

A NOTE ON THE GRAMMATICAL HOMOPHONES OF -k-

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One of the most difficult problems in understanding Ogbíá is the large number of homophones which occur in the language. Many lexical and grammatical words which sound alike have different meanings and syntactic functions. This paper examines the homophones of -k- and their four principal syntactic functions. It is argued that an understanding of the grammatical structure of Ogbíá has to be closely linked to pragmatics, i.e. the ways the users of the language employ and shape it to convey meaning in verbal interaction.

Les fonctions grammaticales des homonymes de -k- font le sujet d'exposé de ce texte. On observe que -k- fonctionne comme mécanisme pour désigner des structures grammaticales différentes telles que l'interrogation, la négation, proposition subordonnée adverbiale et mot enclitique.

0. INTRODUCTION

The language under investigation is Ogbíá. It is classified by Williamson (1980) under the Central Delta group of languages which is a sub-branch of Delta Cross. The larger family under which this language is subsumed is Benue-Congo. The dialect described here is the one spoken in Kòlò. The people call themselves and their language Aghólò or Kòlò. In this text, the following orthographic symbols have been used:

/b/ represents a bilabial implosive while

/d̥/ stands for an alveolar implosive.

Ogbíá has two sets of vowels which are classified as [± ATR]

[+ ATR]	[- ATR]
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/i/	/ɪ/
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/e/	/ɛ/
-----	-----

/u/	/ʊ/
-----	-----

/o/	/ɔ/
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/a/	/ɑ/
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[-ATR] vowels are transcribed thus: / ɨ ɛ ʊ ɔ ɑ /

Four tone marks have been employed. They are written as '(high), -(downstep), `(low) and ^falling.

0.1 THE METHOD

The approach adopted in the treatment of this topic is essentially pragmatic. Pragmatics is defined narrowly in this text and refers to:

- (1) a description of actual texts which have occurred and the context of utterance of some of these texts.
- (2) an explanation of the meaning potential of the homophonous morpheme -k-,
- (3) an illustration of the grammatical functions of -k- in verbal interaction to signal such notions like (i) interrogative (ii) negative (iii) adverbial notions of time and purpose, and (iv) intensifier.

My method then borders on making statements of meaning and it is in this respect that I acknowledge the influence of Halliday (1973 and 1974), an exponent of British contextualism. To a lesser extent, I am also indebted to Dik (1978), an exponent of functionalism.

Halliday places emphasis on the most ordinary everyday uses of language and the relation of language to social man 'Since language is the means whereby people interact, how else can one look at language except in social context?' (cf Halliday, 1974).

'Halliday thus turns his attention away from the preoccupation of linguists of the 1960s whose main emphasis was on the investigation of language as knowledge of what the speaker knows to the neglected aspect of language which concerns itself with language as social behaviour or language in relation to social man.' (cf. Dittmar, 1976).

Working in Halliday's tradition, an attempt will be made to portray what native speakers of Aghólō can say and mean when employing the various homophones of -k-. It will be shown that morpheme -k- can express a variety of meanings and that a functional view of language which defines language as relations based on meaning, with meaning defined in terms of function, satisfactorily accounts for this multivalued morpheme.

1. INTERROGATIVE

Many question words which occur in English have equivalents in Ogbíá.

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| (1) Who? | Ànyén? |
| (2) What? | Èrê? or Méré? |
| (3) When? | Àkàràífyè? |
| (4) Where? | Àkàrágà? |
| (5) Which? | Òkéré? |
| (6) Why? | Ìdyékà? |
| (7) How many? | Èní? |

These question words can constitute meaningful utterances when used in isolation in everyday discourse; for instance, if I'm in the house when I hear the doorbell ring, I can say in response **Anyén?** or **Anyénè?** i.e. 'Who is that?' Similarly, if, within the household, the children have been kicking up a row, I can impatiently call out from where I am, **Èrê?** i.e. 'What on earth can the matter be?' These question words, however, when they occur in longer utterances have to be accompanied by the question particle **-k-** as in 8-12:

- (8) **Ànyén k' ádíghì?**
 Who dó (past)
 'Who did that?'
- (9) **Èré k' ásòr?**
 What happen (past)
 'What happened?'
- (10) **Ènà k' ágì màkárágà?**
 he/she go (past) where
 'Where did he/she go?'
- (11) **Ìdyékà k' éná àrúè?**
 Why he/she come (past)
 'Why did he/she come?'
- (12) **Òdó k' ághò mènì ógyè?**
 odo buy(past) how many knives
 'How many knives did Odo buy?'

2. NEGATIVE

A negative morpheme **do** occurs in the language. It has a greater frequency of occurrence than **-k-** which is used mainly to negate imperative sentences, relative clauses and in threats. Both never co-occur together in the same utterance. In simple statements and questions **do** is always the form used as is illustrated in 18-20.

- (18) **Mí bènà dó mánwiny.**
 I have nòt children
 'I don't have children/I have no children'
- (19) **Èná òrú dó mádóddòn.**
 he/she come(fut)nòt today
 'He/she will not come today'
- (20) **Ànwá ídó dó mísèn?**
 you eat (pres) nòt now
 'You're not eating now?'

2.1 NEGATIVE COMMANDS

When **-k-** is prefixed to an infinitive verb stem, it signals a command in the negative.

	<u>Infinitive</u>		<u>Affirmative</u>		<u>Negative</u>	
(21)	ògị 'to go'	Gịé!	'Go!'	k' ògị	'Don't go!'	
(22)	òrù 'to come'	Túé!	'Come!'	k' òrú	'Don't come!'	
(23)	òdè 'to eat'	Đé!	'Eat!'	k' òdè	'Don't eat!'	
(24)	òmàrà 'to stand'	Màrà!	'Stand!'	k'òmàrà	'Don't stand!'	

2.2 NEGATIVE RELATIVE CLAUSES

The morpheme **-k-** is the variant employed in negative relatives. Note that in this case no prohibition is entailed unlike the examples above listed under negative commands viz; (21) - (24).

- (25) a. Ànwúnòm bhà wá árù.
 people the they come (past)
 'The people came.'
- b. Ànwúnòm bhà árù bhà
 people the come (past) the
 'The people who came.'
- c. Ànwúnòm k' órù bhà
 people not come (past) the
 'The people who didn't come.'

3. SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION

When **-k-** occurs before nominals, it can function as a linker between a main clause and its subordinate. The dependent clause can be an adverbial clause of time or purpose.

3.1 TIME

- (26) Wààdé k'iyàr tákòdù
 we eat (pres) before we sleep (fut)
 'We must eat before we go to sleep.'
- (27) k' ánwà ịgị, pùrù áwà!
 when you go(fut) ask them
 'When you go, greet them!'

3.2 PURPOSE

- (28) Òkpe dō k' éná táléghé
 pay' nót for he/she cry (fut)
 'It is of no avail for him/her to cry.'
- (29) Gíé k' ághò midì ịná
 gò'so as buy (pres) some fish
 'Go and buy some fish!'

4. INTENSIFIER

There's yet another function of -k- which is well illustrated in (30) and (31).

(30) *Ànwà k' ígír.*
 you thanks
 'More thanks is actually due to you'

(31) *Ànwà k' émòr.*
 you sang
 'you even sang better.'

In these contexts, -k- is a meaning modifier and an intensifier. It expresses great gratitude or appreciation for favours or services rendered to someone. When an individual says then 'Anwà k' ígír.' he means that the person he is addressing is more deserving of his gratitude and thankfulness. He is saying in a nutshell that the favours he has received are nothing to compare with what he can offer or do in return. Similarly in item (31) if the leader of a dance or song troupe congratulates his troupe after an impressive performance, the troupe can respond thus: 'Anwà k' émòr'. In this sense, they mean that it is more befitting for them to congratulate their leader than the other way round. In short they are saying we may not have done so well if it hadn't been for your efforts.

5. CONCLUSION

The grammatical homophones of *Ògbiá* are best accounted for in the framework of a pragmatic theory in which the constituents of linguistic expressions are explained in terms of the ways these expressions can be used to communicate meaning in verbal interaction.

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