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THE PLACE OF SYNTAX IN URHOB MORPHO-PHONOLOGY: THE CASE OF VOWEL REDUPLICATION IN URHOB

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Abstract

The occurrence of Urhobo vowels in sequence often leads to one of the vowels either deleting or becoming a glide (Aziza, 2007:465). However, the demands of syntax appear to trigger the occurrence of vowels in sequence in order to produce constructions that are grammatically acceptable in the language. This paper aims at identifying and describing such syntactic triggers that bring about this phenomenon. Data for the study was gathered from oral sources drawn from eleven (11) Urhobo proverbs. It was observed that the syntactic need to express tense, aspect, state, passivity, degree and negation in sentences brings about a reduplication of vowels. These vowel reduplicants carry specific grammatical functions and meanings as expressed in the grammatical features they exhibit in sentences examined. The outcome of the study, therefore, highlights the role syntax plays in connecting sound to form, grammatical meaning and function of words in a natural language. It also draws attention to two other types of overt syllable structure in Urhobo (VV, CVV) as well as different types of phrases and sentences the phenomenon produces in Urhobo language.

Key words: vowels in sequence, syntactic triggers, vowel reduplication, syllable structure, spoken language, syntax in morphology and phonology

1.1 Introduction

The five sub-divisions of descriptive linguistics are Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax and Semantics (Anagbogu, et al. 2001:30). These sub-divisions often interact in a language in the

process of interlocution within speech communities. Whereas phonetics concerns itself with the study of speech sounds, phonology examines how the speech sounds make meaningful contrasts. The sounds made are organized into segments that can collocate which can stand alone as full-fledged words or depend on another unit to make sense. This is the domain of morphology. Syntax studies how the words in a language are organized into larger units, viz, phrases, clauses and sentences. Semantics deals with the study of the meaning of any of the outputs of the sub-divisions. Furthermore, in the revised Standard

Theory where the two levels of analysis: phonological and semantic components have been replaced by the Phonetic Form (PF) and Logical Form (LF) in the Government and Binding (GB) theory of Syntax there appears to be a demonstration of the link between syntax and phonology on one hand, then syntax and semantics on the other hand (See Ndimele 1992:14-16; 1999: 159-165). In his detailed description Ndimele (1999:178) showcases this relationship and asserts that

The final effect of syntax ... is to relate the sounds of a stretch of utterance to ... meaning ... the syntactic component is a mediator between sound and meaning.

The sounds of a stretch of utterance are simply words in sentences. The outcome of the present study would exemplify how syntax mediates between sound and the form and meaning of words in a natural language.

Some linguists who developed interest in studying indigenous languages focused on different contexts in which the language is used. These scholars relied heavily on the oral traditions of the people as the corpus from which such studies could be carried out. Otite (2003:3) states that, in such societies the

volume and quality of fragile documents produced by early explorers, missionaries, colonial administrators and those involved in commerce, leave hardly any option than to rely on oral tradition as raw material for the reconstruction of the history and other kinds of studies

Williamson (1984:1) further argues that the spoken form of the language is more natural more basic, and superior to the written language. According to her therefore,

when we come to writing, the spoken language must be our guide, and in developing a written form of a language, our aim should be to make the written agree closely with the spoken form. If this is well done we should be able to read the language just as easily as we can understand people speaking it.

This stance informs the conceptual framework against which the data for this study is drawn from oral sources. According to Mensah (2013:89-90),

proverbs are deeply rooted in the people's cultural traditions and reflect their ways of life..... proverbs are dynamic and innovative, displaying diverse degrees of semanticity and traditionality, and they contain enormous ethnographic information which draws upon age and currency.... They are deeply ingrained in our language and thought.

Thus the language structures of the people are couched in their proverbs.

1.2 Urhobo Language Studies

Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars have shown much interest in the study of Urhobo language. There are also regulatory bodies that are saddled with the task of ensuring that studies in the language are properly coordinated. This is one of the tasks of the Urhobo Language Committee which has had to examine various aspects of the language studied over the years to ensure acceptable standards are maintained. The committee recommended the following as the standard for the orthography of the Urhobo language:

- That the written form of Urhobo should follow strictly grammatical rules
- That every word must stand by itself and have its complete meaning. In case of doubt about a word, find out the root of the word
- That a complete word must have its own spelling
- That the use of the apostrophe (') in prose writing should be discouraged. It may be required in poetic form of writing
- Like in other languages the subject and the predicate must clearly show in all sentences

See also Ege (1985: ii-iii)

The following make up the letters of the Urhobo alphabet as adopted by the Urhobo Studies Association on April 28 2005, in the following order:

**a bch d dj e ẹ f g gbghghw h hw
i j k kp l m mw n ny o ọ p ph r rh
s sh t u v vw w y z**

Here, there are twelve (12) digraphs, one (1) trigraph and twenty-five (25) monographs. The digraphs are: \widehat{ch} [c]; \widehat{dj} [j]; \widehat{gb} [gb]; \widehat{gh} [γ]; \widehat{hw} [hw]; \widehat{kp} [kp]; \widehat{mw} [ηm]; \widehat{ny} [n]; \widehat{ph} [φ], \widehat{rh} [r]; \widehat{sh} [ʃ]; \widehat{vw} [v]; the trigraph is \widehat{ghw} [γw̃]. The monographs are: a b d e ẹ f g h i j k l m n o ọ p r s t u v w y z.

Phonetically, the digraphs and trigraphs are treated as single units of sounds because they are doubly articulated as can be observed in the transcription. Where they occur in syllables therefore, they are tagged C not CC or CCC. This does not rule out the possibility of consonant clusters in Urhobo. Aziza (2007 b: 279) identifies three syllable types in Urhobo: V, CV, and CCV. Another important point to note in the writing of Urhobo and the representation of sound segments in the syllable is nasalization. All the seven oral vowels in Urhobo can be nasalized. Nasalization can also affect the meaning of a word. Orthographically, this is marked with an ‘-n’ at the end of the word after the last vowel. Thus we have *ghò* [γò] ‘entertain’ as against *ghòn*[γò̃] ‘be stiff’. The ‘-n’ cannot be classified as C. So far there is no known Urhobo word that ends with a consonant as all Urhobo words end with vowels. Therefore there is no syllable structure that has a C as its coda.

Urhobo language has several dialects;Avwraka dialect is mainly used in this study. There are three basic tones in the language: high tone (H) [´], low tone (L) [`] and down-stepped high tone (!H) [¯]. In this study, the high and low tones are marked. The down-stepped high tone is subsumed under the low tone and marked as low (since it is lower than the high tone).

2.1 Definition and Forms of Reduplication

Reduplication is a non-concatenative phonological phenomenon, “a process whereby an affix is realized by phonological material borrowed from the base ... the repeated part of the word serves some derivational or inflectional purpose.” (Katamba 1993:163, 180) It has been described as a reduplication of segments (sequences of consonants and vowels) or reduplicated prosodic units (syllables or moras), that reduplication copies not only whole words, syllables or morpheme but also copies constituents and fragments that are not morphemes or syllables. As a matter of fact,

the “copy-and-association” model of reduplication Marantz, and McCarthy and Prince (1986) propose that a reduplicant is stored as a skeletal morpheme in the lexicon of the speaker and that it is made available for word formation. (Marantz, 1982)

Thus, like any other segment, vowels can be reduplicated. Vowel reduplication occurs in different ways in different languages. Our first example is in Yorùbá. In this language a reduplication of vowels occurs as the consonants get deleted from the underlying form represented leftward, if the consonant occurs as the first member of an identical set produced through reduplication.

Yorùbá

(1)

- | | | | |
|---------------|---|-----------|--------------------------|
| a) UF: àdíḁùn | → | SF: àádùn | ‘sweetness; a corn food’ |
| b) UF: àkíké | → | SF: àáké | ‘axe’ |
| c) UF: erírú | → | SF: eérú | ‘ash’ |
| d) UF: èdúdú | → | SF: èédú | ‘charcoal’ |

(Oyèbádé 2007: 224)

This is also observed in examples (2), where vowel reduplication in Urhobo can be induced by the deletion of segments

Urhobo

(2)

a) To form the repetitive compound below, the high front vowel is palatalized after which V₁ is deleted at word boundary. This leads to a retrogressive assimilation which is a reduplication of V₂

UF: èsíó + èsíó	→	SF: /èsíósíó/ [èsjéèsjó]
Pull pull		‘continuous pulling’

b) Some coinages derived from borrowed concepts

UF: éwùnré àwòn —→ SF: éwùn' àwòn / éwũáwò / [éwũáwò]
 dress AM legs ('dress of legs') trousers

c) Some prepositional phrases

UF: èvùnré ùvún —→ SF: èvùn' ùvún / èvũúvũ / [èvũúvũ]
 belly AM room (belly of room) 'in the room'

(Sourced from Aziza, 2007 b:289 ; c 304)

In the associative constructions above, observe that though the associative marker is removed from the underlying compounds, the high tone on the associative marker is retained. This high tone is then expressed on a reduplication of V₂, thus replacing the underlying low tone of V₂.

In Yorùbá, transitivity causes reduplication and tone raising. In the following examples, the vowels on the verbs are reduplicated when the verbs take on a third person singular pronoun as their objects:

(3)

- (a) UF: Olú rà
 'Olu bought'
 (b) SF: Olú rà á
 'Olu bought it'

(4)

- (a) UF: Adé fò
 'Ade washed'
 (b) SF: Adé fò ọ
 'Ade washed it'

(Abíódún, 2007:69)

Vowel reduplication also features in the Yorùbá question word requesting to know the frequency of an event as shown below:

(5)

- (a) ÈèmelòóniDúpé jeunlànàá?
 'How many times did Dupe eat yesterday?'
 (b) Èèmelòóni o sáré lánàá?
 'How many times did you run yesterday?'

(c) È̀emel̀̀ònìÒgbèniMákindé l̀́sì ilú L̀́òndònù?

‘How many times did MrMakinde go to London?’

(Schleicher 2008:50)

In Schleicher (2008:12, 33), we find further examples of reduplication of vowels in Yorùbá. Examples are in the Yorùbá loan words *kílààsì* for ‘class’, and *ṣòòṣì* for ‘church’. Another example is in the question tag *è̀emélòó* (How many times...?) where the last vowel is reduplicated to indicate number of times or repeatedness (Schleicher, 2008:50).

Another language where vowel reduplication has been observed is in agentive constructions in È̀wùlù, an Igboïd language. In this language, agentive nominals are formed from verbs by reduplicating the final vowel on the base after prefixing a vowel as follows:

È̀wùlù

(6) VERB

AGENTIVE

- | | | | |
|------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| a) UF: gbú | ‘kill’ | ò-gbú-ù | ‘Killer’ |
| b) UF: jé | ‘go’ | ò-jé-è | ‘Goer’ |
| c) UF: gbá | ‘shoot’ | ò-gbá-à | ‘Shooter’ |
| d) UF: té | ‘cook’ | ò- té-è | ‘Cooker’ |

(Utulu 2018)

2.1.2 Functions of Reduplicants

Ajiboye (2018) highlights several functions that reduplicants perform in different world languages as gathered from existing literature. One of such examples can be found in Urhobo where vowels get reduplicated on the adjectival complements to show intensity (superlative degree) as shown below:

(7)

(a) ùwènvwinà mègbè [ùwèv̥v̥nà mèègbè]

House the **INT** dirty

‘The house is the dirtiest’

(b) òghwò nà nà màdjà [òɣwò nà nà máàjà]

soup this **INT** peppery

‘This soup is the hottest’

In some languages, reduplicated nouns can indicate plurality of action, and reduplicated adjectives indicate intensity. For example, in Rotuman, adjectives are formed from nouns by reduplication, and in Tarok, partial reduplication marks third person singular possessive (Inkelas and Zoll 2005: 276). Reduplicative forms can be polysemous or homonymous. Afrikaans and Bikol both have reduplication with outstanding polysemy. In Afrikaans, for instance, the reduplicants have several different functions such as plural marking, diminutive marking, adjective derivation, etc. In Tagalog there are different formal types

which do not refer to one meaning each. One type copies the first two syllables of the base, and this can mark distributive (e.g. *dala~dalawa* 'by twos') as well as attenuation (*ma-tali~talino* 'rather intelligent') and reciprocity (*mag-kita~kita* 'see one another') (Dissertation:10)

Reduplication facilitates the attachment of inflectional and derivational forms to nouns and verbs in some languages. We give a few examples of Malay and Tamil here, taken from Nadarajan (2006:48), which show how the meaning and functions of words can be affected by reduplication:

(8) Tamil-suffix

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| a) [ithu] (root)- 'this' | [atthu] (root) - 'that' |
| b) [ithu + -vum] > [ithuvum] – 'this too' | [atthuvum] – 'that too' |
| c) [ithu + -an] > [ithuthan] - 'only this' | [atthuthan] – 'only that' |

(9) Malay- prefix and suffix

- | | |
|--|--|
| a) [ikat] (root) - 'tie ' | [ikat +kan] >[ikatkan] –
'to tie' |
| b) [ikat-ikat] – 'tie several times' | [mengikat- ikat] >
'continue tying' |
| c) [ter-ikat]- 'attached' | [terikat-ikat] –
'continuously attached' |
| d) [terikat-ikatkan]- 'intentionally attach' | [ikat-ikatan]- 'bundles that
are tied up' |

Inflection is necessitated by the syntactic needs of a sentence. Normally, when words are inflected they do not change the syntactic category. Katamba (1993: 52) states that "Inflectional morphemes ...modify the form of a word so that it can fit into a particular syntactic slot". The operation leaves the syntactic category of the base unaffected and adds some extra elements of meaning and grammatical function such as tense, aspect, mood, negation, etc.(Spencer, 1991:21).

Reduplicants are used to indicate future in Tagalog and perfective tense in Greek.

(10) Tagalog

- | | | | | |
|------------|---------|-------------|----------|--------------|
| (a) Taweig | 'call' | ta + taweig | tatawēig | 'will call' |
| (b) Sulat | 'write' | su + sulat | susulat | 'will write' |

(11) Greek

- | | | | | |
|-------|-----------|---|----------|---------------|
| Leipo | 'I leave' | → | léloipia | 'I have left' |
|-------|-----------|---|----------|---------------|

(Pereltsvaig in Kauffmann 2015:4)

Kauffman (2015:3, 1) states that reduplication can be a full-fledged part of grammar. He also adds a cultural perspective to the function of reduplication, that

... Reduplication in some cultures is a form of informal wordplay that is chosen over dry straight-forward discourse to convey intensity, humor, and playfulness, while applying cutesy, tongue-tickling or whimsical sounds and words. Doubling sounds, whether in words or parts of words, enables verbalization of thoughts to come alive in a colorful manner. It is a form of seasoning that salts and peppers language. Which sentence is more fun to say? *My dog likes to go slowly on a walk.* -
- OR -- *My dog likes to 'dilly-dally' on a walk.*

Furthermore, he explains that “the complex system of reduplication types in Bikol exemplarily shows that reduplication can be (and in most languages is) a full-fledged part of grammar ...” (Kauffmann 2015:3).

3.1 Data presentation

Data for the present study is taken from eleven (11) Urhobo proverbs. These are presented in two formats: the underlying form (UF) and the surface form (SF). The underlying form will help to guide the reader as to the correct spellings of the individual words that make up the sentences. The surface forms represent how the sentences are rendered in the spoken form.

Urhobo proverbs (Sourced from public domain)

(12) (a) UF: É dé nènèèsì rẹ ógbènẹ, kẹ àátòrhẹ òbò
IndP if follow behaviour of eel, then IndP **Tasp** burn hand

(b) SF: É dé nèn'èsì (**r'**) ógbènẹ, k' àátòrh'òbò

“If one is mindful of mean things, one would get his fingers burnt”

(13) (a) UF: À ávuẹ órhuẹrò né èkì fáà réèé

IndPP **pas** tell blind that market scatter **Tasp** PST NEG

(b) SF: À ávu'órhuẹrò **n'** èkì fá àréèé

“One does not tell the blind that trading is over”

(14) (a) UF: :Èràvwè rẹ (ò)ó mú úfì chọ, ó dām rẹ úrhé rẹ (ò)ógùnù rù

Animal that(ResP) **Tasp** carry trap fail, 3sg if see wood that(ResP) **state/asp**
bend PST

kẹ ọ́dẹ

then 3sg **Tasp** run

(b) SF: Èràvwè r' ó m'úfì chọ, ó dām r'úrhé r' ó gùnù rù k'ọ́dẹ

“The animal that escapes a trap runs away whenever it sees a piece of crooked wood”
Previous experiences make you very cautious.

- (15) (a) UF: Òkpàghà dááàvà kè òòhèriè àbò
Oil bean when **Tasp** explode then 3sg **Tasp** open hand
(a) SF: Òkpàghà dááà và k'òò hèri' **ábò**
When the oil bean pod explodes it opens the fingers
“As one matures one reaches out to more people”
- (16) (a) UF: È ékpò Ávwráká ré nò ùghé ré éshàrè
IndPP **passgo** Abrakato watch spectacle of men
(b) SF: È é kp'Ávwráká ré n'ùgh'éshàrè
“One goes to Abraka to watch men”
- (17) (a) UF: Ùwènvwì (rè) é jí òmà, óyèénmàávwèrè
Message (that) IndP send body, that **aspINT** fast
(b) SF: Ùwènvwì é j' òmà, óyèénmàá vwèrè
“The task performed by oneself is fastest”
- (18) (a) UF: À á vwè àmwá (rè) óhwò ófàvwóbrù èdè rẹ̀rẹ̀èèèè
IndPP **passtake** cloth (of) person other to plan day of feast **NEG**
(b) SF: À á vw'ámw'óhw'ófàvwóbr' èd'órẹ̀èèèè
“One does not plan a feast with borrowed robe”
- (19) (a) UF: Òghùú muèòvié sàvwàévwàrhà àá
Anger. **asp** carry kingcut bead **NEG**
“The king does not abase himself when angry”
(b) SF: Òphùú m'òvié sàvw'évwàrhà àá
- (20) (a) UF: Àsòójè á sàám rẹ̀ òviè èè
Night **asp** ‘do’+NEG IndP cause **not** see king **NEG**
(b) SF: Àsò.ó j' (à) á sà.á mr'òviè.èè
“Night causes one not to see the king”
That is,
“Night time (sorrow, heaviness of heart) beclouds vision”
- (21) (a) UF: Ísòndá gàn, òbò ívè kóyè évwó rhiè únúsò

Faeces if hard, hands two that IndPP^{pass} use open anus

(a) SF: Ìsòn dà gàn, ób'ìvè kòy'èé'vwórhi'ùnùsò

“When faeces is hard the two hands are employed to open the anus”

That is,

“A hard task requires double effort”

(22) (a) UF: Èsì vè émó rọyègbàáàvà íbì
Pig with Plchildherstogetherasp crack nut

(b) SF: Èsì v' émó rọyè gbàá v'íbì

“The pig cracks nuts with her children”

One trashes out tough issues in-house

4.1 Data Analysis

The example of vowel reduplication in Yorùbá above is phonologically induced. That in Èwùlù is morphologically motivated. Although there are also instances in Urhobo where vowel reduplication can also be morphologically motivated, in the data presented above one can observe the role syntax plays in inducing vowel reduplication.

There are evidences of distinct tense markings e.g., past tense in Urhobo. However, in some cases as can be seen below, in the simple and present continuous, there is an overlap of tense and aspect in the language. Negation, state and passivity are also signaled by vowel reduplication. The sentences are re-presented here for easy access. The grammatical features borne by the reduplicants are highlighted in bold

(12) (a) UF: É dé nènèèsì rẹ ógbènẹ, kẹ àátòrhẹ òbò
IndP ifollow behaviour of eel, then IndPTasp burn hand

(b) SF: É dé nèn'èsì (r') ógbènẹ, k' àátòrh'òbò

“If one is mindful of mean things, one would get his fingers burnt”

(13) (a) UF: À ávuẹ órhuẹrò né èkì fáà réée

IndPP^{pas}stell blindthat market scatterTaspPST NEG

(c) SF: À ávu'órhuẹrò n' èkì fá àréée

“One does not tell the blind that trading is over”

(14) (a) UF: Èràvwè rẹ (ò)ó mú úfì chọ, ọ dá mrẹ úrhé rẹ (ò)ógùnù rù

Animal that (ResP)Tasp carry trap fail, 3sg if see wood
that(ResP)state/asp bend PST

kẹ ọ́djà

then 3sg Tasp run

(b) SF: Èràvwè r' ó m'úfì chọ, ọ dámr'úrhé r' ó gùnù rù k'ò.ọ́djà

“The animal that escapes a trap runs away whenever it sees a piece of crooked wood”
Previous experiences make you very cautious.

- (15) (a) UF: Òkpàghà dááàvà kẹ ọ́òhèriẹ àbò
Oil bean when **Tasp** explode then 3sg **Tasp** open hand
(c) SF: Òkpàghà dááà và k’ọ́ọ̀ hẹ̀rì’ àbò
When the oil bean pod explodes it opens the fingers
“As one matures one reaches out to more people”
- (16) (a) UF: È ékpò Ávwráká ré nò ùghé ré éshàrè
IndPP **passgo** Abrakato watch spectacle of men
(b) SF: È é kp’Ávwráká ré n’ùgh’éshàrè
“One goes to Abraka to watch men”
- (17) (a) UF: Ùwènvwì (rẹ) é jí òmà, ọ̀yèénmàávwèrẹ
Message (that) IndP send body, that **aspINT** fast
(b) SF: Ùwènvwì é j’ òmà, ọ̀yèénmàávwèrẹ
“The task performed by oneself is fastest”
- (18) (a) UF: À á vwè àmwá (rẹ) óhwò ọ̀fà vwóbrù èdè ré òrèèè
IndPP **pass** takecloth (of) person other to plan day of feast **NEG**
(b) SF: À á vw’ámw’óhw’ọ̀fà vwóbr’ èd’órèèè
“One does not plan a feast with borrowed robe”
- (19) (a) UF: Òghùúmuèòvié sàvwàévwàrhà àá
Anger. **asp** carry kingcut bead **NEG**
(b) SF: Òghùú m’òvié sàvw’évwàrhà àá
“The king does not abase himself when angry”
- (20) (a) UF: Àsòójẹ á sàámrẹ òviè èé
Night **asp** ‘do’+NEG IndP cause **not** see king **NEG**
(d) SF: Àsò.ó j’ (à) á sà.á mr’òviè.èé
“Night causes one not to see the king”
That is,
“Night time (sorrow, heaviness of heart) beclouds vision”
- (21) (a) UF: Ísòndá gàn, ọ̀bò ívẹ kọ̀yè évwó rhiè únúsò

Faeces is hard, hands two that IndP^{pass} use open anus

(b) SF: Ìsòn dà gàn, ób'ìvè kòy'èé'vwórhi'ùnùsò

“When faeces is hard the two hands are employed to open the anus”

That is,

“A hard task requires double effort”

(22) (a) UF: Èsì vè é mó rọyègbàá và íbì
Pig with **P**lchildherstogether**asp** crack nut

(b) SF: Èsì v' é mó rọyè gbàá v'íbì
“The pig cracks nuts with her children”
One trashes out tough issues in-house

A comparison of the underlying forms with the surface forms shows that a lot of vowel deletion occurs in the spoken form when vowels occur in sequence. However, vowels that mark tense-aspect, state, passivity, degree and negation do not delete but occur in sequence in the written form as well as in the spoken form.

Note that the reduplicants take the phonetic features of the vowels immediately preceding them. The precedents play host to the reduplicants. Phonetically they form a tautosyllabic unit with their hosts as follows

(i) É dé nèn'èsì (r') ógbènέ, k'áàtòrh'òbò

[é= dé= nè- n'= è- sì= r'= ó- gbèn-éné=, k'=àá= tò-r'= ò-bò]
V=CV=CV-CØ=V-CV=CØ-CV-CV=, CØVV=CV-CØ=V-CV

(ii) Áá vu'órhuérò n'èkì fá àré èé

[áá= vw'= ó-rwé-rò=n'=è-kì=fáà=ré= èé]

VV¹=C²Ø=V³-CCV-CV=CØ=V-CV=CVV=CV=VV

(iii) Èràvwè r'(ò)ó m'úfi chò, ó dām r'úrhé r'òó gùnù rù k'òó djè

[è-rà-vè= r'= (ò)ó= m'=ú-fi= cò=, ó= dá= mr'= ú-ré= r'= òó= gùn-nù=rù= k'=òó= jè]

V-CV-CV=CØ=(V)V=CØ=V-CV=CV=, V=CV=CØ=V-CV=CØ=VV=CV-CV=CV=CØ=VV=CV

(iv) Òkphà dàá và k'òó hẹrì' ábò

[ò-kphà-yà=dàá=và= k'=òó=hè-rj'= á=bò]

V-CV-CV=CVV=CV-CØ=VV=CV-CCØ=V=CV

- (v) È é kp'Ávwráká ré n'ùgh'èshàrè
[èé=kp'= á-vrá-ká=ré= n'=ù-γ'= é-fà-rè]
VV= CØ-V-CCV-CV-CØ=V-CØ=V-CV-CV
- (vi) Ûwènvwì é j' òmà, óyèénmàávwèrè
[ù-wě-ũì= é=ʒ'= ò-mà=, ó-jěě=màá=vè-rè]
V-CV-CV=V-CØ=V-CV=, V-CVV=CVV=CV-CV
- (vii) À á vw'àmw'óhw'ófà vwóbr' èd' órè èè
[àá= v' à-ɲw'= ó-hw'= ó-fà=vó=br'=è-d' ó-rè=èé]
VV=CØ=V-CØ=V-CØ=V-CV=CCØ=V-CØ=V-CV=VV
- (viii) Òghùú mu'òvié sàvw'évwarhà àá
[ò-γùú=⁴mw'=ò-vjé=sà-v'=é-và-rà=àá]
V-CVV=CCØ=V-CCV=CV-CØ=V-CV-CV=VV
- (ix) Àsòó j' á sà.á mr'òviè èè
[à-sòó= j'= á=sàá=mr'= ò-vjè=èé]
V-CVV=CØ=V-CVV=CCØ=V-CCV=VV
- (x) Ìsòn dà gàn, ób'ivè kòy'èé'vwó rhi'ùnùsò
[ì-sǝ= dà=gǝ=, ó-bò=ì-vè=kò-y'=èé='-vó=rj'= ù-nù-sò]
V-CV=CV=CV=, V-CV=V-CV=CV-CØ=VV=Ø-CV=CCØ=V-CV-CV
- (xi) Èsì v' émó ròyè gbàá v'íbì
[è-sì= v'= é-mó=ró-yè=gbàá= v'í-bì]
V-CV=CØ=V-CV=CV-CV=CVV=CØ=V-CV

1-3: Ø stands for deleted segment, = for word boundary and - for syllable boundary within a word.

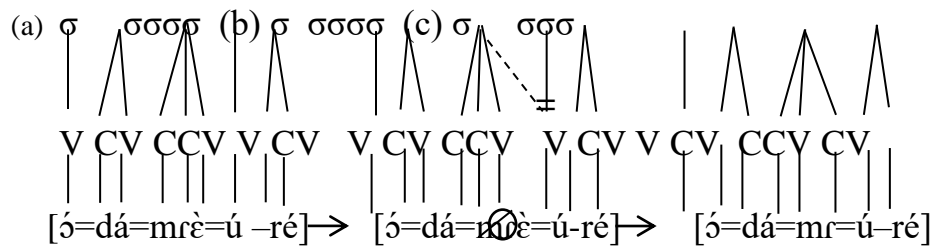
4: 'mw' here is not the same as the digraph mw [ɲm] pointed out in Section 1.2 above. The case here is a sequence of two consonant sounds co-occurring as a result of the glide formation of the high back vowel /u/ in 'mu'. See Aziza 2007 a pp 467-469.

The deleted segments tend to connect with the adjoining syllable in the course of pronunciation as shown in (xii) and (a) - (c) below:

(xii) [ó= dá= mr'= ú-ré=]

$V=CV=CC\emptyset=V_i-CV$

The above is derived from '... ó dām̀rè̀úr̀hé ...' [ó=dá=mr̀è=ú-ré]. The distribution of the syllable here is as follows:



The following syllable structures result from the reduplication of vowels within sentences (i)-(xi)

(i) $C\emptyset VV$

(ii) VV ; CVV ; VV

(iii)

$C\emptyset(V)V$; $C\emptyset VV$; $C\emptyset VV$

(iv)

CVV ; $C\emptyset VV$

(v) VV

(vi)

CVV ; CVV

(vii)

VV

; VV

(viii) CVV ; VV

(xi) CVV ; CVV ; VV

(x) VV

(xi) CVV

In 17/(vi) above, degree construction of gradable predicates in the sentence results in the reduplication of the vowel on the intensifier (*màá*), as also observed in Ajiboye (2014:80). Ajiboye states here that there are no superlatives in Urhobo but that where multiple taxonomies are involved in the opposition; intensifiers are used to show how much an entity has a particular feature.

So far there are no known canonical passive sentences in Urhobo. However, there are some constructions that can be termed pseudo-passive in the sense that like canonical passive sentences the speaker is not really interested in the doer of the action being expressed. Rather, s/he is interested in the action itself. In sentences 13, 16, 17, 18 and 19 the indefinite pronoun is semantically the SOURCE. This pronoun stands as an independent word, though a vowel. It is a V syllable. The SOURCE, which is the syntactic subject of the construction, is then reduplicated to reflect passivity.

The following phrases result from the syntactic triggers of vowel reduplication in the data presented:

1. That (relative) phrase

- (i) Èràvwè rè (ò)ó mú úfì chò, ó dá mrè úrhé rè (ò)ógùnù rù
 Animal that (ResP)Tasp carry trap fail, 3sg if see wood that(ResP)state/asp bend PST
 ké òódjè
 then 3sg **Tasp** run
 “The animal that escapes a trap runs away whenever it sees a piece of crooked wood”
 “Previous experiences make you very cautious”
 (iii) Ùwènvwì(rè) éjì òmà, óyèénmàávwèrè
 Message (that) IndP send body, thataspINTfast
 “The task performed by oneself is fastest”

2. Phrasal verbs

- (i) Òkàghà dáávà ké òòhèrìè àbò
 Oil bean when**Tasp** explode then 3sg**Tasp** open hand
 “When the oil bean pod explodes it opens the fingers”
 “As one matures one reaches out to more people”
 (ii) Èsì vé é mó ròyègbàávàíbì
 Pig with **Pl**childher**togetherasp** crack nut
 “The pig cracks nuts with her children”
 “One trashes out tough issues in-house”

3. Anaphoric phrases

- Ùwènvwì (è)é j’ òmà, óyèénmàávwèrè
 Message (that) IndP send body, that INTfast
 “The task performed by oneself is fastest”

4. Compound prepositional phrase

- Èsì vé é mó ròyègbàávàíbì
 Pig with **Pl**child her togetherasp crack nut
 “The pig cracks nuts with her children”

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The two formats of the data presented the underlying form (UF) and the surface form (SF) enables comparisons to be easily drawn between how the sentences should be written going by one of the conventions recommended for the writing of the language, and how it is spoken. It could also be argued that proverbs are poetic and so may not conform to “standards of normal speaking” due to the poetic license of the poets. The presentation however shows that the basic structure of the sentences in terms of word order and the syntactic category of words inflected do not change. This further confirms Katamba and Spencer’s position referred to in Section 2.1.2 above. The major difference between the two forms is in the “insertion/affixation” of the vowel reduplicants into the base form. Besides, native speakers hardly speak without using proverbs to embellish what they say as proverbs are veritable tools for conveying the totality of what is intended.

Aziza (2007 b: 279-280) identifies three basic syllables in Urhobo: V, CV, and CCV. The data analysed above, however shows instances of constructions that have CVV and VV syllables, thus establishing the existence of additional two syllables in Urhobo. Depending on the individual speaker, some VV syllable can incorporate a C to yield a CVV syllable hence (C)VV as shown in xii (a-c) above.

5.1 Conclusion

Urhobo vowel reduplicants occur in sequence to their hosts, thereby producing a fourth and fifth kind of syllable structure in Urhobo, syntactically – CVV and VV, not underlyingly but overtly. Therefore, syntactic triggers in Urhobo Language bring about two additional syllables as against the three earlier presented in existing literatures. Our claim here confirms Aziza’s findings (2007a: 465-469). She states that vowels get elided or become glide when they occur in sequence, but grammatically functional vowels are normally retained, thereby leading to the occurrence of vowels in sequence. It is the vacuous vowels that are elided.

This phenomenon of co-occurrence of vowels in sequence in the language also results in different types of phrases and sentences in the language as shown in the data analysed above.

Ajiboye’s observation (2012:10-11) that the syntactic needs of the sentence bring about inflection is confirmed again from the foregoing analyses. Observe also that just as has been pointed out earlier, these inflectional operations leave the syntactic category of the base unaffected. The data also show that the reduplicants add some extra elements of meaning and grammatical function such as tense-aspect, state, degree, passivity and negation to the sentences.

5.2 Recommendation for Further Studies

The ‘insertion’ of the vowel reduplicants into the base form of the underlying sentences is an indication of some movements in these sentences. This could be further investigated to know how these movements occur and from where these reduplicants originate.

Work on the writing system of the Urhobo language is still on-going. As already pointed out in Section 1.2, Urhobo language scholars recommend among other things that

- (i) the written form of Urhobo should follow strictly grammatical rules
- (ii) every word must stand by itself and have its complete meaning
- (iii) a complete word must have its own spelling

We wish to add here that in the writing of Urhobo these syntactic triggers of tense-aspect, state, passivity, degree and negation examined here should be adequately written in sentences when they occur, just as demonstrated in the underlying forms (UF) of the proverbs analysed above. The UFs presented in this study therefore serve as templates in this regard.

Still on the writing of urhobo, the current system appears to focus more on the representation of grammatical features with tones whereas there are tonal differences across dialects of the language. More studies on tonal differences between the dialects of Urhobo need to be carried out so as to seek possible ways by which these differences could be resolved.

List of abbreviations used

INT	Intensifier
3sg	Third person singular
asp	Aspect / present tense
PST	Past tense marker
NEG	Negation
Ppass	Pseudo passive
ResP	Resumptive pronoun
Pl	Plural
State	Stative verb
IndP	Indefinite Pronoun
AM	Associative marker
Tasp	Tense-aspect
‘do’+NEG	‘does not’

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