
A Comparative Analysis of Perfective Aspect in Nanka and Ehugbo Igbo

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Abstract

This research focuses on a comparative study of perfective aspect in Nanka and Ehugbo varieties of the Igbo language. It aims at analysing how the perfective aspect marker is realized in the two Igbo speaking communities as a case study. This study seeks to analyse the similarities and the differences among the different varieties, and to find out how closely related they are. The elicitation method was adopted using an interview technique as well as researchers' knowledge of their dialects. The method of analysing the data was purely descriptive. Twenty sentences written in the Standard Igbo were used as a guide by the researchers for data collection and were translated by informants in their different varieties of the language. The sentences were generated by the researchers. Having collected and analysed the data, this research study shows the different ways the two selected dialects mark perfective aspect using the suffixes '-na/ne' and '-wo' respectively. It is observed that perfective marker in both dialects bears a high tone. The result shows that the selected speech communities are varieties of the Igbo language, although there are little differences. We conclude, therefore, that different morphemes can be used to mark perfective aspect in Igbo, depending on the speech community.

Keywords: perfective aspect, comparative study, dialects, elicitation method, aspect

1. Introduction

Nigeria as a heterogeneous nation with large number of cultures is made up of many languages of which the Igbo language is one of the major languages. The Igbo language comprises of numerous dialects and numerous speakers. The dialects of Igbo are so large that they cannot be estimated, although some of the dialects are not mutually intelligible. The Igbo language is spoken in the South East (Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi) and South South (Delta, Rivers) regions of Nigeria. The selected speech communities in Orumba North Local Government Area of Anambra State and Afikpo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, are drawn from Inland West Igbo dialect cluster and Waawa Igbo respectively (Ikekeonwu, 1987).

Every language has its grammar, that is, the rules of language that its speakers must abide with when using the language. Aspect as a grammatical category expresses how an action, event or state, denoted by a verb, relates to the flow of time. It refers to the way an event is viewed internally and can be classified broadly as imperfective or perfective. The perfective aspect is used to describe an action as a complete event, while the imperfective aspect views an event as the process of unfolding or a repeated or habitual event (corresponding to the progressive/continuous aspect and habitual aspect). The Igbo language marks perfective aspect with the suffix *'-la'* attached to verb roots although the perfective marker varies according to the different varieties of the language.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the paper, while section two reviews some scholarly works on aspect. The third section handles the methodology,

presentation and analysis of language data. Section four summarizes and concludes the work.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Aspect

Aspect is a grammatical category that reflects the perspective from which an action/situation is seen. It can be seen as complete, in progress, having duration, beginning, ending, or being repeated. Comrie (1985) in Onovbiona (2016) defines aspect as the different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation. According to Hornby (2010:72), aspect (grammar) is defined as the form of a verb that shows, for example, whether the action happens once or repeatedly, is completed or still continuing. He explains that aspect expresses action or being (or state) in respect of its inception, duration or completion. Eyisi (2004:47) indicates that aspect is the form or category of the verb which shows inception, duration, continuity or completion. In other words, it is the form of a verb that indicates whether an action happened in the past but is still continuing or whether it has completely ended. Hence, it involves an event that started in the past, continues till the completion of such an event. Carter and McCarthy (2006:411) define aspect as the writer's/speaker's perspective on the time of an event. For Biber et al (1999), aspect relates to considerations such as the completion or lack of completion of events or states described by a verb.

The above definitions on aspect are related and they agree on the concept that aspect refers to how an event or action is to be viewed with respect to time, rather than to its actual location in time. In other words, aspect can be used to indicate whether the action is going on, has been completed or whether it is continuous and it is concerned with the time contained within a situation.

2.1.1 Perfective Aspect

According to Carter and McCarthy (2006:415), perfective aspect is concerned with the speaker's perspective on the relationship between one time frame and an event that takes place in another time frame. For Greenbaum (1996) cited in Adrina and Salgado (2019), the perfect aspect is primarily used to place the time of one situation relative to the time of another situation. Richards (2000:337) defines perfective aspect as (in grammar) "is a kind of aspect that indicates the relationship between a state or an event. The perfective aspect is used to refer to a state or an action which has taken place before the time of speaking, as well as to a state or an action (or series of actions) occurring in a period of time we imagine as continuing until the present or until a certain moment in the past (until *now* or until *then*), or that has just ended. The events and situations referred to by the perfective aspect have some relevance to the time of speaking (the present in the case of the present perfective, the past for past perfective and the future for the future perfective). In other words, the perfective aspect is used to indicate the completeness of an action, to see events as a whole.

Examples:

- 1) I have tidied my room.
- 2) She had just found a solution to the problem.

The present perfective is formed by *have/has* + past participle, the past perfective is formed by *had* + past participle as can be seen in the examples above, while the future perfective is formed by *will have* + past participle.

Example:

- 3) We will have been together for ten years next month.

Among the three perfective aspects, the present perfective is frequently used and in this research study, the present perfective will

be used. It can be used to express the association between actions that happened in the past and the present.

Examples:

- 4) Professor Wang **has left for** Beijing for a conference.
- 5) I **'ve closed** the window.

In example (4) above, *has left* expresses the action happened in the past, and the result is that Professor Wang now is not at the place where the utterance was made. It can be shown that present perfective is an aspect which is concerned with two time periods, of which one refers to sometime in the past, and the other refers to present time.

Aspect is often confused with the closely related concept of tense because they both convey information about time. While tense relates the time of referent to some other time, commonly the speech event, aspect conveys other temporal information, such as duration, completion, or frequency, as it relates to the time of action. Emenanjo (1978) reveals that in Igbo language, aspect is the appropriate grammatical category for referring to the Igbo verbal system and not tense. He further states that the verb in the Igbo language always has the perfective marker = (V)*le*/=(V)*la* in the underlying structure and the suffix is always high tone, irrespective of the tone class of the verb. For example:

- 6) Ha ēriele yā.
'They have eaten it'
- 7) Chikē aзуpla ұло ahụ.
'Chike has bought that house'

According to Obiamalu (2013), the perfective verb form in Standard Igbo has the following morphemic structure: E + CV + A + La. Where E = a/e harmonic prefix, CV = verb root,

A = Open Vowel Suffix (OVS) and La = perfective suffix. Example:

- 8) Ibè à-zụ-ọ-la akwà ọhụrụ
 Ibe AGR-buy-OVS-PF cloth new
 ‘Ibe has bought a new cloth’

Obiamalu (2013) further argues that the open vowel suffix (OVS) in Igbo which occurs in a variety of constructions such as imperative, perfective, conditional and subjunctive is an empty morpheme since it lacks semantic content but serves as a stem extender. His argument is based on three pieces of evidence which include that:

a. The OVS does not occur in perfective constructions where the verb root has a CVV syllable structure. Example:

- 9) Ọ bịa-la
 3SG come-PF
 ‘He has come’

b. The OVS does not occur where the verb root is a complex one (a verb with more than one root). Example:

- 10) Ike e-gbū-dà-la nkwo ahụ
 Ike AGR-cut-fall-PF palm tree that
 ‘Ike has cut down that palm tree’

c. In some dialects where the perfective is marked by the suffix *-go* and other phonologically related variants: *-gwo*, *-wo*, *-gwe*, the OVS does not occur. Examples from Ọnicha dialect:

- 11) O gbū-gō ekē
 3SG kill-Perf python
 ‘S/He has killed a python’

- 12) O gō-gō ụnọ n' Onicha
3SG buy-Perf house at Onicha
'S/He has bought a house at Onicha'

2.1.2 Perfective Aspect in Igbo

Perfective aspect indicates completion or termination of an event before a reference time. As has been mentioned above that the perfective aspect is marked in the Standard Igbo using the suffix '-la' though there are lots of variations in the varieties of the language, it is a verbal suffix that marks the end of a situation which indicates the completion of an event. Examples of perfective aspect in the Standard Igbo:

- 13) Ànyị à-rụcha-a-la ọrụ ahụ.
1Pl Pref-work-finish-OVS-Perf work Det
'We have finished the work'
- 14) Ha à-ga-a-la ahịa.
3Pl Pref-go-OVS-Perf market
'They have gone to the market'
- 15) A-zà-a-la m èzi.
Pref sweep-OVS-Perf 1sg compound
'I have swept the compound'
- 16) Ndị nkuzi à-kụ-ọ-la ụmụakwụkwọ ahụ ihe.
Teachers Pref-flog-OVS-Perf students Det
something
'The teachers have flogged the students'

- 17) Onyeisi ụlọ akwụkwọ à-chụ-ọ-la nwaakwụkwọ
ahụ.
Head school Pref-expel-OVS-Perf student
Det
‘The headmaster has expelled the student’
- 18) Nwokē ahụ à-lụ-ọ-la nwaagboghọ ahụ.
Man Det Pref-marry-OVS-Perf lady Det
‘The man has married the lady’
- 19) Ànyị è-nye-la ha ego hā.
1Pl Pref-give-Perf them money POSS
‘We have given them their money’
- 20) A hụ-la m agadī nwokē ahụ.
Pref see-Perf 1sg old man Det
‘I have seen the old man’
- 21) Ha à-kwụ-ọ-la ụgwọ akwụkwọ hā.
3Pl Pref-pay-OVS-Perf fee school POSS
‘They have paid their school fees’
- 22) Ọ kpọ-ọ-la nwokē ahụ.
3sg call-OVS-Perf man Det
‘S/he has called the man’
- 23) Nwaànyị ahụ à-ga-a-la ọrụ.
Woman Det Pref-go-OVS-Perf work
‘The woman has gone to work’
- 24) A-zụta-la m ùde.
Pref-buy-Perf 1sg cream

‘I have bought the cream’

- 25) Ha à-sa-a-la àkpà ha.
3Pl Pref-wash-OVS-Perf bag POSS
‘They have washed their bags’
- 26) O hicha-a-la oche ahụ.
3sg clean-OVS-Perf chair Det
‘S/he has cleaned the chair’
- 27) Ànyị e-wète-la akwụkwọ ahụ.
1Pl Pref-bring-Perf book Det
‘We have brought the book’
- 28) Nwokē ahụ è-gosi-la ya ụlọ ha.
Man Det Pref-show-Perf her/him house POSS
‘The man has shown her/him their house’
- 29) E-si-e-la m àgwà.
Pref-cook-OVS-Perf 1sg beans
‘I have cooked beans’
- 30) Ọ rịgō-ō-la n’elu osisi.
3sg climb-OVS-Perf on top tree
‘S/he has climbed the tree’
- 31) Nnà m à-ga-a-la n’ubi.
Father 1sg Pref-go-OVS-Perf Prep farm
‘My father has gone to the farm’
- 32) Òbi a-mụ-ọ-la akwụkwọ ya.

Obi Pref-study-OVS-Perf book POSS

‘Obi has studied his book’

The above examples of perfective constructions show how the Standard Igbo marks perfective aspect. In this study, the equivalents of the above perfective constructions are obtained from the speech varieties of three selected Igbo communities to ascertain the points of similarities and differences in perfective marking.

3. Research Methodology, Data Presentation and Analysis

This section focuses on the areas where the research work was conducted, the method of data collection, the instrument/tool used in collecting data, and the data presentation and analysis as was introduced earlier in section two.

3.1 Method of Data Collection

The research method adopted in this research study is data elicitation method. The technique used was interview where the informants translated the twenty (20) sentences written in standard Igbo into their varieties. After audio recording, the researcher analysed the recorded data and identified the markers of perfective aspect in Nanka and Ehugbo Igbo. In this research study, one native speaker was selected from each speech community to represent the research population. The informants who are adept speakers of their dialects were carefully chosen because they have spent greater part of their lives in their towns and are very familiar with their varieties. Also, researchers’ knowledge of their dialects was applied.

3.1.1 Tone and Tone Marking Convention

Tone is the use of pitch levels to indicate semantic differences in lexical items and pitch patterns of grammatical constructions. Igbo as a tone language, has two distinctive basic tones: high and low, as well as the tonal phenomenon known as downstep. The tone marking convention adopted in this research study is Green and

Igwe's (1963) tone marking system. Here, the high tones are left unmarked, while the low tones (`) and downstep tones (-) are fully marked. Example:

- a) isi 'head'
- b) ìsì 'blindness'
- c) isì 'smell'
- d) isī 'to cook'

3.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected from the three informants are presented in this section using the earlier stated twenty sentences. The method of data analysis is purely descriptive.

3.2.1 Perfective Aspect in the Nanka Variety of Igbo

Examples:

- 33) Àyì à-rụ-cha-a-na ọrụ ụhụ.
1Pl Pref-work-finish-OVS-Perf work Det
'We have finished the work'
- 34) Phe è-jewe-ne aphĩa
3Pl Pref-go-Perf market
'They have gone to the market'
- 35) A-zà-a-na m mbala.
Pref sweep-OVS-Perf 1sg compound
'I have swept the compound'
- 36) Ndị nkuzi à-pịa-na ụmụ akwụkwọ ọhụ iphe.
Teachers Pref-flog-Perf students Det something
'The teachers have flogged the students'
- 37) Onyeishi ụnọ akwụkwọ à-chụ-ọ-na nwa
akwụkwọ ọhụ
Head school Pref-expel-OVS-Perf student
Det
'The headmaster has expelled the student'
- 38) Nwokē èhu à-nụ-ọ-na nwaàgbọhọ ọhụ.

- Man Det Pref-marry-OVS-Perf lady Det
'The man has married the lady'
- 39) Àyì è-nye-ne phe ego phe.
1Pl Pref-give-Perf them money POSS
'We have given them their money'
- 40) A-phụ-na m agadī nwokē èhu.
Pref see-Perf 1sg old man Det
'I have seen the old man'
- 41) Pha à-kwụ-ọ-na ụgwọ akwụkwọ pha.
3Pl Pref-pay-OVS-Perf fee school POSS
'They have paid their school fees'
- 42) Ọ kpọ-ọ-na nwokē èhu.
3sg call-OVS-Perf man Det
'S/he has called the man'
- 43) Nwaànyị ihụ è-je-e-ne ọrụ.
Woman Det Pref-go-OVS-Perf work
'The woman has gone to work'
- 44) E-gōte-ne m ùde.
Pref-buy-Perf 1sg cream
'I have bought the cream'
- 45) Pha à-sa-a-na àkpà pha.
3Pl Pref-wash-OVS-Perf bag POSS
'They have washed their bags'
- 46) Ọ phīcha-a-na oche èhụ.
3sg clean-OVS-Perf chair Det
'S/he has cleaned the chair'
- 47) Àyì e-wè-te-ne akwụkwọ ọhụ.
1Pl Pref-bring-Perf book Det
'We have brought the book'
- 48) Nwokē èhu è-goshi-ne yē ụnọ pha.

- Man Det Pref-show-Perf her/him house POSS
 ‘The man has shown him/her their house’
- 49) E-shi-e-ne m àgwà.
 Pref-cook-OVS-Perf 1sg beans
 ‘I have cooked beans’
- 50) O ri-gbe-e-ne n’enu oshishi.
 3sg climb-OVS-Perf on top tree
 ‘S/he has climbed the tree’
- 51) Nnà m è-je-e-ne n’ ubì.
 Father 1sg Pref-go-OVS-Perf Prep farm
 ‘My father has gone to the farm’
- 52) Òbi a-mụ-ọ-na akwụkwọ yā.
 Obi Pref-study-OVS-Perf book POSS
 ‘Obi has studied his book’

From the above data, it is observed that the perfective aspect is marked using the suffix ‘-na/-ne’. In the vowel system of the Igbo language, there are two sets of vowels which can be described in terms of advanced tongue root. They include: +ATR (e, i, u, o) and –ATR (a, ị, ụ, ọ). For the +ATR vowels, the tongue root is advanced for the articulation of the affected vowels, while the –ATR vowels involve the retraction of the tongue root in their articulation. Vowels within a given word harmonize with respect to the feature, Advanced Tongue Root. It is also observed that if the vowels in the verb roots belong to the +ATR group, the perfective marker ‘-ne’ will be suffixed whereas when the vowels belong to the –ATR group, the perfective marker ‘-na’ will be attached to the verb root.

The perfective markers ‘-na’/‘-ne’ express that the event has happened in the past. For example, in number ‘52’ above, it means that ‘Obi’ is not studying his book at the time the speech was made. Also from the data, it is observed that the open vowel suffix does not occur where the verb root of the perfective constructions has a

CVV syllable structure (as in number 36) and where there is complex verb root (as in numbers 34, 39, 47 and 48), following Obiamalu's (2013) argument. There are some unconditional exceptions in the use of OVS in Nanka dialect of the Igbo language. For instance, there is absence of OVS in '39' and '40' which have neither a complex verb root nor CVV syllable structure. The tone of the perfective marker (na/ne) suffixed to the verb root does not change the tone of the main verb.

3.2.2 Perfective Aspect in the Ehugbo Variety of Igbo

- 53) Ayị a-rụdu-wo yaa ọrụ m□
1Pl pref-work-perf Det work Det
'We have finished the work'
- 54) Wo e-jege-wo ahia□
3PL pref- go- Perf market
'They have gone to the market'
- 55) A zà-wo m□ ọgbọdọ ezi
Pref-sweep-perf Isg compound
'I have swept the compound'
- 56) Nde nkuzi e-ti-wo umụrụma ụlọkwụkwọ m ihe
Det Teachers pref-flog-perf students Det
something
'The teachers have flogged the students'
- 57) Onyeisi ụlọkwụkwọ à-chụlaga-wo nwatakiri ụlọkwụkwọ
m
Head school pref-expel-pref child school
Det

‘The head teacher has expelled the student’

- 58) Nwokē nì a-lụ-wo nwaàgbọọgọ m
Man Det pref-marry-perf lady Det
‘The man has married the lady’
- 59) Ayị a-nio-wo wo ego wo
1Pl pref-give-perf 3PL:OBJ money POSS
‘We have given them their money’
- 60) A-hụ-wo m ezenze nwoke m
Pref-see-perf 1sg old man Det
‘I have seen the old man’
- 61) Wo a-kwụ-wo okpogo ụlọkwụkwọ wo
3PL pref-pay-perf fee school POSS
‘They have paid their school fees’
- 62) O ku-wo nwoke m
3sg call-perf man Det
‘He /She has called the man’
- 63) Nwaanyị m e-jege-wo ọrụ
Woman Det pref-go-perf work
‘That woman has gone to work’
- 64) A-zụta-wo m manụ isi
Pref-buy-perf 1sg oil head
‘I have bought cream’
- 65) Wo a-sụ-wo ekpà wo

3PL pref-wash-perf bag POSS
'They have washed their bags'

- 66) O husi-o (o husiwo) yaa oche m
2sg clean-perf Det chair Det
'He/She has cleaned the chair'
- 67) Ayi e-wete-wo yaa ekwukwo m
1pl pref-bring-perf ? book Det
'We have bought the book'
- 68) Nwoke m e-gosio-wo ulo wo
Man Det pref-show-perf house POSS
'The man has shown him/her their house'
- 69) E-wu-wo m agwa
Pref-cook-perf 1sg beans
'I have cooked beans'
- 70) O nyikooru-wo n' elu osisi
3sg climb-perf on top tree
'He/She has climbed a tree'
- 71) Nna m e-jego-wo n' ubi
Father 1sg pref-go-perf prep farm
'My father has gone to farm'
- 72) Obi a-mu-wo ekwukwo a
Obi pref-study-perf book POSS
'Obi has studied his book'

It is observed that the perfective aspect in the Ehugbo dialect of the Igbo language is marked using the suffix ‘-wo’. When the perfective marker ‘-wo’ is used in a rapid speech, ‘w’ is deleted as in number 66. “Wo” can also be used as a pronoun (3rd person plural pronoun or a possessive pronoun) as in numbers: 54, 61 and 65. It is observed that there is absence of Open Vowel Suffix (OVS) in Ehugbo dialect of the Igbo language in line with Obiamalu’s (2013:109) view that OVS does not occur in the varieties of Igbo that mark the perfective aspect by the suffix **-go** and other phonologically related variants: **-gwo**, **-wo**, **-gwe**. From the above data, it is also observed that ‘m’ can also serve as a determiner (53, 56, 57 58) as well as a pronoun (55, 60, 64, 69, 71).

3.2.3 The Comparative Analysis of the Three Varieties of Igbo

The two collected data will be compared using the following research questions.

3.2.3.1 Research question 1

How does perfective aspect marked in Nanka and Ehugbo varieties of the Igbo language?

The table below shows how perfective aspect is marked in Orumba North Local Government Area with regard to the three selected towns.

Table 1: Perfective markers

The two selected dialects	Perfective markers
Nanka speech community	‘-na/-ne’
Ehugbo speech community	‘-wo’

The above table shows that Nanka speech community uses the suffixes ‘-na/ne’ to mark perfective aspect while Ehugbo makes use of the suffix ‘-wo’.

3.2.3.2 Research question 2

What are the similarities in the two selected varieties?

From the data above, it is observed that the markers of perfective aspect from the two selected speech communities express the same meaning, and it can also be used to show completed action.

Like in the standard Igbo language, it is observed that the perfective aspect is marked in the two speech communities by suffixation. The suffixes which are attached to the verb roots comprise of the consonants: “n and w” and the vowels: “a, e and o”. In other words, the perfective markers in the above varieties of the Igbo language are semantically the same.

Another similarity observed in the above data is that the perfective markers (*na/ne* and *wo*) from the two selected varieties have high tones irrespective of the tonal classes of the verbs and the tones of the perfective markers suffixed to the verb root do not change the tone of the main verb.

3.2.3.3 Research question 3

What are the differences in the two selected speech communities?

The difference between the varieties of the Igbo language is that the “*-na/-ne*” suffix that marks perfective aspect in Nanka variety is realised as “*-wo*” in Ehugbo variety.

4. Summary and Conclusion

This research study focuses on the comparative study of perfective aspect in Nanka and Ehugbo speech communities. In other words, this research aims at identifying the markers of perfective aspect in the two selected varieties of the Igbo language. This study also reviews some scholarly works that have been done on aspect and its types. From the data analysis, it is observed that Nanka variety uses either of the suffixes “*-na*” or “*-ne*” to mark perfective aspect, while

Ehugbo variety marks perfective aspect using the suffix “-wo”. It is also observed that “-wo” is a third personal pronoun in the Ehugbo dialect. It was also found out that the ‘w’ in ‘-wo’ can be elided or assimilated into ‘o’ when used in a rapid speech as in the case of example 66 and other instances. Finally, we conclude that the two dialects used in this study are varieties of the Igbo language and the perfective aspect in the above dialects is marked by suffixation. This study will contribute to the study of perfective aspect in Igbo and serves as a base for further research on the perfective aspect.

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List of Abbreviations

- Pref: Prefix
OVS: Open Vowel Suffix
Perf: Perfective aspect
Poss: Possession
Prep: Preposition
3sg: Third Person Singular
1pl: First Person Plural
3pl: Third Person Plural