

## The Structure of Idioms in Ibibio

Escor Efiong Udosen<sup>1</sup>, Imeobong John Offong<sup>2</sup> & Maria-Helen Ekah<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

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Idioms exist in Ibibio, a Lower Cross language spoken in Nigeria. This paper attempts an investigation of the structure of this figurative language arising from the basis that they are constituents beyond the word. It relies on the Continuity Constraint framework proposed by William O'Grady in 1998 to explain the relationship that exists among the lexical components of idioms such that they must of a necessity occur with one another to convey the meaning they do, otherwise, the meaning changes. Data were gathered from the interactions of Ibibio speakers who reside in large numbers in Calabar, Cross River State. They were extracted by the researchers' native speaker knowledge of the language. It is discovered that sentence idioms which are interrogatives, declaratives and imperatives occur in Ibibio. Compound idioms are also a reality in the language as well as Noun Phrase Idioms. It has also been seen that by virtue of usage, infinitive phrase and Negative constructions exist as idioms in the language.

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**Keywords:** Ibibio, Idioms, Infinitive, Phrase, Structure

### 1.0 Introduction

Language is structured. It is a system of signs and symbols which communicate information or messages, ideas and emotions among humans. It is made up of levels which can be analysed scientifically. The basic levels of linguistic analysis are phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Sapir (1921) views language as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by a means of voluntarily produced symbols. The word to be noted here is 'system'. This portends that language is made up of units or forms in a manner comparative to the human circulatory system for instance, which comprises the heart, blood vessels, arteries, veins, capillaries and so on.

A closer look reveals that at each level of linguistic description, the linguist is likely to encounter a further existence of structures. These structures do not exist in a haphazard manner. Bas(2001, p.3) asserts that whether spoken or written, language is not a hotchpotch of randomly distributed elements. Rather, its linguistic ingredients are arranged in accordance with a set of rules. Therefore, at the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic levels of language, one can describe what constitutes the structures of sound combination, word formation, word combination and larger syntactic chunks, lexical and sentence meaning, and so on.

The purpose of this study however, is to describe the syntactic structure of idioms in Ibibio. It provides an understanding of how lexical items in Ibibio combine into idioms and relate with each other to produce the meaning they do, which differ from what is provided for the words by the lexicon of the language. It further aids the establishment of what is similar to and different from other figurative expressions such as proverbs, from the perspective of syntactic structure.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar – Nigeria. E-mail: [escorudosen@gmail.com](mailto:escorudosen@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar – Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup> Department of English, University of Uyo, Uyo – Nigeria.

### 1.1. Ibibio Language and its speakers

Ibibio is spoken by the Ibibio people who are found as indigenes in at least eighteen out of thirty-one local government areas in Akwa Ibom, a state in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. According to the 2006 National Census reports, Ibibio language is said to be the fourth major language in Nigeria with nearly four million speakers. Outside of its indigenous abode, Ibibio is spoken by a considerable number of people in Bende in Abia State as well as Calabar South and Calabar municipality, Odukpani and Akpabuyo local government areas in neighbouring Cross River State. The status of Ibibio in the neighbouring Cross River State is largely due to the existence of the two states as one administrative entity before September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1987 when Akwa Ibom State was carved from the erstwhile Cross River State. Migration for socioeconomic activities such as farming, fishing and trading has also led to this.

Like most human languages, Ibibio contains figurative language such as proverbs and idioms. Though considerable work has been done on proverbs and idioms, emphasis have been laid on their meaning and how speakers utilize these figurative linguistic forms to convey messages. The focus of this research is the syntactic structure of idioms in Ibibio.

### 2.0. Definition of Terms

#### 2.1. Structure:

A structure is an arrangement or organization of elements which are related to each other and which function effectively to achieve a purpose. Language comprises structures at the different levels of linguistic analyses. The structures and substructures within language do not occur haphazardly, but in ways that can be described. The phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics of a language reveal not only general but peculiar patterns of combination. Idioms contain constituents which are distinctly ordered and structured to encapsulate meaning.

#### 2.2. Idioms:

These are expressions which function as single units and whose meanings cannot be worked out from its separate parts, (Richards and Schmidt 2012, p. 246). They are also referred to as complex bits of frozen syntax whose meanings are more than a sum of their individual parts, (Nattinger and DeCarrico 1992, p. 32). In structure, they are said to be multi word units like phrasal verbs, because they consist of strings of words which can correspond to a single semantic unit, (Saeed 2003, p. 59). The point to note here is that idioms comprise elements organised in a manner that provide for the effective encoding of a message, expressing meaning that may not be directly linked to them. These elements are words, phrases as well as clauses.

### 3.0. The Problem

Very few detailed linguistic studies have been conducted on Idioms in Ibibio. More so, the sparse literature available has concentrated on producing lists of these figurative expressions and translating them. An example is a compilation undertaken by Bassey Udoidiong (2007) titled *Nke ye ufiod ukang myin, 500 parables and proverbs of our land with possible English translations and explanations*. While this work is commended for providing the basis upon which idiom dictionaries can be compiled, it is found wanting in that Idioms (*ufiod*) are not differentiated from proverbs (*nke*). This occurrence may be based on the author's orientation outside the field of linguistics. It may also be representative of the little knowledge speakers of the language have about idioms in Ibibio. Following the need to differentiate between other fixed expressions and figurative language, and the bid to encourage more linguistic researches into Idioms in Ibibio in particular; this paper attempts a description of the syntactic structure of idioms in Ibibio.

### 4.0. Objective of the study

Idioms are useful tools for communicating a great deal of meaning in a few words, (Stern 1998, p. vii). In view of this property, and the fact that their meaning cannot be deduced from the literal meaning of the individual words, an attempt at understanding the syntactic structure of idioms has been undertaken in this paper. This is done by describing their internal structures taking into consideration the relationship which exist among the individual components. Investigation into the structure of "Idioms in Ibibio" rather than "Ibibio Idioms" stems from the fact that though not in large numbers, foreign words are used in the composition of some idioms in Ibibio. Examples include

*Yak very good ado very bad*

- Allow very good become very bad - gloss
- Do something excessively - idiomatic meaning

*Koñ owo ke cross okepo inwa*

- Nail someone on cross stem cassava - gloss
- Criticize/condemn someone - idiomatic meaning

*Dakeka ke it's alright*

- Leave at it's alright -gloss
- Accept defeat/compromise one's Position -idiomatic meaning

**6.0. Review of Related Literature**

**6.1. Figurative Language**

Figurative Language has figurative meaning. McGregor (2009) is of the position that compared to literal meaning which is actually encoded by the component lexical or grammatical signs of words or strings of words, non-literal or figurative meaning can be considered to be an extension of the literal meaning. To this end, the meaning of idioms is an extension of what they would literally mean. For instance, *to spill the beans* literally means pouring out beans seeds. However, liquid substances are spilled not solids, or grains. This meaning is extended to mean “letting out a secret”. The extension is achieved using metaphor, where the first action is compared to the second in an indirect way. Leah (2012, p. 1) says that the figurative sense of a group of words is used to give an imaginative description or a special effect. She categorizes idioms, metaphors, proverbs, similes and fixed expressions generally under non-literal or figurative language. Such imaginative descriptions or special effects can be visualized in the following Ibibio examples. They are presented in the infinitive forms for better understanding:

*Adinyanna nmaa*

- To stretch-out lie - gloss
- To die - Idiomatic meaning

*Adiida ke udvñ*

- To stand on a mortar - gloss
- To be inexperienced/immature - idiomatic meaning

*Adiikoooro nsippe*

- To wipe (one's fore head) and Shake (the sweat off) - gloss
- To experience hardship - idiomatic meaning

In the examples above, the figurative meanings are arrived at by drawing imageries from the earlier. For instance, the act of dying is likened to lying in a stretched-out position (which every dead person takes). Dying is therefore presented using a euphemistic idiom to convey the message. In the second example, a child who needs to get something from the dryer over the fireplace in a traditional Ibibio kitchen, needs to increase his or her height by standing on a mortar. In the idiomatic sense, this represents inexperience or immaturity. The third idiom shows a scenario where hardship is equated with wiping one's forehead and shaking the sweat gathered in the process, off. One who is engaged in manual labour usually does this to show exertion of energy. This represents the experience of intense hardship.

Reporting the outcome of a survey, Aitchison (2012, p. 184) indicates that there are over five examples of figurative language per one hundred words spoken, almost a third of which were novel uses. This portends two things. In the first place, we use figurative language such as idioms often. Secondly, humans seem to have the ability to use one instance to refer to another, spontaneously. This is what theories of metaphor seek to explain.

Thirdly, our ability to create new idioms for instance, seems to be based on the existence of a semantic and syntactic framework which enables such ingenuity. Fourthly, the hearer's ability to comprehend idioms depends on the ability to draw a relationship between the idea captured within the idiom and the meaning that is referred to. The earlier being the source domain and the latter being the target domain. This is what the conceptual metaphor framework tries to explain.

The appropriate use of figurative language such as idioms is a mark of communicative and pragmatic competence in a language. Speakers with this ability are given respect in this regard. Iwuchukwu (2014, p. 136) highlights that a young person who grows up using figurative language like proverbs is eulogized for possessing uncommon wisdom and intelligence. This also holds sway for Senam and Ukut (2010, p. 66) who assert that to cultivate the habit of speaking charismatically, especially in Ibibio, one has to make use of linguistic, stylistic and figurative expressions to spice up one's communication. The use of idioms is referred to in Ibibio as *utaké yííod*. Such use bestows linguistic and stylistic impetus on speakers.

Idioms occur in speech and writing and journalists are some of the most common users of idioms. Idioms such as *push the envelope* and *one's take on something* are typical examples. A number of dictionaries have been written to enable language learners acquire and use idioms appropriately. Kleiser (2010) affirms that teachers, professors, lawyers, doctors, authors and students alike need such dictionaries to strengthen their writing. What this means is that idioms are very important elements of one's language. A number of idioms are also found in an Ibibio prose work titled 'Utíđofon', written by Bassey Udoidiong

## 6.2. Sources of Idioms

This work views sources of idioms from the perspective of structure and meaning. To this end, it identifies three backgrounds from where idioms originate. These are the linguistic, socio-cultural and historical. The first domain produces the lexical items which make up the idiom. The second and third provide the context within which idioms make meaning.

Idioms consist of more than one lexical item. This is why they are sometimes called idiomatic expressions. Discuillo and Williams (1987) say that they form part of a native speaker's lexicon like lexical items. This portends that idioms relate with a native speaker's mental lexicon in two ways. First of all, an idiom is a listeme in its own right. Secondly, it consists of other listemes which come into combination. According to Ifill (2002, p. 4), continuity among the component parts of an idiom makes it possible for an idiom to be listed as an entry in the lexicon. This highlights the fact that the constituents are bound, and the idiom satisfies what O'Grady says is a requirement of the continuity constraint. This rule says that an idiom's component parts must form a chain, (O'Grady 1998, p. 284).

Additionally, Ukpong (2010) observes that slang items which transcend the stage of being in vogue, into neutrality, where every competent speaker of the language utilizes them as an entry in the lexicon becomes an idiom. Slang which become idioms are survivors of replacement. Below is such an idiom, highlighting the slang item.

*Sín ovo ke feghe sañ*

(2SING) Put someone in run along	-	gloss
Make someone apprehensive/afraid	-	idiomatic meaning

Idioms can also be extracted from proverbs and this instance suffices:

*Kama ñkpa ison*

(2SING) handle death debt	-	gloss
Face imminent consequences	-	idiomatic meaning

This idiom is derived from:

*Ama ańwaan ovo akama ñkpa ison*

(He who engages in an illicit affair with someone's wife owes death)

Just like language reflects the society which uses it, idioms capture the peculiarities of the society within which it is utilized. To understand certain idioms, one needs to have knowledge of the belief system, norms, values, traditions and practices of a speech community. It can be inferred that the existence of religious elements in the idioms of English is as a result of the Christian and Hebraic cultures of Britain and The United States of America. For this reason, a Chinese student who is learning English may find the understanding and use of idioms of this nature difficult.

The following idiom reflects the belief of the Ibibio people that a reincarnate is wiser and more knowledgeable than a first-timer.

*Akpa ndieegbe obod*

First 1SG-come-NEG to earth	-	gloss
A naïve person	-	idiomatic meaning

It is observed that knowledge of the history of a society aids the understanding of the meaning of some idioms. The English Idiom *jump on the band wagon* reflects the history of English transportation when wagons were in use (idiomorigins.net). History has it that *read the riot act* is a product of a legal proclamation traceable to King George 1. The real riot act was passed in 1714 and enforced a year later. An example in Ibibio is:

*Udeb uñm*

Soaked pounded	-	gloss
An overused item/ spent person	-	idiomatic meaning

This brings to light the culinary history of Ibibio people when they soaked peeled cassava tubers in the stream and prepared it for eating by cooking and pounding mounds of them.

### 6.3. Types of Idioms

Idioms can be categorized in different ways. O'Grady et al (2011, p. 260) groups idioms into:

- (a) Semantic Idioms: these idioms are said to be picturesque in that their literal meanings may invoke a rich and sometimes bizarre message, and are most often based on metaphor. English examples include *kick the bucket*, *a red herring*, *pull someone's leg*, and *fly by the seat of one's pants*. Idioms in Ibibio such as *kpoon efad ke iba owo* (dress in borrowed robes), *keene owo ke nsim efad* (follow someone closely), *nyook ebod ye ukwokko ikwa* (a belaboured person), fall under this category.
- (b) Syntactic Idioms: These are expressions whose syntactic structures cannot be generated by general principles. An English example is *by and large* as well as *sixties and sevens*. Ibibio examples include *tap tip* (being brisk) and *itai ye aban* (close friends).

Leah (2012, p. 5) classifies idioms into eight groups. They are Idiomatic pairs, transparent, semi-transparent, semi-opaque, opaque, informal and formal idioms. The first group of idioms is identified based on syntactic structure. The second through the fifth groups are differentiated based on the closeness of idiomatic meanings to their literal meanings. The sixth and seventh groups of idioms are identified by their usage, which depend on function, domain, and topic of discussion as well as the role of the participants in a talk exchange.

Fernando (1996, p. 35-36) also classifies idioms into pure, semi, literal, ideational, interpersonal and relational idioms. Others are idioms of encoding and idioms of decoding. Howbeit, these classifications depend on meaning and syntactic structure.

### 6.4. Idioms and Meaning

The ability to decipher the meaning of what is said or written is an important aspect of communication whether one uses literal or figurative language. Mateu and Espinal (2010, p. 3) draw a distinction between syntactically encoded meaning and conceptually encoded meaning. Referring to the earlier as compositional and the latter as non-compositional, they are of the view that any fruitful study of the semantics of idiomatic constructions is to be based on a clear distinction between syntactically transparent compositional meaning and non-syntactically transparent conceptual ones. Keysar and Bly (1999, p. 1560) maintain that the meaning of idioms are not arbitrary and may offer a window into speakers' conceptual structure. This can be interpreted to mean that while syntactically encoded meaning offers the literal meaning of idioms, the conceptually encoded meaning provides for figurative meaning. One way of encoding meaning conceptually is through the use of metaphor. Metaphor is defined as the understanding of one concept in terms of another and the representation of abstract concepts in terms of more basic physical and cultural experiences, (O'Grady 2011, p.208).

It is therefore the duty of the hearer to match these two points with each other. Ifill (2002, p. 24) indicates that idioms find their way into a language as dead metaphors which were once robust figurative tropes, but which later became arbitrary to modern speakers. The critical factor here seems to be time. This lends credence to the evolution of slang into idioms.

More so, Aitchison (2012, p. 193) expresses that when humans consciously use metaphor, they subconsciously follow certain guidelines and tend to compare items from different semantic fields which share minor but obvious characteristics. To this end, *ediibom owo ñkwa mfed ke itiad* (to burst one's scrotum on/with a stone) is a very painful ordeal for a victim. This physical pain is what someone says he is not afraid of when dared by another. *Edijfat akpab* (to hug a tree of thorns) also presents a scenario where one's conscious decision to align with a terrible personality for instance, is comparable to hugging a tree of thorns, which again, is an uncomfortable experience. A tree of thorns and someone with a bad character share the characteristic of discomfort in the latter example.

### 7.0. Methodology and Theoretical framework.

Data for this study were gathered in Calabar metropolis. A large population of Ibibio speakers resides here. The researchers' native speaker competence was also helpful in identifying and extracting the idioms in the speeches recorded. Brief interviews were conducted to ascertain the meaning of some of the idioms which were not known. The analysis of data is based on William O'Grady's framework called The Continuity Constraint, proposed in 1998 his work *The Syntax of Idioms*. This framework takes into consideration the fact that idioms have a meaning that is not the simple function of the literal meaning of their parts. O'Grady observes that the theory of grammar has nothing to say about why particular meanings are more likely to be extended figuratively. He also takes into account the view that the creation of idioms involves two parallel mechanisms, one grammatical and the other semantic, (1998, p. 289). The high degree of conventionality in the choice of lexical items which make up an idiom is also considered by the proponent. According to him, the relationship between these lexical items must form a chain.

The Continuity Constraint is predicated on the contention that idioms are subject to a grammatical constraint and the key to formulating this constraint lies in the relationship between the heads and their dependants. These dependants are their arguments, modifiers and specifiers, which include determiners. O'Grady believes that a head licenses its dependants in that their syntactic and semantic properties determine the number or type of other elements with which it can or must occur (p. 283). He provides these examples to illustrate his points:

See stars  
Bite the dust  
Get to first base  
A chip off the old block

In example 1, the head of the idiom *see* licenses its dependant (the argument) *stars*. In example 2, *bite* licenses the argument *the dust*, with *dust* licensing the determiner *the*. In example 3, *get* licenses the preposition *to*, *to* licenses *base*, and *base* licenses *first*. In example 4, *chip* licenses *a* and *off*, *off* licenses *block* and *block* licenses *old* and *the*. These analyses reduce idioms to a continuous chain of head to head relations.

According to O'Grady analysing the syntax of idioms using the Continuity Constraint has the following advantages:

- (a) It straightforwardly accounts for the existence of non-constituent idioms, sometimes referred to as incomplete idioms. Examples in English include:

Loose X's cool  
Fill X's shoes

Examples of Ibibio idioms of this category include:

<i>Tañ owo ndab</i>		
(2SING)-talk (repeatedly) one's dream-	gloss	
Taunt someone	-	idiomatic meaning

<i>Ben owo kaa</i>		
(2SING) Carry someone go	-	gloss
Report someone	-	idiomatic meaning

*Sak owo obod*

(2SING) laugh someone destiny - gloss  
 Mock someone - idiomatic meaning

(b) It accounts for why adjectives, quantifiers and other types of modifiers can be added to idioms that exhibit an appropriate degree of compositionality as visible in the following idioms:

Kick the filthy habit  
 Pull yet more strings  
 Leave no legal stones unturned

In Ibibio, the modifier that can be added is the intensifier *ataa*, the quantifier *uwak*, *afid* and *ukeed* as in:

*Bø ataa afim*

(2SING)-take real air - gloss  
 take a good stroll - Idiomatic meaning

*Nie uwak ñkpo se ino ayip*

(2SING)-own many thing  
 which thief steals - gloss  
 be very wealthy - Idiomatic meaning

*Yaak ukeed idem nò owo*

(2SING)-leaveallbody give  
*Someone* - gloss  
 trust someone completely - Idiomatic meaning

(c) It makes specific predictions about the types of idioms that cannot occur. O’Grady hints that no licensing relations occur between the heads of a subject and a direct object. Therefore, in English for instance, there should be no idioms such as *A son of a gun*.

O’Grady also posits that there are no idioms with just the verb and a genitive with a proceeding head position left open. An example is *play the devil’s ( )*. More so, the verb – determiner (V-Det) sequence has been indicated as an impossible idiom composition, while the verb- prepositional phrase(V-PP) does not permit free substitution in the preposition position. For instance the preposition “about” in the idiom *beat about the bush* cannot be replaced with “by” for instance; otherwise the idiom will become an illicit one, (O’Grady 1998). A case in Ibibio is that of *duok mmooñ ke edem unen* (pour water on the back of a hen), where *ke edem* cannot be replaced with something like *ke enyoñ* (on top or over). Where this is done, the idiomatic meaning is altered. The water must be poured on the back of the hen to convey appropriate idiomatic meaning. This is because pouring it over the hen, where other parts like the tail or head of the hen is touched leads to the meaning being distorted.

The Continuity Constraint is intended as a restriction on the organization of idioms as lexical items. It observes that idioms cannot have more than three clauses. Also, it is discovered that some syntactic and semantic processes can break idioms into parts, just like every day non-idiomatic phrases. Examples are:

Raising

All hell broke loose  
 All hell seemed to break loose

Relativization

Pull strings  
 The strings that pat pulled got Chris the job

The constituents of an idiom may be thrown apart in a clause or sentence construction, but the idioms which they are part of complies with the Continuity Constraint, (O’Grady 1998, p. 288). Ifill (2002, p. 16) connects the structure of the idiom to the structure of its non-idiomatic counterpart such that when an idiom is modified, it is done at the literal level. Therefore, where the literal version cannot be modified, the idiom cannot be modified either.

## 8.0. The structure of Idioms in Ibibio

### 8.1. Noun Phrases:

Mensah (2009) maintains that the noun is the head of the noun phrase. Noun phrase idioms occur in Ibibio. They are:

1. *Mmiḡḡñ etək efad*  
 Fart small buttocks - gloss  
 An easy feat - idiomatic meaning
2. *Nṡḡḡḡ ubiak uman*  
 Beginning pain labour - gloss  
 The beginning of a frustrating  
 or painful experience . - Idiomatic meaning
3. *Ikenḡ asiit owo ɲyo*  
 Song which blocks someone's voice - gloss  
 An unattainable goal or unachievable aim - idiomatic meaning
4. *Atḡk adiinyeghe*  
 One who urinates come shake - gloss  
 A second fiddle - idiomatic meaning
5. *Okon ukḡḡk ekpad*  
 Okon empty pocket/bag - gloss  
 A poor person - Idiomatic meaning
6. *Udeb utim*  
 Soaked pounded - gloss  
 An overused /valueless thing or  
 Spent person - idiomatic meaning
7. *Ete nnañña*  
 Man labour/work - gloss  
 A husband/boss - idiomatic meaning
8. *Anuḡ iso owo*  
 Who goes out person - gloss  
 A prominent person/ or leader - idiomatic meaning

The noun phrase idioms are direct objects in sentences they appear in. For instance, the statement *ado nṡḡḡḡ ubiak uman* (this is the beginning of a painful experience) has *nṡḡḡḡ ubiak uman* functioning as the direct object. Also, *anye ado ete nnañña* (he is the husband/boss) has *ete nnañña* functioning as the direct object.

### 8.2. Infinitive Phrases:

An infinitive is a verb form that can be used as a noun, an adjective or an adverb. An infinitive phrase consists of an infinitive “to” and any modifier or complements the infinitive has. The entire phrase can be used as a noun, an adjective or an adverb, (Odell et. al. 2007, p. 480).

It is important to mention that most idioms can take the structure of infinitive phrases by virtue of usage. These idioms are classified under this category by virtue of the function they undertake. Examples are:

9. *Adiita uvem*  
 To eat life - gloss  
 To have fun - idiomatic meaning
10. *Adiikḡḡk mba*  
 To cut stay - gloss  
 To remain in a place - idiomatic meaning
11. *Adiifit mḡḡk nanna anyen*  
 To swell cheeks, shine eye - gloss  
 To provide entertainment - Idiomatic meaning

12. *Adiikanna idem*

- To turn body - gloss
- To flirt around - idiomatic meaning

13. *Adiivunuk owo mbara*

- To pierce someone nail - gloss
- To give someone reliable information - Idiomatic meaning

These infinitive phrases can act as nouns. For instance, one can say *adiita uwem afon* (to have fun is good). It is observed that when the infinitive marker is removed, it becomes an imperative sentence idiom *ta uwem*

**8.3. Compound Idioms:**

Compound idioms in this sense refer to words which are linked with a conjunction and are used idiomatically. They seem to be few in number in Ibibio and they include:

14. *Ekpụ ye añwa*

- Rat and cat - gloss
- Enemies/foes - idiomatic meaning

15. *Itai ye aban̄*

- Tar and pot - gloss
- Close friends - idiomatic meaning

16. *Uyọọk ebod ye ukwoko ikwa*

- Slaughter goat and cleaner knife - gloss
- A belaboured/spent person - idiomatic meaning

In example 16, the pairs are made up of compound words. While earlier example shows pairs that consist of single lexical items that are nouns. Compound idioms in Ibibio also function as Noun Phrases.

**8.4. Sentential Idioms:**

Sentential idioms occur in Ibibio as is the case in other languages. Declarative, imperative and interrogative sentences were present in the data collected. They are:

**8.4.1. Declarative sentences:**

16. *Akọñọ mban̄ enan̄*

- 3SING-is hanging jaw cow - gloss
- He /she is incurring a problem - idiomatic meaning

17. *Edu akpetie nte idem*

- Manner should be like body - gloss
- A beautiful woman - idiomatic meaning

18. *Ọbọọñ unweere ke idem*

- Lord 2SING-roll on body - gloss
- God bless and reward you - idiomatic meaning

19. *Amọọno anyen*

- 3SING-sees eyes - gloss
- He/she is enlightened - idiomatic meaning.

20. *Adep ama adiiọọtọi*

- 3SING-rained3SG-finished - gloss
- 3SING-come dripping - gloss
- He/she has attained success - idiomatic meaning

21. *Ansak obod*

- 2SING ISING-laughing destiny - gloss

You are mocking me	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>22. <i>Isòñ adòrò</i></b>		
ground /floor is slippery	-	gloss
Conditions are unfavourable	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>23. <i>Adia ñkèpò ke afere</i></b>		
2SING-are eating something in soup	-	gloss
You are enjoying luxury	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>24. <i>Avuò nte unen anaa</i></b>		
3SING-has reached where the hen is sleeping	-	gloss
He or she is exposed/enlightened	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>8.4.2. Imperative Sentences:</b>		
Imperative sentence idioms also occur in Ibibio. They include:		
<b>25. <i>Sìn ikò ke ufòk</i></b>		
(2SING)-Put talk in house	-	gloss
Summarize or conclude an address	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>26. <i>Sìn udua ke iso</i></b>		
(2SING)-Put market on face	-	gloss
Wear makeup/beautify your face	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>27. <i>Fòp itiad men</i></b>		
(2SING)-Roast stone swallow	-	gloss
Do your worst	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>28. <i>Yak utòñ mmi adia inlã</i></b>		
(2SING)-allow ear my eat salt	-	gloss
Stop making noise!	-	Idiomatic meaning
<b>29. <i>Nò udia koono uduañ</i></b>		
(2SG) give food (2SG) gather excreta	-	gloss
A completely dependent person	-	idiomatic meaning

#### 8.4.3. Interrogative sentences:

Though not in large numbers, interrogative sentence structures occur as idioms in Ibibio. They include:

<b>30. <i>Ada ke udlã?</i></b>		
2SING-are standing on a mortar?	-	gloss
Are you that naïve/ incapable?	-	Idiomatic meaning.
<b>31. <i>Ukpaaaba kaña</i></b>		
3SING-have not died yet?	-	gloss
Have you not put to bed?	-	Idiomatic meaning

#### 8.4.4. Negative constructions

It has been observed that some idioms only occur in the negative form when they are being used. However, they seem to be few in number. For instance, one cannot say *ado mmiòpòñ etàk efiad* (an easy feat), but *idoobo mmiòpòñ etàk efiad* (It is not an easy feat). Other negative sentence idioms are:

<b>32. <i>Ñwòttò atitia itiad</i></b>		
1SING-shown NEG teacher stone	-	gloss
I am not literate	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>33. <i>Idoobo afere obu obu</i></b>		
3SING-is NEG soup crayfish crayfish	-	gloss
It is not an easy feat	-	idiomatic meaning
<b>34. <i>Inyòhòke ubòk</i></b>		
3SING 1SING-filled NEG hands	-	gloss

He/She is not my match	-	idiomatic meaning
35. <i>Ikpaaaba enaĩ</i>		
3SING-cost NEG cow	-	gloss
It is not expensive	-	idiomatic meaning

**9.0 The Continuity Constraint and Idioms in Ibibio**

In adopting the Continuity Constraint to explain the internal structure of idioms, cognizance should be taken that there is no semantic relationships between the component lexical items and the idiomatic meaning they express. However, it stands that there is a syntactic relation such that specific lexical items must occur with others to constitute an idiom. This is what is called licensing, a term which the Continuity Constraint uses to explain that relationship. We take this example:

36. <i>Kaa udua ke unyoroĩo</i>		
(2SING)- go market at return	-	gloss
Do something when it is late	-	idiomatic meaning

The structure above comprises of a main clause and a subordinate clause. For the first clause, the heads is *kaa* which licenses the argument *udua*. *Unyoroĩo* licenses *ke* in the subordinate clause, which incidentally is a prepositional phrase. There are two chains in this construction and this characterizes it as a complex imperative sentence. Also, the Continuity Constraint can be applied for an understanding of interrogative sentence idioms if the sentence is made to include the subject and changed to its imperative sentence form. Let us consider this idiom:

37. <i>Akpa afibho ekpo yak nsaĩa ikod?</i>		
2SG-would wear masquerade let 1SG-walk bush	-	gloss
Would you frustrate me?	-	idiomatic meaning
<i>(Afo) fĩbho ekpo yak nsaĩa ikod!</i>		
2SG-wear mask let 1SG-walk bush	-	gloss
Frustrate me!	-	idiomatic meaning

This structure comprises two independent clauses, *(afo) fĩbho ekpo* and *yak (ami) nsaĩa ikod*.

**10.0. Summary and Conclusion**

Syntactically speaking, idioms in Ibibio are mostly sentential and phrasal constructions, although a handful of compound idioms also occur. The sentential idioms are declarative, imperative and interrogative in nature. Idioms in Ibibio also exist as negative constructions and infinitive phrases though these latter depends on usage, as they can also become imperative sentences. What ensures the relatedness between the component parts of an idiom, that is the words, is what O’Grady refers to as licensing. The component lexical items when looked at individually would literally not make meaning which is close to what the entire idiomatic construction refers. O’Grady acknowledges the pivotal role played by the heads as they relate their dependants within idiomatic constructions. This work further validates the position that Idioms in Ibibio can be characterized in syntactic terms.

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