

On the single entry proposal for inherent complement verbs (ICVs) in Igbo

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Abstract

Anyanwu (2003) argues that the inherent complement verb (ICV) with its inherent complement constitutes a semantic unit, not a syntactic one. The syntactic difference is not accounted for to determine the syntactic status of the complement. The elegance of this description notwithstanding, we fail to distinguish it from Nwachukwu (1985) whose position is that both the IC and the ICV are an X^0 category. That is, the ICV and the IC combine as a single entry in the lexicon. This work questions this position because there are cases in which the so-called IC accepts a nominal modifier (cf. Emenanjo, 2005): an indication that it is a minimal category with its levels of projection within the VP. In other words, Uwajeh's (2003) analysis that the complement of the ICV is object is corroborated.

Introduction

The important position of verb in language is adequately demonstrated in the syntactic classification of languages, which is done according to some of the fundamental characteristics of the verb. The classification includes ergative language; active language; and accusative language (Trask, 1993:4,5&93). The ergative language involves a grammatical pattern in which subjects of intransitive verbs and direct objects of transitive verbs are treated alike for grammatical reasons, while subjects of transitive verbs are treated differently. Crystal (1980:130)

explains this by commenting that the ergative language operates with structures in which there is a formal parallel between object of transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive one. He is supported by Radford (1988:44) who notes that in such language there exist intransitive clauses that have transitive counterparts in which the transitive object corresponds to the ergative subject:

- (1) a. Nino-m ačvena surat-eb-i gia-s
 Nino-ERG showed pictures-PL-ABS Gia-DAT
 ‘Nino showed the pictures to Gia’ (Georgian)
- b. Balam miraŋ-∅ baŋgul yaŋa-ŋgu
 NM.ABS beans-ABS NM.ERG man-ERG
 wugan bagul đugumbil-gu
 gave NM.DAT woman-DAT
 ‘The man gave beans to the woman’ (Dyirbal)
 (Valin, 2001:37)

On the other hand, the active language involves transitive and intransitive verbs that have subjects, which are treated identically for grammatical purposes. The basis of this is that the subjects are semantically agents. Non-agent subjects and direct objects are handled differently in this type of language. In fact, this nature necessitates a rigid classification of lexical verbs into those that take agent subjects and those that take non-agent subjects. See the following example from Eastern Pomo.

- (2) a. Ha: mí:palšá:ka ‘I killed him’
 b. Wí’éčkiya ‘I sneezed’
 (Trask, 1993:5-6)

Lastly, the accusative language permits the handling of subjects of intransitive verbs and subjects of transitive verbs identically, while direct objects of transitive verbs are treated differently. More languages seem to agree with this pattern. The Igbo language more neatly belongs to this class:

- (3) a. Obi gburu agu
 Obi kill-PAST lion
 ‘Obi killed a lion’
 b. Obi b̄jara
 Obi come-PAST
 ‘Obi came’

However, the Igbo verbs seem to receive more attention in terms of classification by complementation instead of transitivity/intransitivity. Emenanjo (2005) presents this classification:

- i. General complement verbs (GCVs)
- ii. Inherent complement verbs (ICVs)
- iii. Bound complement verbs (BCVs)
- iv. Prepositional phrase complement verbs (PPCVs)
- v. Ergative complement verbs (ECVs)

The GCV occurs with a classificatory noun root, a term used, according to Emenanjo, by Chafe (1970:116-118) or a general noun complement. Emenanjo argues that the application of classificatory noun root would show that in the deep structure, the Igbo GCV occurs with one and only one general noun complement:

4. ịgū AGŪMAGŪ 'to read READABLES'
 ịzū AZŪMAZŪ 'to buy BUYABLES'
 ịhū AHŪMAHŪ 'to see SEEABLES'
 ịdē EDEMEDE 'to write TEXTS'
 ịrī ERIMERI 'to eat EDIBLES'
 ịnū ANŪMANŪ 'to drink DRINKABLES'

The ICVs have been identified by Nwachukwu (1976). Nwachukwu (1983 & 1985) give further attention to the verbs. The verbs include a nominal element which may or may not be cognate with the verbs. (5-8) exemplifies ICVs.

5. ịtū anya 'to expect'
 -- ụjọ 'to beafraid'
6. ịgba àjà 'to consult a diviner'
 -- ọsọ 'to run'
7. ịkpa àgwà 'to behave'
 -- nkàta 'to joke/discuss'
8. ịtā arụ 'to bite'
 -- nchara 'to rust'

They also include the adjectival verbs:

9. ịma mma 'to bebeautiful'
 ịbu ibu 'to bebig'

Emenanjo explains that two points need to be emphasized about ICVs. First, some of them include the verb which is

lexically empty or a dummy while the noun has an identifiable and independent meaning:

10. *igbā mgba* 'to x a wrestle'
īmā mmā 'to x a beauty'

Second, a few others include the verb and its nominal complement which lack identifiable and independent meaning synchronically:

11. *ihī nne* 'to be many'

The conclusion Emenanjo makes about ICVs is that they have fixed collocations, or are idioms, which explains why their nominal complement is obligatory in both the deep structure and the surface structure. This conclusion corroborates the semantic analysis of the constituent verbs as ambiguous (cf. Anyanwu and Iloene, 2004).

The BCVs have been identified by Emenanjo (1975 & 1978). The BCVs occur with BCN, which Emenanjo (1978:131) explains is a verbal derivative formed by affixing the harmonizing low tone verbal vowel prefix, à-/è- to the verb stem. He further explains that while the short BCN formed from simple verbs is two elements long (made up of the prefix and the simple verbroot), the longest BCN formed from complex verbs is four elements long (made up of the prefix and selected elements from the complex verb stem). The BCVs with their BCNs which are cognate with the verbs are exemplified as follows:

12. iwùèwù 'to be famous'
 ifùèfù 'to be lost'
 ikwùkwòàkwùkwò 'to be managing'

Emenanjo (2005) illustrates the distinction between GCVs, ICVs and BCVs. According to him, while the GCVs and ICVs admit nominal modifiers, the BCVs do not.

13. a. Ọ nà-èri ajō nri
 He DUR-eat bad food
 'He is a very heavy eater'
 b. Ọ màrà ajō mma
 She beASP bad beauty
 'She is very beautiful'
 c. *Ọ wùrù ajō èwù

(13c) is ill-formed because of the modifier, ajō, which the BCV, 'iwuewu' would not admit.

The PPCVs are followed by prepositional phrases with which they constitute an indivisible semantic unit (cf. Emenanjo, 2005). They are therefore different from Mbah's (1999:176) category incorporated prepositions. About these Mbah comment:

Category incorporated prepositions ... refer to these lexical categories which bind into a compound in the process of which one of the elements loses its categorial status by reanalysing its meaning. In Igbo, some verbs express prepositional notions when they combine with some other verbs.

The category incorporated prepositions are exemplified in (14) while (15) exemplifies the PPCVs.

14. v + v → v + preposition

rì 'crawl' + dà 'fall' → rìdà 'crawl down'

gba 'run' + go 'grow/prosper' → gbago 'run up'

bu 'carry' + tù 'dump' → butù 'carry down'

15. a. Motion verbs

isī n'EBE 'to come from PLACE'

ìbja n'EBE 'to come to PLACE'

b. Locative verbs

ìkwū n'EBE 'to stand at PLACE'

ìnō n'EBE 'to be at PLACE'

c. Others

ìhū n'anya 'to love/like'

ìtū n'anya 'to amaze'

(Emenanjo, 2005)

The ECVs have been discussed by Uwalaka (1988:43-45) under the subject-object switching phenomenon, which, according to her, represents a restricted but interesting aspect of Igbo syntax. Examples (16-19) illustrate the phenomenon.

16. a. Àdha bàrà mamiri eci

Adha burst-rv(past) urine yesterday

‘Adha produced urine involuntarily yesterday’

b. Mamiri bàrà Àdha eci

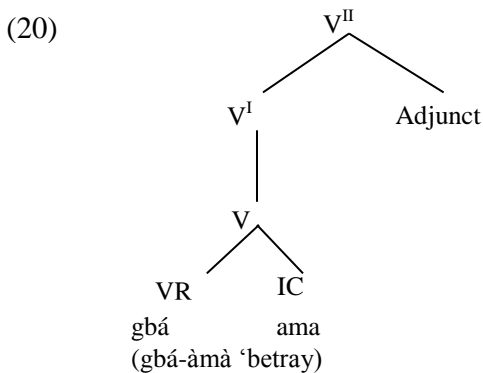
Urine burst-rv(past) Adha yesterday

‘Adha produced urine involuntarily yesterday’

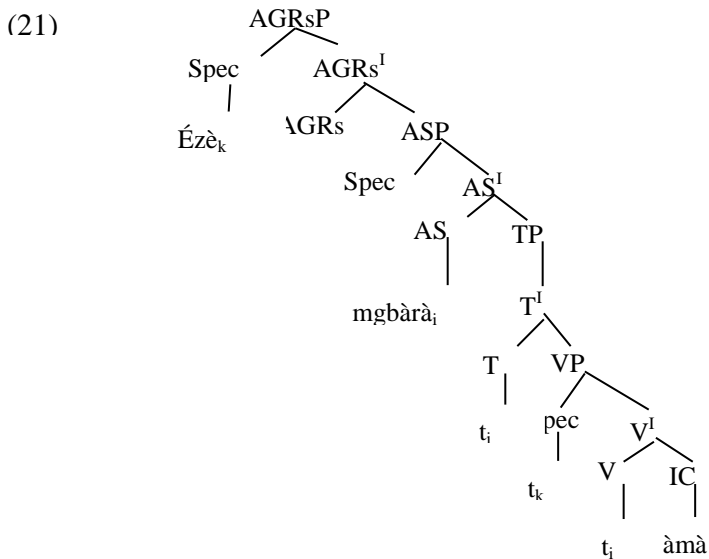
17. a. Àdha kwàrà ụkwarà
 Adhacough-rv(past) cough
 ‘Adha coughed’
 b. Ụkwarà kwàrà Àdha
 Cough cough-rv(past) Adha
 ‘Adha coughed’
- 18.a. Àdha wèrè iwe
 Adha angry-rv(past) anger
 ‘Adha was angry’
 b. Iwe wèrè Adha
 Anger angry-rv(past) Adha
 ‘Adhawasangry’
- 19.a. Àdha rìshìrì imi ahwà
 Adha crawl-out-rv(past) nose plenty
 ‘Adha (involuntarily) produced plenty of mucus from her nose’
 b. Imi rìshìrì Àdha ahwà
 Nose crawl-out-rv(past) Adha plenty
 ‘Adha (involuntarily) produced plenty of mucus from her nose’

This work focuses on the ICVs. Two questions are sought to be answered: 1) What is the implication of the semantic unity between the nominal element and the verbs as proposed by Anyanwu (2003)? and 2) What grammatical relation does the nominal element have with the ICV?

ICV and the status of the nominal element that occurs with it
 Nwachukwu (1985) analyzes the inherent complement and the verb that encodes it as a X⁰ category:



Anyanwu (2003) argues differently. He proposes that the two elements constitute a single semantic unit and not a syntactic one. He illustrates this with the tree below:



According to Anyanwu, the inherent complement verb, *gbá*, merges with the inherent complement, *àmà*, forming a V^I under the VP node. The NP, *Ézè*, merges with the V^I , *gbá àmà*, in order to form the VP, *Ézè gbá àmà*. The agent NP, *Ézè*, originates VP-internally in a theta-marked specifier position from where it moves via AGRs into the Spec of AGRsP for the purpose of checking its nominative case features. Similarly, the head of the VP, the V moves up into the T slot, suffixing the tense marker, -*rv*, and finally, the new verb stem moves up into the ASP head slot suffixing the non-perfect marker, *m-* (aspectual marker), yielding the complex verbal form which stays at ASP head slot. The inherent complement, *àmà*, though nominal in morphology has no features to check and does not move.

To what extent is this analysis different from Nwachukwu (1987)? For Nwachukwu, the verb in question is *ìgbá àmà* ‘betray’ while for Anyanwu, the verb is *ìgbá*, which has a meaning that is hardly expressed except the nominal element, *àmà* occurs. Hence, Anyanwu comments that both the verb and the nominal element constitute a single semantic unit. Unfortunately, Anyanwu is silent on the syntactic relation that exists between the verb and the nominal element since according to him they do not constitute a syntactic unit as Nwachukwu holds. Of course, if they are not syntactically one then there should be a syntactic relation between them. And, if there is no syntactic relation between them then Nwachukwu’s position is preferable and by implication not distinguishable from Anyanwu’s position.

One thing that is clear in the two positions is that there is the consensus that there is a verbal element and a nominal element in the derivation. The thesis of complementation has served to shroud the analysis of the nominal element as the syntactic

complement of the verb, towards providing an easy solution to the problem of analysis by transitivity which originates with the *semantic opacity* of the verbal elements.

Semantic opacity is the obscurity of meaning. This is what distinguishes it from ambiguity which connects with choice of meaning. That is, in ambiguity there is a relation of more than one meaning in which each of the meanings is contextually determined for a choice to be made. On the contrary, opacity is a relation of meanings which lack a factor of determination: a situation that blocks easy choice of meaning, (cf. Uwajeh, 2003).

Uwajeh (2003) argues that the thesis of complementation is an opposition to the reality connected with Igbo verbs,

... thesis of inherent complementation ...
derives from too much respect by the
grammarians for how tradition expects
languages to behave, and from a
concomitant unwillingness on the part of
the grammarians to accept the facts of Igbo
language as they are.

He demonstrates his position against the thesis, using (22-24), which are the standard Igbo translation of his examples from his dialect:

- (22) Íkéchūkūwū tịrụ Pọlìnà mvọ
Ikechukwu pinch-PAST Paulina nail
'Ikechukwu pinched Paulina'
- (23) Àdàórìè sùrù éwú m ókú
Adaorie burn-PAST goat me fire
'Adaorie burnt my goat'

- (24) Àkpáná gbàrà nwánné yá
 Akpana sting-PAST child.mother her/his
 ntútú
 needle
 ‘Akpana stung her sibling a needle’

According to him, each of the sentences of (22-24) has two direct objects if they are computed to represent the thought pattern of the owners of the language which includes that for (22), Ikechukwu caused his nails to pinch, and the person pinched was Paulina; for (23), Adaorie caused the fire to burn and my goat was burnt; and for (24), Akpana caused a needle to sting and her sibling was stung.

Uwajeh’s clarification is not contrary to the position of Essegbey (2002) concerning the ICVs in Ewe. According to Essegbey, it is difficult to specify the meaning of the ICV (This is what Uwajeh calls semantic opacity.) *Fú* in (25) demonstrates this,

- (25) Kofí fú tsi
 Kofi ICV water
 ‘Kofi swam’

He reveals what Uwajeh describes as “respect by the grammarian for how tradition expects languages to behave” in pointing out that the concept expressed by the verb and the complement is usually expressed by a verb alone and thus occurs in an intransitive clause in many known Indo-European languages. We think that this direct comparison between Igbo and English gave birth to the thesis of inherent complementation the

way it has been handled by Nwachukwu and the way it has been handled by others including Anyanwu. Essegbey does not subscribe to this type of comparison in the way Uwajeh has not done; hence, he analyzes the IC as a proper syntactic complement. In other words, the ICV in (25) is transitive.

We draw attention to (13). Here, the IC accepts a nominal modifier which restricts attribute to it. This to us is an indication that the IC is a full-fledged nominal element that has its own level of projection within the VP. In other words, IC does not constitute a single semantic unit with the ICV. However, because of the semantic opacity of the ICV, it obligatorily occurs to specify the meaning of the ICV.

Conclusion

This work has drawn attention once more to the thesis of inherent complementation proposed by Nwachukwu (1985). Complementation here has not been used in the sense of verb-complement relation which translates as verb-object/indirect relation but in the sense of filling the verb-entry. Hence, for Nwachukwu, the verb and the complement are a minimal category. However, for Anyanwu (2003) they are not. They are semantically one but syntactically different. This syntactic difference is not accounted for to determine the syntactic status of the complement. In support of Uwajeh (2003), we analyze the nominal element (called IC “inherent complement”) as a direct object of the verb (ICV). In other words, the ICVs in Igbo are transitive verbs in the same way Essegbey (2002) has analyzed ICVs in Ewe.

Of course, cases such as (22-24) where a verb has two direct objects are not peculiar to Igbo. Valin (2001:68) provides an example from Malagasy:

- (26) Manolotra ny vary ny vahinny ny vehivavy
 offers the rice the guests the woman
 ‘The woman offers the guest rice’

According to Valin, if *ny vahinny* ‘the guest’ is analyzed as direct object, it would be strange to analyze *ny vary* ‘the rice’ as indirect object being that it does not translate as a recipient NP. In other words, the direct-indirect object contrast is not adequate for languages like Malagasy. Hence, the primary-secondary object contrast: the primary object being the recipient of ditransitive verbs or the usual direct object of plain transitive verbs and the secondary object, the theme of the ditransitive verb. Evidently, the care to avoid a violation of the theoretical position connected with object-indirect object contrast could have been another factor leading to the emergence of the thesis of inherent complementation: ‘Of course, in what other way could two nominal elements be analyzed when one is not a recipient NP?’ It would be easier to analyze one of the nominal elements as forming one entry with the verb or one semantic unit with the verb.

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