

IGBO NA + PARTICIPLE: A SEMANTIC EXAMINATION

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'Na + participle' is generally upheld as the structure that motivates the progressive aspect. This paper shares the same view. However, it considers the semantic projections of the structure signaled by the constituent verb form and suggests that the structure expresses the progressive and habitual aspect simultaneously. The paper regards this as the nebulous character of the structure, which is neutralized by the selection of a time expression. The time expression properly situates the progressive aspect. No expression is observed to properly situate the habitual aspect. Furthermore, the paper points out that there are verbs, the participial forms of which motivate the structure to express only the progressive or only the habitual aspect. This is tested with '-ga suffix' and the 'je-auxiliary', which distinguish the progressive and habitual aspect in some dialects of Igbo, specifically Owerri and its satellite dialects. Finally, the paper demonstrates that there are verbs, the participial forms of which never constitute the structure to express progressive or habitual aspect. The verbs motivating this feature are quality-expressing verbs referred to as adjectival verbs by Emenanjo (2005). In fact, Uwalaka (1988:180) evidences the feature.

La séquence 'na+participe' est généralement considérée comme la structure qui motive l'aspect progressif. Cet article partage cet avis. Cependant, il prend en considération les projections sémantiques de la structure telles que signalées par le constituant de la forme verbale et suggère que la structure traduit l'aspect progressif et habituel de manière simultanée. L'article considère cette caractéristique comme celle qui rend cette structure nébuleuse et dont la neutralisation se fait par le biais du choix de l'expression temporelle. L'expression temporelle situe de manière efficace l'aspect progressif. Aucune expression n'est observée pour situer de manière adéquate l'aspect habituel. En outre, l'article signale le fait qu'il y a des verbes dont les formes participatives motivent la structure pour exprimer soit le progressif seulement soit l'aspect habituel seulement. C'est l'utilisation du suffixe -ga et de l'auxiliaire je qui permettent de distinguer l'aspect progressif et l'habituel dans certains dialectes igbo, notamment le dialecte Owerri et ses dialectes satellites. En dernière analyse, l'article démontre qu'il y a des verbes dont la forme participative ne constitue jamais la structure pour exprimer l'aspect progressif ou l'aspect habituel. Les verbes qui motivent cette caractéristique sont des verbes qui expriment la qualité et que Emenanjo (2005) appelle des verbes adjectivaux. En fait, Uwalaka (1988 20) prouve bien l'existence de ce trait.

0. INTRODUCTION

Semantics handles meaning, which is an unstable phenomenon: a situation responsible for the little attention it has received. In fact, a better picture of the problematic nature of meaning is captured in the following words of Cherry (1957:114):

... to speak of utterances and their meaning is almost to make a dualism, 'body' and 'soul', 'substance' and 'form'. The meaning and the utterance form a unit: a 'meaningful utterance'. A 'meaning' is not a label tied around the neck of a spoken word or phrase. It is more like the beauty of a complexion, which lies altogether in the eyes of the beholder...

The haze associated with meaning as implied by Cherry could have been the factor contributory to Chomsky's non-recognition of semantics in his early theories (cf. 1957, 1965). Particularly, his early theories considered semantics as a non-generative component of grammar: a situation that won the theories strong criticisms

from Lakoff (1971) Fillmore (1977), and Langacker (1987). Chomsky was not the only one who held this view. Akmajian et al (2001:227) comment that

Semantics has not always enjoyed a prominent role in Modern Linguistics. From the World War 1 to the early 1960s, semantics was viewed, especially in the United States, as not quite respectable: its inclusion in a grammar... was considered by many as a sort of methodological impurity or an objective to be reached only in the distant future.

The foregoing situation is now history. Today, it is one of the best practices to recognize and consider semantics, even with its attendant problems, as a proper part of grammar. Akmajian et al corroborate this in the following words:

It is often said that a grammar describes what fluent speakers know of their language- their linguistic competence... If that is so, we can argue that whatever fluent speakers know of their language is a proper part of a description of that language. Given this, then the description of meaning is a necessary part of the description of a speaker's linguistic knowledge (i.e. the grammar of a language must contain a component that describes what speakers know about the semantics of the language), p227.

With the growing interest in semantics and its adequate recognition as a component of the grammar of language, one revelation has come forth. The recognition has to do with the fact that the semantic component is involved in the representation of beliefs, expectations, etc. Hence, the Logical Form (LF), determined by grammatical rules is the component that accounts for reference conditions.

This revelation forms the basis of this paper. With recourse to it, the 'na + participle' structure in the Standard Igbo will be analyzed with a view to accounting for the computation of its referential nature, which has implications for the aspectual categories it motivates.

1. EXPLICATION OF TERMS RELEVANT TO THE TOPIC

1.1 ASPECT

Ndimele (1993:82) comments, "Aspect is a grammatical category which designates the internal temporal organization of a situation described by the verb". This is corroborated by Richards et al (2002:34). Moreover, they have classified it into two, lexical and grammatical aspect.

Lexical aspect, according to Richards et al, refers to the internal semantics of verbs, which can be grouped into a number of categories such as states, activities, accomplishments, achievements, etc. Verbs of state refer to unchanging conditions, e.g. *want, have, be*, etc; verbs of activities refer to processes with no inherent beginning or end point, e.g. *play, walk, breathe*, etc; verbs of accomplishment are durative, i.e., they last for a period of time, but have an inherent end point, e.g. *read a book, write a novel*; and verbs of achievement, which are non-durative and have an inherent end point, e.g. *finish, realize, arrive*.

Grammatical aspect in the words of Richards et al refers to "the resources provided by a language (such as verbal auxiliaries, prefixes and suffixes) to encode different perspectives taken by a speaker towards activities, events and states".

Trask (1993:21) comments that the aspectual categories often expressed are perfective aspect, perfect aspect and imperfective aspect. The perfective aspect,

according to him, involves a verb form that hardly expresses reference to the internal temporal constituency of a situation. He illustrates this with the English sentence, “Lisa learned French in Caen” (cf. p204). Furthermore, he points out that this aspectual category has a sub-division, punctual. This expresses an action or state confined to a single instant of time, e.g. “Hillary reached the summit of Everest” (cf. p224).

The perfect aspect associates with the verb form that expresses a state resulting from an earlier event. Trask explains that in most languages, the same verb form may be used to express related but distinct perfect aspect notions, such as the experiential, the hot news and the resultative.

The imperfective aspect makes reference to the internal structure of the activity expressed by the verb. Trask notes its sub-divisions, which include habitual, progressive, iterative, durative, etc (cf. p135).

From the comments above, it is obvious that aspect is a product of the form and meaning of the verb, i.e. a product of the morphosyntax and semantics of the verb. Put simply, it is morphologically and semantically distinguished for the part it plays in syntax.

1.2 PARTICIPLE

Trask (1993:200) comments that the participle is any of the various non-finite verb forms which can act as the heads of verb phrases functioning as adjectival or adverbial modifiers. He points out that English exhibits an imperfective or present participle in –ing and a passive or past participle of variable formation.

Richards et al (2002:386) agree that the participle is a non-finite verb. However, they restrict its function to be adjectival. Moreover, they explain that it can occur in passive sentences and is used to form perfect and progressive aspect.

Trask’s and Richards et al’s positions have more implications for English than other languages. However, what seems universal in their positions is that the participle is a non-finite verb form.

Emenanjo (1978:128-9) discusses the form of the participle in Igbo. According to him, it is marked by a vowel prefix **e-** or **-a** and can take inflections. He further points out that it occurs with its complement and follows any of the Igbo auxiliaries.

The participle as discussed by Emenanjo has almost the same form as the participle in Echie as discussed by Ndimele (2003:60). However, he (Ndimele) classifies the participle in Echie as simple and obligative. The simple participle in Echie, according to him, is marked by **-e** or **-a**, while the obligative participle is marked by a high tone homorganic nasal prefix.

As pointed out by Emenanjo, the participle in Igbo follows any of the auxiliaries, for example, **na**. This paper is concerned with the structure which **na** forms with the participle in Igbo with a view to determining the aspectual categories the structure motivates and the verbs that are involved in such cases.

2. Na + PARTICIPLE¹

Emenanjo (1978:128) observes that all Igbo verbs have participles: an indication that **na** has a wide scope of occurrence with the participial forms of Igbo verbs.

It is common to find in the literature on Igbo grammar that ‘**na** + participle’ expresses the progressive aspect. This is the case in Green and Igwe (1963:170-1); Emenanjo (1978:173-8); Uba-Mgbemena (2006:75-6); etc, as illustrated in their examples to show participles. (1-3) evidences the examples by Green and Igwe; Emenanjo; and Uba-Mgbemena respectively:

- | | | |
|-----|--|--------------------------------------|
| (1) | a. O □ nà-àsu □ nrí | She is pounding food |
| | b. Anyi □ nà-ekè anú □ | We are sharing meat |
| (2) | a. Ànyi □ nà-àru □ u □ lò □ | We build/are (were) building a house |
| | b. U □ zò □ nà-àzu □ ahī □ a | Uzo trades/is (was) trading |
| (3) | a. Ha nà-èbe akwa | They are crying |
| | b. O □ gà nà-enyere gi aka n’o □ rū □ | He will be helping you at work |

Observe that only the gloss analysis of (2), from Emenanjo, squints in two directions, namely habitual and progressive. One therefore wonders why he (Emenanjo) uses the example to illustrate what he calls progressive-normal: it is an indication that he holds on to the general order. Whatever is the case, this paper provides a more elaborate analysis of ‘**na** + participle’. Particularly, it illustrates that some participial forms of verbs express both the progressive and habitual aspect with **na**. Abraham (1967) is not therefore wrong in commenting that the structure, ‘**na** + participle’ marks the present habitual. Instances of the mix-up in its expression of both the progressive and habitual aspect as evident in (2) motivate such analysis. Some, in the same structure, express only the progressive aspect; some only the habitual aspect, while some others express neither the progressive nor habitual aspect. Each of these cases are handled with examples in the sections below.

2.1 Na + PARTICIPLE EXPRESSING PROGRESSIVE AND HABITUAL ASPECT

The progressive aspect, in the words of Trask (1993:219), refers to “an action or event which is in progress at the moment of time serving as the reference point for the utterance”. In contrast, the habitual aspect describes an action which is regularly or consistently performed by some entity, (cf. Trask, 1993:125).

(4–8) could hardly be computed as distinguishing between actions or events describable as being only progressive or only habitual. Based on this, we argue that ‘**na** + participle’ in the sentences simultaneously expresses progressive and habitual aspect.

- | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|
| (4) | O □ nà-èri nri. |
| | 3SCL AUX-PROG/HAB-eat food |
| | S/he is eating/S/he eats. |

¹ The following abbreviations have been used in this section: PROG, progressive; HAB, habitual aspect; 3SCL, third person singular pronominal clitic; AUX, auxiliary; PST, past tense; VP, vowel prefix; ?, unacceptable; *, not possible to occur. Moreover, only the high tone is left unmarked. Note that the down-stepped tone is marked by the macron.

- (5) **O** **nà-ekè** **akwu****kwo**.
 3SCL AUX-PROG/HAB-share book
 S/he is sharing books/S/he shares books.
- (6) **Ezè** **nà-àñụ** **mmanya**.
 Eze AUX-PROG/HAB-drink wine
 Eze is drinking/Eze drinks wine (Eze always drinks beer/wine)
- (7) **Ọ** **nà-èrè** **azụ**.
 3SCL AUX-PROG/HAB-sell fish
 S/he is selling fish/S/he sells fish. (S/he always sells fish)
- (8) **Àda** **nà-èsi** **nri**.
 Ada AUX-PROG/HAB-cook food
 Ada is cooking/Ada cooks (Ada always cooks food)

The past forms of (4–8) represented as (9–13) further illustrate the simultaneous expression of the progressive and habitual aspects.

- (9) **Ọ** **nààrà èri** **nri**.
 3SCL AUX-PST-PROG/HAB-eat food
 S/he was eating/S/he used to eat food
- (10) **Ọ** **nààrà ekè** **akwụkwọ**.
 3SCL AUX-PST-PROG/HAB-share book
 S/he was sharing books/S/he used to share books.
- (11) **Ezè** **nààrà àñụ** **mmanya**.
 Eze AUX-PST-PROG/HAB-drink wine
 Eze was drinking/Eze used to drink wine.
- (12) **Ọ** **nààrà èrè** **azụ**.
 3SCL AUX-PST-PROG/HAB-sell fish
 S/he was selling fish/S/he used to sell fish.
- (13) **Àda** **nààrà èsi** **nri**.
 Ada AUX-PST-PROG/HAB-cook food
 Ada was cooking/Ada used to cook food.

(4–13) demonstrate that there is a thin line separating the expression of progressive and habitual actions or events. Hence, an expression denoting the progressive can also be computed as denoting the habitual. Distinction is however marked by the introduction of a time expression. Consider (14–15).

- (14) **Ọ** **nà-àgba egwu** **ùgbu à**
 3SCL AUX-PROG-dance now this
 S/he is dancing.
- (15) **Ọ** **nà-àgba** **egwu**.
 3SCL AUX-PROG/HAB-dance dance
 S/he is dancing/S/he dances.

The time expression, **ùgbu a** in (14) restricts the action to being progressive. Its absence in (15) motivates a lack of distinction between the action being progressive or habitual.

May it be noted that the nebulous character of ‘**na** + participle’, which manifests in cases of simultaneous expression of the progressive and habitual aspect is explicated in some dialects of Igbo, especially Ikeduru and other satellite dialects of Owerri. In the dialects, the suffix, **-ga** marks progressive while the auxiliary, **je** occurs with a participial form of the verb to express the habitual aspect. (16–19) illustrate this.

- (16) **Ọ** **rìgà** **nri.**
3SCL eat-PROG food
S/he is eating.
- (17) **Ọ** **jè-èri** **nri.**
3SCL AUX-HAB-VP-eat food
S/he eats.
- (18) **Òbi ñụ ñgà** **mmanya.**
Obi drink-PROG wine
Obi is drinking.
- (19) **Òbi jè-àhụ** **mmanya.**
Obi AUX-HAB-VP-drink wine
Obi drinks wine.

2.2 **Na** + PARTICIPLE EXPRESSING ONLY PROGRESSIVE ASPECT

(20–21) demonstrate instances where ‘**na** + participle’ expresses only the progressive aspect.

- (20) **Ọ** **nà-àgbọ** **agbọ.**
3SCL AUX-PROG-vomit vomiting
S/he is vomiting.
- (21) **Òbi** **nà-edò** **àhụ.**
Obi AUX-PROG-recover body
Obi is recovering.

Tetsing (20–21) with the application of **-ga** suffix and **je** auxiliary would reveal that they are only progressive and never habitual. There is a strong indication that this situation exists as a result of the involuntary action the verbs **gbọ** ‘vomit’ and **do ahụ** ‘recover from illness’ express.

- (22) a. **Ọ** **gbọ ñgà** **agbọ.**
3SCL vomit-PROG vomiting
S/he is vomiting.
- b. **?Ọ** **jè-àgbọ** **agbọ**
3SCL AUX-HAB-vomit vomiting
?S/he vomits.
- (23) a. **Òbi dọga** **àhụ.**
Obi recover-PROG body
Obi is recovering.
- b. **?Òbi jè-edò** **ahụ.**
Obi AUX-HAB-recover body
?Obi recovers.

2.3 Na + PARTICIPLE EXPRESSING ONLY HABITUAL ASPECT

The following sentences illustrate cases where ‘na + participle’ expresses only the habitual aspect.

- (24) **Nnụ** □ **nnụ** □ **nà-èfe** **efe.**
 Bird AUX-HAB-fly flying
 Birds fly.
- (25) **Agwọ** **nà-atu** □ **àtụ** □.
 Snake AUX-HAB-bite biting
 Snakes bite.
- (26) **Ụmụ** □ **aka** **nà-àñụ** **āñā.**
 Children AUX-HAB-drink breast
 Children suck breast.
- (27) **Edè** **ndu** □ □ **nà-àgba** **agba** **n’ọnū** □.
 Cocoyam raw AUX-HAB-sting stinging in mouth
 Cocoyam itches in the mouth.

(24–27) could hardly denote actions or events in progress at a moment of time. Rather, they denote actions that regularly occur accounted for by such actions being naturally associated with the subject NPs. In other words, what the verbs in the sentences predicate is intrinsic in their subjects. However, observe that in dialects of Igbo such as the ones mentioned, (24–27) would become progressive if their verbs take **-ga** progressive marker, e.g.

- (28) **Egbe** **à** **fègà** **u** □ **fe.**
 Kite this fly-PROG fly
 This kite is flying.
- (29) **Nkita** **à** **tàgà** **Ibè** **arụ.**
 Dog this bite-PROG Ibe bite
 This dog is biting Ibe.

They could as well maintain being habitual by taking **-je** auxiliary. Examples are (30–31) below.

- (30) **Umù** □ **aka** **jè-àñụ** **āñā.**
 Children AUX-HAB-drink breast
 Children suck breast.
- (31) **Edè** **ndù** □ **jè-àgba** **agba** **n’ọnū** □.
 Cocoyam raw AUX-HAB-sting stinging in mouth
 Cocoyam itches in the mouth.

2.4 Na + PARTICIPLE EXPRESSING NEITHER PROGRESSIVE NOR HABITUAL ASPECTS

(32 – 33) illustrate cases in which ‘na + participle’ neither expresses progressive nor habitual aspect.

- | | | |
|------|--|-------------------------|
| (32) | ?Àda nà-àma
Ada AUX- [*] PROG/HAB-VERB NOUN-COMPLEMENT ² | mmā.
beauty] |
| (33) | ?Òbi nà-èsi
Obi AUX- [*] PROG/HAB-VERB NOUN-COMPLEMENT | ike.
strength |

There is a strong indication that this feature is motivated by the constituent verbs being quality-expressing verbs or adjectival verbs (cf. Emenanjo, 2005). Uwalaka (1988:180) identifies the feature: "... verbs of quality either occur in a form that is unmarked for tense and aspect or they take the -rV assertive suffix when these verbs are associated with a present meaning." In fact, testing (29) and (30) with **-ga** suffix and **je** auxiliary to see if they could express progressive and habitual aspect further evidence the feature as unacceptable sentences occur:

- | | | | |
|------|----|---|-------------------------|
| (34) | a. | ?Àda màgà
Ada VERB-PROG NOUN-COMPLEMENT | mmā.
beauty |
| | b. | ?Ada je-ama
Ada AUX-HAB-VP-VERB NOUN-COMPLEMENT | mma.
beauty |
| (35) | a. | ?Òbi sìgà
Obi VERB-PROG NOUN-COMPLEMENT | ike.
strength |
| | b. | ?Òbi jè-èsi
Obi AUX-HAB-VP-VERB NOUN-COMPLEMENT | ike.
strength |

3. CONCLUSION

Via recourse to the semantic projections of 'na + participle' structure, this paper has given an account of the aspectual categories the structure motivates. Particularly, the paper argues that the structure does not only motivate the progressive aspect as it is widely upheld but also the habitual aspect. In fact, there are verbs with which the structure cumulatively marks the two aspects simultaneously. Distinction occurs by the introduction of a time expression which clearly marks progressive, while its absence enhances the nebulous character of the structure. This feature is taken care of in some dialects such as Owerri and its satellite groups, which use the suffix, **-ga** to express progressive and the auxiliary, **je** to express habitual.

Furthermore, there are verbs with the 'na + participle' structure, which motivate only the progressive aspect. They have this feature because they express involuntary action, action which implicitly the subject NPs cannot control. Associating the verbs with **-ga** and **je** provide more clarification. With **-ga** the progressive is realized. However, with **je** the habitual fails, confirming their restrictive status of expressing progressive.

Moreover, the structure could involve verbs that motivate only the habitual aspect. It is evident that verbs involved express actions naturally associated with their subject NPs. That is, what the verbs predicate of their subject NPs is intrinsic in the NPs. (24 – 27) demonstrate this. Noteworthy is the fact that the verbs could occur with **-ga** to express progressive. They could also occur with **je** to maintain their status of expressing habitual.

² Noun-complement is used here to refer to the noun, meaning of which is bound to the meaning of the preceding verb. This is necessary because we have found it difficult to provide an English gloss for the verbs **imā** and **isi**.

Finally, the structure does not involve certain verbs. In other words, some verbs do not license their use in the structure for the expression of neither the progressive nor habitual aspect. An example of such verbs is the quality-expressing verbs or adjectival verbs.

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