

AUXILIARY VERBS IN IGBO

Aloysius Udosinachi Umeodinka
Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

This paper takes a second look at the auxiliary verbs in Igbo with the aim of achieving an update on the state of the auxiliaries in the language. It first examines the not less than seven different auxiliaries identified by Emenanjo (1985) and the features he used to identify them. The premise is that these features can contribute to establishing the auxiliary verbs in the different Igbo dialects. Their application to Umuchu dialect of Igbo could confirm the existence of four auxiliaries in the dialect: -je, -ga -ma, and -dj. Hence, this seems to confirm that Emenanjo's features can indeed serve to establish the auxiliaries in the different dialects of the language.

1. Introduction

The essential role of auxiliary verbs in Igbo grammar has drawn the attention of many scholars, authors and researchers. The variety of interests has given rise to divergent views on what should be the generally acceptable definition of auxiliary verbs in Igbo. Perhaps, the lack of definitional unanimity is the cause of the different approaches to the auxiliary verbs in the language, thus leading to as many kinds of auxiliary verbs as there are authors.

For instance, Emenanjo (1978) has a list of many types of auxiliary verbs which he maintains abound in Igbo grammar. Nwachukwu (1983) examines the array of Emenanjo's (1978) identified auxiliary verbs and finds some of them unacceptable.

The objective of this study is to, first, re-visit the issue of the definition of auxiliary verbs and proffer a definition of auxiliaries in Igbo. Secondly, the study evaluates the features used by Emenanjo (1978), Nwachukwu (1983) and attempts to use them to identify the auxiliaries in Umuchu dialect.

The next section reviews some of the works on auxiliary verbs in the language, while section 3 is on Emenanjo's features of Igbo auxiliary verbs. Section 4 applies these features in establishing the auxiliaries of Umuchu dialect, while section 5 concludes the work.

2. Literature Review

Finch (2000) classifies verbs into lexical and auxiliary verbs. Those verbs that have the tendency to behave like the main verb in a verb phrase are the lexical verbs. It is the duty of the main verb to supply the clause's semantic content. The verb that supplies functional and grammatical meaning to the clause is the auxiliary verb. Such verbs possess the capability to express tense, aspect and mood, though they are restricted in form and distribution.

According to Nwachukwu (1983, p. 25), "in order to better appreciate the functions of Igbo auxiliaries, one needs to study the functions of English auxiliaries." This view seems to indicate that a review of the English auxiliaries could provide a footing for going into the Igbo auxiliaries. Emenanjo (1985), on the other hand, is of the view that a good number of the studies that can now be found on auxiliaries are focused on English auxiliaries, modals and quasi-modals and that some of the issues they have raised bother on general linguistic theory. Some of them are: the status of auxiliaries, their morphology and syntax, the notional classes which auxiliaries express, the categorization of auxiliaries, how auxiliaries originated and the general spread of the concept of auxiliaries. Out of about seventeen varying ideas on these issues, Emenanjo (1985) focuses on three: auxiliaries as helping verbs, main verbs and as being part of a universal category, AUX.

Emenanjo (1985) explains that Schon (1861), Spencer (1921) and Welmers and Welmers (1968) argue that auxiliaries do not exist and, for that reason, are main verbs. Welmers and Welmers (1968) accept the status of *-na* and *-ga* in Igbo syntax, but are of the view that they behave syntactically like main verbs. Emenanjo (1985), on the other hand, holds the view that in structures such as *O na-eje*. 'He is going', *O ga-eje*. 'He is going (at- going)' and *O ga ije* 'He is going to-be-to-go', there is a complex verbal consisting of two verbs: the auxiliaries *-na* and *-ga* and the main verbs immediately accompanying and complementing them. His stand is that auxiliaries behave as function words denoting aspect and/or polarity, whereas the lexical verbs play the role of carriers of lexical meanings. He posits that the main verbs complement the auxiliaries and describes the relationship they form as "auxiliary complex" (Emenanjo, 1973). He also agrees with Steele (1978, p. 14) that the complements of the auxiliaries are "a special form of the main verb—a participial or infinitive form" and confirms both possibilities of participle or infinitive complements for Igbo. He also maintains that even in interrogative

contexts, the auxiliaries never fail to co-occur with their (verbal) complements, and that the auxiliaries are syntactic elements that indicate tense, modality, aspect and polarity, and also have more grammatical than lexical meaning in synchronic Igbo syntax. Nwachukwu (1976, p. 489) on the other hand, describes the relationship between the auxiliary and its main verb complement as “unanalyzable”, consisting of “auxiliaries which help other verbs to express the right meaning/time plus complement”.

In relation to the category, AUX, Emenanjo (1985) is of the view that it can manifest in three forms: as auxiliary verbs, affixes and tone-bearing morphemes. He posits that in a situation where an auxiliary is derived from a verb, the verb from which it is derived and the derived auxiliary can remain in use. Also, with the derivation process remaining the same, resultant auxiliaries may have a change in their phonological structures or have some semantic shifts.

In terms of auxiliaries and syntactic typology and as far as synchronic syntax is concerned, Igbo language manifests a typical SVO characteristics; which means that the language has auxiliaries (Lehmann, 1978). Also, on the standpoint of this typology, its auxiliaries occur before the full verb and in second position (Steele, 1975; Akmajian, 1980). On this platform still, the Igbo language possesses negative auxiliaries. This agrees with the findings of Mulder (1978) in his study of Finnish Negative, which reveals that SVO languages employ verbs as negative markers. All these views on auxiliaries and syntactic typology are shared by Emenanjo (1985) concerning the auxiliary in the Igbo language.

Concerning the characteristics of auxiliaries, Emenanjo (1985) claims to have confirmed that all Igbo auxiliaries are stative verbs. He bases his argument on Marino’s (1973) finding that stativity is one of the mandatory features of auxiliaries, especially modals.

Emenanjo (1978) gives a list of seven auxiliaries. He however, admits that the numerical strength of Igbo auxiliaries appear to vary from dialect to dialect, with six in Onicha, two in Ohuhu and three in “Central”. His examples of the seven auxiliaries are as follows:

- (1) -*na/-dị* (progressive habitual marker),
-*dị* (progressive negative marker (Qnịcha)),
-*ga* (future marker)
-*ma* (future negative marker)
-*ga/-ka* (perfective marker)
-*ga/-ka* (the marker of the unfulfilled)
-*ga/-ka* (marker of the unfulfilled).

Nwachukwu (1983) is of the opinion that this number can be trimmed down to five, if *-ga/-ka* is simultaneously regarded as an auxiliary and a modal verb because *ga* plays a dual role in Igbo grammar. But with his argument that the verb *ji* (from Mbaise) be recognized as one of the auxiliaries of the language, the total number of Igbo auxiliaries should be six.

On another note, Nwachukwu (1983) ranks syntactic criteria over the semantic in the classification of Igbo verbs, unless the former has failed to give unambiguous categorization. He subscribes to the idea of the division between auxiliaries and non-auxiliaries or full verbs. In the areas of what are and what are not auxiliary verbs, Nwachukwu (1983) lends some support to Emenanjo's (1978, p. 126-7) position that auxiliaries vary from full verbs in the area that "they are never used alone" because their presence entails the presence of a bound verb complement. Okonkwo (1977), Okafo and Ewelukwa (2008) and Ekeulu (2009) recognize only two auxiliary verbs in Igbo: *na* and *ga*. Ekeulu (2009) however emphasizes the use of a hyphen between the auxiliary and the verb complement as a graphic indication.

3.0 Features of the Igbo Auxiliary Verbs

Emenanjo (1978, 1985, 1991) and Nwachukwu (1983) are works that contain some studies carried out by Professor Nolue Emenanjo on the subject of auxiliary verbs in Igbo. In other words, Emenanjo is the foremost Igbo grammarian/linguist who has written a lot on the auxiliary verbs of the language. Emenanjo (1985) goes beyond the "Central" auxiliaries to look into those of other dialects like Nnewi, Igbouzo and Owerri. Through these studies, he has

exposed the possibilities for the investigation of the auxiliary verbs of the Igbo language. This section outlines and discusses the features identified by Emenanjo.

(a) *Inability to be used alone*

Igbo auxiliary verbs lack the ability to be used alone in a grammatical construction. It compulsorily co-occurs with some nomino-verbal complement, a participle or an infinitive (in some dialects).

(2) O na-edede ihe
 3Psg. AUX-write something
 'He is writing something.'

(3) Nwunye m na-eri osikapa
 Wife I AUX-eat rice
 'My wife is eating rice.'

(4) Ekene ga-ewe-ta ya
 Ekene AUX-bring-DIR it
 'Ekene will bring it.'

(5) Ekene ga-iwe-ta ya
 Ekene AUX-bring-DIR it
 'Ekene will bring it.'

In the above sentences the auxiliary is complemented by the participles of the verbs *-de*, *-ri* and *-we*. Note that in the case of example (4), the form *eweta* involves the participle and the extensional suffix *=ta* involving direction (to the direction of the speaker), while in (5) it involves an infinitive as complement, but still with the extensional suffix. In other words, the verbal

complement still remains the participle or infinitive, whether the complement is modified through an extensional suffix or not.

(b) Not easily amenable to verb derivational morphology

Full verbs are known to easily have verbal derivatives of various forms as a result of the inflectional morphology of the language. The Igbo auxiliary can hardly have more than two forms. The common derivatives from auxiliaries are the simple participle and the infinitive as already illustrated in sentences (2) to (5) above.

(c) Inability to take a wide range of suffixes and enclitics

This feature has also already been mentioned in the discussion of examples (2) to (5) where only the modified main verb, as participle or as an infinitive, can take a suffix. The auxiliary verb cannot take a suffix because it must always occur beside the main verb it modifies.

(d) Incapable of being nominalized

This attribute almost excludes the auxiliary verbs from the verbs of the language. As the verb is the main source of word formation in the language, nominalization of verbs and verbal structures is the normal process of word formation in the language. Only the auxiliary verbs are not amenable to this process.

(e) Inability to choose their complements, subjects and indirect objects

The auxiliary verbs do not have an inherent argument structure that can be compared with the argument structure of main verbs. For example, the verb *-nye* 'give' requires a giver, an object to be given, and a receiver, but not of the auxiliary verbs has such an explicit requirement of event participants. Hence, the auxiliary verbs lack the ability to determine the nominal complements, subjects and indirect objects. They only require the nomino-verbal complements in the form of infinitives and participles.

(f) *The modified participles are used with their complements*

It was already noted in feature (a) above that the modified participles and infinitives can have affixes attached to them. An additional fact arises from the Igbo verbal structure involving a V+NP/PP structure and which has been described extensively in Igbo linguistics and designated inherent complement verb (Nwachukwu, 1983; Emenanjo, 1978). Two examples are *-cha ocha* 'be bright/have colour' and *-gba mgba* 'wrestle' whereby the nouns *ocha* and *mgba* are the inseparable inherent complements of the verbs *-cha* and *-gba*. The participles of the auxiliaries are always used with their complements in sentences.

(6) Ø na-acha ocha
 3Psg. AUX-shine white/bright
 'He/She is fair (in complexion)'

(7) Ø ga-agba mgba
 3Psg. AUX-move wrestle
 'He will wrestle.'

Here, the participle *acha* of the verb *-cha* still co-occurs with its complement, *ocha*, just as *agba* which is the participle of *-gba* does with *mgba*. The modification of these verbs by the auxiliary does not affect the verb's inherent structure.

(g) *Mark tense and aspect and differentiate different verbal constructions*

In addition to the modification of the main verb by the auxiliary, the auxiliaries also serve to mark tense and aspect. Hence *-na* has been identified as marking the progressive aspect by some authors as well as the present continuous by others. *-ga* marks generally marks 'future'.

(h) *Have consonant-syllable (cs) structure*

Auxiliaries share with verbs the characteristic of having a consonant-syllable structure, but do not have any possibility of expansion into a compound verb.

4. Emenanjo's Features and the Auxiliaries of Umuchu Dialect

Here we apply some of the features identified by Emenanjo to Umuchu dialect of Igbo in Aguata local government in Anambra State.

First of all, four auxiliaries could be confirmed for Umuchu. These are *-je* 'future', *-ma* 'future (conditional)', *-ma* 'future', *-di* 'habitual' and *-ga* 'future'

- (8) Chiemerie je-eje Umuchu
Chiemerie AUX-go Umuchu
'Chiemerie will go to Umuchu.'
- (9) Chinwe je-ekwu ya
Chinwe AUX-speak it
'Chinwe will say it.'
- (10) M ma -aga ahja.
I AUX-go market
'I will go to the market.'
- (11) M ma-agu akwukwo n' ututu.
I AUX-read book PREP morning
'I will read in the morning.'
- (12) Onyinye ga-eri ede.
Onyinye AUX-eat cocoyam
'Onyinye will eat cocoyam.'

(13) Onyinye ga-agba egwu.
 Onyinye AUX-dance music
 ‘Onyinye will dance.’

(14) Ọ dj-eme ya.
 3Psg. AUX-do it
 ‘He always does it.’

(15) Ọ dj-ezu ohi.
 3Psg. AUX-steal theft
 ‘He usually steals.’

The above examples are some of the morphemes that help the main verb to express intended meanings in the Umuchu variant of the Igbo language. The auxiliary complexes are *je-eje* and *je-ekwu* for (8) and (9), *ma-aga* and *ma-agu* for (10) and (11), *ga-eri* and *ga-agba* for (12) and (13), and *dj-eme* and *dj-ezu* for (14) and (15). In all these instances the first component of the auxiliary complex is the auxiliary verb, followed by the modified verb in the form of a participle. This seems to indicate that Umuchu belongs to those dialects where the auxiliary is followed by a participle, and not an infinitive. In terms of their semantics, the two *-ga* and *-je* are FUTURE auxiliaries, while *-dj* is used to mark habitual action. Finally, all of the above named auxiliaries in Umuchu exhibit all the features identified by Emenanjo.

5. Conclusion

The study has endeavoured to review some of the works on auxiliary verbs in the Igbo language. More specifically, it reviewed and applied the features identified for Igbo auxiliary verbs by Emenanjo (1985) on the Umuchu dialect of Igbo, and through that could confirm four auxiliaries for the dialect. It could further also be confirmed that Emenanjo’s features also apply to the auxiliary verbs in Umuchu dialect.

Finally, The conclusion is that the verb class auxiliary is confirmed for Igbo, but could vary in number from dialect to dialect.

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