

IGBO VERBS OF SPEAKING

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Abstract

There is yet no detailed study of the Igbo verbs of speaking. This has therefore created a lacuna in the study of this class of verbs in the language. The present study, though a preliminary one, is a detailed attempt at studying such verbs. The verbs used here come from the author's intuitive knowledge of the language and from the story book, *Ihe onye metere*, by C.E. Ofomata. The present study examines these verbs in terms of their grammatical features. It also attempts a description of the grammaticalization process by which the complementizer *sị* is derived from the verb *sị* 'say'. In the light of this, the study concludes that these verbs be further investigated to help shed more light on their characteristic features.

1. Introduction

Verbs of speaking are typified by those verbs which are used vocally in human communication. Speaking as an act involves the vocal production of verbal content by a human being. Verbs of speaking otherwise referred to as *verba dicendi*, serve as a means of expressing one's thought or reaction. Cross-linguistically, every language has a stock of such verbs. The number however varies from language to language.

Verbs of speaking cover the various acts of human communication, ranging from making statements or assertions, asking questions, issuing orders or command and making requests. With regard to their overall syntactic frame, these verbs involve at least a subject and two complements. According to Shemesh (2002, p. 212) "the subject noun phrase (NP1) realises the Addresser, the first complement (NP2) realises the message...." Semantically, the message, which the second complement realises, could be a direct quote (mimetic) or an indirect quote (diegetic) (cf Rhodes, 1986. P. 3).

The study of verbs of speaking has been carried out in a number of languages (Bonami & Godard, 2008; Chappell, 2008; Gil, 2007; Lehrer, 1988; Rhodes, 1986; Shemesh, 2002; Worman, 2006; Zwicky, 1971; among others). Apart from Uwalaka (1988) there seem to be no attempt at studying such verbs in Igbo. This has led to a lacuna in the study of

Igbo verbs. As a preliminary study therefore, the paper is a modest attempt in trying to fill this gap.

Uwalaka (1988) marks a milestone in the study of verbs of speaking in Igbo. She categorised verbs of speaking as a sub-group of experiential verbs. She claims that only an animate NP can function as the subject of such a verb (Uwalaka, 1988, p. 149). Within this group, the verbs are classified as verbs of reaction. Uwalaka adopts the term verbs of verbalization which she defines as “verbs which an Experiencer NP uses to express his thoughts or reactions to things around him ...” (Uwalaka, 1988, p. 172). She outlined the complement types categorised for by these verbs by means of some illustrative examples associated with the various Case roles.

This study is organised into four sections. Section 1 is the introduction. In section 2, we present the grammatical features of the verbs. Section 3 examines the unique feature of the verb *sị* ‘say’. Section 4 is the summary and conclusion.

The data used here are drawn from the author’s intuitive knowledge as well as from C.E. Ofomata’s story book, *Ihe onye metere*. The tone marking convention adopted here is that of Green and Igwe (1963) where low [ˊ] (L), and down-step [ˋ] (DS) tones are marked, while high tone (H) [ˈ] is not indicated.

2. Grammatical features of verbs of speaking

The list below exemplifies the morpholexical structure of the verbs.

1	(a)	(b)	(c)
	- <i>sị</i> ‘say’	- <i>kọwa</i> ‘explain’	- <i>ta ụtā</i> ‘blame’
	- <i>sà</i> ‘reply, answer’	- <i>kwutò</i> ‘defame’	- <i>gba àsịrị</i> ‘gossip’
	- <i>kwu</i> ‘speak’	- <i>kèle</i> ‘greet’	- <i>ti/ma iwū</i> ‘legislate’
	- <i>gọ</i> ‘deny, refute’	- <i>kwuwa</i> ‘explicate’	- <i>kpe irē</i> ‘plead earnestly’
	- <i>gwa</i> ‘tell’	- <i>kwujọ</i> ‘slander’	- <i>sị/tụ āsī</i> ‘lie’
	- <i>kpe</i> ‘report’	- <i>kwunwè</i> ‘repeat’	- <i>kparịta ụkà</i> ‘discuss, converse’
	- <i>jụ</i> ‘ask’	- <i>gbagha</i> ‘dispute, contest’	- <i>zì ozī</i> ‘send message’
	- <i>kù</i> ‘call’		- <i>rụ ụkà</i> ‘debate’
	- <i>kọ</i> ‘narrate, describe’		
	- <i>tà</i> ‘reveal, expose’		

The list above is merely a representative sample. The examples in 1(a) are simple monosyllabic root verbs, while the ones in 1(b) are disyllabic. Apart from the verb *kèle*

‘greet’, the rest are made up of two root verbs. In 1(c) the verbs are *Inherent Complement Verbs* (CV) made up of a root verb and a noun which functions as the inherent complement. Morphologically, the verbs in 1(a-c) do not exhibit any peculiar features which are different from other Igbo verbs.

Semantically, verbs of speaking cover the various domains of human communication through verbal expression. The domains range from statements or assertions, issuing orders or command, making requests, to asking questions. The section that follows is a descriptive analysis of the verbs

This section of the study focuses on the syntactic frame associated with verbs of speaking. In other words, it describes the syntactic structure by which such verbs are realised. For the purpose of analysis, we restrict our description to the verbs *sị* ‘say’, *kwu* ‘talk, speak’, *gwa* ‘tell’ and *jụ* ‘ask’.

Prototypically the verbs *sị*, *gwa*, and *jụ* are transitive, while *kwu* is intransitive. These verbs however can be associated with the following frames.

2(a) NP[subj] V [quotative] (intonational pause): [“direct speech”]

(b) NP[subj] V1 [speech act] V2 [quotative] [indirect speech]

The subject NP is followed by the verb, an object NP which may not be overt, and the complement.

3(a) Ude sị: “m gà-àbja èleta unù”
Ude say 1sg Fut-come visit 3pl

‘Ude said: “I will pay you a visit” ’

(b) Ude kwùrù sị: “m gà-àbja èleta unù”
Ude talk-Pst say 1sg Fut-come visit 3pl

‘Ude said: “I will pay you a visit” ’

(c) Ude gwàrà ànyị sị: “m gà-àbja èleta unù”
Ude tell-Pst 3pl Say 1sg Fut-come visit 3pl

‘Ude said to us: “I will pay you a visit” ’

(d)*Ude kwùrù: “m gà-àbja èleta unù”

Ude talk-Pst 1sg Fut-come visit 3pl

(e)*Ude gwàrà ànyị: “m gà-àbja èleta unù”

Ude tell-Pst 3pl 1sg Fut-come visit 3pl

Example (3a) is a case of direct quotation where the undisclosed speaker reports from the perspective of the Sayer. The verb *sị* ‘say’ is a quotative verb that introduces the complement clause in direct speech (Crystal, 2003, p. 384). The Addressee, the 2pl object pronoun, is within the complement clause. The Sayer in (3b) is followed by the sequence of verbs *kwu* and *sị*, and then the reported speech in the complement clause. In (3c) there is the Sayer (Ude) the verb *gwa* and the 1pl pronominal object NP *ànyị*, followed by the verb *sị* and the complement clause in direct speech. The examples in (3d-e) are unacceptable because on their own, they are unable to introduce direct speech in the complement clause. Note that (3b-c) are grammatical due to the presence of the quotative verb *sị* occurring after the verbs *kwu* and *gwa*, in contrast with (3d-e) where *sị* is absent.

According to Bonami and Godard (2008) the speech as seen in direct quotation such as (3a-c), is reported by the Speaker from the Sayer’s perspective. The quoted speech is preceded by a colon in writing or an intonation pause in speech context. The pronominals take their reference from the speech situation. Thus, the 1sg subject pronoun *m* in the complement refers to the Sayer (Ude), while the 2pl object pronoun *unù* refers to the Addressee (cf *ànyị* in (3c) above).

Let us now consider the verb *sị*, *gwa*, and *kwu* in the context of indirect speech.

4(a) Ude sị nà ọ gà-àbja èleta ānyī
 Ude say COMP 3sg Fut-come visit 3pl
 ‘Ude said that he would pay us a visit’

(b) Ude sị nà ya gà-abja èleta ānyī
 Ude say COMP Log Fut-come visit 3pl
 ‘Ude said that he would pay us a visit’

- (c) Ude gwàrà ànyị nà ya gà-abịa èleta ānyī
 Ude tell-Pst 3pl COMP Log Fut-come visit 3pl
 ‘Ude told us that he would pay us a visit’
- (d) Ude gwàrà ànyị sị (nà) ya gà-àbịa èleta ānyī
 Ude tell-Pst 3pl say[COMP] (COMP) Log Fut-come visit 3pl
 ‘Ude told us that he would pay us a visit’
- (e) Ude kwùrù nà ya gà-àbịa èleta ānyī
 Ude speak-Pst COMP Log Fut-come visit 3pl
 ‘Ude said that he would pay us a visit’
- (f) Ude kwùrù sị (nà) ya gà-àbịa èleta ānyī
 Ude speak-Pst say[COMP] (COMP) Log Fut-come visit 3pl
 ‘Ude said that he would pay us a visit’

The examples in (4) instantiate the complementizer induced indirect speech construction. We need to draw attention to examples (4d and f) with *sị* ‘say [COMP]’ and *nà* co-occurring as complementizers. The indirect speech construction is “made up by two clauses: the main clause, centred around an event of saying, and an objective complement clause relying on a parallel between the clausal object NP” (Guardamagna, 2010, p. 5). Thus for example, the whole of (4a) is the main clause, while the objective complement is the clause headed by the complementizer *nà* ‘that’.

Also in (4) the indirect speech is based on the Speaker’s perspective, and pronominal deixis is interpreted with respect to the utterance situation (Bonami & Godard, 2008, p. 2). In (4a) for instance, the 3sg subject pronoun *ọ* ‘he’ has arbitrary or free reference. That is, it could refer to any person, including Ude as well. The subject pronoun *ya* (glossed as Log(ophoric)) in (4b-f), uniquely refers to the subject NP Ude. Following Sells (1987) for example, this pronominal subject is analysed “as the subject of the complement clause of a logocentric verb...” (Mmadike, 1999, p. 271). Usually, logophoric pronouns function as the subject of the complement clause of verbs of communication and cognition. In the

complement clause, the 3pl pronominal object *ànyị* refers the Addressee, who is the Speaker too (cf 4c and d).

The examples in (3) and (4) feature the verbs *sị*, *gwa* and *kwu* as used in making statements or assertions. In these examples, *sị* is the only verb that introduces both direct and indirect speech complements respectively. The next examples will feature the domains of communication involving request, command and question, as in (5) and (6).

5(a) Ude gwàrà m kà m kwurụ ọtō
 Ude tell-pst 1sg COMP 1sg stand up
 'Ude told me to stand up'

(b) Ude sị kà m kwurụ ọtō
 Ude say COMP 1sg stand up
 'Ude said that I should stand up'

(c) Ude gwàrà m sị m kwurụ ọtō
 Ude tell-Pst 1sg say 1sg stand up
 'Ude told me to stand up'

(d) Ude sị m: "kwurụ ọtō"
 Ude asked 1sg stand up
 'Ude asked me to stand up'

6(a) Ude jürü mà àhụ ọ dịkwà gị
 Ude ask-Pst COMP body 1sg be-well 3sg
 'Ude asked whether you are well'

(b) Ude sị mà àhụ ọ dịkwà gị
 Ude say COMP body 1sg be well 3sg
 'Ude asked whether you are well'

(c) Ude sị: "àhụ ọ dịkwà gị?"
 Ude say body 1sg be well 3sg
 Ude said: "are you well?"

The complement clauses in (5a-b) have the illocutionary force of a request by virtue of the complementizer *ka* 'that' and the non-imperative tone pattern of the verb *kwuru* (HH) on the contrary, the complement clauses in (5c-d) have the illocutionary force of a command, given the LH tone pattern of the imperative form of the verb *kwùrú*. Furthermore, it is possible that the presence of the quotative verb *sị* in (5c-d) imposes the command tone

The interrogative complement clauses in (6a-c) are of the Yes/No question type. As is the case, the 3sg subject pronoun *ọ* in the complement clause bears a low tone. This, according to Nwachukwu (1987:70), is "a diagnostic feature of affirmative Yes/No question in Igbo". In all, only the complement clause in (6c) is realised as direct speech.

Thus far, we have been able to describe the syntactic frame associated with the verbs *sị*, *kwu*, *gwa*, and *jụ* in such domains as making a statement or assertion, making a request, issuing a command and asking a question. In the discussion that follows, we examine the unique feature of the verb *sị* 'say'.

3. The unique feature of the verb *sị*

We begin by saying that the Igbo verb *sị* 'say' is the archilexeme of the verbs of speaking. This assumption is based on the fact that it has the widest range of distribution among the other verbs in examples (3)-(6). Furthermore, it is the most preponderant verb of speaking in Ofomata's (2003) story book, *Ihe onye metere*. This unique feature of *sị* is equally reported for the English form 'say' (Worman, 2006, p. 36; Bloor & Bloor, 2004, p. 124; and Olivares, n.d., p. 55).

It is pertinent to recall the claim by Uwalaka (1988:149) that verbs of speaking usually require an animate subject NP. This however has been countered by Iwamoto (n.d.:80) who claims that when 'saying' is used in an extended sense, the Speaker "need not be a conscious being...." In this regard, it is possible in Igbo to have the following sentences where the subject NP is inanimate.

- 7(a) Akwụkwọ nsọ gwàrà ànyị sị: "egbūlē ọchù"
 Book holy tell 3pl say commit-Neg murder
 'The holy book tells us: "do not commit murder"'

- (b) ̀lwu ānyī sị nà nzùkọ ọbụlà gà-àbụ na mgbèdè
 Law 3pl say COMP gathering every Aux-be in evening
 ‘Our law says that every gathering will hold in the evening’

The subject NPs *Akwụkwọ nsọ* and *̀lwu* in (7a-b) respectively are inanimate. They are however used here in the metaphoric sense as grammatical subject.

One other unique feature of sị ‘say’ is its use as a complementizer. This has been reported by Nwachukwu (1987, p. 65) and Uwalaka (1988, pp. 173-174). They identify the complementizer *sị* as the stem of the verb *ịsị* ‘to say/tell’. This claim of verbal source of the ‘say’ complementizer is attested to in some other languages (cf Worman, 2006; Yeung, 2006; and Chappell, 2008).

In the analysis of Krio, a language in Sierra Leone, Worman (2006, p. 36) asserts that the verb *se* ‘say’ [se]v is reanalysed as the complementizer category [se]COMP. This claim is said to hold for such Nigerian languages like Kanuri and Hausa in which the verbs *ngin* and *ce/cewa* are, respectively, the verbs of ‘to say’ “which in each case have developed into COMP-like role” (Worman, 2006, p. 36). It is further reported in Chappell (2008) that

the grammaticalization of SAY verbs, or verba dicendi, into complementizers, subordinating conjunctions and other grammatical functions has been documented in detail for many languages of the African, South and Southeast Asian regions and also, interestingly, for creoles ... (Chappell, 2008, p. 1)

The schema in (8) represents the pathway proposed by Chappell (2008:2) in plotting the grammaticalization of SAY verbs into complementizers in Sinitic languages.

- 8(a) SAY > quotative function as the main verb of the principal clause introducing direct or indirect speech
 (b) > quotative function as V2 in a serial verb construction where V1 = speech act verb
 (c) > complementizer upon extension of V1 to other verb classes including cognition perception.

This study will adopt the schema in (8) as a model for plotting the grammaticalization path of the verb *sị* 'say' in Igbo into the complementizer/subordinating conjunction *sị*, as (9a-c) illustrate.

9(a) Ude sị: "m gà-àbịa èleta unù"

Ude say 1sg Fut-come visit 2pl

'Ude said: "I will pay you a visit".'

(b) Ude kwùrù sị: "m gà-àbịa èleta unù"

Ude speak-Pst say 1sg Fut-come visit 2pl

'Ude said: "I will pay you a visit"'

(c) Roza mà sị ukwù bù egō

Roza know COMP waist be money

'Roza knows that the waist is used in making money'

The examples in (9a-c) respectively fit into the pathways in (8a-c) above. In (9a) the quotative verb *sị* functions as the main verb with the direct speech in the complement clause. Example (9b) has *kwùrù* and *sị* as serial verbs. The verb *kwùrù* as V1 is a speech act verb, and *sị* as V2 in the serial verb construction functions as a quotative verb. Finally, in (9c) the verb *mà* 'know' is a verb of cognition, while *sị* functions here as the complementizer which introduces the complement clause.

4. Summary and conclusion

To summarise, this study has been able to describe a sample of the set of verbs classified as verbs of speaking. In terms of morphological structure, these verbs exhibit the same features as other Igbo verbs. Semantically, verbs of speaking constitute a coherent class of verbs specifically used as a verbal process in the human act of speaking. There is usually a Speaker who reports the speech of the Sayer (the subject NP) as a direct or indirect speech. In direct speech, the Sayer is reported verbatim (mimesis) and pronominal deixis takes its

reference from the reported speech situation. When indirect speech is involved, the Sayer is not reported verbatim, but the meaning of what is said remains the same (diegesis). Pronominal deixis is interpreted with respect to the utterance situation (Bonami & Godard, 2008, p. 2). For their syntactic frame, verbs of speaking select a subject NP designated as Sayer. There is an Addressee, and the message which may be realised as an NP or a complement clause.

Finally, the study explored the possibility of how to analyse the grammaticalization process by which the complementizer *sí* could be derived from the lexical verb *sí* 'say'. As a preliminary attempt therefore, it is hoped that this study will serve as the basis for further and more inclusive analysis of this class of verbs in the language.

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