

A Semantic Analysis of Irreversible Binominals in Igbo

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Abstract

The study of coordination in Igbo has been specifically limited to the syntax of conjunctive coordination. This is because all coordinators in Igbo have been assigned to this, singular, closed syntactic class of conjunctions. This approach has neglected the investigation of the discrete semantic features of the members of this class of conjunctions. Hence, this study aims at exploring the semantics of a special type of conjunctive coordination in Igbo, traditionally termed **complementary binominals** (Emenanjo, 1978; 2012; 2015). The study, however, adopts the cross-linguistic term, **irreversible binominals**. It adopts the conceptual approach of Fenk-Oczlon (1989) and Malkiel (1959) for the description of the semantic types of Igbo irreversible binominals. The study also adopts Frame Semantics Theory which focuses its conventions on the link between language use and cognitive experience. The natural conversations of the speakers of the Nnewi, Nsukka and Onitsha varieties of Igbo provided some of the data for the study. Additional data originated from Emenanjo (2012: 230-234). Consequently, the investigation shows that there are nine semantic sub-classes. These include: the order of intimacy in personal relationships and social order like, **ikwú nà ibè**; spatial positions, comprising data like **n'úgwu nà ndịdà**; negative before positive concepts and processes, **áká èkpè nà áká nri**; completeness of an event or a purpose, **urú nà òghóm** and the understanding of concrete and abstract events, **chí nà ákàráká**. Other variables are: the understanding of archetypes and their replications, **m̀pú nà ághùghò**, subsidiary and main level of entities, **èzí nà ùlò**, Igbo folktales, **Èké nà ògwùrùgwù**, extra-linguistic prominence, **úgbògùrù nà ányú** and prosody, **égbé nà égbè**. The study concludes that the semantic classes of irreversible binominals in Igbo can be operationalised based on their conceptualisation by the native speaker.

Keywords: *coordination, Igbo conjunctions, complementary binominals, irreversible binominals*

Introduction

The term *coordination* is confusing in Igbo grammar. This is because it is most times used interchangeably with the term *conjunction*. Or, it is sometimes expressed as a sub-type of conjunction. This confusion in the use of terms may be due to a scarcity of the literature on coordination, both in Igbo and in other languages. However, Haspelmath's (2004, 2007) typological study of coordination in various languages has led to a more elegant and less confusing definition of the terms and the concepts involved in coordination. According to Haspelmath (2007: 1), 'coordination refers to syntactic constructions in which two or more units of the same type are combined into a larger unit and still have the same semantic relations with other surrounding elements.' This meaning reiterates Haspelmath (2004: 28) formal definition of coordinate constructions; where it is stated that all coordinated elements belong to the same syntactic category and together form a constituent of the same category. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985:945) also has the same concept about coordination. For them, coordination is a type of linkage whereby the resulting conjoint construction is equivalent, structurally speaking, to each of its members. These definitions can be illustrated with the Igbo example in (1) below.

1.

a. Nné nà nnà bù ùgwù nwàtá⁷

Mother CONJ father COP dignity child 'The mother and the father confer dignity on the child'

b. Ûmù àgbóghò gù-rù égwu nà ùmù òkóròbìà gbá-rá égwu

Young girls sing-IND song CONJ young men dance-IND song 'The young girls who sang and the young men who danced'

In (1a) *Nné* 'mother' and *Nnà* 'father' belong to the same grammatical category of noun. In the construction in (1a) *nné* or *nnà* independently, can function as the syntactic or semantic subject of the clause. When they are combined to form a larger unit, *nné nà nnà*, they still retain their grammatical function as subject in relation with the rest of the clause. The construction in (1b) consists of two clauses *Ûmù àgbóghò gù-rù égwu* and *ùmù òkóròbìà gbá-rá égwu*. These clauses are linked to form a larger construction of the same clausal category and with no change in the category of its constituent members.

The typical study of coordination in Igbo would describe example (1) and all other forms of coordination as instances of conjunction. This is illustrated in the literature with example (2a-d) which are derived from Emenanjo (1978: 88; 2015: 337), Ikekonwu, Ezikeojiaku, Ubani and Ugoji (1999:118) and Uwalaka (1996: 105; 1997: 65).

2a. Ò nò n'ùlò kà há bià-rà

3s COP in house CONJ 3PL come-IND 'S/he was at home as they came' (Emenanjo 1978: 88)

b. Mà Í chò mà Í chò-ghi

CONJ 2s want CONJ 2s want-NEG 'Whether you like it or you like it not' (Emenanjo 2015: 337)

c. Ó nyè-rè há màrà há jù-rù

3s give-IND 3PL CONJ 3PL refuse-IND 'S/he gave them but they refused.'

(Ikekonwu, Ezikeojiaku, Ubani and Ugoji (1999:118)

d. Otútù mádù nà-à-chò Krist màkàrà ó nyèjùrù há áfọ

Several person PROG-AGR-look Christ CONJ 3s fed 3s stomach

'Many people are looking for Christ because he fed them very well.' (Uwalaka 1997: 65)

e. Í nà-à-gù ákwùkwọ sí Í nà-à-zù áhja

2S PROG-AGR-read book CONJ 2S PROG-AGR-buy market

'You are studying but you claim to be trading' (Uwalaka 1996: 105).

In (2a and b) Emenanjo (1978; 2015) states that the morphemes *kà* and *mà* are sub-types of conjunctions termed subordinators. And the explanation of example (2c) as stated by Ikekonwu et al (1999), is that *màrà* is one of the conjunction words amongst others. Uwalaka (1997 and 1996) in examples (2d and f) also ascribe the term conjunction to the words *màkà nà* and *sí*.

In the literature on Igbo conjunctions, there is no attempt to give clear differentiating syntactic and semantic properties of each of the conjunction words. The words are all grouped

⁷The transcription follows Standard Igbo orthography: à (low tone); á (high tone); and ā downstep. Only the first of two or more consecutive high tones is marked. All tones are marked for lexical items that are variable in the dialects. Igbo has a phonological feature of vowel harmony, where the eight vowels in the language are neatly divided into two sets. One set comprises vowels produced with the Advanced Tongue Root (+ATR) while the other set comprises vowels with -ATR. In standard Igbo ATR vowels are represented with sub-dots, e.g [ɔ̣] while the +ATR vowels do not have the sub-dot. The abbreviations used here are; AGR-agreement, APPL-applicative, COLL-collective, COP-copula, COOD-coordinator, CONJ-conjunction, DET-determiner, FUT-future marker, NEG-negative marker, PROG-progressive, IND-indicative, 1S-first person singular, 2S-second person singular, 3S-third person singular, 3PL-third person plural.

as a single class that has the same syntactic and semantic function. However, Agbo (forthcoming) provides a typological description of coordination constructions in Igbo using the concepts and terms which Haspelmath (2007) has proposed for the cross-linguistic study of coordination.

Haspelmath (2007: 23) following Wälchli (2005) also makes a distinction between *natural conjunction* and *accidental conjunction*. The term *natural conjunction* refers to the conjuncts that “habitually go together and can be said to form some conventionalised whole or *conceptual unit*.” Haspelmath (2007: 23) gives the following as examples of natural conjunctions in English: ‘mother and father’, ‘husband and wife’, ‘boys and girls’, ‘bows and arrows’, ‘needle and thread’, ‘house and garden’. Malkiel (1959) and Lambrecht (1984) assign the term, *binominal* to natural conjunction because it ‘generally consists of only two conjuncts’. Accidental conjunctions on the other hand include those that do not usually go together and cannot form a conceptual unit. Such conjunctions as ‘Joseph and John’, ‘governors and students’, ‘police and priests’, among others, are clear examples.

In Igbo grammar, Emenanjo, (1978; 2012; 2015) adopts the term *complementary binominals* for natural conjunctions. For Emenanjo (2015: 617) they ‘are made up of two nouns or noun phrases linked by a conjunction, or two verbs or verb phrases without an overt conjunction.’ Emenanjo, (1978; 2012; 2015) attempt to list these conjunctions and their literal meanings in the Igbo language. Indeed, they are part of the general class of conjunctions in Igbo with no attempt to describe their formal or semantic features in relation to the accidental conjunctions of which Agbo (forthcoming) has proposed a typological classification. Nevertheless, Wälchli (2003) attests to the syntactic and semantic features of natural conjunctions cross-linguistically. Igbo natural conjunctions are syntactically linked by the *na* morpheme and Agbo (forthcoming) classifies conjunctions occurring syntactically with this morpheme as the *Nà conjunctive coordination*. In this type of coordination, the *nà* morpheme functions as the coordinator between a noun and another noun. The complementary binominals of Emenanjo (1978; 2012; 2015) fall into this syntactic class of conjunctions.

The objective of this paper is to go beyond the literal meanings of this class of conjunctions and explore their semantic and conceptual operations by the Igbo language user. The paper adopts the cross-linguistic term *irreversible binominals* to describe this class of conjunctions. Irreversible binominals are expressions which are rigidly fixed in normal speech (Cooper and Ross, 1975: 63). They occur in only one particular order and all studies on irreversible binominals agree that they consist of two main constituents and a coordinator and for Igbo, this consists of the *na* coordinator. The characteristic feature of irreversible binominals include the fact that they are fixed and conventionalised units of expression (Malkiel (1959); Cooper and Ross (1975); Fenk-Oczlon (1989); Lambrecht, (1984) and Norrick, (1988). The rigid order of occurrence of the binominals is related to their semantic relations. The two coordinated nouns usually denote concepts that are cognitively related to each other. This makes their composition probable and natural. Olsen (2002b) and Masini (2006) impute the feature of non-compositional semantics on these binominals. Therefore, the concept of the binominal is not a sum of its constituent parts but a lexicalised unit in the language.

Theoretical Approaches

In the first place, this study adopts the assumptions of the Frame Semantics Theory as expounded in Fillmore (1968; 1985a). This theory assumes that there is a link between language use and cognitive experience. In Frame semantics, a linguistic expression serves as a precursor for the

understanding of the event structure and the category of the event in which the linguistic expression is used. The research goal of the Frame Semantics Theory is to expose the rationale for the categorisation of linguistic expressions by a speech community. The categorisation of events depends on the culture and history of the speech community, within which the linguistic expression is used. This category is then determined by the hearer against the background of the culture and history of the speech community.

Frame Semantic Theory has two important concepts. The first is the concept of *prototype*. The prototype is the cultural background against which the linguistic expression is understood. The second concept is that of *perspective* and it depends on the sequence of events consequential on the use of the linguistic expression. The linguistic expression is the index of the sequence of events. This sequence of events is the *frame* and it is the cognitive structure used for understanding the particular situation in which the linguistic expression is used.

Frame Semantics is termed the 'Semantics of Understanding' (Fillmore 1985a: 222-235). The aim of this semantics is for the hearer of a linguistic expression to understand what context fits that expression. In other words, a frame is brought to mind when a linguistic expression that is conventionally associated with it is used (Fillmore 1985a: 232).

In addition, the study adopts descriptive and cross-linguistic approaches, where the categories that have been used to describe irreversible binominals in other languages are adopted and adapted. These cross-linguistic approaches are propounded in Benor and Levy (2006). They comprise the semantic variables for the classification of irreversible binominals. These include the semantic factors of *hierarchical relations*, *conceptual accessibility* and *iconic sequencing*. These variables interface with the context of language use and these include the context of *information status*, the *focus and emphasis* and *extra-linguistic factors*. These concepts will be fully explained in Sections 2.1-2. 29 of the paper and the concepts will be modified in analysing Igbo irreversible binominals.

Methodology

The recorded natural conversations of Igbo speakers in public places in Nsukka, Nnewi and Onitsha served as one source of data for the study. These conversations were recorded in field notes taken during personal cum research visits to these towns. The analysis of the field notes was aided by personal interviews conducted with twelve native speakers, (four from each of the dialect areas carefully chosen for the study) who were selected based on the aims of the research. These language consultants were asked to give the meaning and the context of use of each of the data recorded in the field notes. They were also asked to elicit utterances depicting these contexts. These utterances were again recorded in the field notes. Another major source of data was Emenanjo (2012:230-234) collection of the relevant utterances for this study. The consultants selected for this study were asked to describe the cultural context in which these utterances would be employed in speech. Their description gave more insight to the perspective and historical context in which the utterances are employed. The rest of the work of is laid out thus: Section 2.0 describes the semantic classification of the data for the study while Section 3.0 is the conclusive part of the study.

Semantic Variables in the Classification of Irreversible Binominals

In this section the data will be classified according to the semantic variables and contextual factors operationalising the use of irreversible binominals in Igbo. The description seeks to give insight to the native speakers' understanding of the categorisation of these binominals against

the background of the perspective of the hearer and the culture and history of the people. These variables include Igbo thoughts and understanding of the order of intimacy in personal relationships and social order; spatial positions; negative before positive concepts and processes; completeness of an event or a purpose and the understanding of concrete and abstract events. Other variables are: the understanding of archetypes and their replications; subsidiary and main level of entities; Igbo folktales and extra-linguistics prominence.

Understanding of the Order of Intimacy in Personal Relationships and Social order

This factor gives perspective to the hierarchy of values inherent in personal relationships and social hierarchy. In other words, it shows the order of intimacy with regards to personal relationships and the order of the social structure. The examples in (3a-c) from the data illustrate this point.

3.

a. Gwá *ikwú nà ibè* há biá
Tell kinsfolk and friends 3PL come 'Tell the folks to come'

b. Òfú chúkwa kè-rè *ògàrànyà nà ógbènyè*.
One God create-IND rich and poor 'It is one God that created all people'

c. Ézè ànyí kpò-kò-rò ndi *nzè nà ózò* àlà ànyí
King 3pl call-COLL-IND DET nobles land 3pl 'The king called together the nobles of our land'

A close look at the irreversible binominals in (3a) shows that they encode the order of intimacy in personal relationships among peoples. In (3a), the expression *ikwú nà ibè*, is uttered against a background of the prototypical understanding of the order of intimacy in human relationships, where *ikwú* 'kinsfolk' irreversibly precedes *ibè* 'friends'. Culturally, it is expected that a person would have closer personal ties with his or her blood relatives than with friends. However, both the kinsfolk and friends are all classified as folks in this utterance based on the perspective of the hearer and speaker. This perspective is engendered by the frame of reference. This frame includes the directive by the speaker to the hearer to call the people together. These people include both the blood relatives and the friends of the hearer. Therefore, the hearer is expected to carry out the directive in the sequence of first calling his blood relatives before calling his friends. Another irreversible binominal *ényi nà ógò* 'friends and in-laws' give the same understanding, where one is expected to be more intimate with his friends than with his in-laws.

In example (3b) the irreversible binominal *ògàrànyà nà ógbènyè* comes in focus in relation to the prototype of the social classes of people that make up a community. The traditional Igbo community comprises both the people of means at the top of the social ladder and the people in deprivation at the bottom of the social ladder. Therefore, the term *ògàrànyà nà ógbènyè* 'wealthy person' and *ógbènyè* 'impoverished person' is a cover term for the social classes in the traditional society, where those at the top of the class are mentioned first before those at the bottom. The perspective of the speaker and hearer of the sentence in (3b) includes all the social classes of people in the society and the frame is the instruction by the speaker to the hearer that all social classes of people are created by God. The sequence of events of the creation is engendered by the cultural understanding that wealthy people are more important than the impoverished ones and this is indicated in the order of the binominals in the utterance.

In example (3c) *nzè nà ózò* is a unitary term for the titled men of the traditional Igbo community. This term depicts the cultural context in which the utterance is expressed. *nzè* is a noble title that stands next in rank to *ézè* 'king'. It is usually conferred on men who *a priori* have

been instituted into the cult of the holders of the *ózò* title and have shown over time to be men of wisdom and insight. The *ózò* title is next in rank to *nzè*. Therefore, *nzè nà ózò* stands for the nobles or rulers of the traditional community. The perspective of the speaker and hearer in (3c) includes the people that make up the ruling class of the community. Among this ruling class is a sequence of hierarchical events where one becomes *ózò* before *nzè* and finally *ézè*. This sequence of events is the frame from which the speaker and hearer understand the sentence in (3c), whereby the king summons the nobles of the land.

Understanding of spatial positions

Spatial positions which also comprise three dimensional perspectives can be given by irreversible binominals. For example, in (4a) the expression *n'úgwu nà ndịdà* 'on the hill and the low-lying area' gives the dimensions of the maximum and the extremity. The cultural context here is the fact that all beings live either at the topmost part of the hills or the lowest extremities of the low lying areas of the land. Therefore, the expression is pronounced with the perspective of preaching the gospel to all parts of the land.

The understanding of (4b and c) also has this three dimensional perspective. In (4b), *Éluigwé nà àlà* 'heaven and earth' represents the prototypical firmament. This firmament which is in the sky has a three-dimensional perspective where the foothold is the earth. God almighty is believed to inhabit this firmament and rules the world in justice from there. For this reason, the speaker wants the hearer to have the perspective of seeking justice. The hearer, from a cultural perspective, knows that justice is dispensed from the firmament, by God. So the speaker creates a setting of understanding the seeking for justice. In (4c), *ísí nà ódù*, 'head and tail' similarly consist of a three-dimensional perspective. A man or an animal has a head and bottom or tail and is viewed spatially from that perspective. The head is culturally seen as the beginning of the man or animal while the tail is the bottom or end of the man or animal. So the speaker creates a setting of the three-dimensional view of a man or animal as the frame for the hearer to give a response to the question. That is to give the essence of the behaviour.

4a. Jèé gbá-sá óziomá n'úgwu nà ndịdà

Go spread-IND good news on hill and low-lying area 'Go preach the good news in all the country

b. Éluigwé nà àlà lè-kwá áká m, áká m dì-kwá óchá

Heaven and earth look-COOD hand 1S, hand 1S COP-COOD white 'Behold the firmament look at my hands, my hands are clean'

c. Kèdú ísí nà ódù àgwà Í nà-àkpá?

Q head and tail behaviour 1S PROG-behaving 'What is the essence of your behaviour?'

Understanding of negative before positive concepts and processes

Negative and positive concepts and processes in the Igbo culture are expressed in irreversible binominals, whereby the negative concept precedes the positive one. These binominals usually represent concepts and processes that are in a continuum. For example, in (5a) the expression *áká èkpè nà áká nrí* 'left hand and right hand' symbolize the cultural notion of the use of the right hand and the left hand. For the Igbo people, the right hand is used for doing all the right things like eating, giving out or taking things, shaking of hands, and holding of things amongst others. While the use of the left hand is severely restricted to only personal and private acts like wiping the rear end. The Igbo people frown at the use of the left hand in interpersonal relationships. It is viewed as a lack of manners and good breeding. Therefore, the cultural prototype that engenders the expression in (5a) includes the fact that a fully-fledged individual

should know which hand to use in interpersonal relationships. So the perspective of the speaker is that *Ada* as a juvenile may not have the requisite knowledge of which hand to use in any given situation. This perspective creates the frame, which is a scale of measurement of maturity in which *Ada* more or less is graded as belonging to the immaturity scale.

5.

a. *Àdá á-má-ghí áká èkpè ná áká nrí yá*
Ada AGR-know-NEG hand left and hand right 3S 'Ada is immature'

b. *Ọ nọ n'àgbàtà ónwú ná ndù*
S/he COP in between death and life 'S/he is in a precarious health condition'

c. *Há nwè-rè àkọ ná úchè*
3PL have-IND guile and wisdom 'They have common sense'

In (5b), *ónwú ná ndù* 'death and life' expresses the cultural concept of being. The Igbo people perceive being as a continuum containing two forms, that is, death and life. Death indeed bears a negative connotation for the Igbo people because it is never courted. Therefore, (5b) is uttered with the perspective that being is a range that consists of two forms. The frame of the utterance includes the fact of sickness in which the speaker brings to the fore the critical condition of the patient. The patient is said to be at that point of being, where he or she could remain in this present life or transit to the other life in the continuum of being.

In example (5c), *àkọ ná úchè* 'guile and wisdom' comprise the cultural concept of discretion or practical wisdom. Delicacy is required while applying wisdom in dealing with other people. This delicacy varies depending on the person or situation. Thus, (5c) is uttered in relation to the prototype of a continuum of refinement in interpersonal relationships. This is why *àkọ* 'guile' has a negative connotation and it lies in the part of the continuum that is unacceptable in the culture. *Úchè* on the other hand has a positive connotation. The speaker of the sentence in (5c) gives the perspective of how practical wisdom should be applied. Therefore, the frame of (5c) includes a setting where the need for delicacy in interpersonal relationships is applied.

Understanding of the completeness of an event or purpose

The category in this section includes irreversible binominals that represent a sense of the completeness of purpose when expressed in any situation. A careful study of the examples in (6a-c) includes utterances that show these facts.

6a. *Àdá ghọtà-rà úrù ná òghóm di n'áhía ákwà*
Ada understand-IND profit and loss COP in market cloth 'Ada understands (completely) the trade in clothes'

b. *Nwóké áhù bù ónye ókwú ná úkà*
Man DET COP person talk and discussion 'That man is a troublemaker' (in a complete sense)

c. *É jì m òfọ ná ógù*
AGR hold IS righteousness and innocence 'I am completely innocent'

The utterance in (6a) is expressed within the cultural understanding of trading. Anyone going into trading is expected to have completely understood the rudiments of the trade. This is the background against which (6c) is expressed. *úrù ná òghóm* 'profit and loss' is part and parcel of trading and anyone who learns the rudiments of the trade will make profits and avoid losses. This is the perspective in which the speaker wants the hearer to understand the expression. It is

this perspective that creates the frame which refers to the cultural conception of the rudiments of trading.

òkwú nà ùkà ‘talk and discussion’ in (6b) reveals the conception of a troublemaker in the culture. A troublemaker is usually seen as one who, on purpose, provokes verbal exchanges. Therefore, the perspective of the utterance is that which sees a troublemaker as someone whose complete make up includes inciting altercations between himself and others.

The expression *òfọ nà ógù* ‘righteousness and innocence’ in (6c) contain two related Igbo lexical items. *òfọ* is a ritual staff used to invoke divine vengeance on unconfessed offenders and *ógù* is a spike or wand (of wood or metal) symbolizing innocence and guiltlessness. Therefore, in the culture, anyone who holds *òfọ nà ógù* to make a confession is indeed saying the complete truth and proving his innocence. This cultural background creates the perspective in which the speaker and hearer understand the sentence in (6c).

Understanding of concrete and abstract events or objects

Irreversible binominals comprising concrete and abstract events or objects indicate a direct relationship between these events. While the concrete event or object is culturally seen to be physically manifested, the abstract object is an intellectual grasp of this physical manifestation. This relationship is expressed in the following example (7). In (7a) the binominal *chí nà ákàráká* ‘personal god and personal destiny’ contain two concepts. The first is the cultural concept of a personal god who is felt in the spirit and whose physical actions can be deciphered in the present. Then the second concept is that of personal destiny, where the actions of the personal god is manifested but in a manner that is only known through meditation and reflection. This cultural prototype informs the perspective of the speaker and hearer of (7a) and consequently the frame of reference for understanding the expression.

7a. *Ì nà-à-kpáí chí nà ákàráká yá?*
Q PROG-AGR-insult personal god and personal destiny 3S ‘Are you insulting his lot in life?’

b. *Ànyí nííle chò-rò àkù nà ùbá*
2PL all want-IND properties and wealth ‘We all want wealth’

c. *Óbì júpùtèrè yá n’íwé nà ònùmà*
Heart filled 3S with anger and resentment ‘S/he was filled with bitterness’

In (7b) the cultural understanding of *àkù nà ùbá* ‘properties and wealth’ indicates the relationship between the physical manifestation of an object and abstraction of the idea of that object. For the Igbos, *àkù* is manifested in landed properties while *ùbá* is the mental conception of the eventual increase in these landed properties. This background sets the perspective for understanding the expression in (7b) and the frame as already explained for other examples in this study. *íwé nà ònùmà* ‘anger and resentment’ in (7c) can be explained as (7a and b). Anger is usually manifested in concrete events like shouting, fighting, amongst others but resentment can only be imagined. This common human cultural fact is the prototype for the perspective and frame of understanding (7c).

Understanding of archetypes and their replications

The understanding of archetypes and their replications are denoted in the binominals in (8a-c). They usually comprise one nominal encoding the precursor to the second binominal in the coordination. For example in (8a) where *mpú nà ághùghò* ‘evil conduct and deceit’, the first binominal *mpú* represents the essence of evil while the second binominal *ághùghò* is a replica of this essence. Therefore, the prototype for understanding (8a) is the cultural concept of essential evil which has different ramifications. It is the sequence of these ramifications that create the perspective for (8a) and also the frame for understanding the particular situation wherein the expression occurs.

8a. Órú góméntí bù sò *mpú nà ághùghò*
Work government COP only evil essence and deceit ‘The civil service is replete with corruption’

b. Há àbúó bù *ágwọ nà ákpì*
3PL two COP snake and scorpion ‘The two of them are sworn enemies’

c. Há nà-à-kwányé-ré yà *ùgwù nà nsópùrú*
3PL PROG-AGR-render-IND 3S prestige and respect ‘They show him great regards’
For (7b), *ágwọ nà ákpì* ‘snake and scorpion’ illustrate two venomous creatures. *ágwọ* is seen as the epitome of venomous creatures while *ákpì* is seen as comparable in venomousness to the snake. The display of sworn enmity is the epitome of animosity between two people. This cultural idea stands as the prototype for the perspective giving rise to the frame in (7b). For (7c) *ùgwù nà nsópùrú* ‘prestige and respect’ indicate a situation where prestige is viewed as the precursor of respect. In the culture, a man of personal and social prestige is highly regarded. This prototype shows the sequence of events where a prestigious individual attracts respect. This perspective creates the frame of understanding the situation.

Understanding of the subsidiary and the main level of entities

The data in (9a-c) consists of binominals that occur in the order of the level of structural importance. This is represented in the binominal *èzí nà úlò* ‘compound and house’ in example (9a). The first nominal *èzí* is a subordinate structure to *úlò*. In the Igbo culture, the concept of a family compound consists of a demarcated plot and a building where the members of the family live. It is considered that the plot of land is a subordinate structure while the superordinate structure is the family that lives on the land. These two structures make up a family compound. This is the prototype for understanding the perspective of the expression in (9a) and also for understanding the situation that gives rise to the frame of reference.

9.
a. Àdá bù ónye *èzí nà úlò* Òkéké
Ada COP person compound and house Okeke ‘Ada is of the family of Okeke’

b. Ó jè-rè áhíá zú-kóróchá *ntà nà imòrókó*
S/he go-IND market buy-COLL small and big ‘S/he went to the market and bought a lot of things’

c. Òkóró bù *díké nà dímkpà* n’ágha
Okoro COP man and warrior in war ‘Okoro is courageous in wars’

In (9b) *ntà nà imòrókó* ‘small and big’ represents the relationship between subsidiary and main objects in terms of order. It can be explained using the theoretical approach of this study. The same goes for (9c) where *díké* ‘man’ is subsidiary to *dímkpà* ‘warrior’. Being a man is the basic

level to becoming man of courage or a warrior. This is the cultural belief and it influences the perspective in which (9c) is understood and the frame created.

Understanding of Igbo Folklore

There are a number of irreversible binominals associated with Igbo traditional stories. These binominals excite the imagination of the hearers of these folklores. They are figurative expressions of Igbo iconology, which serve to educate and entertain with traditional wisdom. A consideration of (10a-c) reveals these facts. In (10a), for instance, the binominal *Éké nà ògwùrùgwù* 'python and mythical python' serve as an icon of beauty. In the folklore, the python is deemed to be a beautiful creature and the shape and colours of the rainbow are associated with the beauty of the python. This iconic idea is the cultural background to the prototype of (10a), which influences the speakers' and hearers' perspective of a story in a particular context. This context serves as the frame.

10a. *Éké nà ògwùrùgwù* à-chísá àgwà mmá yá
Python and mythical python AGR-spread behaviour good 3S 'The rainbow has spread its beauty'.

b. *Ákúkò nzá nà òbù* nà-à-tó útó
Stories nza and obu PROG-AGR-sweet sweetness 'The folktales of nza and obu are interesting'

c. *Há nà-à-kò* ákúkò *ídúu nà óbá*
3PL PROG-AGR-tell story Edo and Oba 'They are telling incredulous stories'

For (10b), *nzá nà òbù* consists of two birds that are constant features in Igbo folktales. *Nzá* is a legendary diminutive bird that got himself overfed and drunk and thereafter challenged his personal god to a physical fight. *Òbù* on the other hand, is another bird but a huge one, which in the folklore had never challenged his personal god, in spite of its large size. Therefore, in the culture the binominals serve as ironic symbols in folklores. This is the prototype for (10b) and also the perspective and the frame of reference is built on this perspective. In (10c), *ídúu nà óbá* creates the imagination of the mythical Edo people and their powerful king. In Igbo folklore, the exploits and adventures of the Edo people and their kings always appeared superhuman and supernatural to the hearers of the tales who used to wonder in disbelief. Therefore, this binominal is the cultural icon of skepticism, especially in things that cannot be verified physically.

Understanding Extra-Linguistic Prominence

There are binominals that express the order of prominence between two elements that belong to the same class or category in the cultural understanding of the cosmos. The order of occurrence of these binominals entails the listing of the more regarded element before the less regarded one. In (11a) for instance, the binominal *úgbògùrù nà ányú* 'pumpkin and melon' belong to the same species of plants but *úgbògùrù* is more regarded for food and medicinal values than *ányú*. Therefore, the cultural background for the expression explains the perspective of understanding the utterance. The frame is the context of the situation where the speaker wants the hearer to know that the medicine man is incompetent.

11.

a. *Díbià* áhù á-má-ghí íhé dí íchè nà *úgbògùrù nà ányú*
Medicine man DET AGR-know-NEG thing COP different from pumpkin and melon 'That medicine man is ineffectual'

- b. *Éwú nà òkúkò* nò bé yá pù-rù à-pù
Goat and chicken COP house 3S go out-IND AGR-go out 'Everything living in his house has gone out'

- c. *Mú nà gí gà-é-bí n'ùlò m*
1S and 2S FUT-AGR-live in house 1S 'You and I will live in my house'

The binominal *Éwú nà òkúkò* 'goat and chicken' fall into the traditional category of domestic animals which every household keeps. However, possession of a goat is of more importance than that of a chicken. This explains the order of their occurrence in the expression. However, *Éwú nà òkúkò* is figurative of everything in a household and this is the cultural prototype that one can use to understand (11a). This understanding gives the perspective and frame of the utterance. In (11c) the binominal *Mú nà gí* 'me and you' shows the order of importance between two interlocutors. The speaker usually regards himself and his views, albeit unconsciously, as more important than the hearer's. This is the background for understanding (11c) following the concepts of prototype and perspective as ingrained in Frame Semantics.

Understanding Prosody

There are irreversible binominals that are understood from their prosody. This has to do with the features of irony, focus and emphasis that may not be derived from the lexical items. They are usually derived from the contrast in the tonal features of the binominals. For example, in (12a), *égbé nà égbé* 'kite and gun' are differentiated by the contrast in the tonal features of the two lexical items. This contrast indicates the irony in the utterance and ultimately the meaning of the statement. While *égbé* 'kite' is a predatory bird and can be dangerous to its preys, *égbé* 'gun' is obviously more dangerous than a kite. Therefore, this statement reflects the sarcastic and ironic intentions of the speaker which may not be gleaned from the utterance alone. This irony and sarcasm give the prototype and perspective.

12.

- a. *Ífě dī íchě nà égbé nà égbé*
Thing COP different in kite and gun 'There is a difference between a kite and a gun'

- b. *Ó rù-chàrà ùlò yá ó bù-rù kpóó nà òyóyò*
3S build-COMPL house 3S 3S COP-IND kpoo and oyoyo 'When he finished building his house it was a thing of marvel'

- c. *Ó bù-u-rù ñgwóngwó nà ñgwòngwò bàtà bé yá*
3S carry-APPL-IND- property and ngwongwo enter house 3S 'S/he carried all sorts into his/her house'

For the utterance in (12b), *kpóó nà òyóyò* are ideophones which serve to give meaning only in context. Their rhythmic occurrence denotes the intention of the speaker which is to figuratively express the marvelousness of the house in question. These ideophones give the prototype and perspective for understanding the utterance. *ñgwóngwó nà ñgwòngwò* 'property and ngwongwo' in example (12c) are prosodic elements created by the tonal contrast. Note the high tones on the first item and the low tones on the second. The rhythm thus created encodes a meaning that cannot be derived from the grammar but from a cultural understanding of the prosody itself. As this study has shown, this is the prototype and consequently the perspective for understanding the intention of the speaker.

Conclusion

This semantic typology of irreversible binominals in Igbo has adopted and adapted the categories for the cross-linguistic study of these types of binominals. For Igbo in this study, nine categories

of irreversible binominals were explored. These include: the order of intimacy in personal relationships and social order; spatial positions; negative before positive concepts and processes; completeness of an event or a purpose and the understanding of concrete and abstract events. Other variables are: the understanding of archetypes and their replications; subsidiary and main level of entities; Igbo folktales and extra-linguistics prominence. The findings of the study include the fact that a linguistic expression containing an irreversible binominal evokes an understanding that is conventionally associated with it in a particular situation. It is these situations that operationalise these semantic classes by the native speaker. The data for the study is not exhaustive but they may be prototypes for the further study of the semantics of irreversible binominals. This will, hopefully, give rise to more perspectives on irreversible binominals in Igbo.

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