

Overt Noun Phrase Constructions in Ikwerre

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on description the overt NP constructions in Ikwerre. The specific objectives were to: examine the anaphoric features of NPs in Ikwerre; determine the distribution of personal pronouns as overt NPs in Ikwerre and examine referential expressions in NP constructions in Ikwerre. In order to actualise the objectives of the study, the descriptive research design was adopted. The data for this study were gathered through primary and secondary sources. The primary source involved the use of self-designed phrase and sentence lists to collect language data from language consultants who are competent native speakers of Ikwerre. The Noun Phrase and Sentence lists consisted of fifty (50) items each making it a total of one hundred (100) items. The findings of the study amongst others revealed that the independent and the dependent forms of pronoun in NP structures may have a wide range of variation in their distribution but sometimes may occur interchangeably, especially at the object and possessive NPs and distinctively as subject NP. They also showed that the reciprocal NP ta interrupts the internal configuration of rV verb sequence and further established that reflexives and reciprocals belong to anaphoric subcategorization of nominals.

Keywords: Reciprocals, Anaphoric Reference, Referential Expressions and Reflexives.

Introduction

Andrews (1985) avers that noun phrases perform a range of semantic, pragmatic and grammatical functions. He argues that the semantic functions of the noun phrase interpret how the how the referent of an NP participates in the propositions conveyed by the sentence either by utilizing internal referents within the sentence or referents in the

universe of discourse. Huddleston (1988) also states that noun phrases can be assigned certain semantic roles that determine logical relations within the structure of the sentence.

The syntactic function of noun phrases is another defining property which helps to clarify their status and role. Thus, Payne and Huddleston (2002) state: “NPs are prototypically capable, when placed in an appropriate case-form, of functioning as a complement in clause structure, i.e., as subject (*The doctor arrived*), object (*We need a doctor*), or predicative complement (*Kim is a doctor*)” (p. 326). From this definition, it can be inferred that the syntactic function of noun phrases is restricted to the above-mentioned functions. However, noun phrases can also function as complements in prepositional phrases (*The bread is in the kitchen*). In connection with this, Payne and Huddleston (2002) distinguish another category, one which is intermediate between the noun phrase and the noun. This is the *nominal*, which fills another syntactic function, that of nominal modifiers. Example (1) may serve to explain this term.

(1) The red apple

On the contrary, the focus of the present study is not on complement function of the NP neither is it on the distinguished nominal modifier function. In this study, the focus is on the semantic functions of the NP in overt NP clauses. Three types of overt NPs are attested for in the grammar of Ikwerre. They include: anaphors, pronouns and referential expressions. These types of overt NPs as attested in Ikwerre grammar are categorized and analyzed below.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to describe the overt NP constructions in Ikwerre. The specific objectives shall be to:

1. examine the anaphoric features of NPs in Ikwerre;
2. determine the distribution of personal pronouns as overt NPs in Ikwerre;
3. examine referential expressions in NP constructions in Ikwerre.

Methodology

This study is a descriptive one. Therefore, the descriptive research design was adopted. The reason was so as to enable the authors elicit useful data in Ikwerre NP structures and components. The data for this study were gathered through primary and secondary sources. The primary source involved the use of self-designed phrase and sentence lists to collect language data from language consultants who are competent native speakers of Ikwerre. The Noun Phrase and Sentence lists consisted of fifty (50) items each making it a total of one hundred (100) items. Interviews were also conducted with the language consultants who provided the authors with useful constructions, some of which were not ordinarily in the data gathering instruments. The author made use of diverse sources to collect data for this study, including introspection – the authors’ intuition, personal interviews, and extensive library materials on Syntax. A descriptive method of data analysis was adopted in analyzing the gathered data. Ikwerre has both level and contour tones. Therefore, in this study, the authors adopted a convention of leaving the high tone unmarked while marking all other tones.

Anaphors Features of the NPs

Anaphora is the use of an expression that depends specifically upon an antecedent expression for interpretation. Generally, anaphora binds different syntactic elements together in a sentence. In generative grammar, anaphors are reflexive and reciprocal pronouns, and they are said to have anaphoric relations with nominals. Anaphoric relation is typically said to take place whenever the semantic value of a linguistic form is related to the value of some previous or anticipated mentions. Thus, in anaphoric relations, there are “referentially dependent” expression (the anaphor) and “referentially independent” expression (Hinzen, 2016, p. 29). The latter serves as antecedent to the former, and the former gets its reference from the latter.

Anaphoric Reference occurs when the writer refers back to someone or something that has been previously identified, to avoid repetition. It is a kind of reference which is backward looking. In other words, hearer has to look backward within the text to get the desired meaning. Primarily, the 3rd person pronouns – *he, she, it, they* usually go with anaphoric reference. Beyond the personal pronouns, Kamalu and Osisanwo (2015) observed that the definite article – *the*, and demonstratives like – *that* can also be used for anaphoric reference. Similarly, in Ikwerre, demonstratives such as: *kà* ‘this’ *kèm* ‘that’, *elekèm* ‘those’ and *elekà* ‘these’ can be used for anaphoric reference. Some other words and expressions such as: *one, mè* ‘did’, *nǔ kpọ me jì kwù* ‘as I did say’, etc, can also be used.

Examples:

1. a. Okwute_i hnùgwù éwhù-a_i n’ényà kè kwù.
 PN love himself so much
 ‘Okwute loves himself so much.’
 b.* Okwute_i hnùgwù éwhù-vé_i n’ényà kè kwù.
 PN love themselves so much
 ‘*Okwute loves themselves so much.’
2. a. Nnenda_i ma-à éwhù-a_i.
 PN know-Neg herself
 ‘Nnenda does not know herself.’
 b.* Nnenda_i ma-à éwhù-vé_i.
 PN know-Neg herself
 ‘*Nnenda does not know themselves.’

To determine the semantic value of an anaphoric expression, we need to know what its antecedent is, and we need to know the semantic rules that determine the value of the anaphor in terms of the value of its antecedent. The semantic value can be determined by means of feature valuation. For instance, sentences (1b and 2b) are ungrammatical because the number feature of *themselves* (1b and 2b) is not interpretable. Note that Ikwerre does not show gender distinction between masculine and feminine genders. Both genders are marked using *o* at the subject position and *a* at the object

position. In (1a and 2a), these features (number and gender) converge, while in (1b and 2b) number feature does not converge. Also, the anaphor *herself* is referentially dependent on *Nnenda*.

The study of anaphora cuts across syntax, semantics and pragmatics. We need syntax to describe the distribution of anaphoric expressions and their antecedents, and we need semantics to describe how the semantic value of an anaphoric expression is determined. We also need pragmatics to understand their actual usage within a given context.

Reflexives

Reflexive NPs in Ikwere exhibit the following features in their distribution and interpretation. Let us look at some examples.

3. a. Chinda_i gbù ẹwhù-a_i
 PN kill himself
 'Chinda killed himself.'
- b. *Chinda_i gbù ẹwhù-ì_i
 PN kill himself
 *'Chinda killed yourself.'
- c. *Chinda_i gbù ẹwhù-vẹ_i
 PN kill himself
 *'Chinda killed themselves.'
4. Nyenwinikne_i kẹm gbù ẹwhù-a_i
 man the/that kill himself
 'the/that man killed himself'
5. Nyenwerne_i kẹm gbù ẹwhù-a_i
 woman the/that kill herself
 'the/that man killed herself'
6. Okwute_i, ọvùlà Nnenda hnùgwù ẹwhù-a_i n'ẹnyà kẹ kwù.
 PN Neg. PN love himself so much
 'Okwute, not Nnenda loves himself so much.'
7. Okwute_i nù Nnenda_i hnùgwù ẹwhù-vẹ_i n'ẹnyà kẹ kwù.
 PN Conj. PN love themselves so much
 'Okwute and Nnenda love themselves so much.'
8. Ì_i hnùgwù ẹwhù-ì_i n'ẹnyà kẹ kwù.
 2sg love yourself so much
 'You love yourself so much.'

In (3), the reflexive picks its reference from the subject NP *Chinda*. This shows that the reflexive NP *Nyénwíníkné* and the subject NP *Chinda* have the same referent. Thus, the reflexive takes the subject NP as its antecedent. In Ikwere, there is no gender

distinction between the masculine reflexive and the feminine reflexive markers. So, often times, common nouns as well as personal names are used to mark this distinction. In examples 4 – 5 above, *ẹwhụ-a* means ‘himself/herself’ and so, unlike in some languages where the gender marking feature is overt in reflexives, what mark gender in examples 4 – 5 are *nyénwíníkné* ‘male’ and *nyenwèrnè* ‘female’.

The requirement that the Ikwere reflexive NP and its antecedent agree in terms of their nominal grammatical features follows from the fact that the reflexive depends on the antecedent for its interpretation as the reflexive and the antecedent share one referent. The agreement in the nominal features constrains the grammar from generating a contradiction in the specification of the relevant properties for the selection of the referent. Therefore, the reflexive is bound by its antecedents *Okwute*, *Nyenwinikne* ‘man’, *Nyenwerne* ‘woman’ and *i* ‘you’ bind the reflexives *ẹwhụ-a*, *ẹwhụ-vẹ* and *ẹwhụ-ị* as evident in (3a), (4), (5), (6), (7) and (8) respectively.

In Ikwere, the antecedent NP must precede the reflexive NP within the minimal clause which serves as the binding domain. The construction 9 below contradicts this grammatical rule.

9. **ẹwhụ-a_i gbù Nyenwerne_i kẹm*
 herself kill woman the/that
 ‘herself the/that woman killed’

The antecedent NP must c-command the reflexive NP and not the other way round. According to Haegeman (1996) as cited in Isaac (2020, p. 20), a node A, C – commands a node B, if and only if:

- i. A does not dominate B;
- ii. B does not dominate A;
- iii. The first branching node dominating A also dominates B.

Therefore, a reflexive NP cannot have independent reference but must depend on the binder for its reference. Example (9) is considered ungrammatical because in the distribution of the NPs, the antecedent NP depends on the reflexive NP in violation of the binding principle which posits thus:

A binds B, if and only if:

- i. A, C – commands B;
- ii. A and B are coindexed

(Haegeman, 1996 as cited in Isaac 2020, p. 20)

In example (10) below, the antecedent NP and the reflexive NP are coindexed in agreement with the binding principle.

10. *Vẹ_i hnù ẹwhụ-vẹ_i*
 They Prog. see themselves
 ‘they are seeing themselves’.

Co-indexation here provides the interpretation that there is a shared referent in the distribution of the antecedent and reflexive NPs within the minimal clause. Ikwere reflexive NP can be said to be therefore A-bound in its category as the antecedent of the reflexive NP must be locally bound within the minimal clause.

Among the notable findings in Ikwerre reflexivisation is the fact that gender as a nominal grammatical feature does not play any role in the interpretation and distribution of reflexive NPs within the Ikwerre clause structure. The only reflexive nominal grammatical features that present in Ikwerre are those of person and number.

Person

Person is a nominal grammatical feature that the speaker in a speech event. It is a category used in grammatical description to show the nature of the participants in a situation. The contrasts are peripheral deictic, i.e. referring specifically to characteristics of the situation of utterance. Crystal (2008) observed that the “distinctions of person are usually marked in the verb and/or in the associated pronouns (personal pronouns)” (p. 358). In Ikwerre, just like in some other languages, a three-way contrast is found in describing person: the first person, in which speaker/speakers refer(s) to him/herself, or to a group usually including themselves (as in: *me*, *ayí*); the second person, in which speaker(s) typically refers to the person he is addressing (e.g. *ge*); and the third person, in which other people, animals, things, etc. are referred to (e.g. *ya*, *vẹ*). In Ikwerre, person distinction can also be shown in other word-classes than personal pronouns, as with the reflexive and possessive pronouns (*ẹwhù-ń*, etc., *ń*, etc.). consider the following examples.

Ẹwhù-m 1st person

As in:

11. a. Me_i gbù ẹwhù-ń_i
I kill myself
‘I killed myself’

b. *Me_i gbù ẹwhù-ń_{me}
I kill myself
‘I killed myself’

Ẹwhù-i 2nd person

As in:

12. a. Ge_i gbù ẹwhù-ń_i
You kill yourself
‘you killed yourself’

b. *Ge_i gbù ẹwhù-ge_i
You kill yourself
*‘you killed yourself’

c. ń_i gbù ẹwhù-ń_i?
You kill yourself
‘you killed yourself?’

d. ń_i gbùle ẹwhù-ń_i
You kill-Perf. yourself
‘you have killed yourself’

Ẹwhù-a 3rd person

As in:

13. Yá_i gbù ẹwhù-ă_i
 He/she kill him/herself
 ‘he/she killed him/herself’

In examples (11 – 13) above, the various reflexives are seen agreeing in person with their antecedent pronouns. The ‘person’ agrees with the reflexive marker. Another striking finding from this study is found in (11a and 12a). Usually, the reflexive marker vowel suffix in Ikwere overt NP structure takes the same vowel as the vowel of its antecedent as in *ya*-a as in (13) if not the entire antecedent *vẹ* ‘they’ suffixing the nominal *ẹwhù* as in *ẹwhù-vẹ* ‘themselves’. Unlike the coreferential pattern that holds in (10), in (12), the reflexive marking suffix –i takes a different vowel from that of its antecedent. This accounts for why (12a and c) are grammatical and (12b) ungrammatical. Nonetheless, even though (12a and c) are grammatical, (12a) can only be used in assertives whereas (12c – d) can be useful elsewhere in including interrogative constructions and in showing completed action.

Number

Number is a grammatical category useful for analyzing word classes in order to express such contrasts as singular, plural, dual (du) (‘two’), trial (‘three’), paucal (‘few’), etc., as in Ikwere *nyenwinikne* ‘boy/man’ and *nyenwèrnè* ‘boy/woman’ expressing a singular number notion, whereas *elenwinikne* ‘boys/men’, *elenwèrnè* ‘girls/women’ express a plural number notion. “The contrasts generally correspond to the number of real world entities being referred to, but linguistic discussion has drawn attention to the problems involved in proposing any such straightforward one-to-one correlation” (Crystal, 2008, p. 335). A noun, for example, may ‘appear’ singular, but refers to a multiplicity of entities (*ìgwemādnù* ‘crowd/multitude’), and nouns which ‘seem’ plural may refer to a single entity (e.g., *billiards*) although not quite productive in Ikwere. In Ikwere overt NP constructions, number plays a crucial role expressing grammatical notion of reflexives. Let us consider the following examples:

1st person plural

14. Ayì_i gbū ẹwhù-ayì_i
 We kill ourselves
 ‘We killed ourselves’

2nd person plural

15. Anù_i gbū ẹwhù-anù_i
 You kill yourself
 ‘you killed yourself’

3rd person plural

16. Vẹ_i gbū ẹwhù-vẹ_i
 They kill themselves
 ‘they killed themselves’

The data in (14 – 16) reveal that there is a regular pattern in deriving the plural number of the 1st, 2nd and the 3rd persons in Ikwerre. That pattern is repeating the exact subject form of the antecedents NP at reflexivised position. So, we have for instance, *Ayị gbù ẹwhù-ayị* ‘We killed ourselves’ *Ayị* ‘we’ reoccurring in *ẹwhù-ayị* ‘ourselves’, the reference NP. The same structural pattern applies in (15 and 16).

Reciprocals

Reciprocal is a grammatical description that is useful for referring to classes which express the meaning of mutual relationship. Crystal (2008) recognizes two kinds of reciprocals namely: reciprocal pronouns such as *each other* and *one another*; and reciprocal verbs such as *meet*. In Ikwerre, reciprocal pronouns have government and binding theory, reciprocal pronouns, along with reflexive pronouns and NP-traces, form the class of anaphors.

17. Anụ mènụ ivnè-anụ hneoma

You do REC good
‘do good to one another’

18. a. Okechi nù John hnù tà-rù

PN and PN see REC-PST
Okechi nù John saw each other’

b. Okechi nù John hnùrù ẹwhù-vẹ

PN and PN see REC-PST
Okechi nù John saw themselves’

c. *Okechi hnù tà-rù ẹwhù-ă

PN see REC-PST himself
*Okechi saw each other’

19. a. À kwù tà-rù ọkà

We speak REC-PST speech
We spoke to each other’

b. À kwùrù ọkà

We speak-PST speech
‘we spoke’

c. *Ò kwù tàrù ẹwhù-ă ọkà

He/she speak REC-PST him/herself speech
*‘he/she spoke each other him/herself’

d. *Ò kwù tàrù ọkà

He/she speak REC-PST speech
*‘he/she spoke each other’

In Ikwerre, the reciprocal NP *ta* interrupts the internal configuration of verbal sequence. This accounts for why we find *ta* interrupting the sequence of the rV in (18 and

19). *Ru* which usually marks past when attached to verb root is detached by the reciprocal element *ta*. This further justifies the proof that every language has an independent and unique structural configuration. In Ikwerre, the reciprocal NP *ta* is referentially dependent and it is subject to the same distribution and interpretative constraints as reflexives. The syntactic features of the Ikwerre reciprocal NP state thus:

The reciprocal must express pluralism in terms of number.

The reciprocal must have an antecedent.

The reciprocal must occur in the same clause with its antecedent.

The reciprocal must share the same nominal grammatical features of person with its antecedent.

Personal Pronouns

Isaac (2020) had attested for personal pronouns as a type of noun phrase in Gokana. Similarly, in Ikwerre, personal pronouns are attested as a type of noun phrase. The nominal grammatical features of case, person and number apply to them even though they do not mark gender distinction.

20. a. *Ò dnà nù àlì*
He fall PREP ground
'he fell on the ground'
- b. *Ò dnà nù àlì*
She fall PREP ground
'she fell on the ground'
- c. *Ò dnà nù àlì*
It fall PREP ground
'it fell on the ground'

Notice that the personal pronouns in (18a – c) above do not show any distinction in their gender. *O* 'he/she/it' is used to mark the masculine, feminine and the neuter genders.

Personal pronouns in Ikwerre are presented in table 1 below to indicate grammatical contrasts in the nominal features of case, person and number of the pronouns.

Table 1: Ikwerre Personal Pronouns

Dependent form		Subject		Object		Possessive	
		Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1 st		m 'I'	a 'we'	m 'me'	ayî 'us'	m 'my'	ayî 'our'
2 nd		i 'you'	añ 'you'	i 'your'	anû 'your'	i 'your'	anû 'your'
3 rd		o 'he/she/it'	Vẹ 'they'	a 'him/her/it'	vẹ 'them'	a 'his/her/its'	vẹ 'their'

Indepen dent	1 st	me 'I'	ayî 'we'	me 'me'	ayî 'us'	me 'my'	ayî 'our'
	2 nd	ge 'you'	anû 'you'	ge 'your'	anû 'you'	ge 'your'	anû 'you'
	3 rd	ya 'he/she/it'	vẹ 'they'	ya 'his/her/it'	vẹ 'they'	ya 'his/her/its'	vẹ 'they'

A look at the following data would help:

21. a. ge me-ru a
You do-PST it
'you did it'
- b. Chika kà-nụ ì kịnī?
PN tell PST you what.
'what did Chika tell you'?
- c. ì mà-rụ mma
You be-PST beauty
'you are beautiful'

Ge 'you' in (21a) is more emphatic and so, beyond being the independent form of the 2nd person singular pronoun can be regarded as a focus marker irrespective of the position it occurs. On the other hand, the *ì* 'you' in (21b – c), which is also 2nd person singular pronoun functions as both dependent subject, object and possessive NPs.

Referential Expressions

Reference is often used to state a relationship of identity which exists between grammatical units. Referential expressions generally refer to noun phrases that are in themselves referential, such as labels for entities in the universe of discourse. Crystal (2008) refers to them as lexical noun phrases. Referential expressions have independent reference and so, do not need antecedent. They are also not bound within sentence grammar or the discourse domain. They freely select their referent from the universe of discourse. See the examples below.

22. Woke hnụrụ nwenètà a
PN see (PST) sister/brother his
'Woke saw his brother'
23. Woke hnụrụ nnwèrè nwenètà a èchilē whèrùèwhè
PN see (PST) wife sister/brother his/her day past
'Woke saw his brother's wife yesterday'
24. Woke chọyalẹ nye gbū ewu adna ă
PN find (PST) person kill (PST) goat his daughter
'Woke has found the person that killed his daughter's goat'

In the example (22) above, *Woke*, *nweneta a* 'his brother/sister' and *adna a* 'his daughter' do not have their reference traceable to the discourse. Their reference is independent of the discourse; recoverable in the universe. This is the reason they are free from any kind of constraint of sentence grammar. They do not share a co-referential

relation; in the sense that there is no identifiable referent that binds them in the constructions. Both NPs are free and do not tolerate any form of binding. The analysis above corroborates Isaac's (2020) assertion that referential expressions in Gokana do not tolerate any A – binding – they must be given total freedom. Hence, just like Gokana NPs, Ikwerre NPs are analyzed in accordance with the following characteristics:

- a) Reflexives and Reciprocals [+Anaphor, -Pronominal]
- b) Personal Pronouns [-Anaphors, +Pronominals]
- c) Referential Expressions [-Anaphors, -Pronominals]

Conclusion

In the Ikwerre plural NP structure, number has been observed to play prominent role. Usually, a prefix is attached to the nominal to derive a plural counterpart. The independent and the dependent forms of pronoun in NP structures may have a wide range of variation in their distribution but sometimes may occur interchangeably, especially at the object and possessive NPs and distinctively as subject NP.

Based on the foregoing, reflexives and reciprocals belong to anaphoric subcategorization of nominals. Just as Isaac (2020) observed in Gokana, reflexives can have a singular antecedent in the nominal grammatical feature of number, the reciprocal NP is by default plural and requires a plural antecedent for its interpretation. In referential expression both NPs are independent and do not tolerate any form of binding.

Recommendations

Following the findings of this study, the authors therefore recommend the following:

1. Further studies should be conducted to show more instances of referential expressions in Ikwerre language.
2. A comparative study of English and Ikwerre should be conducted to show the configurations overt NP constructions of these two languages.

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