

A structural analysis of the Igbo comparative *ká* and its grammaticalised status

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Abstract

Over the years, the study of Igbo comparative markers has received very little attention in morphosyntax research. In a few existing literature where they are mentioned in passing, scholars unanimously project the verb '*ká*' 'surpass' as a comparative marker. Little or no attempt has been made to investigate its varying contexts of occurrence and its gradual transition from a purely lexical to a grammaticalised function. This work, therefore attempts to bridge the existing gap in the extant literature by examining extensively, the Igbo comparative, *ká* and its grammaticalised status. We adopt the parameters of grammaticalisation in measuring the autonomy and grammaticalised status of the comparative verb *ká*. Data for this study were obtained from both primary (introspective and field data) and secondary sources (corpus data) of the standard Igbo and other varieties of Igbo such as the Awka dialect.

Keywords: Grammaticalisation; Igbo comparative; Verb serialisation; Complex predicate; Comparison

Introduction

Literature on the study of comparison as a grammatical category in Igbo is quite scanty. The basic assumption and projection is that the comparison of superior inequality is marked by the verb *ká* 'surpass'. Stassen (1985) identifies the *ká* verb as the Igbo comparative marker and classifies Igbo as an Exceed II language type under the fixed case comparatives. He presupposes that Igbo lacks the possibility to form a serial verb string of the type illustrated in languages of Exceed I type using the verb *ká*. In the light of synchronic language data however, it is observed that this is rather not the case. In a detailed grammatical description of Igbo grammar, Emenanjo (2015) enlists the comparative construction as an example of a serial verb construction in Igbo. The characterisation of comparison in Igbo is a bit more complex than it appears in the existing literature. The comparative marker *ká* occurs in varying construction types

(having a core comparative meaning). We consequently make the claim that *ká* tends towards grammaticalisation as observed in constructions where it occurs devoid of the prototypical properties of the comparison of superior inequality. The general definition of comparison captures basic grammatical elements that should characterise comparison; some of which are lacking in the context where the grammaticalised *ká* is used (Dixon, 2008; Heine, 1991 et al; Stassen, 2013).

In many languages like English and Italian, comparison is typically associated with the adjective category. However, in languages with a small closed class of adjectives, it is not unusual for property concepts to be predominantly expressed by other categories such as nouns and verbs. Igbo falls in the latter category. Property concepts in Igbo could be partly expressed by verbs and nouns. The predominant parameter of comparison in Igbo is the verb predicate.

This paper investigates the features of the Igbo comparative construction with emphasis on the comparative marker and its grammaticalised function. It establishes the grammaticalised status of the comparative marker *ka* using the parameters proposed in Lehmann (2015). Using data from Igbo, this study lends support to the overall idea that in many West African languages, comparative markers evolve from ‘exceed’ verbs which have the propensity to be further grammaticalised.

Literature review

In this section, we provide a brief review of the core concepts that are relevant to this article; grammaticalisation and comparison.

Grammaticalisation

The process of grammaticalisation typically entails a gradual shift in meaning/function of a linguistic element from a lexical to a grammatical function or from one grammatical function to another. The term ‘grammaticalisation’ was first introduced by Antoine Meillet in 1912. Meillet (1912) cited in Heine (2003, 576), applied the theory of grammaticalisation to the historical analysis of conjunction, particularly in Latin-Romance. Over time, the application of the concept of grammaticalisation has evolved into a vital tool in the diachronic study of language. Grammaticalisation involves “the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status” (Kurylowicz, 1965, 52). Haspelmath (1999, 1043) defines Grammaticalisation as “the change by which lexical categories become functional categories”. This type of change is usually gradual. Across languages, it is not unusual to find morphological and syntactic markers

of categories such as tense, aspect, complementation, and comparison evolving from more concrete forms.

Comparison

Comparison involves a mental act by which two objects are assigned a position on a predicate scale. Difference in the positions on the scale implies the comparison of inequality (Stassen, 2013). “Comparison and gradation presuppose an entity that some property, state or more rarely, a more or less dynamic state of affairs applies to...” (Lehmann, 2004, 1212). In other words, comparison is the formal modification of a predicative word representing a parameter of comparison according to which it applies to its argument, relative to some standard. A comparative construction typically comprises of grammatical elements such as the comparee, standard, predicate, degree marker, and standard marker.

1. Jane is tall-er than Becky
comparee predicate-degree mk standard mk standard

Languages differ with respect to the representation of these elements. In the English comparative for instance, the standard of comparison is introduced by the standard marker *than*. There are however, languages like Yoruba that do not encode the standard marker.

Typology of comparison

Languages encode the expression of comparison differently. Stassen’s 1985 seminal work on the comparative mirrors the many ways by which languages formally lexicalize comparison¹. He distinguishes between two main types of comparative constructions: the fixed case comparatives and the derived case comparatives. Within the former, a distinction is made between exceed comparatives and locational comparatives. For languages with exceed comparative, “the standard NP is constructed as the direct object of a transitive verb with the meaning ‘to exceed’ or ‘to surpass’ ” (Stassen, 1985 p. 42). Stassen further subcategorises the exceed comparatives into three groups: Exceed I, Exceed II, and Exceed III. He classifies Igbo as an Exceed II comparative type where the exceed verb is the main predicate while its comparative predicate is encoded in a nominal form which is usually a verbal or codified abstract noun. Below are examples of comparative constructions from the three Exceed comparative type languages:

Exceed I (Yoruba)

2. ile mi kere ju tiwon
house my small exceed theirs
'My house is smaller than theirs'

Exceed II (Igbo)

3. ge ka m ike
2SG exceed Pro strength
'You are stronger than me'

Exceed III (Duala)

4. a) Bono bo kolo buka ndabo
boat 3SG big-PRES exceed house
'The boat is bigger than the house'
- b) Modi a buki Edimo bwala
M. COP exceed E. laziness
'Modi is lazier than Edimo'

(Stassen, 1985 p. 159-182)

A summary of the defining features of the 3 Exceed comparative types are given in the Table below:

Table 1: Typology of Comparison

Exceed I language prototype: Yoruba	Exceed II language prototype: Igbo	Exceed III language prototype: Duala
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involves a serial verb construction comprising of a gradable predicate and an exceed verb	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Languages have some sort of direct parallelism between the surface form of the comparative and a	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The comparative form is the main verb while the exceed verb is deranked into an infinitive or participle

	<p>form of chaining construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The comparative predicate is put in the form of an adverbially used abstract noun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has features of both exceed I and exceed II
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Stassen (1985) asserts that Igbo lacks the capacity to form a serial verb string of the type illustrated in Yoruba. On the contrary, an analysis of synchronic Igbo data shows that Igbo comparative constructions could be formally marked via verb serialisation just as in languages of Exceed I such as Yoruba. In a detailed description of Igbo grammar, (Emenanjo, 2016) identifies the comparative construction as an instance of verb serialisation in Igbo. Similarly, we show in subsequent sections that verb serialisation is one of the strategies for marking comparison in Igbo using the verb *ká* ‘surpass’. Stassen (1985, 180) notes that the choice between the variants of exceed comparative is dependent on the verby or nouny character of the language. This assertion holds a bidirectional implication:

- If a language has an exceed I comparative, it is verby. If an exceed language is verby, it has an exceed I comparative*
- If a language has an exceed II comparative, it is nouny. If an exceed language is nouny, it has an exceed II or exceed III comparative*

Following Stassen’s assertion, Igbo would most likely be classified as being nouny. We however show with examples in subsequent sections that Igbo is more verby than nouny and that the form illustrated in 2 is the surface structure of an underlying form comprising two verb predicates. Notable in Stassen’s characterization of exceed comparative languages is the fact that the comparative marker is usually derived from a transitive verb which could mean exceed, surpass, be better than, and so on. He however uses the term ‘exceed’ as a cover label for similar possibilitiesⁱⁱ.

Building on Stassen’s work, Heine (1997) observes that comparative markers are derived from other more concrete entities (that is, from a number of conceptual source structures) referred to as event schemas. From the array of source schemas proposed by Heine (1997), the action schema coincides with Stassen’s exceed comparative. According to Heine (1997, p. 112), “when the action schema is employed, the comparee is portrayed as a kind of agent ...”. The concept of ‘surpass’ in Heine’s schematic formula (‘X is Y surpasses Z’) stands for verbal notions such as defeat, be better than, win over, and

exceed. Heine (1997, p. 112) lists the following source schemas for comparative constructions across languages:

Source schema	Label of schema
X is Y surpasses Z	Action
X is Y at Z	Location
X is Y from Z	Source
X is Y to Z	Goal
X is Y, Z is not Y	Polarity
X is Y then Z	Sequence

It is therefore plausible that degree related markers (comparative markers, intensifiers) in form of affixes and particles may have evolved via grammaticalisation paths from surpass/exceed verbs. A major line of thought that we hold in this work is that the Igbo comparative marker *ká* is undergoing grammaticalisation from a purely comparative meaning to another degree related meaning and function. We mainly adopt Lehmann’s 2015 parameters of grammaticalisation in reviewing the status and features of *ka* as a grammaticalised form.

Theoretical framework

Lehmann (2015) proposes some grammaticalisation parameters relevant in measuring the autonomy of a linguistic sign. These parameters are outlined and briefly explained below:

Table 2: Grammaticalisation Parameters

PARAMETER	AXIS	
	Paradigmatic	Syntagmatic
WEIGHT COHESION VARIABILITY	integrity paradigmaticity paradigmatic variability	structural scope bondedness syntagmatic variability

The three parameters proposed by Lehmann have paradigmatic and syntagmatic leanings. Paradigmatically, weight refers to the integrity of a linguistic sign. The

integrity of a sign decreases if there is a gradual semantic bleaching or phonological reduction. Syntagmatically, weight refers to the structural scope of the construction a sign helps to form.

Paradigmatic cohesion involves the formal and semantic integration of a sign within a paradigm while syntagmatic cohesion refers to the connection that exists between two signs in a syntagmatic relation.

Paradigmatic variability refers to the freedom with which a language user chooses a linguistic sign with regard to a paradigm as a whole; to the extent that the unobligatoriness of specifying a sign becomes impossible in a given context. Syntagmatic variability refers to the ease with which a sign can be shifted around in a given context. This feature decreases with increase in grammaticalisation.

Previous works on comparison in Igbo

In existing studies on Igbo comparatives, forms of the verb *ká* ‘surpass’ are usually analysed as the comparative marker. Emenanjo (2015, p. 544) identifies the verb form *káriá* as a serial verb used in expressing comparison in Igbo. He gives the following examples:

5. a) Ada mara mma karia Uzo
A be beautiful-PRS beauty more than U
‘Ada is more beautiful than Uzo’
- b) Chike to-ro uto karia Ada
C grow-PRS growth more than A
‘Chike is taller than Ada’

Ezenwafor & Ezenwafor (2015) identify two possibilities for the marking of comparative constructions: *ká* and *kári*. Examples:

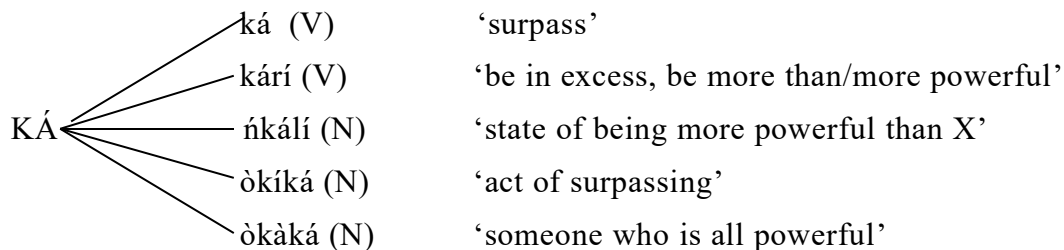
6. a) Obi ka Ada bu ibu / Obi ka Ada ibu
O surpass A be fat fatness / O surpass A fatness
‘Obi is fatter than Ada’
- b) Obi bu-kari-ri Ada / Obi bu-kari-ri Ada n'ibu
O be fat-more than-PRS A / O be fat-more than-PRS A in fatness
‘Obi is fatter/bigger than Ada.’

In (6a), the comparative marker *ká* occurs as a serial verb while in (6b), the comparative marker *kári* is realised as the V2 of a compound verb.

The semantics of *ká*

The core meaning of the verb *ká* ‘surpass’ denotes the event of being more or better than in relation to a feature (X surpasses Y in Z). Just like most Igbo verbs, *ka* usually requires a noun complement which may be overtly realised or implied. The noun complement is usually the standard in a comparative construction. The root *ka* serves as a base for the derivation of some nouns, as well as the verb *kárí*. The verb *kárí* is therefore a combination of *ka+rí*ⁱⁱⁱ. It obligatorily takes a bound cognate verbal particle *akarí* when it denotes the notion of ‘being in excess as exemplified in 9.

The derivations from *ka* are shown in the following sketch:



Examples:

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------|-----|--------|------|-----------------------------------|---|----|-----|--|
| 7. | Chíómá | kà | m̀ | ímā | ‘Chioma is better than me’ | | | | |
| 8. | Chíómá | kà | rìrì | m̀ | ‘Chioma is more powerful than me’ | | | | |
| 9. | ńrì | à | kà | rìrì | àkárí | ‘This food is in excess’ | | | |
| 10. | ńkálí | nà- | àkpátá | é | gwù | ‘Being more powerful brings about fear’ | | | |
| 11. | Chúkwú | bù | òkàkà | | ‘God is all powerful’ | | | | |
| 12. | Òkíká | Í | kà | Àdá | nà | ébū | gī | ísí | ‘Your surpassing of Ada is making you proud’ |

Comparative construction in Igbo

A prototypical Igbo comparative construction comprises the comparee, standard, predicate, and degree marker. The position of these constituents varies depending on the construction type. Consider the examples below:

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|----|--------------------------------------|---------------|----------|----|-----------|
| 13. | a) | ńnēm̄ | kà | ńnám | tó | ógō |
| | | comparee | degree marker | standard | | predicate |
| | | ‘My mother is taller than my father’ | | | | |

- b) *Ñném̄* *tò-kàrì-rì* *nnàm* (*n'ógō*)
 comparee predicate-degree marker standard
 'My mother is taller than my father'

The Igbo comparative is marked by two forms: *ká* and *kárí(á)* in varying constructions. The predicate of comparison could be a noun (especially nouns that denote property concepts) or verbs. The Igbo comparative markers could occur as serial verbs as in 13a or in V+V constructions as in 13b.

The comparative markers *ka* and *kari* in serial verb constructions

The following examples illustrate the use of *ká* and *kárí* as comparative markers in serial verb constructions:

14. *Àdá kà Chíómá má ímā*
 A. surpass C. be beautiful beauty
 'Ada is more beautiful than Chioma'
15. *Àdá kà Chíómá bù íbù*
 A. surpass C. be fat fatness
 'Ada is fatter than Chioma'
16. *Àdá kà Chíómá èsí írī*
 A. surpass C. cook food
 'Ada cooks food better than Chioma'
17. *Àdá tò-rò ógō káríá Chíómá*
 A. grow-PRS tallness more than C.
 'Ada is taller than Chioma'
18. *Àdá bù-rù íbù káríá Chíómá*
 A. be fat-PRS fatness more than C.
 'Ada is fatter than Chioma'

The comparative marker/verb forms a non-contiguous serial string with the comparative predicates *má ímā* 'be beautiful', *bù íbù* 'be fat' and *sí írī* 'cook' in 14-16. Unlike

stative verbs, active verbs obligatorily take an open vowel prefix *e/a-* in comparative constructions; particularly in SVCs (see 16). At the syntactic level, the standard NP is encoded as the direct object of the comparative verb and the comparee NP as the subject (see 14-16). Note however, that at the surface structure, the second verb in the serial string could be covert. This is applicable to most comparative SVCs that involve stative predicates (14-15) with the form *ka* as the comparative marker (we return to this later).

In sentences 17 and 18, the comparative verb form *kárí* takes the open vowel suffix *-a*, co- occurs with the predicates of comparison *tó ógō* ‘be tall’ and *bù ìbù* ‘be fat’ in a SVC and also introduces the standard of comparison. The function of *káríá* as a comparative marker is somewhat restricted. Its realisation of a purely comparative meaning is dependent on the type of predicate that it co-occurs with. For stative predicates (especially verbs that denote property), the comparative marker *káríá* expresses comparison of inequality. On the contrary, when active verbs form a serial string with the comparative verb form *karia*, two readings are realised; the comparative and frequentative meanings^{iv}. The resulting interpretation of the latter connotes the performance of an activity more often. Consider the following example:

19. Nné m̄ nà èsí ñrī káríá hā
 mother 1SG.POSS HAB cook food more than 3PL
 ‘My mother cooks better than them/ My mother cooks more often than them’

The comparative verb forms *ká* and *káríá* assume different positions in relation to the predicate of comparison. In examples 14-16, the comparative marker precedes the predicate of comparison, while in 17 and 18, the predicate of comparison precedes the comparative marker.

Variants of *ká* in comparative constructions

As we noted earlier, the parameter for comparison in Igbo is primarily the verb predicate which may express an activity, state or property concept. At the surface level however, there are instances where predicate of comparison is realised as a noun in 20b, 21b, and 22b or a preposition + noun in 20c, 21c, and 22c. It is this possibility of a noun predicate of comparison that probably informed Stassen’s (1985) analysis of Igbo as being nouny rather than verby. There is usually more than one variant of any comparative construction in Igbo. We shall use the variants of the comparative construction to illustrate the possible predicates of comparison obtained in Igbo. Consider the following examples with the verbs *bù ìbù* ‘be fat’, *sí íkē* ‘be strong’ *gbá égwū* ‘dance’:

20. a) Àdá kà Chíómá bù íbù
A. surpass C. be fat fatness
'Ada is fatter than Chioma'
- b) Àdá kà Chíómá íbù
A surpass C fatness
'Ada is fatter than Chioma'
- c) Àdá kà Chíómá n'íbù
A. surpass C. in fatness
'Ada is fatter than Chioma'/'Ada surpasses Chioma in fatness'
21. a) Í kà m̀ sí íkē
2SG surpass 1SG be strong strength
'You are stronger than me'
- b) Í kà m̀ íké
2SG surpass 1SG strength
'You are stronger than me'
22. a) Àdá kà Chíómá à-gbá égwū
A surpass C. PREF-dance song
'Ada dances better than Chioma'
- b) * Àdá kà Chíómá égwú
A surpass C song
'Ada dances better than Chioma'
- c) Àdá kà Chíómá n' í-gbā égwú
A surpass C. in INF-dance song
'Ada dances better than Chioma/Ada surpasses Chioma in dancing'

The above illustrations show that if a *ká* comparative construction takes an adverbially placed noun as its comparative predicate, then, it most likely has an alternative or equivalent construction which takes the comparative verb predicate. Stassen's 1985 classification as a nouny and exceed II comparative type does not put into consideration the fact that the predicate of comparison could be not only a noun but also a verb (V+N). The view that we hold is that the predicate of comparison in Igbo is underlyingly a V+N form as in 20a, 21a and 22a. In other words, the noun predicate of comparison illustrated in 20b, 21b and 22b are surface structures resulting from some transformation; the

optional deletion of the verb. Note that while the verb comparative predicate is possible for all comparative forms, the noun comparative predicate is mostly applicable to stative/property concepts. Comparative constructions involving verbs of activity do not allow the deletion of the verb. In 22b for instance, the omission of the verb *gbá* results in ungrammaticality.

The evolving pivot

The standard of comparison may be introduced by a grammatical form referred to as the pivot. In some languages, the pivot is marked morphologically or analytically. In English for instance, the pivot is marked analytically. The standard of comparison is introduced by the independent word *than* as in *James is smarter than John*. Lehmann (2004) observes that the pivot is lacking in many languages. It is therefore not uncommon to find languages with no pivot in comparative constructions.

In Igbo, the prototype of the comparative has no marker that introduces the standard of comparison. There is however a comparative construction type that suggests the evolving of a pivot (see 23-24). In the previous sections, we outlined the two comparative markers: *ká* and *kárí*, and illustrated how they function independently in comparative constructions. Although both comparative markers can function independently, there are instances where they co-occur in a comparative construction. In such constructions, the form *kárí* tends to function more as a pivot. Consider the following examples:

23. Àdá **kà** bù íbù **káríá** Chíómá
 A surpass be fat fatness more than C
 ‘Ada is fatter than Chioma’
24. Nné m̄ **kà** èsí n̄rī **káríá** hā
 mother 3SG.POSS surpass cook food more than them
 ‘My mother cooks better than them’

The comparative verb *kárí* and compounding

Igbo abounds with verb compounds comprising V₁ + V₂ constituents or the verb + suffix. Different types of verb compounds have been identified. Lords (1975) identifies a resultative compound type which expresses action and the result of an action such as *ku-gbu* (hit-kill). Uchechukwu (2008) describes a verb compound type that expresses a prepositional meaning such as *de-nye* (write-give) ‘write for’, *bu-nye* (carry-give) ‘carry to’.

In this section, we discuss the realisation of the comparative verb *kari* and the predicate of comparison as a verb compound. The following examples are illustrative:

25. Àdá pè-kàrì-rì ím
 A be small-more than-PRS 1SG
 ‘Ada is smaller than me’
26. Òbí gbà-kàrì-rì Èméká n’ égwú
 O dance-more than-PRS E in dance
 ‘Obi dances better than Emeka’

In 25 and 26, the comparative verb *kari* forms a verb compound with the predicates of comparison *pé m̄pē* ‘be small’ and *gbá égwū* ‘dance’. In each instance, the comparative verb occurs as the V₂ component. The V₁ and V₂ share the same subject, as well as other grammatical features such as tense, negation and aspect. Although the verbs *pé*, *gbá* and *kari* are inherently high tone verbs, they are assigned a low tone in V+V comparative construction. This tonal change is a defining feature of all V+V comparative compounds. The derivation of a comparative verb compound is a highly productive process. The comparative verb *kari* has a wide range of applicability; that is, it is capable of combining with as many Igbo verbs as possible in the formation of a compound verb that expresses comparison.

One of the ways of expressing the superlative meaning in Igbo is by the use of the verb form *kari* + *cha/si* in a compound verb formative as illustrated in sentence (27) below’.

27. Àdá mà-kàrì-chà-rà úmù nwáànyì nílē
 A be beautiful-more than-COMPL-PRS women all
 ‘Ada is the most beautiful of all women’

Igbo adjectives and the comparative

In many languages, comparison as a grammatical category is associated with the adjective class. In English for instance, the comparative is morphologically marked by the suffixes *-er/-est* on adjectives. For languages with no distinct class of adjectives or with very few adjectives, comparison is linked with other word classes, most especially verbs and nouns.

Igbo has been characterised as one of such languages with a small class of adjectives (Emenanjo, 1978; Maduka-Durunze, 1990). Five pure or basic adjectives are typically identified in Igbo; four of which divide into two pairs of antonyms. They include *óchá* ‘fair/white’, *ójíí* ‘dark/black’, *ómá* ‘good’, *ójóṓ* ‘bad’, *úkwú* ‘big’. These adjectives are

derivatives from verbs^{vi}. They are not compatible with the comparative markers *ka* and *kari* for the following reasons:

- They have a restricted distribution, that is, they can only function as nominal modifiers in NPs such as *nwáànyì òchá* ‘fair woman’
- They have noun and verb equivalents which serve as predicates of comparison (see Table 3)
- They are relatively non prototypical.

Consider the following sentences where the Igbo adjectives seem to appear in comparative constructions:

28. ?Àdà kà òné yā òchá
 A surpass mother 3SG.POSS fair
 ‘Ada surpasses her fair mother’

29. ?Ó kà Chiómá ójí
 3SG surpass C dark
 ‘She surpasses dark Chioma’

Sentences 28 and 29 illustrate the co-occurrence of the comparative marker *ka* and the adjectives *òchá* ‘fair’ and *ójí* ‘dark’ where both adjectives occupy the position of comparison predicates. Although the above sentences are not ungrammatical, the adjectives in this context, function as attributive modifiers of the noun, not as predicates of comparison. The predicate of comparison in 28 and 29 are unspecified^{vii}. Example 28 gives the reading ‘*Ada surpasses her fair mother*’ instead of *Ada is fairer than her mother* while 29 gives the reading ‘*She surpasses dark Chioma*’ instead of ‘*She is darker than Chioma*’. We therefore posit that the Igbo adjective cannot function as a predicate of comparison. It is mostly verbs and nouns that serve as comparison predicates. Again, it is only the verb that forms a v+v compound with the comparative verb. The adjective in 28 is replaced with the verb and noun equivalents in 30a - 30c. The verb *chá* (*òchā*) ‘be fair’ is realised as the predicate of comparison in 30a and 30b while the noun *òchá* ‘fairness’ serves as the predicate of comparison in 30c. Examples:

30. a) Àdà chà-kàrì-rì òné yā
 A be fair-more than-PRS mother 3SG.POSS
 ‘Ada is fairer than her mother’

b) Àdà kà òné yā chá òchā
 A surpass mother 3SG.POSS be fair fairness
 ‘Ada is fairer than her mother’

- c) Àdá kà òné yā òchá
 A surpass mother 3SG.POSS fairness
 ‘Ada is fairer than her mother’

Table 3 shows the Igbo adjectives, as well as their verb and noun equivalents which serve as predicates of comparison.

Table 3: Igbo Adjectives and their equivalents

Adjectives	Verbs	Nouns
òchá ‘fair/white’	chá (òcha) ‘be fair/white’	òchá ‘fairness/whiteness’
òjíí ‘dark/black’	jí (oji) ‘be dark/black’	òjí ‘blackness’
ómá ‘good’	má (mma) ‘be beautiful/handsome’	ímā ‘beauty/goodness’
òjò/ájò ‘bad’	jò (njò) ‘be ugly’	ńjò ‘ugliness’

The realisation of *ká* as a suffix

In the previous section, we noted that Igbo is characterised by a type of complex predicate that comprises the verb + suffix. Emenanjo (1978) classifies many of such suffixes as extensional suffixes which serve to extend the meaning of the verb. A verbal origin is suggested for some of these suffixes (see Lord, 1975). Uchechukwu (2008) outlines some defining features of the verb + suffix formations to include more tonal variability and adherence to the rule of vowel harmony.

In this section, we discuss the semantic, morphological, and grammatical shift of the verb *ka* in specific contexts. It is evident from the examples below that *ka* has gained an additional meaning and grammatical function. Consider the following examples:

31. Àdá èbù-ká
 A be fat -INT
 ‘Ada is very fat’
32. Í nā-èkwú-ká
 2SG HAB-talk-INT
 ‘You talk too much’

Sentences 31 and 32 illustrate the realisation of *ká* as a suffix that expresses intensity and emphasis both with stative and active verbs. There is a shift from its lexical meaning and comparative function in 14-16 to a more grammatical meaning in 31-32. As an intensifier suffix, *ká* is quite productive. It combines with most Igbo verbs in verb + suffix

formations. We classify it as a suffix rather than a V_2 in in a V+V construction for three reasons: phonological change, shift in meaning and grammatical function, and its positional mobility in relation to the main verb. Some Igbo affixes are known to form a harmony pair in agreement with the vowel of the root word to which they are bound. For instance, the negative suffix is realised as *ghi/ghị*, the inchoative suffix as *wa/we*, the infinitive prefix as *i/ị*, the prepositional suffix *ta/te*. Although a harmony pair for the intensifier suffix does not yet exist in the standard Igbo, it is attested in some variants of Igbo such as the Awka dialect. In this dialect, the intensifier suffix forms the harmony pair *ka/ke* as shown in the following examples:

33. Àdá m̄ nwáànyị àmá-ká
 A 1SG.POSS daughter be beautiful-INT
 ‘My first daughter is very beautiful’
34. Nwá Chínyèlù èpé-ké
 child C be small-INT
 ‘Chinyelu’s child is very small’

On the basis of the tongue root feature, Igbo vowels are divided into two harmonious groups: +ATR (eiou) and -ATR (aiou). Most affixes function in agreement with the vowel harmony rule. If the vowel(s) of the root word has the +ATR feature for instance, it selects from the harmony pair, the affix that agrees with its feature. Sentences 33 and 34 illustrate the vowel harmony features of the intensifier suffix. In 33, the suffix *-ká* agrees with the +ATR feature of the vowel of the verb root *má* while in 34, the suffix *-ké* agrees with the -ATR feature of the vowel of the verb root *pé*^{viii}.

The argument that the form *ká* has evolved into a suffix is further strengthened by its occurrence with the lexical forms *ká* and *kári* from which it is derived. Consider the following examples:

35. Àdá àká-ká m̄ ógō
 A surpass-INT 1SG tallness
 ‘Ada is much taller than me’
36. Àdá àkárí-ká ānyī
 A be powerful-INT 1PL
 Ada is much more powerful than us

The positional mobility of the intensifier suffix can be observed in V+V constructs where *ka* is moved further away from the main verb. For instance, in 32, it is shown that *ka* serves as an intensifier suffix to the verb *kwú* ‘talk’. If the verb *kwú* combines with

another verb such as *jó* ‘be bad/ugly’ in the formation of a compound verb, the intensifier suffix is then moved to the position after the V_2 as illustrated in (37).

37. Àdá èkwú-jó-ká ānyī ná ízúkó áhù
 A talk-be bad-INT us in meeting that
 ‘Ada really offended us with her speech in that meeting’

The grammaticalisation of *ká* and *kárí*

In this section, we examine the status of *ka* and *kari* in the light of the grammaticalisation parameters proposed in Lehmann (2015). These parameters include weight, cohesion and variability and cut across the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis. They were briefly discussed in under the section on theoretical framework.

Paradigmatic aspects

At the paradigmatic level, weight refers to the integrity of a linguistic sign. The integrity of a sign decreases if there is a gradual semantic change or phonological reduction. The verb forms *ka* and *kari* have their full weight in examples 7-9 where they serve as full lexical verbs connoting comparison and excessiveness. A reduction in phonological integrity is observed with *kari* when it occurs as a V_2 constituent in a compound verb. This phonological change takes the form of tonal variation where the inherently high tone verb *kárí* assumes a low tone in V+V constructions. The examples given in 25 and 26 are reproduced below:

38. Àdá pè-kàrí-rì ím
 A be small-more than-PRS 1SG.OBJ
 ‘Ada is smaller than me’
39. Òbí gbà-kàrí-rì Èméká n’ égwú
 O dance-more than-PRS E in dance
 ‘Obi dances better than Emeka’

This tonal variation is however not peculiar to the verb form *kárí* but also applicable to any other verb with which it forms a comparative verb compound. In 38 and 39 for instance, the inherently high tone verb roots *pé* and *gbá* are assigned a low tone. For the verb form *ká*, a reduction in its phonological integrity is evident in instances where it is subject to the rule of vowel harmony in uniformity with many suffixes in Igbo (see 33-34).

A reduction in the semantic integrity of *ká* is particularly observed when it functions as a suffix as in sentences 33 and 34. There is a shift in its semantics from a grammatical comparative meaning in 14-16 to denoting intensity or emphasis on verbs expressing a state or an activity as in 33-34. In relation to paradigmaticity, the verb forms *kárí* and *ká* form a paradigm of comparative markers in Igbo. The latter becomes grammaticalised into an intensifier with an adverbial function in constructions where it serves as a suffix. As a suffix, *ka* shares some similarities with other morphemes classified as extensional suffixes in Igbo.

Paradigmatic variability refers to the freedom with which the language chooses a linguistic sign. A sign is considered to have a certain degree of obligatorification in a specific morphosyntactic context. The verb form *kárí* is obligatorily used to express comparison in the V₂ position of a compound verb while the grammaticalised *ka* suffix has a low level of paradigmatic variability in morphosyntactic contexts where it functions as an intensifier.

Syntagmatic aspects

Central to the syntagmatic aspects are the structural scope, bondedness, and syntagmatic variability. At the syntagmatic level, weight refers to the structural scope of the construction a sign helps to form. An increase in grammaticalisation implies a condensation or decrease in the structural scope of a linguistic sign. The structural scope of the verb forms *ká* and *kárí* decreases from the clausal level in 14-18 to the VP level in 31-39. They are realised as the second component in a complex predicate. In the case of *kárí*, its scope is narrowed down to the VP level as the V₂ in a compound verb. For the form *ká*, its scope narrows to the VP level as an intensifier suffix bound to the verb. The sentences below illustrate the structural scope of both forms at the clausal and VP levels. Examples:

40. a) Àdá tò-rò ógō kárí-á Chíómá
 A. grow-PRS tallness more than-SUFF C.
 ‘Ada is taller than Chioma’

b) Àdá tò-kàrí-rì Chíómá
 A grow-more than-PRS C
 ‘Ada is taller than Chioma’

41. a) Àdá kà Chíómá tó ógō
 A surpass C grow tallness
 ‘Ada is taller than Chioma’

- b) Àdá è-tó-ká
 A PREF-grow-INT
 ‘Ada is very tall’

Syntagmatic cohesion refers to the decreasing possibility of a linguistic sign to stand alone. It implies an increase in the morpho-phonological integration of a sign in relation to another form with which it shares a syntagmatic relation in form of cliticization, agglutination or fusion. The form *ká* is characterised by syntagmatic cohesion. As a lexical verb, *ká* may function independently, but as an intensifier, it is structurally bound to the main verb. An indication of its bondedness is evident in its phonological change with respect to the vowel harmony rule. In the Awka dialect of Igbo, the vowel of the intensifier suffix is realised as *ká/ké* in agreement with the vowel of the verb root to which it is bound.

Syntagmatic variability refers to the ease with which a sign can be shifted around in a given context. This feature decreases with an increase in grammaticalisation. As a bound form, the intensifier marker *ká* displays a low level of syntagmatic variability in comparison with its occurrence as a lexical verb. The verb form *ka* may occur in variable positions in different constructions whereas its morphosyntactic position as an intensifier is fixed. The stages of *ká* and *káráí* with respect to grammaticalisation are summarised in figure 1:

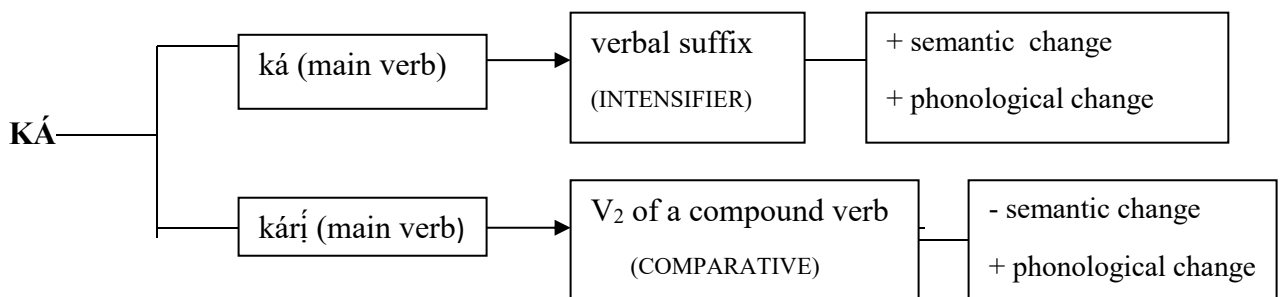


Fig 1 The grammaticalised suffix *ka*

Conclusion

From a typological viewpoint, Igbo comparative constructions align with the exceed III comparative type than exceed II described in (Stassen 1985). The verb and noun categories rather than prototypical adjectives, serve as the predicates of comparison. Following the different source schemas proposed in Heine (1997), we classify Igbo as

being characterised by the action schema: X is Y surpasses Z. In this schema, the comparee is portrayed as a kind of agent having a feature that surpasses that of the standard NP.

The paradigm of Igbo comparative markers comprises two verb forms: *ká* and *kárí*. Both comparative markers are at different stages of the grammaticalisation process with *ka* being the more grammaticalised form. Measuring their features using the grammaticalisation parameters suggests a gradual semantic shift, a morphosyntactic change (lexical verb → affix, comparative marker → intensifier) and phonological change in form of tone variation and in consonance with the vowel harmony rule. There is a semantic and phonological reduction in the paradigmatic weight of *ká*, as well as a decrease in its structural scope. The phonological change observed with *ká* is particularly captured in some lects of Igbo such as the Awka dialect. The comparative verb *kárí* appears to be less grammaticalised than *ká*. In a comparative compound verb, *kárí* occurs as the second verb (V₂). There is a possibility that *kárí* could evolve into a standard marker.

The form *ká* is analysed as being fully grammaticalised into a suffix in contexts where it functions as an intensifier for the following reasons: change in semantics and grammatical function, phonological change, shared features with other Igbo affixes, its morphosyntactic features, high level of productivity, and its ability to attach to the forms from which it is derived.

Abbreviations

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
COMPL	completive
COP	copula
HAB	habitual
INF	infinitive
INT	intensifier
NEG	Negation
OBJ	object
PREF	prefix
PRS	present
SG	singular
SUFF	suffix

Proper names are glossed using their initial alphabet. Eg: Ada → A

ⁱ In the brief review of Stassen 1985 as it applies to the Exceed comparative language types and particularly to Igbo, we intentionally leave out a large chunk of typological correlations made by Stassen since these correlations do not fall within the scope of this paper.

ⁱⁱ Heine (1997) adopts the term ‘surpass’ as a cover label for Stassen’s exceed comparatives. Heine claims that ‘surpass’ appears to be semantically closer to the ultimate source of comparative markers.

ⁱⁱⁱ The semantics of *rì* is quite vague. It is possible the *rì* may have evolved from the copula *rì* ‘be’ as used in some Igbo dialects spoken in Imo state or from the lexical verb *rì nne* ‘be much/many’ as obtained in some dialects of Igbo (Onitsha dialect). Examples:

1a) Chioma *rì* mma ‘Chioma is fine’

1b) Ego a *riri* nne ‘This money is much’

^{iv} In Igbo, an alternative way of reinforcing a comparative meaning (devoid of ambiguity) with active verbs in a SVC is with the use of the verb *ma* ‘know. Example: *Nnem ma esi nri karia ha* ‘My mother cooks better than them’

^v The form *-cha/-si* primarily serves as a completive suffix. The difference between both forms is mainly dialectal. The use of the *-cha* suffix as a completive marker is prevalent in the standard Igbo and other Igbo dialects such as the Mbaise dialect while the use of the *-si* suffix is common in the Onitsha dialect. Examples:

2) Ha e-ri-cha-la nri (Mbaise dialect)

3PL PREF-eat-COMPL-PERF food

‘They have finished eating food’

3) Fa e-ri-si-go nni (Onitsha dialect)

3PL PREF-eat-COMPL-PERF food

‘They have finished eating food’

^{vi} Emenanjo (2015) argues that the adjective class is in fact, a redundant lexical category in Igbo. He reiterates the view which we share; that property concepts are largely expressed by Igbo verbs.

^{vii} The position of comparison predicates in 28 and 29 can only be occupied by verbs or nouns not by pure adjectives. In the examples below, the predicates of comparison are the nouns *òchá* ‘fairness/whiteness’ and *òjí* ‘blackness’

4) Àdà kà òné yā óchá òchá
A surpass mother POSS fair fairness
‘Ada is fairer than her fair mother’

5) Ó kà Chíómá ójī òjí
3SG surpass C dark blackness
‘She is darker than dark Chioma’

^{viii} The formation of such harmony pair is not restricted to the intensifier suffix. Even in negative constructions, the Awka dialect forms a similar harmony pair for the negative suffix *-ra/-re*. Examples:

6) O vu-re ivu
3SG be fat-NEG fatness

7) O gba-ra egwu
3SG dance-NEG song

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