

MOTION VERBS IN IGBO AND THEIR LEXICALIZATION PATTERNS

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Abstract

Not much work has been done on Igbo motion verbs, especially from the perspective of cognitive semantics. The effort in this paper therefore is to analyze the motion verbs of the language from the cognitive semantics angle in order to ascertain their possible lexicalization and conflation patterns. The data for the analysis is drawn from two Igbo dictionaries through the simple extraction of the Igbo equivalents of English motions verbs. The application of Talmy's lexicalization framework could confirm that Igbo motion verbs exhibit six different lexicalization patterns: motion+manner, motion+cause, motion+path, motion+two semantic components, as well as motion and numerosity. The conclusion is that the application of Talmy's framework holds a great promise for further work on the motion verbs of the language.

1. Introduction

Motion verbs are known to be present in all languages of the world and belong to the basic vocabulary of any language, but through the process of lexicalization other concepts are also encoded in them. For example, the English motion verb *stagger* involves motion, but also includes the manner in which the motion takes place: in an unsteady manner. However, a verb like *enter* encode both movement and direction; here a forward movement.

The purpose of this study is to outline the motion verbs of the Igbo language and determine their conflation patterns. The rest of this paper goes into this issue by first reviewing the relevant literatures on the subject, followed by the presentation and analysis of data. It concludes with a summary of the findings.

2. Literature Review

This section presents the definitions of lexicalization that will be adopted for this work and also reviews the treatment of motion verbs and the lexicalization of verbs of motion in the literature.

2.1 Lexicalization

Lexicalization, according to Brinton and Traugott (2005), has been used for two very different phenomena involving diachrony and word formation processes.

Igbo Language Studies, Vol. 1, Pages 73-86 variously for word formation, adoption into the lexicon or falling outside the productive rules of grammar (Sauer, 2004; Plag, 2003). Similar definitions can be found in Bussmann (1996) and Blank (2001). Bussmann (1996) considers *idiomatization* to be the diachronic element of lexicalization which occurs when the original meaning can no longer be deduced from the individual elements of a lexicalized item. Lehmann (2002) on the other hand, while pointing to idioms as the best examples of lexicalization, also notes that *idiomatization* is only one aspect of lexicalization, and the two terms should not be used interchangeably as is sometimes the case; rather, lexicalization has to be regarded as the cover term for a range of phenomena, semantic or non-semantic.

Another view is to restrict lexicalization to words formed by word-formation processes (Lewandowski, 1992; Lipka, 2002, p. 111; Brinton & Traugott, 2005, p. 96) and the reduction of a sentence through the process of lexicalization to a simple lexical item, or also when a form can no longer be accounted for by regular grammatical rules (Brinton & Traugott (2005, p. 21). Antilla (1989) and Bauer (1983) belong to those who share this view.

Talmy's (1985, 2000) approach is different from the above views as he sees lexicalization in the synchronic sense of the conflation of complex conceptual structures into a single lexical form. Hence, lexicalization is involved where a particular meaning component is found to be associated with a particular morpheme and, more broadly, where a set of meaning components, bearing particular relations to each other, is in association with a morpheme, making up the whole morpheme's meaning. Talmy therefore regards the term 'lexicalization' as meaning-in-form relation that has overtime been referred to with three terms which are *lexicalization*, *incorporation* and *conflation*. Rappaport & Levin (1998) also define lexicalization in line with Talmy as the way in which a small set of event types (e.g action, motion, change of state) link up to a large set of root or particular lexeme with idiosyncratic meaning.

For the present study, Talmy's (1985, 2000) understanding of lexicalization as the conflation of conceptual structures or meaning components in a single lexical form shall be adopted as the working definition and used later on for the data analysis.

2.2 Motion verbs

O'Grady and Archibald (2008:203) define motion verbs as words that can describe motion through space or those verbs that express a kind of motion such as *go*, *walk*, and *run*. Pablo and Gutiérrez (2001) define them as words which describe the situation in which an object, the figure, moves with regard to a reference point which is the ground, following a trajectory which is the path. Harley (2002) cited in Prezi (present volume) also describes motion verbs as those verbs that involve motion or change of position as a whole. According to Schalley (2002), for a verb to be a motion verb, there has to be a movement of the whole body involved and it can be a movement along a path as in walking or at a location as in jumping.

Prezi (present volume) defines Igbo motion verbs as those verbs that involve movement while expressing action, and it is as a result of the involvement of movement that they are equally referred to as movement verbs. She classifies Igbo motion verbs based on the morphological and tonal criteria.

Under morphological classification there are simple, compound and complex motion verbs.

- Simple motion verbs are those that consist of only one root and do not have any other linguistic unit attached to them. Motion verbs like *bíá* 'come' and *chú* 'chase' belong here.
- Compound motion verbs are those that are made up of two or more roots which function as equal partners. The examples from Prezi include: *gbápù* 'run out', *kwápù* 'push out', *gbágá* 'run to'.
- Complex motion verbs are those that consist of one verb root in addition to one or more extensional suffixes. Prezi explains that the verb elements of this group do not function as equal partners, rather, the bound morpheme constituents of the verb depend on the free verb root to obtain their meanings. The examples given for this type of motion verb includes *chútáwá* 'begin to chase towards the speaker', *bíákótá* 'come together'.

The second classification which is the tonal criterion, is based on the pitch of the verbs. Under this classification, there are high tone motion verbs and low tone motion verbs.

- High tone motion verbs are those whose inherent tone is high and they include *gá* 'go', *chú* 'chase', *gbá* 'run'.
- Low tone motion verbs are those that inherently have low tone like *zà* 'sweep', *nyà* 'drive', *pù* 'go out' etc.

The last classification is the semantic. Under this classification there are path, manner and manner-path motion verbs.

- Path of motion verbs are those that specify the direction of movement. It includes *bà* ‘enter’, *dà* ‘fall’, *pù* ‘go out’.
- Manner of motion verbs are those that refer to a type of distinct motion described by a particular verb. Examples are *gbáran*, *gwú* ‘dig’, *kwà* ‘push’ etc
- Manner –path motion verbs are those that consist of a combination of manner and path of motion. Examples are *gbápù* ‘run out’, *gbágá* ‘run to’ etc

In the present study, motion verbs shall only refer to those verbs that involve a movement of the whole body as pointed out by Schalley (2002) and therefore shall exclude verbs like *zà* ‘sweep’ and *gwú* ‘dig’ as contained in Prezi (present volume).

2.3 Lexicalization patterns of motion verbs

Talmy (1985, 2000) focuses on those cases where more than one semantic element is lexicalized in a single morpheme and which he describes as the conflation of semantic components with surface forms. Below are his categories of motion verbs (Talmy, 1985, p. 128; 2000, p. 25):

- Figure: The salient moving entity in the motion event.
- Ground: The reference frame against which the figure moves.
- Path: The course followed by the figure.
- Motion: a situation denoting movement.
- Manner/cause: The former refers to the ways of motion with which an agent or patient manifests while the latter refers to causing events which lead to the motion.

Talmy establishes a three way typology according to how the meaning of a verb in a language characteristically encodes the motion event: (a) *Motion + manner/cause*, (b) *Motion + path*, and (c) *Motion + figure*. However, there are other conflation patterns, but any of the three above is compulsorily found in all languages; hence the conflation pattern of the particular language is based on the dominance of such pattern. For example, in his investigation of the lexicalization patterns of English and Spanish motion verbs, Talmy establishes that English dominantly conflates manner with motion verbs like *rush*, *stagger*, with a few conflation of

path and figure. English *motion + path* conflated verbs include *enter*, *descend*, while English *motion + figure* conflation include ‘*rain*’ and ‘*spit*’ which involve the movement of the figure from one location to another. Spanish, on the other hand, dominantly lexicalizes a *motion+path* in a single lexeme and expresses manner elsewhere:

- (1) *La botella entróflotando en la cueva*
the bottle entered floating to the cave
‘The bottle floated into the cave’

In the above examples, *motion+path* are lexicalized in the verb (*entró*) while manner which is ‘*flotando*’, is profiled elsewhere.

Talmy’s framework has been used to establish the lexicalization patterns of other languages. For example, Narasimhan (1998) for Hindi, Schaefer (1985) for Tswana, a Bantu language, Brinton and Traugott (2005) for Chinese language, Ojibwa and Finno-Ugric languages and many other languages.

In spite of the growing body of work on motion verbs of different languages, the lexicalization patterns of Igbo motion verbs have not been investigated in the light of Talmy’s Cognitive Semantics and the patterns of lexicalization identified by the author. The next section is therefore investigates the various Igbo motion verbs on the basis of Talmy’s framework in order to ascertain the lexicalization or conflation patterns that can be confirmed for Igbo.

3. Igbo Verbs of Motion

Talmy’s (1985, 2000) typology of the lexicalization of motion verbs which is adopted for the analysis here is summarized below.

a. *Motion + co-event, path or figure*

The above named class is divided into the following sub-classes:

- i. *Motion + manner conflation*: occurs when a verb in addition to expressing motion describes the way or style of the movement.
- ii. *Motion + cause conflation*: occurs when a verb expresses motion as well as the cause of the movement.
- iii. *Motion + path conflation*: is another typology pattern for the conflation of motion verbs where the verb expresses both the fact of motion and the direction or path of that motion.

- iv. *Motion + figure conflation*: occurs when a verb expresses the fact of motion together with the figure. Motion verbs with this characteristic pattern express various kinds of objects or materials as moving.

b. Motion + ground

This conflation occurs when a verb expresses both the fact of motion and the particular ground object which refers to the means of movement or the figure on which the movement occurs.

c. Motion + Two Semantic Components

This pattern of lexicalization occurs when two components of a motion event conflate with the fact of motion. Components of a motion event refer to manner, path, figure or ground. In other words, this lexicalization pattern involves the conflation of manner and path + motion or path and ground + motion and so on.

d. Motion+ No Further Semantic Component

This occurs when the verb expresses the motion component alone without the conflation of any other component of the motion event. According to Talmy, this pattern does occur, perhaps with some frequency in representing the locative type of motion event. Here a single verb form represents motion without a conflation of path, figures or co-events.

e. Motion + A Minimally Differentiated Semantic Component

There are systems in which motion does conflate with another component of motion event different from the ones already mentioned. This lexicalization pattern occurs when motion, instead of conflating with figure, may conflate with the numerosity of the figure or, instead of conflating with path, may conflate with the deictic portion of path and not with the portion that pertains to geometric configurations.

Talmy's lexicalization patterns can be used to categorize most languages, depending on the range of meaning their motion verbs typically express (Matsumoto 2003). They shall be applied in the next section to the motion verbs of the Igbo language.

3. 1 The Conflation of Igbo Verbs of Motion

The data for this study was collected through a simple selection of the Igbo equivalents to some of the verbs of motion in the Igbo bilingual dictionaries by Igwe (1999) and Echeruo (2001). It would of course go beyond this work to examine all motion verbs of the language. The data and the analysis in this section can therefore be regarded as an incursion into the characterization of motion verbs in Igbo.

3.1.1 Motion + co-event, path or figure

(i) *Motion + manner conflation.*

The Igbo verbs involved here are: *-gbé ígbé* ‘move on hands and knees or crawl’; *-chú ósọ* ‘chase/run after’; *-mí* ‘move stealthily or quietly or secretly; sneak’; *-fě* ‘fly or move in a flying manner’; and *-néfè* ‘step over person/object or avoid contact with an object by stepping over it’.

(2) *Nwátà áhù gbè-rè ígbé.*
Child DET crawl-rV(Past) crawling
‘That child crawled.’

(3) *Òbí chù-rù yà ósọ.*
Obi chase-rV(Past) him race
‘Obi chased or pursued him/her’

(4) *Mírí ba`á n’ ụlọ!*
sneak entre-IMP PREP house
‘Sneak into the house!’

(5) *Úzúzù fě-bà-rà yàn’ ányá.*
dust fly-enter-rV(Aast) 3PS PREP eye
‘Dust flew into his/her eyes’

(6) *Ádá néfèrè óché áhù.*
Ada step.over-rV(Past) chair DET
‘Ada stepped over that chair’

(7) *Òbí wù-bà-rà n’ àzú úgbọ̀là áhù.*
Obi jump-enter-rV(Past) PREP back vehicle DET
‘Obi jumped into the back of that car’

The verbs listed in the above sentences are motion verbs that also code the manner of the movement. Hence, *manner+motion* conflation can be confirmed for Igbo verbs.

ii. *Motion + cause conflation*

The verbs to be used here are *-kwà ákā* ‘push’ and *-gbá úkwú* ‘kick’

- (8) *Òbí kwà-rà Àdá áká.*
Obi push-rV(Past) Ada hand
‘Obi pushed Ada.’

- (9) *Òbí gbàrà Àdá úkwú.*
Obi kick-rV(Past) Ada leg
‘Obi kicked Ada.’

According to Talmy, cause and motion are conflated in a verb when the verb expresses movement as well as the cause of the movement. The verbs in the above examples have both motion and cause conflated in them. In these examples, Ada moved as a result of Obi’s pushing and kicking respectively. The pushing and kicking are therefore the cause of movement. Hence, motion + cause conflation is possible in Igbo motion verbs.

iii. *Motion + path conflation*

Some of the verbs involved here include: *-pù* ‘move out or go out’, *-bà* ‘enter/move/go into’, *-bíá* ‘come or movement towards the speaker’.

- (10) *Àdá pù-rù n’ èzí.*
Ada go.out-rV(Past) PREP outside
‘Ada went outside.’

- (11) *Àdá bà-rà n’ ùlò.*
Ada enter-rV(Past) PREP outside
‘Ada went into the house.’

- (12) *Òbí bìà-rà.*
Obi come-rV(Past)
‘Obi came.’

The verbs in (10)-(12) express both motion and path or the direction of the motion. Therefore, motion + Path conflation can be confirmed for Igbo motion verbs.

Finally, with regard to the first major group of Talmy’s *Motion + co-event, path or figure*, it has to be noted that the last sub-group, *Motion+Figure* conflation, could not be confirmed for Igbo. For example, the Igbo equivalent to the English conflation, ‘to rain’, is an inverted verb+NP structure that has an NP+V structure: *mmírí ízò* ‘to rain (literal: rain to

fall)’. This example can only confirm the conflation of *motion+figure* in the English verb *to rain*.

3.1.2 Motion + two semantic components

The verbs in this group are mainly compound verbs. Some of them include the following: - *gbébà* ‘crawl into’, -*gbepu* ‘crawl out’, -*gbédà* ‘crawl down’, -*fěbà* ‘fly in or into’ -*fěpù* ‘fly out /off’ -*fědà* ‘fly in or into’, -*chúbà* ‘pursue into or chase into’ -*chúpù* ‘pursue into or chase into’ -*chúdà* ‘pursue down or chase down’ -*mípù* ‘move out secretly or sneak out’ -*mídà* ‘move down secretly or sneak down’

- (13) *Nwátà áhù gbé-bàrà n’úlò.*
 child DET crawl.enter-rV(Past) PREP house
 ‘That baby crawl into the house.’
- (14) *Nwátà áhù gbé-pù-rù n’úlò.*
 child DET crawl-go.out-rV(Past) PREP house
 ‘That baby crawled out of the house.’
- (15) *Nwátà áhù gbé-dà-rà n’àlà.*
 child DET crawl-fall.down-rV(Past) PREP floor
 ‘That baby crawled down to the floor.’
- (16) *Nnùnù áhù fě-bà-rà n’íké.*
 bird DET fly-enter-rV(Past) PREP force
 ‘That bird flew in suddenly.’
- (17) *Nnùnù áhù fě-pù-rù n’íké.*
 bird DET fly-go.out-rV(Past) PREP force
 ‘That bird flew out suddenly.’
- (18) *Nnùnù áhù fě-dà-rà n’íké.*
 bird DET fly-fall.down-rV(Past) PREP force
 ‘That bird flew down in suddenly.’

- (19) *Chú-bà-á yā n'ụlọ.*
 chase-enter-IMP 3Ps PREP house
 'Pursue or chase him into the house!'
- (20) *Chú-pụ yā n'ụlọ.*
 chase-go.out.IMP 3Ps PREP house
 'Pursue or chase him out.'
- (21) *Chú-dà-á yā n'àlà.*
 chase-fall.down-IMP 3Ps PREP house
 'Chase him down to the floor'
- (22) *Àdá mī-bà-rà n' ụlọ.*
 Ada sneak-enter-rv(Past) PREP house
 'Ada sneaked into the house.'
- (23) *Àdá mī-pụ-rụ.*
 Ada sneak-go.out-rv(Past)
 'Ada sneaked out'
- (24) *Àdá mī-dà-rà.*
 Ada sneak-fall.down-rv(Past)
 'Ada sneaked down.'

The verbs in the above sentences are compound verbs that involve the combination of *motion+manner* and *motion+path*. In sentences (13) to (15) the verbs are *-gbébà* 'crawl into', *-gbepu* 'crawl out', and *-gbédà* 'crawl down'. While the first verbal component *gbé* 'crawl' has a *motion+manner* conflation, all the second components have a *motion+path* conflation. It is therefore not surprising that these second components could be realized as directional elements in the English translations. Similarly, in sentences (16) to (18) the compound verbs are *-fěbà* 'fly in or into', *-fěpụ* 'fly out /off', and *-fědà* 'fly down', with the first verbal component, *fě* 'fly' having a *motion+manner* conflation, while the rest have a *motion+path* conflation. In the next group, sentences (19) to (21), with the compound verbs *-chúbà* 'pursue into or chase into', *-chúpụ* 'pursue out of/drive out', *-chúdà* 'pursue down or chase down', the first verbal component, *-chú* 'chase/pursue', also has a *motion+manner* conflation while the rest have a *motion+path* conflation. Finally, this combination applies also to the last group of

compound verbs *-míṗù* ‘move out secretly or sneak out’ *-mídà* ‘move down secretly or sneak down’. This conflation arising from verbal compounds seems to fall within the group which Talmy refers to as *motion + two semantic components*. This pattern could therefore be seen as confirmed for Igbo. The overall picture that seems to emerge here is that *Manner+Motion* are conflated in the verb root, while *path* is usually added as a suffix or through another verb root with a *motion+path* conflation.

3.1.3 *Motion + a minimally differentiated semantic component*

The conflation of motion and any other concept apart from manner, cause, path, figure and ground is referred to as *motion + a minimally differentiated semantic component*. The best example is the verb *-nú* ‘move in a great mass or number of’ which always demands a plural subject (see sentence 25, and note the ungrammaticality of sentence 26 that does not have a plural subject).

- (25) *Há nū-bàrà n' úlò.*
 They move.en.mass-enter-rV(Past) PREP house
 ‘They moved in a great number into the house’

- (26) **Ádà nūbàrà n' úlò*

Motion and numerosity can conflate in Igbo. This implies that the verb of movement can be used when describing a movement of a great number of people or animals. This pattern is therefore confirmed for Igbo.

4. Summary and conclusion

The effort in this paper is to establish the lexicalization patterns of Igbo motion verbs. It can be observed that the language seems to operate an intermixed conflation system in the lexicalization of its motion events. An intermixed system of conflation according to Talmy refers to when a language exhibits no particular or consistent conflation for the various members of that motion event type. Six different lexicalization patterns can be confirmed for Igbo motion verbs:

(1) *motion and manner* conflation where the concepts of motion and manner are lexicalized in a verb. (2) *Motion and cause* conflation where the concept of motion and cause are lexicalized in a verb.

(3) *Motion and two semantic components* where the concept of motion as well as two other components which are manner and path are realized through compound verb structures.

(4) *Motion and path* where the concept of motion is lexicalized with path in a verb.

(5) Motion and a minimally differentiated semantic component where the concept of motion and numerosity of the figure are lexicalized in a verb.

With this, it is observed that Igbo motion verbs have no such lexicalization patterns as *motion+figure* and *motion+ground*. Furthermore, most of the *manner+motion* conflated verbs cannot stand alone in sentence constructions. They usually require path conflation which is resolved either through a V+V compound verb formation or through a V+Suffix formation. Note, for example, that the verb *-mí'sneak'* is a *motion+manner* verb but must always be combined with a *motion+path* verb in a compound verb structure. The second verb in such compound verb structures spells out the *path* and is consequently translated as a directional preposition in English. This could be the reason for the existence of numerous *motion+two semantic components* pattern of lexicalization in the language.

It is hoped that the present effort shall mark the onset of further work on this very interesting aspect of the Igbo language.

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