

The Syntax and Semantics of Verbs of Cooking in Ìgbò

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This work is a study of three semantic sub-classes of Igbo verbs of cooking. These are the verbs of heating, the verbs of mixing and the verbs of parboiling. The members of these three classes each have inherent properties that encode different shades of meaning in their syntactic constructions. These distinctions in syntax and semantics are the bases for the classification of the verbs. The theoretical framework adopted for this classification is Role and Reference Grammar, which classify verbs by lexical decomposition instead of by abstraction or specification. The study has implications for language acquisition for the Igbo child. The child is faced with the challenge of distinguishing the verbs and also grappling with their selectional restrictions. This can be achieved when the child is raised in an environment where Igbo is spoken in all domains of language use. Otherwise, the child will be deficient in the use of these verbs for communication.

Keywords: Igbo verbs, lexical representation, language acquisition, role and reference grammar¹

1. Introduction

In this study, verbs of cooking have been identified as the semantic class of verbs which inherently encode the activities of meal preparation. Our data identifies three semantic sub-groups of these verbs. They are: **verbs of heating**, **verbs of mixing** and **verbs of parboiling**.

The **verbs of heating** essentially encode the direct application of heat. The heat from the fireplace is directed on to the food item. Sometimes this involves dipping the item into the fire and other times it involves keeping it a few centimeters away from the fire but with the heat rays directly piercing the food item.

The **verbs of mixing** are those verbs which encode the information that the meal being prepared involves a variety of ingredients.

Verbs of parboiling encode the meaning that the heat applied to the food item is controlled. This means that when the preparation of the meal is going on, there is utmost care to see to it that the heat applied is kept within a certain range of temperature in order to get the desired effect on the food item.

1.1 Background

Igbo is a major language in Nigeria with eighteen million speakers (Adegbija, 2004). It belongs to the Kwa (Benue-Congo sub-branch) language family (Bendor-Samuel, 1989). Igbo has two basic tones: High and Low. The phenomena of downstep and vowel harmony are present in the

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language. In this paper, the tone pattern of each lexical item is provided to underscore the importance of tone in the language.

1.2 Data Collection

The constructions studied in this paper have been tested for grammaticality by speakers of the Nnewi and Nsukka dialects of Igbo. All the examples were actually heard from broadcasters and Igbo gospel artistes, who are modern and ingenious with the use of the language. These utterances stimulated the initial interest in the work presented here, and, provided the data in its natural usage. These data were transcribed by the author who is a native speaker of the language.

The transcribed data were subsequently subjected to discussion with five other Igbo speakers of the Nsukka and Nnewi variety. The author discussed with these speakers the co-occurrence restrictions of the verbs of cooking. The author presented to the speakers the construction in (1.0) below, where the verb *dà* 'heat' subcategorises for *ázu* 'fish'. This construction is bad based on the author's competence in the language. The other speakers adjudged the sentence to be wrong too. This sentence served as the basis for judging other constructions as either wrong or right.

Each sentence analysed in this paper was read aloud and discussed by the informants with the author.

- (1) * *Ngózí dà-rá ázu*
Ngozi heat-IND fish
'Ngozi cooked the fish'

1.3. Theoretical Orientation

The study is undertaken within the framework of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) as developed in Van Valin (2005) and Van Valin and La Polla (1997). The RRG framework implements a system of lexical decomposition based on Vendler's (1967) theory of *Aktionsart*. The term *Aktionsart* means 'inherent temporal properties of verbs'. Van Valin (2005) proposes six classes of verbs viz: state, achievement, accomplishment, activity, active accomplishment and semelfactives. A number of syntactic and semantic tests determine the *Aktionsart* of a clause.

This author in a paper to be published soon (Verb classes and *aktionsart* in Igbo) has developed six syntactic and semantic tests to determine Igbo verb classes. Igbo verbs of cooking fall into three classes viz: achievement, accomplishment and active achievement verbs.

The RRG framework implements a system of lexical decomposition of verbs with state and activity predicates as basic. The lexical representation is known as the Logical Structure (LS) of the predicate. State predicates are represented as **predicate'** and activity predicates include **do'**. Accomplishment LS have the operator BECOME, while achievements LS have the operator INGR, which is short for 'ingressive'. Semelfactives include the operator SEML. See Van Valin (2005) and Van Valin and La Polla (1997) for details of the lexical representation for *aktionsart* classes.

The RRG framework is justifiable for this study because it allows a classification of Igbo verbs based on lexical decomposition instead of by specification and abstraction. RRG has the advantage of being inspired by both theoretical and descriptive considerations. The framework incorporates the prominent roles of semantics and pragmatics in explaining language phenomena. Our data is better understood if the cultural perspective of cooking is taken into consideration.

The main competing theories are the Government and Binding (Chomsky 1986a) and the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995a), which are popular in Nigerian Linguistic circles. Government and Binding (GB) and the Minimalist Program (MP) have the point of view that language should be studied independent of the communicative and the sociocultural contexts. For these theories, syntax is the core aspect of language while semantics and pragmatics belong to the periphery. In other words, the only thing necessary for language study is the native speaker's intuition.

GB and MP cannot fully explain the constructions in our data. The selectional restrictions of the verbs of cooking, with their semantic and pragmatic relations, is best captured within the framework of RRG.

2. The Verb of cooking 'ísí'

The verb *ísí* 'to cook' is a generic verb that can collocate with all food items in the language. In other words, the verb *ísí* can take as direct object any nominal that, in an integral manner, implies a food item. Let us demonstrate with the examples in (2) how this verb operates in Igbo sentences.

- (2) a. *àdá* *sí-rí* *jí*
 Ada cook-TNS yam
 'Ada cooked some yam'
- b. *Eze* *sí-rí* *ánú*
 Eze cook-TNS meat
 'Eze cooked some meat'
- c. *Ngózi* *sí-rí* *óká*
 Ngozi cook-TNS maize
 'Ngozi cooked some maize'

In examples (2a-c) the verb *ísí* 'to cook' co-occurs with three different object NPs. In (2a) the verb co-occurs with the NP *jí* 'yam'. In (2b) it occurs with *ánú* 'meat' and in (2c) it occurs with *óká* 'maize'. The sentences all have the same semantic interpretation of the cooking of a food item but the verb does not distinguish the method with which these food items become meals. The native Igbo speaker will only have an indistinct idea of what kind of meal is being prepared

when s/he hears the sentences in (2a-c). For example, in example (2a) the speaker will have the idea that the yam is being prepared for a meal but there are different ways of preparing yam meals in Igbo culture which the verb *ísí* does not encode. The same analysis can be applied to (2b and 2c) because there are different ways of preparing meat and maize meals in Igbo culture. However, in Igbo there are verbs that inherently encode the primitive concepts of the method of preparation of these meals. This is the focus of this paper.

In the subsequent sections we shall show examples of these verbs and how they occur in Igbo sentences.

2.1. Verbs of heating

The Igbo verbs which function syntactically and semantically as verbs of heating include the verbs in (3) below.

- (3)
- ídá* ‘to heat’
 - ímí* ‘to roast (meat or fish)’
 - ihú* ‘to roast (crops)’
 - íñá* ‘to grill’
 - íghé* ‘to fry’

These verbs have different shades of meaning when used in sentences. The sentences in examples (4a-e) demonstrate how these verbs operate in Igbo sentences, while (4a'-é) is the lexical representation of these verbs.

- (4)
- a. *Ngózi dá-rá ófè/*ázu*
 Ngozi heat-IND soup
 ‘Ngozi brought the soup to a boil’
 - a'. BECOME **heated**' (ófè)
 - b. *òkonkwo mị-rị ázu/*ófè/*
 Okonkwo dry-TNS fish
 Okonkwo smoked the fish
 - b'. BECOME **dry**' (ázu)
 - c. *Ífěómá hu-rú éde/jí/*ánú/*ázu*
 Ifeoma roast-TNS cocoyam
 ‘Ifeoma roasted the cocoyam’

- c'. BECOME **roasted'** (édè)
- d. Ókóró ñà-rà' ókú'
Okoro heat-TNS fire
Okoro warmed himself
- d'. BECOME **warm'** (Ókóró)
- d₁. Ókóró ñà-rà' ókà'
Okoro heat-TNS maize
Okoro grilled the maize
- d₁'. BECOME **grilled'** (ókà)
- e. Chinyèrè' ghè-rè' azú'
Chinyere fry-TNS fish
'Chinyere fried the fish'
- e'. BECOME **fried'** (azu)

Our data indicates that verbs of heating subcategorize for countable object NPs. In (4a) *ófè* 'soup' is interpreted to mean a pot of soup. For the sentence (4d₁), *ókà'* 'maize' is interpreted to mean one cob of maize. The other object NPs (4b, c and e) have countable readings.

The verb *dá* 'heat' in (4a) sub-categorizes for all food items of plant origin and also for *miri* 'water'. This is why it cannot collocate with the object NPs, *ázu'* 'fish' or *ánu'* 'meat' which are of animal origin. The direct object NP *ófè* 'soup' consists of liquid that include vegetables, meat and/or fish. The method of heating depicted by the verb *dá* is represented in (4a'). This representation indicates that the NP changes from a state of coldness to boiling point. The boiled soup is edible. The change of state is not instantaneous. In this study, we categorize this verb as an accomplishment verb.

The verb *mí* 'dry' in (4b) sub-categorizes for only the NPs *ánu'* 'meat' and *ázu'* 'fish'. This is why its co-occurrence with *ófè* is ungrammatical. The method of drying involves hanging the fish over a fireplace and allowing the heat waves and smoke to dehydrate it over a number of days. The verb is a result state verb bearing in mind that the object NP *ázu'* changes from its raw form to a dehydrated form which is edible. This state is usually for its preservation. The lexical representation of the verb in (4b') shows that the verb is an accomplishment verb. In this instance, it means that the change of state of the object NP is not immediate but gradual.

The verb in (4c) *hú* 'roast' can only collocate with object NPs of plant origin. Hence it co-occurs with *ókà'* 'maize' and *jí* 'yam' but it cannot co-occur with NPs of animal origin, like

ánú and *ázu* as shown in (4c). The method of heating involves placing the crops directly on top of the fire and allowing them to roast. The action of roasting takes some time to achieve. We classify the verb as an accomplishment verb since its action is not instantaneous. This is represented in the logical structure in (4c').

The verb *ñá* 'grill' in (4d) encodes a different meaning from the verb *ñá* 'grill' in (4d₁). In (4d) it is the subject of the verb that undergoes a change of state from coldness to warmth. While in (4d₁) it is the object NP that undergoes a change of state, from a raw food item to a cooked one. The verb *ñá* in (4d) can only co-occur with animate subjects and it has an Inherent Complement Verb₁ *óku* 'fire'. While the verb *ñá* in (4d₁) can only co-occur with object NPs of plant origin, for example it can co-occur with *ji* 'yam' and *éde* 'cocoyam' but not with *ázu*. For the verb in (4d) the subject NP is beside the fireplace until it experiences a change of state from coldness to warmth. This takes some time. In other words, the verb is an accomplishment verb as illustrated with the lexical representation in (4d'). And for the verb in (4d₁) the heating of the object NP takes place over a grill and over a period of time. This verb is also classified as an accomplishment verb. The lexical representation is illustrated in (4d₁').

Our analyses show that verbs of heating fall into the class of accomplishment verbs following the work of Van Valin (2005) and Van Valin and La Polla (1997). This simply follows from the fact that Igbo meals are not fast foods.

2.2 Verbs of mixing

The following verbs function as verbs of mixing in Igbo:

- (5) a. *ígwó* 'to mix'
 b. *íse* 'to stir into a thick paste'
 c. *ísú* 'to pound'
 d. *ísú* 'to pound'
 e. *ígbó* 'to make'

The examples in (6a-e) below illustrate the syntactic structure of these verbs while their lexical representation is given in examples (6a'-e'). The verbs in sentences (6a-d) are inherently active accomplishment verbs. There is a separate activity of heating which takes place before the mixing activity takes place. The verbs *ígwó*, *íse*, *ísú* and *ígbó* (5a, b, c and e, respectively) co-occur with object NPs that hitherto undergo a heating process. On the other hand the verb *ísú* (5d) co-occurs with object NPs that do not undergo a heating process before being mixed with other food items. The constructions in (6a-e) illustrate the different activities involved when each of these verbs is used.

- (6) a. *Chínwé* *gwò-rò* *ísi éwú/àbàchà/*akpu/*éde*
 Chinwe mix-TNS head goat/abacha/cassava root/cocoyam
 'Chinwe prepared *ísiéwú*'³

a'. **do'** (Chinwè, [**steam'** (Chinwe, isi ewu)]) & INGR **mixed'** (isi ewu)

b. ónyínyé *sè-rè* nri *ókà' *àkàmù' *ákpù' *jí*
 Onyinye draw-TNS food maize/pap/yam
 'Onyinye prepared maize flour meal'

b'. **do'** (onyinye, [**steam'** (onyinye, ókà)]) & INGR **knead'** (ókà)

c. òbì *sù-rù* jí/édè/ákwù/ákpù/*ose/*egusi
 Obi pound-TNS yam/cocoyam/oil palm/cassava
 Obi prepared pounded yam meal

c'. **do'** (òbí, [**steam'** (òbí, jí)]) & INGR **pounded'** (jí)

c₁. *Nneka su-ru* ósè/ògbòṅò/ègúsí/*jí/*édè/*ákpù'
 Nneka pound-TNS pepper/ògbòṅò (local condiment)
 Nneka pounded some pepper

c₁'. BECOME **pounded'** (ósè)

d. *Ifeoma kpù-rù* ègúsí/òkpéyé
 Ifeoma mould-TNS melon seed/oil bean seed
 Ifeoma prepared melon seed/oil bean

d'. **do'** (ifeoma, [**pound'** (ifeoma, ègúsí)] & INGR **moulded'** (ègúsí)

e. *Ezè gbò-rò* àkàmù/garri/tea/*òkpéyé/*ákpù/*nri *okà*
 Ezè make-TNS akamu/garri/tea
 Eze prepared pap/grated, cassava meal/tea

e'. [**do'** (Ezè, ϕ)] CAUSE [INGR **cooked'** (gàri)]

The verb *gwó'* 'mix', in the context it is used in (6a) means that the raw meat, comprising the parts of a goat's head is steamed before being mixed with other condiments to produce the delicacy known as *ísíéwú*. This process is represented in (6a'). The verb seems to invariably co-

occur with object NPs that appear as seeds or bits and pieces. It can co-occur with the object NPs *àbàchà*, (produced from cassava shavings), *jí* ‘yam’, *ùkpáká* ‘oil bean seed’, and *ùkwá* ‘breadfruit.’ When it co-occurs with the NP *jí*, the inherent meaning is that the boiled yam has been cut into several small pieces before being mixed with other condiments. But it cannot co-occur with *ákpú* ‘cassava root’ and *éde* ‘cocoyam’, as shown with the asterisk in (6a).

In the same vein, the verb *sé* ‘draw’ in its context in (6b) means that some water is heated and, then, the maize flour is poured into it to form a hot paste. This paste is stirred to produce the maize meal. The lexical representation of this activity is illustrated in (6b’). It seems the verb *sé* only co-occurs with the object NP *nri óká* ‘maize’. For example, it cannot co-occur with *àkàmu* ‘pap’, *ákpú* ‘cassava root’ or *jí* ‘yam’ as shown with the asterisk in (6b).

The verb of mixing *sú* ‘pound’ in the context of (6c) means that the object NP had been previously steamed before being pounded with a pestle in a mortar. This is the lexical representation of the verb illustrated in (6c’). The verb encodes the idea that the object NP, when pounded and mixed with water, results in a substance with a smooth texture. In other words, pounded yam, cocoyam and cassava are consistent and smooth to the touch, while pounded oil palm fruits results in a liquid with delicate texture.

The vowel of the verb *su* ‘pound’ in (6c), is produced with a ‘retracted pharynx’ while the vowel of the verb *sú* ‘pound’ in (6c₁) is produced with an ‘expanded pharynx’. This phonological difference has semantic implications. The verb in (6c₁) inherently means that the object NP is not mixed with water before pounding. Instead, the food items are put in a mortar and pounded until they turn into powdery substances, which are subsequently mixed with other food items. We classify the verb *su* as an accomplishment verb because the activity of pounding has a terminal point but it is not instantaneous. This verb cannot co-occur with the object NPs that are steamed before pounding. They only occur with object NPs that are in the raw state. For this reason, they cannot occur with the NPs *jí* ‘yam’, *ákpú* ‘cassava’ and *éde* ‘cocoyam’. When pounded in the raw state, the NPs *jí*, *ákpú* and *éde*, will not result in the meal with the smooth and delicate texture. Note also that the verb *sú* in (6c) cannot subcategorize for *ósè* ‘pepper’ and *ògbòno* ‘a local condiment’. The lexical representation of the verb is shown in (6c₁’).

In (6d) the verb *kpú* ‘mould’ subcategorizes for the object NPs *égúsi* ‘melon seed’ and *òkpéyè* ‘oil bean seed’. The verb inherently means that the object NPs have been heated and pounded before being moulded with the hands. In other words, the Igbo speaker will know that the object NP must be steamed before pounding, and, subsequently moulded with the hands. This is what the lexical representation in (6d’) encodes. While moulding the object NP, it is mixed with cold water to get the desired texture. The verb subcategorizes for only object NPs which have been steamed and pounded before the activity of moulding begins. This is why it cannot co-occur with the object NPs in (6a-d). These NPs have only been heated but yet to be pounded.

The verb *gbó* ‘make’ in (6e) has an activity reading with a termination point. It seems that this verb sub-categorises only for non-native food. For example, the object NPs *àkàmu* ‘pap’, *gàrí* ‘grated, dried and roasted cassava’ and *tea* in (6e) is of foreign origin. This makes their co-occurrence with *gbó*, grammatical. The process of cooking encoded in the verb *gbó* ‘make’ include mixing the food items with boiling water. For *àkàmu* ‘pap’, it involves mixing the raw pap paste (made from maize flour) with boiling water, while for *gàrí*, it involves mixing the

grated, dried and roasted cassava with boiling water. The object NPs *òkpéyè*, *ákpú* and *nri ókà*, which are native Igbo food items cannot co-occur with the verb.

The lexical representation in (6e') shows that it is an active accomplishment verb. Notice that the object NPs of these verbs has uncountable reading. *Isiewu* in (6a) is interpreted to mean a goat's head that has been cut into several uncountable pieces while *ábàchá*, appears as several bits of shavings from cassava roots. *nri ókà* in (6b) is maize flour which is obviously uncountable. *jí ,édè, ákwú* and *ákpú* in (6c) when co-occurring with the verb have the interpretation of being uncountable. They appear as several pieces instead of say, a single piece of yam or cocoyam. The objects NPs in (6d and e) have similar interpretations.

Four out of the five verbs of mixing in our data fall under the class of active accomplishment verbs. This is because they include the activity of steaming which brings about a change of state for the steamed food item. The verb *su* is an accomplishment verb because it does not include the steaming activity in its action. It only includes a change of state notion.

2.3 Verbs of parboiling

The examples in (7) below from our data are verbs of parboiling.

- (7) *ímáchú* 'to parboil'
íghú, 'to heat or boil'
ímá mīrī-ókú 'to throw hot water'
ídá mīrī-ókú 'to burn with hot water'

These verbs have different syntactic and semantic representation. The examples in (8a-d) are syntactic representations of these verbs while their lexical representation is shown in (8a'-d').

- (8) a. *Nnenna` máchú-ru`* *òsìkápá/*ákwú/*ákpú*
 Nnenna parboil-TNS rice/ oil palm seeds/cassava
 'Nnenna parboiled the rice'
- a'. INGR **parboiled'** (òsìkápá)
- b. *Nneka` ghú-ru`* *ákwú/ákpú*
 Nneka steam-TNS oil palm seeds/cassava
 Nneka parboiled the oil palm seeds
- b'. INGR **do'** (Nneka), [**steam'** (Nneka, ákwù)]
- c. *Ngozi má-ra`* *úkwa`* *mīrī-óku`*
 Ngozi throw-IND breadfruit water hot
 'Ngozi parboiled the breadfruit'
- c'. **do'** (Ngozi, [**throw'** (Ngozi, hot water)]) & INGR **parboiled'** (úkwa)

- d. *Ada dá-ra' óka' mīrī- óku'*
 Ada burn-IND corn water hot
 'Ada parboiled the maize'

- d'. **do'** (Ada, [**steam'** (Ada, corn)]) & INGR **parboiled'** (corn)

The verb *máchu'* 'parboil' encodes the idea of steaming. It is the only verb in our data with a direct translation meaning 'to parboil'. It appears that this verb can only co-occur with the object NP, *òsikápá* 'rice'. In the context of the sentence in (8a) it implies that the object NP, *òsikápá* 'rice' is put in cold water and the water brought to a boil. This is the method of parboiling indicated by the verb. It is an achievement verb because the duration of the activity is very limited. This is what the lexical representation in (8a') illustrates.

The verb *ghú* in (8b) encodes the idea of steaming whenever it appears in any sentence. The interpretation of (8b) is that the object NP *ákwú* 'oil palm' and *ákpú* 'cassava' are placed in cold water and the water is heated until boiling point. This is how parboiling is achieved. The verb is an achievement verb as the action depicted by the verb takes a short time to get to completion. The lexical representation is shown in (8b'). The verb *ghú* co-occurs with other NPs like *jí*, 'yam' and *édé*, 'cocoyam'. However, when this happens the interpretation of the verb changes. When it collocates with *jí* and *édé*, the sentence means that the object NP is boiled until the food item is done, and, therefore edible.

The verb *ímá mīrī-óku'* 'to throw hot water' in (8c) also encodes the idea of steaming. This verb only co-occurs with the object NP *úkwá* 'breadfruit'. The verb is an activity verb with an inherently terminal point. Here, the object NP *úkwá* is placed in hitherto boiling water and allowed to simmer for a few minutes. In this way parboiling takes place. We classify it as an active accomplishment verb. The lexical representation of the verb is shown in (8c'). The verb *ídá mīrī-óku'* in example (8d) literally means to 'burn with hot water'. The NP *óka'* 'maize' is understood to be burned in hot water. In other words, the NP *óka'* is steamed. This activity has a terminal point. The verb is an active accomplishment verb. It collocates only with the object NP *óka'*. The lexical representation is shown in (8d').

The verbs of parboiling and verbs of heating all involve the direct application of heat but they have different classes assigned to them. The verbs of heating all fall under the class of accomplishment verbs while the verbs of parboiling fall into two classes viz: achievement and active accomplishment verbs. This classification is based on their primitive concepts. Verbs of parboiling co-occur with object NPs that are uncountable.

4. Language Acquisition and Igbo verbs of cooking

Van Valin and La Polla (1997) make the important assertion that research on language acquisition from the communication-and-cognitive perspective should depend on empirical evidence for making their claims and not on ‘theoretical fiat’. According to Van Valin and La Polla (1997:641), the primary issues to be tackled in language acquisition include:

- (1) the distinctions that must be learned in order to acquire the category or concept,
- (2) the kind of evidence available to the child in the input from caregivers and from the situation in which utterances are used,
- (3) To what extent is the concept or category related either to the child’s innate non-linguistic cognitive capacities or to other non-linguistic capacities or knowledge.

The child learning Igbo must know that a raw food item is placed in a cooking pot or directly inside fire for it to be turned into a meal. S/he also has to learn the utterances made in the specific situations when such actions are taken. These utterances are the verbal cues for the child to learn the verbs of cooking. The physical act of cooking provides the evidence for learning the verb classes. The verbs of cooking in Igbo fall into the class of accomplishment, achievement and active achievement verbs. The evidence for the duration of cooking is observable when the child’s caregivers carry out the act. This is how the child readily learns the class of the verbs uttered when cooking is going on.

The object NPs collocating with the verbs of cooking can be learned from listening to caregivers associating these NPs with particular verbs while cooking. The child learns that these NPs follow the verb in the syntax, while the subjects of the sentences precede these verbs.

The verbs of cooking are related to the child’s other cognitive capacities in the sense that s/he will come to know that raw food items are not eaten. They undergo the process of cooking. Again, the child also knows that every domain of Igbo life has its own register of terms and cooking is not an exception. The verbs of cooking in our data can only be learned by an Igbo child who grows up in an environment where the language is used for all domains of life.

5. Summary

In this paper, we have studied the primitive concepts imbued in the semantics of the verbs of cooking in Igbo. This has enabled us to give the interpretation of their inherent meaning and also to classify them.

The verbs of cooking in Igbo fall under three semantic classes of verbs: the verbs of heating, the verbs of mixing and the verbs of parboiling. Following the framework of Role and Reference Grammar, these verbs respectively fall under the logical structures of accomplishment, achievement and active achievement verbs. The lexical representation of these

classes portrays the inherent ‘temporal properties’ of these verbs, which enable us to conceive their actions and interpret these actions.

The implication of this classification and interpretation is that an Igbo child learning the language must learn to distinguish the verbs and the specific object NPs that collocate with them. This can be done through verbal cues from caregivers and also through the practical observation of the cooking activities of these caregivers. The knowledge the child has about the world around him will facilitate the correct use of these verbs. However, the best way to acquire the competent use of these verbs is for the child to be raised in an Igbo speaking environment.

Notes

¹ Inherent Complement Verbs are ‘verbs the citation form of which includes a nominal element which may or may not be cognate with the verb.’ See Nwachukwu (1983: 109-113).

² The transcriptions follow standard Igbo orthography. The abbreviations are: TNS ‘tense’ and IND ‘indicative’

³ isiewu is a local delicacy made of the boiled parts of a goat’s head mixed with other condiments.

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