

A Comparison of Separable Igbo Verbal Complex and Separable German Phrasal Verb

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Abstract

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Verb construction is a natural and Important phenomenon that is found in the grammar of all existing languages. This study is an attempt to compare and contrast two different languages from two different language families and find similarities and differences existing between them. The data collected for this study was obtained from a secondary source, journal, articles and textbooks and a descriptive analysis was used to analyse these data. Verbs in Igbo can be classified into simple, compound and complex. This study focuses on the verbal complex of Igbo language and on the phrasal verb in German language.

Keywords: Verbs, Phrasal Verbs, Complex Verbs, Separable Verbs.

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INTRODUCTION

The Igbo language is a Niger-Congo language spoken in Nigeria, while the German language is an Indo-European language primarily spoken in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. One of the interesting features of these language is the Igbo verbal complex and the separable German phrasal verb. This data analysis compares and contrasts these language features to identify their similarities and differences. Any learner of Igbo language always finds some features of the Igbo verbs difficult. The Igbo verb structure can be said to be complex and based on the complexity of its structure, scholars like Emenajo and Nwachukwu divide the Igbo verbs into three: simple verbs which involves the verb root only, the compound verb (verb + verb or verb + suffix) and the verbal complex, verb + noun phrase or prepositional phrase (V+NP/PP).

Just like Emenajo, Nwachukwu (1987) also identifies a type of verbal complex in Igbo, they also agree that the verbal complex can also be referred as the Inherent complement verbs (ICV). This work examines the analysis of the *gba* verbal complex in Igbo and the

separable German phrasal verb. The researcher investigates the complex verb *gba* in order to explain the component of the separable verbal complex in Igbo language.

Most work done on the Igbo verbal complex by notable scholars like Emenajo (1975), Nwachukwu (1985), Wards (1936), Lords (1975) and Uchekukwu (2004) made use of the *gba* verb root in order to explain the complexity of the Igbo verb. Verbal complex is the combination of verb and a noun or prepositional phrase and can also be referred to as Inherent complement verb (see Nwachukwu 1987). The separable German phrasal verb involves the addition of a prefix to a verb. The addition of the prefix changes the original meaning of the verb it was added to. In the German language structure, the prefix will be separated from the verb and placed at the end of the sentence in order to give the sentence a complete meaning.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Igbo and German language have unique verb constructs that can be separable. However, there seem to

be little or comparative studies on these verb constructs (Igbo verbal complex and separable German phrasal verb). This research attempt to bridge this gap in knowledge by investigating the points of similarities and differences that characterizes the verbal constructs in both languages.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This research aims at the following:

To describe the Igbo verbal complex with emphasis on the *gba* cluster

- To describe the separable German phrasal verb.
- To compare the Igbo verbal complex and separable German phrasal verb to discover their similarities.

1.4 Significance of the study

This research work will enrich the bodies of language existing between both languages and to making the acquisition of both language easier for learners. This work is been carried out in order to benefit people who wants to acquire either language as an L2, to make it easier and understandable. This work will be beneficial to L2 learners of Igbo and German language.

1.5 Scope of the study

This study focuses on the *gba* verb cluster in the Igbo language and the separable German phrasal verb which includes “abfahren” (to depart or leave), the “ab” which is the prefix and the “fahren” which means “to drive”, “aufstehen” (to get up) the auf which is the prefix and the “stehen” which means to “stand”. It aims to compare between both languages and to find similarities existing between the verbs in both languages.

1.6 Research questions

1. What is the Igbo verbal complex and how can they be described?
2. What is the separable German phrasal verb?
3. What are the similarities existing between both verb types in Igbo and German?

2. Theoretical review

2.1 Verbs

Strumpf and Douglas (1997) define a verb as a word which expresses action, existences or conditions. Ndimele (1999), a verb is typically the most important

Example:

Verb	Past form	Past participle
Arrive	arrived	arrived
Attack	attacked	attacked
Love	loved	loved

According to Eyisi (2004), Irregular lexical verbs are verbs that does not maintain a uniform pattern in the formation of the past and the past participle forms.

word in the predicate area of the sentence. He maintains that predicate is the part of a sentence which says something about the subject. Radford (2004) posits that a verb “is a category of word that has the morphological property that it can carry a specific range of inflection and syntactic properties that it can lead the complement of infinitival to”. Eyisi (2004) defines a verb as a word or group of words that is used to tell what someone or something is, does, or experience. She also explained that a verb is a word which expresses action, existences or conditions. Eyisi concluded that a verb is the life of a language. Through the verb all important parts of speech, our words take action and we express who we are and how we feel.

Crystal (2007) refers to a verb as “an element which can display morphological contrasts to tense, aspect, mood, voice, person and number”. Ikegwuonu (2013) explains that the verb is the centrality in any language. It is central in the grammatical constructions of any language. She implies that the category verb is always present in all languages of the world. Hornby (2015) defined a verb as a word or group of words that expresses an action, an event (such as happen) or a state.

According to Murthy (2017), a verb is described as a word which is used to indicate an action, a state of being, of existence or possession. Gunner (2022) defines a verb as a word that shows action in a sentence. It also shows the tense, agreement with the subject, a noun’s state of being and gives more information about a noun.

2.2 Classification of English verbs: Eyisi (2004) classified the English verb in to two types:

a. Lexical verbs:

They are also called main verbs: Wollacott (2022), a lexical verb is a verb that provides information. They are open class type of verb and are used to express states and actions. Such verbs are also known as Main verbs. Examples: “study”, “eat”, and “listen”.

Eyisi (2004) further explains that a lexical verb is said to be regular if its base form does not change when inflections are added to create new forms. They are called lexical verbs because their simple past and past participle form are obtained by the addition of ‘ed’ to their forms.

Example:

Verb	past form	past participle
Begin	began	begun
Bite	bit	bitten
Break	broke	broken

AUXILIARY VERBS

Eyisi (2004), an auxiliary verb also known as helping verb, determines the mood or tense of another verb in a phrase. Their major function is that they help the main verbs to form their tenses. The auxiliary verb consists of the two main sub-classes which includes: primary auxiliaries and the modal auxiliaries.

Examples of the primary auxiliary:

According to Eyisi (2004), the primary auxiliary is three in number and they have two features,

- 1, Each end in -s in the third person singular.
a be: He *is* a good ambassador.
b do: Ekene *does* her assignment judiciously.
c Have: Captain Von Trapp *has* seven children.

2, They are also used as lexical verbs and as an auxiliary verb.

- a), Main verb
i be: The twins *are* intelligent students.
ii do: Salma *does* her assignment every day.
- b) As auxiliary verbs
i be: The girls *are* skipping.
ii do: Their choir *do* not sing well.

Modal Auxiliaries:

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) defined modal auxiliary verbs as little words that precede the main verb of a sentence and are largely used to express a speaker's or writer's opinion or attitude towards the proposition that the sentence expresses or the situation that the proposition describes.

Eyisi (2004) said that a modal auxiliary verb expresses the mood of the verb.

Example of a modal verb:

Present: can, may, will, shall, must.

Past: could, might, would, should.

2.3 Phrasal verbs

According to Bolinger (1971) A phrasal verb is a combination of an ordinary verb and a preposition or an adverbial participle that has at least one particular meaning that is not predictable from the combined literal meanings of the verb and preposition or the participles. West (1978) defines phrasal verbs as idiomatic combination of a verb and an adverb or a verb and a preposition, or a verb with both an adverb and preposition. It means that a phrasal verb is made up of compound words which must include a verb followed by either an adverb, a preposition or combination of both. Homby (1988) states that phrasal verbs can be transitive or intransitive. A phrasal verb is a verb combined with

an adverb or preposition or sometimes both, to give a new meaning.

For Eyisi (2004) a phrasal verb is a verb followed by a preposition or an adverb. This combination creates a meaning different from the original verb. She adds that "phrasal verb are also called compound verb, verb particle construction or verb phrase".

Examples:

Take off- The plane took off.

Give up- The old man gave up the ghost.

Look forward- We look forward to seeing you during the holiday.

Some phrasal verbs contain two particles such as:

Break out in- spot.

Look out for- someone/something.

Team up with- make a partnership.

Nordquist (2019) defines a phrasal verb as a phrase made up of two words that acts as an individual verb. Phrasal verbs typically combine a verb with an adverb or preposition to create a meaning independent of the original word. For example, the verb 'kick' and the preposition 'off' combine to form the phrasal verb "kick off", which means "begin".

2.4 Classifications of Igbo verbs.

Mbah (2011) describes the Igbo language as "a verb language". This is because of the significant roles the verb plays in the grammatical structures of the language.

Ogwueleka (1987) identifies three basic classes of Igbo verbs, defined in terms of their morphological structure.

They include:

i, Simple verbs: Ogwueleka (1987) observed that a simple verb form contains its citation form and nothing else.

Example

izu 'to buy', iga 'to go', isi 'to cook', ide 'to fall'.

This consists of a consonant-vowel structure (CV) but without an infinitive marker. Examples includes, "je" meaning 'go', "ma" meaning 'know', "da" meaning 'fall', "gba" meaning 'kick', "kwe" meaning 'say' etc. (Uchechukwu 2011).

ii, Compound verbs: Ogwueleka (1987) maintains that a compound verb form consists of at least two free verb forms.

Example.

Citation form imperative form

irigo ri + ga = rigo rigo.

Igaba 'to keep going' ga + ba =gaba gaba.

A compound verb is the verb which has a minimum of two verbs, that they may act independent verb (Mbah 2005).

Uchechukwu (2010) explains that a compound verb structure involves the combination of one simple verb root with a suffix or two simple verb roots. That is, verb + verb or a verb + suffix.

Example:

Verb + verb

“gba” ‘to kick’ + ‘pu’ ‘to go out’

“igbapu” ‘to kick off/away’

Verb + suffix

“gba” ‘to spray/splash’ + “sa” ‘on/upon’

“igbasa” ‘to splash on’

iii. Ogwueleka (1987) claims that a complex verb form is a verb form that consists of a verb root and a bound affix.

Example.

Citation form

ipata ‘bring/carry’ to bute bute

ilote ‘to remember’ lote lote

iii. Complex verbs: The verbal complex involves the combination of a verb root with a noun or prepositional phrase. That is V+NP/PP.

Emenanjo (1975:165) explains that both the verb root structure and the NP/PP structure in a complex verb are not bound together like in the compound phrase, instead they are separated and other language structure can occur between the verb root and the NP/PP complement. The composite V+NP/PP structure is known as Inherent complement verb (ICV) (Nwachukwu 1985). Emenanjo (1978) the inherent complement verb which was identified by Nwachukwu (1976) includes a nominal element which may or may not be cognate.

Nwachukwu (1987) in his classification of Igbo verbs recognizes two types of verbs in Igbo. These are Inherent complement verbs (ICV) and the non-inherent complement verb. He defined the Inherent complement verb as a morphological subset of a verb which consists of a consonant and a vowel (CV) root followed by a free noun (or in very few cases, a prepositional phrase). Inherent complement verb is subdivided into transitive and intransitive, while non inherent complement verbs are divided into transitive, unaccusatives and unergatives.

He observed that the presence of inherent complement verb in Igbo has had effect of complicating the phenomenon of transitivity.

Examples of inherent complements in Igbo includes:

i. vu – cluster

vu – onu

‘carry-mouth’

‘fast’

ii, tu – cluster

tu – i -anya

‘hit – at. eye’.

iii, ma – cluster

ma – mma

‘be – beautiful’

‘be beautiful’.

According to Uchechukwu (2011) he explained in his work that a verbal complex involves the combination of a verb root with a noun or preposition.

For example:

a, igba mmiri ‘to water (something)’

Ifeanyi gba-ra oka ahụ mmiri

Ifeanyi spray/splash- rV(PAST) maize that water

‘Ifeanyi watered the maize’.

b, Ifeanyi na – agba n ezi

Ifeanyi AUX – moves PREP outside

‘Ifeanyi lays about = Ifeanyi is a layabout.

He further explains that the first example is a combination of the verb root *gba* with a nominal phrase (NP) *mmiri* ‘water’ (it has a V+ NP structure), while the second example is a combination of the verb root *gba* with the prepositional phrase (PP) *n ezi* (this has a V+ PP structure).

2.5 Separable verbs.

A separable verb is a verb that is composed of a lexical core and a separable particle. In some sentence positions, the core verb and the particle appear in one word, whilst in others the core verb and the particle are separated. The particle cannot be accurately referred to as a prefix because it can be separated from the core verb. German, Dutch, Afrikaans and Hungarian are notable for having many separable verbs. Separable verbs challenge theories of sentence structure because when they are separated, it is not evident how the compositionality of meaning should be understood.

Separable verbs (Trennbare Verben) and inseparable verbs (Untrennbare Verben) in German are verbs whose meaning is altered by the addition of a prefix. Prefixes that are separable are separated from their verb in the conjugated form e.g., *anstehen* – *ich stehe an* (to queue – I queue). Whereas, inseparable prefixes cannot be separated from their verb e.g., *bestehen* – *du bestehst* (to pass – you pass). The prefix determines whether a verb is separable or not (Collin’s 1980).

Separable German phrasal verbs are ordinary verbs which have a prefix added to the front of the verb,

which will give the new verb a different meaning. The verb must undergo a conjugation process like every other verb before adding it to a sentence.

Separable verbs follow the same pattern of other verbs (weak and strong) but then one has to do something extra:

- Chop off the prefix
- Conjugate the verb
- Put the prefix at the end of the clause. (Benneth 2022).

Classification of German verbs.

Benneth (2022) classified German verbs into two which are:

Regular verbs:

which are also called “weak” verbs. They obey the rules of standard conjugation. The weak verbs do not change their verb stem in the present tense, add a ‘t’ to the stem in the simple past, and from the past participle with a *ge* stem, we add a ‘t’.

Example: “horen” means ‘to listen’ and “kaufen” which means “to buy”.

Present tense past tense past participle

Ich hore ich horte ich habe gehort
Du kaufst du kauftest du hast gekauft

Weak verbs in the simple past for the 3rd person singular (er/es/sie) change the typical -t conjugation to an -e, just like the first person singular.

Present tense past tense past participle

Ich hore ich horte ich habe gehort
Er hort er horte er hat gehort.

Irregular verbs: They are also known as “strong” verbs. They follow their own pattern.

Examples: “finden which means ”
Present tense: ich fand – wir fanden
du fandest – ihr fandet
er fand – sie fanden

Irregular verbs do not add ‘t’ but do add most of the conjugated endings to their irregular stems. There are no set rules for predicting the past tense forms of irregular verbs.

Sometimes, there is a third class of German verb which is the Mixed verb.

The mixed verb are verbs that primarily are regular but do have their own conjugated form. They combine the rules for weak verbs and strong verbs.

Example: ‘brennen’ means to “burn’ and “rennen” means “to run”

brennen ----- brannte-----gebrannt

rennen----- rannte-----gerannt

In the simple past tense, a ‘t’ is added to the stem just like in a weak verb. However, there is also a stem-vowel change like strong verbs. Similarly, the past participle combines the weak ‘t’ ending with a stem-vowel change.

Modal German verbs: There are few modal verbs in German language and they includes: ‘can’, ‘must’, ‘want’, ‘should’, ‘may’ etc.

Example:

- Ich kann singen.
‘I can sing’.
- du darfst rauchen.
‘you may smoke’.
- Sie müssen gehen.
‘you must go’

3. Empirical studies

Steinbach *et al.*, (2007) worked on German complex verb and he classified them into four groups: Prefixed verbs (prafixverben: zerfallen), particles prefixed verbs (partikel prafixverben: umfahren), particle verbs (partikel verben: umfahren) and double particle verb (doppelpartikel verben: hineinlaufen). However only particle and prefixed verbs appears to be the most recurring types of complex verb.

Uchechukwu (2011) studied the Igbo complex verb (the verb + NP/PP or verb + PP) structures. He noted that there are issues to be addresses theoretically in order to under the Igbo complex verb. Such as; the exact meaning of one and the same verb roots as it is combined with various complements. The relationship between the verb root and its NP/PP complement and lastly, the productivity of verb + NP/PP structure. He proposed a new approach to Igbo verbs which is the ‘Image schema’. The image schema motivates the semantics of the Igbo verb root, its combination with various complements and the formation of new verb + NP/PP constructions in the Igbo language.

Ibukun (2019) carried out a study on the morpho-syntactic structure of Yoruba and German complex verb. She analysed the complex verbs structures of German found in Gunter Grass’s Blechtromel and Yoruba complex verb found in Fagunwa’s Igbo olodumare literary texts. She compared and contrasted their work using contextual usage in corpus. This research showed that some of the complex verbs in both languages comprise of two or more constituents, while those with more than two constituents are in the minority. She opined that these factors are substantial and capable of instantiating areas of learning difficulties for Yoruba learners of German and German learners of Yoruba.

Nwachi *et al.*, (2020) investigated the complex Igbo verb *gba* in order to find out the basic component of the verb in Igbo thereby arriving at its lexical meaning. Their study found out that '*gba*' is a verb of movement or motion which results in change of position and is applicable to all the words that bear the verb root. It was also established that different meaning associated with the word bearing verb root is based on the verb that selects the complement thus the word *gba-egwu* means 'dance', *gba-mgbe* means 'wrestle' and *gba-oso* means 'run'. It brings about clarity among the meaning of the lexeme in the same semantic domain and their findings was beneficial specially to teaching of second language learners.

4. Theoretical framework.

This study adopted the Contrastive analysis hypothesis formulated by Lado (1957).

Contrastive analysis hypothesis is an area of comparative linguistics which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages in order to determine the differences or similarities between them, either for theoretical purposes or purposes external to the analysis itself. CA has been used as a tool in comparative historical linguistics to establish language genealogy, in typological linguistics to create language taxonomies in translation theory to investigate problems of equivalence to create bilingual dictionaries. Contrastive analysis (CA) is the systematic comparison of two or more languages, with the aim of describing their similarities and differences. CA has often been done for practical/pedagogical purposes. The aim has been to provide better descriptions and better teaching materials for language learners. Lado believes that the degree of differences between the two languages also correlated with the degree of difficulty but later on, the analysis attention was drawn to similarities between languages, because language teaching was extended to benefit from such information. CA states that where the first language and the target language are similar, learners will generally acquire structure with ease and where they are different, learners will have difficulties.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research work makes use of qualitative research design or method and is concluded as one which involves the collecting and analyzing of non-numeric data to understand concepts, opinions or experiences. A qualitative research design is concerned with establishing answers to the whys and hows of the phenomenon in question (unlike quantitative). Due to this, qualitative research is often defined as being subjective (not objective), and findings are gathered in a written format as opposed to numerical.

Method of data collection

The method used for data collection by the researcher were secondary data (already existing works of other scholars). They include textbooks, journals, articles which were relevant for the study. These data were used to identify the similarities and differences between separable Igbo verbal complex and the separable German phrasal verb.

Method of data analysis

After the data has been collected, the researcher analyzed the Igbo data first using gloss and then analyses the German verb. The researcher went on to do a comparison between both languages in order to point out their similarities and differences. The researcher found out that there are more similarities than differences.

Tone Marking Convention

The tone marking system used is that of Green and Igwe (1963) tone marking convention. Tone marking which is a system of using pitch levels to indicate semantic differences in lexical items and pitch patterns in grammatical constructions. Green and Igwe (1963) states that:

High tone syllables are all left, while all low tone syllables and down step tones are marked.

Example:

aka 'hand'
isi 'smell'
isi 'to cook'
siri 'cooked'.

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Data presentation

Some examples of complex verb also called inherent complement verb in Igbo:

Table 1

S/N	verbal complex.	glossing
1	Gba	kick
2	Ma	know
3	Kwu	say
4	Nye	give
5	Kpe	
6	Vu	carry
7	Tu	hit.

From Table 1 above, Igbo verbal complex is the combination of a verb plus noun or prepositional phrase. As explained by Igbo scholars, the original meaning of the verb changes with the addition of a noun or prepositional phrase. The Igbo complex verb also allows other activities exist between the verb and the NP/PP structure

6.2 What are separable German phrasal verbs?

Table 2

S/N	Separabl German phrasal verbs	glossing
-----	-------------------------------	----------

	Verbs + prefix	Combination	meaning
7	horen + auf	aufhoren	to stop
8	kommen + an	ankommen	to become
9	fahren + ab	abfahren	to depart
10	stehen + auf	aufstehen	to get up.
11	kommen + zuruck	zuruckkommen	to come back
12	horen + zu	zuhoren	to listen to
13	rufen + an	anrufen	to call

Separable German Phrasal verbs are verbs that can be separated. The original meaning of the main verb also changes with the addition of the prefix. When making a sentence in German language with the inclusion of a separable phrasal verb, the verb is first conjugated and the prefix will then be taken to the back of the sentence structure.

Some examples of Separable German Phrasal verb also known as Trennbare verben includes:

Data analysis

Example 14:

Ma

Uche ma-ra Ada na umunne ya, na Amaka ula.

Uche slap rv-past Ada and her siblings and Amaka slap.

Uche slapped Ada and her siblings including Amaka.

Here, *ma* is the verb root in its simple form which means 'to know'.

This example shows that the verb root can be separated from the preposition or the noun in a sentence (mara ula 'to slap'). The verb root allows other activities to be carried out in between it (the verb root and the preposition or noun phrase).

This also exist in the German language. The prefix is separated from the Noun or Verb in a sentence.

For example:

aufstehen – 'to get up'

'auf' is the prefix and 'stehen' is the main verb.

Ich stehe um 7 uhr auf.

I get up at 7:00

The addition of the prefix changes the original meaning of the verb. 'stehen' originally means 'to stand' but when added to a prefix it becomes 'aufstehen' which means 'to get up'.

The example shows that in both languages the verb root can be separated from the noun, verb or prepositional phrase and allow the existing of other activities in between them. This is one of the similarities that can be found between German language and Igbo language.

Example 15:

Wir kommen am Freitag zuruck.

We came on Friday back.

'We are coming back on Friday'.

Amaka gba-ra oka ahu mmiri.

Amaka spray/splashed -rV (past) maize that water.

'Amaka watered the maize.'

Similarities that can be found:

1. The Igbo complex verb and the German phrasal verbs allows other activities to be carried in between them.
2. The addition of either an NP/PP (Igbo) and the prefix (German) change the original meaning of the simple verb root or the verb.
3. The prefix and NP/PP are both divided and taken to the ending of the sentence structure.

7. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study finds out that, it is indeed difficult for learners of Igbo to learn German language as a target language because even if they have few similarities that can be found in the verbs the differences are indeed much, for example, in the word formation and order.

Works of different authors were reviewed concerning the concept of verbs in both languages. It was observed that verbs construction is mostly found in actions, state or being and it is mostly acting on an object.

This study also finds out that the *gba* verb root is a verb of movement or motion which results in change of position, the word *gba* does not mean one thing, the meaning of the word changes according to the addition of prefix or suffix.

Also, it has also been observed that both German phrasal verbs and Igbo separable verbs can be separated, that is, the allow the participation of other activities in-between the verb root and the NP/PP and also in-between the verbs in German and the prefix added to it.

The addition of the prefix to the verb changes the original meaning of the verb and gives it a new meaning outside that original meaning and for the Igbo

verbs, the addition of the suffixes or the NP/PP changes the original meaning of the verb root or clusters.

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