
English-Igbo Evaluation of the Multi-Dimensions of Igbo Prepositional Meanings

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Abstract

This paper discusses “English-Igbo Evaluation of the Multi-dimensions of Igbo Prepositional meanings”. It aims at explaining what is meant by English-Igbo prepositional meanings, enumerate the many dimensions of the meanings and analyse the implications of the multi-dimensional meanings on the Igbo language. It anchors on the Use Theory of Meaning. The data are obtained from secondary source and analysed using descriptive method. The results reveal that English-Igbo prepositional meaning refers to the notions and nuances of meaning which are perceived by the native English and Igbo speakers when some certain prepositions are used in Igbo grammatical constructions. Some of such prepositional meanings include: congregative, suppressive, attitudinal, joint-association and negative-tense-dependent prepositional meanings. This study has the implications of enhancing and sharpening the semantic knowledge of the Igbo-English speakers in their use of prepositions in both languages as well as making them to acknowledge the existence of prepositional notions, and the strategies for expressing such meanings.

Keywords: preposition, meaning, function words, closed class words, English, Igbo

1) Introduction

The role of semantics is to explain the ways in which words and sentences of various grammatical constructions are used and understood by native and fluent speakers of a particular language. Its meaning is a very essential element in communication. That is why it is vital that people communicating with each other should agree on the meanings of the words being used; otherwise they cannot communicate.

Following this significance of meaning, this study examines “English-Igbo Evaluation of the Multi-Dimensions of Igbo Prepositional Meanings”. The study investigates what is meant by English-Igbo Prepositional Meaning and enumerates the various meaning dimensions of Igbo prepositions. It also identifies the implications of the many dimensions of prepositional meanings on the Igbo language.

The approach used is descriptive, and with the Use Theory of Meaning of Wittgenstein (1953), the characteristics of the phenomenon of preposition is examined in order to establish the quest of the study. As a native speaker of the Igbo language, the researcher’s intuitive knowledge of Igbo has helped in the analysis.

In order to satisfactorily accomplish this set task, the study is organized into five sections: the introduction, literature review, theoretical framework, data presentation, analysis and findings, and conclusion. The outcome of the study is anticipated to make a huge contribution to knowledge. For instance, researchers in grammar and semantics are expected to be inspired for more studies in this area. The speakers of English and Igbo are sure to appreciate the prepositional nuances as a new vista of semantic knowledge. The fields of the grammar and semantics of Igbo preposition will not remain the same as they have received a boost.

2) Literature Review

The review is done under the following headings: Word classes/Parts of speech, prepositions, Igbo prepositions, English prepositions, English-Igbo prepositional notions, and Igbo words and matching English prepositions.

2.1 Word Classes/Parts of Speech

Words are the raw materials of every language (Nkwocha, 2002). They are the building blocks of every language because of the specific functions each of the words performs. It is in the consideration of the different functions they perform that they are called parts of speech or word classes (Eyisi, 2006). According to Nkwocha (2002:1):

Words are the raw materials of a language. Without them, we may find it extremely difficult to express our thoughts and ideas. These words have their classes or categories and are classified as different parts of speech according to their function in enabling us to express our thoughts whether spoken or written.

It is these words that belong to different classes that make up the vocabulary of a language. Eight of them are identified in the English language, and they are: nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections (Awolola, 2005). There are open and closed word groups. Awolola (2005) reveals that nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives are content words and belong to the open word group because of their ability to continuously admit new members; while pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections are function words and belong to the closed word group. Greenbaum (1996: 92) states that “grammatical descriptions

require reference to word classes or parts of speech”. What can be deciphered from here is that words are the rudiments of language and they are divided into classes including the preposition.

2.2 Prepositions

In the words of Emenanjo (2015: 11) “the preposition is the only part of speech which may be found preceding nominals and verbals and can never be found in isolation.” This definition confirms Awolola’s (2005: 31) view that “prepositions are like hooks for making modifiers of nouns and pronouns.”

Hodges and Whitten (1982: 551) define and illustrate what a preposition is in English. To them, a preposition is “a part of speech (a function word) that links and relates a vocabulary word to some other words in the sentence” e.g. “These paintings hung in the hall”, where “in” is the preposition that connects and relates “hall” (the object of the preposition ‘in’) to the verb “hung”. Ngoesi (2000) is of the view that a preposition is a part of speech which, apart from coming before nominals, shows the relationship between nominals and other words in the sentence.

The foregoing definitions and explanations show that a preposition refers to function words or a group of words used before a noun or pronoun to show place, position, time or method. Being function words means that they exist to explain or create grammatical or structural relationships into which the content words may fit. Such words do not have any meaning on their own; only in association with content words. Examples from English are: “of” “to”.

2.3 Igbo Prepositions

In their separate definitions, Ekulu (2009), Mbah and Mbah (2014), Ezikeojiaku (1989) and Ngoesi (2000) agree that the only common

preposition in Igbo is “Na”. They are in unanimity that a preposition is a part of speech which fronts or comes before the noun phrase in Igbo. Ngoesi (2000) adds that the preposition also fronts or comes before the infinitive, gerund and words that indicate negative infinitive in Igbo.

Umeodinka, Ugochukwu, Ogwudile and Ilechukwu (2019), Uba-Mgbemena (2006) and Ogbalu (1974), however, recognize other words that function as prepositions in Igbo. While Ogbalu (1974) accepts “Na” and “Nke” as Igbo prepositions, Uba-Mgbemena (2006) and Umeodinka, Ugochukwu, Ogwudile and Ilechukwu (2019) opine that even though “Na” does the work of a preposition and other functions, there are also some words that do other works in Igbo and as well do the work of a preposition; such as: “maka”, “banyere”, “gbasara”, “kamgbe”, “tupu” and “karija”.

All these scholars, with no exception, are unanimous in maintaining that the vowel succeeding the ‘N’ in “Na” has to be removed when “Na” is used before a noun that begins with a vowel, as in: *n’elu* ‘upwards’, *n’ala* ‘downwards’, *n’akpa* ‘in the bag’. They also agree that “Na” is written without removing its vowel when it comes before a noun starting with a consonant, e.g. *Na Nsukka* ‘at Nsukka’, *Na mbido* ‘at commencement’, *Na Lagos* ‘in Lagos’, and so on.

English Prepositions

In the English language, Otagburu, Okwor, Ngonebu, Orabueze and Ogenyi (2012) submit that the preposition is a word that relates a noun or pronoun to another word in the sentence. The preposition governs the noun or pronoun following it. They identify three types of prepositions – time preposition, place preposition and direction preposition. Examples of time preposition are: in, at, on, for, during and while. Prepositions of place are: in, on and at; while the

prepositions that clarify the direction of a person or thing are: under, over, right, left, etcetera.

Hodges and Whitten (1982), Aniga and Ellah (2010), Nkwocha (2002) and Awolola (2005) are unanimous in maintaining that a preposition is a part of speech or a word that is placed before a noun or a pronoun to indicate its relationship to some other parts of a sentence.

Nkwocha (2002) has classified prepositions into the following: Simple (on, in, by, for, to, with, out, under, etc), disguised (atop, ashore, amidst, ahaunting), compound (above, without, within, into, upto, unto, behind, beside), double (out of from above, up to, from within), phrasal (by means of, by way of, on account of, in favour of) and participial (judging, regarding, respecting).

What can be deduced from all these views is that a preposition precedes a noun or pronoun in its regular function of showing the relationship of such a noun and the other words in the sentence. Also, the English prepositions exist in numerous types. The many different categories are the indications of the different usages that can generate different meanings in the English language.

2.4 English-Igbo Prepositional Notions

From Hornby (2010), the word “notion” is about an idea, a belief or an understanding of something. What this explanation implies is that English and Igbo prepositions produce different dimensions or notions of meaning in their translations.

Aniga and Ellah (2010: 22) maintain that “care must be taken not to misuse preposition since a mistake can inhibit your listeners from understanding you”. Related to this is Emenanjo’s (1987: 30) comment that “parts of speech have notional/semantic characteristics”. It is in a similar sense that Ogbalu (1974) maintains

that “the following verbs have prepositional force: *banyere*, *dị ka*, *nyere*, *rue*, *megide*, *tụkwasi*, etc.

2.5 Igbo Words and Matching English Prepositions

The following table is a depiction of Uba-Mgbemena’s (2006: 59-60) Igbo sentences that have the words ‘maka’, ‘banyere’, ‘gbasara’, ‘kamgbe’, ‘tupu’ and ‘kariya’ giving them some prepositional notions or meanings in English.

Table 1 Igbo sentences with words denoting prepositional notions in English

S/N	Igbo Sentence	Igbo-English Preposition Word	English Prepositional Meaning/ Notion
1	Anyị ga-enyere gị aka <u>maka</u> chukwu	Maka (because of)	We will help you <u>because of</u> God
2	Ha bịara <u>maka</u> njem ahụ	Maka (because of)	They came <u>because of</u> that journey
3	Anyị na-atụ ero <u>banyere</u> nsogbu ahụ	Banyere (about)	We are making arrangement <u>about</u> that problem.
4	Anyị bịara <u>gbasara</u> okwu ahụ	Gbasara (for)	We came <u>for</u> that discussion.
5	<u>Kamgbe</u> esemokwu ahụ, anyị ahụbeghị Obi	Kamgbe (since)	<u>Since</u> that quarrel, we have not seen Obi.

6	<u>Tupu</u> ọnwá ọzọ unụ ga-anụ dum.	Tupu (before)	<u>Before</u> next month, you will receive my message.
7	Ụmụaka amaghị onye ọzọ <u>karịa</u> nne ha.	Karịa (except)	Children do not know any other person <u>except</u> their mother.

It is clear in the above examples that the Igbo words underlined in the table, even though they function as other word classes, give prepositional notions in English. The Igbo words “banyere”, and “gbasara” have the same meaning equivalent to “about” in English.

Although ‘kamgbe’ functions as an adverb and conjunction, it also works as a preposition here. In the same way, the word ‘karịa’ is an adverb, but works as a preposition also.

4) Theoretical Framework

The theory which guides this study is the Use theory of Meaning propounded by Wittgenstein (1953). The theory states that the meaning of an expression is a matter of the way the expression is put into use by its competent users. Wittgenstein’s stand is that an understanding of how language is applied is more important than its abstract meaning. That is to say that the context in which a sentence is uttered may be more useful in determining its meaning than anything else. It boils down to the fact that the way a competent user puts a linguistic expression is the right way to use such an expression. To Wittgenstein (1953), statements can only be said to be meaningful if, and only if, such expressions can be defined or pictured in the real world. To him, it is only when statements are pictured in the real world that they become useful. In other words, it is the situation of usage that shows whether expressions or prepositions, in this case, are appropriately used.

The application of the Use theory of Meaning goes with the observation that the meaning of a word is a yardstick in the explanations of its various occurrences. On the basis of this understanding, it presupposes that each word means what it means by virtue of the acceptance conditions of certain specified sentences containing that word. The Use Theory of meaning enables us to understand that a language which only one individual can understand is an incoherent language. It is, therefore, only when a community of persons shares the same understanding about a language that such a language passes the test of coherency.

4) Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

This section contains an analysis of the research data obtained from the secondary source, precisely Okonkwo (1974) and Emenanjo (2015).

4.1 ‘Na’ Used for English opposite Meanings

Okonkwo (1974: 76):

- 1 i. O ba ra n’ ụlọ
3SG enter-rV suff Pst prep house.
‘he/she enters into the house’
- ii. O si n’ ụlọ
3SG come Pst prep house
‘he/she came from the house’
- 2 i. O ba-ra n’ime ụlọ
3SG enter-rV suff Pst into house
‘he/she entered into the house’
- ii. O nọ n’ime ụlọ
3SG be.stative inside house
‘he/she is inside the house’

In (1), Okonkwo stresses that the preposition “Na” is often employed in Igbo “to translate prepositions that have opposite meanings”. It is used to translate all English prepositions of motion e.g. in, from, into. “N’ime” in (2) is a compound of ‘Na’, which is employed in Igbo, and in English translates to the preposition “into” along with the motion verbs. This is a meaning nuance for both languages.

Emenanjo (2015: 167-171):

- 3 i. i-bu-kọ ihe n’ akpa
 to-carry-together things prep bag
 ‘carrying many things in a bag’
 ii. ị-chụ-kọ anụ ọnụ
 to-chase-together meat mouth
 ‘to hunt for animals jointly’
- 4 i. ị-fọnye n’ akpa
 to-park prep bag
 ‘to park inside a bag’
 ii. i-tinye n’ ọnụ
 to-put prep mouth
 ‘to put inside the mouth’
 iii. ị-kụnye ntu
 to-fasten nail
 ‘fastening with nail’
- 5 i. Ite mmiri na-anyị-ji m olu
 pot water aux-heavy-break 1SG.OBJ neck
 ‘the pot of water is very heavy on me’
 ii. Ọ na- azọ-ji osisi
 3SG AUX- march-break stick
 ‘he/she is breaking a stick’

- 6
- i. Q na- e- bu-ru m ibu
 3SG AUX- Pref- carry-rV 1SG.OBJ load
 ‘he/she is carrying loads for me’
- ii. Q na- ezo-ro m ihe
 3SG AUX- hide-rV Suff. 1SG.OBJ things
 ‘he/she hides something from me’
- iii. Q na-amị-rị m ọbara
 3SG AUX-draw-rV Suff. 1SG.OBJ blood
 ‘he/she is drawing blood from me’

Emenanjo sees example 3(i&ii) as expressing congregative meaning, while those of 4(i-iii) express penetration-denoting prepositional meaning. Emenanjo emphasizes the use of the rich extensional morphological tendencies of the Igbo language to create some prepositional implicature. According to him, the extensive suffix affluence of the Igbo language is employed in creating congregative, penetration-denoting, suppressive and applicative prepositional meaning or content. In (3), the extensive suffix ‘kọ’ is used to generate the prepositional meaning suggestions in *ibukọ* ‘to carry together in’ and *ichukọ* ‘to hunt animal together’. Likewise, the extensive suffix “nye” is used in (4) to denote a case of nouns in the language used to express motion into something. Examples (5) express suppressive prepositional meaning, and application prepositional meaning is expressed in (6). (6) are dative and ablative case meanings. The extensional suffixes can make the constructions to have prepositional meaning that are benefactive or malefactive. The extensive suffix ‘-ji’ in (5) is used to usher in the prepositional notion of suppression, just as ‘eburu’, ‘ezoro’ and ‘amịrị’ in (6) denote the source of the action, and that is why they are dative and ablative.

Okonkwo (1974: 76):

7. i. O megide-re Eze anyị.
3SG offend-rV Pst king our
'he/she offended our king'
'he/she worked against our king'
- ii. O me-gide-re iwu
3SG do-against-rV Pres law
'it is against the law'
- iii. Ha kwụ-dewe-re m
3PL stand-near-rV suff. Pres 1SG.OBJ
'they are standing near me'
'they are standing by me'
- iv. O gba-ba-ra ohiya
3SG run-enter-rV Pst bush
'he/she ran into the bush'

The suffixation of 'gide', 'ba' and 'dewe' to the verb in Igbo represents prepositional meanings that translate into 'against', 'by' or 'into' respectively in English.

Emenanjo (2015: 168):

- 8 i. Obioma bja-ra, ri-chapu nri ahụ
Obioma come-rV Pst, eat-all food that
'Obioma came and ate-up that food'
 - ii. O na-a-ga-feta-ra gi
3SG AUX-Pref-go-towards-rV pres. 2SG
'it is going towards you'
- 9 i. Ikem ji uche a-zu ahia.
Ikem use sense pref-buy market
'Ikem is careful of what he buys'

- ii. A na-e-ji uchu aga n' ihu
Imp.Pron. Aux-pref-use Pres. hardwork go prep progress
'it requires hardwork to succeed'
- 10 i. Obi so enyi ya aga.
 Obi follow friend his going
 'Obi is going with his friend'
- ii. Ugochi so Ụzọ eje akwụkwọ
 Ugochi follow Ụzọ going school
 'Ugochi goes to school with Ụzọ'

The morphological verb contents of *richapu* 'eat up' in 8(i) are '-ri', '-cha', '-pu'; and those of 'gafetara' in 8(ii) are: '-ga', '-fe', '-ta', 'ra'. In data (8), prepositional meanings are generated with complex verbs. In the expressions, complex verb stems can give rise to figurative or idiomatic meanings. Data in (9) and (10) represent another use of complex verb forms. In this process, free verb structures are connected in special ways, resulting in the creation of a wide range of prepositional or semantic notions for communication. (9) expresses attitudinal/behavioural prepositional meaning, while (10) presents accompaniment joint association meaning. 'ji' and 'azu', and '-eji' and 'aga' in (9) are serial verbs; and their translations into English give rise to prepositional meanings, e.g. *so enyi ya aga* 'going with his friend', *so Uzo eje akwukwo* 'going to school with Uzo'.

Emenanjo (2015: 217):

- 11 i. O me-re ya, ọ tūmasighi na o ji-ghị ahụ
 3SG do-rV Pst it, it notminding that 3SG has-NEG body
 'he/she did it notminding that he/she is sick'

- ii. O mere ya, na-agbanyeghi na o ji-ghi ahụ
3SG do-rV Pst it, AUX-despite that 3SG has-NEG body
'he/she did it despite being sick'

Emenanjo (2015: 171):

- 12 i. O bi n' Enugwu
3SG live.stative prep Enugwu
'he/she lives in Enugwu'
- ii. O bi n' elu
3SG live.stative prep top
'he/she lives on top'
- iii. O bi(ri) ebe a n' oge agha
3SG live-rV Pst place this prep time war
'he/she was living here during the war'

Data in (11) and (12) could be said to represent other sources of prepositional meanings in Igbo. (11) shows verbid prepositional meaning. In the opinion of Emenanjo (2015: 217), verbids stand “for a small class of fossilized verbal elements which translate mostly as prepositions in English”. (12) expresses space or time meaning, which is achieved by the use of ‘Na’; ‘Na’ is the Igbo preposition whose semantic field of prepositional meaning expressing space and time is very varied. It is obvious that it is the preposition ‘Na’ that has manifested itself into these manifold meanings in (12), to say the least.

4.2 Summary of Findings

The study has all the while been motivated by a purposed investigation into the existence of English-Igbo prepositional notions. It has explained a preposition as a part of speech whose

function is to come before a noun or pronoun in order to show its relationship with other words in the sentence. Igbo-English prepositional meanings have been explained to be the nuances of meanings that reveal themselves as Igbo-English understanding when Igbo prepositions are used.

The types of prepositional notions discovered in the study include congregative, suppressive, applicative, idiomatic, attitudinal, verbid and space or time prepositional meanings. The investigation has left the following implications: 'Na' not being the only Igbo preposition, Igbo-English relationality of prepositions and the existence of English preposition-prone Igbo words.

5) Conclusion

The study has been centred on Igbo and English- two languages that share the same syntactic typology. They both belong to the subject-verb-object linguistics structure. Perhaps, it is on account of this similarity that an investigation of their meanings in the use of prepositions became motivated and, at last, rewarding.

The purpose for the investigation has been justified. The use of prepositions in both languages gives rise to some meanings particularly understood commonly by the native speakers of both languages. This common understanding is what is called as prepositional notions in this study.

Now established, the prepositional notions have the implication of enriching the two languages especially in the area of semantics. It will also foster some interest in English and Igbo grammatical and semantic studies.

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