A study of plurals and diminutives in Iheaka Igbo

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Abstract

Certain diminutive sequences shared by Iheaka speech community are conventionalized in such a way that the semantic associations are immediately apparent. Iheaka dialect undoubtedly has well defined dialect specific, seemingly plural and diminutive patterns of word formation. Besides, aside from compounding, agglutination, reduplication, clitics etc which the investigation of selected utterances in a cross section of Igbo dialects reveals, there exist certain word formation processes in Iheaka which are found mainly with plural and diminutive constructs. This paper draws data from Iheaka, a Northern Igbo dialect to examine how diminutives and plural formation processes operate in the said dialect. The paper also discusses the diminutive as a pervasive feature of the lexicon, and as it manifests itself in parts of the morphology (example: plural suffix). The above preamble shows the need and the relevance of this present study. The paper discuses with copious examples, plural and diminutive (affixes) formation in the dialect to include: chá, ché, nwá, já and èzè. Word formation analysis and descriptive generalization of morphological processes has been employed in this database about word form-lexicalization. In the tone marking convention, we tone marked almost every data (in our Igbo examples) for the purposes of clarity.

1.0 Introduction

This section will focus on some concepts that we deem necessary for this study. Some of them are Iheaka Dialect (ID), word formation, plural and diminutive formation as parts of word formation processes. Brief prefatory comments on these concepts are therefore germane (relevant).

1.1 Iheaka dialect

Iheaka dialect is a satellite dialect of Nsukka main cluster of the Igbo language in the new Benue Congo language family. In their classification, Ikekeqnwu (1986) and Nwaozuzu (2008) refer to Nsukka as the Northern Igbo Wáàwá. The dialect is spoken by large groups of certain enclaves in substantial parts of Nsukka central, Qkpaligbo and some parts of Obollo communities. This is due to the fact that the people have been a very migratory people, hence, a large number of the people occupy the above

mentioned areas. Consequently, they share in common some cultural denominators (language/dialect) by which they are identified. Iheaka is about 12 km from the University town of Nsukka. The major access road is the Nsukka-Obollo-Afor road constructed between 1912 and 1914 (Nnaji, 1985) with forced labour.

1.2 Word formation

Basically, it is not uncommon for word formation to deal with the description of the structure of words or set of words (usually lexicalization). Bussmann (1996) for example, describes word formation as the investigation and description of processes and rule-governed formation of new complex words on the basis of already existing linguistic resources. Hence, new words can arise only according to the already existing prototype in the lexicalized vocabulary of the language. The major part of all word formation, according to Bussmann, can be subsumed under derivation (the creation of new words through suffixes of a specific word class (for example English read +ing, read +able), prefixation (attachment of a prefix to a free morpheme for example un +readable, mis +interpret), composition (compounds of several free morphemes, for example fire + man, bath + man) and conversion (the change of word class of a stem: compound noun, compound verb). There is no doubt that clippings, abbreviations and blending are rather regarded as peripheral and formations not involving full linguistic signs (see for example Bussmann; 1996 and Marchand, 2004 for details). Beecher (2004) also opines that, "the morphological paradigm as a theoretical construct has a central role in explaining inflectional word formation, particularly in word and paradigm approaches to morphology". Aronoff (1976), having recognized word formation as part of modern linguistic theory, has worked out the characteristics of the rules that generate new complex words in the lexicon on the basis of the words already present therein. In Iheaka, such new complex words in the lexicon do abound following the rules of suffixation and prefixation as we shall see in the subsequent representative examples from the dialect under study. The above expositions therefore strengthen the fact that word formation processes are invariably productive, and constantly in operation to expand the lexicon as new meanings emerge in the area.

In other words, word formation has a function of lexical enrichment, whereby new words are coined to denote new, or newly salient concepts and secondly a transpositional function.

1.3 Plural formation

Recognizing a central role for plural in word formation, Bussmann (1996) argues that plural is a subcategory of number in nouns and verbs which usually serve to indicate the presence of more than one element, but which can also have an individualizing function with certain common nouns such as the English examples (rock-rocks) and collective nouns (people-peoples). Similarly, the dialect under study has an assortment of denominal derivatives including the diminutive plural which is marked by 'ché and 'chá' suffix. Plural formation by stem-internal vowel changes is called broken-plural in contrast to plural formation by suffixation only without other changes (Beecher, 2004). Palmer (1962) asserts that the inter-relationships among some Tigre singular/plural nouns and corresponding singular plural diminutives can be described as broken plurals as shown below:

Example:

	Gloss	Singular	Plural	Diminutive Singular	Diminutive Plural
i.	'stone'	əbən	əbän	ebbän ät	ebbän-ät
ii.	'coffee pot'	gəban	gäbän-otat	gäbä-ät	gäbbän-etat
iii.	'paper'	wəraq	wäräq-otat	wäräq-ät	wäräq-etat
iv.	'pot'	säkänab	Säkännəb	Säkäneb-ät	Säkäneb-at

As a Semitic language, aspects of Tigre phonology and morphology are traditionally analyzed templatic. In each example (i-iv) above, the various forms share the same sequence of stem consonants or radicals, which form a 'template'. Vowel change differentiates related forms and sometimes, as with the plural of 'əbən 'Stone' or säkänab 'pot'. Some broken-plurals also bear a suffix (e.g. gäbän-otat 'Coffee pot' or wäräq-otat 'paper'), a prefix, or both. Tigre has an assortment of denominal derivations including diminutives, augmentatives and pejoratives generally derived from the corresponding singular noun; but in some cases derived from a corresponding broken-plural. Several phonological features are described as characteristic of diminutives in Palmer (1962). These include the /o/ of the plural suffix-otat changing to /e/ in the diminutive plural suffix-etat, and the gemination of /b/ when preceded by /ə/ as in the forms derived from 'əbän 'stone'. Palmer also describes the gemination of a consonant proceeding /ə/ or /i/ (e.g. the /n/ in säkänəb

'pot') as a phonetically long consonant that is morphologically a single radical. Toeing the same line as Beecher, Trask (1993) remarks that pluralization is the process of changing the form of the word/ noun in most cases, so that it expresses information such as number.

Palmer (1962) also remarks that, some phonological features described as characteristic of diminutives express information such as number. Given the above assertion, it is apparent that the findings and formation of some denominal diminutives and diminutive plurals as evidence of word formation have not been given any attention in the dialect from the available records hence, the need for this study.

1.3 Diminutive

Diminutive criterions serve to express an outgrowth of nouns derived by means of certain suffixes like the English-let (booklet), - ie (Bilie), -y (kitty) or a prefix like the English-mini (mini-vac) (Bussmann 1996). In accounting for diminutive expressions, Bussmann sees "diminutive as a rule modification, which can signal an emotional attitude of the speaker as well as expressions like the status of a word denoting something, or persons small of its kind and something regarded with affection, similarity or contempt". In line with Bussmann, Nwaozuzu (1991) in her classification of progenitiver affiliatives in Igbo sees the form "small" (nwá) as representing diminutive features. She opines that "nwá" (small) has the following semantic realization: small, child, and offspring. Hence, "nwá" in Igbo can express the status of a word as well. Extending the concept of diminutive, Napoli (1996:192) asserts that diminutives are used to indicate positive evaluation. Similarly, the Iheaka dialect makes liberal use of ameliorative diminutive affixes. In his own assertion, Bauer (2004) opines that while some affixes not only change word-class, they also add their own determinable meaning, as there are those whose sole function is to effect a transposition. Hence, we may wish not to take a stance on whether diminutive is derivational or inflectional.

In view of the foregoing, one can harmonize the views by claiming that diminutive instantiates word formation which consists of adding to a noun, root, and radical or stem an affix or affixes. Another side to this is that diminutive has to do with designating certain affixes that denote smallness, youthfulness, familiarity or affection. Hence, it concerns itself with the status of the word.

2.0 Diminutive suffix in English

Some languages do add diminutive affixes with relative ease. English according to Akmajian et al (2004) has a so-called diminutive suffix usually spelt-'y' or –'ie' and –'let' (see for example Napoli 1996, Bussmann 1996, Bauer 2004, and Akmajian et al 2004). Here are some representative examples of the diminutive suffix in English indicating affection and smallness. See illustrations below from Napoli (1996) and Akmajean et al (2004). Example:

Diminutive Suffix-y/-ie

2.	**Base word**	**Diminutive**
a.	Mom	mommy
b.	Dad	daddy
c.	John	Johnny
d.	Dan	Danny
e.	dog	dogy
f,	Gloria	Glory

	Diminutive Base word	**Diminutive**
g.	horse	horsie
h.	bill	billie

3.	**Diminutive Base Word**	**suffix –let Diminutive**
a.	pig	piglet
b.	owl	owlet
c.	frog	froglet
d.	book	booklet
e.	boom	boomlet

Notice that '-y/-ie' diminutive is very productive in English. It can even be attached to names. The '-y/-ie' diminutive often denotes ameliorative (endearment) features in the language. Examples (3a-c) above denote the young of the specie while (3d-e) indicate that the 'book' probably has a few pages and the 'boom' probably was not very loud. Glaringly, each diminutive suffix-y,-ie and –let causes no phonological alteration in the base word to which it is attached, but does augment the base by adding its own sound. It does not change the part of speech of the base (both dad and

daddy are nouns), and it causes no obvious semantic change (in the sense that both 'dad' and 'daddy' for instance denote the same person). Similarly in Iheaka, the above phenomena abound, as will be illustrated presently.

2.1 Italian diminutive

Italian is one of the languages that have an assortment of diminutive suffixes (for details see, Napoli 1996). Exemple:

Diminutive: verb-verb (V-V)

4. a. Attorcero 'to twist', attorcinare 'to sidle' Augmentative N-N
   b. Querceta 'Oak grove' quercetina "small grove of oaks" pejorative: adjective-adjective (A-A)
   c. Dolce: 'sweet' dolciatro "sickly sweet" ameliorative" (N-N)
   d. Elina, 'a girl's name' Elenuccia, 'dear Elena.'

In each case in the above examples, the addition of the diminutive suffix did not change the category. This pattern of evaluative affixes not changing category is almost of Italian and Romance as Napoli (1996) highlighted. However, in the dialect under study the ameliorative and augmentative are basically productive quite unlike the pejorative. We can also notice from the above that diminutive can carry ameliorative, pejorative and augmentative senses as we have seen in the Italian diminutives (see a, b, c, d,) above.

2.2 Diminutive in Igbo language

In her semantic categorization of Igbo nominal compounds Nwaozuzu (1991) says that "affiliatives are those group of compounds having as their semantic structure an entity (Ent) plus an obligatorily present affiliator (Aft_1) and an optional affiliator (Aft_2) all of which combine to give a semantic whole (ie Ent + Aft_1 + Aft_2 - Afiliatives). Hence she demonstrates that "nwá" for instance could be contextualized to have the following semantic output:

a. diminutive
b. off – spring
c. child

In other words, she attributes the form 'nwá' to designate diminutive denoting the smallness of things and the young of animal. Example:

4. a. nwá + jí ⟶ nwá jì "small yam"
   b. nwá + odú ⟶ nwá odú "small pestle"
   c. nwá +éwú ⟶ nwá éwú "kid" goat"
   d. nwá + ēgbē ⟶ nwá ēgbē "bowet"

In the above examples, notice that the evaluative diminutive 'nwa' denotes the size of the nouns to which they are attached. Hence both ji, odú, éwú, and ēgbē are all nouns, but their status or sizes are not known not until the 'nwá' diminutive is prefixed to them, indicating their sizes clearly to be small of their kinds. Notice also that the category of the words remain the same (N-N).

However, aside from Nwaozuzu's findings, there are other diminutives suffixes in Igbo language denoting affection/ endearment.

5. a. Àdá + nwá ⟶ Àdá nwá "dear Ada"
   b. Èbérè + nwá ⟶ Èbérè nwá "dear Ebere"
   c. Èméká + nwá ⟶ Èméká nwá "dear Emeka"

In the above examples, notice that the form 'nwá' depicts affection/endearment on the part of the speaker. Hence, diminutive can signal an emotional attitude of the speaker. Similarly, the new word 'nwa' which is added to the root is class maintaining (N-N), hence the notion of ameliorative. Note also that the high tone on /a/ of 'nwá' changes to a down step due to phonological rules and applications during associative constructions.

In the dialect under study, the diminutive affixes include ché and chá in plural formation and 'já and èzè in ameliorative diminutive formations respectively.

2.3 Plural formation in Igbo

Trask (1993) asserts that plural-formation is the process of changing the form of the word/noun in most cases, so that it expresses information such as number. Similarly in line with The New international Webster's Dictionary (2003) which describes plural as consisting of more than one, plural formation processes in Igbo utilize qtxtx, and xmx to designate the presence of more than one. Example:

6	Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
a.	óchė́	chair,	Ọtútú óchē	many chairs
b.	m̀mádụ̀	people	Ọtútú mmádụ̀	many people
c.	nwá	child	Ụmú	children

In the above examples, each word signals singular before the expansion of the lexicon but when the plural indicator ótútú or úmú is added to each word, the word changes to express information such as number. In some cases the Iheaka dialect also uses ótútú or úmú before a stem/ word to indicate the presence of more than one element. Notice that ótútú is added before a noun in the formation of its plural. Hence, plurality instantiates word formation process as in example (7) above.

3.0 Word formation processes in Iheaka Igbo

3.1 Plural formation in Iheaka

We have noted earlier that plural is a subcategory of number for nouns, which usually serves to indicate the presence of more than one element. The following are some of the representative examples from the dialect under study.

7. Diminutive/plural

	Word/Noun	Gloss	Suffix	Plural	Gloss
a.	ùbé	pear	ché	ùbéche	pears
b.	óchē	chair	ché	óchēchē	chairs
c.	ékèké	melon	ché	ékèkéché	melon
d.	Ọdú	pistle	ché	Ọdúchá	pestle
e.	ábó	basket	chá	ábóchaā	Basket
f.	ákpōkō	pepper	chá	ákpōkōchā	Pepper
g.	ọ́gà	hoe	chá	ọ́gàchá	hoes

Note that 'ché' and 'cha' are phonologically dependent on their host or root. Apart from the symmetrical tonal behaviour observed above, vowel harmony exists; essentially between the word and the diminutive plural indicator. Each host which has a final vowel with + expanded pharynx occurs with the vowel of the diminutive plural indicator belonging to the same harmony group. In essence, while the affected forms

(a-c) above have vowels with the feature + ATR, those in (d-f) have -ATR. There is no internal vowel change in the above examples.

Plurals formed by suppletion in Iheaka

The inter-relationship between the singular/plural noun and corresponding singular/plural diminutive in the dialect is like what Beecher, (2004) describes as denominal diminutives, evaluative, and pejoratives; which he further analyzes as templates. Instances from our study area include:

8.

	Singular	Gloss	Plural	Diminutive singular	Diminutive plural	Gloss
a.	Nwá	child	úmù	Nwáńchì	úmù ńchi	Small children
b.	ónyényè	female	njiomu	nwá ónyényē	úmù ńjíómù	small girls
c.	ónyékè	male	njikóm	nwá ónyékè	úmù ńjíkóm	small boys

In addition, the examples in (9a-c) could further be interpreted thus:

b.	**Singular**	ónyé	nwúnyè	ónyé...	nyè	ónyényè
	Plural	ńdí	inyóm-	ńdí ...	òm	ńjíòmú
c.	**Singular**	ónyé	nwókē-	ónyé ...	ké	ónyékē
	Plural	ńdí	ikóm -	ńdí ...	kòm	ńjíkòm

In each example, the various forms undergo internal vowel/ consonant suppletion changes. In example (8a) 'nwa' changes to 'úmù'. The feminine form ónyényè (8b), changes to 'ńjíkòm and the masculine form ónyékè (8c) changes to ńjíkm. In other words, it seems that 'ónyé' changes to 'ńjí' and nyè transforms to 'òm in the regular plural formation while in ónyékè transforms to 'ónyé' and kè transforms to 'ọm' respectively in the plural formation. Perhaps these examples are illustrative of suppletion and broken plurals in contrast to plural formed through suffixation only without other changes", (Beecher 2004:1). Some broken –plurals also bear a suffix, a prefix or both. Notice also that ńjí + kóm means "ńdí + kòm" – "ńjíkómù" in Iheaka and "ńjíkóm" in standard Igbo respectively, hence 'ńjí'is the dialectal form of " ńdí

in standard Igbo. Instances of asymmetrical tonal behaviour are also observed above between the diminutive singular and the diminutive plural affixes.

3.2 The diminutive indicator 'nwá in Iheaka

Consider the following representative example:

10.	Noun	Gloss	Diminutive	New word	Gloss
(a)	ụgọ̀dù	dog	nwá	nwáụ̀gọ̀dụ̀	puppy
(b)	òbíshí	cat	nwá	nwáòbíshí	kitten
(c)	éwú	goat	nwá	nwáéwū	kid
(d)	éshi	pig	nwá	nwáéshī	piglet
(e)	éshú	cow	nwá	nwáéshū	calf
(f)	ọ̀bọ̀gwù	duck	nwá	nwáọ̀bọ̀gwụ̀	duckling

From the above, we may say that the diminutive premodifier "nwá" denotes the small/young of animal as in standard Igbo (see example above) Notice also that there is no vowel displacement during the formation. Significantly, the diminutive nwá in (10) is a premodifier (in a premod + head construction). The examples in (10) illustrate compounding. In line with the above, Selkirk (1982) in Aderson (1992) argues that morphologically complex words are created by an extension of rules of phrase structures to a set of word- internal categories (such as roots, stem, suffix, prefix etc). Notice also that the 'nwá' diminutive form is not phonologically dependent on its host. 'Nwá' maintains its high tone in the formation of the new word; hence, there is a kind of symmetrical tone pattern on the new form.

3.3 'Ja' as a diminutive indicator in Iheaka

In her 'Igbo nominal compound', Nwaozuzu (1991:165) illustrates 'nwá'□ as a diminutive, denoting the smallness of something. In line with the above assertion, Davidson (2000) remarks, "a diminutive is an adjective denoting very small of a noun and an ending added to a word to indicate smallness". She calls such ending "diminutive suffix". In addition, "diminutive is associated with an affix especially a suffix added to the radicals to form a diminutive word", (Brown 1993:674). Consider the following examples:

11.

	Noun	Gloss	Diminutive Suffix	New Word	Gloss
a	úgwú	a person's name	já	úgwújá	úgwú junior
b	ódò	a persons name	já	ódòjá	ódò junior
c	ézè	a persons name	já	ézèjá	ézè junior
d	ọ́yímá	a woman's title name	já	ọ́yímájá	ọ́yímá junior
e	ọ̀yìōdò	a woman's title name	já	ọ̀yìōdòjá	ọ̀yìōdò junior
f	ọ̀ryíéshwū	a woman's title name	já	ọ̀ryíéshwūjá	ọ̀ryíéshwū junior
g	áttámá	a man's title name	já	áttámájá	ttámá junior

The examples in (11) show that the dimunitive 'ja' depicts two things: junior/small of its kind, and sameness/resemblance. Hence, when 'ja' is suffixed to the name of a person, it means that; probably, the person at birth glaringly resembles either of the parents. Hence, he/she is named after either of the parents that he/she resembles. Notice also that the inhabitant term via the nouns serve as a base to which já is suffixed to form the diminutive word. The process involved creates one word from another in which the lexical meaning of the created word is category preserving. Hence, in (11c) for example, 'Ézè' is a noun; Ezeja is also a noun (N-N) etc.

3.4 Diminutive formation depicting ameliorative (positive evaluation – affection/ endearment)

Several productive word formation processes in Iheaka exemplify striking cases of positive evaluation and affection in the diminutive. These cases (diminutive indicator) in addition to providing evidence for positive evaluation and affection, illustrate a further possibility of diminutive formation in word formation processes. Examples are shown below:

	Noun	Gloss	Diminutive suffix	New word	Gloss
12 (a)	ọ́màdá	a person's name	èzè	ọ́màdáèzè	dear ọ́màdá
(b)	ǹkwọ́	a person's name	èzè	ǹkwóèzè	dear ǹkwó
(c)	ogbòńnàyá	a person's name	èzè	ògbòńnàyáèzè	dear ògbòńnàyá
(d)	ọ̀yíódò	a person's name	èzè	ọ̀yíódōèzè	dear ọ̀yíódò

The diminutive indicator is tonally independent as is shown in (12) above. However, this diminutive suffix 'èzè' may be said to have a form that could be construed as the surname to the name it is attached. However, because of its full productivity as a diminutive indicator in the dialect, it does not function as a surname or even a name

in that domain. In addition, as a surname or name, it is separately written as Ézè and not 'Ézè'.

Summary of findings and conclusion

In this paper, we have outlined some diminutive and plural indictors to attest to the fact that diminutive and plural indicators abound in Iheaka dialect. In addition to justifying the productivity and plausibility of plural and diminutive indicators, the paper has shown how plurals and diminutives can be formed through word formation processes. The paper has identified two ways of plural formation. One is by suffixation of diminutive plural ché or cha and plurals formed by suppletions. Further more, three types of diminutive affixes were identified. They are realized as nwá, 'já' and èzè. Word formation theory, being a viable morphological model for analyzing word formation processes has been employed in the data base to show that plural and diminutive formation in Iheaka are derived from roots, stems or words by means of the various diminutive indicators/premodifiers; and suppletion as indicated above.

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v. Provide gloss for all examples from other languages. The gloss should be in single quotation marks with no comma preceding or following it, unless necessary; type each numbered item on a separate indented line with the number in parentheses; indent after the number; use lowercase letters to group sets.

(2) a. Nye m mmiri 'Give me water'
b.Ọ gara nke ọma 'It went well'

Refer to numbered items as 2, 2a, 2a, b, 2(a-c). Align word for word or morpheme by morpheme glosses of example phrases or sentences with the beginning of each word.

(3) Ada sị na ya ga-abja.
Ada say that she will come.

Place a hyphen between morphs within words in the original and a corresponding hyphen in the gloss:

(4) fog-okfel próbál-ni olvas-ni
will-1sg try-inf read-inf

If one morph in the original corresponds to two or more elements in the gloss (cumulative exponence), separate the letter by a period, except for persons; there is no period at the end of word:

(5) es-tis be-2PL. PRESS. IND.ACT

Gloss lexical roots in lower case roman type; persons as 1, 2, 3, and 4, and all over other grammatical categories abbreviated in small capitals. List the abbreviations in notes.

vi. Arrange entries in references alphabetically by surname of authors; list multiple works by the same author in ascending chronological order; use suffixed letters a, b, c, etc to distinguish more than one item published by a single author in the same year; list a journal or a book as a separate entry under the editor's name if more than one article or chapter is cited from the journal or book. Each entry should contain the following elements: for books, author's given name(s) or initials; given name and surname of other authors, year of publication, full title of the book, place of publication and publishers; for a project report, thesis or dissertation, full title is followed by name of degree and the name of the of the institution for which the project report, thesis or dissertation has been written; for a journal article, the full name of the journal follows the title which is followed by the volume number and page numbers for the entire article; for a chapter contributed in a book, the following form: title of the chapter, in full name(s) of editor(s), title of the book, place of publication, publishers and page numbers of the entire chapter; for monographs, the editor, volume or part number (if applicable) and series title (if any) should be indicated following its title; for a work from the Internet, its title is followed by the following form: Retrieved on (date) from (website); note an entry for a dictionary should begin with name of its editor; an entry for a work by an organization should begin with the name of the organization:

Ayuwo, Jones G. I. 2003. The teaching of Kiswahili in Nigeria: The journal so far. In Ndimele (ed.) *In the linguistic paradise: A festschrift for Nolue Emenanjo.* Aba: NINLAN, 421-426.

Eme, Cecilia A. 2005. A syntax of Igbo monosyllabic conjunction. *Awka Journal of Linguistics and Languages, 1,* 95-103.

Eyisi, Joy. 2003. *Common errors in the use of English.* Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Limited.

Knoetze, J. G. 1997. *Educational research.* Retrieved on 5-7-2003 from http://hagar.up.ac.za/cie/bed/modules/rgo785/tools/edcationalresearch.htm.

United Nations Organization. 1975. *Report of the world population conference.* Paris: UNESCO.

All the specifications are largely based on the Linguistics Society of America (LSA) Language Style Sheet. Comply with them. AJILL considers them seriously.