarative sentence to the initial position of the sentence in the interrogatory question is what Borsley (1991) calls movement into COMP. Cowper (1991) also argues that wh-transformation is an instance of the rule move-α, where wh-word (or phrase) in interrogative sentences are believed to have been moved from somewhere else in the sentence. The implication of this is that the wh-word nsò 'what' at the beginning of the sentence in 22(a) is believed to have been moved from the position occupied by a trace to

its S-structure position in 23. Going by Borsley (1991) movement into COMP hypothesis, we realize that the wh-word in 22(a) is extracted from the sentence in 23 and deposited at the wh-node under COMP. The INFL element on the other hand will occupy the adjacent COMP, which is nearer to the NP.

An important wh-movement transformation in Efik is the introduction of the AUX element *ké* after the move- α rule has been applied. In the structure in 23, both the Aux element and INFL and the wh-word are moved into the same COMP. However, their nodes branch from the parent COMP. This if often called the Chomsky adjunction (Culicover 1976). It is however noted that this kind of transformation does not apply to every wh-word in Efik as we can see in 22(b) and (c).

*Imperative sentences*

Imperative sentences are used to issue commands. They do not have subjects at the surface structure characteristically. However, it is often claimed that the underlying subject of an imperative construction is the second person singular 'you'. In Efik proverbs, we observed a few instances of command, which we have already analysed under proverbs as verb phrases. We shall however be concerned here with negative imperative constructions which are more prevalent in Efik proverbs:

24(a)　Kû- bárá　íkáñ ú- tíénné ntè úrúk-íkọt ọ- ńíọñ-dé
　　　　NEG prepare fire 2SG follow like　snake　3SG long ES
　　　　'Do not reinforce the fire based on the length of the snake'

(b)　　Kû- kéré　mkpá ntè údọñọ
　　　　NEG think death like sickness
　　　　'Do not be consumed by the thoughts of death than sickness'

(c)     Kû-wọk éwọk       ú-    frê    ényìn ké     éním
        NEG swim  swimming 3SG  forget eye    PREP sinking
        'Do not swim and forget how to sink'

(d)     Kû-  tíé ké    órùñ ékọm  ú-   tá ékọm
        NEG  sit PREP root walnut 3SG eat walnut
        'Do not sit at the taproot of walnut to eat walnut'

The negative imperative sentences in 24(a)-(d) have the NEG imperative marker
kû- which is closely followed by the verb at the beginning of each sentence. The use of
kû- NEG operator functions basically in addition to signaling negation, express contrast
in 24(a) and (b) between the intensity of the fire and the length of the snake as well as
between death and sleep respectively. The association of the NEG marker with
preposition in 24(c) and (d) further reveals the contrast between the action of the
respective verbs, that is between *éwọk* 'swimming and *éním* 'sinking' on the one hand
and *tíé* 'sit' and *tá* 'eat' on the other hand.

*Simple declarative sentences*

These types of sentences are used to make statements. They have the basic word
structure of subject-verb-object order. The subject NP in this kind of construction must
agree in person and in number with the verb, which usually take concord affixes.

25(a)   Íbúó é-   kpéré ínùá ákáhá
        nose 3SG close mouth much
        'The nose is too close to the mouth'

(b)     Ńwán á-   kámá ísọn é-    tìñ   úyò-íkọ ébé
        Wife   3SG owe    debt 3SG speak voice husband
        'The wife of a debtor speaks in consonance with her husband'

(c)     Étí íkwọ é-  díọñọ  ké   ínúk

good song 3PL know PREP whistle
'A good song is known from its whistled tune'

In 25(a)-(c), the respective subject NPs are *íbúó* 'nose', *ńwán* 'wife', and *étí íkwọ* 'a good song' and the heads of the predicate phrase are *kpéré* 'close', *tiñ* 'speak' and *díọñọ* 'know' respectively, which also carry concord markers representing various kinds of persons with which the verb agrees with the subject NPs. The concord prefixes are e-, which represents the third person singular, a-, which stands for the third person singular and e-, which indicates the third person plural correspondingly. These concord markers function as the unemphasized subjects in the respective sentences (Kari, 2003). This is because if the pragmatic knowledge of the emphasized subjects is already established, the concord markers can be used to replace them. This raises an important question of double subjects in Efik, which is a requirement of the syntax of the language.

The study also discovers that Efik proverbs can display instances of negative declarative sentences as we can see in 26:

26(a)  Ọ- fíọk  í- fíọk  -ké  été  ọ-  fíọk  ọ-fíọk
       3SG know 3SG know NEG COMP 3SG know 3SG know
       'A wise person does not know that others could be wiser'

(b)    Ń-  síné  -ké  ké  úbóm énàñ é-  síné -dé
       1SG enter NEG PREP canoe cow 3SG enter ES
       'I cannot enter a canoe that carries a cow'

(c)    Ń-  túá  -há ówó   ékè  ọkpọ-úsùñ ésìé ó-  wót -dé ényé
       1SG cry NEG person COMP   morsel   PRO 3SG kill ES PRO
       I do not mourn anyone who is killed by his own morsel'

(d)    Étó  í-  dá -há  ìkpòñ  í-  fòró ákài
       tree  3SG stand NEG alone 3SG turn forest
       'A tree does not make a forest'

An important generalization about negation markers in Efik is that they are motivated by the syllable structure of the verbs they are attached. Where the verb has two or more syllables, -ké NEG marker is used as in 26(a) and (b), but when the verb is a single syllable, -hx marker is used depending on the harmonic principle of the following vowel of the verb concerned. This is a principal claim of Mensah (2001) that negation in Efik is signaled by both morphosyntactic and phonological processes.

*Verb serialization*

A phenomenon where two or more verbs are present in a sentence which is interpreted as a single action rather than a series of actions is known as verb serialization (Sebba 1987). Serial Verb Constructions (SVC) have their peculiar grammatical properties such as subcategorization, inflectional capabilities, transitivity, strict ordering relationship and so on. They also have morphological, phonological and syntactic constraints. In Efik proverbs, we have a few cases of SVC:

27(a)   M- fọp   ń- tá úfọk  èkà  á-nám     éyén  á- kábáré íno
        1SG-roast 1SG-eat house mother 3SG-cause child  3SG-turn    thief
              '(Frequent) roasting and eating (of fish and meat) at home cause a child to
        become a thief'

(b)     Ákpán    èkà  á- mán  á-  tá
        first son mother 3SG-born 3SG-eat
        'A mother who bears and kills (her children)'

(c)     Ù-wòt ń-   tá ìkpọñ  á- nám  únàm  ọ- nyọn
        3PL-kill 1SG-eat alone 3SG-cause animal 3SG-escape
        'Killing and eating alone cause the (hunted) animal to escape'

In the examples in 27, the constructions *m-fọp ń-tá* 'roasting and eating', *á-mán á-tá* 'bearing and eating' and *ù-wòt ń-tá* 'killing and eating' in (a), (b) and (c) consist of series of verbs which act together as a single predicate without any overt marker of coordination, subordination or syntactic dependency of any sort. They are monoclausal…and they have only one tense, aspect and polarity value (Aikenvald, 2003:1). The two verbs in the construction denote a certain substantial situation or action and share a common nominal argument which is explicitly expressed. The verbs in the series carry concord affixes representing person, number and aspect. This shows that there are basic contrasts in inflectional categories of serialized verbs in Efik. It is argued that the serial verbs profile a single process comprising two separate coded phases. In other words, two phases are signaled under one overall event. *m-fọp* 'roasting', *á-mán* 'bearing' and *ù-wòt* 'killing' respectively represent the inception phase in 27 (a), (b) and (c) while *ń-tá* 'eating' is their corresponding termination phase. The two events are semantically related to be understood as two phases under a single event.

*Modal contrast*

Mood is an inherent category which functions to describe an event in terms of whether it is necessary, possible, permissible or desirable (Katamba, 1993). It is concerned with the attitude the speaker takes towards the reality or truth of what he is saying. A handful of proverbs in Efik is laced with modal markers, which occur as concord affixes:

28(a)   M-  kpọ- fíọk   ké   ékwọñ ọ-  yọ- ńyọñ  m-  kpá-  dá íkó-tíán ń-  kíbí

1SG MOD know COMP snail 3SG ASP escape 1SG MOD use basin        1SG
cover
'If I had known that the snail will escape, I would have covered it with a basin'

(b)      É-    kpé- dí ńtáhá-ǫfǫñ ǫ-    kpǫ-   fǫn ékárá?
         3SG MOD be    rag        3SG MOD good pad
         If you were a rag, would you make a good pad?


         *Kpǫ-* and *kpé-* modal morphemes in 28 occur in conditional clauses in preverbal

positions. In (a), they are used to express the speaker's personal wish. The speaker is

expressing regrets over the logical necessity of an action that is no longer possible. In (b),

they expressed elements of uncertainty. The interpretation of 28(b) implies that the

speaker is not sure of the ability of the addressee or the goodness of the pad, which is

predicated on this ability.



*Aspectual contrast*

         Aspect is concerned with the internal temporal make-up of the action, event or

state. According to Bauer (1991), the action considered is true independent of time or

throughout time. We have identified two types of aspectual markers in Efik proverbs; si-

and kx- as we can see in 29:


29(a)   Ówó í-    sí- dǫñ -ké   ákpàn íkót nnànènyìn
        person 3SG ASP put NEG basket invite problem
        'No one loads his basket to invite problem'

(b)     Í-  dí -hé úsèn é-   sí- tíbí -dé òbùbè ké   érǫñ é- sí-    dúk
        3SG-be-NEG day 3PL ASP dig  ES   pit   COMP frog 3SG ASP enter
        'It is not the day the pit is dug that a frog is found in it'

(c)     M-   má-   ń- yímé í-   kí- dí -hé  kpúkprù

1SG PAST 1SG agree 3SG ASP be  NEG  all
'I have accepted but not in totality'

(d)    Ọ- mọ̃ñ é-    nék únék  ọ-   kọ-  kọñọ -dé ísọn ùsọ
3SG FUT 3SG dance OBJ 3SG ASP put up ES debt father
'You will dance until you remind people of your father's debt'


In 29(a) and (b), the habitual aspect sí- is employed. According to Comrie (1976), habituality classifies a situation as being "… characteristic of an extended period of time, so extended in fact that the situation referred to is viewed not as an incidental property of the moment, but precisely, as a characteristic feature of a whole period" (p.27). in other words, the si- aspectual marker expresses actions and states that are frequentive. It has the implication that the truth of the situation may or may not hold. In 29 (c) and (d), the relative completive aspect markers, kí- and kọ- are signaled by reduplication. They do not only emphasize the termination or completion of a situation but also relate the completion to some other events either explicitly mentioned or understood in the context of the speech act.

## The Future of Efik Proverbs

When Chinua Achebe, the great African novelist remarked that proverbs (in the Igbo language) are the palm oil with which words are eaten, he was directly emphasizing the indispensability of this genre in the day to day discourse situation of the culturally sensitive members of the speech community. Unfortunately, the gains of westernization and globalization have robbed off on this salient aspect of our literary culture. Special knowledge relating to the use of proverbs are either fast disappearing or already extinct, given the endangered crisis of some of our indigenous languages. The process of linguistic transmission has collapsed, particularly among the city youths, who according

to Fakoya (2007), are somehow alienated from the culture that utilize proverbs to anchor talk (p.10). Most educated parents lack the skills of utilizing the genre of proverbs in enforcing stern rectitude in the socio-moral behaviour of their children. Apart from this domestic neglect, custodians of traditional values have not promoted the use of proverbs in traditional ceremonies such as naming, marriage, burial, and chieftaincy and so on. All these problems are tied down to the declining use of the indigenous languages within the socio-cultural and educational domains.

The custodians of language and other traditional values, community based organizations, teachers and all stakeholders need to develop an institutional framework to awaken and resurrect interest in proverbs. Children need to be taught formally and informally the use and meaning of proverbs to provide a strong cognitive background for understanding Efik Such knowledge can also help to strengthen their creativity, imagination and ingenuity. This need has to be accommodated in the curriculum at every level of learning. If proverbs are studied and intellectualized, the ethonolinguistic potential for the development and revitalization of indigenous languages and culture will be astronomically boosted.


Concluding Remarks

This paper has been basically concerned with aspects of the morphosyntax of Efik proverbs. We argued that proverbs do not only have stylistic and sociolinguistic relevance but since they are formed by combining identifiable linearly realized components, they have structural relationships which they enter into in the lexicon; the paper investigated the structure and system of proverbs taking into account their

typology, stylistic features, derivational relationships, and syntactic structure. We argue that Efik proverbs reflect the entire grammatical structure and offer useful sociolinguistic insight into the understanding of the language, and submit that in filling our comprehension of Efik proverbs, we need to pay attention to its morphology, and syntax, which provide the essential ingredients for their contextual application. We proffered some remedial approaches that can be adopted to revitalized interest in the use of proverbs not only among the culturally sensitive members of the Efik speaking community but in the upcoming generation. This is the people that are better placed to transmit this legacy to the next generation, thus sustain a strong literary and linguistic bond.

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