A Morpho-Semantic Analysis of the Use of Reduplication in Elizabeth Oshuare Ombor-Pereowei's "I No Fit Breathe"

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Abstract

This paper explores the morpho-semantic analysis of reduplication in Elizabeth Oshuare Ombor-Pereowei's "I No Fit Breathe", an African poem written in Pidgin English to campaign against police brutality in Nigeria in commiseration with the death of George Floyd, a black American who was brutalized to death by a policeman in Minnesota, United States. This paper undertakes a thorough examination of the significance and meaning of the use of reduplication in the text. The framework that informs this study is the Morphological Doubling Theory. By utilizing this theory, the researcher attempts a morphological and semantic analysis of reduplication in the poem and finds out that the poetis consistent in using only one form of reduplication which is the total reduplication, intended to create a distinctive style and a clear mental picture of the gruesome event depicted in the poem. The study recommends that more research should be conducted on the use of reduplication in other genres of literature. Also, other linguistic theories should be applied in the study of Ombor-Pereowei's "I No Fit Breathe".

Introduction

Language is an essential tool for communication. Generally, it is an organized and systematic means of communication and precisely a shared code of conduct by members of a particular community. In the words of Ferdinand de Saussure in Nwala (2015, p. 8), "Language exists only by a sort of contract shared by the

members of a community." Therefore, language is a social commodity in that, it is a primary means of social communication or interaction among people.

Over time, as members of a particular speech community interact with other speech communities, either for trade or other social needs, there tends to be a language change. Language change involves a permanent alteration in the features and use of a language. It is a common phenomenon that occurs due to language contact and interference which necessitates the use of various forms of word formation processes such as borrowing, reduplication, etc. Omer asserts that:

> The influence of such changes is reflected in the appearance of new vocabulary items represented by word-formation processes. Reduplication (Red.), one of those fertile processes, is a linguistic phenomenon found in phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels." (70).

Reduplication is a word formation process commonly found in the English language and other languages where words are repeated to create a rhythmic effect, new meaning, or emphasis. According to McArthur (1998), "reduplication is the act or result of doubling a sound, word, or word element, usually for grammatical or lexical purposes, for example, bye-bye, hush-hush, girly-girly, etc." Furthermore, Crystal (1985:259) in Roberts (1991:115) defined reduplication as "a process of repetition whereby the form of a prefix/suffix reflects certain phonological characteristics of the root." This is to say that the repetition that occurs in the process of reduplication can be complete or total, for example: pee-pee, bye-bye, etc, or partial, for example, tik-tok, dilly-dally, etc.

Reduplication is a common phenomenon found in most Nigerian languages, especially, Nigerian Pidgin English. Nigerian Pidgin English is a language that was originally developed as a result of a contact situation that existed between people who had no common language or means of communication in Nigeria, and who particularly used the language for trade. Todd (1984) cited in Ugot and Ogundipe (2011:228) defines "pidgin as a marginal language that arises to fulfill certain restricted communication needs among people who have no common language." He further notes that "pidgin is a common language that has a fixed word order and is syntactically simpler than any other mother tongue varieties of

English." This means that Nigerian Pidgin English is simpler and easier to learn, compared to other varieties of English, mostly because, the vocabulary of Pidgin English is sharply reduced.

Balogun (2013:91) sees "Nigerian Pidgin as a marginal language used among Nigerians to facilitate communication needs in certain interaction contexts." The bilingual nature of Nigeria has made Nigerian Pidgin English a lingua franca across the country, in that, it is used in almost every city and spoken by the different classes of people that make up the country, though it varies in depth and usage across the different regions. Ojarikre (2013:126) affirms that "the present profile of Nigerian Pidgin is that of a lingua franca, building linguistic and communicative bridges among the 400 or so ethnic groups in Nigeria." He further regarded the languageas "a child of necessity and a language of convenience" due to its communicative value as a contact language.

The structure of the Nigerian Pidgin English is unique. Ugot and Ogundipe (2011) notes that "the structure of Nigerian Pidgin English includes the absence of some grammatical categories like gender, case, mood, voice, person, and number; it also lacks inflections for plural purposes and derivative types, it lacks copular in equative construction and sentences and there is also the absence of subject-verb agreement."

Reduplication is commonly used in Nigerian Pidgin English, in that, it fulfills the purpose of emphasizing the message being passed across. For example:

1. She faint true true?
   The speaker is trying to confirm if "she" truly fainted, therefore, the emphasis in the question is on the truthfulness of the event not just on the mere occurrence of the event.

This paper focuses on the morphosemantic analysis of Elizabeth OshuareOmbor-Pereowei's "I No Fit Breath", an African poem written in pidgin English to campaign against police brutality in Nigeria in commiseration with the death of George Flyod, a black American, who was brutalized to death by a white policeman. This work intends to decipher the meaning and effect that Ombor-Pereowei tries to create with her predominant use of reduplication in the text.

Bio-Data of the Poet

Elizabeth OshuareOmbor-Pereowei(Lizzy Pereowei) is a native of Uokha town in Owan East Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Public Administration from Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma. She is a storyteller, poet, and singer. She loves to motivate and inspire people via her daily inspirational quotes on her social media handles. She spent her childhood in the Southern part of Nigeria in Rivers State and Delta State. Elizabeth is married, blessed with two children, and currently resides in the United Kingdom. She has written other books currently on sale on Amazon such as the children's book on the Adventures of the Antelope and the Bear, and such poems as ***No Longer There***, ***Make Me Sleep***, etc.

Literature Review

Reduplication is a morphological process in which the base or root of a word is completely or partially repeated. It is frequently represented as RED. According to Omer (p. 71), reduplication is a morphological phenomenon in which the base, root, or stem of a lexeme or a part of it is repeated completely or with a slight change. The term is also considered as an affixation process that involves the addition of a free morpheme (not necessarily a bound morpheme) to the beginning, the end, or within the base. Katamba (1993 and 2006) in Igaab (2020).

Also,Crystal (1985:259) in Roberts (1991:115) defines reduplication as "a process of repetition whereby the form of a prefix/suffix reflects certain phonological characteristics of the root." Moravcsik (1978) quoted in Roberts (1991:115) further delimits the notion of reduplication by saying that:

> Reduplication can be the repetition or reiteration of a syntactic, phonological, or phonetic string, and this repetition can be several times, whereby the reduplicated form wholly or partially reiterates the base form and that the reduplicated form is semantically linked to the base form in some systematic way.

In Literature, reduplication is used interchangeably with repetition. Repetition is a term that is used to indicate sounds and concepts that are repeated in one form or the other to provide reinforcement and emotional emphasis, (Nadarajan, 2006:40). It is predominantly a poetic device in which words are repeated in a line(s) or stanza(s) of a poem for informative or reinforcement purposes on the subject matter of the poem. Reduplication can also be used interchangeably with other concepts such as duplication, cloning, and doubling in that they share the same meaning.

Theoretically, reduplication involves an interface between morphology and phonology. Phonologically, reduplication is described as reduplicated segments (sequences of consonants/vowels) or reduplicated prosodic units (syllables or moras), while morphologically as the reduplication of linguistic constituents (i.e. words, stems, roots), (Ndarajan 2006:40).

Ndarajan (2006) further sees reduplication as a word formation process in which some parts of a base (a segment, syllable, morpheme) are repeated, either to the left, or to the right of the word or, occasionally, within the middle of the word. It is worth noting that the repeated part follows the base to emphasize it and that in some cases, the repeated part may not carry the same meaning as the base and sometimes, it is a modification of the base. The reduplicated element is referred to as the reduplicant and is usually repeated once.

There are two major forms of reduplication; the whole or total reduplication and the partial reduplication. The total or whole reduplication is characterized by the complete or total doubling or repetition of the base, for example, sick sick, girly girly, boo-boo, pee-pee, etc, whereas the partial reduplication involves the partial doubling of the reduplicative, for example, tik-tok, chit-chat, zigzag, etc.

At the syntactic level, reduplication is regarded as reiteration in a paraphrased form or alternative lexical forms (near-synonyms) and meaning is specific to the context in which the form is created (Wang, 2005 cited in Nadarajan 2006). Reduplication at the syntactic level can be categorized into the following: repetition (that is the exact duplication of the base word e.g play play), reiteration (also regarded as partial reduplication e.g itsy bitsy), referring expressions (e.g here and there, this and that, etc.) and parallelism (e.g know and know, look and look,etc).

Reduplication in Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE)

As earlier stated, reduplication is a morphological process of doubling the base or root of a word to create a new meaning. The multilingual nature of Nigeria necessitated the need for a central language like Pidgin English, a language that has grown beyond being regarded as only spoken by illiterates, to being spoken by people across classes.

There are several word formation processes in Nigerian Pidgin English, such as borrowing, blending, neologism, reduplication, etc. Here, we shall focus on the word formation process of reduplication. Reduplication in Nigerian Pidgin English is used to create emphasis, describe a prolonged activity, nick-naming, onomatopoeic expressions, plurality, adjectives, etc.

An example of the use of reduplication in describing a prolonged activity:
Na so she talk talk so tey spit dry for her mouth. – She spoke for so long.
Reduplication in NPE can also be used as adjectives, for example:

- Queen na cry cry baby. – The queen cries a lot.
- This one na talk talk meeting. – A meeting characterized by prolonged discussions.
- Oga Pablo na lie lie master. – Mr. Pablo is a master of lies.

Reduplication can also be used to intensify a simple form, for example:

- Na so so sleep you sabi. – All you know is to sleep.
- Chukuchukudey for that tree. – That tree has thorns.

Reduplication can be used to indicate plurality.

- Na so so meat meat full this soup. – There are too many pieces of meat in the soup.

Reduplication can be used for nicknaming.

- Oga talkutalku. – A talkative person.
- Shine shine bobo. – Handsome boy

Reduplication can also be used to create emphasis.

- She fine well well. – She is very beautiful.
- Make sure say you come today today. – Ensure you come today.

Reduplication is an indispensable tool in Nigerian Pidgin English, in that, it is used to create several effects and for many other purposes beyond the ones exemplified above.

So many scholars have carried out wholesome studies on the concept of reduplication in English and other languages. In general, they have described reduplication as a morphological word formation process that involves the doubling or repetition of a base or root word to create a new meaning or word. Studies have also shown that there are some similarities and differences in the process of reduplication in different languages.Nadarajan (2006), in her Crosslinguistic Study of Reduplication, examines the concept of reduplication as an important phenomenon in language study. She explained and exemplified the contrast between reduplication and triplications, and the similarities between reduplication and repetition. She further provides a detailed explanation of the types of reduplication and their usage in English and two other languages; Malay and Tamil. She also discusses the concept of echoic expressions. According to her, "Echoism is a distinctive form of expression which includes repetition of words for aesthetic or expressive effect." She further noted that, "Echoism includes primary onomatopoeia and secondary onomatopoeia. Within primary onomatopoeia, there is an attempt to direct imitation of naturally occurring sounds in sound symbolism or natural correspondence between sound and sense, for example, chug chug (locomotive) ding dong (doorbell), etc," (p. 45).

Nadarajan (2006) also describes reduplications at the syntactic level and she categorized them into four; Repetition, Reiteration, Referring expressions, and Parallelism -echoing forms/ semantic parallelism. She further exemplifies reduplicants with contrastive meanings and the concept of emphatic reduplication in which she affirms that: "In Tamil language, the last verb of an utterance (usually a modal verb) can be reduplicated for emphasis by taking the infinitive of the finite verb and adding an emphatic –ee to it while placing it before the finite verb, which is Vb + infinitive + ee +Vb Finite, for example, Poohamaatta v-eemaatteen. - won't go, will never ever go (literal translation)." (p. 49).

Igaab (2020), in her Contrastive Analysis of Reduplication in Arabic and English Languages, provides a detailed explanation of the concept of reduplication and its major types. She also explains reduplication in both languages, using a corpus-based approach. On the classification of reduplication, she establishes a difference between the classification of reduplication in English and Arabic language. According to her,

> In English, there is more than one way of classifying reduplication. On the basis whether the whole or part of it is repeated, there are two types: full and partial. It is divided into three types: prefixal, infixal and suffixal because reduplication is a process of affixation. When reduplication expresses some meanings informally but without production, it is divided into three types: rhyming, exact and ablaut. On the basis of different degrees of production, three types are mentioned: multiple, depreciative and intensification. There is another type which is contrastive reduplication depending on its use and existence in colloquial English.

On the other hand, the Arabic language classifies reduplication based on the following; whether all or part of the base is copied or not, whether the parts that follow each other in the reduplicative construction have the same morphological difference, based on meaning, that is, whether the second part of the reduplicative can be meaningful, based on the number of parts, on the direction of the vowel effect on the preceding and following sounds, that is, the regressive and progressive reduplications, and based on meaning which is expressed by tri-consonantal roots: that is, the intensive and pejorative reduplication.

The author further describes the phonological process involved in reduplication in both languages. In English, reduplication often involves the copying of the prosodic constituents, that is, the repetition of the base is sometimes accompanied by a change of a vowel in the second half. Whereas in Arabic, there is a change in the initial consonant with different first and second syllables. She also describes the morphological processes involved in reduplication in both languages. She notes that, in English, the base can be doubled without changes in sound, as in "girly-girly". Whereas in Arabic, the predominant form of reduplication is the partial one where a slight change is made for the two bases to come together to form a new word. Furthermore, she examines the semantic processes involved in reduplication; in English, a new meaning is formed from a new word, and this meaning can be unclear. In Arabic, the reduplicative words could either be completely meaningless or have a separate meaning from the other half. The syntactic process of reduplication describes the grammatical arrangements of reduplicants and the structure of sentences.

Ugot and Ogundipe (2011) in their work "Reduplication in Nigerian Pidgin: A Versatile Communication Tool," discuss Nigerian Pidgin English, theories of pidgin, the status of the language, and the predominant use of republication in Pidgin English for several purposes such as the expression or description of prolonged activity, to emphasize a subject matter, for pluralization, to modify a simple form, to express adverbs and adjectives, etc.

Several authors hold different views on the concept of reduplication, though there seems to be an agreement that reduplication is a repetition or doubling of a base word to create a new word or meaning. This paper is a morpho-semantic analysis of reduplication in Lizzy Pereowei's "I No Fit Breath". The paper seeks to examine the use of reduplication in creating meaning in the poem.

Theoretical Framework

This paperappliesan aspect of Morphological Doubling Theory in the morpho-semantic analysis of the poem, "I No Fit Breath" by Elizabeth OshuareOmbor-Pereowei. This theory states that the principle of reduplication is driven by a morphological doubling, rather than a phonological doubling. The theory was first propounded by Sharon Inkelas and Cheryl Zoll in 2005.

According to Mustafa (2022), Morphological Doubling Theory (MDT) states that reduplication is a process in morphology, instead of phonology, which calls the second element a reduplicant to add meaning to the base. He further states that "the theory suggests that reduplication occurs because it is required by morphology to satisfy a stated semantic requirement."

Morphological Doubling Theory asserts that reduplication requires two semantically identical morphemes, though, some phonological modification can exist in the replicant. Inkelas and Zoll (2) further posit that reduplicant and base are related to each other in exactly one way which requires a perfect morphosyntactic agreement.

Summarily, Morphological Doubling Theory claims that reduplication involves the concatenation of two stems meeting the same morphosyntactic description, with possible phonological modification of either or both constituents. (Inkeles& Zoll, 9). This theory is adopted for this study because it proposes that reduplication involves the doubling of a base or root word with a level of semantic identicality.

A Morpho-Semantic Analysis of The Concept Of Reduplication In Ombor-Pereowei's"I No Fit Breathe"

4.1 The Poem: *I No Fit Breathe*

(As we take remember our broda, George Floyd)

I go buy sometin for area wey I dey stay.
The moniwey I know; e don tay,
Naim I give dem. Maybe e no legit!
Whether na my fault or no be my fault,
Dem no even allow me talk!
Na so olokpa dem stand for my front!

Dem carry my hand go my back.
Lock am with iron; d thing sef make me shock!
Everytin surprise me as d matter just
Dey happen fast fast.
I dey vex, but I still maintain!

Even sef, those Olokpa dem no even
Do wetin government talk for
The coro disease weydey kill kill people.
Na so dem carry me commot
Like goat wey dem wan go butcher.
I open my mouth, but I no fit even talk plenty!

Na wetindey happen so?
Na becos of my colour?
Abi nabecos of my blood?
This one na see-finish ooo!
My papa; oh my papa dem don fight, fight
So tay, their blood sef enter for the matter.
Dem no want make dem pikin suffer like this!
But the matter still dey be like say e no wan end!

Plenty plenty eye catch wetin happen.
From every which way, every corner,
Everybody now, don see am!
Wait! Abi na punishment for my sins?
Dem no even allow me hear am!
One eye! One eye catch am gbam!
The time wey my heart don already dey fail.
As all of dem press me put for ground!
One sef stand dey look as if e no consainam!
Inside my neck, the other one plant im knee.

Small small, my strength don dey finish!
I no fit breathe; I no fit breathe!
Yet, inside my neck, olokpa still bury im knee!
I no fit breathe; I no fit breathe!
Seconds don turn to minutes o!
I no fit breathe, I no fit breathe!
Abeg, somebodi, give me sometin, anytin!

Mama! Mama! Where you dey, abeg help me!
Na so my last talk take pour for ground!
Just like dat, fiam! My spirit don comot for my body!

Which kain witchcraft be dis?
Many people don kpai like dis before o!
Which kain world be this?
Wey man go kill im fellow man like this!
Like play, like joke, my life don end
Like say e no even first start!
No! No, my blood go cry out!
Justice! Justice, where you dey?
Justice abeg come!
Justice, abeg, come do ya work!
Na only den, naim I go come talk say
Las las, I fit breathe now!

Explication of the Poem

The poem is presented from a first-person narrative point of view and it is of six stanzas of unequal lines. The poem is written in commemoration of the death of George Floyd, a black American, who was brutalized to death by a policeman on the 25th of May, 2020, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States. The poet, in pidgin English, narrates the experience of George Floyd during the altercation that ensued with the policeman that eventually led to his death.

George Floyd's case which trended the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag on social media came a few months before the #EndSars protest in Nigeria which was a campaign against police brutality. Before the nationwide protest, there had been a series of reports on the social media space, especially on X (formerly called Twitter), where Nigerians had laid complaints with clear pictorial evidence of assaults, brutality, and extortion by the police officials. As the complaints kept mounting up, the government turned a blind eye which caused the infuriated masses to embark on a nationwide protest that lasted for over a week and led to the loss of lives at the Lekki Toll gate. The poem seems to also mirror the experiences of several Nigerians who have beenvictims of police brutality.

The first stanza talks about the beginning of the persona's experience on the day of his death. He is said to have gone shopping around his residence,*"I go buy sometin for area wey I dey stay."* (line 1, stanza 1) and unknown to him, the money he had was counterfeit and before he could explain, he was manhandled by the police.

I go buy sometin for area wey I dey stay.
The moniwey I know; e don tay,
Naim I give dem. Maybe e no legit!
Whether na my fault or no be my fault,
Dem no even allow me talk!
Na so olokpa dem stand for my front!
(line 1-6)

The poet uses the term,*olokpa*, a Yoruba word meaning "police". It is a colloquial term generally used to refer to the police officials in Lagos State, Nigeria. The poet adopted the word to indigenize the poem to her Nigerian roots.

In the second stanza, the persona describes how, to his surprise, the police handcuffed and arrested him. The persona notes how the police ignored the "social distance rule" of the Covid 19 era of 2020, when the incident occurred. He expresses this in line 14: "*Even sef, those Olokpa dem no even// Do wetin government talk for//The coro disease weydey kill kill people*." This implies an ironic situation where a police official who is supposed to uphold the orders or laws of the government is seen breaking one. The persona further expresses surprise and speechlessness at the speed at which everything happened, his freedom of speech is seized and he is arrested almost immediately "Like goat wey dem wan go butcher." (line 16), yet he didnot revolt or do anything to warrant being seen as dangerous, talk more of being killed at the spot.

The third stanza shows the persona asking a series of questions expressing his state of shock and surprise. *"Na wetindey happen so? //Na becos of my colour? // Abi nabecos of my blood?"* (line 18-21). He questioned his race and heritage, wondering if those are the reasons why he is termed a thief at first sight.

In the fourth stanza, the persona notes that the event attracted a lot of witnesses but the witnesses did nothing as some were less concerned. He further expresses his pain of being punished for no just cause.

In the fifth stanza, he wails, calling out to his mother as life is being snuffed out of him, and in the last stanza, he expresses the condition for his soul to eternally rest, which is that he gets justice. In his words:
Justice abeg come!
Justice, abeg, come do ya work!
Na only den, naim I go come talk say
Las las, I fit breathe now!
(line 54-57)

Analysis of Reduplication in the Poem
As earlier stated, the concept of reduplication involves the doubling or repetition of a base to change its meaning or form a new word. Elizabeth Pereowei employs the use of reduplication in her work, "I No Fit Breath". We will be analyzing each instance of usage, deciphering their meanings and morphological constructs.

The Morphological Doubling theory, propounded by Inkelas and Zoll, which suggests that reduplication occurs because it is needed by morphology to satisfy a stated semantic requirement is a potent theory that best describes the intention of the poet in her use of reduplication in the work.

Example 1: *Dey happen **fast fast**.* (Line 10) – It happened really fast.

In the example above, the reduplicative functions as an adverbial phrase modifying the verb "happen", which is used to indicate the pace at which the event occurred. It paints a picture of the speed at which the event occurred, giving no time for the persona to salvage the situation.

According to Ugot and Ogundipe (2011), one of the purposes of reduplication in Pidgin English is to intensify the meaning of the base. This is exactly what Elizabeth Pereowei tries to achieve with her predominant use of reduplication in the work.

Example 2: *The coro disease weydey**kill kill** people.* (Line 14) – The Corona Virus that is killing many people.

Here, the reduplicant "kill" is used to denote plurality, that is, the multiple killings by the Coronavirus in 2020. The poet by mentioning "coro" informs the readers of the period of the event which took place in 2020.

Example 3: *My papa; oh my papa dem don **fight, fight**.* (Line 22) – My father!Oh my father has been fighting.

The base word "fight" is doubled and separated by a comma to express a protracted action. The word is used connotatively in the context of human right activism, rather than in the denotative sense of a physical combat. The fight has been on for over generations until the era of the persona who has become a victim of racism whichhis father had fought against.

Example 4: ***Plenty plenty**eye catch wetin happen.* (Line 26) – So many eyes witnessed the event.

Here, the poet also uses reduplication in "plenty plenty" to indicate plurality and to paint a picture of the magnitude of persons who witnessed the event.

Example 5: ***Small small,** my strength don dey finish!* (Line 36) – Gradually, my strength diminishes.

Here, reduplication is used as a powerful tool to create a mental picture of a continuous gradual action that shows how the persona's strength gradually diminishes, leading to weakness and final death. This example gives a practical explanation of the Morphological Doubling Theory which suggests that reduplication occurs because it is needed by morphology to satisfy a stated semantic requirement, not just for the phonological aesthetics of the text. The semantic requirement here is the meaning the author tries to communicate which is the gradual and painful process of the death of the persona.

Example 6: ***Las las,** I fit breathe now!* (Line 53) – Finally, I can breathe now.

This shows the point at which the persona claims to have his soul eternally at rest after getting justice. The reduplicative "*las las*"is derived from the prepositional phrase "at last" which means "ultimately" or "finally". In the context of the poem, the personal uses it to expressthe relief that his soul has ultimately found rest and solace.

Example 7: ***Like play, like joke,*** *my life don end* (Line 50) – Just like a joke, my life has come to an end.
Here,the poet uses a semantically parallel expression to show the persona's active consciousness that traces the progression of the event from the point of arrest to the point of his death. It further evokes pity for the persona's helplessness in saving his own life.Although an actant in the poem, the persona stands as a handicapped observer, watching helplessly at the wickedness of man exhibited through aconscienceless brutality which snatched life from his hands.

Throughout the text, the poet is consistent with using only one kind of reduplication which is the total reduplication, where there is a complete repetition of the base word. With this, Ombor-Pereowei succeeds in painting a mental picture of the event that leads to the painful and untimely death of the persona.

Conclusion

This paper emphasizeson the application of morpho-semantics in the analysis of reduplication inElizabeth OshuareOmbor-Pereowei's "I No Fit Breath". The study shows that the use of reduplication creates a clear mental picture of the gruesome death of the persona.

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