A SYNTAX OF IGBO MONOSYLLABIC CONJUNCTIONS

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The focus of this paper is the syntax of three Igbo monosyllabic conjunctions. They are 'na', 'ma', ' ka'. The paper shows that none of them has any specific inherent meaning and as such their meanings are determined by context .(cf. Nwachukwu (1987)). It also shows that these conjunctions are always inherently low in tone and they retain their low tone always no matter their context of occurrence.The paper also proves that substituting one conjunction with another can have a significant semantic effect.

1. Introduction

The conjunctions in Igbo language are basically of two types when viewed from their morphological make-up. These two types are those that are morphologically monosyllabic and those that are non-monosyllabic/ polysyllabic in form. Examples of those that are non-monosyllabic are mana, maka, maka na. The monosyllabic conjunctions are not the only ones that are found in Igbo, they are the ones that come within the scope of this work. We have to point out that the tone-marking convention used in this work is that popularized by Nwachukwu , as in Nwachukwu (1987,1995), where only high and low tone marks are used ; and the first of a sequence of same tones is marked while the subsequent ones are left unmarked until a contrasting tone appears and is marked . If a sequence of two high tone marks is seen, the second in the sequence is interpreted as a downstep tone.

One interesting thing about these monosyllabic conjunctions is that they retain their inherent low tone in all their syntactic environments of occurrence. Furthermore, substituting one of the conjunctions with another in the same syntactic position is capable of bringing about a significant change in meaning.

This paper is divided into four sections. Section one is the Introduction, section two looks at the syntax of the monosyllabic conjunction, section three shows the conjunction being substituted with one another and the semantic consequence of the substitution(s). The final section is the summary and conclusion.

2.1 Syntax of Igbo Monosyllabic Conjunctions.

In this section we shall discuss these three Igbo monosyllabic conjunctions in that order: na, ma , ka. While discussing each of these, we shall, among other things, do the following:

- show the conjunction as it appears in sentences and its meanings underlined in the gloss sentences.
- use tone marks to show its unchanging tone pattern.
- put the conjunction in different syntactic positions and point out the semantic implication of this.

For a detailed discussion of the monosyllabic and non-monosyllabic Igbo conjunction as they perform both co-ordinating and subordinating functions in Igbo syntax, see Nwachukwu (1987). A brief discussion of the subject is seen in Okonkwo (1977),Adamaechi (1985), Emenanjo(1991), Ngoesi (2000).One may also refer to Emenanjo (1978); and Ume, Ugoji and Dike (1989).

Most of these works discussed the functions of conjunction in Igbo syntax but none of them tried to show the different semantic effects which substituting one conjunction with another would have on the meaning of sentences. The present paper does this, as seen in section 3.1.

As pointed out in the earlier part of this paper, the meaning of each of these Igbo conjunctions is determined by context. The different meanings each conjunction assumes in sentences might have prompted Emenanjo (1978) into identifying them as 'nà 1'; and 'nà 2'; 'ka 1'; ' kà 2'; ' kà 3' and ' kà 4' etc. Nwachukwu (1987) does not support this numbering of the conjunctions based on their meanings. For example, for 'nà' , he points out that although we see it as having different meanings, "these apparently different meanings are structure – specific, we are still dealing with the same Igbo conjunction *nà* of unvarying phonemic shape and tone, which functions alike in co-ordinate as well as in subordinate structures." (p.67). This is the line of thought followed in this paper because this idea of numbering makes each of the conjunctions look as if it is no longer one type. The fact that a conjunction assumes different meanings depending on context does not remove the truth of its still being the same conjunction; retaining both its segmental and suprasegmental phonemic shape in all environments irrespective of its meaning.

2.1.1 Nà

'Nà' is one of the monosyllabic conjunctions used in standard Igbo. According to Green and Igwe (1963), the Ohuhu dialect has 'la' as the dialectal variant of 'nà'. Oluikpe (1979) points out that 'la' is also used as the dialectal variant of 'nà' in the Ngwa dialect. This conjunction should not be confused with 'na' functioning as a preposition, especially when the prepostion is followed by a

word that begins with a syllabic nasal. This is because, unlike 'na' conjunction, its tone fluctuates, depending on the tone of the word following it; as seen in the following: 'ná mbido' ' in the beginning'; 'nà ndida' 'in the slope'

Below are the examples of sentences where 'nà' is functioning as a conjunction in Igbo.

1.a Ńnu nà mmanụ adighi ụkọ
Salt and oil are not scarce.

b. Àda nà Ógè gara ahia.
Ada and Oge went to the market.

c. Ńne m nà ńna m bàra ogaranya.
My mother and father are rich.

d. Ńdi nkuzi nà úmù akwukwo puru.
The teachers and students went out.

2a. Ọ gwàra m na há gà – agá
He told me that they will go.

b. Ó dòro ánya nà ó bù ogbu.
It is clear that he is a dumb person.

c. Há siri na ikpe amaghi ya.
They said that he is not guilty.

d. Ńdi enyi yá màara na ó bụ ónye eziokwú.
His friends know that he is an honest man.

3a. Nà há erighị nri jòro ńjo.
That they did not eat food is bad.

b. Nà ó bù ógbú dòro anya.
That he is a dumb person is clear.

c. Nà anyi gàra úlò ikpé abàghị úrù.
That we went to court is not important.

4a. Nà ó dàra ulé pùtara na o mághị akwụkwo.
That he failed the examination indicates that he is not intelligent.

b. Nà há erighi nri pùtara na águú agùghị ha.
That they did not eat meant that they were not hungry.

c. Nà há sàra ákwà gosịrị na há anòghị nkịtị
That they washed clothes shows that they were not idle.

From the above examples we see that 'nà' can occupy the sentence initial and sentence – medial positions, but never sentence final position since "conjunctions are never found in utterance – final position". (Emenanjo 1978:86).This results from their name – conjunction – which derives from Latin 'conjungo' meaning 'I join together'. If a conjunction occurs sentence-finally then there could be nothing to join.For it to function as its name implies, there must be something to be joined eg. 'A'to be joined to 'B', thus 'A na B'.In example 1,

the conjunction appears at the sentence medial position, connecting words and phrases. Here it has the meaning 'and'. Although it also appears at the sentence medial position in examples 2 a, b, c it connects clauses or sentences. Its meaning here becomes 'that'. Examples 3 a, b, c show 'nà' occupying the sentence initial position. It has the meaning 'that' in this position.

In certain constructions, 'nà' as a conjunction can come both at the sentence – initial position and sentence – medial position. In such sentences, 'nà' translates into 'that' in both positions, as examples 4 a, b, c show.

One interesting thing to be observed from all the examples above is that whether 'nà' is at the sentence – initial or sentence medial position, or whether it means 'and' or 'that', it still retains its low tone.

2.1.2 Mà

'Mà' , like 'nà' discussed in section 3.1.1, is a monosyllabic conjunction whose meaning is determined by the context in which it occurs; and it retains its inherent low tone no matter its syntactic position or semantic implication. Below are examples of sentences where it occurs at the sentence – medial position.

5a. O jụrụ ha ma ha ga – erí nrí.
He asked them <u>whether</u> they will eat (food)

b. Áchòro m íma mà o nwere jí
I want to know <u>whether</u> he has yams

6a. Nyé ya egó mà ọ bịa.
Give him money <u>if</u> he comes.

b. Akụ amáka mà a mara kpaa yá.
Wealth is very good if properly acquired.

7a. Há buru íbù ma ńne há dì girigiri.
They are fat <u>but</u> their mother is slim.

b. Ńdị nwoké bùru óche mà ńdị nwaànyị zara ezí
The men carried seats <u>but</u> the women swept the compound

8a. Wètá egó mà ọ bụ ọkukọ.
Bring money <u>or</u> fowl

b. Zùtara yá àgwa ma ọ bụ osíkapa.
Buy him beans <u>or</u> rice.

9a. Nápùtá yá egbè; ma mgbọ kwu.
Retrieve the gun from him; <u>and</u> the bullets too.

b. Sópùrù mà feé Chinekè gị nke óma.
Honour <u>and</u> adore your God profoundly.

These examples showing 'mà' at the word medial position also show, among other things, that 'mà' has varying meanings as the English gloss indicates. In sentences 5 a, b, 'mà' is translated into English 'whether'; in 6a, b it translates into 'if'; in 7 a, b it is realised as 'but'.; sentences 8 a, b have 'mà'

translating into 'or' while in 9 a, b it becomes 'and' (For 'mà' to translate into 'or', it has to be followed by 'ò bù' as seen in example 8).

However, these are not the only realisations of 'mà'. In some contexts it comes in pairs – mà ... mà. In such contexts the pair often translates into 'both... and' and 'whether...or'. Examples are shown below:

10a. Ọ kụziiri ma nwóké mà nwaanyị.
He taught <u>both</u> men <u>and</u> women

b. Ihe mere gbàsara ma ókènye ma umùáká.
What happened concerns <u>both</u> the adult <u>and</u> the young.

c. Mà gị mà ńne gị gàra ńzùkọ.
<u>Both</u> you (sing) <u>and</u> your mother attended the meeting.

11a. Nyère yá aka mà ọ rịọrọ gị ma ọ rịọghị gị.
Help him <u>whether</u> he solicits your help <u>or</u> not.

b. Dọkịtà ya siri ya ríé nri mà ọ gụrụ ya ma ọ gụghị ya.
His doctor asked him to eat <u>whether</u> he is hungry <u>or</u> not.

c. Mà ọ sọrọ gị ma ọ sọghị gị, kwụọrọ yá ụgwọ.
<u>Whether</u> you like it <u>or</u> not; pay for him.

The different syntactic appearances of 'mà' and its semantic realisations in the foregoing examples (5-11) go to support Nwachukru (1987:71) that " 'mà' is a very versatile conjunction occurring freely in different structures and functioning as the equivalent of various English conjunctions – but, and, whether, if et cetera"

2.1.3 Kà

As an Igbo conjunction, 'kà' appears in different syntactic structures and the meaning it bears depends on the context. In some constructions it is used singly; its syntactic position at this time being either sentence – medially or sentence – initially. But in some constructions 'kà' is used in pairs, just as 'nà' and 'mà' discussed in the earlier sections. Examples of sentences where 'kà' occurs include:

12a. Ànyị hùrụ ha ka anyị lọtara.
We saw them <u>when</u> we returned.

b. Há bịara ka mmiri nà –ézo.
They came <u>when</u> it was raining.

13a. Kùziere yá kà o mùtá.
Teach him so <u>that</u> he may learn

b. Ó kwùru okwu kà ha ghọta onye o bù.
He spoke so <u>that</u> they might recognise him.

14a. Ódò ádịghị àkpá àgwa ka ókènye.
Odo does not behave <u>like</u> an adult.
b. Ànu ọhịa à kwụụrụ ọtọ kà mmàdụ.
This animal stood up <u>like</u> a human being.
15a. Ọ dị ọjị kà ọ dị ọcha?
Is it black <u>or</u> white?
b. Ànyị azụtara ánụ ehi kà ọ bụ ánụ ezi?
Did we buy beef or pork?
16a. Kà Chukwu gozie gị.
<u>May</u> God bless you.
b. Kà ọganiihu bụrụ nke gị
May progress be yours.
17a. Kà dị kà nwunye chọrọ jzuta edè.
<u>Both</u> husbands <u>and</u> wives wanted to buy cocoyam
b. Kà ńdị ojii kà ńdị ọcha tosịrị iri ezigbo nri.
Both black people and white people need to eat good / nutritious food.
c. Ezi omume dịịrị ka nwóké kà nwáànyị.
Good behaviour is for <u>both</u> men folk <u>and</u> women folk.

The 'kà' conjunction as used in 12 and 13 above translates into 'when' and 'that' respectively. In 14 it means 'like' while in 15 it stands for 'or'. The hortative sentences in 16 a, b have 'ka' translating into 'may'. In all these, the conjunction appears singly. However, in 17, we see 'kà' appear in pair – 'ka ... ka'. Here the pair translates into 'both... and'. There may be other meanings of 'kà' depending on context. But whatever its meaning or context of appearance as a conjunction, it still retains its inherent low tone.

3.1 Conjunctions' Substitution: Semantic Implication

According to Schacht (1989:929), and Cohen and Nagel (1993:17) respectively, "... the meaning of a sentence is a function of the meaning of the singular and general terms that are its parts" and "the information conveyed by words depend both logically and psychologically on... the information conveyed by sentences".

But we also have to add that when an incomplete sentence is left with a specific vacant syntactic slot, the particular word that appropriately fills the slot can, sometimes, cause the whole sentence to assume a meaning different from what it would be when another word occupies the slot. The different semantic realisations of the examples below, showing the substitution of one monosyllabic conjunction with another in the same slot of the same sentence, attest to this.(For the sake of clarity, the English gloss of the Igbo sentence is

numbered "a, b", or "a, b, c' to correspond to the meaning of the Igbo sentence when the slot is filled with a conjunction in the order of listing). The examples are:

18. Ó gà - abịa { nà / mà / kà } há gaa.

a. He will come if / when they go (dialectal- Adazi-Nnukwu dialect)
b. He will come if / when they go.
c. He will come so that they go.

19. { Nà / Mà / Kà } chi bọọ.

a. If / when the day breaks (dialectal- Adazi-Nnukwu dialect).
b. If / when the day breaks.
c. May the day break.

20. Ó mère { ma / ka } nwoke.

a. It affected even men.
b. He acted like a man.

21. { Nà / Kà } há kwùru { na / ka } hà mère

a. That they said that they did (it)
b. As they said so they did

22. Ọ pụrụ { na / ma / ka } há bịara

a. He left because they came.
b. He left but they came.
c. He left when they came.

23. { Nà / Mà / Kà } nwóké { nà / mà / kà } nwáànyị gara

a. That men and women went
b. Both men and women went.
c. Both men and women went.

24. Ọ dọrọ ányá { nà / ka } ọ dara ogbu

a. It is clear that he is a dumb person
b. It is clear when be became dumb .

25. Ọ jùrụ ha { na / ma / ka } ha gá – eri nri

a. He asked them if / whether they will eat (food).
b. He asked them if / whether they will eat (food).
c. He asked them if / whether they will eat (food).

It is seen from the above examples that although there may be instances where substituting one conjunction with another in the same syntactic slot does not bring about any meaning difference (as in 25 a, b, c) there are instances where such substitutions do have significant semantic implication (as in 18 – 24). For instance, in 18 whereas gloss 'a' and gloss 'b' mean the same thing, 'a' being somehow dialectal, 'c' has an entirely different meaning. This is also the case in 19 where 'a' and 'b' could be said to mean the same thing while 'c', the hortative expression, means something different.

4.1 Summary and Conclusion.

This paper discussed the Igbo monosyllabic conjunctions 'nà' , 'mà' , 'kà'. The paper showed that they are both inherently and syntactically low in tone. Their meanings are determined by the context in which they appear. For instance, the paper shows that 'nà' may mean 'and', 'that'; 'ma' may mean 'and', 'or', 'but' , 'if' etc; 'kà' may translate into 'that', 'when' , ' or' , 'like', 'may' etc - all depending on the context. Substituting one conjunction with another in the same sentence in the same environment often brings about a meaning difference , as shown in the paper in section 3.1

In conclusion, Igbo language is seen to be able to express its conjunctive notions by using one conjunction to achieve different meanings in different constructions in the language.

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