

REFLEXIVE AND RECIPROCAL VERBS IN IGBO

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Abstract

In grammar, a reflexive verb is one whose semantic agent and patient are the same. Also, a reciprocal verb is one whose action expresses states in which two participants bear mirror image thematic relations to one another. This paper adopts the government and binding approach to reflexives and reciprocals in carrying out series of tests with four classes of Igbo verbs to find out whether they can be reflexive or not, in terms of their nature, form and manifestation. The first discovery, from the analysis is that =riṭa is not the only verbal affix to encode reciprocity in Igbo; the suffix =gwara attached also expresses reciprocity. Furthermore, it can be confirmed that out of the four verb classes tested, three (dynamic, copula and psychological verb) classes are reflexive while three (dynamic, copula and psychological) also reflect reciprocity. The stative verbs failed the two tests because they produce awkward constructions which are semantically unacceptable for expressing reflexive and reciprocal notions; hence, all forms of Igbo stative verbs (present, past, imperative) cannot express reflexive or reciprocal notions. Such, however, is not the case with the dynamic, copula and psychological verbs. The paper therefore, recommends that further tests be carried out with other Igbo verb classes to find out the extent to which they can be used to encode reflexive or reciprocal notions.

1. Introduction

There have been various efforts over the years from different scholars to classify Igbo verbs. These include Emenanjo (1975a), (1975b), (1978), (1987) and (2005); Nwachukwu (1983), (1984); Uwalaka (1982); Ubahakwe (1976); Uchechukwu (2004a), (2004b), (2011a), among others. These authors have written on different aspects of the Igbo verb from the perspectives of different frameworks and approaches. Nwachukwu (1984) for instance provided various classifications of the Igbo verb viz: dynamic, stative, and copula verbs. Uwalaka (1982) and Okeke (2011) explore the psychological verbs. Onumajuru (2005) and Ogbonna and Iloene (2006) investigate the verbs of planting, while Agbo (2010) examines Igbo verbs with body part complements, among others. The present study belongs therefore to this group, but with a particular focus on the reflexive and/or reciprocal nature of specific classes of Igbo verbs. The

tone making convention employed here is the general format where all syllables are marked.

The rest of the paper is divided as follows. Section 2 takes up the issue of reflexivisation while Section 3 is on reciprocals in the language. In section 4, the paper takes an overview of reflexive and reciprocal verbs in other languages and tests four classes of Igbo verbs (dynamic, stative, copular and psychological) to establish their reflexive or reciprocal nature. Section 5 summarises and concludes the paper.

2. Reflexives

A reflexive, according to Everaet (1986) is usually a pronoun that comes before a noun, pronoun, adverb or adjective to which it refers (normally its antecedent) within the same clause. In the government and binding theory of generative grammar, a reflexive pronoun is an anaphor that must be bound by its antecedent (Radford, 1981). An anaphor, on the other hand, is a type of expression whose reference depends on another referential element (Halliday, 1994) and it is presented using a proform, i.e, a pronoun referring to its antecedent.

(1) Obi liked a car company of *himself*.

In the above example, *Himself* is an anaphoric expression that is coreferential with the the subject (i.e Obi). In some languages, according to Napoli (1996), there is a difference between reflexives and non-reflexive pronouns; but the condition that determines whether or not an entity be bound is not yet properly defined and it depends on the nature of the language in question. On the other hand, reflexivisation “is a process of converting a noun, pronoun, noun phrase or nominal element into a reflexive pronoun.” (Ndimele, 1999, p. 144). In English, reflexive pronouns bear the suffix *-self* as in the following expressions: myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, oneself, ourselves, etc.

According to Faltz (1985), reflexive pronouns are primarily used in three situations:

i. when the subject and object are the same:

(2) He shaved himself with a razor.

ii. As the object of a preposition when the subject and the object are the same:

(3) That woman is dancing for herself;

iii. And to emphasize the subject through an intensive pronoun. Example:

(4) They drank all the wine themselves

2.1 Reflexives in the Igbo Language

In the Igbo language, the reflexive pronoun is *onwe* meaning 'self', with the appropriate pronominal antecedent it agrees with in number and person. Example:

- (5) a. Ebi tiri onwe ya ihe
 Ebi beat-past self 3sg something
 'Ebi beat himself'
- b. Ebi na Mma tiri onwe ha ihe
 Ebi and Mma beat-past self 3pl something
 'Ebi and Mma beat themselves.'

In example (5a), Ebi is coreferential with 'onwe ya'. There is agreement in number and person. (i.e. *Ebi*, a third person singular NP takes a third person singular anaphor *ya*). In (b) also, the 3rd person plural NP, *Ebi* and *Mma* take the 3rd person plural reflexive anaphor *ha*, (see Okeke 2008 for details). Uchechukwu (2011b) has however noted the reflexive-reciprocal polysemy problem that arises in plural constructions like example (5b) where the sentence could also be given a reciprocal interpretation.

3. Reciprocals

The study of reciprocals has attracted linguists attention for many decades now. Scholars studying different world languages and the manifestation of reciprocals in constructions such as Napoli (1996); Asher (2004); Radford (1986), Dalorymph et al (1994a); schwerzschild (1996), e.t.c believe that reciprocal constructions show situations where participants relate to each other or one another in the same way. But the proper syntactic relationship between the reciprocal and its antecedent must be well established before this relationship takes place. This postulation is in line with Filip and Carlos's (2001, p. 1) assertion that "It has been firmly established that the interpretation of reciprocal sentences is sensitive to a rich variety of

factors, both linguistic and extralinguistic, and cannot easily be accorded any single truth-condition meaning which persist in all contexts.” Hence, a context independent semantics for reciprocals cannot be given (see Roberts 1987; Schwarzschild 1996 for details). Based on this syntactic relationship and context a reciprocal is a linguistic structure (anaphor) that marks a specific kind of relationship between two phrases. In other words, they are “anaphors requiring an antecedent within the same sentence” (Okeke 2008, p. 190). Reciprocal constructions deal with participants, each of which plays both the agent and patient roles in relation to each other (Asher, 2004). Example:

(6) Obi and Chinwe designed each other’s dress.

Sentence (6) above has the following reciprocal meaning: *Obi designed Chinwe’s dress; and Chinwe designed Obi’s dress.*

In his investigation of reciprocals, Parry (1998) notes that many Bantu and Turkish languages have special reciprocal morphemes attached to verbs, and that Latin uses *inter* and the reflexive pronoun of the subject of the verb: *inter se* (between themselves) especially when the verb is third person. English does not have such a morpheme, rather it uses *each other*, *one another* or some other phrases to indicate reciprocity. According to Reinhart and Siloni (2005), most Indo-European languages do not have special markers for reciprocity in verbs, and reciprocal constructions are expressed through reflexivity or other mechanisms. For example, Russian marks reciprocity in intransitive verbs with a suffix which also has reflexive and passive interpretations (Haspelmath, 2001). Hicks (2008) identified two types of reciprocal markers: (a) Nominal reciprocals and (b) Verbal reciprocals. In nominal reciprocals, the markers exhibit properties characteristic of nouns or pronouns while in verbal reciprocals, the marker is part of the morphology associated with verbs. In the light of this, the English reciprocal markers, ‘each other’ and ‘one another’ could be described as ‘nominal reciprocals’ because, according to Radford (1981), they function as noun phrases without independent references because the referents are determined elsewhere.

3.1 Reciprocals in the Igbo Language

As already noted in example (5b) above, and which is repeated below as (7), the reflexive morpheme raises a reflexive-reciprocal polysemy issue when a plural subjects are involved:

- (7) Ebi na Mma tiri onwe ha ihe
 Ebi and Mma beat-past self 3pl something
 'Ebi and Mma beat themselves/each other.'

The above is in line with Lichtenbert's (1985) explanation that one form can be used to mark both reciprocal and reflexive constructions in some languages. Hence, the Igbo language can be counted as one of the languages that have nominal reciprocals.

However, a look at the verb in specific reciprocal constructions indicates another form of reciprocal construction in Igbo. This involves the use of the verbal suffix =*rita* to mark reciprocity. Example:

- (8) Nyeritanu onwe unu ekele nke udo
 give one another self 2pl greeting poss peace
 'give one another a salutation of peace' (Adapted from Mbah, 2006).

From the above example, Igbo could also be counted as one of the languages that have verbal reciprocals. Consequently, Igbo could be described as having both nominal reciprocals and verbal reciprocals.

Another important point is that Igbo also uses the same nominal morpheme to mark reciprocity and reflexivisation. Consider examples (10) and (11) below.

- (9) Emeka na Uju huru onwe ha n'anya
 Emeka and Uju see -past self 3pl in eye
 Emeka and Uju love each other/themselves
- (10) Emeka na Uju mara onwe ha ura
 Emeka and Uju know-past self 3pl slap
 'Emeka and Uju slapped each other/ themselves

According to Mbah (2006), to disambiguate the above sentences as reciprocal constructions, the English equivalents must be 'each other' or 'one another'; otherwise the equivalent

‘themselves’ would render them reflexives. Mnah also adds that once the subject is not plural, the similarity of structures crashes:

- (11) Emeka kuru onwe ya igwe
 Emeka hit –past self 3sg iron
 ‘Emeka hit himself with iron’

Another point that further strengthens the view that Igbo has verbal reciprocals is the additional suffix =*gwara* which also indicates reciprocal constructions in the language. The sentences below are highly illustrative of this.

- (12) Emeka kuru mu, m kuru *gwara* ya
 Emeka heat-past me, me beat *retaliate* him
 ‘Emeka hit me and I hit him back’
- (13) Emeka mara Uju ura, o ma *gwara* ya
 Emeka know-past Uju slap she know-*retaliate* him
 ‘Emeka slapped Uju and she slapped him back’
- (14) Uju tiri ya, o ti *gwara*.
 Uju beat-past him/her, him/she beat-*retaliate*
 ‘Uju beat him/her and he/she beat back’
- (15) Uju kpuru mu asi, m kpuru *gwara* ya
 Uju call-past me hatred, me call *retaliate* him/her
 ‘Uju hated me and I hate her also’

Examples (12) to (15) are reciprocal constructions in which two participants bear mirror image thematic relations to each other; the first participant relates to the second just as the second relates to the first. However, these constructions are actually semantically ‘retaliatory’ and do not portray friendly reciprocation. They portray more of actions reciprocated as a result of strife and jealousy. Consider examples (16) to (18) below:

- (16) Emeka nyere mu ego, m nyere *gwara* ya
 Emeka give-past me money, me give-back him/her
 ‘Emeka gave me money and I gave him/her back.’

- (17) Uju hụrụ mụ n'anya, m hụgwara ya
 Uju see-past me in-eye, me see-back/in return him/her
 'Uju love me and I love her back'
- (18) Uju kere mụ isi, m kegwara ya
 Uju tie -past me head, me tie-back/return him/her
 Uju plaited my hair and I plaited her own.

Examples (16) to (18) are grammatically acceptable in Igbo but not communicatively acceptable. These examples are just to buttress the point that the suffix =gwara is used to indicate a reciprocal construction in Igbo, but without a positive notion.

Based on the above examination of reflexivisation and reciprocity in Igbo, the next section explores the reflexive and reciprocal verbs in the language.

4. Reflexive and Reciprocal Verbs in Igbo

Before going into Igbo reflexive and reciprocal verbs, it is pertinent to have an overview of how such verbs manifest in other languages.

According to Reinhart and Sioni (2005), a verb is said to be reflexive when the subject and the object are the same. That is, verbs denoting an action that the agent argument applies to itself or a state of mind that the experiencer or argument has with regard to itself. For example, compare examples (19) and (20) with (21) and (22):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(19) M kpurụ onwe m afonụ.
 I shaved REFL PRO beard
 'I shaved my beard.'</p> | <p>(20) Uche kpurụ onwe ya afonụ.
 Uche shaved REFL PRO beard
 'Uche shaved his father's beard.'</p> |
|--|--|

Because the subjects and objects of the above sentences are the same, the verbs are used reflexively. This usage contrasts with a transitive usage of the same verbs in (21) and (22) below:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>(21) Uche kpurụ Emeka afonụ.
 Uche shaved Emeka beard
 'Uche shaved Emeka's beard.'</p> | <p>(22) Emeka kpurụ Uche afonụ.
 Uche shaved Uche beard
 'Emeka shaved Uche's beard.'</p> |
|--|---|

It should be noted that, in addition to the above explicit reflexive use of a verb like *-kpụ* in (19) to (20) above, and its use as a transitive verb in (21) and (22), the same verb belongs to the verbs that can be described as inherently reflexive. By this is meant that in the event expressed through such verbs the subject acts on himself as in a reflexive construction but without the explicit reflexive indicator/marker *onwe*. Such verbs usually involve events that a human being executes on himself. Below is an example involving the same verb *-kpụ* 'shave'

- (23) M na-akpụ afọny.
 I AUX-shave beard
 'Literal: I am shaving beard.'
 'I am having a shave.'

Reciprocal verbs, on the other hand, denote events involving more than one participant who execute exactly the same action on each other. In other words, reciprocal verbs mark events involving participants who occupy both the role of agent and patient with respect to each other (Haspelmath 2011). An example of a reciprocal verb in Igbo is *izù* 'to meet (of more than one person)':

- (24) Uche and Amaka zuru n' ụlọyika.
 Uche CONJ Amaka meet-rV(Past) PREP church.
 'Uche and Amaka met in the Church.'

The next section involves an effort to establish to what extent Igbo dynamic, static, copular and psychological verbs can be reflexive or reciprocal in nature. For each class of verb, some verb roots are picked, providing some sentences from the Igbo language to confirm or disprove the presence or otherwise of reflexive or reciprocal verb in that class of Igbo verb.

a. Dynamic Verbs

Dynamic verbs are those verbs that show progressive action through the subject, they are the opposite of stative verbs. According to Kollin (1994), dynamic verbs occur over time and as such have a duration, with or without an explicit endpoint. The events expressed through dynamic verbs involve perceptual, mental, physical events as well as verbs of locomotion like ‘to walk’. In Igbo, dynamic verbs form their past tense form using the *-rv*(Past) suffix.

Miller (2002) posits that there are three major types of dynamic verbs

1. Accomplishment verbs expressing actions that have a logical endpoint
2. Achievement verbs expressing actions that occur instantaneously and
3. Action verbs that can go on for an indefinite period of time

b. Stative Verbs

These are verbs that describe states rather than actions. One basic characteristic of stative verbs is that they do not show progressive tense. Progressive forms of verbs indicate that something is happening or was happening or will be happening (Halliday, 1994).

According to Nwachukwu (1984), Igbo stative verbs express states, conditions or situations and they fall into two subsets, those that express a non-past time meaning in their simple CV stem and those that express the same non-past time meaning in the CV + rV form. He termed them subset A and B respectively and illustrates them with the following examples:

(25) Subset A	Non – past CV	Imperative CV + rV	Past CV + rV or CV + V + rV
as in	<i>nọ</i> <i>dị</i> <i>bụ</i>	<i>nọrọ</i> <i>dịrị</i> <i>bụrụ</i>	<i>nọrọ or nọrọrọ</i> <i>dịrị or dīrị</i> <i>bụrụ or bụrurụ</i>
(26) Subset B	CV + rV	CV + e	CV + V + rV
as in	<i>toro</i> <i>chọrọ</i> <i>chara</i>	<i>toro</i> <i>chọọ</i> <i>chara</i>	<i>tooro</i> <i>chọrọrọ</i> <i>chaara</i>

c. Copula Verbs

Copula verbs are linking verbs that link the subject to their predicate (a subject complement).

Example:

- (27) Nwoke ahụ nọ n’ime ụlọ.
 Man DET be PREP inside house
 ‘That man is at inside the house.’

The noun phrase **Nwoke ahụ** is the subject, the verb **nọ** serves as the copula and the prepositional phrase **n’ime ụlọ** is the predicative complement. In Igbo, copula verbs are only three according to Nwachukwu (1984) viz - **nọ**, **bụ/wụ** and **dị**. (However, for a detailed, corpus-based analysis and categorization of these verbs in their copulative and non-copulative functions, see Uchechukwu (2011b)).

d. Psychological Verbs

Igbo psychological verbs can be classified as experiential verbs (Uwalaka 1988). According to Agbo (2009, p. 213) “these are verbs which refer to an entity’s perception, cognition, sensation and reaction”. By implication, experiential verbs show the experience of feeling of entities involved in the subject Noun Phrases (NPs) in the sentence. Below are some Igbo psychological verbs:

- (28) a. *imụ amụ* ‘to laugh’
 b. *ihụ n’anya* ‘to love’
 c. *iwe iwe* ‘to be angry’
 d. *iche echiche* ‘to think’
 e. *ikpọ asị* ‘to hate’
 f. *ichị ọchị* ‘to laugh’
 g. *iche uche* ‘to worry’
 h. *ibe akwa* ‘to cry’
 i. *ime ebere* ‘to have pity on’ (Adapted from Okeke 2011)

According to Okeke (2011), Igbo psychological verbs have certain morphological, syntactic and semantic features such as:

- a. They have the usual CV phonotactic pattern for simple verbs and a CV structure that goes beyond the simple CV for complex verb.
- b. They have the typical structure of [verb root + NP/PP]

4.1 Data Presentation Based on the Above Classes of Igbo Verbs

Igbo Dynamic Verbs in Reflexive Constructions

Some of the Igbo dynamic verbs are *-kụ, -gbu, pịa, -te, -hụ* as in:

- (29)
- a. Uche kụrụ onwe ya igwe
 - b. Emeka gburu onwe ya mma.
 - c. Uche pịara onwe ya ụtari.
 - d. Emeka tere onwe ya ude.
 - e. Uche hụrụ onwe ya n'ugegbe.

Igbo Stative Verbs in Reflexive Constructions

Some of the Igbo stative verbs are *-to, -ma, -da, -bu, -cha* as in:

- (29)
- a. Uche toro onwe ya ogologo.
 - b. Emeka mara onwe ya mma.
 - c. Uche dara onwe ya akakpọ.
 - d. Emeka buru onwe ya ibu.
 - e. Oroma chara onwe ya acha.

Igbo Copular Verbs in Reflexive Constructions

The three Igbo stative verbs are *-nọ, -bụ, -dị* as in:

- (30)
- a. Uche nọ onwe ya ajọ anọdụ.
 - b. Emeka bụ isi ọwụwa nye onwe ya.
 - c. Uche dị njọ nye onwe ya.

Igbo Psychological Verbs in Reflexive Constructions

Some of the Igbo psychological verbs are *hụ, me, be, chị, kpọ* as in:

- (31)
- a. Uche hụrụ onwe ya n'anya.
 - b. Emeka mere onwe ya iwe.
 - c. Uche bere onwe ya akwa.
 - d. Emeka chịrị onwe ya ọchị.
 - e. Uche kpọrọ onwe ya asị.

Discussion on the Above Presented Data

Based on our test on the above presented data, Igbo dynamic verbs can be reflexive because the verbs show actions that are carried out by an entity that is both the subject and object. The sentences are also marked for number and person. Therefore, singular subjects take singular reflexive pronouns and vice versa. But as Mbah (2006) rightly points out, when the subject is plural, reflexive construction can also show reciprocity. Observe example (41)

- (32) Uche na Emeka kuru onwe ha igwe.
 Uche CONJ Emeka hit-rV(Past) self they iron

This sentence is ambiguous. If the interpretation is *Uche kuru onwe ya igwe and Emeka kuru onwe ya igwe*, it equals reflexivization, but if the interpretation is with ‘each other/themselves’, it registers reciprocal meaning. But once the subject is singular as in (29), it shows reflexivisation.

For the sentences with stative verbs, these are in reflexive structures but are semantically not reflexive. The average native speaker’s interpretations of the constructions are that Uche and Emeka are simply/ordinarily tall, handsome, dwarf, and fat ‘on their own’ respectively. They do not at all show that Uche or Emeka is tall, handsome, a dwarf or fat ‘for himself’, hence, the unacceptability of the expressions. In other words, Igbo stative verbs cannot be reflexive.

The next group is the copula verbs; the Igbo copulas are reflexive in nature. The reflexive constructions formed in (30a-c) are quite acceptable and grammatical in the Igbo language. The same applies also to examples (31a-e) which illustrate that Igbo psychological verbs can be reflexive in nature.

The next step is to test the reciprocity of the above named verb classes using the suffixes **=rita** and **=gwara**.

Stative Verbs in Reciprocal Constructions

- (33) a. Uche na Emeka toritara onwe ha ogologo.
b. Uche na Emeka maritara onwe ha mma.
c. Uche na Emeka daritara onwe ha akakpo.
d. Uche na Emeka buritara onwe ha ibu.
e. Oruma na udara ndi a charitara onwe ha acha.
- (34) a. Uche toro ogologo, Emeka togwara [ya].
b. Uche mara mma, Emeka magwara [ya]
c. Uche dara akakpo, Emeka dagwara [ya]
d. Uche buru ibu, Emeka bugwara [ya].
e. Oroma a chara acha, udara a chagwara [ya]

The test for reciprocity in Igbo stative verbs generated grammatical awkward sentences (using both the =rita and =gwara suffixes) that are not communicatively acceptable in the language. In other words, they failed the reciprocal test.

Copular Verbs in Reciprocal Constructions

- (35) a. Uche na Emeka noritara onwe ha ajo onodu.
b. Uche na Emeka buritara onwe ha ogbatauhie.
c. Uche na Emeka diritara onwe ha na mma.
- (36) a. Uche noro Emeka n'ulo, Emeka nogwara [ya]
b. Uche buru Emeka ogbatauhie, Emeka bugwara [ya] ogbatauhie
c. Uche diri Emeka mma, Emeka digwara [ya] na mma

Grammatically, the sentences (35a-c) are correct and also communicatively acceptable; but (36a-c) are grammatically acceptable but communicatively unacceptable.

Psychological Verbs in Reciprocal Constructions

- (37) a. Uche na Emeka huritara onwe ha n'anya.
b. Uche na Emeka meritara onwe ha ebere.
c. Uche na Emeka chiritara onwe ha ochi.
d. Uche na Emeka chiritara onwe ha ochi.
e. Uche na Emeka kporitara onwe ha asi.

- (38) a. *Uche hụrụ Emeka n’anya, ọ [Emeka] hụgwara ya (n’anya).
 b. *Uche mere Emeka ebere, o [Emeka] megwara ya (ebere).
 c. Uche chiri Emeka ọchi, ọ [Emeka] chigwara ya (ọchi).
 d. Uche mụrụ Emeka amụ, ọ [Emeka] mụgwara ya (amụ).
 e. Uche kpọrọ Emeka asi, ọ [Emeka] kpọgwara ya (asi).

The verbs *-hụ*, *-me*, *-chi*, *-mụ* and *-kpọ* combine well with the reciprocal suffix *=rita* to form grammatical and acceptable sentences. However, with regard to the suffix *=gwara*, its connotation of ‘retaliate’ is such that a native Igbo speaker will not reciprocate good gestures by way of a retaliation because good gestures can only be reciprocated but not retaliated as in (38a) and (38b).

5. Summary of the Findings and Conclusion

The focus of this paper was to provide a series of test to discover the presence of reflexive and reciprocal verbs in some Igbo verb classes. Because of the narrow scope of the paper, we chose only four verb classes viz: dynamic, stative, copular and psychological verbs.

The reflexive and reciprocal tests with dynamic verbs reveals that Igbo dynamic verbs can be used to form reflexive and reciprocal constructions.

The second test involving stative verbs confirms that these verbs bear reflexive structures but are semantically not reflexive because the interpretation of the structures are quite different from reflexive notions. Consequently, Igbo stative verbs tested for reciprocity generally are grammatically awkward sentences that are not communicatively acceptable in the Igbo language.

In test three, (ie, the test involving Igbo copular verbs) the copular verb class can be used to form reflexive and reciprocal constructions. The same applies also to psychological verbs. The study also discovers that for those verb classes (dynamic, copula and psychological) that passed both the reflexive and reciprocal tests, they have all their other forms (present, past and imperative) showing reflexivisation and reciprocity. Conversely, for the stative verb that failed the test, non of its forms (present, past and imperative) shows reflexivity or reciprocity. Finally, the paper also discovers that in addition to the suffix *=rita* which is known

in the literature for forming reciprocal constructions, the verbal suffix =*gwara* is also used to for reciprocal constructions but with the connotation of retaliation.

It is hoped that the present effort would awaken more interest in this area of testing the extent to which Igbo verb classes can be used to form reflexive and reciprocal constructions.

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