

IGBO LANGUAGE IN COMMUNICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a universal phenomenon that is seen as an identity that marks out one group of people from another. It is a means of communication among people. As humans are gregarious beings, it is imperative to communicate and engage in social interaction among people. This communication takes different shapes and forms. Essentially, there are two main types of communication, namely, the verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. The spoken language is what is referred to as Linguistics. Igbo Language in Communication is an exploration of the Igbo spoken language as a means of social interaction. Igbo language in communication involves the study of human interaction through coded spoken language signal, its interpretation in social environment with the knowledge of the culture and values, aided by our mental faculty and what has already been stored in the subconscious mind.

Igbo language is spoken by the Igbo people. The language has over twenty-four (24) dialects, and they are mutually intelligible. The Igbo language belongs to the "Kwa" sub-family group of languages according to Ubahakwe.¹ Ubahakwe explains that the languages that belong to the "Kwa" sub-family group share some common certain traces of structural similarities especially relating to word roots or word stem. The Igbo language was said to have been written first by the British colonialists who introduced the use of the English alphabet. According to Ohiri-Aniche, "the study of Igbo language started around 1940 with only two Secondary Schools - Dennis Memorial Grammar School (DMGS), Onitsha and Methodist Institute, Uzoakoli.² Today, however, the teaching of Igbo language is widespread in secondary schools in Igbo speaking states and in universities and tertiary institutions."

According to Echebima the study of Linguistics "enables us to analyze and understand the nature of the complex structural components of a language"³ that produce meaning for social interaction. The paper focuses on the study of the sound (Phonology) system of Igbo language; the combi-

nation of the sounds to form words (Morphology); the issue of the formed words and their meaning (Lexical items), the arrangement of words in an utterance to produce meaning (Syntax); the deduction of the meaning through the Syntax order (Semantics) and the study of meaning in context (Pragmatics) All of them combined to form what we hereto call Igbo language communication.

PHONOLOGY

Phonology is the study of the sound system of a language. Ume, Dike and Ugorji define phonology as the study of the characteristics of sounds of a language.⁴ Just like every other language, words, letters, or scripts represent definite sounds in the Igbo language. Each letter that represents a sound is called a phoneme. A phoneme is the minimal or the smallest unit of sound or the basic significant element of sound in a language. The Igbo language has 36 phonemes as presented below:

a	b	ch	d	e	f
g	gb	gh	gw	h	i
i	j	k	kp	kw	l
m	n	ni	nw	ny	o
o	p	r	s	sh	t
u	u	v	w	y	z

Among these letters of the alphabet are eight (8) vowel phonemes and twenty-eight consonant phonemes. The eight vowel phonemes are: e i, i o o u u.

Vowel phonemes are sounds produced without any obstruction of the air in the mouth while the consonant phonemes are the sounds that have some obstruction of the passage of the air through the mouth during their articulation and production. The organs of articulation which cause the obstruction of the air in the mouth during the speech production include the movement, the action and position of the lips, the teeth, the tongue, the alveolar ridge (the upper gum), the hard and soft palate (the roof of the mouth), the uvular and the vocal cord. The twenty-eight (28) consonant sounds are:

b	ch	d	f	g	gb	gh
gw	h	j	k	kp	kw	l
m	n	ni	nw	ny	p	r
s	sh	t	v	w	y	z.

The Igbo phonemes with their equivalent sounds in English words are represented in Table 1below:

Table 1: The Igbo Phonemes realized in English words

Igbo alphabet	English sound equivalent
/a/	as in arm
/b/	as in bill
/ch/	as in church
/d/	as in dog
/e/	as in egg
/f/	as in fish
/g/	as in god
/gb/	not in English
/gh/	as in high
/gw/	not in English
/h/	as in house
/i/	as in eve
/i/	as in eagle
/j/	as in jug
/k/	as in kite
/kp/	Not in English
/kw/	as in queen
/l/	as in lemon
/m/	as in middle
/n/	as in note
/n/	as in king
/nw/	not in English
/ny/	not in English
/o/	as in old
/o/	as in odd
/p/	as in pin
/r/	as in road
/s/	as in sing
/sh/	as in sheep
/t/	as in test
/u/	as in book
/u/	as in joyful
/v/	as in vine
/w/	as in wind
/y/	as in yield
/z/	as in zinc

Source: Echebima (2015:7-9)

Some of the Igbo phonemes have diacritics. This makes a significant difference between two seemingly similar words. Diacritics bring about

change the in meaning the similar words. The following examples will suffice the above submission.

oku (a call)	and	ọkụ (fire) with the diacritic
olu (neck)	and	ọlụ (work) with the diacritic
iko (cup)	and	ịkọ (to plant) with the diacritic
iri (ten) and		ịrị (to climb) with the diacritic

Furthermore, with the application and the influence of the tones one can differentiate between

ike [HH] strength	and	ike [HL] bottom
ọkụ [HH] fire	and	ọkụ [LL] clay pot

To illustrate the nasalized sound of [n] we can see the difference between

anụ [HH] meat	and	an̄ụ [HH] bee
in̄ụ [HH] to hear	and	an̄ụ (HH) to drink

The nasalized sound is indicated with a dot or a tilde above the letter [n].

MORPHOLOGY

Morphology is the study of word-building or the study of the internal structure or composition of words, or the study of morphemes. According to Echebima (2015:41) morpheme can be a word or meaningful part of a word.⁵ Morphemes are also described as “building blocks of meaning.” The two types of morpheme are the free morpheme and the bound morpheme. The free morpheme is a word or a morpheme that can stand on its own, while a bound morpheme is one that cannot stand on its own but must be attached to a word or another morpheme. Unlike the free morpheme the bound morpheme usually does not have a definite meaning but its presence lends or accord a definite meaning to the formed word. For example:

bu + je = buje (carry to); two bound morphemes

bu + lie = bulie (carry up); two bound morphemes

tụ + da = tuda (throw down); two bound morphemes

buda + chaa = budachaa (carry down all), free morpheme and a bound morpheme.

bata + ghi = bataghi (did not come in), free morpheme and a bound morpheme.

buda + chaa + la = budachaala (has carried all down); a free morpheme and two bound morphemes.

di + nta = dinta (hunter); two free morphemes
 umu + nne = umunne (siblings); two free morphemes

akara + aka = akaraka (destiny); two free morphemes.

Bound morphemes are also known as affixes. Apart from the original prefix, infix, and suffix as forms of affix, the gbo language houses other features which are attachments that are attached to the work stem to form more words. One of these feature is called agglutination in which a string of morphemes joins to form a t atwhich tends to express a long statement. For example, the word, "budachaala" means "has carried all down" and "mezichabeghila" means "has not yet finished putting things in order." The term agglutination is derived a from Latin word meaning, "gluing" or "sticking together."⁶

Another type of affix to Igbo word called the enclitics includes the words, "keduzi" (How are things and "rienu" (eat [you people] in which the syllables "zi" and "nu" are enclitics.⁷ Enclitics do not have their own meaning but form a peculiarity of the language offering a shade of understanding to the listener. These affixes influence the meaning of the basic word or morpheme to which they are attached. These affixes could generate multiplicity of verb forms and new words as illustrated below.⁸

i	+	be	+	pu = ibepu (to cut off)
prefix		verb root		suffix.

wepu	+	ta	+	chaa = weputachaa (bring out all)
basic word		suffix		suffix

wepu	+	ta	+	cha	+	ra = weputachaa (has brought out all)
basic word		suffix		suffix		suffix

saa	+	la	=	saala (has washed)
basic word		suffix		

na	+	e	+	ri	=	na-eri (eating/eats)
prefix		vowel		verb root		

ga- + a + ga = ga-aga (will go)
 prefix vowel verb root

Sometimes an Igbo word can have the affix called “infix” which comes between two morphemes, such as the [m] in:

eri + m + eri = erimeri (food)
 ede + m + ede = edemedede (writing)
 echi + m + echi = echimechi (investiture)

Meanwhile, there is an influential part which the suffix plays in Igbo verb forms which are demonstrated in the two types of suffixes – the Extensional or Derivational suffixes and the Inflectional suffixes. The derivational suffixes relate to the formation of entirely new words with new meanings or new connotations. For example

base verb		suffix		
ive	+	je	=	iveje (to take and go)
ibu	+	da	=	ibuda (to carry down)
.itu	+	ba	=	.ituba (to throw into)
ba	+	mie	=	bamie (to enter farther in)
tụ	+	fee	=	tufee (to throw across)
bata	+	ghị	=	bataghi (did not come)

On the other hand, the inflectional suffixes relate to the issue of grammar and tenses as illustrated below.

base verb		suffix		
bute	+	re	=	butere (brought)
bata	+	ra	=	batar <u>a</u> (entered)
bata	+	la	=	batal <u>a</u> (has entered)
batala	+	ri	=	batal <u>a</u> ri (has since entered)

THE SYNTAX

Syntax looks at how words are sewn or knitted together in a string into a meaningful sentence or part of it. Syntax can be defined as the positioning of words in the proper and correct order to make a meaningful sentence. It can also be viewed as a rule governing how words are arranged in a sentence to form a meaningful utterance. Echebima also describes Syntax as the study of the relationship between words for meaningful expression.⁹ It

is this word order, this syntax that constitutes the grammar. Hence, a good syntax order in a sentence makes the sentence grammatical and correct, while an improper or misplaced order leads to an ungrammatical, incorrect, or incomprehensible sentence or statement. Syntax therefore demands that words and their sounds are correctly placed and knitted together to make a correct sentence.

Since a language is for communication and social interaction, each language has its own set of rules governing the arrangement of words in an expression to be meaningful and easily understood by others. Otherwise, the expression will not make sense. So, every language has its own peculiar language typology. Echebima (2015:10) says that Igbo language belongs to the (SVO) language typology in which the words are arranged in the form: the subject (S), followed by the verb (V) and followed by the object (O). In Igbo it is seen as: *Agu/tagburu/ewu* (SVO). This is to say that the subject is followed by the verb and the object follows the verb. This means that the subject (S) is the “doer”, the performer of the action; that verb (V) indicates the action, while the object (O) is the “sufferer” or the receiver of the action. Table 2 below illustrates the (SVO) Igbo sentence structure.

Table 2: Igbo SVO syntax structure (with -ingle word subject)

Subject	Verb	Object	English translation
Ikechi	Tara	Azu	Ikechi ate fish
M	Nọ	n’ulo	I am in the house
Ha	Riri	Akpu	They ate cassava
Onyinye	muru	Nwa	Onyinye delivered a child
Anyi	na-ata	Oji	We are eating kolanut
Nkita	tara	Ukachi	Dog bit Ukachi.

The above table presents simple sentences with a single noun or pronoun as the subject or head of the sentence, a single verb, and a single object. It is therefore necessary to explain the (SVO) structure further with some longer or extended sentences, to show that the subject could be a noun (N), a pronoun (Prn), or a noun phrase (NP) and the object could be a noun (N), a pronoun (Prn) or a noun phrase (NP), while the verb could be a verb or a verb phrase (VP). In summary:

$$\begin{aligned}
 (S) &= S + V + O \\
 &= NP + VP + NP
 \end{aligned}$$

The following sentences in Table 3 below gives more explanations

Table 3: Igbo SVO Syntax structure (with phrasal subject)

Subject	Verb	Object	Meaning
Onye a	Bu	enyi m	This person is my friend
Nwaanyi ahụ	ga-eri	ofe egwusi	That woman will eat egusi soup
Enyi Azuka	Gotere	omaṛichaa uwe	Azuka's friend ba ought fine dress
Efere oḥuru ahụ	Di	n'elu tebụlụ	The new plate is on the table
Okwuchi na Ada	na-aga	ahia oḥuru	Okwuchi and Ada are going to the new market
Onyenkuzi anyi	Biara	n'ulo anyi taa	Our teacher came to our house today

The constitution of the subjects in the above table are:

Onye a = NP = (N + Det)

Nwaanyi ahụ = NP = (N + Det)

Enyi Azuka = NP = (Adj + N)

Efere oḥuru ahụ = NP = (N + Adj + Det)

Okwuchi na Ada = NP = (N + Conj + N)

Onyenkuzi anyi = NP = (N + Prn)

Let us consider the Verb (V)

These are: bu, ga-eri, gotere, di, na-aga, biara

Let us consider the Object (O)

enyi m = NP = (N + Prn)

ofe egwusi = NP = (N + Adj)

omaṛicha uwe = NP = (Adj + N)

n'elu tebụlụ = NP = (Prep + N)

ahia oḥuru = NP = (N + Adj)

n'ulo anyi taa = NP = (Prep + N + Prn + Adj)

where N = noun, Prn = pronoun, Adj = adjective, Conj = conjunction, Adv. = adverb, Prep = preposition, Det = determinant.

It is obvious that English and Igbo languages share the same sentence structure, there are some differences in their word order in some phrases such as in the following phrases.

Table 4: Igbo phrases in comparison with English phrases

Igbo phrase	Equivalent English Phrase
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onye a (n + det)	this person (det + n)
enyi m (n + prn)	my friend (prn + n)
ofe egwusi (n + adj)	egwusi soul (adj + n)
ahia ohuru (n + adj)	New market (adj+n)
efere ohuru (n + adj)	New plate (adj + n)
onyenkuzi anyi (n + prn)	our teacher (prn + n)

nwaanyi ojo (n + adj)	bad woman (adj + n)
akwukwo a (n + det)	this book (det + n)
nwoke ise (n + adj)	five men (adj + n)
anwu ututu (n + adj)	morning sun (adj + n)
oche ahụ (n + det)	that chair (det + n)

Furthermore the (SVO) structure of Igbo language deals with transitive and intransitive verb. In the transitive verb the action passes from the subject the “doer” to the object, the “sufferer”, whereas in the intransitive verb the action does not pass from the subject to an identifiable object. Consider the following examples.

Table 5: Showing the Transitive Verbs

Subject	Verb	Object	Translation
Chike	No	n'ulo	Chike is at home
Ha	Gburu	Anu	They killed an animal
Nkechi	Butere	Akwa	Nkechi brought cloth
Anyi	na-eri	Nri	We are eating food
O	gara	Uloikpe	He went to court

In the sentences of the table above, the action passes from the subject to the object while the reverse is the case in the sentences of the table below.

Table 6: Showing the Intransitive verb

Subject	Verb	Object	Translation
Unu	ga-abia	-	You (p) will come
Nnamdi	Bia	-	Nnamdi came
O	Garuola	-	He has reached
Ha	na-eche	-	They are waiting
Ngozi	Abiala	-	Ngozi has come

Despite the general (SVO) syntactic rule, there is an aspect of sentence structure called the Generative or Transformational grammar, a concept in which a sentence can be re-written or transformed into various possible versions of utterances and still retain the meaning which in essence is proof of linguistic competences in the language. For example, in English the superficial surface difference between Nnamdi built the house: $N_1P_1 + V + N_2P_2$ (Active Voice) and the house was built by Nnamdi: $N_2P_2 + Aux + V + N_1P_1$ (Passive Voice)

Where Aux is Auxiliary

In Igbo language, it can be said,

- Nnamdi ruru ụlọ ahu
- or Ụlọ ahu ka Nnamdi ruru
- or Ọ bu ụlọ Nnamdi ruru
- or Ọ bu Nnamdi ruru ụlọ ahu

The above differing word arrangement meaning the same thing is what transformational grammar is all about.

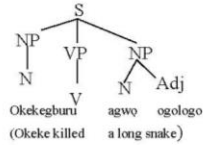
TREE DIAGRAM ANALYSIS

There is an aspect of the analyzing Igbo Communication Syntax that is known as the tree diagram structure which show the constituent parts of the sentence also called the phrase analysis in a tree-like structure with branching lines and nodes resembling an inverted tree.

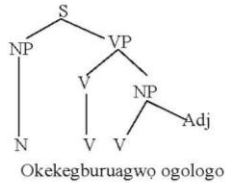
The following sentences are going to be used in the illustration.

Okeke killed a long snake
(Okeke gburu agwo ogologo)

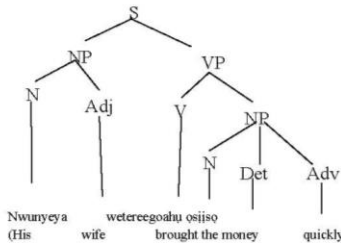
S is sentence S → NP + VP + NP



ii) Using two parts structure, as S → NP + VP



iii) Another example is: "nwunye ya wetere ego ahụ osiiso" (his wife brought the money quickly)

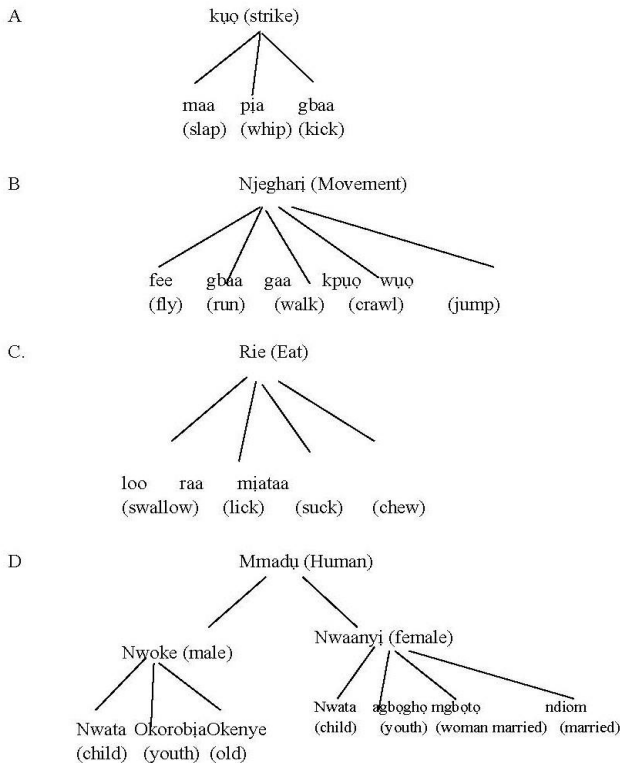


SEMANTICS

Semantics is the branch of linguistics that studies meaning. It deals with the interpretation of sound, words, and sentence structure. It deals with language and how we understand meaning. It is the study of the relationship between words and their meanings and how those meanings are constructed. According to Echebima, Semantics is the cumulative result of the meaning stored in the sound of the words, the meaning of the Lexical items, the words and the syntactic or grammatical arrangement or structure of the words in a sentence or utterance.¹⁰ Semantics is a field of linguistics that is concerned with the meaning of words, phrases and sentences. Meaning is elusive and therefore, it is difficult to account for the different types of meaning, contexts, beliefs, and individual experiences affect meaning. For example, in the semantic field analysis for 'cook' which is "si", the listener should be able to know which language "code" the speaker has used in the message. That is, to say whether the speaker used the word, "ghu", "ghe" or "hu" ie boil, fry, or roast, respec-

tively. According to Okeke and Igbeaku, the terms are related and belonging to the same semantic field of cooking on fire or heating process to prepare food.¹¹ It should be recognized that although the three words belong to the same action of cooking that is sharing something in common, they have various shades or meaning. In the cultural setting each word has its own peculiar meaning. So, there are definite meanings to, "Ọ na-eghu ji", "Ọ na-eghe ji", and "Ọ na-ahụ ji" (He is boiling yam, He is frying yam; and He is roasting yam, respectively). So, the speaker should choose the right word to use, so that the listener will understand and interpret the right meaning. This is why we cannot claim to know a word by merely knowing the pronunciation and the grammatical function of it in the sentence but when we know how to use it acceptably semantically. The knowledge of this semantic analysis will enable us to employ the right word to convey the right semantic meaning to achieve the right purpose.

The semantic analysis can be illustrated with a few Igbo words to show how a head word can branch out into various shades of semantic meaning.



The next aspect of this work which is meaning outside the meaning is Pragmatics.

PRAGMATICS

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context. In pragmatics, utterances are interpreted based on the context of use. It is concerned with the distinction between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning. Pragmatics is concerned with how the society/situation in which an expression is used influence determines the meaning. Pragmatics is the meaning of an utterance which is outside the linguistic, syntactic, or grammatical meaning, but the extra meaning hidden in the words of the utterance. The following examples illustrate how meaning is derived based on the context of use:

a. Conversation between an old woman and a young man

The old man says to the boy:

- i) Nna m, bia ka m lee ihu gi, (My father, come let me see your face).
- ii) Di m, ebee ka i na-aga? (My husband, where are you going?)

In (i) there is the use of "Nna m" (My father) and in (ii) there is the use of "Di m" (my husband) but they cannot be taken literally because the young boy can neither be the old woman's father nor husband, but in their social context or setting the boy will understand that the woman is only showing love and endearment.

b. Igbo greetings like

- i) Unu aboola chi? (Have you people woken up from sleep)
- ii) Unu dikwa mma? (Are you people fine?)
- iii) I biala? (Have you come?)

The three expressions above sound like questions, but they are not. In social context they are just normal Igbo greetings; (i) means, "Good morning" (ii) means, "How are you?" and (iii) means, "welcome." And the respondent's reply in each case would be simply, "Ee" (yes).

c. Conversation between two people

On hearing about a feat performed by a person, the listener responds by saying, "onye ahụ bu aruşi" (that person is a devil). Although the person has used the word, "aruşi" (devil) to describe the person being referred to, he does not really mean that. Instead, the person is being praised as a very clever and ingenious person.

d. Consider the following statements

a) *Aziriza na-agba m.* (I am perspiring). Although the speaker is saying that he is feeling hot and perspiring, in that situation he could actually mean one of the following:

- i) I want to remove my shirt
- ii) I want to go outside
- iii) Put on the air-conditioner
- iv) Open the doors and windows

b) *Mmiri na-achọ izo.* (It is threatening to rain)

This could mean any of the following:

- i) We cannot go out now.
- ii) Let us take an umbrella.
- iii) Let us call a taxi
- iv) I don't want to be drenched.

c.) *Gbupu asu.* (Spit out)

In the Igbo society, when one hears about something detestable, an abomination or horrible action committed by a person or persons, the listener shows disgust and condemnation of the action by making that statement which, though it says "spit out" does not really mean spit out saliva, but rather it serves as a kind of exclamation meaning, "it is horrible!" or "it is terrible!" or "God forbid!"

With the above examples we have been able to demonstrate that there is a lot more to the meaning of what people say sometimes than we can capture from the ordinary grammatical or linguistic form of the expression. The illustrations have shown that Pragmatics relates to the aspect of meaning that hinges on the extra-linguistic word, the context and the situation surrounding such a word. In other words, one can derive more meanings from the unsaid and that deeper meaning of an utterance depends on the context of the interaction, the circumstances surrounding the time of the utterance as well as the cultural setting.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have examined how the Igbo language functions in communication. We have seen that, in Communicating the Igbo Language is more than just speaking. We have been able to state the fact that there is a lot more to the meaning of what people say sometimes than we can capture from the ordinary grammatical or linguistic form of the expression. The paper has illustrated that sound produces the letters of the alphabet and showed how the combination of the sounds of the alphabet created the words and their meanings. It was further shown that the words are ar-

ranged in a string or structured to make meaningful expressions used for communication, information, and social interaction. The paper further demonstrates that in the spoken language an expression has to be decoded or interpreted for the meaning to be understood. We have also established that the expression or utterance is capable of having double meanings which means that interpreting for meaning is not an easy thing because one does not only need to know what the linguistic structure means but also know what the society knows and believes, what the circumstances are, and the facts that are stored in the subconscious mind. Again, in addition to the main subjects of Phonology, Morphology and Syntax as in English language, we also have in our spoken Igbo language, things like the affixes influencing the meaning of words, vowel assimilation and elision, tonal modulation influenced by syllables and stress sound and the unspoken pragmatic meaning of utterances. Moreover, like the English language, Igbo language does not shy away from absorbing loan-words.

NOTES

¹ E. Ubahakwe, "The Language and Dialects of Igbo," in G.E.K. Ofomata (ed) *A Survey of the Igbo Nation* (Onitcha: African First Publishers Limited, 2002), 256.

² C. Ohiri-Aniche, *Nkuzi Igbo Dika Asusu Epum (Igbo L1) N'ulo Alwukwo Ndi Sekondiri*, (Port Harcourt: Emhai Publications, 2004).

³ G. Echebima, *A Textbook of Igbo Linguistics*, (Owerri: Assumpta Press, 2015), 1

⁴ I. Ume, G. Dike and J. Ugorji, *Umi Nkwa Utasusu Igbo*, (Orlu: Nneji & Sons Press, 1998), 5-24.

⁵ Echebima, *A Textbook of Igbo Linguistics*, 41.

⁶ Echebima, *A Textbook of Igbo Linguistics*, 45.

⁷ The term enclitics is derived from the Greek word meaning "leaning on."

⁸ See also Echebima, *The place of The Affix*.

⁹ Echebima, *A Textbook of Igbo Linguistics*, 97.

¹⁰ Echebima, *A Textbook of Igbo Linguistics*, 120.

¹¹ C. Okeke and B. Igbeaku, "Igbo Verb of Cooking: A Lexical Semantic Analysis," *Language Matters*, Vol. 46, No. 1. (2015) (Retrieved from <https://www.Tandfonline.com>. 9/4/2020).