

CLASSES OF MOTION VERBS IN IGBO

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Abstract

This paper draws data from standard Igbo to discuss the issue of motion verbs in Igbo. It adopts a descriptive approach for its analysis. The study uses the morphological, tonal and semantic criteria to identify some classes of motion verbs in Igbo. Classes like simple motion verbs, compound motion verbs and complex motion verbs are identified on the bases of morphological criteria. In terms of their tones, high tone motion verbs and low tone motion verbs exist in the language. Semantically, the classes of path of motion verbs, manner of motion verbs and manner-path of motion verbs can be confirmed. Other features identified include the expression of overt action and the occurrence in serial verb constructions.

1. Introduction

The words which constitute the lexicon of a language perform different grammatical functions in the language are classified into different word classes or parts of speech. It is in cognizance of this that Ndimele (1996, p. 25) notes how “we assign words to classes according to their properties in entering phrasal or clausal structure.” This study shall focus on the class of Igbo verbs known as the motion verbs to establish their phonological, morphological, and syntactic characteristics.

According to Schalley (2002) for a verb to be a motion verb, there has to be a movement of the whole body involved. The author further adds that the movement can be along a path (run) or at a location (jump). Similarly, Harley (2002) describes motion verbs as those verbs that involve motion or change of position of the body as a whole. Finally, in addition to describing motion verbs as those verbs that involve motion or change of position as a whole, Harley (2002) also concludes that English verbs like *sit* and *stand* in the active sense are motion verbs while verbs describing facial movements and placing things with the hands (without moving the whole body) are not movement verbs.

This work goes into the above named subject matter as follows. The next section is a description and classification of the motion verbs of the Igbo language in section 3. Section 4 forms the summary and conclusion.

2. Characteristics of Igbo Motion Verbs

Igbo motion verbs Igbo verbs are those verbs that involve movement while expressing actions. They are also movement verbs. The three criteria, morphology, tone and semantics, are used to classify motion verbs of the language.

2.1 The Morphological Classes

Based on their internal structure, the motion verbs fall morphologically into three group: simple, compound and complex motion verbs.

(a) Simple Motion Verbs

These are verbs of motion that consist of only one verb root. This type of verb does not have any other linguistic unit attached to it. Some examples include the following:

- (1) -chù 'chase', -dà 'fall' -ga 'go'

(b) Compound Motion Verbs:

To this group belong those verbs of motion that are made up of two or more roots which function as equal partners. Some examples include the following:

- (2) -gba + pụ → -gbapụ 'run off/away'
 -kwa + pụ → -kwapụ 'push off'
 -gba + ga → -gbaga 'run to'
 -rị + ga → -rịga 'climb to'
 -rị + pụ → rịpụ 'climb of/out'

Note that that in each of the compound verbs, (gbapụ, kwapụ, gbaga, rịga and rịpụ) the first verb root (gba, kwa, gba, rị and rị) shows the manner of movement while the second verb root

(pu, pu, ga, ga and pu) shows the path of movement. So, in addition to being a movement verb, the second verb root in each example guides the direction of movement.

(c) *Complex Motion Verbs:*

A complex motion verb could be described as consisting of one verb root in addition to one or more extensional suffixes. The verb elements do not function as equal partners, rather the bound constituents of the complex structure are semantically dependent on the verb root. Some examples of complex motion verbs include *chõtawa*, *gbakò*, *bìakòta*, *chùkòrò* etc. as in the following sentences:

- (3) Biko, chõtawa ewu ahụ ebe a.
Please, drive that goat towards this place.
- (4) Unu gbakò ọsọ ọnụ.
You people should run together.
- (5) Unu abụọ bìakòta ọnụ echi.
Two of you should come together tomorrow.
- (6) Mụ na lbe chùkòrò oke ụnyaahụ.
Ibe and I chased a rat together yesterday.

In the above complex motion verbs, the bound morphemes (=tawá, =kò, =kòta and =kòrò) in the verbs (*chõtawa*, *gbakò*, *bìakòta* and *chùkòrò*) respectively depend on the verb roots *chụ*, *gbá*, *bìá* and *chù* for their meanings.

In addition to the above classes, Igbo motion verbs are also subject to them same inflectional morphological changes of verbs of the Igbo language. In other words, their morphological features do not exempt them from the morphological processes of other verbs. For example, the table below summarizes some of the inflectional changes the motion verbs can undergo which indeed are not different from the inflectional changes other verbs of the language are subject to.

Verb Root	Infinitive	Past	Gerund
-gba 'run'	igba 'to run'	gbara 'ran'	ogbugba 'running'
-fe 'fly'	ife 'to fly'	fere 'flew'	ofufe 'flying'
-kwa 'push'	ikwa 'to push'	kwara 'pushed'	okwukwa 'pushing'

Table 1: Morphological Processes of some Igbo Motion Verbs

Finally, Igbo motion verbs are also negated through the suffixation of negator *-ghị* as is evident in the following examples:

(7) *-gba + ghị = gbaghị* 'did not dance/ run/play(football)'

(8) *-gwù + ghị = gwughị*

2.2 The Tonal Classes

The classification of Igbo motion verbs is based on the pitch level in line with the qualities of the Igbo language as a tone language where the two major tones of high and low are identified in addition to the downstep (Emenanjo, 1978). However, based on the inherent tones of Igbo motion verbs, there are high tone motion verbs and low tone motion verbs.

(a) High Tone Motion Verbs (HTMV)

Those motion verbs whose inherent tone is high are known as high tone motion verbs. Some examples are: *-ga*, *-chụ*, *-gba*, *-rị*

(b) Low Tone Motion Verbs (LTMV)

To this group belong the motion verbs that inherently have low tone. They include the verbs like *-zà* 'sweep' *-kwà* 'push', *-nyà* 'drive', *-pụ* 'go out'.

2.3 Semantic Criterion:

Based on their semantics, the Igbo motion verbs can be classified into three: path of motion verbs, manner of motion verbs and manner-path of motion verbs.

(a) Path of Motion Verbs:

Path of motion verbs refer to those motion verbs that specify the direction of movement. This type of motion verb is what Levin (1993), quoted in Kudranacova (2009), calls verbs of inherently directed motion. They include a specification of the direction of motion, even in the absence of an overt directional complement. In Igbo, there are some motion verbs that show the direction of movement as we can see in the following examples:

- (9) O gwuru olulu.
'He/She dug a pit.'
- (10) Ada dara n'ala.
'Ada fell on the ground.'
- (11) Nneka pụrụ n'ezi.
'Nneka went outside.'
- (12) Ibe bara n'ụlọ Ada.
'Ibe entered Ada's house.'

In the above examples, the verbs: *gwuru*, *dara*, *pụrụ* and *bara* are direct motion verbs in sentences.

(b) Manner of Motion Verbs:

A manner of motion refers to a type of distinct motion and the manner in which the motion is executed. Some examples include *-gba*, *-gwu*, *-feba* *-kwa*, *-nya* as in the sentences below:

- (13) Uche gbara ọsọ ụnyaahụ.
Uche ran yesterday.
- (14) Ọ gbara egwu.
He/She danced.
- (15) Onyeka gwuru mmiri.
Onyeka swam.
- (16) Nnụnụ febatara n'ụlọ m.
A bird flew into my house.
- (17) Uche kwara Ibe aka.

Uche pushed Ibe.

- (18) Amaka nyatara ụgbọ ala ya be m.
Amaka drove her car to my house.

- (19) Ibe nyatara anyịnyaigwe ya be m.
Ibe rode his bicycle to my house.

From the examples of path of motion and manner of motion verbs in Igbo, it is obvious both the path of motion and manner of motion are encoded in the verbs as part of their root meaning. *-gba* 'run/dance', *-gwu* 'swim', *-fe* 'fly', *-kwa* 'push' and *-nya* 'drive/ride'. In addition, the context of the verbs helps to clarify the meaning of the verbs since many of them like *-gba*, *-gwu*, *-feba* *-kwa*, *-nya* are inherent complement verbs.

It should also be noted that in Igbo, when a bound morpheme =*ta* is suffixed to a manner of motion verb, it directs the movement to a path towards the speaker. The implication of this, is that when this morpheme is suffixed to a manner of motion verb, it encodes both manner and path of motion in its meaning. Examples: *kwata*, *nyata*, *gbata* etc. as evident in the following sentences:

- (21) Kwata Uche ebe a.
'Push Uche to this place.'
- (22) Nyata ụgbọala ahụ n'ụlọ ọrụ m echi.
'Drive that car to my office tomorrow.'
- (23) Gbata bọlụ ahụ ebe a.
'Pass that ball to this place.'

(c) Manner-Path of Motion Verbs:

There is also a type of motion verb which consists of a combination of manner of motion and path of motion in its semantics. This is the manner-path of motion verb and comprises two verb roots; the first verb root shows the manner of motion while the second encodes the path of motion. This is illustrated in the sentences below:

- (24) Eze gbapụrụ be ya.

Eze ran out of his home.

- (25) Agwọ ahụ rịgara n'azụ ụlọ.
That snake crawled to the back of the house.

- (26) Gbaga n' ụlọ Okeke.
Run to Okeke's house.

In the above examples, the verb root *-gba* in (24) and (26) encode the manner of motion while the second verb roots (*-pu*, *-ga*, *-ga*) in each of the examples respectively indicate the path of motion.

2.3 Other Features of Igbo Motion Verbs

Summarily, the other features that can be confirmed for the motion verbs include the encoding of overt action and movement in addition to the occurrence in serial verb constructions. The encoding of overt action is exemplified in the sentences below:

- (27) Eze gara ahia.
Eze went to market.
- (28) Ibe chụrụ Ada ọsọ ụnyaahụ.
Yesterday, Ibe chased Ada.
- (29) Ifeoma nyatara ụgbọala ya be m n'izu ụka gara aga.
Ifeoma drove her car to my home last week.

With regard to serial verb constructions, the motion verbs can follow each other in serial construction as we can see in the examples below:

- (30) Ọ bịara sụcha ahịhịa ma zachapụ ya n'ụlọ ya.
He came, cleared and swept out grasses from his house.
- (31) Ọ nyara ụgbọala ya bia be m ụnyaahụ.

He came to my house driving his car yesterday.

3. Summary and Conclusion

In summary, it has been observed that Igbo motion verbs can be classified based on three criteria: the morphological and tonal classes.

The morphological classes include the simple motion verbs, compound motion verbs and complex motion verbs. In addition through affixation, Igbo motion verbs can be used to form new verbs and other parts of speech. It is also observed that when the bound morpheme =*ta* is suffixed to a manner of motion verb, it directs the movement to a path towards the speaker and in that way encodes both manner and path of motion in its meaning. On the tonal criterion, high tone motion verbs (HTMV) and low tone motion verbs (LTMV) were identified. Among the findings of this study are the features of Igbo motion verbs which include the presence of overt action and movement and their ability to follow each other in serial verb constructions.

In conclusion, the Igbo motion verb is an important area in the study of Igbo verbs since they have some peculiar features which make them to behave differently from other types of Igbo verbs.

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