

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

My interest in this area of Syntax was developed by the need to have more of documented Annang expressions than the mere oral renditions that come and go in their short-lived forms. In the course of my investigation, I soon realised that not much has been done on Annang Proverbs besides identification and translation with assumed explanation attached to them. It became necessary for me to attempt a Syntactic analysis of these language forms as a means of leaving a permanent record to posterity, especially the educated class who would find the book handy as a resource material.

The materials for this book, **Annang Proverbs New Perspectives**, are a result of many years of gathering Annang proverbs through various sources. I have had occasions to go along with a note pad with which I usually jotted down the proverbs as they are rendered first hand by Annang elders and other bilinguals. It is important to note that these proverbs have some Ibibio variants which differ slightly not in content or meaning but in pronunciation. Since Annang and Ibibio languages are from the same language phylum according to notable authors such as Okon Essien (2010), Owulette (2017) and Umoh Faithmann (1999), there is mutual intelligibility among these groups of speakers in Akwa Ibom State.

As a major linguistic form of communication in Akwa Ibom State and other states in Nigeria, proverbs present themselves as intrinsic features of the oral and written expressions of an Annang person, who would not fail to demonstrate his knowledge at both the social and literary facets. The rich socio-cultural background of the Annang has been a major instrument in the crafting of these fluid forms in which human, animal and object motifs are fully illustrated. Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, his famous prose work, states vividly that in Igbo land, proverbs “are the palm oil with which words are eaten”. This is to say that an Igbo person hardly makes a speech without lacing it with cogent proverbs. The same goes for an Annang man, who is always ready to display his wide knowledge of proverbs at the slightest opportunity.

Annang proverbs are important syntactic features in the teaching and learning of Annang language. Crystal (1974:10) has observed that “there are many languages in the world today which have never been written down”. Annang is a language close to that description because only a few aspects of it have been documented officially. But we have also observed that other ethnic groups in Akwa Ibom State “speak” Annang more conveniently than Ibibio due to their fascination with the plosive /p/ in Annang words such as “Mpo” (a thing), “mpong” (tomorrow). These words may be rendered without the /k/. There is a common phrase that a first timer will always use to demonstrate his or her knowledge of the language: “Akpede mkpo mkpo, mkpa ukpa”, meaning “given the chance, I would matchete you”. The aim is to create fun among nonnative speakers. The verbal elements in Annang connote the use of /l/, /n/ and /d/ respectively but they convey the same meaning as in these interrogative expressions: Ala ali? Ana adi? Ada adi? (Are you coming?) These are used in free variation, accordingly to the different dialects spoken in Annang language.

Annang proverbs exhibit some peculiar Syntactic considerations. The subject or noun deletion is a common feature in Annang proverbs as in “Eseyem anweinwen ebót nanga ayo adikumme”, that can be translated as: it is better to search for a black goat before nightfall. This means that an urgent matter requires a timely intervention. The expression “eseyem” subsumes the subject or noun “awo” (person) but it is understood since it is only an individual that would look for a

goat.

Annang proverbs employ reduplications. Reduplication, like coinages, is a linguistic device that is used to introduce new lexical items into an utterance and it is a common feature among African languages. However, Jin and Feng (2019) regards reduplication as a global language phenomenon which has drawn the attention of many linguists. The proverb: "*Adia edia adia dia, abam adikwok mfot*", employs partial repetition which helps to reinforce the activity. The proverb can be translated as "One Person eats yam, another comes to clear the debris". The proverb shows how both the noun phrase "*adia edia*" and the verb phrase "*adikwok mfot*" are cohesively linked through the use of reduplication. There is an element of repetition in the proverb.

The use of introductory phrase "*isidehe*" (it is never the case) also forms a pattern in Annang proverbs. Such usage conveys a serious thought as in "*Isidehe awo aben abang aka idim, ikoiyo mmong*". (it is never the case that one takes a pot to the stream but does not fetch water). It is seen that the Annang expression "*isidehe*" is always followed with a *that* – clause to complete its meaning. By employing proverbs in our speeches, the intention is to strengthen our arguments, express generalizations, influence or manipulate other people, question certain behavioural patterns, point out our short comings or poke fun at ridiculous situation (Meider 1993). Proverbs play a lot of roles in human communication. In the above Annang proverb, the ideas of going to the stream with a pot and not fetching water are carefully linked to express an undeniable fact.

Another device in Annang proverbs is the use of a subordinating conjunction to join two ideas or to establish two units as in: "*Ikut akeka inwongo, ekwong adika*". The tortoise (ikut) went without drinking, the snail (ekwong) also went. Both animals mentioned in this proverb are naturally slow. It means that if a strong-willed individual is defeated by a certain task, what will happen to a weakling? Reference is also used in Annang proverbs: "*Atime ase ade nko atotot Abasi, anye atot isong*". The harvest instrument (Atime) would first consult the gods (Abasi) before it pierces the soil. "*Atime*" is used as a definite determiner to express an already mentioned object. It is also used as a pronoun (it).

Annang Proverbs make use of clausal ellipses as in "*Akpede akpa ikot ikifono ebua, ayoho iba adifon?*". This device is used to delete the word "*ikod*" (call) and "*ebua*" (dog) in order to shorten the sentence. The proverb also contains a question that portrays the helplessness of the dog at both the first call and the second call. Proverbs in Annang are often marked by terseness of expression, making them different from ordinary speech. The proverb: "*Asen awo adoro unyie idung*" The visitor has outlived his stay is an example of this device. The people (unyie idung) have already taken a decision to part ways with the visitor (asenowo), without mincing words. The import of the proverb is immediately understood by the speaker or the listener.

In the proverb "*Monde ede ita nne abang*" a coordinating conjunction is used to join elements ita (coal) nne (and) abang (pot). This shows a one-on-one relationship, inseparable, used to merge related ideas such as coal and pot sticking together. Annang proverbs are not always a matter of thought but are more context-dependent, emerging from the interplay among speakers, listeners and the situation. Shifting the perspective from viewing proverbs as mere language tools to recognizing them as Syntactic innovations, has helped to open new avenues of how language shapes our everyday interactions. In the proverbs "*Ekpe uman afo abiet ebot*", the speaker has juxtaposed the lion image and the goat image (representing strength and cowardice) to portray a well groomed child and a miscreant. The message is very glaring in the

NP+VP structure of the proverb. As a reprimand, it does not call for a verbose expression but it goes straight to the point.

Proverbs have long been considered fundamental elements of Annang language, enriching human communication by allowing individuals to understand and describe abstract concepts in more related terms. Thus the study of proverbs has expanded beyond their traditional literary confines to become a central topic in Syntactic studies. They are seen to have shaped how people perceive, understand and interact with others around them. A typical example is seen here: “Eto isidaha ikpong ikakpa akai” (A tree does not make a forest). The proverb portrays complex social realities that illuminate how life’s challenges can overwhelm an individual to the extent of his having to rely on others for his survival, growth and possible transformation.

Umana (2014) and Udoka and Umoh, (2020) holds that proverbs (*ufied*) constitute one of the systems of communication that “are passed on from generation to generation and that are derived from society’s experience and thoughts” over a long period of time. Thus proverbs are both a reflection of culture and effective instruments of communication that shape cultural practices and human relations. The Annang proverb; “*Ama anam awo, asua ano nyo*”, is both a warning and an indictment. It is a friend who betrays a friend and the enemy mocks him. It calls for a caution on how we relate with others. In the SVO structure, the proverb is very apt and meaningful.

Annang proverbs also employ rhetorical questions some of which are very touching as in: “*Ama adia mkpo akan owo, abo utongo afid nte enin?*” (When you outsmart another person during a meal, will you defecate like an elephant?) The proverb refers to our gullible nature, the tendency to claim every good thing for ourselves. The interrogative expression is not directed at anyone in particular but it points at the general decadence in the human society.

The use of short forms in subject-verb-object (SVO) is also common among Annang proverbs as in:

Nkakat	Itaha	ekpeme
S	V	O
Ibuod	Ikongo	ekpe
S	V	O

This syntactic arrangement makes the proverb apt and forceful. It gives immediacy to the speech.

Annang proverbs are not mere rhetorics but they are very profound and evocative. Internal struggles can be intense and calls for a prompt or timely intervention as in: “*Ayen ke mkpa, eka ke uman*”. (The child is dying and the mother is in labour). The compound sentence in the syntactic arrangement shows an individual who is in a difficult and inextricable situation. The rendition makes the situation pitiable and picturesque. Compounding can occur as a nominative expression in the subject-object position as in: “*Ekaekpo awo ase abop*”. (The foremost masquerade is worn by a human being). The word “*Eka ekpo*” at the subject position agrees with the predicate “*awo ase abop*”.

Most languages, perhaps all, clearly have a basic order of sentence constituents. Nann (1980) notes that while some sequences may occur predominantly, others only participate in certain lexical transformations. In some Annang proverbs, certain sequences do not undergo structural movement and are therefore considered structurally ambiguous as the following example would show: “*Sise nwot awo isikpono*”. (What kills a person is rather minute). The sentence cannot be rearranged in its present noun phrase versus verb phrase structure; else the meaning will be lost.

The emphasis is on the first segment of the sentence. We notice a difference in the proverb *"Eka ekpo ese edat akpon ikpanesit"*. (The foremost masquerade is reserved for a robust-chested person). The compound elements *"ekaekpo"* and *"akpon ikpanesit"* are suitable at both the subject and object positions. The device helps the speaker to juxtapose free morphemes such as *eka + ekpo*, to form *Eka ekpo*, and *akpon + ikpanesit* to form *Akponikpanesit* as a nominal noun phrase.

According to Enang, Okon Edem, Udoka (2015), collocations also feature in Annang proverbs for sentential balancing of some elements as a way of fostering beauty into a conversation. This device is used in the following example: *"Asin ubok ke aba akwok ke akwok ase atop"*. (One who invades a bee hive is stung by bees). In the NP + VP structure, the collocational elements are well utilized. Some Annang proverbs appear to be connotative in form. The proverb: *"Emo emo ikpitoro aran-afid"*. (The only person who should defecate oily excreta). This means someone who is naturally domineering. The hyphenated noun-phrase *"aran-afid"*, (oily excreta) connotes well syntactically.

The use of the third person pronoun (it), in the words of Udoka, (1998), is also prominent in Annang proverbs, as in *"isidehe"* (it is never), *"ikidehe"* (It was never), *"iboho ide"* (It will never). The expression goes with various verb tenses to state an undeniable fact, instead of being blunt as in the example *"isidehe ekpanga ukpong, anim idem nsek"*. (A youth must learn to fend for himself after the demise of his parents). The person addressed would certainly take an offence if the speaker had blamed him or her for being "redundant" and "lazy" after losing his parents to death. Annang proverbs employ idiophones – a syllable that is added to another word in order to accentuate its pronunciation as in *"A-mmong mmong afut ke ako"* (Only water is boiling in the pot). That means a worthless individual, one who has no substantive means of livelihood. He is nicknamed *"a-mmong mmong afut ke ako"*, because water is the only thing he can afford to cook.

Elision features in Annang proverbs. In some cases a whole word is elided in order to make the proverb rhythmic. This is obvious in *"Mkpo s'kan awo k'ibuo ayem anyen iduk"* (The thing that hovers around the nostril is aiming at the eye), meaning that a persistent problem is awaiting the right time for it to explode. We can notice the shift in construction in the above proverb. Instead of saying *"ayem iduk anyen"*, it changes to *"ayem anyen iduk"*. This can be literary translated as "wants the eye to enter". This is a case of nominal substitution which is carefully employed.

Vulgarism is a key element in Annang proverbs, (Effiong, 2019). It employs the direct use of the word as in *"Akparanwan ase adat itut, isidata anyen"* – A woman exhibits redness in the vagina (itut) not in the eye (anyen). The reference to the female genital appears vulgar, rude and impolite. This, according to Enang, Eshiet, Udoka, (2013), is a deliberate use by a speaker not to offend the listener's sensibility but to condemn some excesses or obnoxious acts by a woman.

Parallelism is used in Annang proverbs. This is a language devise that is used to balance noun with noun, phrase with phrase, clause with clause. This example shows parallel structures in the form of a phrase: *"S'ito k'udem ndi ase ato k'udem anyong"* (what emerges from the depths also returns to the depths). As observed in Inemeh, (2016), the proverb means, that there is a solution to every problem.

Wallwork (1969) notes that language has different manifestations and users of a language express their perceptions using different dialect forms in syntactic constructions. Annang

proverbs occur in both the spoken and the written forms. From the above discussion, it is obvious that Annang proverbs employ a number of syntactic features which have not been fully exhausted in this book. There is a need for further research into this important area of human communication. The writer hopes that students, lecturers, other intellectuals, and the social media would find this edition: *Annang Proverbs New Perspectives*, indispensable and illuminating.

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