

GA AS A HOMONYMOUS LEXEME IN IGBO: A MORPHOSYNTACTIC AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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Introduction

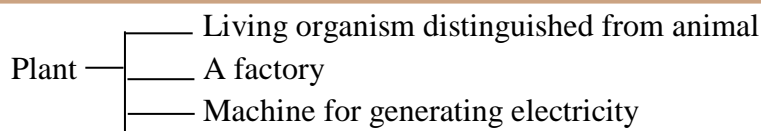
In many natural languages, words may not only have meaning properties in isolation, they often bear some meaning relations with each other. Words may be semantically related either because they share certain properties or because they exhibit contrastive semantic features. There are quite a number of meaning relations which words exhibit due to how they interact with each other in the sentence. Some words enter into some kinds of meaning relations to make different meanings other than they could have made in isolation. It is this notion that gave rise to different meaning relation that obtain both at word and sentence levels.

In Igbo language, there are many homonymous lexemes. These lexemes have different and unrelated meanings, but their surface phonetic forms are the same. *Ga* is among the homonymous lexemes we have in Igbo. This study therefore undertakes its study to find out how it manifests in the syntactic structures of the language. This paper has five sections. Section one is the introduction. Section two is overview of homonymy. Section is the morphological structure of *ga* whereas section four is the syntactic and semantic analysis of *ga* in Igbo. Section five is the conclusion.

Homonymy: An overview

Homonymy appears to be a universal phenomenon. In different natural languages, many words from different word classes appear to have the same spelling and pronunciation. A homonymy is a word which has the same sound, and the same spelling as another but with a different meaning or origin. Crystal (2007:220) defines homonymy as “a term used in semantic analysis to refer to lexical items which have the same form but differ in meaning.” According to Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010), homonymy can be looked at from two different angles: the first is to see it as a word having many meanings (polysemy) or to assume that different meanings realize themselves in a similar form, that is, they are spelt and pronounced alike though they do not have the same meaning. To Yule (2006:107), the term “homonymy” is used “when one form, (written and spoken) has two or more unrelated meanings.”

Allan (1986:84) defines homonymy as “a lexical meaning relation holding between lexemes that have the same phonetic features but have two or more different meanings.” Palmer (1981:102) notes that “if identical forms have different origins, they are treated as homonyms and form separate entries.” In his view, Saeed (2003) posits that homonyms are unrelated sense of the same phonological word. Ndimele (1999:51) illustrates using below example:



From the above example, we observe that the word plant describes three different items. That is, plant 1, describes living organism distinguished from animal, plant 2, describes a factory and plant 3, describes machines for generating electricity. The above example shows that a homonymous lexemes can have two or more entirely distinct meanings.

The morphological structure of *Ga* in Igbo

Morphologically, *ga* is formed with a consonant and a vowel thus: g + a ► *ga* [CV] structure. With the CV structure, it can function as a full lexical verb as well as verb root, which can take affixes. Nwachukwu (1983:132) posits that *ga* is not quite an auxiliary like *na*, because unlike *na* “it can function in a non-auxiliary capacity, that is, as the only verb of an independent clause in the language.” He gives the feature specification of *na* thus [+V, +Aux.-], *ga* has the specification thus [+ V, + Aux] since *ga* can be used as a verb that is [+V] and as an auxiliary, that is [+Aux].

The syntactic and semantic analysis of *Ga* in Igbo constructions

Ga as a lexical verb

The verb is a universal phenomenon in human natural languages. The meaning of a verb can be analyzed into a structure representation of events it designates. A verb has been described traditionally as a word which states the action performed by the subject. It is a word that tells us what the subject does in the sentence. That is why it is defined as an action or a doing word. The Igbo verb form is complex and it is the most fascinating of all the word class in the language. Mbah (2006) describes Igbo language as a verb language. This is because verb plays significant roles in the grammatical structures of the language. Unlike English where word formation cuts across different grammatical categories, Igbo words are only formed from the verb. According to Nwachukwu (1983) no verb is formed from any other part of speech.

Green and Igwe (1963:64) claim that the “verb is distinguished formally from all other parts of speech by the fact that it is the only one in which an inflectional affix is found.” The verb takes the harmonizing vowel prefix *a-/e-* according to the root vowel of the verb. The morpheme constituents of the verb in various verb forms are either the CV root or the root and the vowel prefix.

The verb root can be independent in the sense that it can stand alone. The affixes which are attached to the verb root cannot stand alone but depend on the main verb to have meaning. The dependent particles are affixes which can come before the main verb root. They are called prefixes whereas those that are attached after are called the suffixes.

It is important to note that the verb root and its nominal modifiers are in one semantic unit, and as such, they form one entry in any dictionary because without the nominal, the verb root would be very ambiguous and unspecified. Emenanjo (1987:128) notes:

The inherent semantic nature of the Igbo verb is that it obligatorily co-exists with a nominal element which always complements. It is the nominal element that we call the complement ... the truth is that the semantic content of every Igbo verb inherently describes a certain action or state which by its very nature implies the co-existence of complements.

Following Emenanjo's view, it implies that *ga* cannot in isolation form a meaningful semantic unit unless it co-occurs with inherent complements. Below are the examples of some of the inherent complements of *ga*.

1. a. Ga òga (imprisonment/go to prison)
- b. Ga òjèṁ (go for a journey)
- c. Ga ògù (go to war)
- d. Ga ọ̀lākā (bead the bangle)
- e. Ga òwu (knit the thread)
- f. Ga ihe olū (bead the neckles)
- g. Ga ùle (go for examination)
- h. Ga àkpà (bead the bag)
- i. Ga mbọ (scratch)

The data below show homonymous *ga* and its different unrelated meanings.

2.

—	a. go
—	b. pass through a small opening
—	c. bead
—	d. hook somewhere
—	e. rake fallen leaves and make soil smooth
—	f. scratch with nails or something sharp
—	g. pin together/chain together

From the above data, examples (2a – g) can be represented in the sentences below:

3. a. Uchè gàrà òga.
Uche g-rvpst prison.
Uche went to prison.
- b. Òkukọ gàrà nà m̀pìo.
Fowl pass-rvpst prep small hole.
The fowl passed through the small hole.
- c. Ùju gàrà ọ̀lākā.
Uju bead-rvpst bangle.
Uju beaded the bangle.
- d. Ijèoma gàrà òwu nà òtùtù.
Ijeoma knit -rvpst thread prep-needle.
Ijeoma knitted the thread.
- e. Ọkpụkpụ gàdoro Òbi n' àkpìrì.
Bone hook-rvpst Obi prep-throat.

- The bone hooked Obi inside the throat.
- f. Ebe ogwu ahụ gàdoro Chikē dì n̄jọ.
Place thong Dem hook-rvpst Chike be bad.
The place that thong hooked Chike is bad.
Ha gachara ugbo ha.
3pl rake-rvpst farm 3pl.
They raked their farm.
- g. Uchè gàrà Ibè mbọ n'ihu.
Uche scratch-rvpst Ibe nails prep-face.
Uche scratched Ibe's face.

From the foregoing, *ga* takes the *rv* suffix in the syntactic structures to indicate different semantic readings. It is also observed that the *ga* in sentences (2a - b) and (2c - d) are somehow related in meaning in the sense that it indicates movement of an entity or object. Examples (2e - g) do not related to movement. *Ga* in sentences (e, f and h) are related in the sense that pains are inflicted on the entities.

Ga can take an open vowel suffix to express imperative

Ga as the verb root can take an open vowel suffix to express imperative readings. The structure is thus: [CV + V] verb. Consider examples below:

3. a. Gàa
Ga – ovs
Go
- b. Gàa ukà
Ga-ovs church
Go to church
- c. Gàa ōwū
Ga-ovs thread
Knit the thread
- d. Gàa yā mbọ
Scratch-ovs 3pl nail
Scratch him/her/it
- e. Gàa hā ichè
Ga-ovs 3pl different
Pin them differently

In the above data, the tone of verb roots are consistently on low tones whereas the open vowels which are attached to them are consistently on high tones.

Ga can take -rv suffix to indicate past tense

The *-rv* suffix is attached to the verb root *ga* to express past tense in Igbo. The structure is thus: [CV + rv] verb. Consider below examples:

5. a. Àda gàrà ugbō.
Ada go-rvpst farm.
Ada went to the farm.

- b. Ijèḡma gàrà ọ̀là ntị ya ùnyàahụ.
Ijeoma bead-rvpst earring 3g yesterday.
Ijeoma beaded her earring yesterday.
- c. Nwambā gàrà Obi mbō.
Cat scratch-rvpst Obi nail.
The cat scratched Obi.
- d. Ọ gàrà hà ọfuma.
3pl pin-rvpst 3pl well.
He pinned them well.

The -rv past tense marker assumes the features of the vowel of the CV root and becomes low tone.

Ga can take extensional suffixes

Ga can take extensional suffixes to extend the meaning of the verb root in the syntactic structures. Consider the following examples:

6. a. Ọ gàtèrè aka
3sg go-suff hand
He went far
- b. Ewu gafèrè n'oghere ahù.
Goat pass-rvpst prep-hole Dem.
The goat pass through that hole.
- c. Ọ gaāla ihe olu Àda.
3sg bead-rvp-ovs-perf thing neck Ada.
She has beaded Ada's neckless.
- d. Ọ gakpọrọ Ada anya m̀gbè ha ruru ọgù.
Scratch-rvpst Ada eye when 3pl fight-rvpst war.
Scratched Ada's eye when they fought.
- e. M̀gbè Uchè riri nri nnukwu ọkpukpu gachiri ya n'akpiri.
When Uche eat-rvps food big bone hook-rvst 3sg throat.
When Uche was eating big bone hooked her throat.
- f. Ibè agachaṣāla ebe ọ gà-akọ ugbo.
Ibe pr-rake-rvpst place 3sg fut-pr-farm farm.
Ibe has raked where he will farm.
- g. Ọ gàkọtara akwukwo abuo.
3sg pin-rvspt book two.
He pinned the two books together.

In the above data, the underlined words indicate the CV root, that is *ga* which takes the extensional suffixes.

Ga can take the prefix i/i to derive infinitive

The structure is thus: [Pref i/i + CV] verb as in: i + ga → igā (to go)

7. a. Igā nga adighi mmā.
Pr-go prison pr-be-Neg good.

To go to prison is not good.

- b. Ọ hìàrà àhụ ànyìnyà ìgā n'oghere ahù.
3sg difficult body horse pr-pass prep-hole Dem.
It is difficult for the horse to pass through that hole.
- c. Ha chọrọ ìgākọ akwụkwọ ahù.
3pl want-rvps pr-pin book Dem
They wanted to pin those books together.
- d. Onyeisī ānyị chọrọ ìgā ya mbọ ebe ahù.
President 1pl want-rvpst pr-scratch-suff 3sg place Dem.
Our president wanted to scratch him that place.

In the above data, the tone of *ga* is no longer low. It changes to downstep tone because it indicates infinitive.

Ga can take the prefix o/O with cv + cv roots to derive gerund

The morpheme structure is thus: [Pref o/ọ + CV + CV] verb.

In forming the gerund, the CV root is reduplicated as in: ọ + ga + ga → ọgiga

In the above data, the reduplication is a partial one. Consider the following examples:

- 8.a. Ọgiga Chikē gara be Ezè wètàrà udo.
Going Chike go-rvpst home Eze bring-suff peace.
Chike's going to Eze's home brought peace.
- b. Ọgiga ebe ahù siri ike.
Passing place Dem cook-rvpst strenght.
Passing through that place is difficult.
- c. Ọgiga ọlà ntị ahù adighī mmā.
Beading earring Dem pr-be-neg good.
The beading of that earring is not good.

Furthermore, *n* is prefixed to *ga* and another CV root to derive words such as:

9. a. Ngàngà (pride)
b. Nganye (beading)
c. Ngado (hooking)
d. Ngacha (raking)
e. Ngakọta (pinning together)

From the above data, (9a - c) can be represented in the sentences thus:

10. a. Ngàngà ya dị egwù
Pride 3sg be fear
His pride is too much
- b. Nganye ọlà ntị ahù adighī mmā
Beading ear ring Dem pr-be-Neg good
The beading of that ear ring is not good
- c. Ngado ogwu ahụ dị omimi
Hooking thong dem be deep.
The hooking of that thong is deep.

From the foregoing, it is observed that the verb *ga* has different meanings in the sentences. It also takes different affixes to extend its meaning.

Ga as an auxiliary

In Igbo, there exist a number of auxiliaries. They have their phonological shapes and their syntactic behaviours respectively which vary from dialect to dialect. *ga* is among the well known auxiliaries recognized in Igbo. Nwachukwu (1983:122) posits that Igbo auxiliaries are verbs because they can take inflectional affixes which are the strongest diagnostic test for verbs.” However, unlike full verbs which can be the only verbals in sentences, the auxiliaries cannot be found alone. They are always obligatorily used with the participle verb complement, that is, bound verb complement which are dominated by the verb. Nwachukwu (1983:123) adds that in “terms of feature specifications, full verb are [+ V, - Aux] where auxiliaries are [+ V, + Aux]”. He further comments that “the dependent nature of the auxiliary in an utterance is confirmed by the fact that whenever there is need to emphasis the meaning of the sentence by a cognate verbal qualification, this element (the bound cognate noun) is derived from the verb rather than from the auxiliary.” Unlike the full verbs, auxiliaries cannot be used to derive any item. Mbah (2011:20) contends that “the auxiliaries verb helps the main verb to function properly or have specific meaning.” We are going to discuss the auxiliary *ga* in below:

Ga can be used to express future time meaning (aspect)

Ga and the participle verb can be used to express future time meaning. In terms of semantic ‘implications of *ga* Welmers and Welmers (1968:73) quoted in Nwachukwu (1983) posit that the verb form with *ga* is used for referring “to future” rather than “intensions”, something not yet begun.” Winston (1973:151) quoted in Nwachukwu (1983) contends that *ga* future also expresses probability or expectation” in addition to “literal future time”. Consider the following examples expressing the affirmative and the negative counterparts:

- | | | | |
|--------------------|----------|-------------------------|------------|
| 11. a. Ezè g̃à-èje | ụkà | Ezè ag̃aghī | eje ụkà |
| Eze fut-pr-go | church | Eze pr-go-Neg-pr-go | church |
| Eze will go to | church | Eze will not go to | church |
| b. Uchè g̃à-àb̃ia | echi | Uchè ag̃aghī | āb̃ia echi |
| Uche fut-pr-come | tomorrow | Uche pr-fut-Neg-pr-come | tomorrow |
| Uche will come | tomorrow | Uche will not come | tomorrow |

In the above data, the auxiliary is consistently on a low tone, following by the participle verb. The above sentences indicate simple future time meaning. Furthermore, the *ga* future marker and the participle verb “aga” can co-occur in the sentence as in:

- | | | | |
|-------------------|--------|----------------------|---------|
| 12. a. Ọ g̃à-àga | ụkà | Ọ ag̃aghī | āga ụkà |
| 3sg fut-pr-go | church | 3sg pr-fut-Neg pr-go | church |
| He will not go to | church | He will not go to | church |
| b. Ọ g̃à-àga | nga | Ọ ag̃aghī | āga nga |
| 3sg fut pr-go | prison | 3sg pr-fut-Neg pr-go | prison |
| He will go to | prison | He will not go to | prison |

The below examples express the future past time meaning that indicate unfulfilled action. It is expressed with *gàrà* which is always on a low tone and is followed by either the participle verb or infinitive. Consider these examples:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 13. a. Ibè <u>gàrà</u> èje/ìje ụkà | Ibè agāraghī ịje/ije ụkà |
| Ibe fut-suff pr-go church | Ibe pr-fut-suff-Neg pr-go church |
| Ibe would have go church | Ibe would not have go to church |
| b. Ha <u>gàrà</u> abịā/ịbịā ebe à | Ha agāraghī abịā/ịbịā ebe à |
| 3pl fut-suff pr-come here | 3pl pr-fut suff-Neg Pr-come here |
| They would have come | They would not have come here |

Ga can be used to express future progressive

In some dialects of Igbo, *ga* can be used as a suffix to the verb root in order to express future progressive aspect. Examples:

14. a. Ha rìgà nri
3pl eat-prog food
They are eating food
- b. Ike tàgà ọjị
Ike chew-prog kola
Ike is chewing kola
- c. Ijèoma nùgà mmirī
Ijeoma drink-prog water
Ijeoma is drinking water

When *ga* expresses progressive, it retains its low tone.

Ga can be used to express future perfective

Ga and the participle verb plus the perfective marker can be used to express future perfective.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 15. a. Òbi gà-azụtala akwụkwọ | Obi agāghī àzụtala akwụkwọ |
| Obi fut-pr-buy-suff-perf book | Obi fut-pr-buy-suff-perf book |
| Obi will (already) have bought the book | Obi will not have bought the book |
| b. Àda gà-echutela mmirī | Ada agāghī echutela mmirī |
| Ada fut-pr-fetch-suff-perf water | Ada pr-fut-Neg pr-fetch-suff-perf water |
| Ada will (already) have fetched water | Ada will not have fetched water |

It is observed that the tone *ga* in the affirmative is low whereas in the negative becomes downstep with the negator *ghị*.

Ga as a plural enclitic

Ga can occur alone as an enclitic to indicate plural. It is glossed as *some*. Consider the following examples.

16. a. Àda bùte oche ga.

- Ada bring-suff chair some.
 Ada bring some chairs.
- b. Ọ chọ̀ọ akwụkwọ ga.
 3sg want-rvpst book some.
 He wanted some books.
- c. Akwụkwọ ga kà ọ chọ̀ọ.
 Books some that 3sg want-rvpst.
 Some books that he wanted.
- d. Ọ̀bi, Uchè nà Egō bụ̀gà ụ̀mụ̀nnē m.
 Obi, Uche and Ego are siblings me.
 Obi, Uche and Ego are my siblings.

In the above data, *ga* becomes high tone and follows the nouns in the sentences to indicate plurality in (16a – c) whereas in (16d), it is attached to the verb to indicate plurality.

Conclusion

In this work, we have analyzed *ga* as a homonymous lexeme in Igbo. Phonologically, *ga* can be realized as single lexeme but it can be semantically interpreted in different ways. It is observed that *ga* can function as a verb, auxiliary as well as plural marker in the syntactic structures. It can accept inherent complements. It can also take different affixes to extend its meaning in the syntactic structures. Finally, if *ga* stands alone without any inherent complements or affixes, it will be semantically empty and ambiguous. Therefore, as a homonymous lexeme, it needs inherent complements and attachment of different affixes to enable it become meaningful in the syntactic structures.

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