

## The morpho-syntactic coding of motion events in Igbò

Maduabuchi Sennen Agbo

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# #03

Juin 2017



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- \_ About the substitution of the voiceless post-alveolar affricate among Igala speakers of English
- \_ Cognate object constructions in Degema
- \_ La multifonctionnalité des conjonctions **bó** et **bɔ** en fon
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7, rue Guy-Môquet  
94801 VILLEJUIF Cedex - France  
<http://llacan.vjf.cnrs.fr/lla>  
[llafrique@cnrs.fr](mailto:llafrique@cnrs.fr)

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Les ouvrages sont à adresser à  
Maximilien Guérin ([maximilien.guerin@cnrs.fr](mailto:maximilien.guerin@cnrs.fr))  
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## The morpho-syntactic coding of motion events in Igbo

Maduabuchi Sennen AGBO<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

The phenomenon of motion events is universal in human cognition and language. These events are coded in the verbal structure of human language. This work builds on the past study of Igbo motion verbs and seeks to investigate the interaction between morphology, syntax and semantics in the description of Igbo motion events. Igbo verbal morphosyntax codes four categories of motion events. The first category, which includes verbs like **báá** ‘enter’ and **láá** ‘go home / go to destination’, code the FIGURE, PATH and GROUND in the motion event. The second category includes verbs like **zọ** ‘transplant’ and **kwá** ‘push’ which code FIGURE and GROUND in the motion event. The third category contains verbs like **fé éfé** ‘flying’ and **gbé ígbé** ‘crawling’ which code FIGURE and MANNER in the event. The last category consists of verbs like **ná áñà** ‘wobble’ and **sọ gọnọ gọnọ** ‘stagger’ which code FIGURE, MANNER and CAUSE. The study concludes that motion events in Igbo are coded morphologically. This conclusion is foundational for further investigation of the core components of motion events in Igbo that is, PATH and MANNER. In other words, it is the groundwork of the contribution of Igbo to the study of the cross-linguistic phenomenon of motion events.

### Keywords

Igbo, motion verbs, motion events, Role and Reference Grammar

### Résumé

L’expression du mouvement est un phénomène universel tant sur le plan cognitif que linguistique. Dans les langues humaines, c’est au niveau du

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1. Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Benin (Benin City, Nigeria), maduagbo@gmail.com

verbe que le mouvement est généralement exprimé. Tout en prenant en compte les travaux déjà consacrés à l'étude des verbes de mouvement en ibo, la présente étude cherche à approfondir la question des interactions entre la morphologie, la syntaxe et la sémantique dans le domaine de l'expression du mouvement en ibo. D'un point de vue morphosyntaxique, en effet, la langue ibo distingue quatre types de verbes de mouvement. Le premier type, qui comprend des verbes tels que **báá** 'entrer' et **láá** 'retourner chez soi / se rendre à une destination donnée', exprime les éléments constituants du mouvement que sont la FIGURE, la TRAJECTOIRE et le FOND. Le second type, auquel se rattachent des verbes tels que **zò** 'repiquer' et **kwá** 'pousser' permet l'expression des éléments FIGURE et FOND. Dans le troisième type, où l'on trouve par exemple les verbes **fé éfé** 'voler (dans les airs)' et **gbé ígbé** 'marcher à quatre pattes' ce sont la FIGURE et la MANIÈRE du mouvement qui sont exprimés. Enfin, le quatrième et dernier type regroupe des items tels que **ńá àńà** 'trembl(ot)er' et **sò gònò gònò** 'tituber' qui expriment à la fois la FIGURE, la MANIÈRE et la CAUSE du mouvement considéré. Les résultats de cette étude tendent à montrer que, en ibo, le mouvement est exprimé au niveau de la morphologie. Cette conclusion est un acquis fondamental en vue de futures recherches sur les deux plus importants éléments liés à la notion de mouvement en ibo, à savoir la TRAJECTOIRE et la MANIÈRE. Cette étude constitue aussi un travail pionnier en ce qui concerne la contribution de la langue ibo aux études consacrées à cet universel linguistique qu'est l'expression du mouvement.

### Mots clés

ibo (igbo), verbes de mouvement, expression du mouvement, grammaire des rôles et de la référence

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## 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Motion is one of the central domains of human experience because its conceptualisation involves the interaction with the environment. The linguistic study of motion events is an interesting area for typological investigations in linguistics. The works of Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000b), Aske (1989), Ibarrexe-Antuñano (2001) Filipovic (2002) Slobin (1996, 2004), Uwalaka (1988), among others give credence to the great deal of interesting research on motion events. Talmy (1985, 2000b) embodies the

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2. My gratitude goes to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of this journal for their painstaking effort in making this paper much better than it was when first submitted. I take responsibility for any imperfection in the work.

influential work that has motivated these cross-linguistic investigations. A motion event refers to ‘a situation containing motion and the continuation of stationary location alike’ (Talmy 2000b: 25). In other words, a motion event comprises the change of the location of an object from one point to another. Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000) refers to this kind of motion as *translational motion*. He differentiates it from *self-contained motion* like rotation and oscillation, which does not involve the physical displacement of an object.

This work is also motivated by Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000) and Slobin (1996, 2004) who contend that the components of a motion event are universal and require cross-linguistic investigations. According to Talmy (2000: 25) the components of a motion event are six-fold. First is the presence or absence of the translational motion. Second is the moving object which is termed the FIGURE. The third component is the entity with respect to which the FIGURE moves. This entity is known as the GROUND. The fourth component is the progression of the FIGURE with respect to the GROUND. This is termed PATH in Talmy’s (1985, 1991 and 2000) terminology. The fifth element is the MANNER, which articulates the conception of the motion and the sixth and final component is the CAUSE of the motion.

Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000) also introduces the term *lexicalisation*. Lexicalisation means the way that language extracts the experiential categories of motion from the cognitive faculties of the human mind. That is, how lexical items in the language express the notion of motion. It is the concept of lexicalisation that is the central thrust of this paper. The aim of the paper is to establish how the different levels (morphology, syntax and lexical semantics) of the Igbo<sup>3</sup> clause structure interact in rendering motion events in Igbo linguistic expressions.

This paper concentrates on the analysis of the verbs of motion in Igbo, which refer to verbs that encode ‘changes in locus’ (Ikegami 1970: 87). Igbo has a rich array of verbs that encode the ‘series of consecutive changes in the relationship of location holding between a given object and its domain’ (Rudza-Ostyn 1988: 517). In effect, the verbs of motion in Igbo express the spatial displacement of an object from a place A, at a particular time T<sub>1</sub>, to another place B at some later time T<sub>2</sub>.

Talmy (1985, 1991 and 2000) has established that the analysis of verb structure is essential to the explanation of the lexicalisation of motion events (however, other elements like cognition and culture are also

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3. Igbo is an indigenous language of Nigeria and it is spoken by over twenty million people. It is the fifth most widely spoken language in Africa (Childs 2003: 24) and one of the three major languages in Nigeria. It is a tone language with two distinct tones High and Low and a phenomenon of downstep. Williamson & Blench (2000) classify Igbo as West Benue-Congo under the Niger-Congo language family.

central to the lexicalisation of motion). This analysis of verb structure has given rise to a typology of translational motion events in languages. Talmy (1985, 2000, 2007) identifies the core component of a translational motion event as PATH. Languages fall into two typological groups – Verb-framed (V) and Satellite-framed (S) languages respectively – based on their encoding of PATH in a motion event. In Verb-framed languages, PATH is encoded in the main verb while MANNER is encoded in a subordinate verb or construction. In Satellite-framed languages, PATH is obligatorily encoded in a nonverbal element associated with the verb, while MANNER is encoded in the main verb. However, Slobin (2004, 2006) revises Talmy's classification and proposes a third typological group he terms Equipollently-framed languages. Here the PATH and MANNER of motion is expressed by equivalent grammatical forms. Talmy (2009) contests the claims of Slobin and holds that Equipollently-framed languages can be conveniently included into Satellite-framed languages.

Talmy and Slobin's proposals have influenced a great deal of research on translational motion in various languages. The aim in this paper is not to test their proposals with Igbo data but to investigate the interaction of Igbo morphology, syntax and semantics in the expression of motion events. The analysis here could further serve as a basis for testing Talmy and Slobin's proposals.

### 1.1 Theoretical framework

This study adopts the theoretical framework of Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin 2005; Van Valin & La Polla, 1997). This framework takes a cognitive approach to the analysis of clause structure. Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) employs a method of lexical decomposition based on Vendler's (1967) theory of *Aktionsart*. This term means 'inherent temporal properties of verbs'. For the Igbo language, this translates to 'the most natural or obvious fact about a particular verb used' Emenanjo (1978 : 171) and this includes the participants and conceptual boundaries of the events denoted by the verb. Agbo (2010) following Van Valin (2005) provides a number of syntactic tests to distinguish *aktionsart* classes in the Igbo verb. These tests show that the Igbo verbs fall into two broad classes of static and non-static verbs. The class of static verbs comprises two sub classes of *state* and *attributive state* verbs, while the non-static verbs are further divided into four sub-classes of *activity*, *achievement*, *accomplishment*, *active accomplishment* and *semelfactives*. The static verbs have the syntactic features of atelicity while the non-static verbs are telic verbs. The verb structures revealed in Agbo (2010) are essential in describing Igbo motion verbs. These structures show that the Igbo verb, in any communicative context, intrinsically encodes in various degrees, the six elements of the motion event as espoused in Talmy (1985, 1991, 2000b). This is remarkably

different from Spanish and English, the two prominent languages used as illustrations by Talmy to validate his proposals. For example, in English and Spanish, the PATH and MANNER components are variously encoded in the verbs with FIGURE and GROUND peripheral to the verb. However, Igbo data show instances where PATH, MANNER and GROUND (and various other patterns) are encoded in the verb with only FIGURE being peripheral to the verb. It is instances like these that have motivated this study and the theoretical framework adopted for it.

### 1.2 Data sources and methodology

Using a descriptive research design, a total of sixty-seven motion morphemes and verb roots were compiled with the help of available Igbo literature, music and daily recorded utterances produced by native speakers. The list was presented to native speakers of Abiriba, Nnewi, Nsukka, Owerri and Umuahia dialects for dialectal interpretations and with the aim to present the data as a fair representation of the dialects of the five Igbo speaking States. The motion verb roots of these dialects have largely the same meaning. It is the accompanying affixes that give rise to some few dialectal differences, which are so limited that they can be discarded within the scope of this study.

The data were analysed using the method of lexical decomposition and native speaker introspection. This method, which is RRG's approach to lexical analysis, has the advantage of taking into account the inherent meaning of the morpheme, lexeme or word and the context of use, which must include the native speaker's knowledge about the word and its properties. Lexical decomposition has the advantage of economy in the sense that it constrains the categorisation of the semantic classes of motion verbs.

### 1.3 Previous study of motion events in Igbo

Uwalaka (1988) is the pioneering and seminal work on motion events in Igbo. This work, as far as I know, is the only published material on Igbo verbs of motion. The author adopts Case Grammar analysis and establishes two broad classes of motion verbs viz. concrete and abstract, and gives a semantic analysis of these and their sub-classes. Unsurprisingly, the adoption of Case Grammar results in an unending list of motion verb classes. This is because for each syntactic construction there is a specific Case role assigned to specific nouns in specific contexts without regard to the native speaker's knowledge about the use of the verb.

This paper builds on the analyses of Uwalaka (1988) by focusing on the morphosyntax of motion events with the ultimate aim of decoding the interaction of morphology, syntax and semantics in the lexicalisation of motion events. The theoretical framework of Role and Reference Gram-

mar adopted here, has the advantage of limiting the number of verb classes and rendering more accurately what the native speaker knows about the use of the verb in context.

### 1.3 Igbo verb structure

Emenanjo (1978, 1975b, 2005) asserts that the morphosyntactic structure of the Igbo verb ‘is made up of three mutually obligatory and complementary elements.’ These obligatory elements comprise the verb itself, the complement and/or the bound cognate noun (BCN). The construction in (1) below, with the motion verb **jée**<sup>4</sup> ‘go’ illustrates the morphosyntactic structure of the Igbo verb. **ó**

- (1) **Òbí jè-rè ákwúkwó**<sup>5</sup>  
 Obi go-IND school  
 ‘Obi went to school’

In (1) above, the verb **jé** ‘go’ obligatorily co-occurs with a nominal element **ákwúkwó** ‘school’. The claim here is that every Igbo verb must co-occur with either a nominal element which serves as its complement and/or a bound cognate noun. The idea of the bound cognate noun is illustrated in (2) and (3) below.

- (2) **Òbí jè-rè éjé**  
 Obi go-IND BCN  
 ‘Obi went indeed’
- (3) **Òbí jè-rè ákwúkwó éjé**  
 Obi go-IND school EMPH  
 ‘Obi indeed went to school’

**Éjé** is a morphological derivation of the verb **jé** ‘go’ and it serves as an emphasis morpheme. In the literature this is known as the Bound Cognate Noun or BCN. All Igbo verbs can produce a specific BCN, through a regular process of reduplication of the verb root. The BCN always follows the verb and occurs bound to it (2) or in its close environment (3).

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4. The transcription follows standard Igbo orthography: **à** (low tone); **á** (high tone); and **ā** downstep. All tones are marked to avoid ambiguity due to lexical variance among dialects. Igbo has phonological features of vowel harmony where the eight vowels in the language are neatly divided into two sets. One set comprises vowels produced with the Advanced Tongue Root (+ATR) while the other set comprises vowels with –ATR. In standard Igbo, –ATR vowels are represented with the sub-dot, e.g. [ɔ̣] while +ATR vowels do not have the sub-dot.

5. **Ákwúkwó** originally means ‘leaf’ in Igbo but in the present day usage of the language it frequently translates into ‘school’. This secondary meaning may have risen out of the fact that historically the Igbo people resorted to the word **ákwúkwó** ‘leaf’ to translate the English word ‘book’, probably because the pages of the book looked like the leaves they were familiar with in their traditional environment. Etymologically, **ákwúkwó** must then be understood as ‘[the place of the] book[s] (=leaves)’.

In examples (1) and (2) above, the nominal element **ákwúkwó** and the BCN **éjé** are viewed by Emanjo (1978: 129) as arguments and/or direct objects of the verb, respectively. However, in the RRG framework that this study adopts, the argument of the verb is the participant in the clause that completely carries out or is completely affected by the action represented by the verb. For RRG the BCN of the Igbo verb is not an argument but a part of the verb that extends the meaning of the verb. Therefore, while the nominal element **ákwúkwó** in (1) is an argument because it is completely affected by the action of the verb, the BCN **éjé** in (2) is simply the morphological extension of the verb **jé** and not its argument or direct object. Although we adopt the term ‘complement’ to label the nominal element, the sense we use it differs from Emanjo’s perspective. We use it as a modifying element of the verb. Our perspective will become clearer as we subsequently discuss Igbo verbs in motion events.

## 2. Motion verbs and motion events

The verbs in our data represent the experiential coding of motion events in Igbo in line with the postulation in the literature (Talmy 1985, 1991, 2000b, Aske 1989, Ameka & Essegbey 2006, 2013, Ibarrexe-Antuñano 2001, Filipovic 2002, Slobin 1996, 2004, Uwalaka 1988), where a motion event involves the physical displacement of an object. The rest of this paper is thus organised to systematically discuss the morphosyntactic coding of motion events. Sections 2.1 to 2.4 discusses the various classes of Igbo motion verbs and their morphosyntactic constructions. Section 2.5 gives a lexical representation of the motion event classes in Igbo while Section 3 is the conclusion and discussion of areas of further research.

### 2.1 The verbs coding FIGURE, PATH and GROUND

The verbs roots belonging to this class include the following.

- (4a) **báá** ‘enter’
- (4b) **láá** ‘go home, go to destination’
- (4c) **píó** ‘pass through a narrow pass’
- (4d) **pù** ‘get out’
- (4e) **rògò** ‘ascend, go up’
- (4f) **ródà** ‘descend, go down’

These verbs in syntactic constructions essentially code the FIGURE and the GROUND in the motion event. The FIGURE is usually the argument coding the agent of the clause and the GROUND is usually the argument coding the patient. The verbs themselves inherently encode PATH. The MANNER of movement is not encoded in these events. The following clause constructions make evident these features.

- (5a) **Ọ̀** **bàrà** **n'** **ùlọ̀** **yá**  
 S3SG enter-IND in house POSS3SG  
 'S/he entered her/his house'
- (5b) **Àdá** **là-rà** **Àbá**  
 Ada go.home-IND Aba  
 'Ada went to [the city of] Aba (presumably her home)'
- (5c) **Hó** **piò-rà**<sup>6</sup> **n'ímé** **óshwá**  
 s3PL pass.through-IND inside bush  
 'They passed through a narrow path into the bush'
- (5d) **Ọ̀** **pù-rù** **n'** **ùlọ̀** **yá**  
 S3SG go.out-IND in house POSS3SG  
 'S/he went out of her/his house'
- (5e) **Jízọ̀s** **rògò-rò** **n' éluígwé**  
 Jesus ascend-IND in heaven  
 'Jesus ascended into heaven'
- (5f) **Jízọ̀s** **ròdà-rà** **n' àlà mmúó**  
 Jesus descend-IND into hell  
 'Jesus descended into hell'

The verbs (5a - 5e) are active achievement verbs following the classification of Agbo (2010, 2013). Active achievement verbs encode atelic events with conceptual boundaries. For example, the verbs **báá** 'enter' and **láá** 'go home' in (5a) and (5b) respectively, lexically represent the fact that the motion event has an end point. For the Igbo speaker, the conceptual integrity of the construction is depicted by the morphosyntax. Here, the verbs 'obligatorily co-occur' with nominal elements. For (5a) and (5b) these nominal elements-cum-complements are **n'ùlọ̀ yá** and **Àbá** respectively. In this case, the nominal elements are participants in the motion events because they are affected by the objects (FIGURE) that move. **Ọ̀** in (5a) and **Àdá** in (5b), the FIGURES, in this case move into the GROUNDS **n'ùlọ̀ yá** and **Àbá** respectively. The same analysis is applicable to examples (5c - 5f).

Without this surface syntactic structure, the construction will not encrypt what the native speaker knows about the verbs' usage in context. For example, the verbs in (6a) and (6b) do not have conceptual integrity because of the absence of the 'obligatorily co-occurring nominal elements' that represent the GROUND.

- (6a) \***Ọ̀** **bà-rà**  
 S3SG enter-IND  
 'S/he entered'
- (6b) \***Àdá** **là-rà**  
 Ada go.home-IND  
 'Ada has gone home (and she did this through the peculiar path to her home)'

6. The /ə/ vowel in example (5c) exists in the Nsukka dialect (s. Ikekeonwu *et al.* 2011: 5).



The verbs in (6a) and (6b) must have complements for the speaker to have a full understanding of the utterance, and hence (6a) and (6b) are ungrammatical. The illustration in (6b) may look controversial but note that the verb *láá* intrinsically encodes the ‘path to the home or destination’. So for the speaker the morphological coding of the GROUND is necessary for full lexical knowledge. Agbo & Yuka (2011), in discussing the transitivity continuum of Igbo verbs, ascribe high transitivity features to such verbs as in (5a - 5f). This is because they take complements that are concrete and are completely affected by the action of the agent in the clause. This is different from some other classes of Igbo verbs with low transitivity features, where the complements are not concrete elements.

## 2.2 Verbs coding FIGURE and GROUND

Some of the verb roots in this group are represented in (7) below:

- (7a) **zò** ‘transplant’  
 (7b) **sè** ‘pull with the hand’  
 (7c) **kpù** ‘pull with a rope’  
 (7d) **kwá** ‘push, carry’  
 (7e) **dò** ‘drag’

The sentences in (8a - 8f) show these verb roots in clause constructions, where they code the FIGURE and GROUND in the motion event but do not lexically represent the PATH of the event. They are achievement verbs because they characterise motion events that are instantaneous. They are telic verbs with conceptual boundaries to the event they depict (see Agbo 2010).

- (8a) **Òbí zò-rò òsé n’ alá yá**  
 Obi transplant-IND pepper on land POSS3SG  
 ‘Obi transplanted some pepper seedlings in his land’
- (8b) **Ó sè-re nwá yá áká**  
 S3SG pull-IND child POSS3SG hand  
 ‘S/he pulled at his/her child [with his/her hand]’
- (8c) **Ó kwà-rà íbù yá**  
 S3SG carry-IND load POSS3SG  
 ‘S/he carried away her belongings’
- (8d) **Ó kwà-rà nwá yá áká**  
 S3SG push-IND child POSS3SG hand  
 ‘S/he<sub>i</sub> pushed his/her child [with his/her<sub>i</sub> hand]’
- (8e) **Ó kpù-rù éwú**  
 S3SG pull-IND goat  
 ‘S/he presented a goat’ (by pulling it in tethers to the recipient).’
- (8f) **Há dò-rò yá áká**  
 S3PL drag-IND O3SG hand  
 ‘They dragged it [with their hand]’

The construction in (8a) and (8b) would suffice to illustrate the morphosyntactic features of this class of verbs. The verb root, **zọ́** ‘transplant’ in (8a) obligatorily takes the complement **ósè** ‘pepper seedlings’. In doing so, the verb codes a FIGURE **Óbì** who transfers the pepper seedlings to the GROUND **n’álà yá**. The motion event here involves the relocation of the seedlings from their nursery to the garden or farmland. There is no clear path shown by the verb of the movement of the seedlings. This event is instant because the activity of transplanting seeds from the nursery to the farmland is usually done at once. In sentence (8b) the verb root **sè** occurs with its complement **áká** to code the motion involved in the FIGURE **Ó** forcing the GROUND **nwá yá** to move. Again, there is no clear path shown by the verb in this movement. A close look at the meaning of the verbs in (8c - 8f) would also reveal that no clear path is represented by the verb when compared to the examples in (5a - 5f). The verbs in (8a - 8f) also have high transitivity features (Agbo & Yuka 2011) but are lower in ranking than the verbs in (5a - 5f) in the transitivity continuum.

### 2.3 The verbs coding FIGURE and MANNER

These verbs roots are represented by the data in (9).

- (9a) **fé** ‘fly’  
 (9b) **gbé** ‘crawl’  
 (9c) **gbó** ‘walk languidly’  
 (9d) **hé** ‘walk stealthily’  
 (9e) **kékpù** ‘manner of walking of midgets’  
 (9f) **kpólé** ‘walk with a rolling gait’  
 (9g) **má** ‘leap’  
 (9h) **rí** ‘creep’  
 (9i) **wú** ‘jump’

These verbs in sentential constructions code the FIGURE which is the agent in the clause. There are no GROUNDS encoded in these verbs. The verbs in clause constructions can occur with PATH encoding verbs in a serial verb construction, shown in parenthesis in (10a - 10f). However, this occurrence of PATH verbs is optional and is only done when the speaker deliberately wants to indicate the PATH. The MANNER of motion is inherently encoded in the verb.

- (10a) **Ó fè-rè èfé (láá)**  
 S3SG fly-IND flying (go.home)  
 ‘S/he flew (and went home).’
- (10b) **Nwátá gbè-rè ígbè (pùó)**  
 Infant crawl-IND crawling (go.out)  
 ‘The young child crawled (and went out).’
- (10c) **Óbì gbò-ro ègbò (biá)**  
 Obi move.languidly-IND moving.languidly come  
 ‘Obi walked languidly and (came).’

- (10d) **Àkàkpó kèkpù-rù ékékpù (biá)**  
 Midget walk.like.midget-IND midget-like (come)  
 ‘The midget came walking with his/her characteristic gait.’
- (10e) **Ó hè-rè èhé (pùó)**  
 S3SG walk.stealthily-IND stealth (go.out)  
 ‘S/he walked stealthily and went out’
- (10f) **Ó kpólè-rè àkpólè (láá)**  
 S3SG walk.with.a.rolling.gait-IND rolling (go.home)  
 ‘S/he went home walking with a rolling gait.’
- (10g) **Ñkítá mà-rà àmá (pùó)**  
 Dog leap-IND leaping (go.out)  
 ‘The dog leaped and went out.’
- (10h) **Ó wù-rù àwù (biá)**  
 S3SG hop-IND hopping (come)  
 ‘S/he hopped and came.’
- (10i) **Ákpísì rì-rì àrì (pùó)**  
 Ant creep-IND creeping (go.out)  
 ‘The ant crept and went out.’

These are accomplishment verbs with the features of telicity. The actions they depict are not instantaneous but stretch over a longer period of time than achievement verbs. They belong to the class of verbs traditionally classified as Bound Complement Verbs and their complements are known as Bound Cognate Nouns (Emenanjo 2005, see also § 1.3 above). For example, in (10a) the verb root **fè** takes as its complement the Bound Cognate Noun **èfé** which is a morphological derivative of the verb root. However, this complement is not affected in a tangible way by the FIGURE **Ó** as the complements of the verbs in (5a - 5f) and (8a - 8e). This leads Agbo & Yuka (2011) to conclude that the transitivity features of these verbs is the lowest in the transitivity continuum of Igbo verbs.

#### 2.4 Verbs coding FIGURE, MANNER and CAUSE

The verbs roots for this class appear in the data (11) below.

- (11a) **rú** ‘flow lazily (river currents, any liquid)’  
 (11b) **só** ‘flow (rapidly and in a wavy manner, including non-liquids)’  
 (11c) **ñà** ‘move wobbling’  
 (11d) **zé** ‘sink, slide’  
 (11e) **zè** ‘avoid, dodge’

Following Agbo (2010) these verbs fall into the class of activity verbs with the features of atelicity. In sentential constructions, they necessarily occur with the progressive marker **nà** which precedes the verb root in the construction. However, they are also followed by Bound Cognate Nouns, which serve the same grammatical function as explained for examples (10a - 10i) above. The verbs code the MANNER and CAUSE of motion in addition to the FIGURE. The sentences in (12a - 12e) illustrate this fact.

- (12a) **Òsìmirì nà-é-rú èrù**  
 River PROG-AGR-flow flowing  
 ‘The river is flowing.’
- (12b) **Òbí nà-a-sọ ọ̀nọ ọ̀nọ ọ̀sọ**  
 Obi PROG-AGR-flow tottering flowing  
 ‘Obi walked in a staggering manner.’
- (12c) **Úgbọ̀lẹ̀ à nà-à-ńà ọ̀ńà**  
 Vehicle DET PROG-AGR-wobble wobbling  
 ‘This car is moving in a wobbling manner.’
- (12d) **Úrọ̀ nà-è-zé ézé**  
 Mud PROG-AGR-slide slides  
 ‘Mud does slide.’
- (12e) **À mà ndí á nà-é-zè èzè**  
 S.IPRS know people S.IPRS PROG-AGR-dodge dodging  
 ‘We don’t know who we [should] avoid [in order not to get harmed].’

The analysis of (12a - 12c) exposes the semantic representation of the verbs in the constructions (12a - 12e). For example, in (12a) the verb **rú** (associated with its BCN **èrù**) specifically encodes the various shades of the motion event. It encodes the MANNER which is the archetypical way rivers flow, and the CAUSE of motion which is obviously the under currents of the river. In (12b), the verb **sọ** (associated with its nominal complement **ọ̀nọ ọ̀nọ** and its BCN **ọ̀sọ**) specifically encodes the manner of walking which is staggering. For the FIGURE **òbí** to move in a staggering fashion means that something is causing it. This could be illness, drunkenness, or anything at all. And for the verb **ńà** (associated with its BCN **ọ̀ńà**) in (12c) it encodes the wobbling manner of motion of the FIGURE, **úgbọ̀lẹ̀** and this could be caused by factors such as irregular wheel balancing and alignment or some other mechanical faults.

## 2.5 The lexical representation of motion verb roots in Igbo

The semantic decomposition of verbs in Role and Reference Grammar is termed ‘predicate decomposition’, where words are broken into smaller predicates in order to mark out the required relationship between clauses containing semantically-related words. Van Valin (2005) and Van Valin & La Polla (1997) use predicate decomposition to account for the argument structure of verbs, hence allowing to propose a verb classification.

In the same vein, the motion verbs in Sections 2.1 to 2.4 above will be analysed in terms of lexical decomposition to account for the idiosyncratic meaning of each. The lexical representation of the decomposition of verbs is known as its Logical Structure (LS). This Logical Structure contains the argument structure of the verb. Following Agbo (2010, 2011) and insights from Van Valin (2005: 45) the motion verbs in Section 2.1 to 2.4 above fall respectively into the *Aktionsart* classes of *Active Accomplishment*, *Accomplishment*, *Achievement Verbs* and

*Activity.* The Logical Structure for the motion verbs in § 2.1 to § 2.4 is given in Table 1 below.

*Table 1: The Lexical representation for Aktionsart classes of Igbo motion verb types*

Motion verb type	<i>Aktionsart</i> class	Logical structure
Coding FIGURE, PATH and GROUND	Active Achievement	<b>do'</b> (x, [ <b>predicate</b> <sub>1</sub> ' (x,(y))]) & BECOME <b>predicate</b> <sub>2</sub> ' (z, x) or (y)
Coding FIGURE and GROUND	Achievement	INGR <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x, y)
Coding FIGURE and MANNER	Accomplishment	BECOME <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x, y) or BECOME <b>do'</b> (x, (x, [ <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x, y)])
Coding FIGURE, MANNER and CAUSE	Activity	<b>do'</b> (x, [ <b>predicate'</b> (x) or (x, y)])

The lexical representation of these four classes in Table 1 above brings out clearly the features of each class. It is important to point out the differences between the Igbo data in this work and other well studied languages like English and Spanish. The examples in (13) represent the difference between Igbo and English.

- (13a) **Ó** **bà-rà** **n' ụlò** **yá**  
 S3SG enter-IND in house POSS3SG  
 'S/he entered her/his house'
- (13b) **Òbí** **zò-rò** **òsé** **n' alá** **yá**  
 Obi transplant-IND pepper on land POSS3SG  
 'Obi transplanted some pepper seedlings in his land'
- (13c) **Ó** **fè-rè** **èfé** **(láá)**  
 S3SG fly-IND flying (go home)  
 'S/he flew away (and went home)'
- (13d) **Òsìmirì** **nà-é-rú** **èrù**  
 River PROG-AGR-flow flowing  
 'The river flows'

Example (13a) includes the verb **bàà** 'enter' belonging to the class of verbs that code FIGURE, PATH and GROUND. As already explained the verb inherently codes PATH but must morphologically bind to itself (or co-occur with) a complement, which functions as the GROUND. The element GROUND in this case is not interpreted as the syntactic component of a transitive verb as in the case of the English translation in (13a).

Instead, is this element GROUND is the morphological (NOT syntactic) device the Igbo language employs to code the element in question. In this wise, sentences without the verbal complement will not be acceptable to the Igbo speaker. For example the clause structure \***Ó bà-rà** without the verbal complement **n'ùlò yá** is unacceptable to the Igbo native speaker in any context. However, if we look at the English translation of (13a) the PATH verb *enter* takes *his/her house* as its object (or internal argument) and not its complement as in the case of Igbo. In other words, while the coding of PATH and GROUND in Igbo is a morphological phenomenon, its counterpart in English is syntactic. This same analysis can be applied to (13b) with the verb **zò** which codes FIGURE and GROUND only. In (13c) this typological difference is further delineated. Here the verb **fé éfé** does not take a verbal complement with a perceptible meaning. Instead **éfé** which functions as its complement is a morphological derivative of the verb root **fé**. However, if we contrast it with the English verb *fly*, we may see that this can take an object in the sentence. For example, the sentence *she flew home* shows that the verb takes the object *home*, supporting the claim that the coding of GROUND in English is syntactic. Note that in (13c) Igbo codes the GROUND morphologically as explained in § 2.2. The example (13d) can have the same analysis as (13c) for both the Igbo and English equivalents.

### 3. Conclusion

The analysis of the data collected has shown that the morphosyntactic coding of motion events in Igbo fall into four classes. These categories are determined by the morphological features of the Igbo verb as explained in Section 2 above. The first class comprises the motion verbs coding FIGURE, PATH and GROUND. In this class, the verbs inherently code the element PATH but the morphological representation of the verb in clause structure codes the FIGURE and PATH. These verbs are active achievement verbs based on their 'inherent temporal properties'. In the second class are verb roots that code FIGURE and GROUND in their morphological formation at clause level. The verbs in this class are achievement verbs because of their inherent temporal properties. The third class contains verbs that code FIGURE and MANNER, where MANNER is inherently coded in the verb and there is no morphological representation of the GROUND or PATH. These elements are understood in context. These are achievement verbs in keeping with their inherent temporal properties. The fourth class comprise verbs that code FIGURE, MANNER and CAUSE, where MANNER and CAUSE are inherently coded in the verb and understood in context. In line with their inherent temporal properties, they are activity verbs. The lexical representation of these classes of motion verbs are shown in Table 1. The analysis in this work is the foundation to the study of the core components of motion events which

Talmy (2000) and Slobin (1996) have stated as PATH and MANNER. As earlier stated, the linguistic analysis of motion events is a neglected area of Igbo study. Therefore, this work serves as the foundation for a contribution of Igbo to the study of this universal linguistic phenomenon.

### List of abbreviations

3	third person	AGR	agreement marker
BCN	Bound Cognate Noun	DET	determiner
EMPH	emphasiser	IND	Indicative
IPRS	Impersonal	POSS	possessive
PL	plural	PROG	progressive
PRON	pronoun	RRG	Role and Reference Grammar
S	Satellite-framed	S	subject
SG	singular	V	Verb-framed

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