
A MORPHO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF OMUANWA-IKWERE VERBS

Ngozi IGWE-CHEKWAS

AND

Baridisi Hope ISAAC
Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies
University of Port Harcourt

ABSTRACT

The structuralists' view of a rigid separation of the various levels of linguistics is actually unrealistic as there is often an aspect of relatedness among them but the morpho-semantic interface has been the least studied in Ikwere. This study concentrated on the morpo-semantic classification of Omuanwa – Ikwere verbs. The study is drawn from a descriptive perspective presenting the collected data in their orthographic forms. The morpho-semantic classification described in this study is based on the analysis of the underived verbs. Data used for the study were elicited from the intuitive knowledge of the researcher alongside the oral interview and participant observation of competent native speakers of the selected dialect of Ikwere. The study has shown that the simple and complex morphologically identified classes of Omuanwa verbs exhibit different forms. The simple verb roots record CV, CV-CV and CV-CV-CV syllabic structures while the complex verb roots are made up of the disyllabic bound roots and the Inherent Complement Verbs (ICVs) which are treated as single underived semantic units. At the semantic level, the Omuanwa verbs are divided into dynamic and stative verbs. The dynamic verbs are further classified as action and event verbs. It is also noted that the inflectional processes are common to both dynamic and stative verbs. Similarly, vowel assimilation and eventual vowel lengthening form the phonological features inherent in the verb classes indicated especially the ICVs.

KEYWORDS: Omuanwa-Ikwere, morpho-semantics, verb morphological structure and semantic relation of verbs

Introduction

The investigation of the structure of words and their grammatical organization form a principal aspect of the analysis of a language. A morpho-semantic analysis of the verb class simply examines the meaning effect of the inflectional processes carried out on the verb of a given language. The term 'morph-semantics' is seen as a general linguistic knowledge that pertains to the morphological analysis in combination with semantic interpretations of words. It can also be described as the semantic analysis of words through their constituent morphemes (Dorias 2010). A morpho-semantic investigation of a word thus entails an analysis drawn from the morphological (structural form) and semantic perspective. This aspect of word study is actually necessary and essential to the study of any given language hence the morpho-semantic study of Omuanwa verbs.

The verb class on the other hand is vital to a language as it forms an inherent clausal element of the sentence. Generally, verbs are used to name events or state with regard to the participants. Their meanings often subject them to be seen as the organizational core of the sentence. The meaning of a verb provides a key to its behaviour.

Omuauwa is one of the dialects of Ikwere spoken by eight autonomous communities. Ikwere is one of the languages spoken in a major ethnic nationality occupying four large local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. They include Ikwerre, Emohua, Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Local Government Areas. Based on the record of Williamson (1988), Ikwere language is classified as an Igboid language. The Igboid languages are further located under the node of West Benue-Congo family of Niger-Congo Phylum of languages (Williamson and Blench 2000).

Methodology

A descriptive method of analysis is used for the discussion on the morph-semantic classification of the Ikwere verbs. The descriptive method is necessary for this study to enable a detailed consideration of the meaning related morphological procedures required for the division of Ikwere verbs. The data for this study are taken from Omuanwa dialect of Ikwere. The data were elicited from competent native speakers of the dialect who were not less than forty years of age. The intuitive knowledge of the researcher also aided the sourcing of data for the study. The analyses of the data are orthographically presented.

Verb Structure

The verb category is subject to diverse classifications based on their morphological, tonal, syntactic and semantic features. Morphologically, verbs are classified as simple and complex verbs. They are phonologically classified as high and low tone verbs while lexical and auxiliary verb classes are identified based on their syntactic attributes. With regard to the meaning relatedness of verbs, linguists made a division of verbs into dynamic and stative verbs (Emenanjo 1983 & Ndimele 2010).

Morphological Structure of Omuanwa Verbs

Morphologically, the Omuanwa underived verbs (verb roots) can be classified as simple and complex verbs.

a. Simple Verb Roots

The simple verb roots consist of monosyllabic CV and sometimes, di/trisyllabic CV-CV/CV-CV-CV structures. One outstanding phonological feature of Omuanwa verbs is that they often start with a consonant sound while nouns usually start with vowels. The CV syllabic structure forms the major structure of Omuanwa verb roots (Igwe-Chekwas 2021). Instances include:

- | | | | |
|----|----|-----|---------|
| 1. | a. | rá | ‘lick’ |
| | b. | zà | ‘sweep’ |
| | c. | gwè | ‘take’ |
| | d. | tè | ‘pound’ |
| | e. | vò | ‘comb’ |
| | f. | rnè | ‘burn’ |
| | g. | tné | ‘dance’ |

The verbs have both high and low tone verb roots. There are some Omuanwa simple verb roots that are disyllabic in nature having the CV-CV or trisyllabic having a CV-CV-CV syllable structure as in:

- | | | | |
|----|----|---------|-------------|
| 2. | a. | tútù | ‘pick’ |
| | b. | hàsá | ‘leave’ |
| | c. | kpótnê | ‘wake up’ |
| | d. | chíkótâ | ‘gather up’ |

b. Complex Verb Roots

Some verb roots consist of bound roots. Bound roots are those that cannot exist in isolation and give a semantic value or meaning. The two roots in this case require each other to be able to express a complete meaning in the dialect. These are classified as complex verb roots. They are organized here according to their similarities in form identified as families thus:

3. **kpò family**

a.	knékpò	‘tie to dry completely’
b.	rìkpò	‘eat to finish’ / ‘siphon’
c.	hwùkpò	‘contract’
d.	kwùkpò	‘compress’
e.	tìkpò	‘heat to compress’

4. **chná family**

a.	kwnòchnâ	‘wipe clean’
b.	ráchnâ	‘lick clean’ / ‘lick up completely’
c.	tèchnâ	‘paint clean’
d.	híchnâ	‘clean up completely’
e.	rnùchnâ	‘work clean’
f.	kpáchnâ	‘clean up’
g.	gbúchnâ	‘cut clean’

5. **gbú family**

a.	hìgbú	‘strangle’
b.	rìgbú	‘eat to kill’ / ‘siphon’
c.	tnégbú	‘dance to finish’
d.	kwùgbú	‘beat to death’
e.	tàgbú	‘bite to death’
f.	kpégbú	‘win a case’

6. **kné family**

a.	liknê	‘get well’
b.	hwùknê	‘solidify’
c.	dàknê	‘warm’ / ‘heat up’

It is observed that the vowel harmony principle is actually not in operation in the disyllabic bound root verbs.

Another group of the complex verb roots are those that require a close-knit relationship between them and their complements (usually nominal) to express a given cognitive or referential notion. These verb roots are known as Inherent Complement Verbs (ICVs) in linguistic literature. Ndimele (2010) identified the complements as meaning-specifying grammatical units. They are dual unit morphemes consisting the CV-stem and nominal complement. Both segments form a semantic unit whose semantic value might be transparent when combined or only the complement bears the meaning and sometimes, neither of the units has a transparent meaning (Oweleke 1995, Emenanjo 2015). Examples include:

7.
 - a. gbá-ágbà ‘fence’ (v)
 - b. gbá-égbè ‘shoot’
 - c. gbá-útê ‘wrestle’
 - d. gbá-ásó ‘run’

8.
 - a. tù-òwù ‘carve masquerade’
 - b. tù-ónúnú ‘borrow hole’
 - c. tù-ájárí ‘rust’
 - d. tù-mànyâ ‘libate’

9.
 - a. kpá-ágwá ‘behave’
 - b. kpà-étéré ‘weave mat’
 - c. kpá-ngángá ‘be arrogant’
 - d. kpà-ishì ‘cut hair’

10.
 - a. kwè-nkwnà ‘promise’
 - b. kwè-ishì ‘nod head’
 - c. kwè-ikwnu ‘thrust waist’

It is on these verb roots that both inflectional and derivational processes are carried out to attain word forms and derived lexical items.

Semantic Classification of Omuanwa Verb Roots

As identified in the literature of linguistics, dynamic and stative verbs are the major semantic divisions of verbs in most languages.

a. Dynamic Verbs

These are action oriented verbs. Their semantic values are in functional correspondence with the action they entail in sentences. They are also called action or activity verbs. They indicate the conscious activity inclined roles which individual participants carry out in syntactic constructions that are sometimes of limited duration or occurring at a fixed time (Giering et al 1987). Dynamic verbs relate the agent participatory role or event in which the entity is part of. They are further divided into action and event verbs. The majority of Omuanwa verbs are dynamic in nature. Examples of dynamic verbs which are action oriented in Omuanwa include:

11.
 - a. zà ‘sweep’
 - b. rí ‘eat’
 - c. snú ‘wash’
 - d. rá ‘lick’
 - e. tné ‘dance’

Some of the Inherent Complement Verbs (ICVs) of Omuanwa are activity based as the underspecified part together with the complement give a semantic value that is action inclined. Instances include:

12.
 - a. gbá-ásó ‘run’
 - b. gbá-útê ‘wrestle’
 - c. tù-mànyâ ‘libate’
 - d. gbá-ókú ‘trek’
 - e. gbá-áká-ńtní ‘slap’

In actual speech condition, vowel assimilation occurs in the production of 12b and d. Their actual articulation read thus:

13. a. gbù-útê 'wrestle'
b. gbò-ókú 'trek'

The vowel assimilation necessitates vowel lengthening. A unique syntactic feature of the ICVs is that the inflectional processes are often attached to the underspecified components preceding the nominal complements as in:

- 14 a. ò dà gbá - bẹ́ ásọ [future inchoative expression]
3SG AUX ICV - INC run
'S/he will start running'
- b. Chima gbá - ká - tálá ókwú [frequentative expression]
PN ICV - more FREQ leg
'Chima has been trekking (for a long time)'
- c. Ngozi gbà - gà ásọ [progressive expression]
PN ICV - PROG run
'Ngozi is running'

Some of the dynamic verbs of Omuanwa that are event oriented include:

15. a. znù 'train'
b. nwù 'die'
c. znò 'grow'
d. hwù 'miss'/'disappear'

b. Stative Verbs

The stative verbs do not indicate action, all they do is to express the state of affairs of a given entity. The stative verbs of Omuanwa include the 'be' verbs indicated as:

16. a. bụ
b. dị
c. nò

Their usage in sentences is dependent on the nominal entity that follow them as in:

17. a. ò bụ nyé - ézè
3S be person rich/wealthy
'He/She is rich/wealthy'
- b. ò dị ímé
3s be pregnant
'She is pregnant'
- c. ò dị n' àkpà
3s be prep. bag
'It is in the bag'
- d. ò nò n' ọrọ
3s be prep. house
'He/She is in the house'

The **nò** verb gives a notion of stay, that is, it indicates the place (where) an entity is located or can be found while **dì** plays a dual role of the ‘be’ verb and that of location as 17b and c respectively. The **bù** verb is restricted as a ‘be’ verb in all instances. Some ‘be’ verbs which are realized in line with the adjectives (descriptive words) they precede are **vù, znò, jò, mà, dnà and chnà**. They are used in sentences thus:

18. a. ò vù – rù ívù ‘S/he is fat/big’
3SG be - FACT fat
- b. ò znò – rnò áznó ‘S/he is tall’
3SG be - FACT tall
- c. ò jò - rò ñjò ‘S/he is ugly’
3SG be - FACT ugly
- d. ò mà - rnà rmmá ‘S/he is beautiful’
3SG be - FACT beautiful
- e. Chima dnà - rnà àzì ‘Chima is poor’
PN be - FACT poor
- f. ò chnà - rnà àchná ‘It is ripe’
3SG be - FACT ripe

It can be observed in example 18d that the dialect does not discriminate between male female in the description of human features – unlike English that would use handsome for masculine and beautiful for feminine gender. The term **rmmá** ‘beautiful/fine’ is used for both.

Other stative verbs of Omuanwa include:

19. a. là ‘resemble’
b. nù ‘hear’
c. nwé ‘have’
d. gwná ‘remain’

It is necessary to state at this point that the inflectional processes which are performed using dynamic verbs can also be done using stative verbs especially the progressive aspectual inflectional process. So it is actually grammatical in Omuanwa for one to construct such sentences as:

20. a. Chima là - gà dídí - a
PN resemble - PROG father POSS
‘Chima is resembling his father’ (lit.)/ ‘Chima looks like his father’
- b. ò nù - gà ñtnì
3s hear - PROG ear
‘He/She is hearing’
- c. Ngozi vù - gà ívù
PN fat - PROG fat
‘Ngozi is growing/becoming fat’/ ‘Ngozi is fattening’(lit)

Conclusion

Morphologically, the Omuanwa underived verbs (verb roots) can be classified as simple and complex verbs. The simple verb roots consist of monosyllabic CV and sometimes, disyllabic CV-CV or trisyllabic CV-CV-CV structures. One outstanding phonological feature of Omuanwa verbs is that they often start with consonant sounds. The CV syllabic structure forms the major structure of Omuanwa verb roots. Some Omuanwa simple verb roots are disyllabic in nature having the CV-CV or trisyllabic having a CV-CV-CV syllable structure. Some verb roots consist of disyllabic bound roots and Inherent Complement Verbs. The dynamic and stative verbs are the major semantic divisions of Omuanwa verbs. The inflectional processes are performed both on the dynamic and stative verbs to aid realization of the diverse syntactic constructions. The dialect records a progressive aspectual form in stative verbs.

Recommendations

Given the structure of the complex bound verb root, the study recommends a detailed phonological analysis of the complex verb root to determine its phonological status. The study also recommends a comprehensive grammatical description of the Omuanwa-Ikwere verbs in order to document the attested phono-syntactic features of verbs in the language.

REFERENCES

- Alerechi, R. I. C. (2007). *Dialect survey of Ikwere: A phonological Perspective*. PhD Dissertation, University of Port Harcourt.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*, 4th edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dorais, L.J. (2010). *The language of the Inuit. Syntax, Semantics and society in the Arctic*. Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Emenanjo, E. N. (2015). *A grammar of contemporary Igbo: Constituents, features and processes*. Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd.
- Emenanjo, E.N. (1978). *Elements of modern Igbo grammar*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Giering, D. (1987). *English grammar*. Leipzig : Research School CNWS, Laiden University.
- Igwe-Chekwas, N. (2021). Morphophonemic representation of indicative constructions in Omuanwa-Ikwere. In Anyanwu, O., F. Ude & E. Udoh.(Eds). *USEM Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literature*, 9, 235-257.
- Isaac, B. H. (1995). *The grammar of Gokana*. M.A. Thesis. University of Port Harcourt
- Kari, E. E. (2015). *Morphology: An introduction to the study of word structure*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Ndimele, O. M. (2010). *A concise grammar and lexicon of Echie*. Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages.
- Oweleke, E. N. (1995). Verb-noun selectional restriction in Igbuzo-Igbo. M. A. thesis, University of Port Harcourt.
- Williamson, Kay., S. A. Ekwulo, R. I. C. Alerechi, J. T. N. Wali & W. Annette. (2010). *Reading and writing Ikwere*. Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd.
- Worukwo, G. (1983). *The verbal system of Ikwere (based on the Ogbakiri dialect)*. B. A. thesis, University of Port Harcourt.