

# ORON NOUN MORPHOLOGY

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This article, based on data obtained in 1953 from Mr. Okon Ukam of Eweme village, Calabar Province, Nigeria, supplements my previous delineation of Oron verb morphology (*AFRICA*, Vol. XXVI, 1956, pp. 250-63), where a brief phonemic sketch will be found.<sup>1</sup> Additional Oron sentence examples occur in my 'Oron Proverbs', *AFRICAN STUDIES*, Vol. 19, 1960, pp. 126-37.

Nouns consist of two, three or four syllables, the majority being either disyllabic or trisyllabic, with four-syllable nouns being rare and evidently either onomatopoeic or verbal nouns (i.e., derived from verb roots).

The pitch of nouns include low, mid (a level which includes both mid and mid-high), high, falling and rising tones, which are marked:

low tone	`
mid tone	unmarked
high tone	´
falling tone	˘
rising tone	ˆ

An analysis of 664 disyllabic nouns yields the following inherent tone patterns (the inherent tone of a noun being operationally defined as the tone of the noun when spoken alone), in which it is observable that 596 nouns, constituting approximately 90% of the sample, comprise the tone patterns high-high, high-low, low-low, and low-high.<sup>2</sup>

TO NE	NUMBER OF EXAMPLES	PERCENTAGE
1. high-high	200	30.12
2. high-low	172	25.90
3. high-fall	8	1.20
4. high-mid	9	1.35
5. high-rise	2	0.30
6. low-low	100	15.06
7. low-high	124	18.67
8. low-fall	37	5.56
9. low-rise	6	0.90
10. rise-low	1	0.15
11. fall-low	2	0.30
12. low-mid	3	0.45
	664	99.96

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Mr. Demo Eyo of Etobodom, Nigeria for his help in communicating with Mr. Ukam, who at that time did not speak English. Mr. Eyo, whose native language was Uyo Ibibio, had traded with the Oron in his youth and hence was able to converse with the informant. ['The Oron, who call themselves ɔɔ, number approximately 50,000 individuals, and inhabit 90 villages in Calabar Province, Nigeria. Lexicon and morphology establish the affiliation Oron with the Ibibio-Efik dialect cluster . . . ' From the first paragraph of the article cited in *Africa.—The Editors.*]

<sup>2</sup>The statistically-rare nouns were obtained at the conclusion of my research when I made a vocabulary comparison of Oron with Ibibio and Efik. I have not had the opportunity to check their tone variation in adjectival and genitive relationships.

Nouns retain their inherent tone patterns when used as subjects, direct or indirect objects, and as objects of prepositions, but changes in noun tone patterns occur with certain adjectives, when occurring after adjectives or a noun to indicate 'genitive relationship', and when occurring as an object or as an adverbial noun in interrogative sentences.

Four adjectives, *étí* 'good', *úyô* 'little', *ákân* 'old' and *ùtíbé* 'marvellous', change the inherent noun tone pattern in a special way: (a) in the first syllable high tones become low, while low tones remain low, except for the initial syllable of the inherent tone category low-high which becomes high; and (b) in the second syllable, high tones become low if preceded by a high tone, or mid if preceded by a low tone, while low and rising tones remain low or rising respectively.

Examples:

- |                              |  |                                 |  |
|------------------------------|--|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. inherent high tones:      | <i>ábá</i> 'dog', <i>ábán̄</i> 'pot', <i>ílán̄</i> 'louse' |                                 |  |
|                              | <i>étí àbà</i> 'good dog'                                  | <i>úyô àbà</i> 'little dog'     |  |
|                              | <i>étí àbàn̄</i> 'good pot'                                | <i>úyô àbàn̄</i> 'little pot'   |  |
|                              | <i>étí ilàn̄</i> 'good louse'                              | <i>úyô ilàn̄</i> 'little louse' |  |
| 2. inherent tones high-low:  | <i>álù</i> 'antelope', <i>ánàn̄</i> 'cow'                  |                                 |  |
|                              | <i>étí àlù</i> 'good antelope'                             | <i>úyô ànàn̄</i> 'little cow'   |  |
|                              | <i>ùtíbé àlù</i> 'marvellous antelope'                     | <i>ákân ànàn̄</i> 'old cow'     |  |
| 3. inherent tones low-high:  | <i>èkót</i> 'occiput', <i>àtá</i> 'wager'                  |                                 |  |
|                              | <i>úyô ékót</i> 'small occiput'                            | <i>úyô átá</i> 'small wager'    |  |
|                              | <i>ùtíbé ékót</i> 'marvellous occiput'                     | <i>ákân átá</i> 'old wager'     |  |
| 4. inherent tones low-low:   | <i>ṁfàk</i> 'knot', <i>ìnyàn̄</i> 'river'                  |                                 |  |
|                              | <i>úyô ìnyàn̄</i> 'small river'                            | <i>úyô ṁfàk</i> 'small knot'    |  |
|                              | <i>ùtíbé ìnyàn̄</i> 'marvellous river'                     | <i>ákân ṁfàk</i> 'old knot'     |  |
| 5. inherent tones high-rise: | <i>ṁfũ</i> 'shade'   |                                 |  |
|                              | <i>étí ṁfũ</i> 'good shade'                                |                                 |  |
|                              | <i>úyô ṁfũ</i> 'small shade'                               |                                 |  |

All other adjectives cause the following changes in the tones of nouns:

	INHERENT TONES	TONES WHEN FOLLOWING ALL OTHER ADJECTIVES
(1)	high-high	become falling-low
(2)	high-low	„ high-low
(3)	high-rise	„ fall-rise
(4)	low-low	„ fall-low
(5)	low-high	„ high-mid
1.	Noun tones high-high:	<i>òkpónó àbà</i> 'big dog' <i>ùdíòk àbà</i> 'bad dog'
2.	Noun tones high-low:	<i>òkpónó ánàn̄</i> 'big cow' <i>ùdíòk ánàn̄</i> 'bad cow'
3.	Noun tones high-rise:	<i>òkpónó ṁfũ</i> 'big shade' <i>ùdíòk ṁfũ</i> 'bad shade'
4.	Noun tones low-low:	<i>òkpónó ṁfàk</i> 'big knot' <i>ùdíòk ìnyàn̄</i> 'bad river'
5.	Noun tones low-high:	<i>òkpónó ékót</i> 'big occiput' <i>ùdíòk ékót</i> 'bad occiput'

Analysis of 356 trisyllabic nouns shows that 275, or over 77%, have tone patterns high-high-high, high-high-low, high-low-low, high-low-mid, low-low-low, low-low-high, or low-high-high.<sup>2</sup>

1.	2.	3.
1.	2.	3.
1.	2.	3.
1. high-high-high	77	21.63
2. high-high-low	18	5.05
3. high-low-low	32	8.98

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TONE	NUMBER OF EXAMPLES	PERCENTAGE
4. high-low-mid	11	3.08
5. high-mid-low	1	0.28
6. high-fall-low	2	0.56
7. high-low-fall	6	1.68
8. low-low-low	63	17.69
9. low-low-high	43	12.07
10. low-high-high	31	8.15
11. low-high-low	40	11.23
12. low-fall-low	7	1.96
13. low-low-fall	9	2.52
14. low-high-mid	12	3.38
15. low-low-rise	1	0.28
16. low-high-fall	1	0.28
17. fall-rise-low	1	0.28
18. fall-high-low	1	0.28
356		99.38

All adjectives effect trisyllabic nouns in the same manner except that the pattern high-low-mid varies, depending on which type of adjective modifies it, becoming either low-low-mid or fall-low-mid. The respective tone changes are:

INHERENT TONE	MODIFIED TONE
1. high-high-high	high-low-low
2. high-low-mid	low-low-mid or fall-low-mid
3. low-low-high	fall-low-mid
4. low-high-high	high-mid-mid
5. high-high-low	} fall-low-low
high-low-low	
low-low-low	

Examples:

1. high-high-high: *ékpésé* 'Calabar bean'.  
*úyô ékpèsè* 'small Calabar bean', *òkpónó ékpèsè* 'big Calabar bean'.
2. high-low-mid: *mbùbru* 'joke'.  
*úyô mbùbru* 'small joke', *òkpónó mbùbru* 'big joke'.
3. low-low-high: *âtidián* 'cricket'.  
*úyô âtidian* 'small cricket', *òkpónó âtidian* 'big cricket'.
4. low-high-high: *ídómó* 'temptation'.  
*úyô ídomo* 'small temptation', *òkpónó ídomo* 'big temptation'
5. high-high-low: *ákádàn* 'razor'.  
*úyô âkàdàn* 'small razor', *òkpónó âkàdàn* 'big razor'.
6. high-low-low: *ákpàrà* 'rainbow'.  
*úyô âkpàrà* 'small rainbow', *òkpónó âkpàrà* 'big rainbow'.
7. low-low-low: *àmùmà* 'thunder'.  
*úyô âmùmà* 'little thunder', *òkpónó âmùmà* 'big thunder'.

Although most Oron nouns and adjectives have the same form in the singular and

plural, six nouns and five adjectives possess plural forms which differ slightly from the singular forms. The six nouns are:

MEANING	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1. slave	ófɔ̃n	ífɔ̃n
2. smell	úlù	ńlù
3. girl	ùtâŋ	h̄tâŋ
4. child	óyó	éyó
5. young man	úláp	ńláp
6. brother	óyêkè	ńyêkè

The five adjectives are:

MEANING	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1. white	èfíe	ífíe
2. bad	ìdíɔk	h̄díɔk
3. big	ókɔŋ	ékɔŋ
4. small (applied to children)	tò	tìhìtèk
5. some	ùsúk	h̄dùsúk

Interrogative tone changes.

In questions, the tone of the noun or pronoun may change at the conclusion of the utterance; while there is not enough data to define the changes for all categories of nouns, yet if the tone would ordinarily be high, the tone becomes slightly higher than the normal high, while low tones become either high or rising.

Vocative tone.

A name may be shouted with a falling tone on the last syllable in order to call the individual. Thus, the name Úkam if shouted Úkâm is understood to mean either 'Ukam come here!' or 'Ukam where are you?'.

Noun Agent.

The singular noun agent is constructed from the third person aorist singular. The tone of the pronominal prefix is low; the tone of the verb root is inherent. The noun following the noun agent aorist form is in genitive relationship.

The plural noun agent consists of the prefix ìmà- affixed to the verb root and followed by a noun in genitive relationship.

Examples:

NOUN AGENT		VERB FORM	
1. àbán ilè	'decorator of body'	ában ílé	'he decorates body'
2. àbàt ókuk	'counter of money'	ábàt òkúk	'he counts money'
3. àlàhá ísàŋ	'departer for walk'	àlàha ísàŋ	'he departs for walk'
4. àkǎ útò	'goer to work'	ákǎ útó	'he goes to work'
5. ìmàbán ilè	'decorators of body'		
6. ìmàbàt ókuk	'counters of money'		

Pronouns.

The independent subject, object and possessive pronouns are:

PERSON	SUBJECT	OBJECT	POSSESSIVE	PLURAL
1	àmì	mí	mì	h̄yìn
2	áfù	fí	fù	èfù
3	ònyí	ònyí	ísìkì	émù

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In reported speech, the pronouns whether subject, object or possessive, are: èmù in the second person singular and plural, third person singular, and mèmù in the third person plural.

The possessive pronouns used to express personal possession when no noun is modified are:

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	âmi	ênyìn
2	âfù	êfù
3	îsiki	êmù

Reflexive pronouns are formed by either adding the morph ùnòkì 'self one' after each singular subject pronoun, or prefixing the morph ílé 'body' to plural subject pronouns.

PERSON	SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	àmì ùnòkì	ílênyìn
2	âfù ùnòkì	ílêfù
3	ònyí ùnòkì	ílemù

Finally, although not essentially germane to the present analysis, Oron numerical adjectives are:

1 kì	11 lùoki	40 àbà
2 ìbà	12 lùkìbà	60 ètè
3 ìté	13 lùkítá	80 àniàṅ
4 ìniàṅ	14 lùkìniàṅ	100 ìkìé
5 ìdīṅ	15 èfù	
6 ìdīṅòkì	16 èfúmâkì	
7 ìdâṅàbà	17 èfúmìbà	
8 ìdâṅàtá	18 èfúmíté	
9 ìdâṅàniàṅ	19 èfúmìniàṅ	
10 lùkù	20 édíp	