

The non-restricted *-nyé* in Igbo verb morphology

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Abstract

The -nye element in Igbo has received some attention in the studies of Igbo verb. It occurs in a verbal complex. That is, it occurs with another verb to derive a verb. Earlier analysis describes it as a suffix, particularly an extensional suffix, which denotes the prepositional notion of illativity. The status of this element is doubtful, giving rise to varied analyses. Recently, it is reanalyzed as a non-suffix. By reference to this analysis, the verbal complex it constitutes a part of is at best a compound. This work recognizes and accepts this analysis and goes ahead to demonstrate that this element is not selectionally restricted in the derivation of compound verbs. That is, it occurs with almost all verbs in Igbo to derive compound verbs described here as v+nyé verb compounds. These compounds are grouped into compositional and non-compositional. The v+nyé verb compositional compounds retain the give-meaning overtly and in syntactic constructions are associated with recipient-theme semantic roles and the trivalent argument structure. On the other hand, the v+nyé verb non-compositional compounds are associated with theme-location semantic roles in syntactic constructions. The location is expressed by a PP and is analyzed to have surfaced as a [-HUMAN] caused to receive something. In other words, the 'receive' notion associated with nyé is evident in all the compounds it is a constituent and this qualifies the element as the head-constituent of the compounds. Among all the emerging issues, this work calls for a cross-linguistic study for

elements with a similar behaviour. Perhaps, such elements could have something to do with give-meaning or there could be other interesting dimensions.

Keywords: verbal complex, compound, non-restricted

Introduction

Studies on the Igbo verb contribute greatly to the description of the nature of the Igbo language. This is a major basis for many an Igbo linguist accepting the reference to the language as a verb language. In fact, it appears that there is yet not in sight an exhaustive account of the Igbo verb. Its phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic dimensions richly provide a variety of accounts, many of which have not been tied to a conclusion. This makes the Igbo verb unique and motivates more attention to it towards a more adequate account of the category.

Mbagwu (2013) demonstrates the existence of locatum, and location verbs in Igbo, adopting Hale and Keyser (1992) semantic distinction of the two groups, ‘terminal coincidence’ and ‘central coincidence’. The formalization of this distinction is presented as follows by Kiparsky (1997) using saddle ‘an example of locatum verb’ and corral ‘example of location verb’:

- (1) a. Locatum: $\lambda z \lambda y \lambda x[\text{CAUSE}(x, (\text{HAVE-ON}(y,z))) \& \text{saddle}(z)]$
 b. Location: $\lambda z \lambda y \lambda x[\text{CAUSE}(x, \text{BE-IN}(y,z))] \& \text{corral}(z)]$

One major characteristic of the location verb in Igbo is its suffixal constituent, *-nyé*. Mbagwu (2013) describes this element as illative and as the locus for the verb in marking the semantic

relation, central coincidence. The illativity of the element is verified and corroborated by Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014).

The *nye*-element has received considerable analyses and this paper adds to the studies on the element. Particularly, it demonstrates that this element is selectionally free with most, if not all, Igbo root verbs. In other words, it could occur as a constituent element with almost all Igbo verb roots. While demonstrating this, issues concerning its morphological status would be given some attention: is it an affix (suffix), in this case, contributing to forming verbal complexes or a free morpheme, in this case, forming compound verbs?

Nyé in Igbo studies

Mbah (1999:138) in illustrating his classification of Igbo verbs into simple, complex and compound verbs provide an example such as:

- (2) Ada go-nye-re nne ya unene
 Ada buy.give-PAST mother her banana
 Ada bought banana for her mother

According to Mbah (1999), *gonye* is a compound verb with *go* ‘buy’ + *nyé* ‘give’. With (3a&b), the compounding is well-illustrated.

- (3) a. Ada go-ro unene
 Ada buy-PAST banana
 Ada bought banana
 b. Ada nye-re nne ya unene
 Ada give-PAST mother her banana
 Ada gave her mother banana

The input of (3a&b) to the meaning of (2) is two-way. The first is (4) below while the second is the full gloss of (2) above.

- (4) Ada go-ro unene nye nne ya
 Ada buy-PAST banana give mother her
 Ada bought banana and gave it to her mother

The evidence of the full gloss of (2) is expressive of Mbah's (1999) 'category incorporated preposition'. In other words, *nye* in the verb is incorporated as the preposition, denoting 'for'. Under this description and that of Emenanjo (1978:118), which recognizes *-nye* as an extensional suffix, *gonye* is a verbal complex and not a compound. This description is ruled out by (4), which adequately illustrates *gonye* as a compound in the sense of Mbah (2005), 'the verb, which has a minimum of two verbs that may act as independent verbs'. This is what (3a&b) account for.

Mbagwu (2013) in exemplifying location verbs in Igbo describes *-nye* as an illative suffix, of course, in support of Emenanjo (1978:118). This description is largely constrained by the English interpretation of the Igbo verbs incorporating *nye*:

- (5) a. tìnyé = ítínyé 'to put into'
 b. rùnyé = írùnyè 'to push in'
 c. bànyé = ìbànyè 'to soak in (a liquid)'
 d. wùnyé = ìwùnyé 'to pour into'
 e. kùnyé = ìkùnyé 'to hit in'

(cf. Mbagwu, 2013:62)

We see *nye* denoting the prepositional notion of 'into' or 'in' in the verbs of (5a-e). Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014) contend

against this analysis and by a semantactic analysis consider the verbs as compound verbs while illustrating *nye* as the element subcategorizing items in the syntactic frame in which they appear. In the words of Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014), ‘*nye* as an independent verb is trivalent (a three-place predicate verb) and ... it imposes this trivalency on the output compound verb’:

- (6) a. Ada go-ro unene
 Ada buy-PAST banana
 Ada bought banana
- b. Ada nye-re nne ya unene
 Ada give-PAST mother her banana
 Ada gave her mother banana
- c. Ada go-nye-re nne ya unene
 Ada buy-give-PAST mother her banana
 Ada bought banana for her mother

Determining the syntactic frame adds to its theta role assigning capacity. In (6b&c), it is evident that the theta roles of the grammatical objects are the same, justifying *nye*, a constituent of *gonye*, as the theta role assigner, assigning the recipient-theme roles.

Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014) point out that there are instances in which the theta role assigned by *v+nye* compound is not clearly that of recipient in the sense of ‘receive’, which encodes [+HUMAN]:

- (7) Ada ti-nye-re oroma n'akpa
 Ada put-give-PAST orange in bag
 Ada put an orange in a bag

Here, we see that recipient-theme roles are the case when a [+HUMAN] is involved and trivalency is suppressed for a PP to surface, expressing a location, which metaphorically analyses as the recipient. Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014) clarify, ‘... that the metaphorical extension of the give-meaning of *nye* is concluded with an entity made to be received by something which lacks such ability of receiving hence that thing becomes the location of the entity’. Of course, this rewrites the theta-role pattern to theme-location, where the location is expressed by a PP.

Obviously, it is cases involving metaphorical extensions of the give-meaning of *nye* that have yielded its description as a category incorporated preposition and/or an extensional suffix. Whatever is the description of this element (and we know that much more is demanded to be determined concerning the status of the element) Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014) observe that this element could combine with most, if not all, verb stems in Igbo (by recourse to our position here) to form compound verbs. This paper sets out to demonstrate this.

Igbo verb stems

The Igbo verb stems have been mainly classified by the criterion of tone. Two classes have been identified. They are tone class I, tone class II (See Green and Igwe (1963), Williamson (1972), Emenanjo (1978) etc.) However, Nwachukwu (1983) identifies a third class, which he associates with the Mbaise dialect of Igbo. The three classes are exemplified in (8a-c):

- (8) a. írí – rí ‘eat’
 ígbá – gbá (òsò) ‘run’
 b. ìdà – dà ‘fall’
 ìbì – bì ‘live’
 c. ìbyá – byà ‘come’
 ìgá – gà ‘go’

Verb stems in tone class I bear high tone; those in tone class II bear low tone while those in Nwachukwu’s tone class III behave like verbs in tone class I in their citation forms but in certain other forms, they behave like verbs in tone class II. Moreover, we note that Igwe (1999:xvi) identifies another type of tone class which he designates also as tone class III. Verb stems in this class have reduplicated form with high-low tones:

- (9) a. gbúbù ‘wave’
 wúwù ‘wear something big’

In addition to this classification, Mbah (1999:138) proposes a three-way classification: simple, complex and compound. Verbs in the simple class contain their citation form and nothing else:

- (10) a. byá ‘come’
 nò ‘be at’

Those in the complex class comprise a verb stem and an affix (of course, more commonly, suffix):

- (11) a. bàtá ‘come in’

b. *gòté* ‘buy for’

Lastly, those in the compound class are verbs that contain at least two simple verbs:

(12) a. *kù-wá* ‘hit-break’

b. *gá-bà* ‘go-enter’

In this paper, we limit the data to tone classes I and II verbs, that is, the simple verb forms. They are derived by a consonant © combining with any of the eight vowels of the standard Igbo.

Igbo verb stems + *nyé*

As we have noted, the simple verb forms in Igbo have the CV structure, that is, a C combining with a V. We have tried to be exhaustive in listing the verb stems while demonstrating the non-restriction of the occurrence of *nye* with each of them. Besides, we insist on glossing *nye* as ‘give’ even in such cases where there is a metaphorical notion of an entity made to receive something. Table 1 below presents the cases of verb stems + *nye*:

Table 1: Igbo verb stems + *nye*

Verb stem	Verb stem + <i>nye</i>	Gloss
(13) <i>bì</i>	<i>bi+nye</i> → <i>bì-nyé</i> lend-give	Lend
(14) <i>chì</i>	<i>chì+nyé</i> → <i>chì-nyé</i> collect(many things)-give	give(many things)

(15) m̀ì	m̀ì+nyé → m̀ì-nyé suck-give	suck.into
(16) p̀ì	p̀ì+nyé → p̀ì-nyé press(juice)- give	press.into
(18) s̀ì	s̀ì+nyé → s̀ì-nyé set(a pot with food on a cooking device)-give or cook-give	set(a pot).on fire/cook and give(food to someone)
(19) t̀ì	t̀ì+nyé → t̀ì-nyé put-give	put.into
(20) ỳì	ỳì+nyé → ỳì-nyé wear(a dress on one's body)-give	wear(i.e. put on a dress)
(21) z̀ì	z̀ì+nyé → z̀ì-nyé send(with a message)- give	send(someone with a message to another person)
(22) bà	bà+nyé → bà-nyé soak(a material that absorbs water)-give	soak
(23) chà	chà+nyé → chà-nyé cut(say, a vegetable).into	cut(a vegetable).into

	vegetable)- give	
(24) dà	dà+nyé → dà-nyé fall-give	fall.into
(25) fà	fà+nyé → fà-nyé push-give	push(something).int o(a rafter)
(26) gà	gà+nyé → gà-nyé pass(a thread)-give	pass(a thread).through(the eye of a needle)
(27) gbà	gbà+nyé → gbà-nyé pour-give	pour.into (also, pour and give to someone)
(28) ghá	ghá+nyé → ghà-nyé spread-give	spread.onto
(29) hà	hà+nyé → hà-nyé hand over- give	hand over.to
(30) kà	kà+nyé → kà-nyé cut(a mark into)-give	cut(a mark).into (or, make a mark on something)
(31) kpà	kpà+nyé → kpà-nyé weave-give	weave.into (or, weave and give to someone)
(32) kwà	kwà+nyé → kwà-nye push-give	push.into
(33) mà	mà+nyé → mà-nyé tie(a rope)- give	tie(a rope).on

(34) pà	pà+-nyé → pà-nyé carry-give	carry(something) and give to (someone)
(35) sà	sà+nyé → sà-nyé wash-give	wash.into
(36) tá	tá+nyé → tà-nyé drop(a little liquid)-give	drop(a little liquid).into (or, put a drop of a liquid into)
(37) wà	wà+nyé → wà-nyé tie(a wrapper)- give	tie(a wrapper).on
(38) zà	zà+nyé → zà-nyé sieve-give	sieve.into
(39) bè	bè+nyé → bè-nyé cut(a piece of cloth)-give	cut(a piece of cloth) and give to(someone)
(40) dè	dè+nyé → dè-nyé write-give	write and give to(someone)
(41) fè	fè+nyé → fè-nyé drop(condiments)- give	drop(condiments). into (cooking food)
(42) ghè	ghè+nyé → ghè-nyé fry-give	fry and give to(someone)
(43) gwè	gwè+nyé → gwè-nyé grind-give	grind and give to(someone)
(44) kè	kè+nyé → kè-nyé share-give	share and give to(someone)

(45) kpè	kpè+nyé → kpè-nyé peel-give	peel and give to(someone)
(46) kwè	kwè+nyé → kwè-nyé agree-give	agree with(someone)
(47) mè	mè+nyé → mè-nyé do-give	do something(in the interest of someone)
(48) sè	sè+nyé → sè-nyé draw-give	draw(something out) and give to(someone)
(49) tè	tè+nyé → tè-nye rub-give	rub.into or onto
(50) bù	bù+nyé → bù-nyé carry(a heavy object)-give	carry(a heavy object) and give to(someone)
(51) bù	bù+nyé → bù-nyé uproot(usually cassava)-give	harvest(certain food crops, especially cassava) and give to(someone)
(52) chú	chú+nyé → chù-nyé fetch(water)- give	fetch(water) and give to(someone)
(53) chù	chù+nyé → chù-nyé chase-give	chase.into
(54) dù	dù+nyé → dù-nyé lead-give	lead(someone) to(another)
(55) fù	fù+nyé → fù-give blow-give	blow.into

(56) gù	gù+nyé → gù-nyé collect(usually, a piece of cooking yam from a pot)- give	collect(a piece of yam of cooking yam) and give to(someone)
(57) gbù	gbù+nyé → gbù-nyé cut(usually, a stick)-give	cut(a stick) and give to(someone)
(58) ghù	ghù+nyé → ghù-nyé bring(something) out(using a sharp object)- give	bring(usually coconut flesh) out (with a knife) and give to(someone)
(59) hú	hú+nyé → hù-nyé pour(in large quantity)- give	pour(in large quantity).into
(60) kù	kù+-nyé → kù-nyé collect(using a cup or bowl)-give	collect(using a cup or bowl) and pour into(something) or give to(somebody)
(61) kpù	kpù+nyé → kpù-nyé cover(e.g. with a covering, especially a cap)-give	cover(someone's head a cap)

(62) kpù	kpù+nyé → kpù-nyé drag(usually an animal)- give	offer to(someone) an animal
(63) lù	lù+nyé → lù-nyé marry-give	marry(a wife) and give to(someone)
(64) mù	mù+nyé → mù-nyé set/fetch(fire)- give	set(something) on fire or fetch fire and give to(someone)
(65) rù	rù+nyé → rù-nyé push(a pointed object)-give	push(a pointed object) into(something)
(66) rù	rù+nyé → rù-nyé soften(e.g. pear in fire)- give	soften(a pear in fire) and give to(someone)
(67) sù	sù+nyé → sù-nyé pound-give	pound into or pound(something) and give to(someone)
(68) sù	sù+nyé → sù-nyé collect(soup with a mould of say, garri)- give	eat by swallowing(usually garri with soup) or collect(soup with a mould of garri) and feed(someone)
(69) tù	tù+nyé → tù-nyé throw-give	throw.into

(70) wù	wù+nyé → wù-nyé jump-give or pour(water in large quantity)- give or throw(many things)-give	jump.into or pour(much water).into or throw(many things).into
(71) zù	zù+nyé → zù-nyé buy-give	buy(something) for(someone)
(72) bọ	bọ+nyé → bọ-nyé cut(usually, raw meat)- give	cut meat and give to(someone)
(73) chọ	chọ+nyé → chọ-nyé find-give	find(something) and give to(someone)
(74) dọ	dọ+nyé → dọ-nyé place(a heavy object)-give	place something onto/into or place it for(someone)
(75) fọ	fọ+nyé → fọ-nyé force(something)- give	force(something) into
(76) gbọ	gbọ+nyé → gbọ-nyé vomit-give	vomit.into
(77) ghọ	ghọ+nyé → ghọ-nyé pluck-give	pluck(fruit) and give to someone
(78) gwọ	gwọ+nyé → gwọ-nyé knead(e.g.,	knead(meat) and give to(someone)

	meat)-give	
(79)hò	hò+nyé → hò-nyé select-give	select(something or someone).into a group
(80) kò	kò+nyé → kò-nyé hang-give or remove(something hanging)-give	hang.on/onto or remove(something hanging) and give to(someone)
(81) kò	kò+nyé → kò-nyé scrape-give-give	scrape.into or scrape and put into
(82) kpó	kpó+nyé → kpó-nyé call-give	hand(someone) over to another
(83) kwó	kwó+nyé → kwó-nyé grind(with a machine)-give	grind(with a machine) into or grind and give to(someone)
(84) rọ	rọ+nyé → rọ-nyé bend(something)-give	bend(something) and give to(someone)
(85) sọ	sọ+nyé → sọ-nyé join-give	join.into (a group)
(86) yọ	yọ+nyé → yọ-nyé sieve-give	sieve.into or sieve and give to(someone)
(87) zọ	zọ+nyé → zọ-nyé march-give	march.into

We see how unrestricted the element, *nye* has proven in deriving verb compounds in Igbo. We note that two types of compounds are evident here: compositional compounds and non-compositional compounds. The compositional compounds are those in which the give-meaning of *nye* is overt. With these compounds, the semantic roles of recipient-theme and trivalent argument structure, which the verb *nye* is associated with, apply: (13), (42), (77) etc are examples:

(88) Obi bì-ny-èrè Ada éḡō
 Obi lend-give-PAST Ada money
 Obi lent Ada money

(89) Obi ghè-nyè-rè Ada jí
 Obi fry-give-PAST Ada yam
 Obi fried some yam and gave to Ada

(90) Obi ghò-nyè-rè Ada ókà
 Obi pluck-give-PAST Ada maize
 Obi plucked maize and gave to Ada

On the other hand, the non-compositional compounds are those in which the give-meaning of *nye* analyzes as the prepositional notion of ‘in/into’ or ‘on/onto’. Here, the *v+nye* compound expresses a causative notion in which something that is [-HUMAN] is caused to receive a thing. With this, theme-location semantic roles are motivated, where the location is expressed by a PP. This is the illativity notion which Mbagwu (2013) assigns to *-nye*. Examples are (19), (26), (80) etc, used in (91-93):

- (91) Obi *tì-nyè-rè* *ákwà n'ákpa*
 Obi put-give-PAST cloth in bag
 Obi put a piece of cloth into a bag
- (92) Obi *gà-nyè-rè* *éírí n'ntútú*
 Obi put-give-PAST thread in needle
 Obi put a thread on the needle
- (93) Obi *kò-nyè-rè* *ákwà n'ósísí*
 Obi hang-give-PAST cloth in stick
 Obi hung a piece of cloth on a stick

We note that the *v+nye* non-compositional compounds have a larger corpus and this would have motivated the earlier analysis of the *nye*-element as an extensional suffix.

Conclusion

This paper has pursued the objective of demonstrating the occurrence of the element *nyé* with most Igbo verb stems. In previous analysis, this element is accounted for as an extensional suffix (Emenanjo, 1978:118) and as a category incorporated preposition (Mbah, 1999:138). Mbagwu (2013) follows in the stead of describing it as a suffix while pursuing the goal of demonstrating location verbs in Igbo. This analysis is contested by Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014). By recourse to the syntactic applications of theta role assignment and argument structure, they conclude that the element is a full-fledged verb in the complexes where it is found. Hence, they reanalyze the complexes as compounds. A class of these compounds, they argue, has a metaphorical extension of the give-meaning of *nye*. Here, we

have simply referred to this class as *v+nye* non-compositional compounds while the other class is *v+nye* compositional compounds. Of course, everything we have seen in the compounds qualifies *nye* as the head-constituent.

There are emerging issues as we see here: first, would we continue to refer to the co-occurring element as a verb stem? If yes, then *nye* is a suffix and our argument is that *nyé* is not a suffix: in this case, it is either we use ‘verb stem’ as a convenient reference to the co-occurring element and not in its technical sense or, and this is more acceptable, we refer to the derived forms as **v+nyé verb compounds**. Second, we see that the verb stems of the Igbo language could all be listed by a simple combination of every C with a particular V. However, in doing this we see that there are nebulous or impossible forms. For now, we could say that *chó/chò*, *yé/yè* etc are nebulous or impossible verb stems in the language. Hence, there needs to be a cross-dialectal study to determine forms that are indeed nebulous or impossible. Third, we see that the low tone of *nye* hardly changes but a co-occurring element with a high tone in isolation changes to a low tone in the compound. Find examples in (77) and (82-83). A phonological account is required. Fourth and lastly, we believe that this phenomenon could be found in other languages and we anticipate a cross-linguistic study for elements with a similar behaviour. Perhaps, such elements could have something to do with give-meaning or there could be other interesting dimensions.

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