
Etulo Verbs of Consumption

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Abstract

This study examines the verbs of consumption in the Etulo language. Verbs of consumption are those verbs that give an idea about the ingestion of substances into the body. The study seeks to identify the Etulo verbs that are used in showing substance intake and also ascertain co-occurrence restrictions between the verbs and the objects. Data for this study were collected from Etulo native speakers in Adi, Buruku Local Government Area of Benue State Nigeria. Following from a descriptive analysis of the collected data, the study reveals that in the Etulo language, the substance consumed and the manner of consumption are considered in the co-occurrence of the verbs with their object complements. The consumer is not usually considered in most of the consumption expressions in the language. The study concludes that co-occurrence restriction exists among Etulo verbs of consumption.

Introduction

The act of eating and drinking applies to all human races hence suggesting a universality of the phenomenon. However, obvious variations exist in the conceptualization of the events of eating and drinking by specific languages. For instance, Rice (2009) notes that verbs of consumption in Athapaskan languages focus on the object consumed as well as the manner of consumption with no significant focus on the consumer or the benefits associated with the act

consumption. On the other hand, some languages view consumption as the same hence the use of one word to denote the act of eating and drinking (Aikhenvald 2009, Wierzbicka 2009). In addition to these variations that exist among languages, extant studies have confirmed meaning extension for these verbs of consumption (Newman 1997, 2009, Agyepong, Amfo and Osam 2017). The present study adds to existing studies on verbs of consumption by exploring the semantics of this verb class in Etulo, an Idomoid language spoken in Benue state, Nigeria. The study seeks to account for the co-occurrence restrictions that exist among the verb and their object complement. The study will demonstrate using data from the language that both the substance consumed and the manner of consumption determine the verbs that occur in Etulo consumption expressions.

Etulo belongs to the Idomoid group of the West Benue Congo of Niger Congo group of languages. (Gordon 2005). Etulo refers simultaneously to both the language and the ethnic group. The Etulo are found in Benue and Taraba States, Nigeria. The Etulo speakers in Benue are found in Adi, Buruku Local Government Area and parts of Kastina-Ala, Kastina Ala Local Government Area. The Etulo speakers found in Adi have been used as informants. Verbs classified as Etulo verbs of consumption in this study include those verbs that refer to the intake of substances in the language.

The paper is organized as follows: section 2 reviews some works done on verbs of eating and drinking in other languages. In Section 3, the Etulo verbs of consumption are discussed while section 4 forms the conclusion of the study. The next section goes into the review of some works on verbs of consumption.

Literature Review

In a study of English verbs of consumption, Newman (1997)

observes a convergence between eating and drinking. According to Newman, both acts involve the intake, swallowing and digestion of substance which nourishes the body. Nevertheless, the two diverge with regard to the fact that food is masticated and undergoes a change in form from the time of intake to entry into the stomach whereas liquid is not masticated and does not undergo such change in form. Newman (1997) further establishes metaphorical extension of eating and drinking to such domains as inhaling, emotional and intellectual nourishment, accepting ideas etc.

Building on his earlier study, Newman (2009) which provides a comprehensive volume on consumption across cultures, explores eating and drinking from a cross-linguistic perspective and suggests that the verbs *eat* and *drink* have a central meaning that relate to the intake of food and beverages into the mouth and digestive tract. The author also notes that the event of eating and drinking involve movement, pleasurable experiences and also “represent strong experiential models of sensual satisfaction” (Newman 2009:2).

Newman and Albera (2009) in a study of the verbs *bel-* ‘eat’ and *t’et-* ‘drink’ in Amharic claim that cultural influence on the act of eating and drinking affect the use of the verbs within the larger socio-cultural domain. According the authors, the events of eating and drinking affect the agents of the verbs. The authors further accounts for the figurative extensions of *bel-* ‘eat’ and *t’et-* ‘drink’ and suggest three categorization for the extensions namely: internalization, destruction and affected agent. Burenhult and Kruepe (2016) explore ingestion verbs in the Aslian languages with the aim of delimiting the semantic categories of the ingestion verbs in the languages. The study discovers two semantic types for the Aslian languages. The type one languages according to the authors do not have a generic ‘eat’ verb rather there exist a basic system of three or four eating verbs which specifically focus on the type of item consumed.

Representative of this type include Jahai and Semaq Beri languages. For the type two languages represented by Mah meri, Semelai, Jah hut languages among others, there are a generic verb for eating or ingesting solid food.

With regard to the verbs of drinking, Burenhult and Krupe suggest that the verbs encode manner in terms of bodily posture which may include the verb '*gak gæk*' to drink with the head tilted back or '*dəbək*' drink with ones mouth over the bottle. The study also observes ingestion verbs specific to infant and reveal evidence of meaning extension of the eat verb to other domains.

Agyepong, Amfo and Osam (2017) discuss two consumption verbs *dí* 'to eat' and *nó m̃* 'to drink' in Akan language and argue that in addition to their literal meanings, that the verbs have some metaphorical extension. The authors capture the metaphorical extensions related to the internalization of the two verbs in Akan in terms of gaining possession, absorption, inhaling and emotional and sensual internalization. Agyepong, Amfo and Osam (2017) further submit that physical/psychological destruction as well as material and time waste is depicted within the extension based on patient-oriented destruction.

From the review, it becomes apparent that the basic and extended meanings of verbs pertaining to consumption have been studied in different languages but not in Etulo. These earlier studies which involve divergent languages converge based on their recognition of consumption as a common human activity. The present study therefore contributes to cross-linguistic findings on this verb class by adding data from Etulo language.

Etulo Verbs of Consumption/ Ingestion

The verbs under this group are those that provide an idea about substances introduced or taken into the body. These substances

could be solid or liquid. Verbs of consumption comprise verbs of eating and verbs of drinking. The generic verb depicting consumption of food items in Etulo is *gye* 'eat' while the verb showing the consumption of liquids is *wa* 'drink' as seen in example 1 below.

1a O le gyē m̄ bwe
3SG PROG eat meat
She is eating meat.

b. E fu wā è n̄i ì bwe efā
E fu drink water cup two
E fu drank two cups of water

In 1a, the verb *gye* 'eat' collocates with *m̄ bwe* 'meat' which is solid as its object complement while 1b, has the verb *wa* 'drink' collocating with *è n̄i* 'water' which is liquid. *M̄ bwe* 'meat' in 1a represents a cooked meat while in 1b, the verb *wa* 'drink' with *è n̄i* 'water' which is liquid in form. From the data available to this study, though the verb *wa* 'drink' co-occurs with +liquid, there are specific verbs that show how the liquid is consumed. Consider the instances in 2a-f:

2a. A fē kpanε tasā ò dō ñ ḡi on̄yi
Afe lick plate soup of one
Afe licked a plate of soup

b. ò nwè nē lè ñ ga è n̄i à bē
baby DET PROG suck water breast
This baby is sucking breastmilk.

c.* Inju lè kpanɛ ò lù mu
Inju PROG lick orange
Inju is licking orange

d. Inju lè wa ò lù mu
Inju PROG drink orange
Inju is drinking orange

e.E fu lè wa otse
Efu PROG drink medicine
Efu is on medication.

f. O mbè ò tse ò ò ġi è nè
3SG swallow medicine of four
He swallowed four capsules

From 2a and b, it is observed that there are different verbs occurring with the +liquid object nouns. In 2a, the verb *kpanɛ* 'lick' depicts a situation where one's fingers are used in consuming the liquid content. However, in 2b, the verb *ò ga* 'suck' co-occurs with *è ò ò à bê* 'breastmilk' because the liquid is consumed by extraction through the exertion of suction. 2b suggests that the manner of consumption necessitated the selection of the verb *ò ga*, not the object NP. This is because in Etulo other liquid substances that are enclosed within some kind of containers are rendered ungrammatical in co-occurrence with *ò ga* 'suck' or *kpanɛ* 'lick' as exemplified in 2c. In the instance in 2e, the medicine taken is syrup while 2f represents a case where the medicine is a capsule hence the use of *mbè* 'swallow'.

With regard to the verbs of eating, apart from the verb *gye*

'eat', the study observes that a specific verb is used when hard substances such as nuts are consumed. The inability to use this verb alongside an object complement (which is + hard) represents a display of non native-like competence and results in ungrammaticality. Let us demonstrate with the instances in 3a-c below

3a* Anī lè gye nà kà
1SG PROGeat groundnut
I am eating groundnut

b.* Efu lè gye ì keve
Efu PROG eat coconut
Efu is eating coconut.

c.* O lè gye akpukpû
3SG PROG eat bone
He is eating bone

4a Ani bukū nà kà ì bwe onyī
1SG chew groundnut cup one
I ate one cup of groundnut

b. Efu bukū ì keve ò gè onyī
Efu chew coconut of one
Efu ate one coconut.

c. Efu lè bukù akpukpû
Efu PROG chew bone
Efu is chewing bone.

d. Inju lè la akpukpû à bâ

Inju PROG bite bone teeth
Inju is chewing bone.

The sentential constructs in 3a-c are ungrammatical because the object NPs are hard in nature hence they require mastication. 4a-c represents a display of native-like competence because the verb *bukū* 'chew' co-occurs with edibles that are +solid. The verb *la* which translates to English 'bite' in 4d also occurs with hard edible substances. However *la* 'bite' obligatorily occurs with *bâ* 'teeth'. Apart from liquids, solids and semi solids that can be consumed, both air and smoke can also be ingested into the human body. These events are however, depicted with the verbs shown in 5 following.

5a. A fè wo è kwò ò tawā ò ġi è nè
A fè smoke stick cigarette of four
Afe smoked four sticks of cigarette

b. Ani lè mimī ē awo ò tsi tsè
1SG PROG breathe air good
I am breathing fresh air.

From the verbs associated with consumption in Etulo, it can be inferred that both the substance consumed and the manner of consumption are considered in the co-occurrence of verbs with their object NP.

The verb *wa* 'drink' in Etulo appears to show evidence of meaning extension which the present study shall not delve into. The instance in 6 is a case of such extension.

6.ì kpè se ne wà è òì
Land Det drink water
The land absorbed water

We show in table 1 below the verbs identified as Etulo Consumption

verbs

Table of Etulo Verbs of Consumption / Ingestion

Verb	Manner of Consumption	Object(s) Consumed
gye	Generic	+Solid, semi-solid (m̄ bwe 'meat', itsikapa 'rice' m̄ bweè n̄i 'fish')
wa	Generic	+Liquid (è n̄i 'water', è n̄i ade palmwine, ò lù mu 'orange')
kpane	Ingest by licking with finger	+Liquid (ò d̄ò 'soup')
n̄ ga	Ingest by sucking	+Liquid (è n̄i à b̄e breast milk)
mbè	Ingest by swallowing	+Solid (ò tse 'tablet medicine')
nà kà	Ingest after mastication	+Solid (nà kà 'groundnut')
buku	Ingest after mastication	+Solid (akpukp̄u 'bone', ì keve coconut)
la	Ingest after biting	Solid (akpukp̄u 'bone', ì keve coconut)
wo	Ingest by inhaling	Gaseous (ò tawā 'cigarette')
mimiē	Ingest by inhaling	awo 'air'

Table 1 above comprise three verbs pertaining to ingesting liquids, five verbs indicating the consumption of solid and two verbs referring to the intake of gas. The verbs *gye* 'eat' and *wa* 'drink' show no

particular preference for the manner of consumption hence they have been captured as generic verbs for eating and drinking. This is further evidenced in the meaning extension in example 6 above where *wa* 'drink' is extended to the absorption of water by ground.

Conclusion

This paper explored some verbs pertaining to the intake of substances in Etulo language. The verbs *gye* 'eat' and *wa* 'drink' have been identified as the generic verbs for eating and drinking in Etulo. They are termed such because of their inclination to the object consumed rather than the manner of consumption. Other verbs which depict ingestion with particular attention to the manner and object of consumption have also been identified.

The study has further indicated a possible pointer to meaning extension with regard to the consumption verbs in the language which further researches can delve into. The study concludes that in the Etulo language, the substance consumed and the manner of consumption are considered in the co-occurrence of the verbs with their object complements.

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