Ịgbọ Verbs of Communication

Maduabuchi Agbo

Abstract

This paper investigates the characteristics of Igbo verbs of communication. The study identifies seven sub-classes of Igbo verbs of communication. These classes can be grouped into two broad categories of verbs, that is, those used communicatively and those used non-communicatively. The verbs used communicatively are the Igbo verbs of communication par excellence. The verbs of communication in relation to Igbo vocabulary as a whole fall into the two major classes of Bound Complement Verbs and Inherent Complement Verbs (Nwachukwu, 1984; Emenanjo, 2005). This study establishes Igbo verbs of communication as a semantically coherent class with all the members sharing the meaning of the exchange of information. The study hopes to stimulate interest in this area of Igbo vocabulary.

Key words: Igbo verbs, lexical knowledge, communication, information

1.0 Introduction

Igbo is a major language in Nigeria with about 25 million people speaking it as a first language. The Igbo people are famous for undertaking trading adventures across the West African sub-region and this is why the language is spoken in large markets across the region (Emenanjo, 1998:43).

Igbo is a tone language with three basic tones viz High, Low and the phenomenon of downstep. The tone pattern of each lexical is provided to underscore the importance of tone. High tone is indicated by a raised accent thus / ´ /. Low tone is indicated by a grave accent / ` /, while the phenomenon of downstep is indicated by a raised macron thus / ¯ /.

The language is classified as a Niger-Congo language, which belongs to the new Benue-Congo sub-branch of languages (Bendor-Samuel, 1989) or the West Benue-Congo (Williamson & Blench, 2000). The language consists of many dialects which are mutually intelligible. The current trend in Igbo linguistics is to classify Igbo dialects based on the common features associated with the States of origin of these dialects. Hence, there exists the Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers dialects. This classification is deemed to be more realistic and practical because "Igbo people today associate speakers of Igbo dialects with features common to their states" (Igboanusi & Peter, 2005:60).

The verbs of focus in this study include those verbs that denote how ideas are shared and/or transferred in human communication. For the Igbo language, a study of the syntactic and semantic properties of any class of its verbs can stand as a study of the language (Uwalaka, 1988; 1983). Emenanjo (2005) claims that the Igbo verb is the only source for the derivation of new words in the language. This contrasts with English where the nouns and verbs can be used to derive other words. Nwachukwu (1984) describes Igbo as a verb-language. The reason is that Igbo prepositions and Noun Phrases are 'verb-forms' unlike in English and other Indo-European languages where they appear as semantically empty 'function words'.

The examples in this paper were taken mostly from the daily utterances by speakers of the Anambra and Enugu dialects of Igbo. The examples were tested for grammaticality by five native speakers of these dialects. The author is also a native speaker. The transcriptions follow standard Igbo orthography. The abbreviations are: TNS 'tense', IND 'indicative', PROG 'progressive', AGR 'agreement' 3SG 'third-person singular pronoun' 3PL'third-person plural pronoun' BEN 'benefactive'

Levin (1983) makes the assertion that 'the characteristic of lexical knowledge is easily illustrated with respect to verbs.' This assertion aligns with the claims by Emenanjo (2005; 1984) and Uwalaka (1988; 1983). The centrality of the verb in any language study is incontestable. The basic clause of any language contains a verb with other grammatical categories subservient to the verb's dominance of the structure of the clause. For Igbo, the knowledge of the meaning of a verb determines its syntactic properties. However, the knowledge of the verb by the Igbo speaker goes beyond its meaning to the possible array of words that can be derived from the verb, since the verb is the only source for the derivation of new words. In other words, the lexical knowledge of the Igbo speaker includes the meaning of the individual verb, the syntactic properties that are derived from

the verb meaning and the relationship between verb meaning and morphosyntactic properties.

This study aims to investigate the aspects of the semantics of Igbo verbs of communication in terms of their position within the structure of Igbo vocabulary. Our hope is that this study may draw attention to the semantic interest of this area of the vocabulary in different languages.

The verbs of communication in Igbo identified for this study is a semantically coherent class with all the members sharing the meaning of the transferring ideas from an addresser to an addressee. The choice of this class of verbs for study is because of the role human language plays in communication and conceptualization and, also, its role in relation to the acquisition of knowledge and culture.

1.1 Methods of data collection

The methods of data collection include introspection as a native speaker, elicitation of data from ten native speakers of Igbo and consulting two linguistically adequate and prominent Igbo dictionaries. Williamson (1972) Igbo dictionary, with over 5000 entries from the Onisha dialect, has been very useful in identifying the Igbo verbs of communication for study. Echeruo (1998) Igbo dictionary has also been helpful. The verbs were isolated and our native speaker informants were asked to use them in basic sentences. These sentences were recorded, transcribed and edited to suit the aim of the study. Some data were derived from a number of Igbo literature texts.

2.0 Verbs of communication in Igbo

In the data available to us, the Igbo verbs of communication have eight sub-classes. These include: *the verbs of the transfer of a message; verbs of speaking*; *chatter verbs*; *complain verbs*; *advise verbs*; *verbs of manner of speaking;oath-taking verbs*; and *consulting verbs*. Section 2 below illustrates the examples of these verbs and their alternations.

2.1 Verbs of the transfer of a message

These verbs show the relay of information or messages from the addresser to a known addressee or to an addressee that is absent at the time of the utterance. The verbs also show the relay of a message from one individual to the general public. The examples of these verbs include:

1.

a. ibú ámúmā   'to prophesy'

b. íjú èsè   'to inquire after someone's health'

c. íjú ọ̀hà   'to inquire after someone's family welfare'

d. ímá ókwà   'to give public notice; to announce'

e. íkpó ḿkpụ́   'to cry out in horror'

f. ígbá àmà   'to leak a secret'

These verbs fall under the class of verbs identified as Inherent Complement Verbs (Nwachukwu, 1984). The transfer of the message usually involves a declarative statement by the addresser to the addressee. It could be done by the use of voice (cf 2, a, b,d, f and j) below or non-voice (cf 2g and i) below. There is no specific manner depicted by the addresser in the transfer of the message but the type of communicated information is usually a message from the addresser to the addressee. The number of participants in the event may be two or more. All the verbs in this subclass are used only in the context of communication. Since communication involves the acquisition of information, these verbs denote the change of possession of information from the addresser to the addressee.

The examples in (2) below show the use of these verbs in sentence constructions.

2.1.1 Sentence constructions involving verbs of the transfer of a message

2.

a. Àdá   bù-rù   ámúmā
  Ada   carry-IND   prophecy
  'Ada prophesied'

b. Àdá   bù-ù-rù   Ọ̀bí   ámúmā
    Ada   carry-BEN-IND Obi   prophesy
    'Ada prophesied for Obi'

c. Àdá   jù-rù   èsè   Ọ̀bí
   Ada   ask-TNS wellbeing Obi
   'Ada asked after Obi'

d. Àdá jù-rù   Ọ̀bí èsè
   Ada ask-TNS Obi wellbeing

'Ada asked Obi about his wellbeing'

e. Àdá jù-rù   Òbí   òhà
   Ada ask-TNS Obi   household
   'Ada asked after Obi's family'

f. Ńdí ìchíé   kù-rù   mmúó
   Q   elders   call-IND spirit
    'The elders invited the ancestors'

g. Òbí mà-rà   ọ́kwà
    Obi throw-IND announce
     'Obi has given a public notice'

h. Àdá kpọ̀-rọ̀   ńkpú
   Ada call-TNS   shout
   'Ada shouted in horror to call for help'

i. Àdá gbà-rà àmà
   Ada V   secret
  'Ada leaked the secret'

j. Àdá gbà-à-rà   Òbí   àmà
    Ada V-BEN-IND   Obi betrayal
     'Ada leaked the secret to Obi'

2.2 Verbs of communication of propositional attitudes

Verbs of communication of propositional attitudes in Igbo occur in utterances where one makes a claim, in speech, that may be true or false or even a guess. The following are verbs of communication of propositional attitudes.

3.
a. ígbá ákā ébé   'to give evidence'
b. íkà àkà   'to guess
c. ígọ́ ágọ̄   'to deny'
d. ísà n'ọ́nū   'to confess'
e. ísị́ àsị̀   'to lie'

These verbs belong to the class of verbs identified as Bound Cognate Verbs (Emenanjo, 1978; 2005). The mode of communication depicted by these verbs is done by the use of

voice only. The utterances with these verbs usually carry an imperative force. The verbs can be used non-communicatively as shown in sentence (4a) and communicatively (cf. 4b-f). There is no specific manner in which these verbs are used in communication but the type of communicated information includes statement of reality from the perspective of the addresser. There is a change of possession of information in (4a, b and d) but none in sentences (4c and e). There seems to be only one participant (the addresser) in the events denoted by the verbs. The specific manner of communication is emphatic.

2.2.1 Sentence constructions involving the verbs of the communication of propositional attitudes

4.

a. Áyòg̣ù gbà-a-rà   Ézè áká   ébē
   Ayogu V-BEN-IND   Eze hand   evidence
   'Ayogu has given evidence in support of Eze'

b. Ézè kà-rà   à-kà   íhé   Áyòg̣ù gà-è-mé
   Eze say-IND AGR-say thing Ayogu FUT-AGR-do
   'Eze guessed what Ayogu will do'

c. Ó   g̣ò-rò̩   ya
    3SG   deny-IND 3SG (obj)
    'S/he has denied it'

d. Há   sà-rà   n'ọ́nū̄
   3PL spread-IND in mouth
   'They have confessed'

e. Ọ́   sì-rì̩   àsí̩
   3SG say-IND   lie
   'S/he lied'

2.3 Verbs of social interaction

The verbs of social interaction encode activities where there is a steady flow of informal conversation between two or more interlocutors. The conversation usually takes place in The examples in our data include:

4.

a. íkpá nkà̩tà̩   'to chitchat'

b. íkọ̀ akụ́kọ́   'to tell story'

c. ímā njàkìrì   'to throw banters'

d. ígbághá   'to argue'

e. íhọ̀ íhọ̀   'to tell fables; folktales'

These verbs fall under the class of Inherent Complement Verbs. The mode of communication is by the use of voice only and there is no specific manner of communication since the atmosphere is informal. However, the verbs are always used communicatively. It seems the verbs can take one participant (addresser) as shown in examples (b, c, e, f and g) or two participants (addresser and addressee) as shown in (5a, d and h). Where the verb takes only the addresser, the addressee is understood by whoever hears the utterance. There is usually a change of possession of information between addresser and addressee, where these occur, and, the type of communicated information includes informal banters.

2.3.1 Sentence constructions involving the verbs of social interaction

5.
a. Àdá nà Ọ̀bí   nà   à-kpá   nkàtá
   Ada and obi PROG AGR-stir conversation
   'Ada and Obi are having a conversation'

b. Há kpà-rà   nkàtà
    3PL stir-IND conversation
    'They had a conversation'

c. Ọ̀   kọ̀-rọ̀   ákụ́kọ́
   3SG tell-TNS story
   'S/he told a story'

d. Ọ́   kọ̀-ọ̀-rọ̀   há   ákụ́kọ́
   3SG tell-BEN-IND 3PL story
    'S/he told them a story'

e. Àdá nà Ọ̀bí   nà   a-má   njàkìrì
   Ada and Obi PROG AGR-throw banter
   'Ada and Obi are exchanging banter'

f. Àdá gbághá-rá   ókwú Ọ̀bí
  Ada argue-TNS word Obi
  'Ada argued against what Obi said'

g. Ézè hò-rò̩   íhò̩
  Eze tell-IND fable
  'Eze told a fable'

h. Ezè hò-ò-rò̩   úmù̩   yá   íhò̩
  Eze tell-BEN-IND children 3PL (object) folktale
  'Eze told his children a folktale'

2.4 Complain verbs

The complain verbs denote situations where the addresser feels bad about an occurrence and whines about it to the addressee.

 6.

  a.   íkpésá mkpésā 'to complain openly'

  b. íchí íchí   'to warn'

  c. ínyọ́ ọ̀nyìnyọ̀   'to complain loudly'

The defining feature of these verbs is the specific manner of anger that comes with their usage in utterances. They belong to the class of Bound Cognate Verbs. Their mode of communication is through the use of voice only and the type of communicated information is the lodging of a complaint. When they take only one participant in the clause, it is usually the addresser (7a and c) but they can also take two participants (7b and d). The verbs are always used communicatively in speech.

2.4.1 Sentence constructions involving complain verbs

7.

a. Àdá kpè̩sà-rà̩   mkpésá
  Ada complain-IND complaint
  'Ada complained'

b. Ọ̀bí chì-rì̩   Ézè íchí
  Obi warn-IND Eze warning

'Obi warned Eze'

c. Àdá nyọ̀-rọ̀   ọ̀nyìnyọ̀
  Ada grumble-IND   a grumble
 'Ada grumbled'

d. Àdá nyọ̀-ọ̀-rọ̀   Ọbí ọ̀nyìnyọ̀
  Ada grumble-BEN-IND   Obi a grumble
  'Ada grumbled to Obi'

2.5 Advise verbs

Advice verbs denote the giving of advice by the addresser to the addressee. There are only two examples of these kinds of verbs in our data as shown in (7) below.

7.
a. ídụ̀ ọ́dụ̀   'to advise'

b. ítú álọ̀   'to confer'

They belong to the class of Bound Cognate Verbs and their mode of communication is only by the use of the voice. These verbs carry declarative force in the utterances they occur. They always take two participants (addresser and addressee) and are always used communicatively. The type of communicated information is usually a piece of advice from the addresser to the addressee. There is no specific manner in which this communication is transmitted. The sentences in (7) below indicate the use of these verbs in the language.

2.5.1 Sentence constructions involving advice verbs

7.

a. Áyọ̀gụ̀ dụ̀-rụ̀   Ọbí ọ́dụ̀
  Ayogu poke-IND Obi advice
  'Ayogu advised Obi'

b.Áyọ̀gụ̀ tụ̀-rụ̀   Ọbí álọ̀
  Ayogu contribute-IND Obi confer
 'Ayogu conferred with Obi'

2.6 Verbs of the manner of speaking

The verbs of the manner of speaking encode in them specific manners of transferring of ideas or messages from the addresser to the addressee.

8.
a. ítámū ńtámú 'to mutter'
b. íbá m̀bá 'to scold'
c. ísú nsú 'to stammer'
d. ítú ílú 'to speak in proverbs'
e. ikụ́ ákụ̀kụ̀ 'to make snide remarks'

These verbs belong to the class of inherent complement verbs and the mode of communication is by voice only. Each of the verbs in (8) above encodes a specific manner of the communication of information. In (9a) below, the information is whispered but it is used non-communicatively. In (9b) there is an exchange of information between the addresser and addressee hence the verb is used communicatively. The verb in (9c) depicts a manner of shouting in anger. The verb is always used communicatively because the shouting and anger is directed to the addressee. For (9) the specific manner of speaking is a stuttering of speech. The verb can be used communicatively (9d) and non-communicatively (9e). The verb in example (9f) is used in a manner depicting performance in the language. The Igbo people speak a lot in proverbs and those who can are adept in the use of proverbs are highly respected. The verb in (9f) is always used communicatively. The verb *ikụ́ akụ̀kụ̀* 'to make snide remarks' in (9g) is always used in a mocking manner to the addressee. This addressee is usually understood by the hearer of the utterance.

2.6.1 Sentence constructions involving the verbs of the manner of speaking

9.

a. Ọ̀bí tàmù-rù̀   ntàmù̀
   Obi mutter-IND muttering
   'Obi muttered (emphatic)'

b. Ọ̀bí tàmù-ù-rù̀   Ézè ntàmù̀
    Obi mutter-BEN-IND Eze muttering
    'Obi muttered to Eze'

c. Ọ̀bí bà-rà   Ézè   m̀bá
   Obi scold-IND Eze   scolding
   'Obi scolded Eze'

d. Ọ̀bí sụ̀-rù̀   m̀   nsụ́
   Obi speak-IND 1SG stammering

'Obi stammered to me'

e. Ọ́bí sụ̀-rụ̀   nsụ́
   Obi speak-IND   stammering
   'Obi stammered'

f. Ọ́bí tụ̀-rụ̀   ílú
    Obi throw-IND proverb
    'Obi said a proverb'

g. À̀dá nà-à̀-kụ́   à̀kụ̀kụ̀
   Ada PROG-AGR-hit   snide remarks
   'Ada is making snide remarks'

2.7 Swear verbs

Swear verbs encode situations where the participants in an event swear to an oath that is binding on them or meant to harm the addressee. There are few swear verbs in the language and we have identified three of them in example (10) below.

10.

a. Íñú íyí   'to take an oath'

b. Íkpọ́ íyí   'to curse someone'

c. Ígbá ndù̀   'to bind with an oath'

Swear verbs are inherent complement verbs and their mode of communication is by the use of voice and non-voice. The voice is used to make the pronouncement of an oath, and, the non-voice mode occurs when the addresser drinks a magical concoction to bind him to the pronouncement. The illocutionary force is usually imperative. The verb is always used communicatively as there is an exchange of information in the usage of the verb. The specific manner of transmission of this information is grave and the type of communicated information is a solemn pronouncement by the addresser. The number of participants the verb takes varies. In (11a and c) the verbs take only one participant in the clause while in (11b) there are two participants.

2.7.1 Sentence constructions of swear verbs

11.

a.   Ọ́bí ñù̀-rù̀   íyì̀

Obi drink-IND   oath
'Obi swore to an oath'

b.   Ọ́   kpọ̀-rọ̀   m̀   íyì
     3SG call-IND 1SG   oath
     'S/he cursed me'

c.   Há   gbà-rà   ńdù
     3PL   V-IND   life
     'They bound their lives with an oath'

Figure 1 below illustrates a summary of this attempt to characterize the sub-class of Igbo verbs of communication.

Verbs class	Mode of communication	Illocutionary force	Class of verbs	Specific manner of the transmission of information	Used communicatively or not
Transfer of message	Voice and non-voice	Imperative	ICV	varied	Used both communicatively and non-communicatively
Communication of propositional attitude	Voice only	declarative	BCV	varied	Used only communicatively
Social interaction	Voice only	Declarative	ICV	cheerful	Used only communicatively
Complain verbs	Voice only	Varied	BCV	anger	Used only communicatively
Advice verbs	Voice only	Declarative	BCV	solemn	Used only communicatively
Manner of speaking	Voice and non-voice	Declarative	BCV	varied	Used both communicatively and non-communicatively
Swear verbs	Voice and non-voice	Imperative	ICV	Grave	Used both communicatively and non-communicatively

Figure 1

3.0. Verbs of communication in the vocabulary of Igbo as a whole

In this paper the verbs of communication in Igbo have been considered from the view point of their classification into the major class of verbs as described in the works of Nwachukwu, (1984) and Emenanjo, (2005). We notice that Igbo verbs of communication fall into the two classes of Inherent Complement verbs and Bound Complement Verbs (cf

Fig. 1 above). The verbs can further be classified into two classes of verbs: the verbs that are used only communicatively and the ones that can be used both communicatively and non-communicatively. Therefore, the verbs that are used only communicatively are Igbo verbs of communication par excellence. These include the *verbs of communication of propositional attitudes, social interaction, complain verbs, and advise verbs*. (cf Fig.1). The verbs of the transfer of a message and manner of speaking can be said to include other forms of applicability in the vocabulary of Igbo.

In terms of the mode of transmission of information the verbs fall into the class of the use of voice only and the use of both voice and non-voice.

A further classification of these verbs in relation to Igbo vocabulary is based on the illocutionary force. In this regard, they fall into two major classes; *imperative* and *declarative*. Igbo interrogative clauses require movement rules that are beyond the scope of this work.

In conclusion, the semantic characteristics of the verbs treated in this paper illustrate their applicability as operational verbs of communication and their relationship to the vocabulary of Igbo as a whole.

References

Bendor-Samuel, J.T. ed. 1989. *The Niger-Congo languages: A classification and description of Africa's largest language family*. Lanham, New York and London: University Press of America.

Echeruo, Michael. 1998. *Dictionary of the Igbo Language*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Emenanjo, Nolue E. 1998. The modernization of Igbo and its implications for holistic education. In Kwesi Prah, ed. *Between distinction and extinction. The harmonization and standardization of African languages*. Johannesburg: Witwaterand University Press.

Emenanjo, Nolue E. 1978. *Elements of modern Igbo grammar*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Emenanjo, Nolue E. 2005. Igbo verbs: transitivity or complementation. In Ozo-mekuri Ndimele, ed. *Trends in the study of languages and linguistics in Nigeria (A festschrift for P.A. Nwachukwu).* Port Harcourt: Grand Orbit Communication & Emhai Press, 479-497

Igboanusi, Herbert & Lothar, Peter. 2005. *Languages in competition (the struggle for supremacy among Nigeria's major languages).* Frankfurtam Main: Peter Lang.

Nwachukwu, Philip Akụjuobi. 1984. Towards a classification of Igbo verbs. In Nwachukwu, P.A. ed. *Readings on the Igbo verb (studies in Igbo Linguistics vol. 1).* Nsukka: Igbo Language Association, 18-44

Uwalaka, Mary Angela. 1988. *The Igbo verb. A semantico-syntactic analysis*. Wien: Bertrage Zur Afrikanistik Band 35.

Uwalaka, Mary Angela. 1984. What is a verb in Igbo? In Nwachukwu, P.A. ed. *Readings on the Igbo verb (studies in Igbo Linguistics vol. 1).* Nsukka: Igbo Language Association, 8-17.

Williamson, Kay (ed). 1972. Igbo-English Dictionary Based on the Onicha dialect. Benin City: Ethiope Press

Williamson, Kay & Roger, Blench. 2000. Niger-Congo. In Bern Heine & Derek Nurse eds. *African Languages: an introduction*. Cambridge: University Press, 11-42.

Maduabuchi Agbo, Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Linguistics and African Languages
University of Benin
Benin City
Nigeria.
maduagbo@yahoo.com