

APPROVAL PAGE

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty, the owner of my life, for His sufficient grace, strength and mercy that made this project a successful one, also to my parents, Mr and Mrs Ohue and to my ever-supportive siblings and my best friend.

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Abstract

This research presents a descriptive analysis of the semantic functions of reduplication in the Esan language, a member of the Edoid language family spoken predominantly in Edo State,

Nigeria. Reduplication is a highly productive morphological process in Esan, used by native speakers to extend, intensify, or modify the meaning of base forms across various word classes. The primary objective of the study was to identify the types of reduplication in Esan, explore the semantic functions they perform, analyze how they operate within different grammatical categories, and determine what insights they offer into Esan speaker usage and morphology. The study was anchored on the Descriptive Linguistic Approach, backed by Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT), which emphasizes that grammatical and semantic patterns should be described as they are naturally used by speakers. Data were collected from native speakers through interviews, observations, and recordings of natural speech. The analysis revealed that Esan employs both total and partial reduplication, with total reduplication being more common and used across all word classes including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and time expressions. Reduplication in Esan was found to serve multiple semantic functions such as abundance, intensification, aspect marking, emphasis, repetition, plurality, diminutiveness, and emotional or figurative expression. The study concludes that reduplication in Esan reflects both linguistic functionality and cultural expressiveness, making it a fundamental part of the language's morphological and semantic system. This research contributes to the field of African linguistics by expanding the documentation and understanding of Esan grammar, while also showcasing reduplication as a practical and versatile tool for meaning-making natural language use.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

1.0 Introduction

Language as a medium of communication is characterized by a diversity of structures and processes, many of which serve to enhance the richness and effectiveness of expression.

Among these linguistic processes is "reduplication", a morphological phenomenon found in various languages across the world. Reduplication involves the repetition of a word or part of a word to produce grammatical or semantic effects, such as indicating plurality, intensity, continuity, diminutiveness, and other nuanced meanings. It is a common and productive feature in many African languages, including Esan, a member of the Edoid group under the larger Niger-Congo language family.

Esan, spoken predominantly in Edo State of Southern Nigeria, is a tonal language marked by a rich morphological system with a strong inclination towards agglutinative structures. Among its numerous linguistic features, reduplication occupies a noteworthy position, particularly in the expression of semantics, where it plays multifunctional roles. These functions are both lexical and grammatical, reflecting nuances that are sometimes otherwise difficult to articulate in the language. Reduplication in Esan may signal aspects such as emphasis, multiplicity, habituality, or intensification. It may appear in verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and even nouns, reflecting Esan's complex morphological behavior.

While reduplication is a well-documented linguistic process in the fields of linguistics and African language studies, relatively little focused research has been conducted on Esan in this regard. Most existing works on Esan describe its phonology and syntax, leaving the intricate use of reduplication underexplored. It is within this scholarly vacuum that the current research finds its relevance. By investigating the semantic functions of reduplication in Esan, this study aims to offer a comprehensive descriptive account of how meaning is constructed, modified, or emphasized through morphological repetition.

1.1 The Esan People and Language

Since this research is aimed at a linguistic discussion of the semantic functions of reduplication in Esan, let us take a brief look at the Esan people and culture. Esan is both a language and a people. Esan is an ethnic group in the southern part of Nigeria dominating the central region of Edo State. The language of the people is called Esan but sometimes referred to as Ishan. This is as a result of Britain's colonial's inability to pronounce the name, in other words Ishan is the anglicized form of Esan.

The people are known to be traditional agriculturists, traditional medical practitioners, hunters and warriors. Common crops cultivated by the Esan people are palm tree (òdin), cherry (òtìen), bell pepper (ẹsin), coconut (uwvin), cassava (bóbózi), cocoa, vegetables and others. According to the 2006 population census, the number of Esan's is estimated to be around 2 million of Nigeria's population.

Modern day Esan nation is believed to have originated during the 15th century, when citizens mostly nobles and princes left the neighboring Benin Empire for the North East, after the then Oba (Oba Ewuare) raised laws of mourning that prohibited intercourse, bathing, drumming, dancing and cooking. The law proved too restrictive for many citizens and were clamped on the people for three years. A great number of people who could not abide by the harsh laws escaped through the jungle, thus the name Esan na san fou oha which means 'the people who jumped into the jungle'. Majority of the people who escaped formed the Esan communities, these communities were called Eguare and were formed among the aboriginal people whom they met there. The Esan kingdom though have engaged in inter-tribal war over the years, still maintain homogeneous cultural practice which is said to have been chiefly influenced by the Benin Empire. Esan language has various dialects all of which have their roots from Edo language and as such Esan language is classified as an Edoid language. Linguistically, Esan language is of the Kwa sub-division of the Niger-Congo language family. The Esan people have unique traditions which reveal the beauty of its culture, some of these cultural traditions can be seen in their marriage ceremony, funeral rites, food, naming ceremony, coronation, proverbs etc.

In this research work we are concerned with the reduplication in Esan language with the intent to analyse their semantic functions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite the prevalence of reduplication in many Nigerian languages, the existing linguistic literature on Esan reveals a lack of systematic analysis of the semantics underlying this process in the language. Although speakers of Esan utilize reduplication in everyday discourse, the semantic load carried by reduplicated forms often goes unnoticed or is considered intuitive, thus warranting little analytical attention. This lack of focused study poses challenges not only for linguistic theory, particularly in the area of morphology and semantics, but also for pedagogical purposes in preserving and teaching the language.

Furthermore, given the variations in how reduplication operates across languages and even among dialects of the same language it is insufficient to rely on cross-linguistic generalizations. There is a need for a descriptive, language-specific account that uncovers the semantic spectrum of reduplicated structures in Esan. This study seeks to identify the types of reduplication employed in Esan and provide a description of their semantic consequences within discourse.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this research is to offer a descriptive analysis of the semantic functions of reduplication in Esan. The Specific Objectives of the study include:

1. To Identify and classify different types of reduplication found in Esan.
2. Analyze the semantic roles played by reduplication in nouns, verbs, adjectives, and other word classes.
3. Establish patterns of semantic variation resulting from reduplicated forms.
4. Highlight the pragmatic significance of reduplication within natural Esan discourse.

1.4 Research Questions

To guide the research, the following questions are posed:

1. What are the types of reduplication present in the Esan language?
2. What semantic functions are associated with these reduplicative structures?
3. How does reduplication affect meaning in different lexical categories in Esan?
4. What are the pragmatic implications of using reduplicated forms in communicative contexts?

1.5 Methodology

The data for this study comes from a variety of discourses in which Esan is frequently used. The primary and secondary methods of data collection were employed in this study. The primary data was collected through natural observation of Esan speakers in ordinary discourse noting down reduplicated forms. The researcher also took part in natural conversations with adult native speakers (25-60 years old) with the aim of getting reduplicated forms. The researcher ensured that the informants were free enough so that conversations could be as natural as possible. Relevant information from published and unpublished publications were used in the secondary method. Agheyisi (1986), *An Edo-English Dictionary*, was one of the published books used. The data was analyzed by paying close attention to statements that contained words and their reduplicated versions, which were taken from the recorded dialogue. The data was verified with the help of some native speakers of the language, who assisted to ensure that the data was correct. Our conclusion will be based on our observations and findings.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focuses exclusively on the "semantic functions of reduplication in Esan", rather than its phonological or syntactic characteristics. While some mention may be made of phonological aspects as they intersect with meaning, the central concern remains the role that reduplication plays in generating or modifying meaning in lexical items and expressions.

The research considers data gathered from native speakers of Esan, representing various sub-dialects to the extent possible, and includes both elicited and naturally occurring language use. It examines reduplication in multiple word classes particularly nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs in order to establish the breadth and limits of its semantic utility.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is multiple-fold. First, it adds to the body of knowledge on Esan, a language that is still under-documented despite its cultural and linguistic importance. By focusing on a specific morphological process reduplication this research contributes toward the broader understanding of Esan linguistic structure and its semantic landscape.

Second, the study contributes to the theoretical discussions in morphology and semantics by providing data from an African language that may challenge or enrich existing typological and theoretical frameworks. For instance, semantic functions of reduplication in Esan may reveal patterns that are either congruent with or deviant from patterns in other languages, thus broadening the scope of general linguistic theory.

Lastly, the research has potential practical value, especially in language preservation and educational initiatives. With many indigenous languages in Nigeria facing the threat of diminished usage and eventual extinction, scholarly studies such as this help to preserve linguistic knowledge while also supporting the development of language teaching resources.

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature on reduplication, centering on its forms, functions, and semantic significance across languages, particularly Esan language. The discourse covering a broad understanding of reduplication from various linguistic perspectives. It also presents findings from previous studies on reduplication in African and Nigerian languages and highlights the gap this study seeks to address.

2.1 Conceptual Review

In this section, the study explains the basic concepts and terminologies of this study. The purpose in this review is to make the understanding of this research easier as well explicit, the following are therefore reviewed: Reduplication, Types of Reduplication, Semantic functions of reduplication, and Reduplication in African languages.

2.1.1 Reduplication

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, reduplication is seen as "an act or instance of doubling or reiterating." This fundamental linguistic phenomenon involves repeating words or parts of words to convey new meanings, rhythm or intensity. Through reduplication, language becomes more

engaging and expressive, as evident in everyday examples like "bye-bye" and "super-duper," which add flavor and emphasis to our communication.

Wang (2005) defines reduplication as 'the repetition of a word root or stem, or part of it, in a morphological process'. He explains that reduplication serves as lexical derivation to construct semantic forms in various languages and an inflection to express grammatical functions. He further explains that linguists have a propensity to disregard its roles at the discourse level. Reduplication processes, according to Crystal (2008), are "a type of repetition in which the gotten prefix/suffix reflects specific phonological characteristics of the root." He points out that the process of reduplication has been a focus of prosodic morphology in particular. He differentiates between the base and the reduplicated form, which performs context in grammar. Spencer (1991) notes reduplication as "a morphological action that is a kind of affixation of a prosodic template to a stem, followed by copying that stem in conjunction with the template". Reduplication is a prevalent morphological process in various languages, according to Katamba, O'Grady, and Archibald (2011). By repeating the whole or part of the base to which it applies, it serves as a semantic or grammatical contrast.

According to Katamba (1993:163, 180), reduplication is one of the ways by which words are formed. He explains it as "a process whereby an affix is realized by phonological material borrowed from the base, the repeated part of the word serves some inflectional or derivational purpose". In this description, the reduplicated word is assumed to be a morpheme. As a result, the repetition of segments inside a word is a common feature of word construction. The key topological distinction in reduplication, according to Inkelas (2008), is between morphological duplication and phonological doubling. Reduplication can be simple, complex or automatic. Rubino (2005) stated that, "in a simple reduplicative construction, the reduplicant matches the base from which it is copied without any phonemic additions or alterations. Reduplication with different phonological material, such as a change or addition of consonants or vowels, or morpheme order reversal, is known as complex reduplication".

Frampton (2004) says that reduplication in Arabic is known as a means to indicate the occurrence of a word or an utterance more than once in a context for the sake of threatening, praise, emphasis, or glorification. In other words, when you reduplicate a word in Arabic, it can stand for praise, threat, emphasis, etc. depending on the context. Similarly, Leonid (2003) views reduplication as a very complex and rich system of verbal creation in the oldest Indo-Aryan language. He distinguishes five reduplication verbal production processes: perfect, present tense, causal, desiderative, and intense. For Ekenerho (2014), reduplication is a process that copies a portion or the whole stem and it attaches it to the stem, either before or after it. She points out that nouns, adverbs, and adjectives are derived through the process of reduplication in the Ika and Urhobo languages. Oyebade (2007) who defined reduplication as an affixation process that copies materials from the stem into the affix. He notes that reduplication is used to derive nouns in Yoruba and also functions as an intensifier. He explains that Yoruba employs ideophones, aided by tonal variations, to denote specific character traits, etc. Reduplicatives are commonly used to: a) suggest interchange movement b) duplicate sounds, c) denigrate by implying instability, nonsense, insincerity, vacillation, and d) heighten (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973). Reduplication is frequently used to produce aspectual meanings such as continuous, frequentative, habitual, imperfective, intransitive, repetitive, or progressive (Moravcsik, 1978). Reduplicative

morphemes, according to Rubino (2005), can have multiple meanings, and in some languages, the same reduplicative morpheme can be used to show completely distinct meanings. Reduplication can be used to establish constraints and new terms in nouns. Reduplicative verbs and adjectives can convey plurality, transitivity, aspect, intensity, conditionality, argument, and tense, among other things.

2.1.2 Types of Reduplication

Linguists have identified several types of reduplication, categorized on how the repetition occurs and what kind of elements is repeated. The following are common types observed across languages.

2.1.2.1 Total Reduplication

Total reduplication also known as complete or full reduplication, is a morphological process in which a whole root or base word is repeated exactly or with minimal variation, usually for a grammatical or semantic purpose.

Moravcsik (1978), defines total reduplication as a process that involves "an exact copying of a linguistic form, typically a word, in which the copy retains the grammatical class and semantics of the original, but often results in expanded or altered meaning" (p. 316). For her, the function of total reduplication is strongly tied to expressing semantic categories such as plurality, intensification, distribution, and continuity of an action or quality.

According to Rubino (2005) full reduplication is "the full copying of a root or base form whereby the duplicated structure is used to mark morphosyntactic or semantic changes without the addition of any segmentally new material" (p. 12). Importantly, Rubino emphasizes that in full reduplication, no truncation or internal modification typically occurs the base form is fully preserved in the reduplicated version. For him, this strategy is especially seen in languages where reduplication plays a functional and iconic role, reflecting the structure of meaning through phonological repetition.

Another relevant explanation is given by Hurch (2005), who examines reduplication within a broader cross-linguistic perspective. He describes total reduplication as a linguistic process where "the reduplicant is an exact phonological and morphological copy of the base" and adds that this form of reduplication often signifies "a direct correspondence between form and semantic interpretation", especially in contexts where repetition of action, augmentation, or emotional emphasis is necessary in everyday speech.

2.1.2.2 Partial Reduplication

Partial reduplication is a morphological process in which only a part of a base word is repeated, rather than its entire form. Typically, the reduplicated portion may consist of a consonant-vowel (CV) syllable, an initial sound cluster, or sometimes only a vowel-bearing syllable, depending on the phonological structure of the base.

Describing the nature of reduplication in South Asian languages, Singh (2005) notes that partial reduplication commonly serves to strengthen lexical meaning with social or emotional nuances. This is particularly evident in Indo-Aryan languages, where the reduplicated forms often mitigate commands or introduce playful, satirical, or diminutive overtones. She emphasizes that the non-exact copying of the base allows for semantic flexibility and speaker expressiveness, especially in casual discourse.

Marantz (1982) offers a morphological perspective, arguing that partial reduplication often operates as a derivational mechanism allowing new forms to be created without adding affixes. He explains that in languages with limited derivational morphology, reduplication, particularly partial repetition becomes a key strategy for word formation. This is common in many Austronesian, Semitic, and Niger-Congo languages, where reduplicated verbs or adjectives differ in aspectual or lexical meaning due to the reduplication of just a small portion of the base.

In African languages, Akinlabi and Urua (2003) highlight that partial reduplication plays a central role in expressing habitual actions, emotional shades, and diminutive forms, particularly in lower Niger Congo languages. They explain that such reduplication follows clear morphological patterns that are predictably tonal and aligns with the broader observation that partial reduplication is not just semantically functional but also operated under phonological consistency.

2.1.2.3 Echo Reduplication

Echo reduplication is a special form of reduplication in which the repeated element differs slightly from the base word, generally through systematic phonological substitution usually affecting the initial consonant or vowel of the second element. Unlike total or partial reduplication, echo reduplication is non-identical, with the “echo” component mimicking the base word's structure but not replicating it precisely.

Abdoulaye (1992) discusses echo reduplication in Hausa, a Chadic language spoken in Nigeria, where it serves to add emphasis and abstraction. He notes that the reduplicated forms often include pseudo-morphemes not actually found in lexicon but follow the phonological structure of the base word a pattern that gives them pragmatic value in casual discourse. These forms are often used to express disapproval, sarcasm, or generalization and rely heavily on prosodic delivery.

Shapiro (2007) contributes a cognitive-linguistic perspective by associating echo reduplication with what he terms “creative linguistic mimicry.” In such constructions, the echoed form may not even be derived from any morpheme in the language but still carries associative meaning due to its phonological similarity to the original. This makes echo forms cognitively effective, particularly in speech settings that require spontaneity, informality, or stylistic variation.

Moreover, echo reduplication tends to operate within fixed reductive patterns in some languages especially in child-mother interactions and learner speech where the echoed part is not meant to be understood lexically, but phonetically, for emotional clarity or simplicity. Researchers such as Rath (1995) pointed out that in such contexts, echo reduplication becomes an aid to comprehension, either easing

the sound pattern or enhancing emotional communication. This applies especially in early child speech and songs, where sound patterning often overrides semantic completeness.

Although echo reduplication may not be as formally documented as total or partial reduplication, it remains a linguistically rich and socially meaningful device that allows speakers to give voice to affect, approximation, and abstraction. In many oral languages especially those with strong musical, performative, or poetic traditions, it provides rhythm, playfulness, and prosodic variation.

2.1.3 Semantic Functions of Reduplication

The process of reduplication serves multiple semantic functions in natural language, especially in agglutinative and tonal systems such as those found in African and Southeast Asian languages. Researchers have widely noted that reduplication is not only a grammatical phenomenon but also a semantically motivated mechanism used to enrich and modify meaning. Among its core semantic roles are intensification, repetition and continuity, diminutiveness and softening, pluralization and distribution, as well as emphasis and emotion.

2.1.3.1 Intensification

One of the most extensively documented functions of reduplication is the expression of intensification. This refers to the process by which a quality is magnified or strengthened through the repetition of a word or root. It is particularly prevalent with adjectives and adverbs but may also apply to verbs in some languages.

Moravcsik (1978) identifies intensification as a fundamental semantic outcome of reduplication, explaining that speakers often use it to emphasize a degree of a property that exceeds its norm. She sees this function as iconic, with repetition reflecting the “expansion” of an idea.

Rubino (2005) agrees, remarking that reduplication acts as morphological intensifier, especially in languages that lack formal comparatives or superlatives. Through reduplication, speakers heighten the intensity of an emotion, quality, or action. He observes this function across various language families, including Austronesian, Bantu, and Indo-Aryan.

2.1.3.2 Repetition and Continuity

Another consistent semantic role of reduplication is its use in signaling repetition or continuity of action. In this case, verbs are frequently reduplicated to indicate that an event occurred repeatedly, regularly, or is ongoing.

Matthews (1991) discusses how this form of reduplication connects morphology and semantics. He proposes that repetition of the root mirrors the temporal repetition of an action. Thus, reduplication serves to iconically highlight the repeated nature of the event.

In African contexts, Akinlabi and Urua (2003) have observed that in languages like Ibibio and Yoruba, repeated verbal forms encode both continuity and habitual behavior, helping speakers convey nuanced aspectual distinctions without the use of auxiliary verbs or tense markers.

2.1.3.3 Diminutiveness and Softening

Reduplication also serves as a diminutive or attenuating mechanism, lessening the perceived size, force, or seriousness of a concept. This function is often used to express affection, courtesy, or reduced intensity, especially in relation to nouns and verbs.

Singh (2005) observes that in South Asian languages, reduplication creates a diminutive or affectionate form of a base noun frequently used for terms of endearment, child-directed speech, or softening the strength of a statement. For example, modifying a verb may turn a forceful command into a more gentle request.

Katamba (1993) similarly remarks that in Bantu languages like Luganda, reduplication serves to indicate “smallness in size and effect,” observing that repetition helps speakers index physical scale, social deference, or emotional distance depending on the context.

2.1.3.4 Pluralization and Distribution

Reduplication may also serve the function of indicating plural forms or distributed action. In this role, a word especially a noun or verb is reduplicated to indicate that the object or action occurs in multiple instances or affects multiple participants.

Hyman (2003) provides several African examples particularly in Bantu languages where reduplication of verbs reflects distributed action over time, space, or participants. For instance, one verb form might refer to someone bringing multiple items separately or to multiple people receiving the same treatment.

Stonham (2004) further observes that when verbs are reduplicated, there is often an underlying intention to show that the action is distributed, repeated upon different targets, or carried out multiple times across varying contexts.

2.1.3.5 Emphasis and Emotion

Reduplication is regularly employed to amplify the expressive tone of utterances, functioning as a device for emotional intensification, rhetorical effect, or stylistic emphasis. It often appears in poetry, songs, narratives, and casual or conversational speech, where speakers want to emphasize attitude or emotional involvement.

Michaelis and Lambrecht (1996) argue that reduplication contributes directly to emotional prosody and expressivity, paralleling exclamatory sentence structures or intonation patterns in natural language. They find that this use of reduplication is common in expressive genres, such as oral folklore or informal storytelling.

Wilbur (1973) also notes that emotional reduplication often serves as an indicator of speaker attitude. In such cases, the semantic content of the base word remains stable, but its pragmatic force is

intensified: repetition adds emotion, urgency, or performative emphasis to the message, often mirroring the speaker's internal state.

2.1.5 Reduplication in African Languages

African languages, especially from the Niger-Congo family, are rich in reduplicative forms. These languages frequently rely on reduplication not only for grammatical formation but also to express style, mood, urgency, and emotion (Katamba, 1993). Examples from languages such as Swahili, Efik, Igbo, and Yoruba demonstrate how reduplication functions across linguistic borders.

However, while these languages have received extensive scholarly attention, Esan has little modern documentation, particularly in semantic areas such as reduplication. This limits comparative analysis and curriculum development for Esan.

2.2 Previous Studies on Reduplication

Reduplication has been studied by various linguists across different linguistic traditions, revealing its highly productive nature and diverse semantic and grammatical functions. Extensive research has shown how reduplication is used to express notions such as plurality, intensity, continuation, aspect, and emotional or rhetorical emphasis. This section discusses relevant contributions from five key scholars who have worked on reduplication, highlighting the definitions they proposed and the examples they provided to illustrate its function.

One of the most foundational contributions comes from Edith Moravcsik (1978), whose typological work laid the groundwork for understanding reduplication within universal grammar. She categorized reduplication into total and partial forms and explored their functions in natural language. She points out that reduplication is “a morphological process that involves the phonological copying of all or part of a base form for grammatical or semantic purposes.” In her analysis of Tagalog, for example, the root “lakad” (“to walk”) becomes “lalakad” through partial reduplication to indicate future tense showing that the duplication of the first syllable introduces a temporal interpretation. Moravcsik emphasized the “iconicity” of reduplication, arguing that repeated forms often correspond to repeated or intensified meanings.

Building on this foundation, Joan Bybee (1985) views reduplication from a cognitive and functional perspective, treating it as a universal reflection of human conceptual structures. She described it as one of the most “natural” ways for languages to convey notions like plurality, recurrence, and augmentation. In Vietnamese, for instance, she noted that đỏ (“red”) becomes đỏ đỏ to mean “reddish,” a softening of the core meaning. This demonstrates how reduplication can downgrade or modulate intensity, a semantic function that is common across both isolating and agglutinative languages. Bybee viewed reduplication as where prosodic repetition mirrors mental repetition or spread inherently motivated by perception.

Carl Rubino (2005) explored a comprehensive typological survey highlighting both grammatical and non-grammatical functions of reduplication. He defined it as “the phonological copying of a base to enhance or change its meaning or category.” He illustrated how in Indonesian, the noun *anak* ("child") becomes *anak-anak* ("children") via total reduplication signifying plurality without affixation. Rubino emphasized that reduplication serves both morphosyntactic roles (e.g., tense, number, aspect) and pragmatic ones (e.g., emphasis, politeness). His work shows that reduplication is often preferred over other morphological processes due to its clarity, economy, and intuitive structure.

In the African linguistic context, Larry Hyman (2003) examined reduplication in Bantu languages and highlighted its value in marking aspectual distinctions, such as iterative and continuous actions. In his analysis of Lingala, he cited the verb *tanga* ("to read") and its reduplicated form *tanga-tanga*, which means “to read repeatedly” or “to be engaged in reading.” He noted that the Bantu languages frequently use reduplication to modify predicates, adverbs, and adjectives for semantic intensification or temporal extension. Hyman also acknowledged the connection between total reduplication and prosodic features like tone and rhythm, especially in oral performance and traditional narratives.

Finally, Yiwola Awoyale (1983), a Yoruba linguist contributed a detailed analysis of reduplication’s function in verb and noun phrases. He noted that in Yoruba, reduplication could be used to indicate repetition, frequency, or emphasis. For example, the verb *se* ("to do") becomes *se-se* to imply doing something "over and over again" or "routinely." Awoyale emphasized that reduplication in Yoruba is not just grammatical but expressive, appearing frequently in proverbs, music, and dramatized speech. His work underlines how reduplication reinforces the emotional or rhetorical force of an utterance in both formal and informal usage.

2.3 Concern of the Study

The main concern of this study is the lack of a comprehensive semantic analysis of reduplication in Esan. Although previous research has identified that reduplication exist in Esan and other Ediod languages (Elugbe, 1989; Omoruyi, 2001) no full length semantic description or classification of these forms has been documented in academics literature. The few existing mentions treat reduplication as incidental or simply list examples without exploring how meaning changes with repetition. Furthermore, studies on more widely spoken Nigerian languages cannot be assumed to apply to Esan, given dialectal, syntactic, and cultural differences.

Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by providing a comprehensive descriptive account of reduplication in Esan, especially concerning its semantics roles across different grammatical contexts, noun, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Understanding these meanings will add to the linguistic theory, aid curriculum developers working with indigenous languages, and support documentation effort for Esan.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to establish a linguistic framework that will underpin the research. The analytical approach adopted in this study is the descriptive method of data analysis. Descriptive theories focus on the necessary tools required to effectively characterize individual languages. As noted by Himmelmann (1995:1), a significant portion of what is categorized as 'Descriptive' in the field of linguistics involves two primary activities: the gathering of data and the subsequent analysis of that data.

3.1 DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS

Descriptive linguistics is a crucial area of linguistic study that focuses on the objective and systematic investigation of languages as they are used by their speakers. The main goal of this field is to document and analyze the structural components, patterns, and practical uses of a language without making value judgments about correctness or promoting specific linguistic norms. According to Himmelmann (1998), descriptive linguistics involves two core activities: collecting linguistic data and analyzing it to produce an accurate and comprehensive description of a language. This branch of linguistics examines various aspects of a language, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, to gain a thorough understanding of its structure and function (Lyons, 1981). This approach is particularly valuable for studying under-documented or endangered languages, where creating detailed linguistic records is essential for preservation and future research (Payne, 1997). Unlike prescriptive

linguistics, which sets standards for language use, descriptive linguistics takes a non-judgmental approach, focusing solely on actual language use in everyday contexts (Crystal, 2008). By prioritizing empirical observation and analysis, descriptive linguistics provides a foundation for theoretical linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language education. The descriptive framework adheres to the linguistic patterns used by speakers, aiming to explain these patterns through careful observation of language use and the identification of underlying principles or rules. The theoretical model used in this descriptive paradigm is known as BASIC LINGUISTIC THEORY (BLT), a concept introduced by Robert M.W. Dixon in 1997.

3.1.1 BASIC LINGUISTIC THEORY

Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT) is a framework for describing and analyzing grammatical structures across languages, with a focus on typological and descriptive linguistic research. Introduced by R.M.W. Dixon in 1997, BLT is characterized as a set of practical tools and principles derived from the study of diverse languages. This framework provides a methodological foundation for documenting and understanding language structures, highlighting universally observable features while accommodating language-specific variations. The strength of BLT lies in its commitment to empirical accuracy and flexibility in handling various linguistic data. It offers a systematic approach to exploring phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics by identifying cross-linguistic generalizations and distinct structural patterns. According to Dixon (2010), the primary goal of BLT is to produce comprehensive grammatical descriptions that are accessible to linguists, including those unfamiliar with specific languages. Unlike formal theories, BLT adopts a descriptive approach that prioritizes clarity and precision over abstract formalism.

This makes it particularly advantageous in the field of linguistics, especially in the documentation of endangered or lesser-studied languages, where a practical and straightforward framework is essential (Dixon, 2010). Consequently, BLT continues to be an important instrument in linguistic documentation, typology, and comparative analysis.

3.2 RELEVANCE OF THE BASIC LINGUISTIC THEORY TO PRESENT RESEARCH

Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT) is relevant to this study because it provides a practical and systematic foundation for describing linguistic structures based on actual language use. Since this research focuses on how reduplication functions semantically in the Esan language, which is relatively under-documented, BLT guides the analysis by emphasizing data collected from native speakers and interpreting it within the context in which it naturally occurs. It encourages the researcher to focus on the internal grammar of the language, derived from usage, rather than imposing rigid theoretical categories that may not apply.

Furthermore, BLT supports the descriptive methodology adopted in this study by promoting grammatical and semantic analysis that is grounded in real communication. By prioritizing native speaker intuition, context-dependent meanings, and observable usage patterns, BLT allows for a nuanced understanding of how reduplication expresses concepts like intensity, repetition, and emotional nuance in Esan. In this way, the framework helps ensure that the findings remain faithful to the linguistic reality of the speech community being studied.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents and analyzes data collected on the use of reduplication in Esan, focusing on its semantic functions, that is, the specific meanings these repeated forms add to a word in real usage. The data are drawn from native Esan speakers, gathered through oral interviews, observation during informal speech interactions, and traditional speech forms such as storytelling and proverbs. Reduplication appears frequently and meaningfully in Esan speech and functions well beyond stylistic effect. It plays a vital role in marking meaning, intensifying expressions, and structuring normal discourse.

4.1 Reduplication in Esan

Reduplication is a widely recognized morphological process in which a word or part of a word is repeated to perform a grammatical or semantic function. In Esan, reduplication functions as an important linguistic strategy used by native speakers to intensify meaning, show repetition, indicate quantity, or express emotional nuances. It is a common and productive practice, playing a vital role in the everyday grammar and communication styles of Esan speakers.

According to Moravcsik (1978), reduplication is a morphological phenomenon that reflects iconic meaning where the repetition in language structure parallels or symbolizes repetition or intensity in meaning. Crystal (2008) adds that reduplication often fills grammatical and semantic gaps in languages that lack elaborate inflectional systems. This is particularly relevant to Esan, which does not rely heavily on affixes or tense markers to express intensification, plurality, or aspect; rather, it uses reduplication to convey these meanings.

4.1.1 Types of Reduplication in Esan

In her study on reduplication across Nigerian languages, Eweto (2013) identifies reduplication as a core morphological device in languages such as Esan. According to her, reduplication in Esan serves multiple functions, including quantification, emphasis, repetition, and distribution, and it is widely used due to the language's limited inflectional morphology. Eweto classifies reduplication in Esan into two major types: total reduplication and partial reduplication. She notes that total reduplication involves repeating the entire base item, while partial reduplication involves repeating a segment or syllable (usually at the beginning) of the word. Each type contributes differently to meaning-making and is contextually understood by native speakers.

4.1.1.1 Total Reduplication

Total reduplication in Esan occurs when the entire word is repeated without alteration. This is often used to express abundance, intensification, emphasis, or repetition, depending on the context

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Àmè 'water'	àmèàmè (am'ame) 'plenty of water'
Ízè 'rice'	ízèízè (iz'ize) 'large quantity of rice'
Òjè 'laughter'	òjèòjè (oj'oje) 'prolonged laughter'
Èbálè 'food'	èbálèèbálè (ebal'ebale) 'a lot of food'
Íkhwô 'woman'	íkhwôíkhwô (ikhw'ikhwo) 'women'
Khéré 'small'	khérékhéré (kher'khere) 'very small, tiny (of many things)'
Íghó 'money'	íghóíghó (igh'igho) 'monies'
Èdé 'day'	èdéèdé (ed'ede) 'every day'

In examples (1) to (5), reduplication functions as a quantifier. Without the use of additional numerals or grammatical markers, Esan speakers rely on reduplication to indicate mass or plurality of uncountable nouns. The repeated noun form adds emphasis and communicates a sense of volume or sufficiency. Rather than saying “much” or “a lot of,” speakers naturally double the noun to convey meaning more vividly and effectively.

Root/Stem.	Derived Reduplicated word
Íkhwô 'woman'.	Íkhwôíkhwô 'women (collective)'
Èvá 'two'	évaéva 'group arranged in twos'
Èhá 'three'	èháèhá 'group arranged in three'

These examples demonstrate reduplication’s role in pluralization and distribution. In the absence of plural suffixes, reduplication helps express multiplicity and grouping by number. For example, íkhwôíkhwô refers to multiple women collectively, while évaéva and èháèhá suggest a notion of people or things organized in twos or threes, as often seen in cultural contexts such as dancing or queuing. This function aligns with Eweto’s (2013) view that reduplication in Esan compensates for syntactic features not present in the language.

4.1.1.2 Partial Reduplication

Partial reduplication occurs when only part of the word is repeated. This usually involves a syllable, often the first syllable or a CV (consonant-vowel) segment. While not as dominant as total reduplication in Esan, partial reduplication still appears in some verbs and adjectives to create new internal variation in meaning. Examples are:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Sésé ‘clean’	Sésésé ‘spotlessly pleasing white’
Yóyó ‘fair, sharp’	Yóyóyó ‘very light complexion’
Tètè ‘gently’	Tètètè ‘tiny drops’

These examples illustrate reduplication being used to enhance description, convey affection, or soften content. tetete can be used to describe rain that falls softly, or to refer to someone speaking in a gentle manner. Eweto (2013) said that such patterns are used for affectionate reference, poetic enhancement, and emphatic politeness. These examples align with the descriptive and affective use of reduplication across many tone languages and reinforce the role of reduplication as a culturally sensitive expression tool in Esan.

4.2 Reduplication Across Word Classes in Esan

Reduplication in Esan exhibits remarkable flexibility and productivity across different grammatical word classes, including nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and temporal expressions. Below is a discussion of how reduplication functions differently depending on the class of the word being duplicated, based on naturally occurring speech among Esan speakers. This analysis aligns with Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT), which encourages recognizing form-function relationships modeled by native usage, not abstract rule systems (Dixon, 2010).

4.2.1 Nouns

In Esan, reduplication of nouns generally serves to express plurality, abundance, or mass reference. There are no affixal plural markers in standard Esan morphology, so reduplication becomes the default strategy for signaling “more than one” or “a lot of.”

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
àmè ‘water’	àmèàmè (am’ame) ‘watery, plenty of water’
Ébálè ‘food’	ébálèébálè (ebal’ebale) ‘abundant food’
Íkhwô ‘woman’	íkhwôíkhwô (ikhw’ikhwo) ‘women’
Íghó ‘money’	íghóíghó (igh’igho) ‘monies, lots of money’
Ébé ‘leaf, book’	ébéébé (eb’ebe) ‘greenish colour/ foilage’
Éhèn ‘fish’	éhènéhèn (eh’ehen) ‘fish(es)’

In each of these examples, total reduplication of the noun enhances the base form to communicate high quantity or bulk presence. The form àmèàmè, for instance, is used by speakers when referring to large volumes, such as during descriptions of rainfall, rivers, or excess water in a container. Ébálèébálè is often used during social gatherings or storytelling to emphasize generous provisions or feasting. These usages reflect context-specific quantity marking, and they highlight how reduplication functions as a semantic multiplier. Esan speakers intuitively understand that reduplicating the noun modifies its scope without needing quantifiers like “many” or “much.” This reflects BLT’s principle that language evolves based on communicative necessity.

4.2.2 Pronouns

Reduplicated pronouns in Esan often carry semantic emphasis, exclusivity, or contrast. The base meaning remains the same, but the reduplication reinforces speaker focus or identity isolation.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
1. Ìmè ‘I’	ìmèìmé (im’ime) ‘I alone’
2. Ùwè ‘you’	ùwèùwè (uw’uwe) ‘You alone / only you’
3. Èlè ‘they’	èlèèlè (el’ele) ‘only them / they in particular’

Pronoun reduplication is a discourse strategy, often used in emphatic contexts, such as when someone wants to assert agency, deny responsibility, or reinforce involvement exclusively. For instance, imeime okpa lu o le (“I alone did the work”) indicates that no one else was involved. Ùwèùwè highlights the listener's exclusivity, often used in confrontational or clarifying situations.

Rather than marking grammatical emphasis with particles, Esan speakers intuitively double the pronoun for stress and focus. BLT accounts for this form of usage by noting that grammar often reflects discourse needs, and these emergent patterns are as legitimate as any rule-bound constructions in formal grammar.

4.2.3 Verbs

When reduplication applies to Esan verbs, the function predominantly becomes aspectual, that is, it reflects action that is repetitive, ongoing, or habitual.

Examples:

Root /Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Kókó	kókókó ‘prolonged and loud shout’

Ìmùdià ‘stand’	ìmùdiàìmùdià (imud’imudia) ‘continuous standing’
Wàwà ‘spread’	wàwàwà ‘spread all over / many times’
Zagha ‘scatter’	zaghazagha ‘describes things that are disorderly or unkempt’

Here, reduplication marks what could be called a progressive aspect in languages with affix-based tense-aspect systems. The verb ìmùdiàìmùdià the subject remained standing over a period of time. Kókókó may imply someone moving about collecting items, while wàwàwà suggests a continuous spreading, possibly even an uncontrollable one.

Instead of adding grammatical particles or auxiliary verbs, Esan verbs are reduplicated to embed aspectual meaning within the verb itself. This supports BLT’s assertion that form-function relationships evolve through repeated communicative functions rather than through mechanical application of grammatical rules.

4.2.4 Adjectives

Adjective reduplication in Esan serves as an intensifier, elevating meaning beyond the default level of the attribute. It is a widely practiced means of expressing degree or measure.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Tua ‘fast’	tuatua ‘extremely fast’
Sésé ‘clean’	sésésé ‘perfectly clean’
Khérhé ‘small’	khérhékhéré ‘very small or tiny’

These adjective-based reduplications are used in both praise and disapproval, depending on tone and context. For instance, dùdùdù may describe nightfall, or someone wearing extremely dark clothing. Sésésé often refers to high standards of cleanliness and is used both literally and figuratively (e.g., about a well-dressed person or a tidy home). Khérhékhéré describes physical smallness, but may also imply weakness or insignificance, depending on the context.

In such uses, reduplication behaves like an intensifier (such as "very" in English) that is built into the speech itself, shaping meaning and mood. These functions do not require affixes or modifiers, confirming BLT’s claim that languages develop internal syntactic means for meeting expressive needs.

4.2.5 Adverbs and Time Words

Esan reduplicates time expressions to denote frequency, regularity, and urgency.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplication Word
Èdé ‘day’	èdéèdé ‘every day’
Uzana ‘week’	uzanauzana ‘every week’
Wàrà ‘now’	wàràwàrà ‘right away / urgently’
Uki ‘month’	ukiuki ‘every month’

These reduplicated time expressions help speakers anchor action in real-time, indicating whether something happens regularly, repeatedly, or urgently. Edeede is commonly used in habitual constructions like Edeede i rhiọ eghe – "He goes to the farm every day." Similarly, wanawana is a more intense rephrasing of wana ("now"), often used when urgency is required, as in Wẹ gbọ wanawana! – “Come immediately!”

Such temporal emphasis is key to storytelling, warnings, and everyday scheduling. These forms eliminate the need for additional adverbs, functioning instead as self-contained time markers. BLT emphasizes this type of internal grammatical function, where form adapts to serve meaning simply and efficiently.

Summary Table: Word Classes Affected by Reduplication

WORD CLASS	EXAMPLES	REDUPLICATED FORM	SEMANTIC EFFECT
Noun	àmè ‘water’	àmèàmè ‘watery’	Quantity/Mass
Pronoun	ìmè ‘I’	ìmèìmè ‘I alone’	Exclusivity/Focused Identity
Verb	Kókó ‘gather’	Kókókó ‘prolonged’	Repetition/Continuity

		and loud shout'	
Adjective	Dùdù 'dark'	Dùdùdù 'very dark'	Intensification
Adverb/Time	èdé 'day'	èdéèdé 'every day'	Frequency/Habituality

This section confirms that reduplication is a cross-categorical morphological strategy in Esan. Across all linguistic categories, it plays a functional role rooted in usage.

4.3 Semantic Functions of Reduplication in Esan

Reduplication in Esan performs a wide range of semantic functions that go far beyond structural or phonological repetition. In line with the claims of Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT), which emphasizes that grammatical form is shaped by communicative function (Dixon, 2010), this section explores what meanings reduplication expresses in everyday language. Esan speakers use reduplication to indicate abundance, repetition, emphasis, exclusivity, emotional expression, and more, often without any affixes or additional particles.

Here, the data are analyzed into key semantic categories relevant to Esan reduplication, reflecting how naturally occurring speech patterns shape meaning in real-time communication.

4.3.1 Abundance and Plurality

One of the most common semantic functions of reduplication in Esan is to express largeness in quantity or non-countable mass. When nouns are reduplicated, they no longer refer to a conceptual singular object but instead to an expanded or intensified quantity of that object.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Àmè 'water'	àmèàmè (am'ame) 'watery'
Ízè 'rice'	ízèízè (iz'ize) 'plenty of rice'
Èbálè 'rice'	ébálèébálè (ebal'ebale) 'abundant of food'
Alanme 'meat'	alanmealanme (alam'alanme) 'lots of meat'
Íghó 'money'	íghóíghó 'monies'

In these examples, reduplication highlights how much of something there is. For instance, àmèàmè is used when describing water flowing generously (e.g., after rainfall or in large

containers). *Ébálèébálè* is frequently used in communal settings to describe generous portions of meals. These instances show that reduplication is used not arbitrarily, but rather systematically to intensify the meaning of the noun.

This aligns with Eweto’s (2013) assertion that in Esan and other Edoid languages, reduplication for quantity functions grammatically, often substituting for plural or quantifier markers. It also echoes BLT’s philosophy that speakers naturally create form-function matches to fulfill communicative needs when grammatical structures (like plural suffixes) are absent.

4.3.2 Exclusivity and Identifying Reference

Reduplication is also used in Esan to reinforce identity or express exclusivity. This is particularly evident with personal pronouns, where speakers repeat a form to show that it refers only to that person, with no others involved.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Ìmè ‘I’	ìmèìmè (im’ime) ‘I only, me specifically’
Ùwè ‘you’	ùwèùwè (uw’uwe) ‘you alone/just you’
Èlè ‘they’	èlèèlè ‘only them’

These forms are often used in emotionally heightened discourse or clarification. *Imeime* typically occurs when a speaker is asserting personal effort—“I did it alone.” *Uweuwe* might appear in arguments or defensiveness: “You, and only you!” According to BLT, such reduplication is not just structural but pragmatic, meant to guide the listener’s understanding of agency, focus, or responsibility.

Moreover, Eweto (2013) highlights that pronoun reduplication in Esan serves context-dependent emphasis, helping speakers stress identity or claim responsibility, particularly in confrontations, storytelling, and self-defense.

4.3.3 Frequency and Time Reference

Reduplication in Esan also marks notions of repetition in time or habitual frequency, especially with time-related nouns. When time words are reduplicated, they indicate events that occur repeatedly or routinely, such as “every day” or “all the time.”

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
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Èdé ‘day’	èdèèdé (ed’ede) ‘every day’
Éghé ‘time’	éghééghé (egh’eghe) ‘at all times/always’
Uzana ‘week’	uzanauzana ‘every week’
Uki ‘month’	ukiuki (uk’uki) ‘every month’
Wǎná ‘now’	wǎnǎwǎnǎ ‘immediately/ at once’

Edeede is typically used when describing routine events, such as Edeede i rhiọ eghe ("He goes to the farm every day"). Uzanauzana emphasizes consistent actions across weeks. This regular habit marking is a function of aspect, but it's expressed semantically through reduplication not through tense or aspect affixes, as in languages like English.

Within BLT, this is seen as how grammars develop internally when a language lacks a specific marker for repeated or habitual time, existing morphological tools, like reduplication, take its place. Esan uses reduplication as a flexible context-sensitive marker of time and frequency.

4.3.4 Action Continuity and Iteration

Another strong semantic feature observed in Esan reduplication is action continuity. When verbs are reduplicated, they typically imply that an action is ongoing, repeated, or carried out over time.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Ìmùdià ‘stand’	ìmùdiàìmùdià (imud’imudia) ‘continuous standing’
Kókó ‘gather’	kókókó ‘prolonged and loud shout’
Wàwà ‘spread’	wàwàwà ‘spread widely/ spread all over’

In ìmùdiàìmùdià, the repetition implies persistence. It could be used to describe someone who won't sit, or someone made to stand for a long time. Kókókó, depending on tone and context, may refer to iterative gathering, such as a person picking small items or revisiting a spot multiple times.

Eweto (2013) describes such forms as aspect-marking reduplication, developed from functional communicative needs. BLT supports this by showing that morphology often arises from

recurring discourse patterns. In Esan, people need a way to show repetition, and reduplication becomes the most direct and linguistically economical solution.

4.3.5 Intensification of Qualities and Attributes

Reduplication also functions in Esan to reinforce, exaggerate, or intensify an adjective's meaning, similar to the use of intensifiers like "very" or "so" in English. When an adjective is reduplicated, its original sense becomes stronger or more extreme.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Tua 'fast'	tuatua 'very fast'
Dùdù 'dark'	dùdùdù 'very dark'
Sésé 'clean'	sésésé 'spotlessly pleasing white/very clean'
Yóyó 'fair'	yóyóyó 'very fair/ fair complexioned'
Sónó 'dirty'	sónósónó 'extremely or irritatingly dirty'
Tinnie 'tiny'	tinnietinnie 'very tiny;minuites'

These forms are commonly used in praise, warning, narrative, or complimenting. Dùdùdù might describe nightfall or a person's dark clothing. Sesese describes situations or homes that are exceptionally tidy. Khérhékheré is often used affectionately toward children, while yóyóyó describes beauty or fine skin complexion, often in song or storytelling.

This function perfectly illustrates how reduplication creates emotional resonance. Rather than adding intensifiers like "very," Esan speakers multiply the form to modify the meaning. As Eweto affirms, intensifying reduplication plays a role not only in grammar but in stylistic performance and speaker intentionality.

4.3.6 Diminutiveness and Softening

Esan also uses reduplication to soften expressions, describe things that are small, cute, or affectionate, or to deliver speech in a gentle tone. This function shows how reduplication encodes both semantic and social meaning.

Examples:

Root/Stem	Derived Reduplicated Word
Khérhé 'small'	khérhékheré 'very small/tiny'

The examples show a collection or group of numbers when reduplicated in esan.

4.4 Speaker Usage and Morphological Implications

One of the key findings from this research is that Esan speakers use reduplication deliberately and meaningfully, not arbitrarily. While reduplication is often described as a repetitive process, speakers demonstrate linguistic awareness in how and when to use it.

1. Reduplication follows natural communicative structures. A speaker does not reduplicate simply for rhythm; reduplication is used when specific meanings, like intensity, abundance, or continuity, are intended.
2. Reduplication reflects Esan speakers' preference for clarity. For example, rather than using a separate word for “many,” reduplication serves as a concise semantic intensifier (e.g., *íẓè* → *íẓèíẓè* = a lot of rice). This observation aligns with BLT, which suggests that linguistic patterns are optimized for communicative efficiency.
3. Reduplication is used regularly in oral traditions. In Esan folktales, songs, chants, and proverbs, reduplication creates rhythm and enhances narrative fluency. In these contexts, reduplication stands as both a semantic tool and stylistic device.
4. Morphologically, Esan relies more on reduplication than on affixation. While some languages use prefixes or suffixes to derive morphological meaning, Esan uses reduplication to derive more subtle, layered semantic meaning.
5. Speakers interpret reduplication contextually. For example, *khérhékheré* might mean “very small” in one context or “pitifully small” in another, highlighting Esan’s context-driven interpretation system.

In summary, reduplication in Esan is not random, and it is certainly not for mere decoration, it is a semantically motivated strategy embedded in the mental grammar and social behavior of Esan speakers. Such usage strongly supports BLT’s core principle: language structure should be described and explained based on natural usage and speaker knowledge.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Summary

This chapter provides a final reflection on the study by summarizing the key findings from the research, drawing a general conclusion, and showing the implications of the findings for further work in Esan and related languages. The objective of this study was to conduct a descriptive analysis of the semantic functions of reduplication in the Esan language. Using a data-driven methodology focused on natural language use, and guided by the Descriptive Linguistic Approach within the framework of Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT), the study explored the types, functions, and morphological behavior of reduplication in the speech of native Esan speakers.

Throughout the study, particular attention was given to how reduplication is used across word classes, how it enhances or modifies meaning, and what these patterns reveal about Esan grammar and speaker behavior. The findings provide deep insight not only into Esan reduplication but also into how linguistic expression aligns with culture, context, and communicative purpose. This chapter restates those findings clearly and presents the general conclusion drawn from the analysis.

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to examine the nature of reduplication in Esan and specifically to understand its semantic functions as demonstrated through actual speaker usage. The findings emerged from structured interviews, natural speech data, and a detailed morphological analysis conducted under the Descriptive Linguistic Approach, with support from Basic Linguistic Theory (BLT). The data confirmed that reduplication in Esan is indeed a productive and meaningful process, used by speakers intuitively to modify, intensify, and clarify meaning within varied communicative contexts.

In addressing the first research question, the study identified that Esan uses two major types of reduplication: total and partial. Total reduplication was most commonly observed and involved repeating the full root of the word, especially in cases of nouns like àmèàmè (plenty of water) and adjectives like dùdùdù (very dark). Partial reduplication, though used less frequently, was identified in expressive forms such as tètètè (soft drops) and khérhékheré (tiny), and was often linked to intensified or emotional usage.

Regarding the second research question, the study found that Esan reduplication performs several semantic functions, including expressing quantity and abundance (e.g., ízèízè, ébálèébálè), intensification (e.g., sésé → sésésé for “spotlessly clean”), exclusivity and identity marking in pronouns (e.g., ìmèìmè – “I alone”), repetition and habitual aspect (e.g., kókókó – “gather repeatedly”), as well as time-marking and frequency (e.g., èdéhédé – “every day”, ukiuki – “every month”). These meanings were not fixed grammatically but emerged from speaker usage, specific contexts, and cultural understanding.

In response to the third research question, the study showed that reduplication occurs across multiple word classes in Esan: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and time expressions. Nouns tend to use reduplication for mass or plural marking, verbs for continuity and aspect, adjectives for intensification, and pronouns for emphasis and distinction. This widespread application highlights reduplication as a versatile and productive morphological tool within Esan grammar.

Finally, with respect to speaker usage and morphological implications, the study revealed that reduplication is used in natural, intuitive, and patterned ways by native Esan speakers. Instead of relying on external grammatical rules or inflectional morphology (such as plural suffixes or aspect markers), the Esan language uses reduplication as a context-sensitive tool to meet communicative and stylistic needs. This highlights how Esan speakers morphologically adapt meaning through a process that is deeply embedded in their speaking habits, values, and cultural expression. The repeated forms serve as practical and expressive grammar, echoing the BLT perspective that grammar evolves from usage, not prescription.

In essence, the study shows that reduplication in Esan is not marginal or ornamental but a central, meaning-bearing process used across contexts and classes to enrich communication and fulfill expressive needs.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that reduplication is a core semantic and morphological feature of Esan, functioning beyond repetition to serve complex and layered communicative purposes. Whether signaling abundance, repetition, emphasis, emotion, frequency, or structure, reduplication in Esan operates as a natural meaning-shaping mechanism across various parts of speech.

One of the most significant conclusions drawn is that reduplication in Esan is driven by speaker intention and language use, rather than by fixed grammatical rules. It works as an effective alternative to inflection, enabling the encoding of quantity, aspect, and emotion all through form manipulation. In Esan, reduplication is contextually interpreted and functionally consistent, a finding that strongly supports the usage-based principles of Basic Linguistic Theory.

Furthermore, the process reflects deep cultural values, including expressiveness, rhythm, politeness, and clarity, which are valued traits in Esan communicative culture. As such, any attempt to understand the structure and function of Esan grammar must take reduplication seriously as both a grammatical resource and a linguistic reflection of Esan identity.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the documentation and analysis of Esan language by foregrounding reduplication as a meaningful, systematic, and culturally embedded component of Esan morphology. Through a descriptive and context-based lens, the work affirms that language is best understood when it is observed in practice, as it occurs naturally among speakers. The findings not only enrich knowledge of Esan grammar but also support broader efforts in African language documentation, preservation, and descriptive linguistics.

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