

Grammaticalization of Comitative Markers in Igbo

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Abstract

Cross-linguistic studies have revealed that there are other ways to code the meaning of accompaniment conveyed by the comitative marker outside the morphological marking of nouns in languages (such as Basque) to designate persons or entities in whose company an event occurs. In languages lacking morphological case, comitative expressions are conveyed through alternative means, including adjectives, verbs, "with" prepositions, and "and" conjunctions. Onuoha and Uchechukwu (2023) have studied the verbs "-so, and the verbal suffix "-kò" as comitative markers in Igbo. This paper is a descriptive study, interested in demonstrating that these comitative markers serve more grammatical function inherently without losing their comitative function. The analysis identifies the Igbo comitative markers as grammatical number markers.

Introduction

Comitative markers are normally used to encode the relation between two participants in an event such that one of them is the accompanee and the other the companion. This accompanee and the companion are prototypically human beings who are involved in the same situation, activity or event (Stolz, Stroh & Urdze 2008:602). Comitative was originally conceptualized as a case form that languages use morphological markers to express. Research has been conducted on the comitative constructions found in various languages to identify the parts of speech that each language uses to convey accompaniment (including those without morphological comitative). According to the findings, nouns in many languages do not communicate accompaniment through specific forms.

Researchers have attempted to categorize these languages based on the tactics used to indicate accompaniment, which include verbs, adverbs, prepositions, serial verbs, other than nouns. Such investigation was carried out in the Igbo language by Onuoha and Uchechukwu (2023) with the purpose of identifying the describing the comitative markers in Igbo. The paper examines the language and identifies two morphemes, the verb -so 'follow' and the suffix -kò 'together', whose comitative functions have not been investigated in Igbo language prior to this research, as the comitative markers in Igbo. The authors conclude that while the verb -so expresses the comitative in a serial verb construction where it indicates NP1 following/joining/participating in the execution of an act initiated by NP2, the suffix -kò on the other hand assigns equal status to both NP1 and NP2 as either co-subjects or co-objects of the same verb.

Further investigations have not only identified another comitative marker -nye in Igbo language, but have also proven that these comitative markers could actually serve other functions in the language other than marking accompaniment, this has formed the objective of this paper. The paper aims at investigating the verb -so, the verb -nye and the suffix -kò in Igbo for dual purposes. First, for they express such accompaniment relations which have been described in the literature to be coded as the comitative, and secondly because these comitative markers are subject to grammaticalization.

Notes on Comitative

Comitative can be defined as the case form or strategy a language employs to express ‘accompaniment’ (Trask 1993:49). Accompaniment is a relation between two participants (NPs) in a construction where one is the accompanee and the other is the companion. The strategy through which it is expressed may be by inflecting the nouns, through the use of morphological markers or through other parts of speech like the preposition (such as ‘with’ in English), adverbs, adjectives or serial verb constructions. This strategy or form is what is designated as comitative Crystal (2003:83). The accompanee and the companion in an accompaniment relation are prototypically human beings who are involved in the same situation, activity or event (Stolz, Stroh & Urdze 2008:602).

According to Trask (1993:49), “Comitative is the case form that indicates an individual in whose company something is done”. However, recent studies have described the comitative as not merely morphological but a strategy, bearing in mind those languages that do not have morphological case markers.

Comitative as a case form (in languages that adopt morphological case as in Basque) or strategy (in languages that use other word classes except nouns), is the means through which accompaniment relation is expressed. All languages have ways of expressing accompaniment. These ways of expressing accompaniment may be the same, slightly similar or totally different amongst the different languages of the world. Accompaniment is a relation between two NPs (participants) in a construction in which one is the companion and the other, the accompanee. Comitative constructions are constructions in which accompaniment is expressed. In a comitative construction, the accompanee is given prominence whereas the companion is somewhat marginalized. This is because the constructions are mostly oriented towards the accompanee. For example, in the Italian sentence;

- (1) [*il professore*]accompanee *entra nell’aula* [*con*]relator [*i suoi studenti*]companion
‘the professor enters the lecture-hall (together) with his students’

Il professore is the accompanee, *i suoi studenti* is the companion, and *con* is the relator. However, the finite verb agrees with the subject-NP *il professore* ‘the professor’ in person and number; that is, the third person singular and the subject-NP represents the accompanee whose companion is the group of students represented by the complement NP *i suoi studenti* ‘his students’ which is an optional PP headed by the Comitative marker *con* ‘with’ (Stolz et al 2008:602). This is similar to the English example below where the comitative marker is the preposition ‘with’. Example;

- (2) I went with my friend.

Crystal (2003:83) points out that, in languages which express grammatical relationships by means of inflections, the term ‘comitative’ refers to the form taken by a noun phrase (often a single noun or pronoun) when it expresses the meaning ‘along with’ or ‘accompanied by’. Such a structure, which is usually referred to as ‘the comitative,’ occurs in Basque. For example;

- (3a) *gizonarekin* ‘with the man’ (from Basque).

- (3b) *gizon* ‘man’ (Crystal 2003:83)

1. Notes on Grammaticalization

"Grammaticalization consists in 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, e.g. from a derivative formant to an inflectional one." Jerzy Kurylowicz (1975:52).

According to Heine, Claudi & Hunnemeyer (1991:2), "Grammaticalization refers to the situation where a lexical unit or structure assumes a grammatical function, or where a grammatical unit assumes a more grammatical function". The authors further describes grammaticalization in two perspectives, the diachronic and the synchronic perspectives. They illustrate this with data examples from Ewe, a language belonging to the Kwabranche of the Niger-Congo family, spoken in eastern Ghana, southern Togo, and southern Benin.

(4a). me-nágakofi

1SG-give money Kofi

'I gave Kofi money'

(4b). me-pie βotrú nákofi

1SG-buy door give Kofi

'I bought a door and gave it to Kofi' or

'I bought a door for Kofi'

(4c). me-wódóvévié ná dódókpó lá

1SG-do work hard give exam DEF

'I worked hard for the exam'

Heine et al (1991:2)

Using the above description, we can say that the Igbo comitative markers fall into the synchronic grammaticalization, in the sense that they combine both the comitative function and the grammatical function (marking number). It does not perform one function before performing the other. The Igbo comitatives is examined in terms of the different levels of language; the meaning, sound and the form. This is because when category starts undergoing grammaticalization, the meaning will gradually start changing, it will start losing its original lexical meaning and start having a meaning related to comitative.

Data Analysis

The verb "So", its literal, Comitative and Grammatical Functions

The verb 'sò' literally means 'to follow/go'. This literal meaning does not entail accompaniment. 'Sò' is a motion verb that cuts across different domains of experience, goes in any direction and is not tied to any part of the body. Example:

(5) I ga-eso obere uzo ahu.

Pro aux-to-follow small road that

'You will follow the small path/road'.

The 'so' here simply means 'follow/go' but not accompaniment.

(6) A choro m ka I soro ukwu nne gi

Pro want-pst pro comp pro follow-pst leg mother pro

'I want you to imitate your mother'

In these examples, the full lexical meaning of 'so' is exemplified. The aim is to establish a shift from the full verb to the comitative function. In comitative constructions in Igbo it entails that the action performed in the sentence was initiated by one of the participants who was

accompanied or helped by the other participant to carry out the action. For example, in example (5) below, Ifeanyi is the one going to the football arena while Ndididi accompanied him.

(5) Ndididi sòrò Ifeanyi gáá n'ébé á nà- àgbá bọ̀lù
Ndididi follow-pst prop N go the place pro aux-play ball
'Ndididi accompanied Ifeanyi to the football arena/playground.'

(6) Chima sò Dinta gbúó ánú áhù
Prop N follow hunter kill meat that
'Chima killed the animal with the hunter.'

The verb 'so' also participates in argument distribution. For example, in sentence (6), there are two arguments ; Chima and Dinta. These two arguments are agents, thus agent 1 and agent 2 but because of the properties of 'so', one of the agents is an accompanee agent (i.e Chima). Both agents performed the action of killing but the hunter is the main executor while Chima joins him, that is, accompanies him in the execution of the act. In other words, Chima as well as the hunter killed the animal. Other examples include;

(7) Ndí ọ̀rụ̀ sòrò nnà há úkwú gáá èzùmíké
Workers follow-pst father pro boss go rest
'The workers went to rest with their boss.'

(8) É sò m ónyé òkà íkpē m gáá ùlò íkpē
Pro follow pro lawyer pro go law court
'I went to court with my lawyer'.

In 'so' comitative constructions, two agents that perform a single action are involved. 'Sò' is responsible for the distribution of agent role because the first NP which agrees with 'so' indicates that the NP is not the initiator of the action/event, but one who joins of 'follows' in the execution of the action. However, the inflected forms of the verb do not in any way affect its comitative function.

Having examined the comitative function of the verb 'sò', it is vital we recognize that even though this verb is not posited as a plural marker, it has the inherent capacity of marking number. In addition to expressing comitatives, it anticipates number marking and that is what explains its valency in a construction. There is a shift in the sense that the lexical meaning is diminished. When grammaticalization begins to take place, the lexical item begins to lose its meaning and acquire a grammatical meaning as is the case in 'sò'.

The Verbal suffix “-Kọ”, its literal, Comitative and Grammatical Functions

'Kọ' as a word has several meanings such as 'to dry', 'to tell stories' but the verbal suffix '-kọ' has been treated in Igbo linguistics and grammar books as the “extensional suffix”, which means that it helps to extend the meaning of the verb. It is usually translated as 'together' (Emenanjo 1978; 2015) and others.

In other words, this suffix has never been examined in relation to comitativity and its role in the formation of comitative constructions in the language. As can be seen in the sentences below, its meaning of 'together' means joint and equal participation in an action or event.

(9) Nkechi nà Nnanna nà-égwùríkò égwū n'èzí

Nkechi and Nnanna aux-play together play outside
'Nkechi and Nnanna are playing together outside.'

(10) Há nà-àrúkò órū n'ótù ùlò órū
Pro aux-work-together work in one house work
'They work together in the same work place'.

(11) Ùlò ákwúkwo ányí gàkòrò èzùmíkè ònū
House school pro go-together-pst holiday same time
'Our schools both went on holiday at the same time'.

(12) É gbùkòtàrà nné gī nà nnà gí
Pro kill-together-pst mother you and father you
'Your mother was killed together with your father.'

Here, there is a sense of joint participation in the action performed in the sentences such that the two participants share equal importance in satisfying the requirements of the verb. The sense of "together with/with" is coded in the extensional suffix *kò*.

In the above examples, the "joint participation in an event" expressed through the suffix *kò* can be summarized as follows. Sentences (9) to (12) involve such a joint participation by all the participants in the event expressed through the verb. In (9), the verb *igwu egwu* 'to play' is modified by the auxiliary as *nà-égwù*, in addition to the iterative suffix *ri* 'continuous' and *kò* 'together'. The other sentences have similar modifications of their verbs. Sentence (10) has *rú* 'work' as *rúkò* 'work together'. The vowel 'a' that is available in *nà-àrúkò* is as a result of the modification of the verb by the auxiliary 'na'. Such structures that are modified by an auxiliary are categorized as 'participles' in Igbo language studies (Emenanjo 1985). In sentence (11) *gá* 'go', and *gàkò* 'go together'.

With regards to grammaticalization, the suffix does not lose its comitative meaning in order to mark number, neither does it stop expressing comitative as soon as it starts marking number, instead it plays a dual lexical/grammatical function. 'Kò' can be said to be the most transparent or the prototypical comitative marker because it does not have any other meaning.

The verb 'nye', its literal, Comitative and Grammatical Functions

The verb 'nye' literally means to give. It is used in the Igbo grammar to refer to the act of giving. However, in relation to comitativity, the verb 'nye' refers to 'with' when it occurs with another verb root, that is to say that 'nye' is grammaticalized to mark comitative and number because as soon as it is used to mark comitative, it loses its literal meaning 'to give'. Examples (13) and (14) below show the literal or lexical use of the verb.

(13) Emeka nyèrè m náirà ìrì ìsé
Emeka give-pst pro money ten five
'Emeka gave me fifteen naira'.

(14) Mgbè ànyí biàrà, Obi chòrò ínýè Ada àchìchà nà mmanyá
When pro come-pst, Obi want-pst to-give Ada biscuit and wine
'When we came, Obi wanted to give Ada biscuit and wine'.

In the above examples, the verb ‘nye’ plays its lexical role meaning to give.

(15) Á nònyèrè m íné m n’ùlò
Pro stay-give-pst pro mother pro in-house
‘I stayed with my mother in the house’.

(16) Mary bínyèrè òríakù Ene kémgbè áhù
Mary live-give-pst wife Ene since that
‘Mary lived with Ene’s wife since then’.

(17) Ànyí kwùnyèrè yá
Pro stand-with-pst pro
‘We stand with her’.

In sentences (15)-(17), the verb ‘nye’ is used as a comitative marker to refer to ‘together with’. In (15), ‘nònyèrè’, the use of the comitative marker ‘nye’ entails that there is already an existing participant in the event whom the NP1 is expected to stay with. ‘Bi’ in (16) means ‘to live’ while ‘bínyèrè’ means ‘to live together with’. It is different from a situation where someone says ‘Mary bí be òríakù Ene (that is Mary is living in Mrs Ene’s house)’. The use of ‘nye’ in that sentence signifies that there is someone already living in that house whom the other participant is supposed to live with. The verb grammaticalizes to express comitative and number. This is to show that in addition to its verbal use (lexical function), it also has the tendency to express comitative and number (plural).

The verb ‘nye’ does not occur alone when used to refer to comitatives, rather it is bound to another verb and it is only in the process of being bound that it has the grammatical function. These comitative markers when used on their own as single lexical items may have other meanings but mark comitative when they are used in certain morphosyntactic forms.

Conclusion

Languages without the morphological case express the accompaniment relation through several means, either through verbs, adverbs, prepositions etc. This paper aims at investigating the accompaniment markers in Igbo as being subject to grammaticalization. The analysis clearly proves that the comitative markers ‘so’, ‘kò’ and the verb ‘nye’ however have the inherent capacity to mark plurality. Whenever they occur in comitative constructions, they refer to more than one arguments or participants. This they do without losing their comitative function. The comitative markers ‘so’ and ‘nye’ exemplify the form of grammaticalization that loses their full lexical meaning in order to mark comitative or number, while the comitative marker ‘kò’ can be said to be the most transparent or prototypical comitative marker because it does not have any other meaning.

The verbs on their own may have other meanings, their grammatical functions are established only in those morpho-syntactic environments where they are bound as compound verbs and suffix respectively.

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