

Verb Tone Classes in Ikwerre

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ABSTRACT

Considering the tonal variation existing among the verbs in the various dialects of Ikwerre, this paper identifies the verb tone classes in the language based on the infinitive form of the verb. The paper adopts an eclectic approach in the analysis of verb tone classes in the language. It is observed here that Ikwerre verbs manifest different tone patterns in the infinitive. Four such patterns have been identified in the language, and accordingly Ikwerre verbs are arranged into four tone classes depending on the tone of the verb root in the infinitive: Rising Tone Verbs, Falling Tone Verbs, High Tone Verbs, and Low Tone Verbs. The paper further observes that no one dialect has four tone classes. The maximum number of tone classes in any given dialect is three, while the minimum is two. Finally, verbs from each tone class are used in different constructions: imperative, the simple aspect, the past aspect, the progressive aspect, and the perfect aspect with the aim of finding out how verbs from the same tone class behave in a particular construction.

Keywords: Verb Tone Classes, Ikwerre.

Introduction

Ikwerre is an Igboid language spoken in four local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria. The four Ikwerre-speaking Local Government Areas in Rivers State are Ikwerre, Emohwa, Obio/Akpor, and part of Port Harcourt City. The Ikwerre language comprises twenty-four mutually intelligible dialects: Rumuekpne (Rmkp), Rundlele (Rndl), Odeegnu (Odgn), Emohwa (Emwh), Ogbakiri (Ogkr), Akpo, Obio, Aluu, Igwuruta (Igwr), Omagwna (Omgw), Isiokpo (Iskp), Ibaa / Obeele (Ib/ob), Ipo, Ozuaha (Ozha), Omuanwa (Omnw), Ubima (Ubmh), Akpnabu (Akpnb), Egbedna (Egbd), Omadeeme (Omdm), Omudiogna (Omg), Ubimini (Ubmni), Omerelu (Omrl), and Apnani (Apni). These dialects are classified into groups on the basis of some overt linguistic

variations by Alerechi (2007a, 2007b, 2008, and 2011) forthcoming. Based on differences in phonological behaviour, she delineates the dialects of Ikwerre into north and south; east and west; east-central, west-central, among others. It is worthy of note that these linguistic groups do not conform to those of earlier political divisions of the language area. The present paper descriptively analyses the variation patterns inherent in the verb tone classes of Ikwerre.

Similar to the classification of nouns into tone classes and tone groups, linguists such as Clement (2000) and Igwe (1999) have classified the verbs of some languages into tone classes using various criteria. Igwe (1999: xxiii) recognizes three verb tone classes in Igbo using verb roots with CV structure as well as verb roots with CVCV structure (reduplicated form). On the other hand, earlier studies Williamson (1980), Worukwo (1983), Alerechi (1987 and 2007), Azunda (1987) and Williamson et al (2010) record three tone classes for mono-syllabic verbs using the imperative, infinitive, and the gerund forms of the verb. The present paper therefore describes the tone classes of verbs based on the infinitive form.

Ikwerre Verb Tone Classes

Following a precedent already set by earlier Igboid scholars such as Green and Igwe (1963), Emenanjo (1978), and Nwachukwu (1983), in which the infinitive is used as basis for setting up two tone classes for Igbo verbs (High Tone Verbs (HTVs) and Low Tone Verbs (LTVs), Worukwo (1999: 224), using the infinitive form, sets up three tone classes for Ikwerre verbs: Rising Tone Verbs (RTVs), Falling Tone Verbs (FTVs), and High Tone Verbs (HTVs).

Structurally, the Ikwerre infinitive is made up of a low tone vowel prefix which always harmonizes in tongue root, and occasionally, in backness, with the vowel of the verb root. Whereas in some dialects, notably Omuanwa, Ubima, Akpnabu, Egbedna, and Eleele, the infinitive prefix harmonizes in only tongue root with the root vowel, surfacing always as either [ò], or [ǝ] before [+ Expanded] and [- Expanded] stem vowel respectively. In a number of Ikwerre dialects, the infinitive prefix varies further by harmonizing with the root vowel in both tongue root and backness. In such dialects as Akpɔ and Ogbakiri, the infinitive prefix realizes as [è], [ò] before [+ Expanded] root vowels, and [é], [ɔ] [a] before [-Expanded] root vowels.

Example (1) shows dialects in which the vowel prefix manifests as [ò-] or [ǝ-]

1) Infinitive	2) Infinitive
‘to eat’	‘to fall’
Rmkp [òrí]	[ǝdǎ]
Rndl [òrí]	[ǝdǎ]
Emwh [òrí]	[ǝdǎ]
Alɔu [òrí]	[ǝdǎ]
Omnw [òrí]	[ǝdǎ]

In addition to ò-/ǝ-, the infinitive prefix shows further variation (allomorphs) as [è-è, à], in Ogbakiri and Akpɔ, as shown in (3) – (8):

3. Infinitive	(4)	Infinitive	(5)	Infinitive
‘to eat’		‘to sell’		‘to kill’
Akpo [èri]		[ère]		[òbú]
Ogkr [èrì]		[ère]		[òbú]
6. Infinitive	(7)	Infinitive	(8)	Infinitive
‘to crawl’		‘to fall’		‘to jump’
Akpo [àri]		[àdǎ]		[òbú]
Ogkr [èrì]		[àdǎ]		[òbú]

In few dialects, namely Ipo, Omdm, and Apni, the infinitive prefix manifests only as [í] depending on the tongue root position of the stem vowel. Interestingly, it is only in Ikwerre dialects in which the infinitive prefix is [í-] that the infinitive prefix has a high tone.

- 9) Ipo: [í[↓]ri]
 Omdm: [í[↓]ri]
 Apni: [òrí] ~ [í[↓]ri]

The infinitive prefix has a low tone in all the other dialects. Notice too, that in Apni, where the infinitive prefix has a non [í-] variant, as in (9) above, the vowel prefix has a low tone.

Next, we take a detailed look at each of the verb tone classes recognized in Ikwerre, based on data from the dialects.

Contrary to Alerechi (2007) and Williamson et al (2010) attempt to identify three verb tone classes based on the imperative, infinitive and gerund forms of the verb in Ikwerre, the basis for the present paper’s classification is the infinitive form of the verb. Verbs will therefore be classified on the basis of the tone they manifest in the infinitive. The tonal behavior of verbs from the same tone class will then be examined in the infinitive form, and such other constructions as the simple aspect, the past aspect, the progressive aspect and the perfect aspect. Based on the surface tone pattern of Ikwerre verbs in the infinitive, this study recognizes four verb tone classes in Ikwerre:

1. Rising Tone Verbs (RTVs)
2. Falling Tone Verbs (FTVs)
3. High Tone Verbs (HTVs)
4. Low Tone Verbs (LTVs)

Rising Tone Verbs

These are verbs in which the stem vowel regularly manifests a tonal glide from a low tone to a high tone on the same vowel segment. This tone class of verbs can be represented structurally as in (10) below:

$$10) \quad [\overset{\vee}{V} - C\overset{\vee}{V}]$$

$$\quad \quad \quad L - \quad LH$$

- | | | |
|------|------|------------------|
| 11a) | ènyě | “to give” |
| b) | èlĩ | “to bury” |
| c) | ònyö | “to peep” |
| d) | àbnă | “to enter” |
| e) | àdnă | “to fall” |
| f) | àtă | “to bite” |
| g) | èwhě | “to pass” |
| h) | àkpă | “to nurse” |
| i) | àză | “to sweep” |
| j) | èkpĩ | “to patch” |
| k) | òmũ | “to learn/study” |
| l) | èkě | “to share” |

Quite a few Ikwerre dialects have RTVs. Examples of such dialects are Emowha, Ogbakiri, Akpo, Obio, Aluu, Igwuruta, Omagwna, Isiokpo, Uvahu (Ibaa and Obele). Using the verb ‘dnă “fall” as example, it can be seen that these dialects, apart from variations in the prefixal element, all manifest an upward tonal glide on the root vowel in the infinitive.

- | | | |
|------|------------|-----------|
| 12a) | Infinitive | ‘to fall’ |
| | Emowha | òdă |
| | Oghakiri | àdă |
| | Akpo | adă |
| | Obio | òdă |
| | Aluu | òdă |
| | Igwuruta | òdă |
| | Omagwna | òdă |
| | Isiokpo | òdă |
| | Ibaa/Obele | òdă |

These verbs, however, manifest a high-level tone pattern on the vowel of the verb root in some other dialects like Omuanwa, Ozuaha, Ubima, etc. as shown in (12b)

- (12b) òdă ‘to fall’

RTVs in the Imperative Verb Form

For dialects that have RTVs, the root vowel retains its inherent tone. In other words, RTVs in the imperative form manifest a rising tone on the root vowel as shown (13):

- | | | | |
|-------|-------|------------------------|----------------------|
| (13a) | Dnă | n’èli/n’àli | |
| | fall | PREP ground | “Fall down” |
| b) | Ză | ɔ̀rò | |
| | sweep | house | “Sweep the house” |
| c) | Nyè | Àdna ¹ mini | |
| | give | PN water | ‘Give water to Adna’ |

Conversely, the dialects whose verb root are marked with a high tone turn out to take a low tone in the imperative form as in (14a) – (14c):

- 14a) Dnà n'àli
 Fall PREP ground 'Fall down'
- b) Zǎ ọ̀rò
 sweep house 'Sweep the house'
- c) Nyè Àdna 'mini
 give PN water 'Give water to Adna'

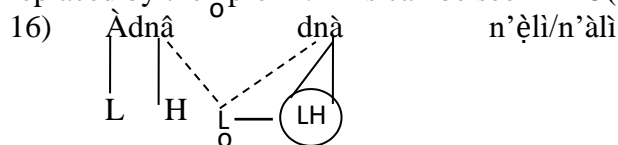
Notice that the object complements which are inherently high are marked also with a low tone in dialects that realize the RTVs as low.

RTVs in the Simple/Habitual Verb Form

When a verb in this tone class is used to express a habit or any similar concept, the verb is always realized on a low tone, the final tone of the NP – subject notwithstanding. It is observed that the tonal behavior of the verbs in this verb form is the same in all the dialects, irrespective of whether the RTVs manifest as a high tone. Consider the examples in (15):

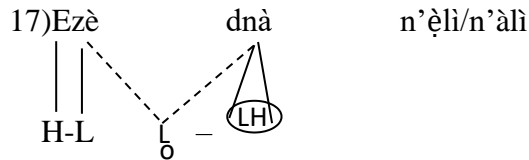
- 15a) Àdnâ dnà n'èli/n'àli
 PN fall PREP ground "Adna falls on the ground" / Adna falls down"
- b) Ezè dnà n'èli/n'àli
 PN fall PREP ground "Eze falls on the ground" / Eze falls down"
- c) Ọ̀ zà ọ̀rò
 3SG Sweep house "He/She sweeps the house"
- d) Àdnâ zà ọ̀rò
 PN Sweep house "Adna sweeps the house"
- e) Ezè nyè

As is evident from (15), the verb is always realized on a low tone. This tonal behavior can be explained by looking closely at activities in the tonal tier. The surface low tone on the verb can be regarded as resulting from the deletion of the stem tone and the rightward docking of the L_0 prefix, in which case the inherent tone of the root vowel is replaced by the L_0 prefix. This can be seen in 15(a), repeated here as (16):



The prefix spreads bidirectionally, docking on both the final vowel of the subject NP and the root vowel. Hence the surface falling tone on the subject NP *Adna*, which underlyingly has a word – final high tone, but manifests a falling tone in (15a) and (16). The leftward spreading of the L_0 prefix is therefore obvious when the subject ends on a high tone. When preceded immediately by a low tone on the NP

subject, as in (15b), (15c), (15e and (15f) the leftward effect of the $\frac{1}{0}$ prefix is not felt because it simply merges with the low tone of the subject NP, as in 15b, repeated here as (17):



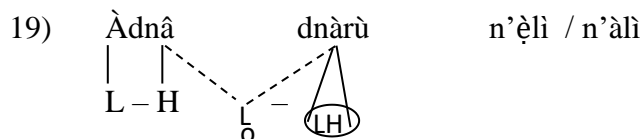
RTVs in the Past Verb Form

The verb in this verb form is structurally made up of a $\frac{1}{0}$ prefix, the root, and a toneless suffix, -ru. The verbal suffix is regarded as toneless because it always copies the tone of the root vowel.

The tonal behavior of RTVs in the past aspect is similar to what was observed in the simple/habitual verb form; both the root vowel and the past suffix are realized on a low tone, and we will, as was done in the previous verb form, analyze this tonal behavior as the result of the deletion of the root tone and the rightward docking of the prefix on both the root vowel and the suffix.

- 18) Àdnâ dnà-rù n'èli / n'àli
 PN fall-PST PREP ground “Adna fell on the ground”

We next present the underlying tones of the verb and the NP subject of (19) in (20).



- 20a) Ezè nyè-rù Àdna mīni
 PN give-PST PN water
 “Eze gave water to Adna”.

- b) Àdnâ nyè-rù Ezè mi↓ni
 PN give-PST PN water “Adna gave water to Eze”

- c) Ọ zà-rù ọrò
 3SG sweep-PST house “He/She swept the house”

The tonal configuration in (19) applies to all the examples in (20).

RTVs in the Progressive Verb Form

The progressive verb form is structurally more complex than the present and past aspects. In many Ikwerre dialects, the progressive aspect is marked by the auxiliary verb *nV*, the vocalic part of which always harmonizes with that of the prefix of the main verb. In some other dialects, the progressive verb form is not marked with any auxiliary but the suffix -ga attached to the verb root.

An interesting tonal relationship holds between the vowel prefix and the root vowel in the progressive aspect. The vowel prefix has a polar tonal relationship with the root vowel. If the vowel prefix is immediately followed by a low tone on the verb root, as in the case of RTVs, the vowel prefix assumes a high tone, but when it immediately follows a high tone on the verb root, such as in FTVs and HTVs, it assumes a low tone (Worukwo 1998: 229). The tone of the vowel prefix therefore contrasts with that of the verb root in the progressive verb form as shown in (21) – (22).

The tone of the verb root remains unchanged.

- | | | | | | | |
|------|------|------------|------------|----------|-------|--------------------------------|
| 21a) | Àdnâ | nè | e-nyě | Ezè | mi↓ni | |
| | PN | AUX | PREF-give | PN | water | “Adna is giving water to Eze” |
| b) | Ọ | nà | a-zã | ọrò | | |
| | 3SG | AUX | PREF-sweep | house | | “He/She is sweeping the house” |
| c) | Ezè | nè | e-kě | ẹ↓ji | | |
| | Eze | AUX | PREF-share | kola nut | | “Eze is sharing kolanut” |
| 22a) | Àdna | nyè-gà | | Ezè | mi↓ni | |
| | PN | give-PROG | | PN | water | “Adna is giving water to Eze” |
| b) | Ọ | zà-gà | | ọrò | | |
| | 3SG | sweep-PROG | | house | | ‘S(He) is sweeping the house’ |
| c) | Ezè | kè-gà | | aji | | |
| | PN | share-PROG | | kola | | ‘Eze is sharing the kola’ |

The examples in (22a) – (22c) demonstrate that the progressive verb form is also marked with the suffix –ga in dialects like Omuanwa. Considering the tonal behavior in the dialects with –ga, the floating low tone prefix of the infinitive knocks off the high tone verb root and spreads rightward to the root and the suffix vowel. Contrary to the dialects with RTV, which retain the inherent tone in the progressive form, the dialects with high tone have theirs changed.

RTVS in the Perfect Aspect

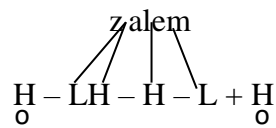
The perfect aspect is marked simultaneously by a 0^H prefix, a high tone suffix -lè, which is itself followed by another suffix -m̃. As shown in (23) the -m̃ suffix is itself followed by a 0^H ,

and can be represented underlying as follows:

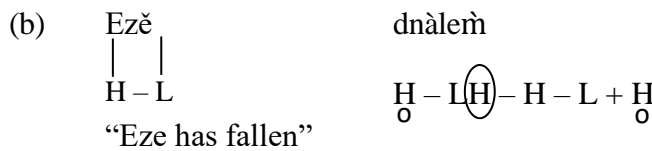
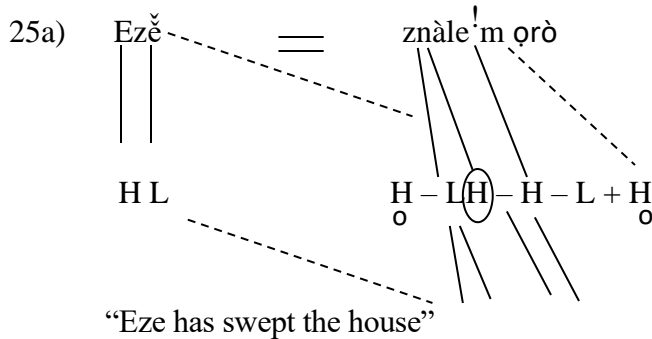
- 23)
- $$\begin{array}{c} -m \\ | \\ L + \begin{array}{c} H \\ 0 \end{array} \end{array}$$

A RTV in the perfect aspect can therefore be represented as in (24), using zã as example

24)



In the perfect aspect the second member of the gliding tone on the verb root deletes, resulting in a low tone for RTVs, and, as will be seen among FTVs, a high tone on the stem vowel for FTVs. Additionally, for RTVs only, the H_0 prefix always docks on the final tone of the NP subject whenever it is followed by a low tone on the verb root. The examples in (25) corroborate the claims made here.



An account of the difference in tonal behaviour of the final nasal suffix in (25) is necessary. The nasal suffix is on a downstep in (25a), and low tone in (25b). Notice that in (25a) the verb, *znàlem* is complemented by the direct object *orò* “house”, hence the downstep on the nasal suffix – *m*, but in (25b) the verb *dnàlem̃* “has fallen”, is sentence-final, and when a RTV is sentence-final the word-final nasal suffix, - *m̃* is low toned. In the following pairs of sentences, the (b) examples have RTVs that are sentence-final; nothing comes after the verb in each case.

Accordingly, the nasal suffix is on a low tone, whereas in the (a) examples, in which the verb is followed by some other lexical item, the nasal suffix is downstepped. The tonal behavior of the verb is in line with that of (25) in examples (26) – (28):

26a)	O	whè-le ¹ m	jì	
	3SG	pass-PERF-realis	2SG	“He/She has overtaken you”
b)	O	whè-le ^{m̃}		
	3SG	pass-PERF-real		“He has passed”
27a)	Ezè	dnàlem̃	n’èlì / n’àlì	
	PN	fall-PERF-real	PREP ground	“Eze has fallen on the ground/down”
b)	Ezè	dnàlem̃	n’èlì / n’àlì	

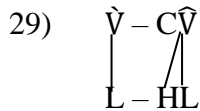
	PN	fall-PERF-real		“Eze has fallen”
	3SG	pass-PERF-real		“He has passed”
28a)	Ba	bnà-le ¹ m	orò	
	3PL	enter-PERF-real	house	“They have entered the house”
b)	Ba	bnà-le ^m		
	3PL	enter-PERF-real		“They have entered”

In the perfect verb form, therefore, the root of an Ikwerre RTV is always realized on a low tone. This tonal behaviour distinguishes RTVs from verbs from other tone classes, as will be seen in the subsequent sections.

Some other dialects, however, do not record the *-m* suffix found in the preceding dialects. Contrary to the lects where *-m* is marked with a downstep when it is complemented with some other items, in Omuanwa the downstep is only felt when the verb is followed by a pronoun.

Falling Tone Verbs

Whereas RTVs manifest a tonal glide from a low tone to a high tone on the same vowel, Falling Tone Verbs (henceforth FTVs) involve a downward tonal glide from a high tone to a low tone on the same vowel in the infinitive. This seems to be consistent with the majority of the dialects of Ikwerre. FTVs can therefore be represented structurally as in (29):



Some of the FTVs in Ikwerre are presented in (30):

30a)	èsí/ osí	“to cook”
b)	èrê/ òrê	“to swallow”
c)	òrô	“to rot”
d)	òvû	“to carry”
e)	àtâ / òtâ	“to chew”
f)	èbî	“to keep”
g)	òvû/ òzû	“to buy”
h)	àyâ/ òhiê	“to return”
i)	ètî	“to kick”
j)	ètê/ òtê	“to rub/smear”
k)	òwû	“to pour”
l)	òrnû	“to work”
m)	òwû	“to build/live in a place”
n)	òdû	“to sew”

A number of Ikwerre dialects have a class of FTVs, notably Omuanwa, Ogbakiri, and Obio.

Notice that some of the examples record the variants as observed in the dialects of Ikwerre.

FTVs in the Imperative

These verbs manifest two forms of tonal change in the imperative depending on how many objects complement the verb, or if the verb is complemented at all. A FTV is realized on a rising tone when it is not followed by a complement, or is followed by a direct object only. However, when the FTV is used ditransitively (has a direct object and an indirect object, it is realized on a low tone. In the following set of imperative sentences in (31), the FTV is used either without a complement, or takes just one object.

- 31ai) Sĩ ʼwiri!
Cook food “Cook some food”
- aii) Sì ñrĩ
cook food “Cook some food”
- bi) Lǎ ọ̀rò!
go house ‘Go home’
- bii) Là ọ̀rò
go house ‘God home’
- ci) Rnũ ẹ̀rnũ
Work work(n) “Do some work”
- cii) Rnù àrnù
work work ‘Work’
- d) Rě!
“Swallow”
- e) Dǔ iwo Àdna
sew dress PN “Sew Adna’s dress”

In the next set of imperative sentences, the FTV is used ditransitively:

- 32ai) Sì nũ ʼbẹ wiri
Cook PREP 3PL food “Cook some food for them”
- aii) Sì nì ↓we nri
cook PREP 3PL food “Cook some food for them”
- bi) Dũ nũ Àdna iʼwo!
Sew PREP PN dress “Sew a dress for Adna”
- bii) Dnũ ni Àdna u↓wo!
Sew PREP PN dress “Sew a dress for Adna”
- c) Rnù nu ↓m ẹ̀rnũ
Work(v) PREP 1SG work(n) “Work for me”

Falling Tone Verbs in the Simple Verb Form

When used in the simple verb form, FTVs manifest two surface tones - downstep or high tone. The verb is realized on a downstep whenever the NP subject ends in a high tone, as in (33ai) and (34ai), and a low tone if the sentential subject ends on a low tone, or is a pronoun, as in (33b) and (34b). In other dialects, however, the verb in the simple verb form is consistently low irrespective of whether the preceding tone-bearing unit is high or low. See examples (33aii) and (34aii):

33ai)	Àdna	'si	wiri			
	PN	cook	food			“Adna cooks food”
aii)	Àdna	sĩ	nri			
	PN	cook	food			“Adna cooks food”
b)	Ezè	sì	wiri			
	Eze	cook	food			“Eze cooks food”
34ai)	Àdna	'vu	mi↓ni	nụ	ri'sî	
	PN	carry	water	PREP	head	
aii)	Àdna	vù	mi↓ni	nii↓sĩ		
	PN	carry	water	PREP	head	“Adna carries water on the head”
b)	Ezè	vù	mi↓ni	ni	ri↓sî	
	PN	carry	water	PREP	head	“Eze carries water on the head”
c)	Ò	vù	mi↓ni	nụ	ri↓sî	
	3SG	carry	water	PREP	head	“He/She carries water on the head”

The difference in the tonal behaviour of the verb can be explained by a close examination of the underlying tones of example (33ai):

35)	Àdna	'si	wiri
	L - H	L _o - H(L)	

The gliding tone of the verb root vowel simplifies to a high tone via the deletion of the low tone, circled above. This leaves the L_o prefix between two high tones, resulting in the downstep on the root vowel.

However, in (35b), where the NP subject ends on a low tone, the tone of the verb is deleted, while the L docks on the root vowel as follows:

35b)	Ezè	sì	wiri
	H - L	L _o - H(L)	

Falling Tone Verbs in the Past Verb Form

FTVs in the past verb form are realized on a low tone irrespective of the preceding tone.

36a)	Àdnâ	sì-rù	wiri	
	PN	cook-PST	food	“Adna cooked some food”
b)	Ezè	sì-rù	wiri	
	PN	cook-PST	food	“Eze cooked some food”

Falling Tone Verbs in the Progressive Verb Form

The features of the progressive aspect were amply presented in the RTVs in the Progressive Verb Form paragraph, and need not be repeated here. The polar tonal relationship between the vowel prefix and the verb root referred to in RTVs in the Progressive Verb Form paragraph also holds in all subsequent progressive forms treated here. For FTVs therefore, the vowel prefix is on a low tone since the first tone of the verb stem is high. The verb root is realized on a high tone for all FTVs as demonstrated:

- 37a) Àdnâ nè è-si ↓wiri
 PN PROG PREF-cook food “Adna is cooking food”
- b) Ezè nà à-ta n↓hnê
 PN PROG PREF-chew thing “Eze is chewing something”
- c) Ò nò ò-wu ọrò
 3SG PROG PREF-build house “He/She is building a house”
- d) Ò rè è-te isnè
 3SG PROG PREF-pound pepper “He/She is pounding some pepper”

There is therefore a significant difference in the tonal behavior of RTVs and FTVs in the progressive aspect. Whereas RTVs retain their inherent tone patterns in this construction, FTVs simplify too high.

However, the FTVs in the dialects that mark the progressive verb form with the –ga suffix record a similar tonal behavior as in the RTVs. The verbal elements are marked with a low tone as shown in (37):

- 38) Àdnâ sìgà nri
 PN cook-PROG food

Falling Tone Verbs in the Perfect Aspect

In the perfect aspect, the second member of the gliding tone, L, deletes, resulting in a high tone on the root vowel.

- 39a) Àdnâ sìle¹m wiri
 Adna cook-of-real food
 “Adna has cooked food”
- b) Ezè tale¹m n¹hnê
 Eze chew-PF-real thing
 “Eze has chewed something”
- c) Ò gbùle¹m ẹwhùrù
 3SG jump-PF-real jump
 “He has jumped”

Contrary to the RTVs where the verb root takes a low tone in the perfect verb form, in the FTVs, the verb root is marked with a high tone in a dialect like Omuanwa. See example (40):

- 40) Àdna sìle n↓ri
 PN cook-PERF food
 ‘Adna has cooked the food’

High Tone Verbs

An Ikwerre High Tone Verb (henceforth HTV) is made up of a low tone vowel prefix and a verb root that is on a high tone in the infinitive. HTVs can be represented structurally as follows:

$$41. \begin{array}{c} \check{V} - C\check{V} \\ | \quad | \\ L + H \end{array}$$

Ikwerre HTVS include:

- 42a) ère/ òre “to sell”
- b) èri/ òri “to eat”
- c) ògbu “to kill”
- d) ògnu “to read/count/sing”
- e) ònwu “to die”
- f) àgba/ògba “to shoot”
- g) èzi/ òzi “to teach”
- h) ònwo “to drink”
- i) ògbu “to jump”
- j) èzne/òjne “to go”
- k) òwhnu “to see”
- l) ònu “to hear”
- m) èzni/ òzni “to sleep”

High Tone Verbs in the Imperative

All the HTVs recorded here, except èzne “to go” and òwhnu “to see” retain their inherent tone patterns in the imperative. Thus whereas the verbs meaning “to go” and “to see” are marked with rising tone in the imperative verb form in some dialects like Ogbakiri, they are pronounced with a low tone in other dialects like Omuanwa.

- 43(a) Gnụ e[!]ri
Sing song
“Sing a song”
- b) Ri iji kà
eat yam this
“Eat this yam!”
- c) Nwọ mini n’òsi[!]si
drink water prep morning
“Drink water in the morning”
- di) Zně a[!]hia[!]
go market
“Go to the market”
- dii) Jně àhià
go market ‘Go to the market’

- e) Zně tnâ
go today “Go today”
- fi) Whnũ 'bẹ n'ọ̀rò
see 3p PREP house “See them at home”
- fii) Whnũ wẹ n'ọ̀rò
see 3pl PREP house “See them at home”
- g) Whnũ Wo'ke_i mà ọ_i b_iale
see wake comp 3s come “See Woke when he comes”
- h) Zně whnũ 'bẹ
go see 3p
“Go and see them”

High Tone Verbs in the Simple Aspect

The verb manifests two kinds of change in the simple aspect: downstep whenever the NP subject ends in a high tone and low tone whenever the subject ends in a low tone.

- 44a) Àdna !re mọ'nô
Adna sell oil
“Adna sells oil”
- b) Ezè rẹ mọ'nô
Eze sell oil
“Eze sells oil”
- c) Ò rẹ mọ'nô
3SG sell oil
“He/She sells oil”
- 45ai) Àdna 'zne ẹ̀nu n'ọ̀si'si
PN go work PREP morning
“Adna goes to work in the morning”
- aii) Àdna jnẹ̀ arnụ n'ọ̀tutù
PN go work PREP morning
“Adna goes to work in the morning”
- bi) Ezè znẹ̀ ẹ̀nu n'ọ̀si'si
PN go work PREP morning
“Eze goes to work in the morning”
- bii) Ezè jnẹ̀ arnụ n'ọ̀tutù
PN go work PREP morning
“Adna goes to work in the morning”
- ci) Ò znẹ̀ ẹ̀nu n'ọ̀si'si
3SG go work PREP morning
“He/She goes to work in the morning”
- cii) Ò jnẹ̀ arnụ n'ọ̀tutù
3SG go work PREP morning
‘S(He) goes to work in the morning’

From the examples in (44) and (45ai-ci), it is clear that what determines the tone of a HTV in the simple aspect is the final tone of the NP subject in some dialects of Ikwerre. While the examples in (45) hold true for dialects like Omuanwa, the examples from (45aii) - (45cii) demonstrate otherwise.

High Tone Verbs in the Past Aspect

The tonal situation in the simple aspect also applies in the past aspect when HTVs are used in this aspect. After a high tone in the NP subject both the verb root and the suffix are realized on a downstep, while a low tone on the NP subject occasions a low tone on the verb.

- 46ai) Àdna !re-ru mọ'nô
 PN sell PST oil
 “Adna sold oil”
- aii) Àdna !re mọ'nô
 PN sell oil
 “Adna sells oil”
- bi) Ezè rẹ-rù mọ'nô
 “Ezè sold oil”
 PN sell-PST oil
- bii) Ezè rẹ mọ'nô
 “Ezè sells oil”
 PN sell oil
- ci) Ò znè-rù ẹrnu
 3SG go-PSTwork
- “He/She went to work”
- cii) Ò jnè arnụ
 3SG go work
 “He/She went to work”

Notice that the tonal behavior of the examples in (46ai) – (46ci) in Ogbakiri are similar to the examples from (46aii) – (46cii) irrespective of the absence of overt attachment of the –rV suffix of the past marker in dialects like Omuanwa.

Once again, the verbs *zne* “go” and *whnu* “see,” both of which are HTVs, behave differently in the past verb form. They are both realized on a low tone, even when they are preceded immediately by a high tone on the NP subject.

- 47a) Àdnâ znè-rù ẹrnu
 3SG go-PSTwork
 “Adna went to work”
- b) Àdnâ whù-rù badnù
 PN see-PST person
 “Adna saw somebody”
- c) Ò znè-rù ẹrnu
 3SG go-PSTwork
 “He/She went to work”

High Tone Verbs in the Progressive Aspect

HTVs retain their inherent tone pattern in the progressive aspect.

- 48a) Àdnâ nè è-ri 'wiri
 PN AUX PREF-eat food
 “Adna is eating”
- b) Ezè nà à-gba ikpè
 Eze AUX PREF-weave cloth
 “Eze is weaving cloth”

2.3.5 High Tone Verbs in the Perfect Aspect

HTVs retain their inherent tone pattern in the perfect verb form. The tonal behavior of the verbal suffixes is the same as was described in the preceding sections.

- 49a) Àdna nwọ-le'm mi'ni
 PN drink-PERF water
 “Adna has drunk water”
- b) Ezè nwọ-le'm mi'ni
 PN drink-PERF water
 “Eze has drunk water”
- c) Bè ri-le'm wiri
 3PL eat-PERF food
 “They have eaten”
- d) Ò nwụ-lem
 3SG die-PERF
 “He has died”

Low Tone Verbs

The class of Low Tone Verbs (henceforth LTV) is made up of a low tone vowel prefix and a low tone stem vowel in the infinitive. Structurally, LTVs can be represented as follows:

50. $\begin{array}{c} \dot{Y} - C\dot{Y} \\ | \quad | \\ L - L \end{array}$

The following data on LTVs is based on the Ubimini dialect.

51. (a) Òdnà “to fall”
 (b) Òzà “to sweep”
 (c) Òlì “to bury”
 (d) Òtà “to chew” / “bite”
 (e) Òwhè “to pass”
 (f) Òmù “to learn”

Low Tone Verbs in The Imperative

LTVs retain their inherent tone pattern as they are made up of a simple verbs root on a low tone:

52. (a) Whè
 |
 Pass
 “Pass”
- (b) Mù a
 | |
 Learn 3ps
 “Learn it!”
- (c) Dnà n’àli
 | | |
 fall prep ground
 “Fall on the ground”
- (d) Lì à n’àli

Low Tone Verbs in The Simple Aspect

Here, too, the verb retains its inherent low tone, as can be seen in (42):

53. (a) O whè mbòchì dùm
 | | | |
 3ps pass day all
 “He passes every day”
- (b) O zà ụlò n’òtutù
 | | | | |
 3ps sweep house prep morning
- (c) O lì awai n’àli
 | | | | |
 3ps bury money prep ground
 “He buries money in the ground”

Low Tone Verbs in the Progressive Aspect

In this verb form, both the stem vowel and the progressive suffix are realized on a low tone.

- 54a) O ligà awai n’àli
 | | | | |
 3ps bury-prog money prog. ground
 “He is studying”.

Low Tone Verbs in the Future Aspect

The future aspect is marked by the low tone auxiliary verb, **gò**, the vowel of which harmonizes with that of the main verb in tongue root. The low tone verb itself is realized on a high tone.

55. (a) O gò za ulò
 | | | |
 3ps fut sweep house
 "He will sweep the house"
- (b) O gò mụ n'hnê
 | | | |
 3ps fut learn thing
 "He will study"

Low Tone Verbs in The Perfect Aspect

The perfect aspect is marked by a high tone suffix, - la, while the verb stem remains on a low tone.

56. (a) O zàla ulò
 | | |
 3ps sweep-perf house
 "He has swept the house"
- (b) O lila awai n'ài
 | | | |
 3ps bury-perf money prep ground"

Conclusion

With the discovery of a class of low tone verbs, we have established in this study that the Ikwerre language has a total of four tone classes for verbs: two gliding tone verb classes – Rising Tone Verbs and Falling Tone Verbs, and two-level tone classes – High Tone Verbs and Low Tone Verbs. Although none of the Ikwerre dialects has all the four tone classes of vowels identified, it is better to recognize four tone classes for the language than claim anything less as this gives a better understanding of the tonal configuration of the language in general. To make exposition easy, we have also adopted just one criterion, the infinitive, since there are marked tonal differences among verbs in this form of the verb. Verbs that have the same tone pattern in the infinitive are seen to generally behave identically when used in a particular construction. Finally, this study can serve as a template for further studies on the tonal system of Ikwerre.

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