

ENDOCENTRICITY IN IGBO V-V COMPOUNDS Duru Ferdinand Ebere and Maduabuchi Sennen Agbo

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Abstract

The issue of the internal semantic relationship that characterizes V-V Compounds is unresolved in Igbo grammar. This paper sets out to investigate this issue. It assumes the concept of endocentricity as the principle of analysis. Endocentricity defines compounds on the basis of their constituent semantic headedness. It accounts for the internal semantic headedness that characterizes compounding elements. Previous studies of Igbo verb compounds largely adopt transformational generative approaches to describe the derivational process of these compounds. None of these previous studies have given a simple account of the semantic properties of the compounding lexemes in relation to the resulting compound. Therefore, this paper attempts to give a detailed account of Igbo V-V compound formations with the focus on the semantic relatedness that underlies the compounding lexemes. The objectives of this study also include the investigation of how the independent semantic specifications of the compounding lexemes affect the semantic readings of the entire compound structure. The paper concludes with the assertion that the derivation of compound verbs in Igbo is semantically motivated and this is contrary to the transformational generative account of the previous studies on Igbo compounds. The study also proposes that compounding verbal lexemes are of unequal semantic degree, as one seems to be the *Head* and the other the *Modifier*. The identification of compound heads and their modifiers respectively is a function of the degree of semantic relatedness between the compounding lexemes rather than their morpho-syntactic positions.

Introduction

In his account of the nature of compounds and compounding in English, Selkirk (1982:12) stated that compounds in English are types of word structures made of two constituents with each belonging to one of the categories of noun, adjective, verb or preposition. The definition by Selkirk (1982:12) suggests that the compound itself may belong to the category of Noun, Verb or Adjective. What is special about compounds according to Selkirk (1982:12) is the fact that the two constituents are linked by a grammatical relation which is not overtly expressed. Hong, Li and Huang (2004) observe that the ordering of the two verb components in a compound verb structure is determined by their eventive relations which in itself can be inferred through the conceptual reading of each verb.

Attempts have been made by scholars over the years to give adequate descriptions of the linguistic features of compounding across languages. This has led to diverse classifications of compound structures across languages.

Bloomfield (1933), Marchand (1969), Shibatani (1990), Spencer (1991), Fabb (1998), Olsen (2001) Haspelmath (2002), Bouer (2001), Booij (2005) Bissetto and Scalise (2009) have made attempts to classify compounds across languages using different classificatory criteria. The basic criteria traditionally adopted for the classification of compounds include headedness, nature of the relationship between the constituents, internal semantics and the categorial labels of the head constituent. Despite the diversity of approaches, what seems to be a unitary phenomenon that underlies compound structures is the principle of headedness.

Fabb (1998) classifies compound verbs into three namely; endocentric, exocentric, and coordinate compound verbs. His classification is in line with that of Shibatani (1990) which also emphasizes the semantic headedness of V-V compound structures. Shibatani (1990) suggests the following classifying scheme for V-V compound verb formations:

- i Modifier-V (M-V) – where the modifier indicates the manner of the activity of the second verb;

- ii V-Modifier (V-M) – where the second constituent identifies the manner or direction of the verb;
- iii V-V – where both verbs have equal semantic contribution to the semantics of the whole, representing a complex event.

Fab (1998) endocentric and coordinate compound verbs derive from Shibatani (1990) `s M-V, V-M and V-V compound structures. However, the exocentric compound formation of Fab (1998) is a unique contribution.

Shibatani (1990) compound verb classification is extensional and more detailed. This classification takes into account the structural semantic disposition of the compounding lexemes within the endocentric and co-ordinate compound verbs. It maintains that endocentric compounds are characterized by two sets of verbal lexemes with distinct semantic functions; Modifier-Head and Head-Modifier structures respectively. It argues that the identification of the Head of a compound structure or its modifier is strictly based on the semantic specification of each of the compounding constituents.

The approaches by Shibatani (1990) and Fabb (1998) have been adopted for this study. The choice of their classification is motivated by the fact that their extensional analysis of CVs captures the structural semantic dispositions of V-V compounds in Igbo.

1.1 The Igbo Verb

According to Emenanjo (1975) “the semantic content of every Igbo verb describes a certain action, state, process or other phenomenon, which by its very nature implies the co-existence of a certain nominal phrase”. It is this nominal or nominal phrase that forms the syntactic complement. Therefore, the nominal of every Igbo verb encodes the meaning of the verb. The nominal can, therefore, be used to define the semantic classes of verbs.

However, Emenajo (1975, 1978, 2005, and 2012) has consistently argued that the internal structural features of the Igbo verb is made up of three mutually obligatory and complementary elements. These obligatory elements comprise of the verb

itself, the complement and the bound cognate noun (BCN). However, the validity of Emenanjo`s assertions has been substantiated by notable Igbo scholars such as Nwachukwu (1987) and Uwalaka (1988). The consensus position of these scholars is that every Igbo verb co-occurs with a nominal element as part of its internal predication. Emenanjo (1978) refers to these nominal elements as complementizers. Studies have proved that all Igbo verbs can co-occur with bound cognate nouns, which occurs bound to the verb. The example below illustrates the tripartite structural properties that characterize the Igbo verb;

(a) Ézè rì-rì ùrì
Eze eat food
Eze ate food

The construction in 1(a) above shows the verb *ri* ‘eat’ co-occurring with *nri* ‘food’ as its obligatory nominal complement.

(b) Ézè rì-rì ùrí èrí
Eze eat food EMPH
Eze ate the food indeed.

The illustration in 1(b) above shows *èrí* as a structural reduplicate of *ri* in the construction. It is a bound cognate noun. It is unavoidably bounded to the verb *rí*. It serves as an emphazier showing that the agent Eze definitely ate the food as conceptualized.

The compound verbs in (c) and (d) below also show manifestation of the argument above.#

(c) Ǹg̀ózí f̀ò-chà-rà òlúgbù
Ngozi squeeze bright bitter-leaf
Ngozi washed bitterleaf.

From the illustration in 1(c), the compound verb *focha* ‘wash clean’ is composed of two independent lexemes *fò* ‘squeeze’ and *chá* ‘bright’. When the compounding unit *fòchá* occurs in a syntactic context, it is conceptualized as a

single indivisible concept, thereby depicting a single lexical event. The construction also has *òlúgbù* as the obligatory complementary nominal element of the verb *fòchá* which it co-occurs with. The concept of Bound Cognate Noun (BCN) can be demonstrated below;

- (d) *Ngózí fò-chà-rà òlúgbù áfóchá*
Ngozi squeeze bright bitter-leaf EMPH
Ngozi has indeed washed the bitterleaf

From the illustration in 1(d) above, *áfóchá* is a partial reduplication of the verb *fòchàrà* and it serves as an emphaziser morpheme. In the literature on Igbo grammar, this is known as the Bound Cognate Noun (BCN) as we have mentioned earlier. All Igbo verbs have the BCN, which is always morphologically derived from the verb. Again, the BCN always follows the verb in the syntactic construction with reference to the verb as shown in 1(b) and 1(d) above.

1.2 Past Studies of Verb compounds in Igbo

Previous studies of verb compounds include Lord (1975), Mbah (1999), Uchechukwu (2004a & 2004b), Obiamalu and Mbagwu (2014) and Agbo (2014). Nevertheless, there is paucity of literature on the study of verb compounds in Igbo.

Lord (1975), claims that the two compounding elements may be interpreted through the action-result meaning of Igbo verb forms, and the first component of the Igbo compound verb can be any action verb while the second component may be stative or action verb. The constructions below are typical of Lord (1975) Igbo compound verb structure;

1.
 - a) *Ó tù-fù-rù ákwúkwó*
3s throw-lose-IND paper
'He threw away the paper'
 - b) *Ó tù-rù ákwúkwó*
3s throw-IND paper
He threw paper
 - c) *Ákwúkwó fù-rù*
Paper lose-IND
Paper lost (Lord 1975:25)

Lord (1975) argues that the first component of the Igbo compound verb can be any action verb while the second component may be state or action verb. Perhaps to Lord (1975), the class of Igbo verbs is just limited to action and state verbs if the only limiting constraint to the formation of Igbo

compound verbs is on the speaker's cognitive capacity and cultural experience. This over generalization is not quite explanatory in Lord (1975). This work attempts to demonstrate that Igbo compound verbs have other structurally semantic configurations other than the mono-form identified by Lord (1975). However, Lord (1975)'s acknowledgement of the bi-componential nature of compound verbs in Igbo is pivotal in Igbo verb compound studies.

However, Oha (2010), based on Uwalaka (1995) classification, identifies eleven Igbo compound verb types based on the structural relationship between the V1 and V2 of the compound structure. The argument is that the compound verb components have common essential properties which ensure the unification of the verbs into the classified compound. Following this classification, Oha (2011), examines the eleven compound verb types identified in Oha (2010) in terms of the combinatorial patterns of the verb components. Three headings of Verb classes, Co-occurrence restriction and Positional constraints form the evaluative yardstick in Oha (2010). However both studies fall short of the orientation of this work as they fail to give an adequate account of the semantic import of the compounding constituents and their morphosyntactic significance.

Similarly, Obiamalu & Mbagwu (2014) and Agbo (2014) develop semantic approaches to the study of Igbo compound verbs. Obiamalu & Mbagwu (2014) emphasizes the semantic approach to verb compound analysis concluding that V-V structures have trivalent features. Agbo (2014) gives a detailed account of compound verb structures in Igbo from the Role and Reference Grammar's (RRG) perspective. Agbo (2014) adopts the claim that the Igbo verb compound is formed from the composition of two lexemes, whose meaning is determined by the native speaker's cognitive and cultural perspective on the verbs resulting from the lexemes. This account is a remarkable departure from certain propositions in Igbo literature which claims that the meaning of a compound verb structure can only be ascertained through its morpho-syntactic configurations.

This account and analysis of Igbo

compound verbs adopts the semantic approach of Obiamalu & Mbagwu (2014) and Agbo (2014). The work takes into account the notions of endocentricity, exocentricity and coordination in relation to compound verbs. The first two notions of endocentricity and exocentricity define compounds on the basis of the presence vs. absence of a semantic head constituent, while the notion of coordination is based on the grammatical relation holding between the two constituents of the compound structure.

2.0 Endocentric compound Verbs

Compound verbs are said to be endocentric when there is an obvious manifestation of a semantic head within a given compound structure. This is to say that endocentric compounds verbs are made up of two independent words one of which is the head. The structural feature of an endocentric compound verb comprises of an obligatory V1 and V2 respectively. The V1 syntactically means the first compounding verbal constituent, while the V2 means the second compounding constituent that syntactically succeeds the V1 in order of occurrence. The identification of V1 and V2 has no semantic connotation as it borders on syntactical positions of the compounding elements. However, the identification of a semantic head of a compound structure is a function of the semantic value of the compounding constituents in relation to the semantic specification of the compound unit.

2.1 Modifier-V (M-V)

As noted above, this is a type of compound verb structure where the V1 functions as a modifier of V2. In the M-V structure, the modifier verb names the manner of activity contained in the second verb. Consider the following constructions:

1. Èméká gbà-gbù -rù ágú
ÈMÉKÁ SHOOT-KILL LION
Èméká shot-killed lion
Èméká killed a lion.
2. Èbèrè ku-gbù -rù ágwó
ÈBÈRÈ HEAT-KILL SNAKE
Èbèrè heat-killed snake
Èbèrè killed a snake

3. Òbíòhà tò-gbù -rù Nwúnyè yá
OBIOHA STRANGLE-KILL WIFE HIM
Obioha strangle-killed his wife
Obioha strangled his wife.
4. Ágwo tùgbùrù ñkítá
SNAKE BITE-KILL DOG
Snake bite-killed dog
Snake killed a dog.
5. Ñkítá tàgbùrù òkuko
DOG BITE-KILL FOWL
Dog bite killed fowl
The dog killed the fowl

The verbs in the constructs above are examples of compound verbs in Igbo with MODIFIER-HEAD structure. The internal structure of a given compound verb is made of two events classified as V1 and V2 where the V1 is acclaimed to precede V2. The two compounding elements must also have their independent semantic specification especially in isolated contexts. The verbs above satisfy this condition and are consequently termed compound verbs.

The event structure of the sentences 1-5 above can be viewed in relation to endocentricity where one event is said to be a modifier of the other event which is the head of the structure. Sentences 1-5 have the verb *gbu* 'kill' as their V2 and *gba, ku, to, tu, and ta* as their V1 respectively. Therefore event structure in relation to endocentricity is that the V2 *gbu* is the head of the compound structure. This is because the semantic value of the entire compound constructions respectively lies on the verb *gbu*. That does not mean that the V1 of the constructions are semantically insignificant. They contribute largely to the meaning but their function in the above construction is restricted to the function of modifiers rather than heads of compound constructions.

The identification of the head of a compound verb construction is neither done arbitrarily nor impressionistic in nature. Rather it is done by the utilization of the compounding elements in isolation retaining their argument structures. The head often retains the semantic value of the sentence while the modifier does not. In some cases, the use of modifiers always results in ungrammaticality but where it is grammatical;

its semantic import may contrast with the meaning of the compound structure and the entire construction in extension.

Consider the following sentences below:

6. Èméká gbù-rù ágú
EMEKA KILL LION
Emeka killed lion
Emeka killed a lion
7. Èbéèrè gbù-rù ágwó
EBERE KILL SNAKE
Ebere killed snake
Ebere killed a snake
8. Óbìòhà gbù-rù nwúnyè yá
OBIOHA KILL WIFE HIM
Obioha killed his wife
Obioha killed his wife
9. Ágwó gbù-rù ñkítá
SNAKE KILL DOG
Snake killed dog
The Snake killed the dog.
10. Ñkítá gbù-rù òkúkò
DOG KILL FOWL
Dog killed fowl
The dog killed the fowl

As we observed in sentence 1-5 the semantic reading of the sentences respectively, is that of an agent killing a patient. And this, with no doubt was clearly conveyed by the verb *gbú*. The use of *gbú* in isolation of its verbal modifiers in sentences 6-10 obviously confirms and authenticates the initial identification of the verb as the head of the compound verb constructions of sentences 1-5. The arguments *Emeka*, *Ebere*, *Obioha*, *Agwo*, and *Nkita* are perceived as agents that carry out an activity that leads to the termination or extinction of the life of the following patients *ágú*, *ágwó*, *nwúnyè yá*, *ñkítá*, and *òkúkò* respectively. This termination of lives was solely captured by the verb *'gbú'*. The grammatical well-formedness attained in 6-10 using the verb *gbu* in isolation of their modifiers further substantiates the claim of *gbu* as the head of the compound construction in 1-5. Such grammaticality may not be ascertained with the modifier verbs in isolation using their argument structure. Consider the following sentences:

11. *Èméká gbàrà ágú
12. *Èbéèrè kùrù ágwó

13. *Óbìòhà tòrò nwúnyè yá
14. Ágwó tu-rù ñkítá
SNAKE BITE DOG
Snake bite dog
The Snake bite the dog
15. Ñkítá tàrà òkúkò
DOG BITE FOWL
Dog bite fowl
The dog bite the fowl

While sentences 6-10 can be said to be grammatical as they purely manifest and maintain conceptual integrity, 11-15 fall short of such characterization with the exceptions of 14 and 15 constructions. Sentences 11-13 are obviously ungrammatical because their argument structures violate the Selectional Restriction Rule (SRR). Their semantic specifications cannot be conceived by a native Igbo speaker especially in relation to the semantic content of the constructions in 1-5 above.

Sentences 14 and 15 exert some degree of grammaticality as they attain some level of conceptual integrity. However, their semantic reading does not represent the termination of life which sentences 1-10 denote. Furthermore, the semantic features of *tu* bite and *ta* bite seen in 14 and 15 respectively are characterized by {+/-life} while that of *gbu* in 6-10 is characterized by {-life}. This explains that neither snake bites or dog bites necessarily results in death.

Based on the analysis above, the verbs *gba*, *ku*, *to*, *tu*, *ta* in the 1-5 constructions are modifiers in the compounding process. They modify the V2 'gbu' in their respective constructs. They are called modifiers because they reiterate the manner of V2. They do not represent the semantic features in the construction rather they read of events that are precursors to the main event which represents the semantic value of the entire construction.

2.2 Verb-Modifier (V-M)

The V-M compound structure is the kind of compound structure comprising an activity or event and its location. In other words, V-M compounds consist of the V1 as head and the modifier V as a locative. The modifier verb (V2) constituent syntactically succeeds the compound head and subsequently gives the V1 which is the head of the compound unit a location. The

following sentences exemplify this claim;

16. Ó gbá -bà -rà n` ónú
IT RUN ENTER in MOUTH
It ran-entered in mouth
It ran into the hole.
17. Òhà gbá -pù -rù èzí
ÒHÀ RUN EXIST COMPOUND
Ohà ran outside
Ohà ran outside
18. Há bì -chì -rì úzò
THEM LIVE CLOSE ROAD
They live closed road
They lived close to road
19. Èméká bà -nyè -rè ákwà nà mmírí
EMEKA SOAK-GIVE CLOTH in WATER
Emeka soaked cloth in water
Emeka soaked the cloth in the water
20. Ùgò sì -nyè -rè ní
UGO COOK GIVE FOOD
Ugo cook gave food
Ugo placed food on the fire
21. Ùwàkwé hù -nyè -rè jí
UWAKWE ROAST-GIVE YAM
Uwakwe roast gave yam
Uwakwe put yam on the fire.

The constructions above show *bà*, *gbá*, *bi*, *hù* and *sì* as the head of their respective compound units, while *bà*, *nyé*, *chì*, and *pù* are modifiers with locative readings. In sentence (16), *gbá* is a motion verb specifying 'run' in the construction, while the verbal modifier *bà* which means 'enter' gives a location of the goal of the motion event. The goal is clearly that the agent be located in a hole. In (17)

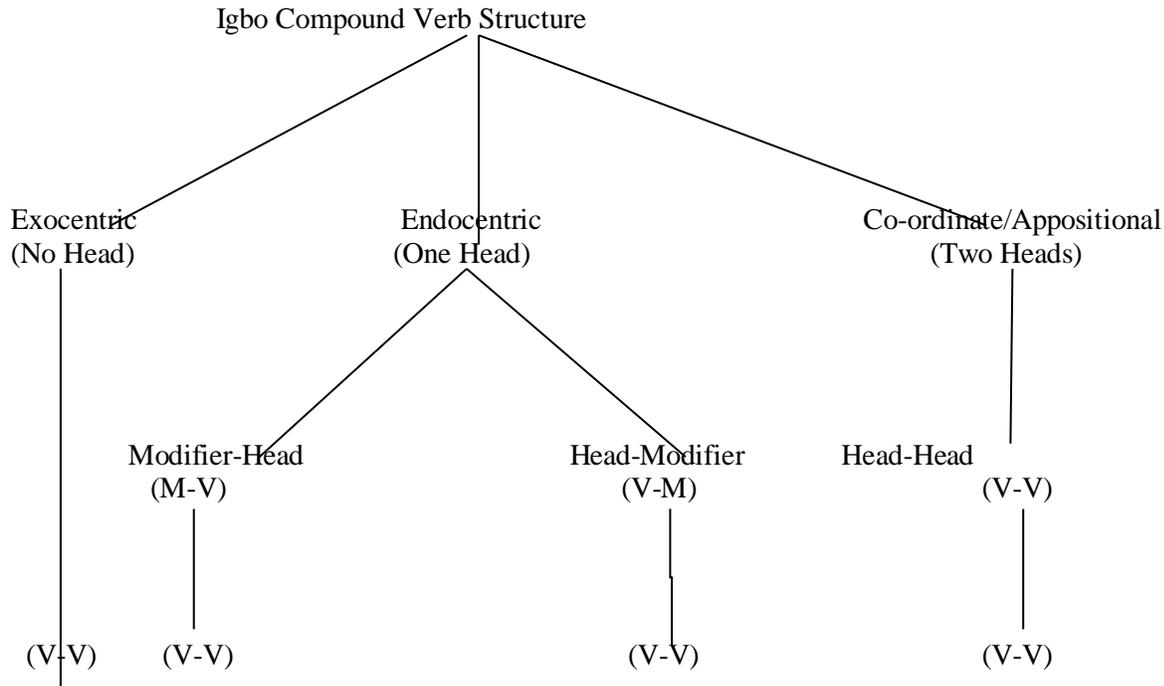
above, the entire compound structure specifies an act of running outside probably from a room or compound. The verbal component *gbá* is the head of the compound unit. It incorporates an activity denoting run. On the other hand, *pù* and its rv suffix *-rù* which means 'exit' modifies the compound head. It specifies the location of the event *gbá* (run), which is the eventual goal of the agent. In sentence (18), *bi* which has the semantic reading of 'live' is the head of the compound structure, while *chì* with its *-rv* suffix *rì* constitute the verbal modifier of the head verb. The modifier *chiri* is a locative denoting where *há* (they) are living. In sentence (19) *bà* 'soak' has the verbal modifier *nyè*. 'Nye' functions to locate the actual place where the cloth has been soaked. It shows *bà+nyèrè* 'soaked in' as a compound verb of location.

In the example 20, *sinyé* 'cooking' is a compound configuration comprising of *sì* as the V1 and head of construction and *nyè* as the V2 and modifier of the compound head. While *sì* means to cook, *nyè* as a compound element in the compound structure locates the cooking situation, which simply, reads that the food is still on the fire at the point of the speech act.

In example 21, *hú* means 'roast', while *nyè* as we have seen above specifies the position of the yam which is been roasted. The position as represented by the modifier verb *nyèrè* indicates that the roasting yam is still on the fire at the point the utterance is made.

3.0 Summary

The diagram in Figure 1 below captures the typical V-V compound and endocentricity in Igbo.
 Fig. 1



The fig. 1 above shows the structural distribution of compounding components within the (V-V) verb compound system in Igbo.

The analysis of the compound verb units show that endocentric relationship is a common morphosemantic reality that characterizes Igbo compound verbs. However, this endocentric semantic relation has two structural manifestations; the Head-First compound verb formations which takes the semantic structure of M-V, and the Head-Last compound verb structures which takes V-M structure, where V is the head of the compound formations and M signifies the modifier respectively. This can be formalized thus;

- Head-first - Verb+modifier (V-M)
- Head-Last - modifier+Verb (M-V)

Conclusion

The discussion thus far demonstrates that endocentricity manifests in two morphosyntactic classes of HEAD-FIRST and HEAD-LAST structures respectively. The internal semantic structure of Head-first verbal compounds comprises of a head verb and modifier verb, while that of head-last comprises of a modifier verb and a head verb in that order respectively.

The modifier verb’s function is mainly descriptive. It represents the semantic value of the compound unit. It modifies the head of the compound structure. Evidence of this claim is shown when

the compounding elements function in isolation. The semantic value of the compound unit is retained and preserved by the compound head when utilized in isolation but such conceptual integrity and preservation of meaning are conspicuously absent when the modifier verbal compounding lexemes are used in isolation.

Again, the semantic decomposition of the compound verb formations as demonstrated in this study shows that compound verbs are products of conceptualization rather than a syntactic phenomenon. The semantic reading of compound verbs is a cognitive function of the native

speaker's cultural, contextual and linguistic knowledge.

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