

Itu Mbon Uso Personal Names: A Morphological Analysis

Friday Ude & Rosemary Benjamin

University of Uyo, Uyo

fridayude@uniuyo.edu.ng & romekjin2@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper examines the morphological structure and morphological processes in Itu Mbon Uso personal names. Data for the study were elicited from six adult native speakers of Itu Mbon Uso selected through stratification. The theoretical framework adopted was eclectic in nature, combining Item-and-Arrangement (IA) model of morphological-based theory and Head Feature Convention (HFC) theory. The findings showed that Itu Mbon Uso personal names have rich morphological structure which provides grammatical information about the morphemic components that make up the names. It is also observed that the morphological processes involved in the formation of the names are mainly derivational in nature and accord with the structure of the language.

Keywords: morphology, onomastics, language, processes, names

1. Introduction

Language is a dynamic phenomenon, which exhibits different degrees of creativity to serve the communication needs of its users. It takes bits of sound (syllables) and morphemes to create lexical items (words) (Mbah, 2012). Words are part of speech (i.e. property of morphology), which form the fundamental building block of a language. A word is composed of morphemes, which perform grammatical operations in human languages as well as modify it into various functions to create meaning. According to Benjamin (2019:31), derivational morphology is a process, which involves “the segmentation of words to create new words from an existing word. It may combine two lexical items together to form new words and new meanings”. Thus, derivational morphology creates new words and meaning into a language from time to time. The meaning of many words is a function of the morphemes that compose them; just as the meaning of a phrase or a sentence is partially a function of the meanings of the words it contains (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyam, 2007).

Names reflect language in use; they contain the lexicon of any language (Essien, 1986). Personal names (anthroponomastics) are formed from words, which constitute the internal structures of words. Through names, we can identify where a person comes from, hence, they (names) reflect both the linguistic and cultural identity of the bearer (Mbarachi & Igwenyi, 2018). According to Essien (1986:5) “Naming in Ibibio is not an arbitrary affair: it is at once a mental, emotional, linguistic and cultural matter”. This assertion, by extension applies to Itu Mbon Uso as a language of the Lower Cross group, where the Ibibio language belongs. Thus, names in Itu Mbon Uso undertake some processes which can be classified on the basis of its morphological form. The morphological structural analysis is an attempt made to capture the structure of language at the word level or concerned with the ‘forms of words’ (Matthew, 2000).

However, scholars as Ude (2010) and Enang (2010) have contributed to the socio-cultural importance of names and the philosophy of the people of Itu Mbon Uso but not much insight has

been given to the morphological aspect of Itu Mbon Uso personal names. This study, therefore, seeks to add another dimension to the study of names using the morphological patterns which agglutinate with affixes and other words to perform grammatical functions as a means of learning the grammar of the language. It aims to identify the morphological structure of Itu Mbon Uso personal names as well as discuss the morphological processes that constitute the names through the process of word formation. Invariably, naming is an aspect of a language, where new words and meanings are formed for posterity. However, one of the factors of language classification is genetics. Genetically, Itu Mbon Uso is classified as a Lower Cross Language of the Benue Congo sub family of the Niger Congo family of languages according to Greenberg (1963). It is a language which belongs to the Lower Cross Languages, which Ibibio, Efik, Ukwu also belong and form a cluster of languages. Itu Mbon Uso is a language as well as the people of the speech community. According to Ude (2010:26), “The people of Itu Mbon Uso can intelligibly speak the Ibibio and the Efik languages without learning them”. Itu Mbon Uso is a name of the people living in a distinct clan which comprises 12 communities and is situated in Ini Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted was eclectic in nature, combining Morphological-Based Theory with Head Feature Convention theory for the morphological analyses. The morphology-based theory is a framework formulated by Charles Hockett in (1954). Hockett (1958:177) defines morphology as “the stock of segmented morphemes and the ways in which words are built out of them”. In morphology-based theory, words are divided into two classes viz: Item-and-Arrangement (IA) and Item-and-Process (IP). The type of classification crucial to this study is the Item-and-Arrangement theory (IA). The theory treats morpheme as the underlying unit of a word (Lieber, 1981, Di Sciullo & Williams, 1987). The theory segments roots (words) in a linear sequence into morphs. IA arranges morphemes and allomorphs in relation to each other as meaning elements to produce complex structures.

The Head Feature Convention (HFC) is a grammatical framework formulated within the Generalised Phrase Structure Grammar (GPSG) theory by Gazdar, Klein, Pullum & Sag, (1985) as an alternative to Transformational Grammar. HFC is a lexicalised or unification-based theory that has hetero-categorical heads and being a universal set of framework has only one level of syntactic description (constraint) that percolates from the head node (mother) to the subcategorisation node (daughter) (Benjamin, 2017). The theory describes category as sets of feature-value pairs combined with their complements to account for structures.

3. Methodology

This study is a qualitative descriptive design which describes the morphological and socio-linguistic nature of Itu Mbon Uso personal names. The population of this study was drawn from speakers of Itu Mbon Uso. Selected names for both males and females were chosen as data using purposive sample method. The research instruments employed included oral interview and participant observation with the researchers’ residual knowledge.

4. Discussion and Results

In this section, the data are specified based on the morphological constructs that constitute naming in Itu Mbon Uso. The data are analysed using the Item-and-Arrangement (IA) model of morphology-based theory and the Head Feature Convention (HFC) theory. The morphological

structure and processes which are productive in Itu Mbon Uso personal names are analysed below:

4.1 Affixation

This is a situation in which bound morphemes are added to the root word to either change or extend the function of the words (Benjamin, 2019). The personal naming process in Itu Mbon Uso indicates the position in which the affix occurs to the root word either as a prefix or a suffix to create a name. This can be explicated in the following ways:

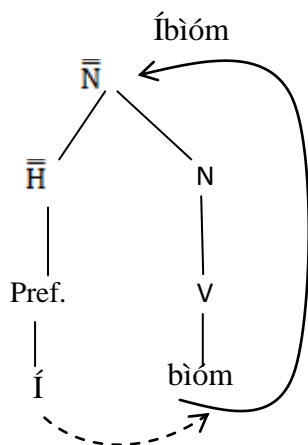
4.1.1 Prefixation

This is a grammatical device or a word component which is attached as a bound morpheme before the root word to create new words as names such as:

1	Prefix	Verb root	Derivation (Name)	Gloss
a.	Í	bìóm -carry	Íbìóm	Eagle
b.	Ú	Úbòn - produce	Úbòn	Family
c.	È	dù - live	Èdù	Character

It could be deduced from example 1 that the prefixes attached to the root words are class changing. They change the categories of the basic forms (verbs) to derive nouns as names. The item-and-Arrangement (IA) theory relates the prefixes (morphemes) to the root words, which are segmented in a linear sequence to produce complex structures as names in Itu Mbon Uso. The examples can be illustrated using the Head Feature Convention as shown in the diagram below:

Fig. 1: Íbìóm ‘Eagle’



In Fig 1, the principle of the Head Feature convention theory illustrates the percolation process that results from the combination of the head node prefix ‘í’- and its subcategory ‘bìóm’ to derive a grammatical category noun Ibìóm as a name in Itu Mbon Uso.

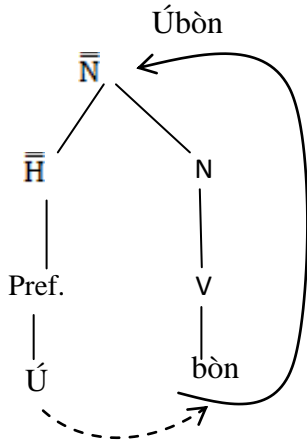
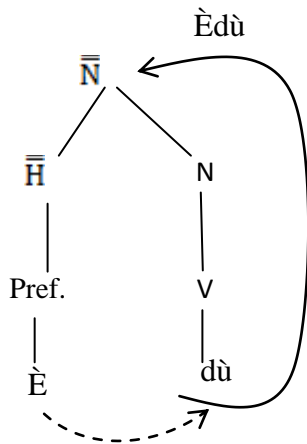


Fig. 2: Úbòn 'Family'

In Fig 2, the diagram illustrates the head category 'ú' which percolates to the feature of the complement node (root word) 'bòn', to derive a noun as name Úbòn.

Fig. 3: Èdù 'Character'



From the diagram, Fig.3 demonstrates a percolation process where the head category 'È' - and the feature of the complement 'dù', merge to derive 'Èdù' as a name.

4.1.2 Circumfixation

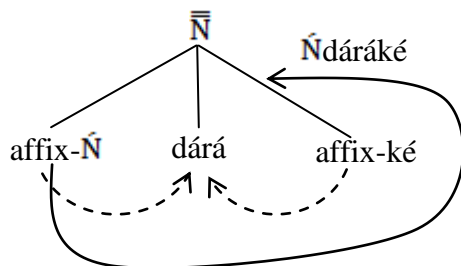
This is a morphological process in which a discontinuous affix comprising two dissimilar parts surrounds an otherwise free morpheme (Mbah, 2012). It adds an affix to both sides of a host morpheme (verb root).

This can be considered below:

2. Prefix	Verb root	suffix	Derivation(Name)	Gloss
a. \acute{N}	dárá ‘rejoice’	ké	\acute{N} daráké	I am not rejoicing.
b. \acute{N}	sémé ‘lament’	ké	\acute{N} séméké	I am not lamenting.
C \acute{N}	dí ‘come’	yó	\acute{N} diyó	I come to wander.

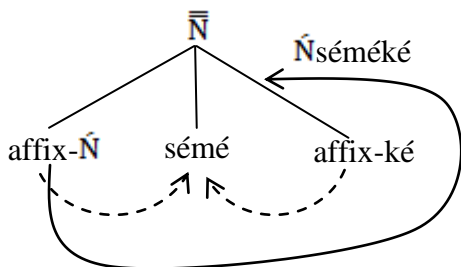
From example 2, the verb roots are attached to the discontinuous affixes. The first marker of the circumfix is marked with the prefix ‘ \acute{N} ’, while the suffix takes variable negative markers, depending on the verb root. Using the Item-and-Arrangement model of morpheme-based theory, it could be deduced that the verbal derivands ‘dárá, sémé, dí’ are governed by the circumfixes to emerge a grammatical category as names. The examples can be diagrammatically represented using the Head Feature Convention (HFC) as:

Fig. 4: \acute{N} daráké ‘I am not rejoicing’



From the diagram, the verbal derivand ‘dára’ on which the features of the circumfixes percolate; intersect with the circumfixes ‘ \acute{N} -/ké’ to derive ‘ \acute{N} daráké’ as a name.

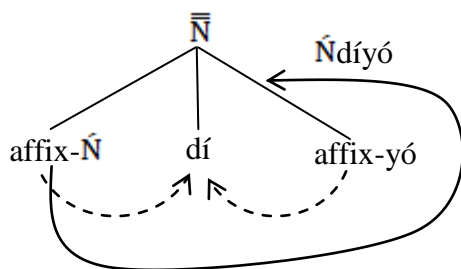
Fig. 5: \acute{N} séméké ‘I am not lamenting’



In Fig.5, the diagram illustrates the head category ‘ \acute{N} séméké’ as a consequence of the percolation of the features of the verb root ‘sémé and the features of the complement ‘ \acute{N} -/ké’ to derive

‘ \bar{N} séméké’, a grammatical category.

Fig. 6: \bar{N} díyó ‘I have come to wander’



The diagram demonstrates the percolation process between morphological forms. This means that the derivand ‘dí’ on which the features of the circumfixes percolate intersect with the circumfixes ‘ \bar{N} -/ké’ to derive a name, \bar{N} díyó.

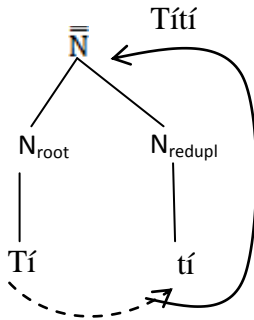
4.2 Reduplication

This is a morphological process, which occurs partly as a full reduplication and as a partial reduplication. The addition of affixes is determined wholly or partly by the root word (base). It attaches an affix to the base through the copying of the full base or part of the base. It performs grammatical and semantic contrasts, e.g.:

3	N1	+	N2	Derivation (Name)	Gloss
a.	Tí ‘remember’	+	Tí ‘remember’	Títí	Remember.
b.	Àkpán ‘first son’	+	Àkpán ‘first son’	Ákpàkpán	First son.
c.	Ákán ‘victory’	+	Ákán ‘victory’	Ákákán	Victory.

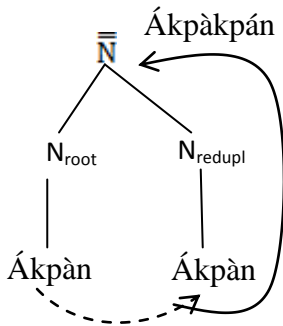
It could be observed that the Item-and-Arrangement theory merges the first and the second noun into a noun + noun construction, which functions as names. There is a full reduplication in 3 (a), where the reduplicant copies the entire root word (CV) such that the derived form has two forms of combinations; the half of the base and the half of the reduplicant which functions to show intensity. There is a modification of the first noun through a deletion process in example 3 (b-c) based on the rule of the language. However, there is no semantic change to the structure of the constructions. The examples can be illustrated using the Head Feature Convention theory as:

Fig. 7: Títí ‘Remember’



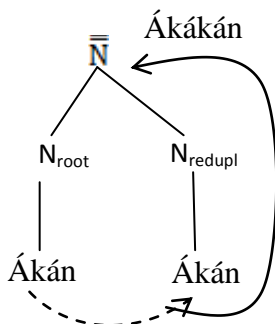
From the illustration, there is a full reduplication. The reduplicant ‘Tí’ percolates to extend the root ‘Tí’ so as to derive a name ‘Títí’ at the same level of compatibility.

Fig. 8: Ákpàkpán ‘First son’



In Fig.8, it could be observed that the head category (reduplicant) ‘Ákpàn’ percolates to the second noun root ‘Ákpàn’ to derive a reduplicated form of a name ‘Ákpàkpán’.

Fig 9: Ákákán ‘Victory’



Here, the two free head features enter into a percolation process to produce a name as a grammatical category. This means that the head category reduplicant noun ‘Ákán’ percolates to the root ‘Ákán’ to emerge a name ‘Ákákán’- Victory.

4.3. Compounding

Compounding is a process of joining two independent root words to form a single word with a new meaning. It can be explicated in two forms as Adjective + noun and Noun +Noun as the following examples show:

4.3.1 Adjective + Noun Construction

This is a nominalization process whereby two root words (adjective and noun) are combined to form new words as names, e.g.

4	Adjective	+	Noun	Derivation (Name)	Gloss
a.	Étí ‘good’	+	Ídó	Étídó	Good Character
b.	Útíbè ‘miracle’	+	Ímá	Útíbímá	Marvellous love
c.	Ákwá ‘big’	+	Ímá	Ákwáímá	Great Love

In the examples above, there is a vowel height constraint which permits deletion on either side of the word boundary. Thus, in example 4(a-b) the vowels of the adjective get deleted because they are non-high vowels, while in example 4(c), the low vowel ‘á’ follows the high vowel ‘í’ at the word boundary without any deletion because of the presence of the identical tones on the contiguous vowels.

The IA theory combines two root words in a construction (Adjective + Noun) with independent meanings to form compound words (names) as its derivation. The examples can be represented on a tree diagram using the Head Feature Convention theory as follows:

Fig. 10: Étídó ‘Good character’

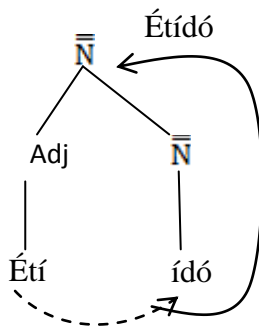
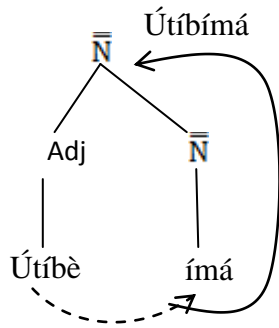


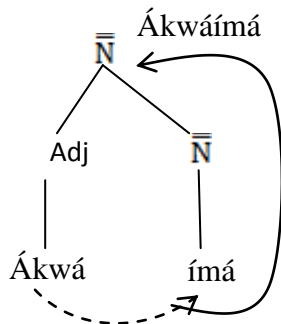
Fig.10 shows a percolation process that resulted from the combination of the head node ‘Étí’ and the subcategory node ‘ídó’ to generate a derivative as a name, ‘Étídó’.

Fig. 11: Útíbímá ‘Marvellous love’



From the diagram, it could be observed that there is compatibility between the feature of the head node and that of the subcategory. The adjective ‘Útíbè’ percolates to the noun ‘Ímá’ to emerge a derivative as a name, ‘Útíbímá’.

Fig. 12: Ákwáímá ‘Great love’



Here, the head node ‘Ákwá’ percolates to the complement (subcategory) ‘Ímá’ at the same level to derive a compound word as a name ‘Ákwáímá’.

4.3.2 Noun + Noun Construction

This is a nominalization process whereby two root words (noun and noun) attach to each other to form new words as names. E.g.

5	Noun	Noun	Derivation	Gloss
a.	Étté ‘father’	Ówó ‘Person’	Éttéwó	Someone’s father
b.	Ímé ‘patience’	Éyén ‘child’	Íméyén	A patient child
c.	Úbóñ ‘glory’	Ábásí ‘God’	Úbóñábásí	God’s glory

From example 5(a-c), it could be observed that two root words (noun and noun), which have independent meanings combine to form a single word as names in Itu Mbon Uso language. The Item-and-Arrangement theory shows the sequential arrangement of the morphemes to form the structure of names. The examples can be illustrated on diagrams thus:

Fig. 13: Éttéwó ‘Someone’s father’

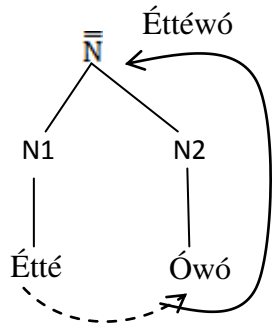
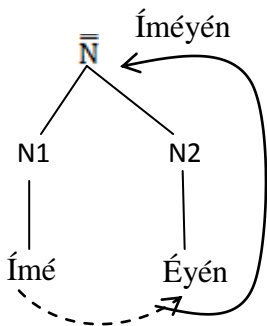


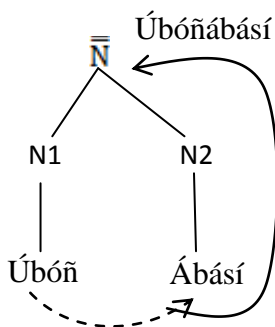
Fig.13 demonstrates the percolation process that results from combining the head node ‘Étté’ and the complement ‘Ówó’ to produce ‘Éttéwó’ as a name.

Fig.14: Íméyén ‘A patient child’



Here, the two free head features enter into a percolation process to produce a grammatical category. This means that the first noun ‘Ímé’ percolates the second noun ‘Éyén’ to derive ‘Íméyén’.

Fig. 15: Úbónábásí ‘God’s glory’



From the diagram, it could be observed that there is compatibility between the feature of the head category and that of the complement. The N1 ‘Úbón’ percolates to the N2 ‘Ábásí’ to emerge a derivative- ‘Úbónábásí’.

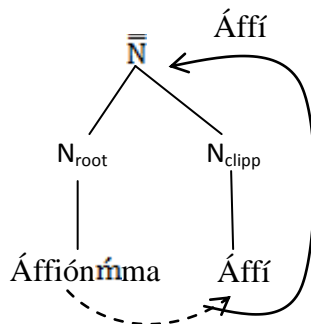
4.4 Clipping or Truncation

This is a word formation process which involves a systematic shortening or deletion of a defined portion of the base words. It is a non-changing category derivation with the same semantic and grammatical content. It is exemplified in the following examples as:

6	Root word	Clipped word	Gloss
a.	Áffíóñmá	Áffí	A female child born on Áffíóñ day.
b.	Ñyáúdó	Ñyá	One who is endowed to sing.
c.	Ádàísóñ	Ísóñ	He, who owns the soil.

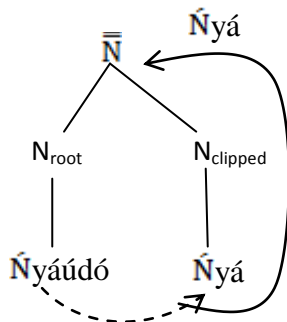
From example 6, it is observed that the root words undergo the process of shortening some syllables to have but a clipped form without any grammatical contrasts. This clipped form has been accepted in general usage of Itu Mbon Uso words (names). The Item-and-Arrangement theory shows the sequential arrangement of the morphemes constituted to derive names of noun grammatical category in the Itu Mbon Uso language. The examples can be represented on diagrams using the Head Feature Convention theory as:

Fig. 16: Áffí ‘A female born on Áffíóñ-day’



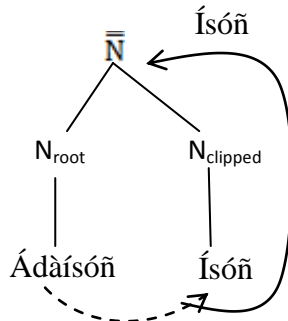
In Fig. 16, the feature of the head node ‘Áffíóñmá’ is the noun root, which is clipped through a percolation process to the feature of the clipped node ‘Áffí’ with the same class category and meaning.

Fig. 17: Ñyá ‘One who is endowed to sing’



From the illustration, there is a percolation process where ‘**N**yaúdí’ becomes clipped through a percolation process to derive ‘**N**ya’ with the same class category and meaning.

Fig. 18: Ísón ‘He, who owns the soil’



From the diagram, it could be observed that the head category ‘Ádàísón’ becomes shortened to the feature of the clipped node ‘Ísón’ through a percolation process with the same meaning and functions.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that naming is part of the grammar of a language. It described the morphological components that constitute the structure of Itu Mbon Uso personal names. The morphological processes predominant in the names are derivational in nature which include affixation, reduplication, compounding and clipping. It was observed that although clipped names have the same grammatical and semantic information; they actually intensify the degree of intimacy between the bearer and the parents. The lexical categories like verbs, adjectives and nouns constitute the root words which form the names. There is an instance of phonological process, deletion which occurs in compounding as a result of vowel height at the word boundary. The Item-and-Arrangement (IA) was used as a tool to segment root words in a linear sequence into morphs to derive names as part of the grammar of Itu Mbon Uso. The Head Feature Convention theory was used to analyse heads as obligatory elements, which merge to generate names. Consequently, the analysis of the morphological structure of Itu Mbon Uso personal names has provided insights into the historical background of the Itu Mbon Uso people.

References

- Benjamin, Rosemary E. 2017. Head feature convention. In B.M. Mbah (Ed.) *Theories of contextual linguistics* (pp.31-43). Awka: Amaka Dreams Ltd.
- Benjamin, Rosemary E. 2019. The morphosyntax of Ibibio verb. A Ph.D Thesis, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Di Sciullo, Anna-Maria & Williams, Edwin. 1987. *On the definition of word*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Enang, Victoria S. 2010. A document of Itu Mbon Uso folktales. A Master’s dissertation, University of Uyo, Uyo.
- Essien, Okon E. 1986. *Ibibio names: their structure and their meanings*. Ibadan: Daystar Press.
- Essien, Okon E. 1990. *A grammar of Ibibio language*. Ibadan: University Press.

- Fromkin, Victoria & Rodman, Robert & Hyams, Nina. 2007. *An Introduction to language* (8th ed.). New York: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Gazdar, Gerald; Klein, Ewans; Pullum, Geoffrey & Sag, Ivan. A.1985. *Generalised phrase structure grammar*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press
- Greenberg, Joseph. 1963. *Languages of Africa*. The Hague: The Mouton.
- Hockett, Charles F. 1954. *Two models of grammatical description*. *Word* 10, 2, 10-34.
- Hockett Charles F. 1958. *A course in modern linguistics*. London: Macmillan.
- Lieber, Rochelle. 1981. *On the organisation of the lexicon*. Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics club.
- Matthew, Post H. 2000. *Morphology*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Mbah, B. M. (2012). Cicumfixation: Interface of morphology and syntax in Igbo derivational morphology. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5, 1-8.
- Mbarachi, Chibuiké & Igwenyi, Esther 2018. Language, identity and the cultural context of names in selected Nigerian novels. *International Journal of Languages and Literature*. 6.1, 29-37.
- Ude, Friday.E.2010. Meaning and structure of Itu Mbon Uso names. In Austin U. Nwagbara, *Discourses and interactions in language and literature* (pp.22-34). Lagos: Pumark Nigeria.
- Urua, EnoAbasi. 1996. Languages and dialects. The language situation in Akwa Ibom State. *Journal of Humanities*, 4, 50-70.