

TOWARDS A CLASSIFICATION OF IGBO VERBS

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Abstract

Verbs and nouns belong to the most open classes in human language, but verbs more than nouns control or govern practically all relationships in human language, from phonology to pragmatics. Cognitive and functional grammarians argue, more convincing to me than TG, that it is the verb that selects nouns and other elements in all primary and secondary categories in human language. Yet, verbs are not as numerous as nouns. Similar to nouns, verbs can be classified, but in different ways in terms of their phonology, morphology, lexicology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. This paper is a contribution to providing an impulse for the much needed research into the classification of Igbo verbs. It provides a bird's eye view of Igbo verb classes.

1. Introduction

Igbo verb classes are gradually becoming a subject of great interest from various theoretical perspectives. In its typological features however, Igbo has, through the close-knit, almost idiomatic relationship between the verb and its complement, the potentials of being analysed through Fillmore's case grammar. Uwalaka (1981) actually carried out such an analysis; her very interesting study of the Igbo verb classes threw up a fairly detailed examination of the various classes of Igbo verbs. This is captured in the schematic representation in *Figure 1* below, followed by our schematic representation of the multiple and crosscutting classifications in *Figure 2*.

For Uwalaka's schematic representation in *Figure 1* the main sub-groups are directly under VERB, followed by further sub-groupings that spell out the specifics of each main group; the tree branches do not cross or intermingle. *Figure 2* on the other hand is their attempt to summarize the interlocking and crosscutting classificatory possibilities of Igbo verbs which exist at macro- and micro-levels. These two levels are also the basis on which the rest of the paper presents a bird's eye view of the classes of Igbo verbs.

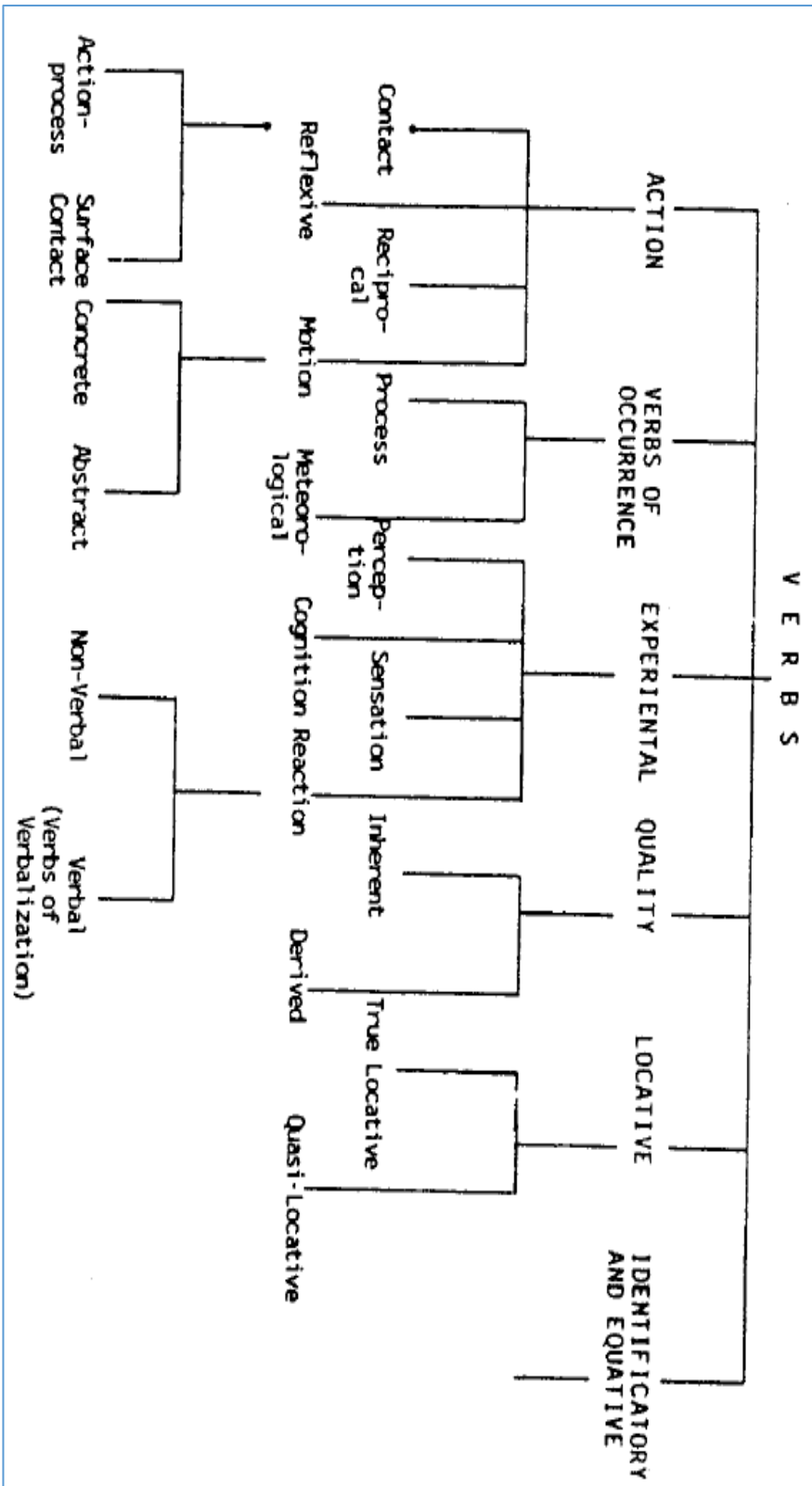


Fig. 1: Uwalaka's (1988, p. 56) Classes of Igbo Verbs

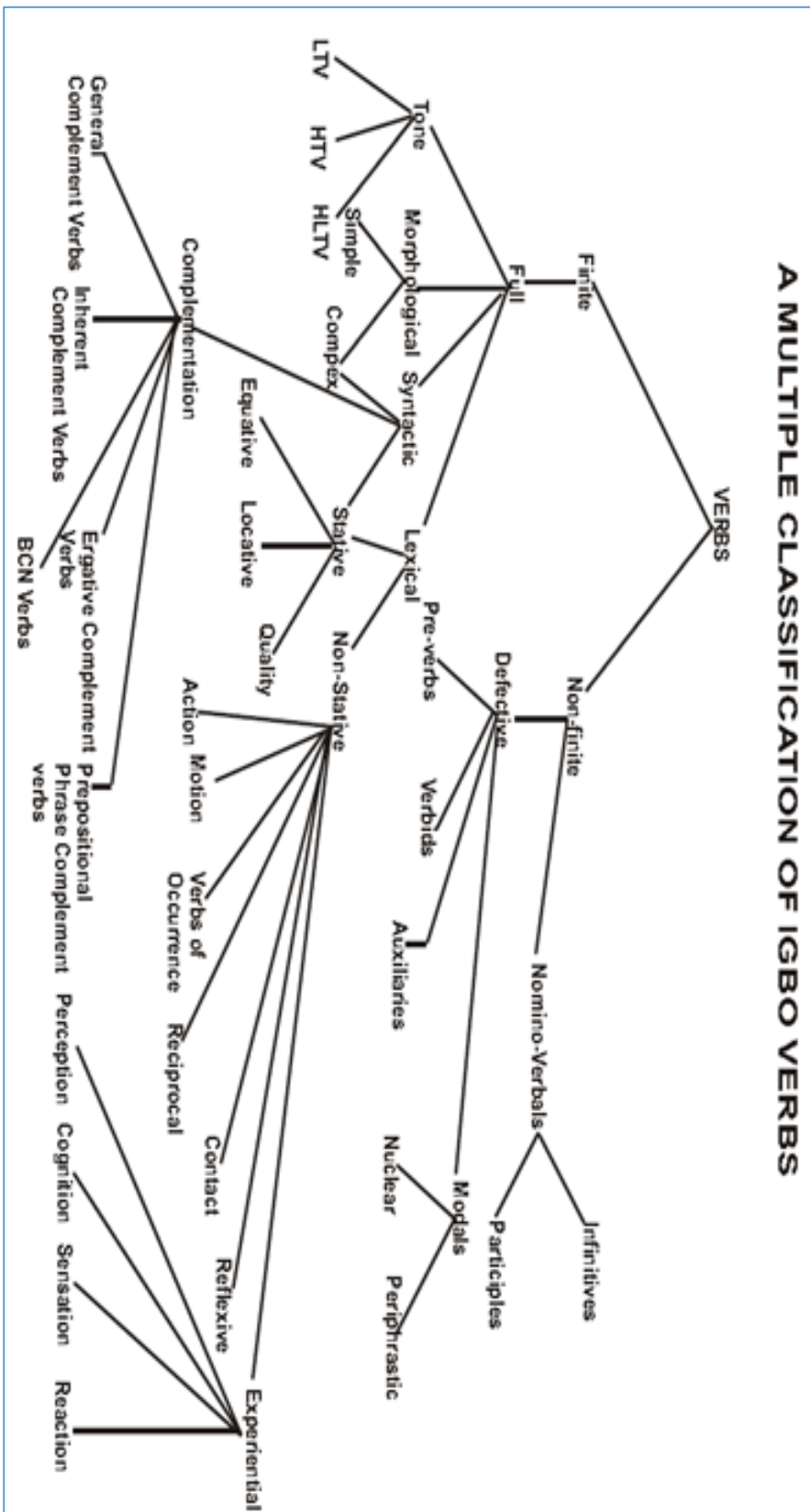


Fig. 2: A Multiple Classification of Igbo Verbs

2. The Macro Level Classification

At this level of classification, it appears that valency can be posited as the feature from which all other sub-classificatory features flow in the form of a +/- variable; hence, either “+valency” or “-valency”.

The categorization as “+valency” implies the ability or otherwise to be encoded for different but combinatory definitive categories. The “+valency” verbs are finite i.e., they can be fully inflected. The “+valency” verbs are independent verbs that can serve as predicates. They can be inflected for the grammatical categories marked on the Igbo verbal system: tense, mood, aspect, negation, and ergativity. They are also regular verbs i.e., they have the full derivational and conjugational paradigms usual with Igbo verbs.

The “-valency” verbs are non=finite i.e dependent, and defective i.e irregular in verb derivation and extensional morphology. They are realized as nomino-verbals, i.e infinitives and participles, (and gerunds in other languages), modals and auxiliaries. All of these dependent verbs give syntactic and further semantic information about the full or main verbs following them. The irregular and defective verbs serve as markers of tense, aspect, negation and mood with or without inflectional affixes and tonal morphemes, but always with nomino-verbals (or periphrastic forms for modals) which can be the information inherent in the main verb.

3. The Micro Level Classification

This level refers to the specific “+ valency” verbs and their features.

3.1 The Morpho-tonological Classification

As regular and full verbs, the “+ valency” verbs can be classified in terms of their inherent tones, morphological and syntactic structures and inherent lexical implications with regard to tone. In a few lects in the Central Igbo area, notable Mbaise, a third class of monosyllabic verbs has been identified as having the tonal behavior of both HTV and LTVs. These have been called HLTVs (Nwachukwu, 1976; 1983)

In terms of their morphological structure, “+valency” verbs have been divided into simple and complex. Simple verbs are monosyllabic, while complex verbs are disyllabic and

beyond. In terms of their morphological makeup, complex verbs can be made up of the following structures:

(1) *Complex Verbs*:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (a) Verb + extensional Suffixes | (d) Palindronic form (Onukawa, 1996) |
| (b) Verb + verb | (e) Compound form |
| (c) Bound disyllabic form | |

But in terms of their tonal behaviour in derivational morphology and syntax, all of (i) – (v) behave are alike. This is why following Williamson (1971) we have preferred the cover term ‘complex’ to ‘compound’ which is just one of five types of disyllabic verbs sub-classified into syntactic classes. In this regard, the feature ‘complementation’ always seemed to capture the facts of Igbo rather than transitivity. Compared with Latin, classical and English grammar, I have always believed that even if transitivity exists in Igbo it, does so only for complements that can be said to be objects in the classical or orthodox sense of the word in linguistic discourse. Otherwise, all Igbo “+valency” verbs obligatorily co-exist with the complements with which they always occur in the underlying structure and obligatorily must be cited in the Igbo lexicon or dictionary. (See Emenanjo, 1975, 2005, 2012; Uchechukwu, 2012; Oweleke, 2007; Uwalaka, 1988).

3.2 The Complementation-Based Classification

As I have consistently argued but with occasional emphasis in terms of complementation, Igbo verbs can be sub-classified into:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| ● General complement verbs | ● Internal complement verbs |
| ● inherent complement verbs | ● Prepositional phrase complement verbs |

3.3 Stative versus Non-Stative Classification

In terms of their lexical content and syntactic behavior, these “+valency” verbs can be sub classified into Statives and Non-statives (Emenanjo, 1978). The stative verbs can be further sub- classified into the following sub-classes:

(a) Equative or Equation	(b) Locative	(c) Quality
<i>bụ</i> ‘be’ [+ animate]	<i>dị na</i> ‘be at’ [+/- animate]	<i>-pe mpe</i> ‘have smallness’
<i>dị</i> ‘be’ [- animate]		<i>-ma mma</i> ‘have beauty’
		<i>-bu ibu</i> ‘have fastness/bigness’

Table 1. *Classes of Stative Verbs*

The Non-stative verbs are much more in number than the Statives. They express a very wide range of semantic notions. *Figure 2* tries to capture action, motion, experiential e.t.c. verbs. Action verbs can sometimes be said to be dynamic or finitive as they express actions that are continuous, progressive or have duration. Indeed, there are action verbs which express states in which there is no obvious action as in (3c) below. Action verbs can however be classified into the following:

(a) Physical Action	(b) Mental Action	(c) Perceptual Action
-gba ọsọ 'run a race'	-che echiche 'think a thought'	-hụ ihe 'see something'
-lụ ọgụ 'fight a fight'	-nabata ọbịa 'welcome a visitor'	-ghọta ihe 'understand something'
-je ije 'go on a journey'	-hụ n'anya 'love; admire'	

Table 2. Classes of Action Verbs

3.4 Classification by Complementation

In terms of complementation, all action verbs have their complements; but in terms of transitivity, some of them can be used intransitively as in group (c) in *Table 2* above. Indeed patently intransitive verbs In English still require complements in Igbo as in:

English	Igbo
laugh	-mụ amụ -chị ọchị
sit down	-nọ ọnọdụ -nọ ọdụ -nọ ala
work hard	-rụsi ọrụ ike

Table 3. English Intransitive Verbs and Their Igbo Equivalents

3.5 Classification by Cluster

One other interesting feature in the classification of Igbo verbs is in terms 'verb cluster' which is based on selectional restriction. In this regard the following authors have recognised various sub-categories of this group

- Verbs of planting and harvesting (Ezenwafor, 2012)
- Psychological verbs (Okeke, 2012; Nweze, 2011)
- Ingestive verbs (Ikegwuonu, 2012)

- Psych verbs (Mmadike, 2012; Uchechukwu, P., 2012)
- Verbs of buying (Anoka, 1972)
- Verbs of some thirteen different clusters (Agu, 2013)
- Cooking terms (verbs) (Uzoigwe, 2011)
- Verbs of planting (Ugoji, n.d.)

All of the verb classes named in in the sections above point to already existing works, while the unnamed classes are yet to be explored.

4. Conclusion

This paper has given a bird's eye view over the possible multiple classifications of the Igbo verb. It is my hope that this sketchy overview would awaken interest in the identification and further characterization of the various classes of Igbo verbs.

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