



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



## Morphology of Àyèré, Kogi state Nigeria

Bisodun Adinlewa \*

*Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.*

World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 24(02), 1200–1207

Publication history: Received on 27 September 2024; revised on 10 November 2024; accepted on 13 November 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.2.3379>

### Abstract

This study delves into the morphological structure of Àyèré, a less-documented language spoken by a minority group in Nigeria. The research aims to fill a significant gap in the linguistic literature by providing a comprehensive analysis of the morphological features of Àyèré, particularly in terms of its morpheme structures, criteria for wordhood in the dialect, Tonal change (pitch alteration) and word formation processes. The study adopts a structuralist approach, utilizing both fieldwork data and existing secondary sources to elucidate the morphological characteristics of the dialect. Key findings highlight the unique aspects of Àyèré morphology, such as its affixation processes, the role of tonal variations in morpheme differentiation, and the influence of neighboring languages on its morphological system. This research contributes to the broader understanding of Niger-Congo languages and offers valuable insights for future studies on the documentation and preservation of endangered languages in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Morphology; Àyèré; Kogi; Morphological processes; Tone.

### 1. Introduction

Àyèré, a dialect belonging to the Yoruboid language cluster, is spoken in parts of Kogi State, Nigeria. Despite its cultural and linguistic significance within the region, Àyèré remains underexplored in linguistic research. As languages evolve and interact with one another, the study of less-documented dialects like Àyèré becomes crucial for understanding the broader dynamics of language change, preservation, and the intricate connections within language families. As Àyèré faces pressures from dominant languages and dialects in the region, understanding its morphology will help to enrich its linguistic theory and also supports efforts to maintain the linguistic heritage of the Àyèré-speaking community. As such, this study is aimed at revealing the unique ways in which this dialect forms and modifies words through processes such as affixation, reduplication, and compounding thereby laying the groundwork for future research and preservation initiatives.

#### 1.1. Theoretical Framework

The Weak Lexicalist Hypothesis (WLH), which is described in Pulleyblank and Akinlabi's Phrasal Morphology from 1988, is the theoretical framework used in this study. The Weak Lexicalist Hypothesis is a linguistic theory that suggests that the meaning of a sentence is primarily determined by the meanings of its individual words or lexemes, rather than by the structure or syntax of the sentence itself. According to this hypothesis, the syntax of a sentence plays a secondary role in determining its meaning, serving primarily to establish relationships between individual words.

According to Pulleyblank and Akinlabi, some words have syntactic input in their derivation while others do not. They posited that apart from the standard case where morphology (i.e. word level categories (xo) feed the syntax, there are also other cases (especially in some African

\* Corresponding author: Bisodun Adinlewa

languages) where syntax (x1 e.g. phrase) serve as input to xo category. The relationship is expressed in the following diagram



Pulleyblank and Akinlabi (1988: 142) Àyèrè is one of such languages where, in addition to Xo, XI categories also feed morphology. There are copious examples of this. Some of them include:

### ÀYÈRÉ

1. [N a [VP bílalè] ] “to put on bare ground”.

pre put on bare ground

2. [N a [VP saho]] “dig hole”

pre dig hole

3. [N a [VP yon] ] “get burnt”

pre burnt

4. [N [VP gbà] [VP gbó] ] “believe”

take hear

In the examples above, the inputs to morphology, that is, abílalè (a bílalè) meaning to put on bare ground in 1 above, asa (a sa), dig hole in 2, ayon (a yon), get burnt in 3, as well as gbàgbó (gbà gbó) believe in 4, are verb phrases of the type VNP.

### 1.2. Approaches to Morphology

Morphological approach to studying language focuses on the internal structure and formation of words. It seeks to understand how words are composed of smaller meaningful units called morphemes and how these morphemes combine to create new words. The morphological approach provides valuable insights into how words are constructed in a language and contributes to our understanding of the fundamental building blocks of linguistic expression.

#### 1.2.1. Structuralist Approach to Morphology

This approach, associated with early linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure, focuses on the internal structure of words and the relationship between form and meaning. Structuralists analyze the morphemes (the smallest meaningful units) and their combinations to understand the organization of a language's morphology.

According to Booij (2002), structuralist morphology investigates the internal structure of words by examining the systematic relations between morphemes. A morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of language, such as a prefix, a suffix, or a root. Structuralist's study how these morphemes are organized and combined to create words. The structuralist perspective assumes that there are rules or principles in a language that determine the possible combinations and orderings of morphemes.

#### 1.2.2. Cognitive Approach

This approach explores the mental processes and representations involved in morphological processing. Cognitive morphologists investigate how speakers perceive, store, and retrieve morphological information, and how it influences language production and comprehension.

Booij, (2000) opines that cognitive morphology investigates how morphological knowledge is stored, accessed, and processed in the human mind. The cognitive approach to morphology focuses on the mental processes involved in the production, comprehension, and acquisition of morphological structures.

Jackendoff, (2002) asserts that in the cognitive approach to morphology, the analysis of word forms and their meaning is based on the cognitive processes and representations involved in language processing.

### 1.2.3. Generative Approaches to Morphology

Generative approaches to morphology refer to linguistic theories and models that aim to explain how words are formed and structured within a language. These approaches typically focus on the internal structure of words and investigate the rules and processes involved in creating new words or inflecting existing ones. Generative approaches to morphology emphasize the importance of hierarchical structures and recursive processes in the analysis of complex word formation." (Bresnan, J. (2001).

### 1.2.4. Lexicalist Approach to Morphology

In the early 1990s, linguist Mark Aronoff originally suggested using a lexicalist approach to morphology. According to Aronoff, the fundamental components of morphological analysis are wording that speakers really employ in their language, not abstract morphemes like in the generative approach. He argued that the lexicon, or mental dictionary, of a language, determines the form of words and their meanings more crucially than was previously believed.

The lexicalist approach to morphology is a theoretical perspective that places a strong emphasis on the role of the lexicon in the analysis of morphology. According to the lexicalist view, the lexicon is the primary locus of morphological knowledge and contains information about the internal structure and properties of words. In the lexicalist approach, words are seen as stored units in the mental lexicon, and the morphological processes involved in word formation and inflection are analyzed as operations that manipulate these stored units. Lexical entries in the lexicon contain information about a word's morphological structure, including its stems, affixes, and any associated morphosyntactic features.

### 1.2.5. Morphological Word

Fromkin et al (2013) asserts that morphological word refers to the smallest linguistic unit that carries meaning and can be further divided into morphemes, which are the smallest units of meaning. Words as conceived from morphological view point are construed out of morphemes through various morphological processes.

#### Monomorphemic Word in Àyèrè

A monomorphemic word is a type of word that consists of a single morpheme, which is the smallest grammatical unit of meaning. In other words, monomorphemic words cannot be broken down into smaller meaningful parts without losing their inherent meaning. For instance, in Àyèrè, below are regarded as monomorphemic word

a. kpá	-	"meet"	
b. rú	-	"reach"	
c. tá	-	"sell"	
d. ṣwí	-	"call"	
e. gbà	-	"take"	etc.

#### Polymorphemic Word

A poly morphemic word is a type of word that consists of more than one morpheme. It is a linguistic term used to describe a word that can take on multiple meanings or forms based on its context or usage. These words often have different meanings or functions depending on the specific context in which they are used. Polymorphic words contribute to the richness and complexity of language by allowing for nuances and variations in communication. They can be challenging to interpret accurately without considering the surrounding context. Below are examples of polymorphic words in Àyèrè.

- |             |   |                          |
|-------------|---|--------------------------|
| a. kpámá    | - | “meet them”              |
| b. kpama-ma | - | “meet them to share it”. |
| c. ùnà      | - | “journey / trip”         |
| d. ríbò     | - | “roll”                   |
| e. gbajímì  | - | “give me”                |

### 1.3. Criteria for Wordhood in Àyèré

The concept of "wordhood" refers to what constitutes a valid or recognized word in a given language. Aronoff and Fudeman, (2005) posit that despite the challenges involved in trying to define a word succinctly, there are several characteristics that can be utilized to pinpoint a word. The criteria for wordhood in Àyèré include the following:

- Morphological criteria
- Syntactic criteria
- Phonological criteria.

In Àyèré some of the morphological criteria that are available include: morpheme structure, Affixation, reduplication, tone change while the syntactic criteria that are available include: fixed order of elements, non-separability, lexical integrity and positional mobility.

#### 1.3.1. Morphological Criteria for Wordhood in Àyèré

Morphological criteria for wordhood in Àyèré are linguistic principles and characteristics that help determine whether a given unit of the language qualifies as a distinct word. These criteria consider the structure and form of a linguistic unit and are important for defining the boundaries between words and other linguistic elements, such as morpheme structure, affixation, reduplication, and tone change. There are several morphological criteria that linguists often use to identify whether a unit is a separate word.

##### Morpheme Structure

Words in Àyèré are often composed of one or more morphemes, which can be classified as either free morphemes or bound morphemes. Free morphemes can stand alone as words, while bound morphemes must be attached to other morphemes.

Free morphemes in Àyèré are those that can function independently as words and carry meaning on their own. They are not attached to other morphemes and can be used as standalone words in sentences. Here are some examples of free morphemes in Àyèré:

- |      |                    |      |
|------|--------------------|------|
| dá   | “go”               |      |
| èndí | “ear”              |      |
| bàtà | “shoe”             |      |
| bòbó | “carry baby”       |      |
| ají  | “Cover, lid”       |      |
| àdá  | “going, departure” |      |
| fùrè | “expire”           | etc. |

In Àyèrè, reduplication is a linguistic phenomenon where a portion of a word or an entire word is repeated, often with slight variations, to create a new word or form. This repetition can serve various purposes within languages, such as indicating intensity, plurality, grammatical aspects, or even creating new vocabulary. Reduplication can involve the repetition of a whole word (total reduplication) or just part of it (partial reduplication), and the repeated portion can be identical or altered in some way.

Base	Gloss	Reduplication	Gloss
bò	“carry”	bòbò	“carry baby on the back of”
do	“escort”	dido	“escorting”
gbé	“abuse”	gbígbé	“abusing”
gbọ	“hear”	gbàgbọ	“believe”
gè	“shine”	gégè	“shining light”
yẹ̀n	“little”	yẹ̀nyẹ̀n	“all in all”
kpátá	“all”	kpátákpátá	“completely, all-in-all”
kpàá	“specific”	kpàákpàá	“in particular”

#### 1.4. Tone Change

A tonal change in Àyèrè refers to the alteration of the pitch (or tone) of a syllable or a word, which can lead to changes in meaning. In linguistics, tonal languages use variations in pitch to distinguish between different words or word forms. The pitch changes are used as a phonemic or distinctive feature, just like consonants and vowels in non-tonal languages.

Below are examples of how tonal change is used to form new words in Àyèrè

##### A

gbé	“abuse”
gbẹ	“tin”
gbẹ̀	“Plant”

##### B

hé	“tie”
hè	“warm”
hẹ	“deny”

##### C

ùnú	“smell”
únú	“mushroom”
ùnù	“tongue”

##### D

úná	“hell”
-----	--------

únà	“trek”
ùnà	“journey / trip”

## 2. Morphological Processes in Àyèré

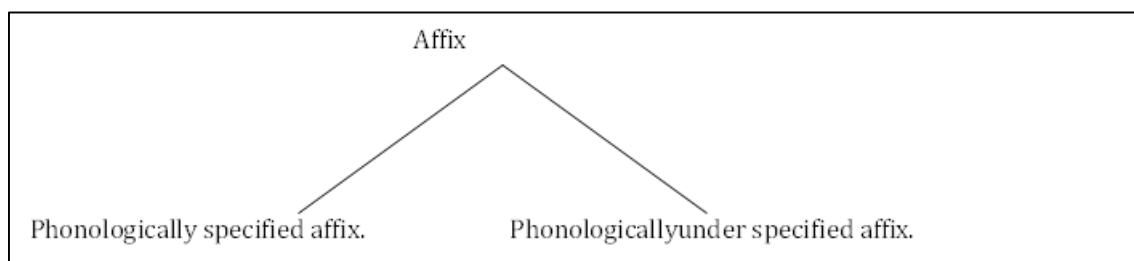
Fromkin, e'tal (2018) posit that morphological processes encompass the rules and patterns governing the internal structure of words, including the addition of prefixes and suffixes, as well as processes like reduplication. This is conveying that morphological processes are comprehensive and involve a set of rules and patterns governing how words are structured internally. This includes operations like affixation (adding prefixes and suffixes) and reduplication, all of which contribute to the formation and modification of words in a language. This explanation aligns with the study of morphology within linguistics, which examines the structure and formation of words.

### 2.1. Affixation in Àyèré

Affixation is a morphological process that involves the addition of affixes to a word, resulting in the creation of a new word. Affixes are morphemes that can be prefixes (added to the beginning of a word), suffixes (added to the end of a word), infixes (inserted within a word), or circumfixes (added both at the beginning and end of a word).

In Àyèré, Affixes can be broadly classified into two based on the nature of their specification with regards to the base.

- Phonologically specified affix
- Phonologically under specified affix.



## 3. Phonologically Specified Affix in Àyèré

A phonologically specified affix in Àyèré is a type of morpheme that is added to a base word to create a new word, and its form is influenced by the phonological characteristics of the base word. In linguistics, morphology is the study of the structure and formation of words. Affixes are morphemes that are added to a base to modify its meaning. It adapts its pronunciation based on the phonological characteristics of the base word to which it is attached. This phenomenon is observed in many languages and contributes to the overall phonological harmony and regularities within a language's morphology. See the examples below

Affix	Base/stem	Derived Word
à	máà “reject”	àmáà “rejection”
à	mran “suggest”	àmran “suggestion”
ẹ	şwe “cooked”	ẹşwe “cooked”
i	fuşi “stubborn”	ifuşi “stubbornness”
ù	pà “vomit”	ùpà “act of vomiting”

These are the conventional affixes, which, although having distinct phonological forms, depend on their base or stem to survive and retain meaning. Phrases or words may act as their stem or foundation.

### 3.1. Prefixes

A prefix is a linguistic element that is added to the beginning of a word to modify its meaning. It is a type of affix, a group of letters or syllables attached to the front of a base word to create a new word with a different meaning. They are added to words to modify their meanings or to indicate grammatical relationships. Prefixes play a crucial role in word formation and can significantly alter the sense of a word, providing clarity and nuance to communication. Here are a few examples of prefixation in Àyèré

prefix	Base/stem		Derived Word
ó	jí	“steal”	“thief”
ẹ	fù	“fly”	“act of flying”
a	jọ	“work”	“act of working”
ù	pà	“vomit”	“act of vomiting”
u	kèhìgbẹ̀kẹ̀le	“reliable”	“unreliable”

### 3.2. Suffix

Suffix in Àyèré is a linguistic component that is added to the end of a base or root word to create a new word or to modify the meaning of the original word. Suffixes are a type of affix, which are morphemes (the smallest units of meaning) that can be attached to words to change their form or function. Suffixes are commonly used in various languages. Examples of Àyèré include:

Base/stem		suffix		Derived Word
kẹ̀nẹ̀	“small”	nẹ̀	kẹ̀nẹ̀nẹ̀	“very small”
káká	“sit”	lẹ̀	kákálẹ̀	“sit down”
pámá	“help”	má	pámámá	“help them share it”
jíwá	“for us”	po	jíwápo	“for us all”
kékẹ̀	“all”	wa	kékẹ̀wa	“altogether”

## 4. Borrowing as a morphological process in Àyèré

Borrowing is a morphological process in Àyèré where the dialect incorporates words or morphemes from another language, due to cultural contact, trade, or historical interactions. This process involves adopting foreign words or expressions and integrating them into the lexicon of the borrowing language. Borrowing is a common phenomenon in the evolution of languages, contributing to linguistic diversity and reflecting the interconnectedness of societies.

Source	Word	Àyèré
English	bible	bíbéli
	handcuff	ánkóòbù
	governor	igómìnà
	barrack	bárékẹ̀
	tailor	itélò
	brassiere	bèrèsíà
	penny	eepinni

## 5. Conclusion

The research has examined the morphology of the Àyèré dialect. Nonetheless, this study has, the most part, given a pertinent explanation of the research issue since it is important to learn more about the formation of words in Nigerian indigenous languages and dialects in order to keep them from becoming endangered. Thus, we propose that this study be considered as a fundamental basis for future research on the dialect, so that future research on the dialect will guarantee that the language is accurately documented

---

## References

- [1] Aronoff, M. (1991). *Lexicalist morphology: Understanding word formation through the real- word wording in speakers' lexicons*. *Journal of Lexical Analysis*, 5(2), 55-70.
- [2] Aronoff, M. & Fudeman, K (2005) *What is Morphology?* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. xviii + 257 pp. £50 (hardback)/£16.99 (paperback). ISBN 0-631-20318-4/20319-2
- [3] Booij, G. (2000). *Cognitive morphology: Investigating the mental processes of morphological knowledge*. *Cognitive Linguistics Quarterly*, 18(2), 67-81.
- [4] Bresnan, J. (2001). *Generative approaches to morphology: Exploring the mental grammar through formal and computational models*. *Linguistic Generative Models Quarterly*, 24(4), 175- 190.
- [5] Fromkin, V., Rodman, R., & Hyams, N. (2013). *An introduction to language* (10th ed.). Boston, USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- [6] Jackendoff, R. (2002). *The cognitive approach to morphology: Analyzing word forms and meanings through cognitive processes*. *Journal of Cognitive Linguistics*, 25(3), 112-126.
- [7] Pulleyblank D. and A. Akinlabi 1988. *Phrasal morphology in Yoruba*. *Lingua* 74: 141 – 166.