

VERBS OF QUALITY IN IGBO: A SEMANTIC AND MORPHO-SYNTACTIC CHARACTERIZATION

Chikelu Ihunanya Ezenwafor
Laboratorio di Linguistica
Scuola Normale Superiore
Pisa, Italy
chikelu.ezenwafor@sns.it

Chibunma Amara Ezenwafor
Department of Linguistics
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education
Owerri, Nigeria
bunma4real@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper examines the semantic and morpho-syntactic characterization of the verbs of quality in Igbo. It adopts the lexical semantic classes proposed by Dixon (2004) and a set of defining morpho-syntactic characteristics proposed by Elders, Trobs and Meltouchi (2009) in their typological study of quality verbs in African languages. A total of sixteen verbs are used for this study and are further classified into various semantic types. A set of semantic features such as semantic intransitivity, high possibility of 'antonymicity', correlation with a question proform, stative reading, etc. are relevant in determining prototypical verbs of quality. Out of the thirteen semantic types proposed by Dixon (2004), only five seem applicable to the Igbo verbs of quality. In relation to temporal reference (tense), Igbo verbs of quality only denote a present meaning using the -rv suffix. This suffix is differentiated from the -rv suffix that denotes past tense in active verbs. The morphemic shape of this subset of verbs is posited as cv+rv in written form but cv+v in spoken form. The Ton Bearing Units (TBU) of both structures are assigned LL tones. Unlike some languages where the comparative and superlative marker(s) are associated with the adjectival verbs, it is observed that these marker(s) though highly applicable, are not exclusive features of Igbo verbs of quality since they could be applied to as many verbs as possible in Igbo.

1. Introduction

In many languages of the world, the verbal category falls into distinct semantic classes. Distinction is made on the basis of semantic characterization between different verb types such as experiential, locative, psychological, motion, quality verbs etc. Another common distinction is made in distinguishing the active from the stative verbs. This paper focuses on a subset of stative verbs in Igbo often described as verbs of quality. A common feature of these verbs is their ability to denote property concepts just like adjectives. A cross linguistic study of property concepts shows that they are often expressed through adjectives. There are however some languages where these concepts are not coded just by the adjectival class but by nouns and verbs alike.

In Igbo, a small class of adjectives expresses few property concepts, while a large number of such concepts are expressed through verbs. The few works on this aspect of the Igbo language include Uwalaka (1988) who identifies a subset of stative verbs and analyses them as 'verbs of quality', and Nwachukwu (1984) who investigates the category of verbs

associated with expressing adjectival meanings but does not refer to them as ‘verbs of quality’. These few works point to the need for more work on this are of Igbo.

This paper employs the formal morpho-syntactic and semantic criteria identified in some African languages as the defining features of verbs of quality. Two of such features are the temporal reference and the stative reading of the verb. More specifically, the effort is to identify the set of criteria that delimit the verbs of quality in Igbo. We examine the extent to which these verbs represent the semantic categories/classes proposed by Dixon (2004). These semantic classes which are typically associated with adjectives, but with verbs in some African languages like Igbo, include dimension, age, value, colour, physical property, human propensity etc.

In the subsequent section (2.0), relevant literature will be reviewed. In 3.0, we present our theoretical framework followed by the presentation and analysis of data in section 4.0. We conclude with our findings in section 5.0.

2. Remarks on Property Concepts

The term ‘property concept’ was used by Dixon (1982) to refer to concepts that are lexicalised as adjectives in languages with adjectives, although such properties could be coded in some languages as verbs, nouns or adjectives. Beck (2000) observes that property concept words show a great deal of intra linguistic and cross linguistic variation in their syntactic behaviour and it is not always possible to predict their lexical classification in a given language from their meaning. In many languages of the world, property concepts are coded by the adjectival class. Thus, Dixon (2004) suggests that the word class ‘adjective’ is language universal. On the contrary, Beck (2000) from a cross linguistic investigation notes that the adjectival class is not prevalent in all languages. While nouns and verbs appear to be essentially universal, languages that have few or no adjectives are a typological common place. In Lao, a South Western language studied by Enfield (2004), argument is made for a subset of verbs for the adjectival class. In a schematic representation of verb types in Lao, he groups the adjectival class of verbs as a subtype that denotes property concepts and which he illustrates with the following examples:

- (1) *Man suung boo*
 3sg tall PCL
 ‘Is he tall?’

- (2) *Khon sung-suung meeni qaaj khooj*
 person REDUP-tall be BRO ISG
 'The tallish person is my brother'

The defining properties of this subset of verbs include reduplication, evidence of comparative and superlative constructions etc. Elders et al (2009) could confirm through their questionnaire on African languages that quite a few of the property concepts are expressed using lexical items that are clearly verbal in character. In Kulango language for example, derived adjectives are almost exclusively derived from a subset of stative verbs (verbs of quality):

- (3) *bśś-ru* 'black' (singular animate)
bśś-ku 'black' (singular non human)
bii 'be black'
 (Culled from Elders et al 2009)

The authors explain that adjectives are formed by the addition of a noun class suffix to a stem together with the nominal tone pattern high...final low tone. Schacter (1985) observes that in Bemba, human propensity as a semantic type of property concepts like strong, brave and wise are expressed by the verbs *ashikpa*, *akosa*, and *accenjela*. In a typological study, Dixon (1982) equally illustrates with some African languages like Venda (a Bantu language), Igbo etc. that there seems to be a limited or restricted use of prototypical adjectives in coding property concepts. In Venda, twenty out of the many property concepts are realised as adjectives. Igbo, just like Venda, has even a more restricted use of adjectives in coding property concepts. Emenanjo (1978) identifies only six true adjectives in most dialects of Igbo. They include the following:

- (4) *o_hcha* 'white'
o_ji 'black'
o_ma 'good'
a_jo/o_jo_o 'bad'
ukwu 'big'
nta 'small'

Dixon (1982) adds *ochie* 'old' and *ohuru* 'new' to this restricted list. He postulates that the remaining set of DAVC meanings are not expressed as adjectives but could be divided up between the lexical classes of verbs and nouns.

In Igbo therefore, it seems evident that there are other means of expressing property concepts or adjectival meanings. A subset of stative verbs is used to complement the function of these few adjectives. This subtype of verbs could be termed quality verbs or verbs of quality.

2.1 Verbs of Quality in Igbo

Nwachukwu (1984) in his study of stative verbs in Igbo recognizes a subset of stative verbs (inherent complement verbs) which are used to express adjectival meanings. He observes that a large number of such verbs are immediately followed by a nominal complement which specifies their meaning. Uwalaka (1988: 177), in her semantic classification of Igbo verbs, identifies a group as verbs of quality. According to her, these "Verbs of quality describe neither process nor action; rather they ascribe to their subject NP some quality or characteristic". Similarly, Elders et al (2009) define quality verbs as a subtype of verb referring to properties and qualities which are prototypically associated with adjectives. They list a number of features associated with verbs of quality in quite a number of African languages. Cross linguistically, they observe that verbs of quality represent a subset of verbs that have a stative reading (no change of state) and are assigned the semantic feature [-dynamic]. In other words, the semantic and morpho-syntactic characterization of verbs of quality in languages vary.

Generally, not less than thirty verbs have been identified as inherent verbs of quality in Igbo. Nwachukwu (1983) identifies twenty four verbs belonging to this class while Uwalaka (1988) identifies fourteen. They include:

- | | |
|--|--|
| (5) <i>icha ucha</i> 'to be fair complexioned' | <i>iru unyi</i> 'to be dirty or defiled' |
| <i>iji nji</i> 'to be dark complexioned' | <i>ichi nti</i> 'to be deaf' |
| <i>ipe mpe</i> 'to be small' | <i>ida ogbu</i> 'to be dumb' |
| <i>ibu ibu</i> 'to be fat' | <i>iru ukwu</i> 'to be deformed' |
| <i>ifu ufu</i> 'to be painful' | <i>igba awhọ ọnu</i> 'to be bearded' |
| <i>icha (acha)</i> 'to be ripe' | <i>ikwocha isi</i> 'to be bald' |
| <i>ika (aka)</i> 'to be ripe/mature' | <i>ikpu isi</i> 'to be blind' |
| <i>ito ogologo</i> 'to be tall' | <i>ipị anya</i> 'to be one eyed' |
| <i>iju (eju)</i> 'to be full' | <i>ida ngworo</i> 'to be lame' |
| <i>ima mma</i> 'to be beautiful' | <i>ida mba</i> 'to be weak with hunger' |
| <i>ijọ njọ</i> 'to be ugly' | <i>igbashi ike</i> 'to be strong' |

ikụ ilu 'to be bitter'
itọ uto 'to be tasty or sweet'
ikpọ nkụ 'to be dry'
ire (ere) 'to be rotten'

ida ọny 'to be expensive'
ikọ ukọ 'to be scarce'
iba ụba 'to be rich/ be plentiful'
iba eze 'to be rich/wealthy'

Note that some of the verbs in the above list are purely dialectal. Another means of expressing adjectival meaning in Igbo could be with the use of the copula 'di' (Nwachukwu 1984). The thrust of this paper however is the use of inherent verbs of quality to express adjectival meaning in Igbo. In Uwalaka's (1988) study of inherent verbs of quality in Uzunoji dialect of Igbo, the following defining features are identified:

i) The questioning proform for verbs of quality.

- (6) *O nu/di ole ethu?*
 NP (he/she/it) is how
 'How is NP?'

ii) Possibility of inherent verbs of quality to occur in a form unmarked for tense/aspect or take the -rv assertive suffix when these verbs are associated with a present meaning and a past meaning when they occur with lengthened vowel. Examples:

- (7a) *Ada mā/mañà mmā*
 Ada be beautiful -rv (assertive) beauty
 'Ada is beautiful'

- (7b) *Ada maañā mma*
 Ada be beautiful-rv (assertive) beauty
 -rv (past)
 'Ada was beautiful'

- (8) a. *Adha jọ/jọrọ njọ*
 Adha be ugly -rv(assertive) ugliness
 'Ada is ugly'
- b. *Adha jọrọ njọ*
 Adha be ugly -rv assertive -rv past ugliness
 'Ada was ugly'

Uwalaka (1988, p. 181) explains that this subtype of verb has subtle tense and aspect requirements. In addition to expressing a present meaning as illustrated in (7a) and (8a), the verb forms in (7b) and (8b) occur with a lengthened vowel that express past meaning. In other words, some verbs of quality can express both present and past meanings.

iii) The semantic interpretation of the NPs which could occur with verbs of quality as attribuant NP, and experience NP's. While the attribuant (subj NP) is obligatory, the experiencer NP is not. Example:

(9) *Uwe keè ma/maña Adha mmā*

Att/C

E/P-Att

dress this be beautiful -rv Adha beauty

'This dress is pleasing to Adha'

'This dress makes Adha look beautiful'

3. Theoretical Framework

There are some semantic types that are associated with the adjectival class. Dixon (2004:3) lists thirteen semantic types that are typical features of the adjectival class. These include:

DIMENSION- big, small, long, tall, short etc.

AGE- new, young, old etc.

VALUE- good, bad, ugly

COLOUR- black, white, red etc.

PHYSICAL PROPERTY - hard, soft, heavy, wet etc.

HUMAN PROPENSITY - jealous, happy, kind, clever etc.

DIFFICULTY - easy, difficult, tough, hard, simple etc.

SIMILARITY - like, unlike, similar, different etc.

QUALIFICATION - definite, possible, true, usual, normal etc.

QUANTIFICATION - all, whole, many, some, few etc.

POSITION - high, low, near, far, right, left etc.

CARDINAL NUMBERS - first, last etc.

Dixon (2004) analyses the first four (DAVC) as the core semantic types and the following two as peripheral semantic types. The core and peripheral semantic types are typically associated with both small and large adjective classes. He explains that in Igbo, the six classes of adjectives align with the four core semantic types. Since most property concepts in Igbo are expressed using inherent quality verbs, this paper adopts the semantic classification of Dixon (2004) in grouping the Igbo verbs of quality into specific semantic types. Through that, we shall ascertain which of the semantic categories are coded by this subset of verbs and which ones that not.

For this work, the questionnaire on quality verbs in African languages by Elders et al (2009) is adopted. We attempt to characterize the verbs of quality in relation to the following semantic and morpho-syntactic features: temporal reference, stative reading, evidence of comparative and superlative markers typical of adjectives or adjectival verbs etc.

4. Semantic Characterization of Verbs of Quality

As noted earlier, property concepts are coded by verbs of quality in Igbo, making up for the limited quantity of the adjectival class in the language. In this section, we shall focus on establishing the peculiar semantic criteria that distinguish such class of verbs in Igbo. The following questions are therefore pertinent: are there peculiar features shared by the verbs in this group? If there are, do these features make them any different from other semantic verb classes? Do these set of verbs share any similarity with the adjectival class considering their complementary role? Finally, we would attempt to relate these verbs to Dixon's (2004) proposed semantic types for adjectives. This is of course bearing in mind their capacity to code property concepts as would adjectives in some other languages.

Following the semantic criteria articulated below, we adopt sixteen sample verbs for our study. The semantic criteria for determining verbs of quality could be summarised thus:

- Ability to express a certain property or quality of an NP (noun, pronoun)
- Semantic implication of stativity (stative reading) in contrast to active verbs
- Correlation with the questioning proform of 'How is NP'? - 'O di ole otu'? originally proposed by Uwalaka (1988)
- Semantic intransitivity
- Occurrence with comparative and superlative markers
- High semantic possibility of antonymy

The following verb samples are analysed for this purpose:

- (10) *itọ uto* 'to be sweet/tasty' *ito ogologo* 'to be tall'
 ijọ njo 'to be ugly' *ikọ ukọ* 'to be scarce'
 ilu ilu 'to be bitter' *icha ocha* 'to be fair'
 ita ahụ 'to be thin' *iza aza* 'to be swollen'
 ibu ibu 'to be fat' *iba uba* 'to be
 ipe mpe 'to be small' wealthy/plentiful'
 ima mma 'to be beautiful' *iru unyi* 'to be dirty'
 iji oji 'to be dark/black' *icha acha* 'to be ripe'
 ifu ufu 'to be painful'

They are further illustrated using the following constructions:

- (11) *Ada jọ-rọ njo*
 Ada be ugly -rv(stative) ugliness
 ‘Ada is ugly,’
- (12) *Ada ma-ra mma*
 Ada be beautiful -rv(stative) beauty
 ‘Ada is beautiful.’
- (13) *O pe-re mpe*
 3sg be small -rv(stative) smallness
 ‘He is small.’
- (14) *O to-ro ogologo*
 3sg be tall -rv(stative) tallness
 ‘He is tall.’
- (15) *O bu-ru ibu*
 3sg be fat -rv(stative) fatness
 ‘He is fat.’
- (16) *O ta-ra ahụ*
 3sg be thin -rv(stative) body
 ‘He is thin.’
- (17) *Nne m na-acha ocha*
 mother poss aux-be fair fairness
 ‘My mother is fair (in complexion).’

- (18) *Nne m na-eji oji*
 mother POSS aux-be black/dark blackness
 ‘My mother is dark (in complexion).’
- (19) *Ejula kọ-rọ ụkọ n'ahia*
 snail be scarce -rv(stative) scarcity in market
 ‘Snail is scarce in the market.’
- (20) *Ejula ba-ra ụba n'ahia*
 snail be plentiful -rv(stative) plenty in market
 ‘Snail is plentiful in the market.’
- (21) *Mkpurụ osisi a tọ-rọ uto.*
 seed stick DET be sweet -rv(stative) sweetness
 ‘This fruit is sweet.’
- (22) *Mkpurụ osisi a lu-ru ilu.*
 seed stick DET be bitter -rv(stative) bitterness
 ‘This fruit is bitter.’
- (23) *Ụkwụ m za-ra aza.*
 leg POSS be swell -rv(stative) swell
 ‘My leg is swollen.’
- (24) *Akwa egwu anyị ru-ru unyi.*
 cloth dance POSS be dirty -rv(stative) dirt
 ‘Our dancing clothes are dirty.’
- (25) *Mgbomgbo a cha-ra acha*
 paw-paw DET be ripe -rv(stative) ripe
 ‘This paw-paw is ripe.’
- (26) *Utari a furu m ufụ*
 cane DET be painful -rv(stative) me pain
 ‘This cane is painful (to me)’

Observe from the above examples that all the verbs denote property concepts such as beauty, ugliness, height (tall/short), size (fat/thin), colour (fair/dark), etc. with the first twelve examples occurring as antonymic pairs. Note however that despite the high possibility of 'antonymicity', all verbs of quality need not necessarily exist with a direct opposite pair. In

example (24), the verb *iru unyi* has a likely antonymic pair in the form of *ocha* which functions more like the complement of a predicate construction like 'Akwa m di ocha' 'My cloth is clean'. As Nwachukwu (1984) rightly points out, 'different adjectival meanings are coded also in Igbo using the predicate 'di' with the relevant nominal complements'. Examples (23) and (25) have no corresponding quality verbs as direct opposites. This though does not reduce their capacity to function as quality verbs. Thus, unlike other semantic verb types, most verbs of quality have a high possibility of existing with antonymic pairs just like the few adjectives in Igbo. Another glaring feature of this subset of verbs is their stative reading marked by the -rv stative suffix. This is in contrast to active verbs where this same marker expresses the past tense rather than stativity. One of their (verbs of quality) points of divergence from other stative verbs is their ability to code or denote arrays of qualities possessed by an NP. This is depicted in the following example:

(27) *Ada mara mma*

Ada is beautiful

(28) *Ada hụrụ m n'anya*

Ada loves me

Note that while both verbs have a stative reading, example (27) describes an inherent feature or quality of the subject NP, whereas example (28) denotes a state that is binding on the two NPs involved ie the subject and object NPs. The verb could however be reconstructed in some way to portray the subject NP 'Ada as a possessor of the 'quality of love'. For example, 'Ada nwere ihunanya' 'Ada has love'. This of course would be far from being prototypical of the verb *ihu n'anya* which takes a nominalised form as a quality possessed by the NP. Verbs of quality could also be used in similar structures i.e., a structure involving two NPs but with different semantic implication. Examples:

(29) *Akwa a mara m mma.*

cloth DET be beautiful me beauty

'This cloth is good on me.'

(30) *Mpuru osisi a tọrọ m uto.*

seed stick DET be sweet me sweetness

'This fruit is sweet to me.'

In examples (29) and (30), observe that the emphasis is not on the inherent property of the subject NP but rather on its relationship or effect on the object NP 'me' as an experiencer. While the subject NP is obligatory, the object NP (the object pronoun 'me') is non obligatory. By implication, verbs of quality are semantically intransitive, requiring basically a subject NP.

Next, we turn to the questioning proform proposed by Uwalaka (1988): How is NP? - *Q di ole otu*. For this paper, we adopt the standard version/equivalent as 'Kedu ka O di' which has the same English translation as the dialectical variant of Uwalaka. Note that the NP represented by the 3sg pronoun could mark both animate and inanimate NPs. The already stated examples (14-29) could therefore be elicited as answers to question proforms. Below are few examples:

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (31) | <i>Kedu ka Ada di?</i> | <i>Ada mara mma.</i> |
| | How is Ada? | Ada is beautiful. |
| (32) | <i>Kedu ka nne Ada di?</i> | <i>Nne Ada na-acha ọcha.</i> |
| | How is Ada's mother? | Ada's mother is fair in complexion. |
| (33) | <i>Kedu ka ụkwụ gi di?</i> | <i>Ukwu m zara aza.</i> |
| | How is your leg? | My leg is swollen. |
| (34) | <i>Kedu ka ejula di n'ahia?</i> | <i>Ejula kọrọ ụkọ n'ahia.</i> |
| | How is snail in the market | Snail is scarce in the market. |

The above elicitation contrasts with activity verbs that correspond to the likely question proform 'What is the NP doing?'. Other stative verbs equally fail to correspond to this test, thus further differentiating them from verbs of quality. The last criterion (occurrence with comparative and superlative marker) is better handled in section 4.2.

Out of the thirteen semantic categories proposed by Dixon (2004), only five seem applicable to Igbo verbs of quality. By extension, we attempt a semantic classification of verbs of quality into different semantic categories as originally proposed by Dixon for the adjectival class. Consider the table below:

Dimension	Age	Value	Colour	Physical properties
<i>ipe mpe</i> <i>ibu ibu</i> <i>ito ogologo</i> <i>ita ahụ</i>		<i>ima mma</i> <i>ijọ njo</i> <i>iba ụba</i> <i>ikọ ụkọ</i> <i>ilu ilu</i> <i>itọ ụtọ</i>	<i>icha ocha</i> <i>iji oji</i>	<i>ifụ ufụ</i> <i>iza aza</i> <i>icha acha</i> <i>iru unyi</i>

Table 1: Semantic classes

Observe from the table that verbs of quality fall into two major semantic classes: the core semantic type and the peripheral semantic type. The core semantic type comprises DAVC ie dimension, age, value, and colour. None of our verb samples however, represents the semantic type 'age'. The peripheral semantic type on the other hand comprises just one semantic category: physical properties. Dixon (2004) explains that all pure adjectives in Igbo are grouped under the core semantic (DAVC). In the table, it can be deduced that the verbs are more inclined to the core semantic type than the peripheral. Four verbs are assigned the semantic feature [+dimension], six verbs are assigned the feature [+value], two are assigned the feature [+colour], while four verbs are assigned the feature [+physical properties] .

4.1 Morpho-syntactic Characterization of Verbs of Quality

In this section, we examine the verbs of quality in Igbo in relation to their morphemic structure in the spoken and written forms, temporal reference, and comparative/superlative constructions. Temporal distinction in relation to tense and aspect is often associated with the verbal category. It seems that that the verbs of quality in Igbo can assume different forms. We first consider the structure of this subset of verb in simple form. Consider the following examples:

(35) *Obi buu/bu-ru* *ibu*

Obi be fat-rv(Stative) fat

‘Obi is fat.’

(36) *Mgbomgbo a* *cha-ra* *acha*

paw-paw DET be ripe-rv(Stative) ripe

‘This pear is ripe.’

- (37) *Akwa m ruu/ru-ru unyi*
 cloth poss be dirty-rv(Stative) dirt
 'My cloth is dirty.'
- (38) *Obi pee/pe-re mpe*
 Obi be small-rv(Stative) smallness
 'Obi is small.'
- (39) *Nne m taa/ta-ra ahụ*
 mother poss be thin-rv(Stative) body
 'My mother is thin.'
- (40) *Oroma a tọọ/tọ-rọ ụtọ*
 orange det be sweet-rv(Stative) sweetness
 'This orange is sweet.'

Examples (35-40) give us the basic morphemic structure of verbs of quality as cv+rv. They could also assume the structure cv+v especially in the spoken form. Note that the two forms are realised with the same tone pattern (LL). It is possible that the structure cv+v is obtained as a result of an optional elision in speech or deletion rule where the 'r' of the -rv suffix is deleted. The latter structure (cv+v) should not be confused with the imperative form of some verbs in Igbo that seem to have similar structure. They could be distinguished on the basis of their tonal pattern. While the optional form for verbs of quality is assigned a LL tone, the structure for the imperative is assigned a LH tone. This optional form for verbs of quality could equally be applicable to other subsets of verb in Igbo.

The verbs illustrated above occur with an -rv suffix which denotes a present meaning. Note that the -rv suffix occurring with this subset of verbs by no means denote a past meaning as observable with activity verbs in Igbo (standard). Though Uwalaka (1988) identifies a verb form for verbs of quality in Uzunoji dialect of Igbo that denotes the past meaning, it seems not to be applicable in standard Igbo. She explains that the lengthened vowel in this verb form which is derived from a morpho-phonemic rule specifically denotes the past tense meaning. Nwachukwu (1984) also proposes a past tense marker which is a feature of Orlu and Onitsha dialects for all stative verbs in Igbo. He speculates that this past tense marker could well become incorporated in standard Igbo since it is fast becoming common among standard Igbo speakers and writers. These suffixes are -bu, -buru. The latter alone seems applicable to verbs of quality in Igbo. The following examples are illustrative:

- (41)a *Obi bu-ru* *ibu*
 Obi be fat-rv(Stative) fatness
 ‘Obi is fat.’
- b. *Obi bu-buru* *ibu*
 Obi be fat-rv(Stative) fatness
 ‘Obi was fat.’
- (42)a *O to-ro* *ogologo*
 3sg be tall-rv(Stative) tallness
 ‘Obi is tall.’
- b *O to-buru* *ogologo*
 3sg be tall-PAST tallness
 ‘He was tall.’ => ‘He used to be tall.’

4.2 Comparative and Superlative Constructions

One of the defining properties of adjectives or the adjectival class of verbs (verbs of quality) is their ability to exclusively realise to an extent the comparative and superlative forms. Comparative constructions require a comparison of two or more values. These values are interpreted as relational terms that require a reference point of comparison and a direction from that reference point <greater than-less than> (cf. Bierswisch 1987). Comparative and superlative constructions should be clearly differentiated from equative constructions which focus on placing two values on an equal scale. In English for example, comparative and superlative markers 'er' and 'est' are suffixes attached to adjectives. Comparison could also be generally expressed for other word classes using lexical words such as more, than (more/better than). Enfield (2004) notes that in Lao the adjectival verbs may be marked directly by *kuai* (more than) in comparative constructions and by *thin-sutz* in superlative constructions. In Igbo, the comparison of values (qualities of an NP), typically expressed by verbs of quality, is marked by the *ka* suffix which is derived from the verb *ika* (to surpass). The suffix *ka* is multifunctional in Igbo serving not just as a comparative/superlative marker but also as an intensifier. There are also instances where this comparative marker occurs as an independent word. Consider the following example:

- (43) a. *Obi bu-ru ibu*
Obi be fat-rv(Stative) fatness
'Obi is fat.'
- b. *Obi ka Ada bu ibu / Obi ka Ada ibu*
Obi COMP Ada be fat / Obi COMP Ada fat
'Obi is fatter than Ada.'
- c. *Obi bu-ka-riri Ada / Obi bu-ka-riri Ada n'ibu*
Obi be fat -comparatv- ext suffs Ada
'Obi is fatter/bigger than Ada.'
- d. *Obi bu-ka-risiri*
Obi be fat -superlatv -ext suffs
'Obi is the fattest.'

From the above examples, we observe that the comparative morpheme is realised in (43b) as 'ka' occurring independently but in (43c), this same *ka* is realised as a suffix affixed to the verb root *bu*. Note that the comparative marker as a suffix in (43c) occurs with the reduplicated extensional suffix *ri*. In (43d), *ka* equally occurs as the superlative marker attached to the verb root *bu* but with slightly different set of extensional suffixes which covertly implies the involvement of more than two NPs in the comparison. The use of *ka* as a comparative marker for verbs of quality is however, not an exclusive feature. Its use could be applied to a wide range of verbs in Igbo. Below are some examples:

- (44) a. *Obi ka Ada esi nri* {process verb}
Obi COMP Ada cook food
'Obi cooks better than Ada.'
- b. *Obi si-ka-riri Ada na nri.*
Obi cook-COMP-APL Ada in food
'Obi cooks more/better than Ada.'
- (45) a. *Obi ka Ada anụ ihe* {experiential verb}
Obi COMP Ada hear something
'Obi hears better than Ada.'

- b. *Obi nɔ-ka-riri Ada n'ihe*
 Obi hear-COMP-APPL Ada in something
 'Obi hears more/better than Ada.'

We observe from examples (44) and (45) that process and experiential verbal constructions could be marked for comparison using the comparative marker *ka* both as an affix or an independent word. However, the *ka* suffix could equally function as an intensifier in occurrence with some verbs of quality. For example:

- (46) *Ada amaka.* = 'Ada is very beautiful.'
Obi ajoka. = 'Ada is very ugly.'
Nne m ebuka = 'My mother is very big.'

Note that in some cases, the usage of the intensifier *-ka* requires the overtiness of the verb complement.

5.0 Summary and Conclusion

This paper has investigated some semantic and morpho-syntactic features of quality verbs in Igbo. We observe that the basic distinction between verbs of quality and other subset of verbs is their ability to ascribe qualities to their NP subjects. They are characterized semantically on the basis of features such as semantic intransitivity, high possibility of 'antonymicity', correlation with a question proform, and stative reading. It is noted that verbs of quality fall under the both broad semantic types (core and peripheral) with more inclination towards the former. Our findings show that verbs of quality express present meaning with the *-rv* assertive suffix in contrast with the past meaning expressed by the *-rv* suffix in active verbs. The optional deletion of 'r' from the structure of the *-rv* suffix is emphasized and differentiated from the imperative verb form.

Finally, it is observed that unlike many languages where the comparative and superlative markers are associated with the adjectives or adjectival verbs, this feature could be applicable to as many Igbo verbs as possible.

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