IGBO ADJECTIVES AS MORPHOPHONOLOGIZED RELATIVES

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Igbo adjectives are semantically, syntactically and morphophonologically derived. Underlyingly, they are relatives that are phonologized into a suppletive form. For this reason they cannot occur in predicative position, unlike adjectives in English. They are in two sets: the relative, polar set, which can be emphasized and further suppleted, and the non-relative, antipodal or taxonomic set, which cannot be emphasized, except perhaps by way of ideophonic periphrasis. Non-emphatic adjectives are also often ambiguous because of their inevitable incorporation of two copulas, one stative and neutral, the other active and cognate. One implication of all this is that ‘Adj’ is not a primitive syntactic category in Igbo and as such is not needed for its formal description. Another is that on the basis of formal behavioural criteria, a proper census of true adjectives in Igbo can now be taken.

1. Introduction

The class of Igbo adjectives is a limited one, with only five basic elements which include the following: oma ‘good’, ‘beautiful’, ‘handsome’; ojọọ ‘bad’, ‘ugly’; ọcha ‘white’, ‘bright’; ojụ ‘black’, ‘dark’; and a rather suspect one, ukwu ‘big’, ‘large’ (see Emenanjo [1978]). Other non-basic forms are omaricha (emphatic form of oma), njokiri (emphatic form of ojọọ), ajọ (a slightly stronger form of ojọọ), and nụkwuru or nụkwu (emphatic form of ukwu) Some of the non-basic forms such as omaricha are dialectal while the basic forms are general.

2. Phonological Derivation of Adjectives

The following table sets out the phonological derivation of adjectives from verb roots through their cognate noun forms. (No attempt is made to formalize this with rules as that would go beyond the scope of this paper):
Many patterns are extractable from this list, but the most interesting observation to make is that the adjectives ocha and ojii have no emphatic alloforms. This fact is accounted for later in this paper. Also, ukwu has no identifiable verb-root source.

3. Adjectives in Associative Construction

An associative construction is one in a non-predicative form in which a modification is made of a head such that the modification is associated with it. It is an important fact of Igbo adjectives that they only occur in associative construction, unlike adjectives in English which can also occur in predicative constructions.

3.1. Basic forms in Associative Construction. Descriptive words in Igbo normally occur in post-nominal position in associative constructions, as the basic adjectives in the following:

(1) a. nwanyì ọma ‘beautiful/good woman’
   b. *ọma nwanyì

(2) a. nwanyì ọjọọ ‘ugly/bad woman’
   b. *ọjọọ nwanyì

(3) a. akwà ọcha ‘white/bright cloth’
   b. *ọcha akwà

(4) a. akwà ojii ‘black/dark cloth’
   b. *ojii akwà

(5) a. ulọ ukwu ‘large house’
   b. *ukwu ulọ

Nothing normally intervenes between head and adjectival modifier except in a singular situation such as the following:
(6) *nwanyị ǹkè ọma*  
'(selected) woman who is beautiful/good’

(7) *ulọ ǹkè ọcha*  
'(selected) house which is white/bright’

The particle ǹkè is one which distinguishes without pointing. In other words, ǹkè makes non-deictic reference. Its behaviour is different from *ahù* ‘that’, and â ‘this’ which do make deictic reference:

(8) *nwanyị ọma â*  
‘this beautiful/good woman’

(9) *nwanyị ọma ahù*  
‘that beautiful/good woman’

However, while the basic and adjectival forms occur only post-nominally, some other nominal modifiers occur both post-nominally and pre-nominally, as is the case with the elements Emenanjo [1978] terms “qualifactive nouns”, e.g. *ogologo* ‘long’, ‘tall’, *mkpụmkụ* ‘short’, *abadaba* ‘broad’, etc.

(10) *nwọkè ogologo â*  
‘this tall man’

(11) *ogologo nwọkè â*  
‘this tall man (emphatic)’

or ‘the tallness of this man’

(12) *ulọ mkpụmkụ â*  
‘this short house’

(13) *mkpụmkụ ulọ â*  
‘this short house (emphatic)’

or ‘the shortness of this house’

When qualifactive nouns precede their head nouns they become emphatic in their descriptive meaning or ambiguously suggest an inherent as opposed to a descriptive meaning. This can be illustrated using tree-diagrams as follows:

(14) 
```
      NP
       |    Dem
      /  
     N    Rel
       /     
      N. Abst
     /     
    nwọkè
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man (who has) tallness this  
‘this tall man’
From the diagrams above, it is clear that the ambiguity in the construction ogologo nwokē à derives from its two possible underlying tree-structures (15) and (16).

We thus conclude that while adjectives in their basic forms cannot be preposed, qualificative nouns may be preposed, in which case they become more emphatic.

3.2. Non-Basic forms in Associative Construction. Just as basic forms occur in post-nominal position, non-basic forms, when they exist in dialects, occur normally in the pre-nominal position, or, in rare usage, in the post-nominal position. As stated earlier, non-basic forms are emphatic. They therefore behave like qualificative nouns except for the fact that even when they occur in post-nominal position they still carry emphasis:

(17) a. ọmarichạ nwanyị à ‘this pretty woman (emphatic)’
    b. nwanyị ọmarichạ à ” (but rare)

(18) a. njokiri ulọ ahù ‘that ugly house (emphatic)’
    b. ulọ njokiri ahù ” (but rare)
(19) a. nnukwu ụlọ ahụ ‘that large house (emphatic)’
   b. ụlọ nnukwu ahụ’

   (but rare)

It is quite interesting to observe that qcha ‘white’, ‘bright’ and ojụ ‘black’
‘dark’ have no emphatic, non-basic forms. The words qcha and ojụ are in absolute
or antipodal/taxonomic opposition, while oma and ojọ are in relative or grade­
able, polar opposition. In antipodal or taxonomic opposition, the opposing ele­
ments have their positions firmly fixed at extremes in such a way that an inherent
emphasis would be redundant. In gradeable, polar opposition, on the other hand,
positions are so fluid that one can always emphasize. Norms are relative, depend­
ing on speakers’ encyclopaedic knowledge of the element of description within the
universe of discourse. The other item, ukwu ‘big, large’, is also gradeable even
though we do not have any member in opposition with it.1

4. Semantic Derivation of Adjectives

4.1. Basic forms. That adjectives are phonologically derived from nouns or their
cognate verbs is clear enough from their phonological shape (see § 1); but more im­
portantly, they are also derived from them semantically. Specifically, the adjective
is derived from a relativized predicate incorporating its cognate noun, as illustrated
below:

(20) ụlọ ahụ ọ; mmá ‘that house is good’
      house that possesses goodness

(21) ụlọ ahụ ọ; mmá ‘that house that is good’
      house that that-possesses goodness

In these sentences ọ is a copula; each could go with the cognate verb mara (made
up of the root -ma- and the -ra factitive suffix, here realized as -ra) with a slightly
different result:

(22) ụlọ ahụ mara mmá ‘that house is beautiful’
      house that does-beauty beauty

(23) ụlọ ahụ mara mmá ‘that house that is beautiful’
      house that does-beauty beauty

1The opposing item to ukwu is the ideophonic nominal nta or ntairi. This in addition to the
fact that ukwu has no corresponding cognate verb intensifies the suspicion that it is not an
adjective.
Examples (20) or (22) are sentences with *mma* in a predicative position; examples (21) or (23) are phrases, noun phrases, with relative clauses containing *mma*. Relativization in Igbo is signalled by tone change (a floating high tone steps up the preceding and following tones if they are low). Relative clause reduction involves the elision of the copula and, in the case of adjective formation, suppletion. Either (21) or (23) can be thus reduced to (24):

(24) *ụlọ oма ahụ*  
    house (that is) beautiful/good that

Example (24) is therefore a shorter paraphrase of (21) and (23) with * oma* as a suppletive form and the demonstrative postposing appropriately. In other words, * oma* (Adj) semantically incorporates a Relative Marker (tone change), a copula (*di* or *mara*), and the abstract noun *mma*. This can be stated using the following polycategorial lexical attachment format (see Gruber [1976]).

(25) Rel
    
    Mk
    
    S
    
    Cop
    
    NABST
    
    { DÌ \[MARA]\}
    
    *oma

That the semantic content of * oma* incorporates the copular *di* or *mara* and the relative tone marker can be seen from the unacceptability of the following:

(26) a. *ụlọ ahụ dì oма*
    b. *ụlọ ahụ dì ōmā*

(27) a. *ụlọ ahụ màrà oма*
    b. *ụlọ ahụ màrà ōmā*

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2This representational format is due to Gruber's formalization of semantic content and lexical environment and his concept of incorporation. A continuous underline enclosing categories, e.g. EMPH, implies that it is obligatorily incorporated. Enclosing brackets ‘( )’ implies that it is optionally incorporated (see Gruber [1976]).
Thus, the elements already incorporated are not permitted in the environment of \( \omega ma \). This accounts for Emenanjo's [1978:71] observation that "adjectives can never be used after -\( \ddot{d}i \) 'have the qualities of'". The other basic adjectives are derived in the same way: \( \ddot{o}cha \) from the noun \( \ddot{o}cha \) and the verbs \( \ddot{d}i \) and \( chara \); \( oj\ddot{i} \) from the noun \( oj\ddot{i} \) and the verbs \( \ddot{d}i \) and \( jiri \); \( oj\ddot{o} \) from the noun \( njo \) and the verbs \( \ddot{d}i \) and \( joro \). The exception here is the fifth member \( ukwu \) which has no cognate verb and as such incorporates only the noun \( ukwuu \) and the verb \( \ddot{d}i \).

That adjectives alternatively incorporate the copula \( \ddot{d}i \) and the appropriate cognate copula is responsible for their inherent ambiguity as shown earlier. We may need to clarify this further. The phrase (28a) can yield either of the paraphrases (28b) and (28c):

(28) a. \( nwany\ddot{i} \ \omega ma \ \ddot{a}h\ddot{u} \)
   b. \( nwany\ddot{i} \ \ddot{a}h\ddot{u} \ \ddot{d}i \ mma \) ‘that good woman’
   c. \( nwany\ddot{i} \ \ddot{a}h\ddot{u} \ m\ddot{a}r\ddot{a} \ mma \) ‘that beautiful woman’

In (28b) \( \ddot{d}i \) is selected, ultimately yielding the adjective gloss ‘good’; in (28c) \( m\ddot{a}r\ddot{a} \) is selected, yielding ‘beautiful’. Example (28a) can therefore be seen to be ambiguous. All the other adjectives except \( ukwu \) are ambiguous for the same reasons, but \( ukwu \) has only one meaning ‘large’ because it incorporates only the copula \( \ddot{d}i \).

4.2. Non-basic forms. The semantic derivation of non-basic forms becomes clear once the derivation of basic ones is shown. As said earlier, the difference between the basic and the non-basic adjectives is in the latter's incorporation of emphasis (and their greater syntactic mobility). It does appear, however, that emphatic, non-basic forms must incorporate one, and only one, copula. Thus, in addition to emphasis, \( \omega maricha \) incorporates only \( m\ddot{a}r\ddot{a} \), \( nj\ddot{o}kiri \) incorporates only \( joro \), \( ajo \) incorporates only \( \ddot{d}i \), and \( nnu\ddot{k}w\ddot{u}(ru) \) necessarily incorporates only \( \ddot{d}i \). These facts can be represented rather casually thus:

(29) a. \( Mk + EMPH + \{\ m\ddot{a}r\ddot{a} + \ mma = \{\ \omega maricha 'extremely beautiful' \)
   b. \( Mk + EMPH + \{\ joro \ \ddot{d}i \ + \ njo = \{\ nj\ddot{o}kiri 'extremely ugly' \}
   c. \( Mk + EMPH + \{\ \ddot{d}i \ + \ ukw\ddot{u}u = \{\ nnu\ddot{k}w\ddot{u}(ru) 'extremely large' \)

A sample lexical attachment to demonstrate the semantic content of non-basic forms is shown below (full account is given in §5):
Once again, the taxonomic colour terms *o*cha and *ojii* cannot be emphasized through suppletion. It does appear in any case that the concepts they represent can be intensified by way of some appropriate ideophonic periphrasis, as in the following sentences:

(31) *o* na  àcha  fàààà 'it shines very brightly'
    it  does  shine  fààà

(32) *o* na  èji  kpìììì 'it is very deep black or dark'
    it  does  darken  kpììì

The ideophones (underlined) here function as adverbial intensifiers. It is not yet certain what the relationship is between semantic field character and ideophonic intensification. If we recognize that the two adjectives under consideration are physical (visual) while the others are mental, then we may surmise that suppletive emphasis and ideophonic intensification function in two opposing semantic field areas, the first in the mental and the second in the physical fields.

5. Formal Syntactic Description

A fragment of Igbo grammar that would conveniently handle the observations made is given below. The subcomponents include a phrase-structure, a transformational and a lexical component.

Phrase-Structure Rules

(a) NP  \( \rightarrow \) N (Det) (Rel)

(b) Rel  \( \rightarrow \) Mk + S
(c) $S \rightarrow NP \ VP$

(d) $VP \rightarrow Cop + (EMPH) + N_{ABST}$

Comment: there is no adjective in the base. Adjectives are the result of incorporation of Relative Marker into a suppletive form (see below).

Transformational Rules

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
N & Mk & NP & Cop & N_{ABST} \\
1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5 \Rightarrow \\
\end{array}
\]

(e) $T_1(obl)$ 1 2 $\emptyset$ 4 5 (when N and NP are identical)

(f) $T_2(opt)$ 1 $\emptyset$ \[\{4 + \text{Tone}\}$ 5

Comment: lexical insertion for adjectives takes off obligatorily after $T_1$. $T_2$ yields all surface forms of non-adjectival relatives, with the null option selectable when $N_{ABST}$ is a qualificative noun, i.e. ogologo, etc., but not when it is a cognate nominal (mma, njo, etc.)

(g) $T_3(opt)$ N EMPH $N_{ABST}$

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
N & EMPH & N_{ABST} \\
1 & 2 & 3 \Rightarrow \\
2 & 3 & 1 \ (\text{when } N_{ABST} \text{ is not taxonomic})
\end{array}
\]

Comment: EMPH is obligatorily required for pre-posing to occur because the position of $N_{ABST}$ relative to $N$(the head) determines whether or not the abstract noun is emphatic.

Lexical Entries ((a) to (j) are partial)

(a) \[
\begin{array}{c}
N \\
\text{nwanỳì}
\end{array}
\]

(b) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Cop} \\
\text{di}
\end{array}
\]

(c) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Cop} \\
\text{marà}
\end{array}
\]

(d) \[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{VP} \\
\text{Cop} \\
\text{N_{ABST}} \\
\text{mma}
\end{array}
\]

(e) \[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]

(f) \[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]

(g) \[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]

(h) \[\text{(EMPH) NABST} \]
\[\text{ogologo} \]

(i) \[\text{(EMPH) NABST} \]
\[\text{mkpumkpu} \]

(j) \[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\text{C} \rightarrow \text{VP} \]

(k) \[\text{Mk} \rightarrow \text{Rel} \]
\[\text{S} \rightarrow \text{Cop} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\{\text{DI} \rightarrow \text{DI} \} \rightarrow \text{MMA} \]
\[\text{oma} \]

(l) \[\text{Mk} \rightarrow \text{Rel} \]
\[\text{S} \rightarrow \text{Cop} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\{\text{DI} \rightarrow \text{DI} \} \rightarrow \text{NJO} \]
\[\text{ojojo} \]

(m) \[\text{Mk} \rightarrow \text{Rel} \]
\[\text{S} \rightarrow \text{Cop} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\{\text{DI} \rightarrow \text{DI} \} \rightarrow \text{QCHA} \]
\[\text{otchacha} \]

(n) \[\text{Mk} \rightarrow \text{Rel} \]
\[\text{S} \rightarrow \text{Cop} \rightarrow \text{NABST} \]
\[\{\text{DI} \rightarrow \text{DI} \} \rightarrow \text{OJI} \]
\[\text{ojii} \]
Comment: Cop is in the left environment of mma, njo, ρcha, δji, and ukwu, but is not incorporated by them. Rather, it is incorporated by ọma, ojọ, ojii, and ukwu. This fact is indicated by the extent of the underline in each case. The words ogologo and mkpumkpu optionally incorporate EMPH, indicated by ‘( )’.
6. Conclusions

Basic-form adjectives in Igbo are derived from nouns, which are themselves derived from verbs by a simple morphological process (not discussed). More specifically, adjectives are predicates incorporating an abstract object nominal, a predicating copula, and a relative marker into a suppletive form. Adjectives in Igbo therefore do not exist in the base component, even though in a casual sense they are words in the language. That is, “adjective” is not a syntactic category in Igbo and as such is not needed for the formal grammatical description of the language. It is nevertheless a notional (semantic) category and therefore participates in perception and conception since it exists at a deep rather than a surface level. Carrell [1970] does not recognize this as she uses the category “Adj” in her syntactic derivations. On the other hand, Oluikpe [n.d.] is equivocal on this issue. He apparently recognizes the abstractness of adjectives when he derives them from underlying relatives (p. 66) though at the same time he incorporates “Adj” as a category in his lexical rules (pp. 41 ff).

Basic-form adjectives all incorporate two copulas, di and an appropriate cognate verb. This is with the exception of ukwu which has no cognate verb. As a result, forms incorporating two copulas are ambiguous while ukwu is not.

Again, with the exception of ukwu adjectives consist of two pairs of antonyms, ocha ‘white’, ‘bright’ vs. ojih ‘black’, ‘dark’ and oma ‘beautiful’, ‘good’ vs. ojog ‘ugly’, ‘bad’. The first pair is antipodal or taxonomic, while the second is polar or relative.

Basic-form adjectives invariably occur in post-nominal position like other nominal modifiers with the exception of qualifactive nouns. Polar adjectives can be emphasized, in which case they occur in a suppletive form. When suppleted, emphatic adjectives occur preferentially in the pre-nominal position. Antipodal adjectives cannot be emphasized since they are by nature absolute in their designation. It does appear, however, that a parallel notion of intensification can be achieved by way of an appropriate ideophonic periphrasis. While (with the exception noted) basic-form adjectives incorporate two copulas, emphatic forms appear to mandatorily incorporate only one. The reason for this is not yet clear. As a result of this they lack the form of ambiguity inherent in basic forms.

Qualifactive nouns such as ogologo behave partially like emphatic adjectives except that they bear emphasis only in the pre-nominal position whereas emphatic-form adjectives still bear emphasis even in the rare situations when they occur post-nominally. Besides, qualifactive nouns can also be used in predicative position while emphatic-form adjectives often cannot.

There are gains to derive from both our formalism and our results. In the first place, an elegant account is given of aspects of the semantics of the Igbo adjective as well as its syntactic dispositions. Other gains include a reduction in the number of primitive syntactic categories as well as in the number of rules in the transformational component, especially “spelling out” rules. In addition, a greater unity is
achieved between syntax and semantics by reducing interpretive semantic markers
in the sense posited by Katz and Fodor [1963], Katz [1972], among others.

Finally, it will be interesting to find out how adjectives behave in other lan-
guages in comparison with our findings in this paper. Discussing adjectives and
adjectival intensifiers in Hausa in relation to their syntactic peculiarities, Newman
[1968:109] states as follows:

adj(ective) + int(ensifier) must follow the head noun whereas an adj without an int
may occur either before or after the head noun, before being the normal position
(intensifiers are underlined):

(1)  rago  fari fat  ‘a snow white ram’
(2)  *fari fat rago
(3)  farin rago  ‘a white ram’
(4)  rago fari  ‘a white ram (with contrastive emphasis on ‘white’)

Newman's data is quite revealing. Intensifiers can occur directly with a colour
adjective, unlike the situation in Igbo. As obtains in Igbo, position relative to head
noun can signal emphasis. However, unlike Igbo the postnominal position is the
emphatic position. As holds in Igbo, emphasis is signalled phonologically through
suppletion. However, suppletive emphasis, unlike Igbo, involves reduction in
phonological complexity. Finally, very much unlike Igbo and against normal ex-
pectations, a presumably taxonomic term is suppleted. Newman however adds
(footnote) that “grammatically ‘adjectives’ in Hausa such as fari ‘white’ ... are
really a subclass of noun.” It will be interesting to further investigate the how's and
why's associated with adjectives in these and other languages.

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