

Topic Constructions in Igbo

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines topic construction in Igbo. Topic in Igbo is a proposed element that is set off from the rest of the clause by comma intonation which involves movement process in which some communicative prominence is placed on a particular constituent of a sentence over and above the surrounding constituents within the same sentence. The findings of this paper reveal that Igbo topic constructions are similar and dissimilar to the Igbo focus constructions because they necessarily involve preposing of the topic element to the left periphery. This paper also reveals that Igbo topics include additive or equative and contrastive topics. This paper further established that Igbo topic constructions essentially involve DPs and show no sensitivity to complex NP island. Finally, the paper established that the Igbo topics often require the topic to be old information and are sensitive to topic islands.

Keyword: Topic Construction, Igbo.

Introduction

Topic in Igbo is a proposed element that is set off from the rest of the clause by ‘comma intonation’. Topicalisation in Igbo is a movement process in which some communicative prominence is placed on a particular constituent of a sentence over and above the surrounding constituents within the same sentence (Ndimele 1992). Topics in Igbo typically represent old information (i.e. information which has already been mentioned in the discourse, and hence it is assumed to be known to the hearer). Bassong (2014:396) notes that they are instance of leftward preposing strategy that is attested cross-linguistically. Igbo topic constructions which involve the extraction from an argument position. The topic in Igbo moves to the specific position of a topic phrase headed by a null topic marker O, which leaves a resumptive element in the TP-internal position. The sentence (1) is example of a topic construction involving an embedded clause. In this context, we note that the topic, the italicised element, occurs in a presubject position where it is before the complementizer *na* ‘that’. We interpret the occurrence of the topic in this position as clear indication that the topic constructions involve the left periphery.

(1) Eze *n* *na* *si* *ri* *bag* *dem* *Ada* *buy* *PST* *it*.
Eze PRE-say-PST that bag dem Ada buy-PST it.

‘Eze said that as for the specific bag, Ada bought it.’

In Igbo, like some other languages like Gungbe, Italian, topic constructions always involve TP-internal resumptive element that is identified by the topics. In this respect, topicalization contrasts with focus/wh constructions in that the focus and wh constructions do not involve a resumptive element. Topic construction is one of manifestations of the left periphery of the clause in Igbo and we follow Rizzi (2001), and Aboh (2004) to argue that it is an example of construction involving A-bar chain.

This paper provides additional support to the cartographic framework by showing that topic target distinct positions in the left periphery of the clause. This paper is organized as follows: section 1 is the introduction while section 2 discusses the objectives of the paper. Section 3 is the significance of the study and section 4 the review of literature. In section 5, we discuss the methodology. In section 6, we discuss the various types of topics that occur in Igbo. Section 7 discusses the similarities and dissimilarities between topic and focus constructions in Igbo while section 8 identifies some characteristics of Igbo topics. Section 9 is the summary and conclusion.

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to:

- Identify various types of topics that typically occur in Igbo.
- Show the similarities and dissimilarities between topic and focus constructions in Igbo.
- Identify some characteristics of Igbo topics

Significance of the Study

This paper provides insight to the study of topic using cartographic approach. It is also useful for cross-linguistic and comparative syntax purposes. For instance, it helps to ascertain whether the Igbo case of topic is similar to what obtains in related languages.

Review of Literature

No much work has been done on Igbo topics. Nwachukwu (1995:182) distinguishing between topic and focus gives the following sentences.

(2a) Ndi ebe unu , ha siri ike na mmadu

People your, they are rough among men

(b) $Mo \models to \exists a \models hu \exists, O \bar{g}a \text{ cho } \bar{r}o \bar{y}a.$

Car that Ogu wants it

(c) Nwaaa ahu_i, ha na ekwu maka ya_i

Woman that, they are talking about her

He observes that examples (2a-c) can be expressed as (3a-b) respectively with little or no difference in meaning, but with a difference of syntactic structure.

(3a) [Moto ahu], ka Ogu cho ro [e]_I

Car that Ogu wants

‘It is that car that Ogu wants’

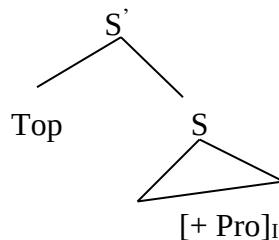
(b) [Nwaanyi ahu]_i wu onye _i anyi na ekwu [e]_i maka ya

‘That woman is the person that we are talking about her’

Nwachukwu (1995) notes that examples (3a-b) contain relative clauses, while (2a-c) are examples of topic because of the use of the deictic element **ahu** ‘that’ which can only show that the subject featured in earlier discourse. Nwachukwu also observes that there are subject and object topic. For example, in (2a) the topic is **ndi ebe ahu**. In (2b), on the other hand, the topic is the direct object or theme of the verb **choro** ‘desire’. He also notes that the topic is co-indexed with a matching pronoun which is characterized as resumptive pronoun following (Goldsmith 1981, Koopman 1982). Nwachukwu (1995:183) points out two features of the topic construction in Igbo.

- (a) Topic is associated with resumptive pronoun as a possible trace.
- (b) Subject or object topic is normal in the language. He gives the following as the structure of topic in Igbo.

(4)



Nwachukwu (1995:184) summarizes topic and focus in Igbo as follows:

- (a) Topic characterized by a pause, (punctuated as comma) between the topic and its comment in both subject and object.
- (b) A topic construction never contains a relative clause.

Focus is marked by the following features: (a) Subject focus (in the sense of subject topic) is declarative sentence, but it does not involve a relative clause.

Nwachukwu (1995) claims that Igbo does not make use of any morphological marking for the two discourse functions and that the strategy adopted in Igbo is syntactic. The syntactic strategy, according to him, can be in form of movement or base-generation. Topic and Focus will be difficult to distinguish because the landing site for any fronted constituent is a scope position that coincides with Comp. In this explanation, Nwachukwu notes that it is only in questions that an NP topic can be followed by a focus one.

Methodology

The non-probabilistic sampling method, specifically, the purposive sampling technique was adopted. This afforded us the convenience of selecting our informants/research assistants and consultants based on our judgement of them as typical and capable of providing the required information needed for the study. The population of this study was drawn from the speakers of the Ngwa Igbo. Ten adult speakers, 5 from each of the two Local Governemnt Areas were used (interviewed as the representative population of the study).

Types of Topics in Igbo

Igbo has the following Topics - additive or equative topic and contrastive topic.

Additive or Equative topic

Like some other language, from the discourse point of view, a topic construction with additive or equative presupposition in Igbo must be known by the discourse participants. Like other types of topic in Igbo, it carries an existential presupposition in that it is obtained when there is an implication that some other individuals shared the same relevant value. This is exemplified in such context as in sentence (5)

(5) Ngo zi m̄kpō rō ndi mmadu ̄ n'oēriri ūyīĒahu.̄

Ngozi invite-PST people LOC Party yesterday

'Ngozi invited the people to the party yesterday'

b Ee kamā gwa m# mākā umūnne# ya, ō kpō ghi ha.

Yes but tell me about siblings his 3sg invite-NEG them

'Yes tell me about his siblings, didn't he invite them'

c Ee nu, umūnne_k ya, Ngozi m̄kpōrō ha_k kwa

Yes of course siblings his Ngozi invite-PST them too

'Yes, as for his siblings, Ngozi invited them.'

In context (5a), the topic *umunne ya* 'his siblings' carries the presupposition that 'some other people were invited to the party'. Therefore, equative or additive topic indicates part of information sharing or having the same value as another part of the same set. We found out that the (5a) can only be true if and only if *Ngozi* also invited some other individuals in addition to 'his sibling'. In addition to that, the reply to (5a) cannot be answered by a wh-question (e.g. who did Ngozi invite?) like in (6) below.

(6) Q Ōnye kā Ngo zi mkpōrō n'oēriri≡ ū yī Ēahū ?

Who foc Ngozi invite-PST LOC party yesterday

‘Who did Ngozi invite to the party yesterday.’

(a) Ngo zi mɛkpoɛroɛ u muɛnne# ya n’oɛriri.

Ngozi invite-PST siblings his LOC party

‘ Ngozi invited his siblings to the party.’

(b) U muɛ nne# ya kaɛ Ngo zi mkpoɛ ro ɛ oɛriri.

siblings his foc Ngozi invite-PST party

‘Ngozi invited HIS SIBLINGS.’

(c) U muɛ nne# ya, Ngo zi mɛkpoɛ roɛ ha n’oɛriri kwa

siblings his Ngozi invite-PST them LOC party too

‘As for his siblings, Ngozi invited them to the party too’.

The fact that (6c) is not acceptable as an answer to the question in (6) is simply an indication that it is not a focus construction. This means that in the context of the question in (6), the statement (6c) simply infelicitly nonsense. This is because the question in (6) requires new information or non-presupposed information that is not known to the hearer. The answer in (6c) clearly indicates that the DP/NP *umunne ya* ‘his siblings’ in the context of (6) has been subject of a previous conversation (that is has been the topic of the sentence). It is interesting to know that Igbo like Basaa, Gungbe etc., that an equative or additive topic display properties of A-bar dependence. Such as unboundedness in sentence (7a), parasitic gap (7b),.

(7a) U ɛbe ahuɛ i, Ezeɛ mɛmaɛraɛ naɛ u muɛ aka# raɛraɛ ha_i kwa

pear dem Eze know-FT that children lick-PST them too

‘As for the pear, Eze knows that the children ate them too’.

(b) Uɛbe_i, u mu ɛaka# raɛkwaɛraɛ ha_i na# asa#ghi_i (aɛsa)

Pear children eat-certain-PST them without PRE-wash-NEG them wash

‘As for the pear, the children also ate them without washing them’.

Contrastive Topic

Contrastive topic in Igbo arises when in the discourse setting there is the presence of relevant alternatives. Sentences with contrastive topic in Igbo involve partial answers to the question under discussion. This means that contrastive topic in Igbo cannot convey exhaustive interpretation. Like additive or equative topic, the contrastive topic does not display an overt topic morpheme or marker. The morpheme is implicitly realized. Examples of contrastive topic in Igbo are provided in (8a-b).

(8) Context: The drink is served. What should we (father, children uncles (etc) drink?

(8a) Nnaɔ, o ɛ naɔ-aɛnu mɛmiɛriɛ naɔ mmaya ngwoɔ

Father, HAB-drink water and/with wine palm

‘As for the father, he drinks water and palmwine.’

(b) U mu ɛaka#, ha naɔ-aɛnu mo tiɛ

Children they HAB-drink malt

‘As for the children, they drink malt.’

The utterance in (8) ‘the drink is served; what shall we drink? Can only be true if and only if there is a set of different people as father, children, etc., and other people in the discourse who share the same event (the act of drinking). The people in the drinking process are contrasted because they do not drink the same thing. So when a statement like (8a) is uttered in Igbo, it indicates that is an alternative to the topic constituent *Nna* ‘father’. These alternative members are many other individuals who act as subset of the whole set ‘we’ (Bassong 2014). The alternative members of the topic are *Nna* ‘father’, (8a) and *umuaka* ‘children’ (8b). We observe that the answers provided in (8a) and (8b) show that the statements are not exhaustive due to the presence of alternative to the answers provided.

Similarities and Dissimilarity between Topic and Focus

Some similarities between topic and focus

The Igbo topic constructions are similar to the focus and any wh-constructions. This is because they necessarily involve preposing of the topic element to the left periphery (9a). The sentence in (9b) is not acceptable as topic and this indicates that Igbo does not involve topic in situ strategy.

(9a) Agwo ahuɛ iɛ, Aɛda mɛgbuɛruɛ ya

SNAKE [DEM] ADA kill-PST it

‘As for the specific snake Ada killed it’

(9b)?? Aɛda, mɛgbuɛ ru ɛ agwo ahu ɛ (assuming it encode topic information)

Ada kill-PST snake dem

‘As for Ada, she killed the specific snake..

As for the specific snake Ada killed it.

Observe from the examples that (9a) is grammatical because the topic element *agwo ahu* ‘the snake’ is fronted to the initial position of the clause while in embedded clauses, the topic occurs to the right of the complementizer *naɛ* in a presubject position (10).

(10a) Eze nɛsiɛ ri na agwo ahu ɛ, Aɛda mɛgbuɛ ru ɛ ya

Eze say-PST that snake [dem] Ada kill-PST it

Eze said that as for the specific snake, Ada killed it.

(b) Eɛmekə nɛsiɛ ri naɛ Aɛda, akwu kwo kaɛ o zu ɛru ɛ

Emeka PRE-say-PST that Ada book foc 3sg buy-PST

‘Emeka said that as for Ada, he bought a book.’

(c) Ngo zi, nri kaɛ o siɛriɛ

Ngozi food foc 3sg cook-PST

‘As for Ngozi she ate THE FOOD’

Sentences (10b-c) suggest that precedence requirement on topic, focus and wh-elements that the topic position is higher than the focus position. As observed in Osugwu and Anyanwu (2020), focused and wh-phrases target a focus projection (FocP) that projects within the C-system. In the same way, the topic is preposed to a distinct in Igbo (see Rizzi 1997, 2001; Aboh 2004, 2008 and Bassong 2014 for similar proposal). The topic occurs in the specifier position of a topic projection TopP that dominates the focus projection FocP. We further propose that the null topic marker (TM) is inserted in Top Y where it encodes the feature [+topic]. I follow Puskas (1995, 1996), Rizzi (2001, 2008), Aboh (2004, 2008), Bassong (2014), to assume that the movement to [spec TopP] is triggered by the need of the topic phrase to check its topic feature against the topic head. This would mean that the topic phrase and the topic head must be spec-head configuration in overt syntax. That nothing can intervene between the null TM and the element immediately to its left suggests that the topic and the null TM share a spec-head relation.

(11)* Ada_i, taa o_i kwu₃ ru₃ ndi o ru # m u gwo

Ada today 3sg pay-PST those workers my wages

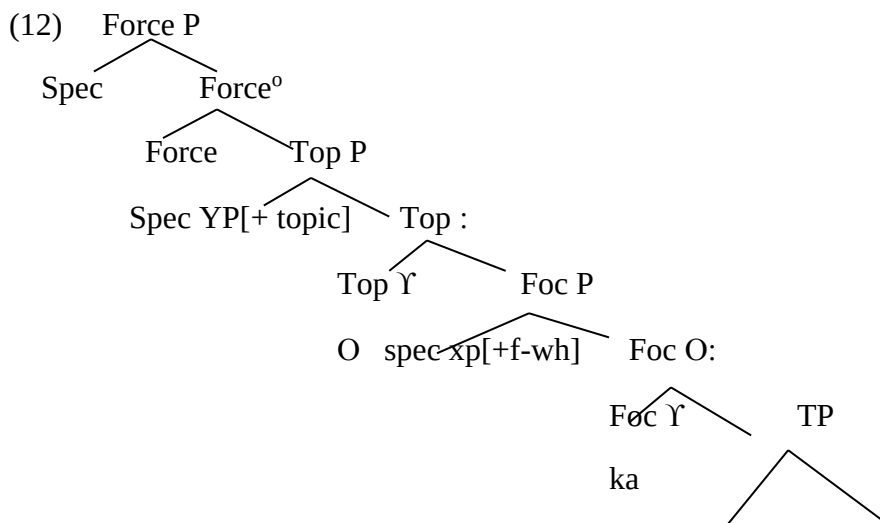
‘As for Ada, she paid my workers today’

b. Akwukwo ahu_i u₃yi₃ahu₃ Eze n₃zu₃ ru₃ ya_i

book dem yesterday Eze PRE-buy-PST it

‘As for the book, Eze bought it.’

Granting this analysis, we can then straight forwardly account for the similarities discussed above. The fact that topic, focus and wh-phrases target distinct positions in the left periphery of the clause also follows (see examples 10-11). The null marker that is associated with Top Y encodes feature [+ topic] and the marker *ka* associated with Foc Y encodes feature [+ focus + wh]. These heads project in the left periphery as components of the left periphery of the clause. In this regard, the Igbo left periphery can be attributed to the partial representation in (12).



Following Aboh (2004), and Rizzi (2001), we assume that the topic-focus system is triggered in a structure only when the clause contains a constituent that needs to check its topic, focus or wh feature.

Some dissimilarity between topics and focus/wh constructions in Igbo.

In Igbo, like some other languages such as Gungbe, Italian, topic constructions necessarily involve an TP-internal resumptive elements that is identified by the topics. In this respect, topicalization contrasts with focus and any moved wh constructions in that the latter never includes a resumptive pronoun strategy. Compare, for example, the

grammatical sentences (13a-b) and the ungrammatical example (13c). On the other hand, focus construction never requires the occurrence of the resumptive clitic. In the focus sentence (13d), the object element is present and the sentence is rule out. But the grammatical focus sentence (13e) involves no resumptive element.

(13a) Eze_i o_i mɛgbuɛruɛ ewu. (Topic)

Eze 3sg kill-PST goat

‘As for the goa, Eze killed it’.

(b) Akwu k̄wo ahu_i Aɛda nɛzuɛ ruɛ ya_i. (Topic)

book dem Ada buy-PST it

As for the book, Ada bought it.

(c) *Akwu k̄wo aɛhu_i Aɛda nzuɛruɛ <akwu k̄wo> (Topic)

book dem Ada buy-PST.

(d) Aɛkpaɛ kaɛ Ezeɛ zuɛ ru_i ɛ <aɛkpaɛ> (Focus)

bag foc Eze buy-PST

‘Eze bought A BAG.’

(e)* Akpa_i kaɛ Eze nzuɛ ru_i ɛ ya_i (Focus)

bag foc Eze buy-PST it

(f) Gini kaɛ Ezeɛ zuɛ ru_i ɛ <gini> (Focus)

what foc Eze buy-PST

What did Eze buy

(g)* Gini kaɛ Ezeɛ zuɛ ru_i ɛ ya (Focus)

what foc Eze buy-PST it

The Igbo topic construction also differs from focus and wh constructions in that the focus can apply to different constituents, while the topics involves DPs essentially. In no circumstance can the adjectivals, adverbials, PPs be preposed to [spec TopP], as illustrated by the ungrammatical sentences (14d,f&g)

(14a) Echi kaɛ Aɛda mɛbi aɛraɛ <echi> (Focus)

yesterday Foc Ada PRE-come-PST

‘Ada came YESTERDAY.’

(b) Eze_i ka_i Ngo _{zi} mkpo _{ro} _i <Eze_i> (Focus)

Eze Foc Ngozi call-PST

‘Ngozi called EZE’

c. N’a_ikpa_i ka_i E_ime_ika n_iti_inye_ire_i ego <n’a_ikpa_i> (Focus)

PREP-bag foc Emeka PRE-put-PST money

Emeka put the money IN THE BAG

(d) Ngwa n#gwa ka_i Eze_i n_iga_ira_i ahi _a <ngwa n#gwa> (Focus)

Quickly foc Eze go-PST market

Eze went to the market QUICKLY.

(e) * Echi, A_ida m_ibi_i _ara_i ya_i.

yesterday Ada PRE-come-PST it

(f) Eze_i, Ngo _{zi} m_ikpo_i _{ro} _i ya_i. (Topic)

Eze Ngozi call-PST him

As for Eze, Ngozi called him.

(g)* N’a_ikpa_i, E_ime_ika n_iti_inye_ire_i ego ya_i. (Topic)

PREP bag Emeka PRE-put-PST money it.

(h)* Ngwa n#gwa_i, Eze_i n_iga_ira_i ahi _a ya_i (Topic)

Quick quick Eze PRE-go-PST market it

Bare quantificational expressions, for example *ihe* ‘something’, *ihe nile* ‘everything’, *ihe ufodu*

etc. cannot be topicalized. This means that they resist topicalization (14a-b), while they can be freely focused as illustrated in (14c-d). This is to say that bare quantificational elements cannot be topicalized but they can be easily focused.

- (15a)* Ihe nile_i, Eze_∃ ga_∃-a_∃zu ⁻ ya_i (Topic)
 Everything Eze will-buy it
- (b) * Ihe_i, Ada ga-eme ya_i (Topic)
 Something, Ada will do it.
- (c) **Ihe nile** ka_∃ Eze_∃ ga_∃-a_∃zu <**ihe nile**> (Focus)
 Everything Foc Eze will buy
 Eze will buy EVERYTHING
- (d) **Ihe** ka_∃ A_∃da ga_∃-e_∃me <**ihe**> (Focus)
 Something Foc Ada will-do
 Ada will do SOMETHING.

From that data in (15a-b), we show that Igbo topics do not involve a quantificational operator-variable chain and this is in line with the analysis put forward by (Cinque 1990; Puskas 1995, Rizzi 1997; Aboh 2004) that bare quantificational elements cannot be topics. This is to say that in Igbo quantified expressions cannot be topicalized because they must bind a variable in the TP-internal position since they always manifest non-quantificational A'-binders. So, (15a-b) are ruled out because the resumptive pronominal element *ya_i* 'it' in the TP-internal position does not qualify as a syntactic variable. From the data, we propose that Igbo topic is similar to the Gungbe Topics (Aboh 2004). From forgoing, it follows that topics in Igbo are not quantificational and necessarily involve an TP-internal pronominal element (14a-b), while the focus or wh construction never includes any pronominal (14d & f).

Sentence (14c) is ruled out because the topicalized element is not quantificational and the empty category in the TP-internal position is illegitimate. We cannot say that it is variable, since there is no quantificational element that binds it and it does not fall under any typology of empty category. This means that it cannot be PRO because the structure violates the binding theory; it cannot also be pro (Rizzi 1986; Aboh 2004). It cannot also be regarded as NP-trace because it is A-free in its governing category and it cannot be a null constant since a null constant is licensed by an anaphoric operator. Moreover, no well-formed derivation in Igbo can be associated with a sentence like (14c).

We follow Aboh (2004) to assume that Igbo uses left strategy which is the use of a resumptive element in the TP-internal position, as illustrated by the grammatical sentence (14a-b). From the analysis, we observe that Igbo is similar to Italian, Hungarian, Gungbe (Aboh 2004), Basaa (Bassong 2014) because it displays a resumptive element that is A'-bound by the topic. This is in agreement with the argument proposed by Rizzi

(1990, 1997, 2004) that the resumptive element is subject to the same recoverability requirements as traces and must satisfy the identification requirement and that the resumptive element must be identified by a local A'-antecedent which is the topic. Sentences (5 and 14a) repeated in (16) and (17) can be represented as examples (18) and (19) respectively and the structures in (20) and (21).

(16) Eze_ḡ n_ḡsi_ḡ ri _ḡ na_ḡ a_ḡkpa_ḡ ahu_ḡ , A_ḡda zu_ḡ ru_ḡ _ḡ ya

Eze PRE-say-PST that bag dem Ada buy-PST it.

‘Eze said that as for the specific bag, Ada bought it.’

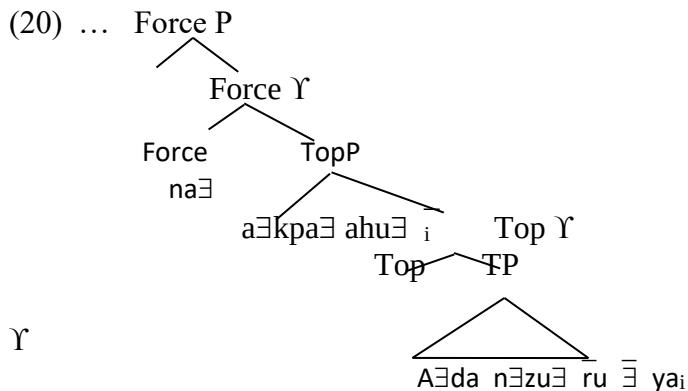
(17a) Eze_i o_i m_ḡgbu_ḡru_ḡ ewu. (Topic)

Eze 3sg kill-PST goat

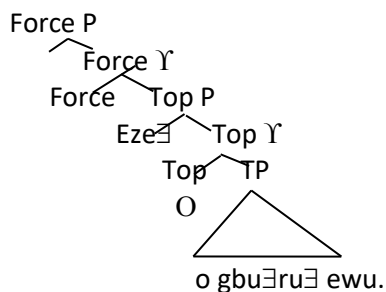
‘As for the goa, Eze killed it’.

(18) ...[Force P [Force Y na_ḡ [TopP a_ḡkpa_ḡ ahu_ḡ _i [Top Y O [A_ḡda n_ḡzu_ḡ ru_ḡ _ḡ ya_i.]]]]]

(19) Force P [Force Y O [TopP Eze_ḡ [Top Y O [TP o_i gbu_ḡru_ḡ ewu]]]]



(21)



From the analysis so far, we can then conclude by saying that the Igbo data support the generalization that focus is quantificational and topic is not and that the anaphoric operator parameter applies. A null constant is allowed in the TP-internal position if and only if the language allows for anaphoric operator in the topic constructions (Cinque 1990, Rizzi 1997, 2001; Aboh 2004).

Characteristics of Igbo Topics

In this analysis, we have shown that the Igbo resumptive pronominalization is typical of DPs in A-positions. This is because topic constructions typically involve DPs in the topic constructions. Granting this analysis, we follow Aboh (2004) to assume that the resumptive strategy in Igbo is a last resort since it arises only in the cases when a gap is excluded.

Topics do not manifest island constraints in Igbo

The Igbo topics, like Gungbe topics do not manifest island constraints at least comparing Cinque's examples as cited by Aboh (2004). In this regard, the sentences in (22) show that the resumptive or copy element in the TP-internal position may occur in a complex NP-island or in a wh-island.

(22a) U lo_i ahu_i ru_i m nwoke# o_inye nru #la_i Eze_i

House dem PREF-see-PST Isg man that [Rel] build-BENEF 3sg Eze

'As for that house, I saw the man who built it for Eze'.

(b) Ulo_i ahu_i, aju_i ru_i m ma_i o_inye ga_i-a_iru_i ru_i ya_i Eze_i

House dem PRE-ask-PST 1sg if who will PRE-build 3sg Eze

'As for that house, I asked who will build the house for Eze'.

The Igbo topic construction is associated with old information

The Igbo topic construction is associated with old information. Consider the following examples:

(23) A_ikpa_i ahu_i, Eze_i n_izu ru_i ya_i

Bag DEM. Eze buy-PST 3sg

'As for that bag, Eze bought it'

(b) * A_ikpa_i, Eze_i n_izu ru_i ya_i ahu_i

Bag Eze PRE-buy-PST 3sg.

- (c) Akwu k̄wo ahu ̄i, o_i fūrū ̄ ēfu
 Book DEM 3sg lose-PST lose

‘As for that book, it was lost’.

- (d) * Akwu k̄wo ahū ̄ o_i fūrū ̄ ēfu
 Book 3sg lose-PST lose.

The ungrammaticality of sentence (23b and d) result from the fact that topic constituent contains a deitic element or have such reading and must be a fully-fledged XP. Hence, the grammatical sentences (23a and c). We propose, that the deitic element shows specificity of the constituent and also bear referential because it selects a pre-identified referent.

Igbo Topic Allows for more than one Topic

Another feature of the Igbo topic construction is that Igbo topic allows for more than one topic. Let’s look at the following sentences.

- (24a) Ezē ākpā ahū ̄ anū rū m̄ nā ō zū rū ̄
 ya_i
 Eze bag dem PRF hear-PST-I that 3sg buy-PST 3sg

‘As for Eze, as for that bag, he bought it’.

- (b) Āda_k, akwu k̄wo ahū ̄ i, ō k̄ gū rū ̄ ya_i
 Ada, book dem 3sg read-PST 3sg

‘As for Ada, as that book she bought it’.

Topic Extraction across an Embedded Topic is not Allowed

The sentence under (25a) clearly shows that topic extraction across an embedded topic is prohibited in Igbo. Although, we have shown that the Igbo topics are not sensitive to complex NP-island, it does not mean that those constructions show no locality constraint (25a-b).

- (25a)* Eze, anūrū m̄ nā akwu k̄wo ahū ̄ ō gūrū ̄
 ya
 Eze PRE-hear-PST 1sg that book DEM 3sg read-PST 3sg

‘As for Eze, I heard that for that book he read it’.

(b) Akwu kwō ahū Ẹ̄i anū Ẹ̄ rū Ẹ̄ m̄ nā Ezē n̄gū Ẹ̄rū Ẹ̄ yāi

book dem PRE-hear-PST 1sg that Eze PRE-read-PST 3sg

‘As for that book, I heard that Eze read it’.

(c) Ezē Ẹ̄i, anū Ẹ̄ rū Ẹ̄ m̄ nā ō ī gū rū Ẹ̄ akwū kwō ahū Ẹ̄

Eze PRE-hear-PST 1sg that 3sg read-PST book dem

‘As for Eze I heard that Eze read that book’.

The sentences under (25a-c) clearly indicate that topic extraction across an embedded topic is not allowed in Igbo. For example, sentence (25a) is ungrammatical because the embedded topic position is already filled by a topic that blocks long extraction. But this is not the case of the grammatical sentences (25b-c) (see Aboh 2004 for similar analysis).

Igbo Topics in both Main and Embedded clause

Another feature of the Igbo topics is that the topic phrase may occur in both root and embedded contexts. This is demonstrated in the sentences under (26). Sentence (26a) shows topicalization which involves a root, extraction of the subject and the object to the matrix clause.

(26a) Azū Ẹ̄ ahū Ẹ̄i Ezē n̄tārā yāi

fish dem Eze PRE-eat-PST 3sg

‘As for the fish, Eze ate it’

(b) Anū Ẹ̄ rū Ẹ̄ m̄ nā azū Ẹ̄ ahū Ẹ̄i Ezē n̄tārā yāi

Pref hear-PST 1sg that fish dem Eze eat-PST 3sg

I heard that as for that fish Eze ate it.

(c) Ezē Ẹ̄i, anū Ẹ̄ rū Ẹ̄ m̄ nā ō ī tārā azū Ẹ̄ ahū Ẹ̄

Eze Pref-hear-PST 1sg that 3sg eat-PST fish dem

‘As for Eze, I heard that the ate that fish’

(d) Azū Ẹ̄ ahū Ẹ̄, anū Ẹ̄ rū Ẹ̄ m̄ nā Ezē n̄tārā yā.

Fish dem PRE-hear-PST 1sg that Eze eat-PST 3sg

‘As for that fish, I heard that Eze ate it’

The Igbo data discussed implicitly suggest that the Igbo topic constructions are similar to the Italian topic or clitic left Dislocation construction in terms of Cinque (1990), Rizzi (1997) and Aboh (2004).

Summary and Conclusion

We have been able to discuss topic construction in Igbo. The Igbo topic constructions are similar to the focus and any wh-constructions. This is because they necessarily involve preposing of the topic element to the left periphery. In this respect, topicalization contrasts with focus and any moved wh constructions in that the latter never includes a resumptive pronoun strategy. This paper identifies two types of topic construction in Igbo - additive or equative and contrastive topics. Additive or equative presupposition in Igbo must be known by the discourse participants while contrastive topic arises when in the discourse setting there is the presence of relevant alternatives.

This paper further noted that Igbo topic constructions essentially involve DPs and show no sensitivity to complex NP island. We also noted that the Igbo topics in most cases require the topic to be old information and that they occur in both root and embedded contexts and are sensitive to topic islands.

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