

AN ANALYSIS OF ANAPHORA AND DEIXIS IN IBIBIO**EUNICE CHIDINMA OSUAGWU PhD**

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Anaphora, Deixis, Ibibio, Reference, Discourse, Pragmatics.

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esthyandikan@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

This study examines the linguistic phenomena of anaphora and deixis in Ibibio, a Lower Cross language spoken mainly in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Anaphora and deixis are essential mechanisms through which reference is established and maintained in discourse in Ibibio. Using descriptive, the study analyzes Ibibio data obtained through native speaker intuition and elicitation. The analysis shows that anaphoric reference in Ibibio is expressed through several grammatical devices, including resumptive pronouns, reflexive constructions formed with *ídém* 'self' plus personal pronouns, possessive pronouns, and demonstratives. Deixis in Ibibio is found to operate primarily through person, spatial, and temporal systems, all of which are anchored to the speaker's perspective. The study further reveals that first and second person pronouns perform strong deictic functions, while third person forms are weakly deictic. In addition, the second person pronoun may be used impersonally, thereby losing its deictic force. The findings highlight the crucial role of context in interpreting reference in Ibibio and contribute to the growing body of descriptive work on Nigerian indigenous languages. Furthermore, subsequent research should employ empirical methods with diverse datasets and focus on building Ibibio corpora to facilitate computational modelling of anaphoric and deictic reference.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human language is fundamentally referential: speakers constantly refer to people, objects, places, events, and ideas in order to communicate meaning effectively. Two important linguistic mechanisms that enable reference are anaphora and deixis. These phenomena play a crucial role in discourse cohesion, interpretation, and pragmatic meaning. Although closely related, anaphora and deixis differ in the source from which referential meaning is derived.

Anaphora involves reference to linguistic material already introduced in discourse, while deixis involves reference that is anchored in the immediate speech situation, such as the identity of the speaker, the addressee, the time of utterance, or the location of the participants. Together, these two mechanisms ensure clarity, coherence, and economy in language use.

Ibibio, a Lower Cross language spoken predominantly in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, provides a rich linguistic environment for examining anaphoric and deictic phenomena. Like many African languages, Ibibio employs a range of morphosyntactic and discourse strategies to encode reference. However, these strategies have not been as extensively documented as those of major world languages.

This study therefore examines how anaphora and deixis are realized in Ibibio, with particular attention to the grammatical devices involved, their discourse functions, and their interaction with context.

Ibibio is the major indigenous language of Akwa Ibom State in the South-South region of Nigeria. It is spoken by the Ibibio people in a large part of the state, particularly in local government areas such as Etinan, Ibiono-Ibom, Ikono, Ikot Abasi, Itu, Mkpato Enin, Nsit Atai, Nsit-Ubium, Onna, Uruan, Uyo, and Ini. These areas comprise the core Ibibio homeland within Akwa Ibom and reflect the territorial distribution of the language within the state.



This study aims to examine the concepts of anaphora and deixis and to identify and describe the major anaphoric devices used in Ibibio. It also analyzes the Ibibio deictic system with particular attention to person, spatial, and temporal deixis, and demonstrates how contextual factors determine the interpretation of anaphoric and deictic expressions in the language. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the documentation and deeper understanding of Ibibio grammar and discourse structure. This paper also, supports the documentation and preservation of Ibibio by providing insights to aspect of the language. This study is limited to the description and analysis of anaphora and deixis in Ibibio, with particular focus on their forms, functions, and interpretation in natural discourse. The scope covers major anaphoric devices such as pronouns, demonstratives, and other referring expressions, as well as the principal types of deixis, namely person, spatial, and temporal deixis. The analysis is based on data drawn from native speaker introspection, elicitation, and naturally occurring utterances, and it adopts descriptive and functional linguistic approaches.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Anaphora

Anaphora has long occupied a central position in grammatical theory, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. Early structural approaches treated anaphora primarily as a syntactic dependency between pronouns and noun phrases. However, later functional and discourse-oriented approaches emphasize its role in maintaining textual cohesion and managing information flow. Crystal (1997) views anaphora as a mechanism through which linguistic economy is achieved, allowing speakers to avoid unnecessary repetition while ensuring interpretability.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) identify anaphoric reference as a core cohesive device, alongside substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Within their framework, anaphora functions to link clauses and sentences to earlier discourse segments, thereby creating unity within a text. This

perspective is particularly relevant for Ibibio, where resumptive pronouns and demonstratives play a crucial role in reference tracking.

Generative approaches, while less central to this study, have also contributed to the understanding of anaphora, particularly through binding theory. Nevertheless, such approaches often overlook the discourse-pragmatic motivations that underlie anaphoric choices in natural language. This study therefore aligns more closely with functional and pragmatic traditions.

Studies on Deixis

Deixis has been extensively studied within pragmatic theory. Lyons (1977) and Levinson (1983) argue that deictic expressions cannot be interpreted independently of context, as their meanings shift with changes in speaker, time, and place. Fillmore (1997) further introduces the notion of deictic anchoring; emphasizing that deixis reflects the speaker's subjective orientation to the world.

Person, spatial, and temporal deixis are generally regarded as the core deictic categories, although social and discourse deixis have also been identified in some languages. The present study focuses on the core categories, as these are most salient in Ibibio data.

Anaphora and Deixis in African Languages

Studies on African languages reveal both universal and language-specific strategies for encoding reference. Faraclas (1989) documents the use of pronouns, demonstratives, and omission in Nigerian Pidgin, while Ndimele (1995) highlights the discourse functions of vocatives and pronouns in Nigerian languages. These studies demonstrate that African languages often rely on pragmatic inference and discourse context rather than rigid syntactic marking.

Research on Niger-Congo languages shows that resumptive pronouns are widespread and often serve important discourse functions. However, detailed descriptions of these phenomena remain scarce for many languages, including Ibibio.

Despite the growing body of work on anaphora and deixis, Ibibio has received little attention in this area of study. Existing descriptions tend to emphasize phonology and morphology, leaving discourse-pragmatic phenomena underexplored. This study therefore fills an important gap by providing a systematic account of anaphoric and deictic mechanisms in Ibibio.

The concept of anaphora has been widely discussed in grammatical and discourse studies. Crystal (1997:19) defines anaphora as the process whereby a linguistic unit derives its interpretation from a previously expressed unit, known as the antecedent. This definition highlights the backward-looking nature of anaphoric reference and contrasts it with cataphora, where reference is forward-looking. Taylor (1985:63) adopts a broader view, describing anaphora as encompassing all forms of cross-referencing within language.

Anaphora is often contrasted with deixis or exophora. While anaphora is discourse-internal, deixis is discourse-external, relying on the situational context for interpretation. Lyons (1977:637) characterizes deixis as the location and identification of participants, objects, events, and activities relative to the spatiotemporal context of utterance. Crystal (1997:107) similarly emphasizes the dependence of deictic meaning on the personal, temporal, and locational characteristics of the speech situation.

Several scholars have examined anaphora and deixis in specific languages. Faraclas (1989), for instance, identifies omission, pronouns, numerals, and demonstratives as anaphoric devices in Nigerian Pidgin, while also noting that not all such devices are universally applicable across languages. Trask (1993) introduces the notion of shifters—expressions whose interpretation shifts with changes in speaker, time, or place. Traugott and Pratt (1980) further argue that deictic expressions require the hearer to reconstruct the speaker's point of view for proper interpretation. Within the Nigerian linguistic landscape, studies on deixis and anaphora remain relatively limited for many indigenous languages, including Ibibio. Existing works, such as Ndimele (1995b), highlight the role of vocatives and participant reference in discourse, but a comprehensive account of anaphoric and deictic systems in Ibibio is still lacking. This study addresses that gap.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored within a functional-pragmatic and discourse-based theoretical framework. The functional approach to language emphasizes how linguistic forms are shaped by their communicative functions, particularly in natural discourse. From this perspective, anaphora and deixis

mmò and áfò. The two independent morphemes enter into a genitival relationship when combined, as in:

ídém mmì, 'myself' ídém mfò 'yourself'
 ídém ómò 'himself' ídém ònyìn 'ourselves'
 ídém òdùfò 'yourselves' ídém ómmò 'themselves'

In Ibibio, there is no legitimate reflexive pronoun. The ídém + personal pronoun combination is used to perform the role of a reflexive pronoun in Ibibio, since it can refer back to people or things which have already been mentioned somewhere within the same clause. In other words, reflexivity is restricted to the clause, e.g.:

3. Akpan ámá wòt ídém ómò.
 (Akpan kill-FT self 3s)
 'Akpan killed himself'.
4. Áfò yè Emèm émá wòt ídém òdùfò
 (2s conj Emem kill-FT self 2p)
 'You and Emem killed yourselves'.

In (3), for instance, the reflexive pronoun ídém ómò 'himself' refers back to Akpan in the subject position of the sentence while ídém òdùfò 'yourselves' refers back to Áfò yè Emèm.

Use of Possessive Pronoun

This is a pronoun which occurs in a genitival relationship with the noun that it modifies. It can also occur in the same clause as the linguistic unit from which it selects its reference. The difference between this and the reflexive pronoun is that a possessive pronoun can also select its antecedent outside its minimal clause, e.g.:

5. Akpan ámá wòt étè ómò.
 (Akpan kill-FT father 3sPs)
 'Akpan killed his father'.
6. Imè yè Nsé ébò étè ómmò áyà dì.
 (Imè conj. Nsé talk-FT comp father 3pPs Fut pr-come)
 'Imè yè Nsé said that their father will come.'

In (5), the 3rd person singular possessive pronouns ómò selects Akpan as its antecedent, while in (6), the 3rd person plural possessive pronoun ómmò selects the compound subject Imè yè Nsé, which is outside the minimal clause containing the possessive pronoun as its antecedent.

Use of Demonstrative

A demonstrative can also be used anaphorically in sentences to refer back to some other entity already mentioned in the sentence or in the discourse, In Ibibio, demonstratives include: ádó 'this' and àkó 'that'.

Examples

7. Ébót mmì ádó ádàm.
 (goat 1sPs be pr.Dm)
 'My goat is this one'.
8. Úfòk ómò ádó mkò.
 (house 3sPs be dt.Dem)
 'His house is that one'.

In (7), the demonstrative ádàm refers back to Ébót mmì in subject position; while in (8) mkò refers back to Úfòk ómò 'his house', also in subject position.

Demonstratives in Ibibio mark proximity and distance while simultaneously functioning anaphorically.

9. Úkák-émì ádó ámì.
 (money-this be this)

"This is the money."

10. Ébót-ákó ádo ákò.
(goat-that be that)
"That is the goat."

The demonstrative *ádo-ámi* 'this one' and *ádo ákò* 'that one' in (9) and (10) refer back to money and goat in the minimal clause.

Discussion on Anaphora Narrative Contexts

11. Mmè kpé-nwèd, Okon ónó mmó úsák ókók.
"As for the teachers, Okon gave them some money."
12. Ntè áfòṅ-ndé, Ákàn ónó mmó ébót.
"As for these children, Akan gave them a goat."

Question Contexts

13. Mmè kpé-nwèd, Ényè ónó mmó úsák ókók?
"The teachers, did he give them some money?"
14. Ntè ufòk-émì, Ényè ánié ényè?
"This house, does he own it?"

Conversational Context

15. Ntè ntóṅ-ndé, Ényàṅ ádo mmó?
"These stories, are they long?"

Frequency and Distribution

Resumptive pronouns occur frequently in narratives to maintain cohesion across clauses. Examples 1 and 2 show narrative contexts where resumptive pronoun *mmó* 'them' refers to 'teachers' and 'children' in the cleftivised positions in the sentences. In the question contexts, examples 3 and 4 show resumptive pronouns *mmó* and *ényè* which resume 'teachers' and 'house' in the cleftivised positions are used as an anaphoric reference to emphasize the elements that received the effects of the verb. In conversation, resumptives appear less consistently, often replaced by ellipsis, but still crucial in topic continuity.

Comparison to Lower Cross Languages

Efik uses similar resumptive pronouns in topicalization, though Ibibio shows greater flexibility in predicate positions.

Reflexive Device

Ibibio does not possess a single morphological reflexive pronoun. Instead, reflexivity is expressed using the construction *ídém* + personal pronoun. Personal pronouns include: *ámí* 'I', *nyín* 'we', *áfò* 'you', *mbúfó* 'you'(pl), *ényé* (he/she/it) and *ómò* (they/them).

Reflexive pronouns include:

- ídém* *mmì* 'myself'
ídém *ómò* 'himself'
ídém *ómmò* 'themselves'
ídém *mbúfó* 'yourselves'
ídémfó 'yourself'

Examples

- 16a. Akpan áma wòt *ídém* *ómò*.
"Akpan killed himself."
16b. Áfò yè Emèm éma wòt *ídém* *ndùfò*.
"You and Emem killed yourselves."

In both cases, the reflexive expression refers back to the subject within the same clause,

showing that reflexive anaphora in Ibibio is clause-bound.

Reflexivity in Ibibio is expressed as *ídém* + personal pronoun. Reflexives appear in affirmative, negative, and interrogative contexts, always clause-bound.

Affirmative

17. Akpan *ámá wòt ídém ómò*. "Akpan killed himself."

Negative

18. Akpan *à-má wòt ídém ómò*. "Akpan did not kill himself."

Interrogative

19. Akpan *ámá wòt ídém ómò?* "Did Akpan kill himself?"

Plural Reflexives

20. *Áfò yè Emem é má wòt ídém òdùfò*. "You and Emem killed yourselves."

Frequency and Distribution

Reflexives are clause-bound, rarely appear in narrative chains, mostly confined to the subject-predicate relationship.

Unlike resumptives, they are less frequent in extended discourse.

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns in Ibibio also function anaphorically. Unlike reflexives, possessive pronouns may select their antecedents either within the same clause or outside the minimal clause.

Examples

21a. Akpan *ámá wòt ètè ómò*.

"Akpan killed his father."

21b. Imè yè Nsé *ébò ètè ómmò áyà dì*.

"Imè and Nsé said that their father will come."

In (21b), the possessive pronoun *ómmò* refers to a compound antecedent outside the embedded clause, showing long-distance anaphora.

Possessive pronouns in Ibibio frequently introduce ambiguity, which is resolved through discourse context.

22. *Èkpè ádó ndók ómò*.

(Ekpe be friend 3SG.POSS)

"Ekpe is his friend."

The possessive *ómò* may refer to Ekpe himself or to another male mentioned earlier.

23. *Áfòṅ ébò áfà ómmò áyà dí*.

(children say mother 3PL.POSS FUT come)

"The children said their mother will come."

The antecedent (*Áfòṅ* 'children') is outside the embedded clause.

24. *Úkàndé òkpòṅ ádó ètè ómò*.

(every man be father 3SG.POSS)

"Every man has his (own) father."

This shows bound-variable anaphora, a more advanced anaphoric phenomenon.

Possessive pronouns can select antecedents inside or outside the minimal clause, creating ambiguity resolved through context or discourse prominence.

Simple Clause

25. *Èkpè ádó ndók ómò*.

"Ekpe is his friend."

Ambiguity: *ómò* could refer to Ekpe or a previously mentioned male.

Embedded Clause

26. Ìmé yè Nsé ébò étè ómmò áyà dì.
"Imè and Nsé said that their father will come."

The antecedent lies outside the embedded clause.

Disambiguation by Context

27. Áfòṅ ébò áfà ómmò áyà dí.
"The children said their mother will come."

Context clarifies that ómmò refers to the children, not another female.

Demonstratives as Anaphors

Demonstratives in Ibibio can also function anaphorically by referring back to previously mentioned entities.

28. Ébót mmì ádó ádàm.
"My goat is this one."
29. Úfòk ómò ádó mkò.
"His house is that one."

Here, ádàm and mkò point back to the subject noun phrases, reinforcing discourse cohesion.

Discussion on Ibibio Deixis

Following Lyons (1977:637) deixis in Ibibio is referred to as the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee. It is used to subsume those features of language which refer directly to the personal, temporal or locational characteristics of the situation within which an utterance takes place, whose meaning is thus relative to that situation".

Participants in a speech event have different ways of referring to different locations relative to the positions of the speaker and the addressee. They also have different ways of encoding the relative temporal differences with respect to the moment of speaking. Any linguistic "item which serves to express a distinction in terms of orientation within the immediate context of an utterance" is known as a deictic category or a shifter (Trask 1993:75). The term 'deictics' is based upon the "idea of identification, or drawing attention to, by pointing" (Lyons 1977:637). Shifters or deictics "make crucial reference to such factors as time or place of speaking or the identity of or location of the speaker, the addressee or other entities" (Trask 1993:75). Their meanings become clearer "only if the hearer reconstructs the position or point of view of the speaker" (Traugott and Pratt 1980:275).

Personal pronouns, vocatives, demonstrative adjectives, locative/temporal nominals are the typical instances of shifters or deictics in Ibibio. We shall discuss deixis in Ibibio under the following: person deixis, spatial deixis and temporal deixis.

Person Deixis

An ideal talk-exchange involves the speaker and the addressee each performing their specific roles. Participant-roles in a speech event are encoded in personal pronouns. In Ibibio, there are three categories of persons that can be identified: the 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person. From the data at our disposal, only the 1st person and 2nd person can perform deictic functions in Ibibio. The 1st person is the grammaticalization of the speaker's reference to himself. The speaker is always egocentric; he "casts himself in the role ego and relates everything to his viewpoint" (Lyons 1977:638). The 2nd person is the encoding of the speaker's reference to one or more addressees. The 3rd person, on the other hand, is the encoding of the speaker's reference to the person(s) or entity or entities which is/are neither the speaker nor the addressee. Of all the three persons identified in Ibibio, it is only the 3rd person that has little or nothing to do with deictic systems. The 3rd person does not have any role in a talk-exchange.

Perhaps we should mention at this point that there may be a situation where the 2nd person may not perform a deictic function, as we can see in the example below:

30. Àmì ìmmé ma éduwèm ómmó; áfò ú-kpù kán úkíd ómmó, áfò údú díónj-ké ìní ómmó édu
(1PS.PRS-like behavior 3PL-POSS; 2s if-can see 3pPs, 2sCL-Fut-neg know when 3sCL-Aux 3pl
nò fién ùsák íbón.
PR-give 2s some kola.

'I like their behavior, if you visit them, you will not know when they will offer you some kola'.

The reference of the 2nd person in the example above is not specific; it is more or less impersonal. Hence, it cannot perform a deictic function in this circumstance. This is quite similar as to English usage.

It is also possible in Ibibio to use vocatives to indicate participant-roles in a speech event. Vocatives have been defined by Levinson (1983:71) as "noun phrases that refer to the addressee, but not syntactically or semantically incorporated as the arguments of a predicate; they are rather set apart prosodically from the body of a sentence that may accompany them". According to Zwicky (1974:790), there are two types of vocatives: "addresses" and "calls" or "summonses". Whereas addresses involve symbolic usage, calls or summonses are gestural. Ndimiele (1995b:49) argues that vocatives which perform gestural functions are more likely to serve as shifters than those that perform symbolic functions.

Spatial Deixis

In a normal conversational exchange, the speaker lives in a reversed world to the addressee. The speaker's location is adopted conventionally as the locus point. The most common devices for marking spatial location in Ibibio are demonstratives (ámì 'this' and ákò 'that') and locative nominals (mí 'here' and kó 'there'). In Ibibio, motion verbs express deictic meanings with respect to locative nominals preceding the motion verbs. Such verbs are ká kó 'go there', VS dí mí 'come here'. The first in the sequence of the foregoing pair expresses the sense of a motion away from the speaker, while the second expresses the sense of a motion towards the speaker.

Temporal Deixis

In every culture, there are calendars for categorizing events, and these events are anchored with respect to the "coding time", i.e., the moment of speaking. In other words, all temporal shifters are anchored in the perspective of the speaker, and therefore can only be understood from his own orientation.

The linguistic item used to mark the coding time in Ibibio is ídáhádò 'now'. Other temporal deictic categories in Ibibio are interpreted with respect to the coding time. Temporal deictic categories such as úbàk-r̀kp̀òj 'yesterday', ísúà-ákó 'last year', údúà- ákó 'last week' make reference to periods prior to the coding time, while others such as r̀kp̀òj 'tomorrow', ísúà-nwén 'next year', údúà-nwén 'next week' refer to periods after the coding time.

There are three phases of time, past, present and future correspond to the temporal orientation of time in Ibibio.

Deixis in Ibibio is expressed mainly through person, spatial, and temporal systems.

Analysis on Ibibio Deixis

Person Deixis

Person deixis encodes participant roles in a speech event. Ibibio distinguishes three persons: first, second, and third.

First person indexes the speaker.

31. Àmì ké f̀m ídáhádò.
(1SG PROG eat now)
"I am eating now."

The reference of àmì changes with each speaker.

Second person indexes the addressee.

32. Áfò dí mí!
(2SG come here)
"Come here!"

Strongly deictic and anchored to the speaker's location.

Impersonal Second Person

33. Áfò ké kpà àmì ké f̀m.
(2SG PROG work 1SG PROG eat)
"If you work, you eat."

Generic áfò does not refer to a specific addressee.

Third person refers to non-participants.

34. Ényè dí mí. "He is coming to me."

Only the first and second persons regularly perform deictic functions. The third person lacks a direct role in the speech exchange and is therefore weakly deictic.

In some contexts, the second person may be used impersonally:

35. áfò ú-kpù kán úkìd ómmó ...
"... if you visit them ..."

It is interesting to note that áfò 'you' does not refer to a specific addressee, and thus loses its deictic force.

36a. Áfò ké kpà àmì ké fím. "If you work, you eat."

36b. Áfò à-yà fím úbàk-r̀mkp̀ǹj ké éb̀t̀. "When one eats yesterday, one is satisfied."

Vocatives as Deictic Devices

Vocatives identify the addressee directly. Following Levinson (1983) and Zwicky (1974), Ibibio vocatives may function as calls or addresses. Gestural vocatives are more strongly deictic because they rely on the immediate speech situation.

37. Okón, dí mí!
(Okon come here)
"Okon, come here!"

A call vocative, strongly deictic.

38. Été m̀, àm̀ ké b̀k̀.
(father my 1SG PROG speak)
"My father, I am speaking."

→ An address vocative, less gestural but still participant-oriented.

Vocatives mark direct address and sometimes social rank:

Polite/Formal

39. Été m̀, àm̀ ké b̀k̀. "My father, I am speaking."

Casual/Familiar

40. Okón, dí mí! "Okon, come here!"

Gestural vocatives are strongly deictic, tied to speaker-addressee interaction.

Formal vocatives emphasize social hierarchy, politeness, or respect.

Spatial Deixis

Spatial deixis in Ibibio is anchored on the speaker's location. Demonstratives such as ám̀ 'this' and ák̀ 'that', as well as locative nominals mí 'here' and k̀ 'there', encode spatial orientation.

Motion verbs further reinforce deictic direction:

ká k̀ 'go there' (away from speaker)

dí mí 'come here' (towards speaker)

Àm̀ ké d̀ mí. (1SG PROG stay here)

"I am staying here."

Áfò ká k̀ k̀ è uf̀k̀.

(2SG go there to house)

"You should go to the house over there."

Ényè dí mí k̀ è àm̀.

(3SG come here to 1SG)

"He is coming to me."

→ Direction of motion is interpreted relative to the speaker

Temporal Deixis

Temporal deixis is anchored to the moment of speaking, referred to as coding time. The primary marker is ídáhád̀ 'now'.

Temporal expressions include

Past-oriented: *úbàk-ńkpòṅ* 'yesterday'

Present-oriented: *ídáhádò* 'now'

Future-oriented: *ńkpòṅ* 'tomorrow'

Ibibio recognizes three temporal phases: past, present, and future, all interpreted from the speaker's perspective.

41. *Àmì má ké fím ídáhádò.*
(1SG NEG PROG eat now)
"I am not eating now."

42. *Àmì fím úbàk-ńkpòṅ.*
(1SG eat yesterday)
"I ate yesterday."

43. *Àmì à-yà fím ńkpòṅ.*
(1SG FUT eat tomorrow)
"I will eat tomorrow."

44. *ákó à-yà kpùk.*
(year-last FUT hard)
"Last year was difficult."

V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study has provided a detailed analysis of anaphora and deixis in Ibibio, demonstrating that the language employs a range of grammatical and discourse strategies to encode reference. The findings confirm that anaphora in Ibibio is realized through resumptive pronouns, reflexive constructions, possessive pronouns, and demonstratives, each of which contributes to discourse cohesion and interpretive clarity. The use of resumptive pronouns in topicalized structures, in particular, underscores the importance of information structure in Ibibio discourse.

The study also establishes that deixis in Ibibio is fundamentally speaker-oriented. Person deixis is anchored in the roles of the speaker and addressee, with first and second person pronouns serving as the primary deictic categories. Spatial deixis relies on demonstratives and locative nominals that encode proximity and distance relative to the speaker's location, while temporal deixis is anchored to the moment of speaking, referred to as coding time. The analysis further shows that deictic expressions in Ibibio cannot be fully interpreted without reference to the extralinguistic context in which an utterance occurs.

In addition, the study reveals that certain grammatical forms, particularly the second person pronoun, may function non-deictically in generic or impersonal contexts. This finding aligns Ibibio with many other languages of the world and reinforces the view that deixis is a pragmatic phenomenon rather than a purely grammatical one. Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of reference in Ibibio and provides empirical support for cross-linguistic theories of anaphora and deixis.

It is interesting to note that the resumptive pronoun in Ibibio appears in a predicate position, showing flexibility in Ibibio anaphora as shown in (3-5).

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that Ibibio possesses a rich system of anaphoric and deictic expressions that contribute significantly to discourse coherence and pragmatic interpretation. Anaphora is realized through resumptive pronouns, reflexive constructions, possessive pronouns, and demonstratives, while deixis is encoded through person, spatial, and temporal categories.

The analysis reveals that context plays a decisive role in determining reference, especially in person deixis, where pronouns may lose their deictic force in impersonal usage. The study also highlights the speaker-centered nature of deixis in Ibibio.

Overall, this research contributes to the descriptive linguistics of Ibibio and underscores the importance of studying indigenous African languages within broader theoretical frameworks.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

Further Research

Future studies should investigate cataphora and exophora in Ibibio, as this study focused mainly on anaphora and deixis. Such research would provide a more comprehensive account of reference in the language.

Comparative Studies

Comparative analyses between Ibibio and other Lower Cross or Niger-Congo languages are recommended in order to identify shared patterns and language-specific features of anaphora and deixis.

Corpus Development

There is a need for the development of a structured Ibibio corpus that includes spoken and written data. This would enable more quantitative and discourse-based analyses of referential phenomena.

Pedagogical Application

The findings of this study should be incorporated into the teaching of Ibibio grammar, particularly in teacher training institutions and language revitalization programs, to promote accurate understanding of reference and meaning.

Documentation and Preservation

Linguists and language planners should intensify efforts to document Ibibio, especially its pragmatic and discourse features, to ensure the preservation of the language for future generations.

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