

A Morpho-Semantic Analysis of Verbs as Lexical Categories

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Abstract

A principal aspect of language analysis is the investigation of the structure of words and their organization into the grammar of a language. A language satisfies the communicative needs of society and people using it when certain rules are observed in the production of linguistic expressions. A lexical category is a unit of classification of words in the grammar of a language and serves to portray the unique configuration properties of certain words and word classes. This paper surveys an aspect of word categorization in Èdo language (lexical category) with a special focus on the properties of the verb as a member of this class. Illustrations will be provided in the paper to justify first of all the dichotomy between different classes of words in the language (lexical vs functional) and the place of the verb in the category of words known as 'lexical'. The findings of the paper will show that the verb possesses rich morphological, syntactic and semantic features that justify its inclusion in the class of lexical class of words.

Keywords: grammatical category, lexical category, verbs and morpho-semantics.

1. Introduction

The basic concepts in a language are encoded as words which are related together within the grammar by means of categories. Baker (2004) identified three items that can be classified as lexical categories in a language as: nouns, verbs and adjectives. Rauh (2010) treats the concept of grammatical categories as 'syntactic categories' following the steps of generative grammars conception of categorization. He claims that syntactic categories are part of the syntactic description of languages, and the syntactic description of languages is concerned with the structure of sentences. Syntactic categories are therefore defined as "the set of linguistic items that can occupy the same positions in the structures of the sentence of a given language" (Rauh, 2010:28). This definition seeks to identify the members of a syntactic category and to describe the properties/features that are relevant for category membership. It equally tells us or provides an insight into which unit can occur in a given position of a sentential structure and which cannot as well as the categorial features that may be responsible for this occurrence restrictions.

Tsojon, et. al. (2014) present a critique of the contemporary classification of English word into grammatical categories. In their appraisal, it was observed that words were classified by traditional linguists based on their semantic properties. This they claim was too simplistic and hence not satisfactory for a proper analysis of word classes in a language like English. They eventually proposed a three-tier method for classifying words into categories as:

- Form (morphology),
- Distribution (syntax), and
- Function (semantics).

Tsojon, et. al. (2014:1).

The basis for this position is that a given lexical item may belong to or take the shape of different grammatical categories depending on the use to which it is put.

2. Methodology

The data collected and used in this study is the Oredo which is the Standard variety of Edo. The data were obtained by direct interview and observation of certain utterances in different contexts by the researcher who hails from that part and is a competent speaker of the language. Data were also solicited from colleagues from the University of Benin particularly from the Department of Linguistics and African Languages who are also competent native speakers of the language. The native speaker's competence of the researcher was also employed in getting these data particularly in the selection of relevant information and validation of linguistic items so collected. These data consisted basically of lexical items and larger derivations like, phrases, sentences and texts.

The analysis will be geared towards knowing the morphological shapes of constituents in Edo as well as their syntactic distribution (as the data consist mainly of lexical items, phrases and sentences of various expressions) in line with the Dixon and Aikhenvald (2004) in the prototypical treatment of the class of Adjectives in some languages. They (Dixon and

Aikhenvald) were of the view that word classes can be identified between languages (and assigned the same names) based on two criteria: similarity of syntactic function and similarity of meaning.

3. The verb in Edo

The verb is the class of lexical categories used to refer to actions, process, activity and state engaged in by an argument. The verb is the lexical element at the nucleus of a clausal structure as its features on the one hand determines the spatio-temporal relations of other elements in a sentence while also determining the number and compatibility of arguments in a derivation. Omorogbe (2012) identifies different classes of the verbs in Edo based on their semantic features reflecting the peculiarities of different activities and how these determine the class of verbs used. Before delving into the semantic classification of verbs in the language, we will first of all look at the morphological compositions of the different verbs in Edo in the sub-sections that follow.

3.1 Morphological Classification of the Edo Verb

The Edo verbs, like their nominal counterparts, possess two basic morphological shapes: simple and complex. The simple verbs are those with a simple morphological form and these verbs cannot be decomposed into different component units. These verbs are also known as inalienable verbs while other verbal forms are the composition of the simple verb and other word classes and as such can be decomposed into their component units when the need arises. This second set of verbs is known as alienable verbs and is the complex form of verbs in Edo. The different morphological forms of the verb as a lexical category are discussed below.

a. Inalienable verbs in Edo

The simple verb is the basic form of the verb in Edo. This verb form cannot be subdivided into different component units or morphs. This is the form of the verb in its natural state as seen from the examples below:

- | | | | |
|----|-------|-------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | i. | kpòló | 'sweep' |
| | ii. | lò | 'grind' |
| | iii. | dò | 'do' |
| | iv. | diá | 'straighten' |
| | v. | bàn | 'pull' |
| | vi. | khùí | 'lock' |
| | vii. | dùé | 'scatter (of uncountable nouns)' |
| | viii. | rríé | 'take' |

The verbs here cannot be separated into their component units as this will mean doing a phonological analysis of the different sound segments employed in the derivation of these words. They therefore represent the form of the verb stem without the addition of other morphs and are thus described as inalienable elements.

b. Alienable verbs in Edo

This is the form of the verb after undergoing a morphological process such as compounds. A verb in the language can combine with another verb, a nominal or a particle to derive this form of the verb. So a complex verb is one that is composed of more than one element as seen from the examples below:

2.	Verb Stem	Compound	Derivation	Gloss
i.	mù 'carry'	mu + egbe ready body	mùègbé	'to get ready'
ii.	dò 'stealthily'	do + rrie stealthily take	dòrrié	'steal'
iii.	rrié 'take'	rrie + rro take hook	rrièrró	'hang'
iv.	tié 'read'	tie + gbèn read write	tiègbèn	'dictate'
v.	fián 'cut'	fian + re cut eat	fiànré	'bite'
vi.	rrié 'take'	rrie + rre	rrièrré	'bring'

The verbs in 2a-f are derived verbs or compound verbs as a result of the process of derivation. A variety of combinatorial patterns can be found in the structures like, Verb-Verb, Verb-Noun and Verb-Adverb. The compound verbs (especially the Verb-Verb and Verb-Adverb compound) express acts that can be called double or two-in-one activities. The verb, dò 'stealthily' for instance combined with, mù 'carry' to express the combined act of hiding to take something which is stealing.

3.2 Semantic classification of the Verb in Edo

The present study will employ the prototypical classification system for the verbs in Edo by dividing them into the following semantic classes based on the description of verbal prototypes in Dixon and Aikhenvald (2004). These classifications are supposed to account for the nature of the different activities verbs are used to portray in a language. The different semantic manifestations of verbal categories in Edo are described below.

a. Motion verbs

This is the class of verbs associated with events that are transitional in nature. They are used to express the kind of activities that involve movement or locomotion. The following examples comprise of motion events or activities in the language.

3. i. rhùlé 'run'
- ii. kpàá 'leave'
- iii. fi 'throw'
- iv. rhié 'take'
- v. mù 'carry'
- vi. sàán 'jump'
- vii. dàn 'hop'

viii. hìin ‘climb’

The verbs above are used to portray different activities embarked on by animate arguments. Some of the activities indicated above have similar connotations by different participants like sàán ‘jump’ (human nouns) and dàn ‘hop’ (non-human nouns).

b. Verbs of rest

These verbs specify events that have to do with a locomotive activity. The activities sometimes can be the state of an entity at a particular time or the position taken at other times. The examples below represent this verb class in the language.

4. i. hẹwẹ ‘rest’
- ii. tótàà ‘sit’
- iii. dàyí ‘hold’
- iv. lòvbiẹ ‘lie down’
- v. mùdià ‘stand’
- vi. vbiẹ ‘sleep’

c. Affective verbs

These verbs are used to show the effects of an activity. They are activities portrayed by a verb which affect an entity and it is visible or concrete. These activities involve some physical exertion of force by an entity on another entity (ies). Examples of affective verbs in Èdo are presented as follows:

5. i. fì ‘throw’
- ii. gbè ‘beat’
- iii. giẹn ‘burn’
- iv. bòlò ‘peel’
- v. bọ ‘build’
- vi. lẹ ‘cook’
- vii. guòghọ ‘destroy’

d. Verbs of Attention

These verbs are used to denote activities involving any of the five organs of sense like hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting and smelling. They are associated with activities that have to do with perception based on any of these senses. The verbs of this class in the language are given below:

6. i. bẹghé/dẹghé ‘see’
- ii. miẹ ‘see’
- iii. họn ‘hear’
- iv. bàlọ ‘pain’
- v. tọn ‘roast’
- vi. wiá ‘smell’

vii. dānmwé ‘taste’

e. Verbs of Speech

These are verbs that denote verbal actions, those activities that involve the anatomical properties of language (speech/utterances). These verbs are outlined below:

7. i. gò ‘shout’
- ii. vàn ‘shout’
- iii. tà ‘say’
- iv. gùán ‘talk’
- v. tié ‘read’
- vi. nò ‘ask’
- vii. khuènnié ‘answer’
- viii. tà má ‘tell’

The classes of verbs identified here are in line with Dixon and Aikhenvald (2004) prototypical classification and identification of grammatical categories based on semantic contents. These are not the sum total of the classification of verbs in the language but an extension of what Omọṛẹgbẹ (2012) did with respect to the verbal classes in Èdo.

The forms of the Èdo verbs can also be discussed much in the same way as the prototypical classes of the verbs presented thus far. Like the nouns examined earlier, these verbs exhibit two basic morphological forms: simple and complex which will we refer to here as alienable and inalienable verbs respectively.

4. Criteria for Classifying Verbs as a Lexical Category

In the preceding sections, the common properties of what is called a lexical category (Verbs) were examined. In this section, an attempt will be made to provide the modalities that informed the decision to place this word class into this category. Information will be provided on the morphological features and semantic functions. It is expected that at the end of the analysis and illustrations in this section that more insights will be provided into the peculiarities and place of this two-word class in the grammar of a language like Èdo.

4.1 Morphological criterion for lexical categories

Morphology has to do with the study of words and their units or morphs as well as how they are organized in a language. It is one level of linguistics that shows the composition of words from sound units or phonemes and the different ways a word can be modified. This modification either results in the extension of the semantic information in the base before modification or leads to an outright change in the semantic content. These are known as inflectional and derivational morphology respectively. In this subsection, therefore, we will be evaluating the morphological properties of the verbs in Èdo.

4.2 The morphological criterion of verbal categories

The Edo verb can be modified morphologically for time and number. The morphological marking of verbs in the language reflect a tendency towards agglutination as this is done mainly by affixation. The Edo verb is inflected for time morphologically by means of the –rv suffix which is used to mark past tense on the verb when it occurs in clause final positions. The examples below represent the morphological marking of verbs for tense (past).

8.	Verb stem		-rv suffix	Derivation
a.	bàn ‘pull’		-re	bánrèn ‘pulled’
b.	bié ‘deliver (of a child)’		-re	bièrè ‘delivered (of a child)’
c.	dò ‘to do’		-re	dórè ‘did’
d.	diá ‘to straighten’		-re	diàrè ‘straightened’
e.	giè ‘send’		-re	gièrè ‘sent’
f.	wù ‘die’	-ru		wúrù ‘died’
g.	gbèn ‘write’		-rèn	gbènrèn ‘wrote’

The verbs in 8a-g are marked for past tense by the –rv suffix reflecting the dual nature of this tense marking in the language (which is basically phonological by means of a high tone //). Based on Omorogbe’s (2012) analysis of the inflectional category in Edo, the –rv suffix is the combination of a constant consonantal phoneme /r/ and a vowel /v/ whose basic shape is the mid-high front unrounded oral vowel /e/. Her analysis of the –rv suffix in Edo is that this is a morphologically realized affix, dependent on the quality of the last vowel in the stem of the verb it is attached to. Thus, the suffix is oral when the stem to which it is attached is oral and nasal when the verb stem is nasal. She further states that these vowels agree in tongue height, lip rounding and position of the tongue in the course of their realization and always carries a low tone. She was of the opinion that the –rv suffix as a post-verbal marker is both a tense and aspectual marker contrary to previous positions that it marks only tense in the language. This suffix was also claimed to participate in transitivity alternation due to the fact that it occurs in clause final position which will be contested in the present work.

The Edo verbs are also morphologically inflected for number by the –lv suffix. The derivation involving such a suffix denotes an activity that is repeated or repeatedly carried out. The claim here is that the action is not always a repeated one but a reflection of the number of participants or arguments associated with the action or activity. The following are examples of number inflection on verbs in the language.

9.	Verb stem		-lv suffix	Derivation
a.	gbè ‘kills’		-le	gbèlé ‘kill’
b.	dè ‘buys’		-lẹ	dèlẹ ‘buy’
c.	bọ ‘builds’		-lọ	bọlọ ‘build’
d.	kpàn ‘plucks’		-nọ	kpànnọ ‘pluck’
e.	bián ‘slices’		-nọ	biànnọ ‘slice’
f.	kièn ‘sells’	-nẹ		kiènnẹ ‘sells’

The verbs in 9 are morphologically inflected by the –lv suffix. This inflection results in as a result of the multiplication of the activities/actions communicated by the verbs. This is directly related to the number of arguments (either subject, object or both) involved in the activities specified in the clause where they are used. It is to be noted that as observed by Omoregbè (2012), the –lv suffix is a composition of the alveolar lateral /l/ and a vowel which is conditioned by the type of vowel in the stem of the verb being suffixed.

4.3 The semantic criterion of verbal categories

A major semantic property of the verb in a language is its transitivity effect on the structure of a derivation. This is the feature of the verb that tells or shows us the number of arguments (subjects and objects NPs) a verb subcategorizes for or selects. While some verbs take just a single argument, some take two or more arguments while others alternate between selecting a single argument or more. Verbs that select a single argument are known as intransitive verb, those that take more than one argument are known as transitive verbs while those that take either one or more arguments are known as ditransitive verbs. Verbal transitivity shows the functional ability of a verb in the course of arguments' selection and distribution. The subsections below show the manifestations of verbal transitivity in the distribution of arguments in the language.

a. Transitive Verbs in Èdo

A verb is said to be transitive when it syntactically subcategorizes for an argument in object position. This is often linked to the classification of verbs as action words. A transitive verb selects more than one argument and shows the effect of a particular action or activity performed by an entity (subject) on another entity (object). The derivations below show the subcategorial attribute of transitive verbs in the language.

10. i.	Òsàgié	bàlò	àmè	ii.	Èbàbá	bò	òwá
	Osagie	pres-scoop	water		father	pst-build	house
	'Osagie is scooping water'				'Father built a house'		
iii.	Òsàzèè	tié	èbé	iv.	Íyè	dé	àkhé
	Osazee	pres-read	book		mother	pst-buy	pot
	'Osazee is reading'				'Mother bought a pot'		
v.	Úyì	kpàán	àlimòí	vi.	Òzó	mú	ágá
	Uyi	pst-pluck	orange		Ozo	pst-carry	chair
	'Uyi plucked an orange'				'Ozo carried a chair'		

The derivations in 10i-vi above are transitive because the verbs : *bàlò*, *bò*, *tié*, *dé*, *kpàán* and *mù* subcategorize for an object NP . This is possible as a result of the presence of the verbal features: [+action, +effect]. The verbs demonstrate the activities carried out by the arguments: *Òsàgié*, *Èbàbá*, *Òsàzèè*, *Íyè*, *Úyì* and *Òzó*. The results of these activities are : *àmè*, *òwá*, *èbé*, *àkhé*, *àlimòí* and *ágá*.

b. Intransitive Verbs in Edo

This category of Edo verbs includes those that do not subcategorize for more than one argument in a clause. In these derivations, verbal attributes are exclusive to the subject arguments which are the only ones permitted or selected by the verb. The verbs are mainly stative which express the state of being or activity that has no effect on other arguments except the performer of the activity. Consider the examples in 11 below:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 11.i. Òsàsú gùá gbè
Òsàsú ablility hab-dance
'Òsàsú can dance' | ii. Òsàkpòlò vbié
Osakpòlò pres-sleep
'Osakpòlò is sleeping' |
| iii. Ìdélé gbinnàrèn
Idele pst-fight-rv
'Idele fought' | iv. Ídádà gòrò
Idada pst-shout-rv
'Idada shouted' |
| v. Òmómó kùú
baby pres-play
'The baby is playing' | vi. Írán lẹ̀èrè
they pst-ran
'They fled' |

The structures in 11i-vi above are the manifestations of verbal intransitivity in the language. The activities expressed by the verbs : gbè, vbié, gbinná, gò, kùú and lẹ̀ è are exclusive to the subject arguments : Òsàsú, Òsàkpòlò, Ìdélé, Ídádà, Òmómó and Írán . The basic feature of intransitive verbs is the presence of a single argument (the subject NP).

c. Pseudo-transitive Verbs in Edo

A further syntactic characteristic exhibited by Edo verbs is that of pseudo-transitive (dual transitivity function). This verbal form either subcategorizes for an extra argument(s) or does not. Pseudo-transitive verbs reflect activities that are either exclusive to the subject of the derivation or whose effects can be felt on other elements. We say that such verbs participate in transitivity alternation as they alternate between a single argument and two or more arguments. The derivations in 12 below show the manifestations of this verbal form.

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------|
| 12.a (i) Òsàsógíè tàlò gbé
Osasogie pres-talk much
'Osasogie talks too much' | = | intransitive |
| (ii) Òsàsógíè tàlò èmwé
Osasogie pres-talk word
'Osasogie is talking' | = | transitive |
| b. (i) Òsàsú kpòlò
Òsàsú pres-sweep
'Òsàsú is sweeping' | = | intransitive |
| (ii) Òsàsú kpòlò òwá
Òsàsú pres-sweep house
'Òsàsú is sweeping the house' | = | transitive |
| c. (i) Òtàsówiè nwọ nẹ
Otasowię past-drink already
'Otasowię is drunk' | = | intransitive |

- (ii) Òtàsówiè nwó àmè = transitive
Otasowiè past-drink water
'Otasowiè drank water'

The data in 12a-c above show the different realizations of ditransitive verbs in Èdo. These verbs have the dual function of selecting a single argument (intransitivity) as well as more than one argument (transitive) in the derivations considered. A further manifestation of this pseudo-transitive class of verbs is the case of cognate derivations shown in example 13 below.

13. a. (i) Òzó nwìná = intransitive
Ozo pres-work
'Ozo is working'
(ii) Òzó nwìnà ìnwìnà = transitive
Ozo pres-work work
'Ozo is working (real work)'
- b. (i) Òdósà vbiè = intransitive
Odosà pres-sleep
'Odosà is sleeping'
(ii) Òdósà vbiè òvbé dàn = transitive
Odosà past-sleep sleep bad
'Odosà slept badly'

The verbs in the structures above (13a-b) are ditransitive but cognate as the object argument selected by the verb is a copy of the verb (nominalized verbs). The object arguments are duplicates of the verb which are copied into the object slot in the derivation.

5. Conclusion

The presentations and discussions thus far in this paper have been on the status and properties of the verbs in Èdo as lexical category within the word classes obtainable in the language. This word, we claimed possesses some morphological and semantic features that separate it from other word classes. The verbal element constitutes the principal constituent of a clause without which, the defining characteristics of such a clause will be violated and its grammatical description will be considered incomplete. There exist a number of agreement relations between other constituents of a clause and the verbs by way of such concepts as: selectional restriction, subcategorization, number and time specification.

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