

Syntactic and Semantic Behaviour of the Ogba Article, Verb and Pronoun

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Abstract

Ogba language is one of the over four hundred minor languages of Nigeria. In terms of family grouping Ogba is a sub-language of Igbo which is among the three major languages in Nigeria. Ogba is tonal while English is intonational. The learners from this linguistic Community are most likely to place tone on every syllable rather than spread the tone on a whole sentence. The verb and the pronoun in Ogba language as they are in the English language play vital roles in the use of the language for purposes of communication amongst speakers. It is believed that an understanding of the aspects of the syntactic and semantic behaviour of the Ogba article, verb and pronoun in the teaching and learning of the English language will aid proficiency in the use of both languages. The paper identifies the three major dialects of the Ogba language-Egni, Igburu and Usomini and their mutual intelligibility. The differences that exist in this dialect are restricted to the area of phonemic variation and are few lexical variants; the same affect the use of articles, verbs and pronouns. Therefore, this paper focuses on aspects of the articles, verbs and pronouns in Ogba language in juxtaposition with English. Aspects such as definite article, indefinite article, zero article, tone class verbs, functional verbs, and different types of pronoun are discussed as well as number, case and person. A parallel approach with the English language is used to facilitate comprehension.

Keywords: X-bar, Thematic-role, Argument, Specifier

Introduction

Concept: there is a problem in Ogbā linguistic community, the problem of some striking similarities and differences on the syntactic and semantic behavior of ogbā article, verb and pronoun with English. This problem according to the findings of this paper has hindered the effective teaching and learning of English in the area. The tutor and learner of English in Ogbā linguistic community should recognize the similarities and differences on the syntactic and semantic behaviour of Ogbā article, verb and pronoun with English in order to carry out effective teaching and learning of English in this 21st century. He/she should also note the area of problem such as in the articles and segmentals and the fact that the segmentals as well as the supra-segmentals and Ogbā differ significantly. The Ogbā language (using Egni as the standard dialect) operates a vowel harmony system with [a] as a neutral vowel; unlike English (Ogum 2009).

The Problem of Segmentals and Articles

Similarly, [p] and [f] are English phonemes but in Ogbā, they are allophones of the same phoneme in free variation as in

[p] ā p ā [‘apa’] tilapia
 and

[f] ‘afa’ [‘afa’] tilapia

The idea of focusing attention briefly on English suprasegmental phonology with a view to underpinning functional communication through the medium of English is that it is rewarding and will facilitate teaching and learning of English. The effective teaching and learning of written English has received significant attention over the years of accommodation of English in Nigeria. The same claim cannot be made of oral English. Some people reckon with oral English as elitist; they perceive it as the sacred object of phonetics and phonology lecturers in tertiary institutions. Sadly, many people dismiss proper articulation of English speech sounds, correct placement of stress, and appropriate use of intonation and masterful control of rhythm as academic pretensions. (Ogum 2000) has cautioned:

Today, English is an international language. People who have learnt its conventions use it. No person, country or race owns it. English is indeed the official language in Nigeria. It is important therefore that we speak the language (and teach it) with a view of attaining national and international intelligibility. Whatever we say is as important as how we say it. Except we say what we intend to say in the correct form, we run the risk of improper communication.

The onus is on the tutor of English to guide the learners effectively to attain desirable oral communicative competence in our school system. This is a major challenge.

The Problem of Articles

The article is one of the areas of English that constitutes a linguistic problem because it is greatly influenced by the mother tongue (L1). In most cases, local transference of vernacular occurs in the non-use of these articles and this constitutes a major problem in the effective teaching, learning and use of English in Nigeria. In delving into this problem of non-use or occasionally, an over use of an article, We have not restricted this paper to the influence Ogbā language has on English and vice versa in the context of the Ogbā language-English contact situation. The materials for locating the areas where the problem occurs are drawn from some papers written by some Ogbā writers, personal letters, sermons given by some Ogbā clergy men in some churches in Ogbā, dialogues among some Ogbā speakers and so many others. This paper attempts to address the problems faced by learners of English in Ogbā linguistic community and to proffer solution that will lead to the mastery of English.

An awareness of the formal characteristics of Ogbā language as well as the sociolinguistic role of English is of a major importance in assessing the relative influence of Ogbā on

English. The problem can be assessed only by understanding the structure of Ogba language *visa-a-vis* the various languages in Nigeria and the English language.

The position and function of article in Ogba language is discernible. According to Ohia (2011), “there is one article in Ogba that is not lexically and syntactically used as “the” and “a/an” are employed in the English language”. The fact that the definite article in Ogba language is not used in the same linguistic form does not foreclose its existence.

The Ogba language possesses the definite article that is only known as ‘ya’ and there is zero indefinite article. The definite article ‘the’ in English is used interchangeably with the demonstrative pronoun ‘that’ and the personal pronoun ‘me’ in Ogba language, and in most cases both stand in the same linguistic parlance. This poses a big threat to the teaching and learning of English articles as there is a notable interference of the mother tongue (L1) in L2 class

Examples:

‘Nwa ya’	‘child the’	(the child)
‘Nwa ya’	‘child that’	(that child)
‘Ekw _{oh} ya’	‘book that’	(that book)
‘Ekw _{oh} ’	‘book’	(a book)
‘Nwa’	‘child’	(a child)
‘Nigam Ekw _{oh} ya’		(give me the book)
‘Nigam Ekw _{oh} ’		(give me a book)

The mark difference between the article in Ogba and the articles in English are:

1. The definite article in Ogba performs a dual function as a noun modifier as well as a pronoun.
2. According to the position of adjectives in Ogba, the article ‘ya’ in Ogba does not precede the noun it modifies as in English. The article comes after the noun to conform with the linguistic structure of the Ogba language. In other words an adjective or article is positioned after the noun it qualifies; it does not precede it.
3. Though articles exist in Ogba, it is seldom used; especially the definite article ‘ya’. This is because Ogba is a unique local minority language that is arbitrary and culture bound. It is different from English lexically, syntactically and morphologically. The Ogba definite article ‘ya’ makes the Ogba language (spoken or written) flat and artificial should it be used in the imitation of English. Consequently, it is often arbitrarily avoided in literary essays or speeches.

Examples:

1. “Ome yisi ekw_{oh} ya la’ akwna’ irni” (He will put the book on table)
2. “Je’ ulo je’ ‘eri irni (Go to house, go and eat)

It is observed in the first sentence that ‘ekw_{oh}’ (book) is defined by ‘ya’ (the) but ‘akwna irni’ (table) has no ‘the’ definite article. Also in the second sentence ‘ulo’ (house), the only noun, has no definite article. In English both ‘akwna irni’ (table) in the first sentence and ‘ulo’ (house) in the second sentence should be particularized by ‘the’. In Ogba, to express these two sentences thus:

1. “Ome yisi ekw_{oh} ya la’ akwna’ irni ya” (he will put the book on the table)
2. “Je’ ulo ya je’ ‘eri irni”(go to the house to eat) would sound flat and artificial. This non-use of the definite article in Ogba is often transferred to English by Ogba speakers of English, thereby making it difficult for the hearer to identify the actual substance the speaker refers to. This is a task that must be undertaken by the teachers and learners of English in Ogba.

Aspects of the Ogba Verb

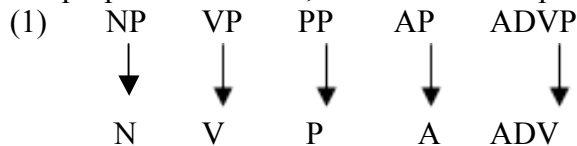
The Ogba verb behaves in a similar way as the Igbo verb because both languages belong to the Igboid group. According to Benneth and Sterks (1977), Bender (1989) in the

classification of African languages, Igbo and Ogba belong to the New Benue Congo Languages. This accounts for the similarity of Ogba and Igbo in tone and accent. Ogba as a tone language has a lexically significant, contrastive but relative pitch on each syllable. Each level of a tone language is a tone-bearing unit (tbu).

The Framework of the Study

The framework adopted in this study is the X-theory. This theory which was devised by Chomsky in (1967) in his article: "Remarks on nominalization" was popularized by Jackdendorf in (1977), X-theory plays a crucial role in syntactic analysis and its essence is to improve on the inadequacy of phrase structure Grammar (PSG).

For proponents of PSG, there can be one possible projection of any category eg.



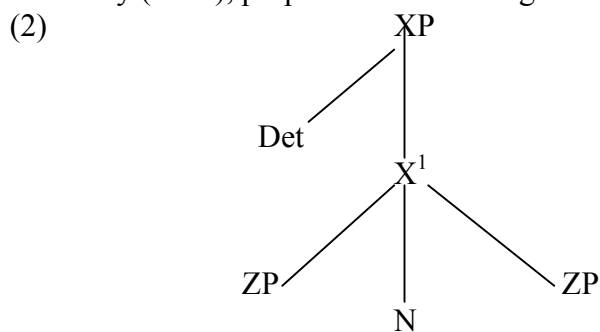
But the proponents of X-Bar theory claim that in addition to the lexical and phrasal levels/categories there can be a possible intermediate category which is larger than the word but smaller than the phrase. The X convention is that each lexical category X defines a set of syntactic categories X, X, X, the subcategories of X of the form X.....X (Jackdendorf 1977:28). The p-structure rule above can be interpreted thus:

X_n= as many bars as contained within the phrase.

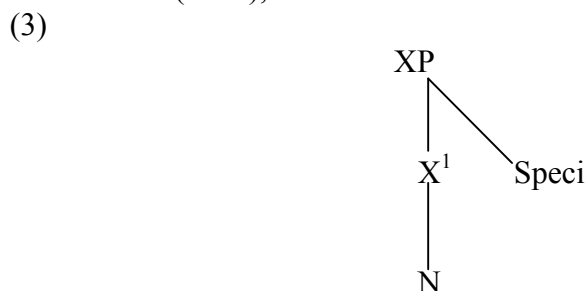
X_ny= any subsequent category which is as a result of the subtraction of one category from super category. Therefore, if the super category is X¹¹¹, the following category will be x which is again followed by X¹ and then X.

X- Schema and the Notion of Head.

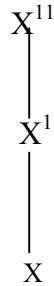
The notion of head is central in the contemporary syntactic analysis. The head of any maximal projection is the most crucial part of that phrase: Since every phrase contains a head, it is therefore the nucleus of every phrase, because it carries the central meaning of that phrase. The other elements which may occur either before or after the head are its various satellites which specify or limit its reference. A head may or may not take a modifier. Chomsky (1970), proposes the following X-Schema for English;



In (2), the specifier of X¹¹ is the determiner, while the argument is what the head can permit. Jackdendorf (1977), revised the X- Schema for English as follows:



He disagrees with Chomsky over the relevance of the modifier. To him X is the head of the projection, while comp or argument is that category that X can subcategorize for (= can permit). All modes in the X = Schema are optional except for those along the main projection path as in (4)



The Relevance of θ -Theory in the Analysis of the Structure of the Ogba Verb.

It is to say the obvious that the knowledge of a language should entail among other things, the fact that a particular verb is a one, two or three place argument verb, and therefore will assign the same number of thematic roles (θ -roles) to these arguments- θ theory was incorporated into syntactic description by Gruber (1965) and Fillmore (1968); studies in lexical relations and the case for case respectively. The idea behind this theory is that grammar should not only provide categorical information, but also thematic information regarding lexical entries. Suffice the following:

- (5a) The categorization feature for the verb murder is ‘murder’, (X V).
- (b) The sub-categorization frame for the verb ‘murder’ is ‘murder, XV (-NP) e.g. murder somebody.
- (c) The selectional restriction frame for the verb ‘murder’ is: < HUMAN- HUMAN >
- (d) The thematic frame for the verb murder is: < AGENTS > < PATIENT> JOHN murdered Mary. >.

Theta roles are essentially semantic properties and are assigned to argument positions (A-position henceforth).

A- Positions often coincide with the positions for nominal elements which may be nouns or pronouns, e.g.

- (e) JOHN murdered Mary
- A-position A-position

A-Position cannot be assigned θ -roles because they are non-argument positions.

There are two types of argument, namely: Internal and External arguments:

Internal Argument

Internal arguments are objects of the verbs. The verb being the case assigner, assigns case to its internal argument, the object.

External Argument

External argument is the subject with the INFL as case assigner and the verb as a theta assigner. There are number of θ -roles that have been identified in syntactic theory. But we must also remark that the number of θ -roles assigned to A- proportion is finite. Each argument bears one and only one θ -role, each θ -role is assigned to one and only one assignment.

(Sells 1985: 37). The following are θ -roles

- (i) AGENT (5)
- (ii) THEME (0)
- (iii) LOCATION ()
- (iv) SOURCE (E)
- (v) GOAL (N)
- (vi) PATH (X)

θ-Roles can also be expressed in a number of semantic dimensions. Thematic relation plays a very crucial role in syntactic analysis. Fillmore (1968) and Radford (1988) have both agreed that constituents of the sentence that are thematically compatible cannot be conjoined.

The Centrality of the Ogba Verb.

The verb is an obligation element in a sentence in the Ogba language as it is in any human language. By this assertion, it means that the verb is the nerve centre of any sentence in Ogba language. The verb is the most prolific word class in Ogba land. In fact, from available facts about Ogba morphology, it suffices to say that word derivation is unidirectional in the list, i.e. from the verb to other word classes. The Ogba verb performs a lot of sentential functions which are performed by other classes in some other languages.

In Ogba, the dearth of free form lexical classes to express certain notions, as we often find in some other languages, is augmented by the verbal class.

The Classification of Ogba Verbs

The parameters for the classification of Ogba verbs are as follows:

Classification by Tone

The Majority of Ogba verbs are bound roots, i.e., they often require the presence of other bound elements when they occur in verb forms. Because of the bound nature of the Ogba verb roots, it is often difficult to determine their inherent tones when they occur in isolation. So the tonal group of any Ogba verb is determined due to its behavior under the infinitive verb form. This split has necessitated the classification of Ogba simple verb roots into tone class I and tone class II. The tone class I verb roots are described as high tone verbs, while the tone class II ones are described as low tone verbs apparently in the infinitive verb form. Nwachukwu, (1983) and Emenanjo (1978) worked on the infinitive verb form in Igbo. The tone class I verbs show a high step tone pattern, while the tone class II ones show a high-low tone pattern as can be seen below:

Tone Class I Verbs:

- (a)-gnu 'read' 'Count' i = ignu -'to read, Count'
- (b)-gba 'run' 'Shoot' i = igba- to run, shoot'
- (c)-rii/ri 'eat' Crawl i = irii, iri- to eat, crawl'
- (d)- bu 'Carry, i = ibu- to carry'
- (e)-zah 'Answer i = izah to answer'.

Tone Class II Verbs

- (a) boh 'dissect' i = iboh- 'to dissect'
- (b) zaa 'sweep' i = iza -'to sweep'
- (c) zno 'rain' i = izno -'to rain'
- (d) di 'endure' i = idi - 'to endure'
- (e) dih 'present' o = odih- 'to be present'.

There is a third class of Ogba verbs with high down steps. Such verbs to Ohia and Onyedibia (2003) are in some Ogba dialects such as Idu Osobile and Idu Obosiukwu.

Functional Classification

There are two distinct groups of verb in human language: verbs that have no distinctive grammatical function but with definite referential meaning and those with particular grammatical function but without referential meaning. The first group is known as lexical/main verbs, while the second is called auxiliary verbs. Emenanjo (1986), notes that auxiliaries in Igbo are verbs which require and/or infinitives to complete their meanings (i.e. complements). He lists the auxiliaries that are used in standard Igbo in spite of some of them being essentially dialect forms. The same qualifies Ogba auxiliaries- mū, lá (will, is).

The Notion of Transitivity in Ogba

There are two conflicting schools of thought as to whether transitivity is a relevant term in Igbo. Emenanjo (1975, 1984 and 1985) agrees that transitivity is a redundant feature in Igbo syntax, basically because every Igbo verb is used with a noun at the deep structure. His argument for the non relevance of transitivity in Igbo is that the language lacks passivization. He argues that in English all transitivity verbs can be passivized. But Nwachukwu (1983, 1987) attempts to dismiss Emenanjo's assertion as he believes that the fact that passivization is not possible in a language does not rule out transitivity. He contends that a verb is transitive if action transits to its object, whether the object is a bound cognate noun or not.

The object of a transitive verb is the patient if it is totally affected by the action expressed by the verb. The group of verbs referred to as motion verbs are not transitive in any way. In the same vein, motion verbs in Ogba, as they are in Igbo, are generally associated with a preposition involved. Therefore, in spite of the surface discrepancies of motion verbs in Ogba, they must be analyzed as sub-category for a PP complement and not transitive.

Examples are:

(14a) o jeere woh órnū - They went to farm.

(14b) unu siga la uloh eje uloh-ekwoh som - Do you go to school from home?

Although the P_P complement is omitted in certain dialects of Ogba, giving the impression that motion is omitted in certain dialects of Ogba and that motion verbs are transitive. It is generally agreed that the occurrence of the optional preposition (lá) in constructions which involve motion verbs does not cause ungrammaticality as (14a and 14b) above show.

Ndimele (1992) working on Etchie verb which is also igboid, says Etchie verbs show a significant contrast to Emenanjo's claim that all Igbo verbs are transitive. Some Etchie verbs can be inherently intransitive; in which case they do not subcategorize for either an overt or covert NP to their right. Therefore, since every nominal position must be theta-marked and assigned case, Emenanjo's conception of verbs that take as transitive is quite unrealistic.

Every language has its own parameterized variations, its own special characteristics and traits; therefore, passivization is not a most important criterion for determining transitivity. What determines transitivity, as noticed in Ndimele (1987) is not only when an object in a language takes θ -role of a patient. The action of the verb can pass from an Agent(s) to a goal (n) and yet the verb is regarded as transitive.

Example (15) clarifies these:

(15) O jeere órnū - He went to farm.

Secondarily, it is not sufficient to generalize the notion that Igboid lects use the so called optional preposition. One thing is worthy of note in the above argument, and that is while the verbs in some Igboid lects are not transitive; they seem to be semantically hollow when used without complement. Moreover the meaning of most verbs in Ogba is seen as semantically empty but for their complement which carry the meaning of the construction.

Example:

(16a) bu ibu - "be fat"

(b) bnu egwu - "Sing a song"

(c) kwu ekâh - "Clap your hand"

With the availability of some theoretical resources since the late 1980s, the issues of transitivity can potentially be significant, constrained and greatly simplified. Debates regarding transitivity in Ogba as presented here can be taken care of by our present understanding in linguistic studies. Argument structure now specified the number of argument that a predicate (Verb) takes, thereby eliminating the problem posed by

transitivity. Such arguments are explained by one-place Argument Verbs, Two-Place Argument verbs, Three-place Argument verbs and Four-place Argument verbs.

Examples:

One-place Argument verbs

(17) Ngozi wnumala (Ngozi died-fact)

Two-place Argument verb

(18) Emeka Kpo wori Emelike (Emeka called Emelike)

Three-place Argument verb

(19) Obi zuni Ada ewu (Obi bought a goat for Ada)

Four-Place argument verb

(20) Eze nigra Obi ego maka ihiri-kem (Eze gave Obi money on my behalf).

Further Steps

While our focus in this paper is on the relationship between Ogba article, verb and pronoun, we observed some differences and similarities between them and those of English in Comparison. In addition, the semantic relatedness and non relatedness of the articles, verbs and pronouns in the two languages account for the performance of English speakers from Ogba Linguistic community. The next step of this paper will focus on “The word class effect in Ogba Language”. The new paper will discuss the noun, preposition, adverb, etc and the role word class information plays in lexical access in Ogba Language and English. Of Central importance in that paper is the question of whether word class effects arise at the lexical-syntactic or semantic level. This is not travail because it has been demonstrated that word class variable correlates with semantic variable-such as imageability. For example, it is a known fact that nouns tend to be more imageable than verbs (Chiarello, Shears and Lund, 1999).

Conclusion

Nigerian Teachers of English and Teachers of English all over the world are depended upon to produce a generation of competent users of English for academic and other purposes in this 21st century. We must not fail. It is said that no nation can rise beyond its educational system and no educational system can be better than the quality of the teachers who operate the system.

Earnestly, this paper observes that a marked problem exists in the usage of article by some Ogba speakers of English. The necessary or redundant use of the definite article, is not as pronounced as the non-use of it due to the non-existent of the indefinite article. The confusion in its usage and the substratum influence are thought provoking. Though the articles appear to be relatively insignificant words in English, they are grammatical tools. Their function is to facilitate the use of the language and therefore should be skillfully handled. If English as a second language must maintain its international standard in Nigeria, such particles in the English language use should be skillfully taught in our educational institutions irrespective of any level.

Similarly, a sizeable amount of data that the Ogba verb in controlling word class in the grammar of Ogba as in other languages of the world has been shown. It regulates the behaviour and distribution of some other word classes, particularly the nominal class. The verb also serves as the host for such secondary grammatical categories as tense, mood, aspect, negation, etc. The Ogba verb can be used to express certain notions in some other languages such as English will be expressed by some certain other form of classes.

In classifying Ogba Verbs, we have used four parameters namely: tonal, functional, semantic and formal. The Ogba verbs were also divided into two groups: those that have no distinctive grammatical function but with definite lexical and those with particular grammatical function but without referential meaning (auxiliary verbs).

Semantically and morphologically, we have classified and grouped verbs into stative and non-stative verbs and simple and complex verb forms respectively.

The paper notes that the question of transitivity which is a traditional notion is no longer valid and could be re-examined with the availability of certain improved theoretical resources among which are the case theory, θ -theory and X-theory. The issue of transitivity by our present understanding has been reduced to the argument structure of the predicate containing such verbs. Using this criterion, therefore, we have grouped Ogba verbs according to the number of Argument they take. This, if followed will facilitate the effective teaching and learning of English in Ogba linguistic community.

If this paper makes any sense to the audience, then authors of other linguistic communities should advice on ways to improve and make concerted efforts towards ameliorating this linguistic problem that mars the effective learning of the English Language as an International Language. Such efforts will increase the learning capabilities of Local users of English in the area of improving on articles or inclusion of articles, verbs and pronouns in their native languages.

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