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## **Ergativity in Igbo: Insights from Nsukka Dialect Cluster**

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### Abstract

The paper focuses on ergativity found in natural languages. In syntactic studies, the transitive-intransitive patterning of verbs controls their argument properties in a construction. Some verbs consistently do not take objects while others do not permit the omission of objects in languages. These objects must be overt in the predicates of such verbs to encode transitivity. Though many researches have been done on transitivity, none has distinguished between those verbs that can be ergativized and those that cannot. The study examines those transitive verbs that can undergo ergativization as well as investigate their syllable structure. Through descriptive analysis the paper isolates the group of verbs in Nsukka dialect cluster (Imiryike variety) that can partake in transitive alternations otherwise referred to as ergativity. The study is limited to the notion of causative and non-causative agentive verbs. The findings are that ergativity in the dialect is marked both syntactically and semantically and results from NP movement from the predicate to an empty NP position in the subject slot. Not all transitive verbs in the dialect can undergo ergativization process, e.g. the verbs of motion, meteorological verbs etc. Not all complements are arguments. The semantic classes of ergative verbs in the dialect include - verbs denoting destruction, body injury, killing, eating, and cooking. The verbs of killing and destruction use compound stem in transitive constructions while the ergative pairs use simple stem. The syllabic structure of the verbs of cooking in the progressive aspect is disyllabic (cvcvrv). Although, the study is not a

contrastive study, some differences involved in formation of ergatives between Nsukka dialect and standard dialect are noted.

### **1.0 Introduction**

Many languages of the world are classified with respect to grammatical patterns characterizing them. Moravcsik (1978) postulates that all human languages are patterned into ergative or absolutive and accusative pattern. The term ergativity refers to the relationship existing between the object of a transitive verb and the subject of its intransitive counterpart. Dixon (1973) and Perlmutter (1983) hold that the relations of subject-of and direct object-of in grammatical construction are language primitives by which we can identify sameness or difference in syntactic behaviour of subjects, objects and goals in certain constructions. The views of the above scholars imply that the subject of an intransitive verb and the object of its transitive counterpart demonstrate sameness and therefore share the same case.

The concept of ergativity is recent in syntax. The interest of many linguists is rather shifted to its related phenomenon - transitivity and intransitivity. The situation may be attributed to its novelty in the field of linguistics. Lamenting over the situation Trost (1973) and Harris (1981) in their pioneer work on Baltic Indo-European and Georgina ergatives hold that the discovery of this concept opens the door for dependable reconstructions of the basic syntactic, morpho-syntactic and paradigmatic models in Indo-European languages. The latter described the perception of scholars of traditional linguists on the notion of ergativity to be strange and uncommon. Dubois (1982:84) observes that "linguists have not been aware of the ergative patterning in discourse: they have lacked information critical to the understanding of the ergative phenomenon". Ergative constructions do not present themselves in the same way, pattern or form in all languages found to possess ergative features. In other words, the manifestations differ from language to language. In some, it manifests morphologically in the case marking of NPs. In such languages, ergative features are marked with inflection to differentiate the syntactic subject of a transitive verb and the object of an intransitive one. By contrast, in other languages, ergative constructions are syntactically marked. Yet, some exhibit the ergative perspective of a sentence syntactically as well as semantically. The paper examines ergativity in Imiryike dialect of Igbo.

Imiryike dialect belongs to Northern groups of dialects according to Nwaozuzu (2008). Ikekeonwu (1986) puts it under the Wawa dialect clusters. Imiryike is situated at the Northern part of Enugu State. The neighbours are Igugu by the North, Qba by the South, Iheaka by the West and Ezimo by the East. The tone convention is the marking of contrast pitch, leaving sameness unmarked. Schwa is used in this study to represent reduced vowel for appropriateness of pronunciation. /◌w/ is used in place of voiceless glottal fricative as in ashxa for ah[a - market

The objective of the study is to explore the ergative perspective of Imiryike variety as well as isolate the classes of verbs that can undergo ergativization. The work also shows the relationship between transitivity and ergativity. The data for this research includes the researcher's intuitive knowledge as a native speaker though the sentences used are cross-checked by other linguists who are competent native speakers.

### **1.1 Ergativity: An Overview**

The concept ergativity originates from the Greek word- *ergon* (work) in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. It describes a class of verbs in which the object of the transitive form can be used as the subject of the intransitive form with an equivalent meaning. In the words of Radford (1988: 406) ergative construction "is an intransitive clause which has a transitive counterpart in which the transitive object corresponds to the ergative subject". Burzio (1981, 1986) sees ergative structure as one in which the superficial subject NP originates as the underlying object of a transitive counterpart. Crystal (1997) observes that ergativity refers to syntactic constructions where there is a parallel relationship between the object of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive one. Both the object and the subject according to him share the same case (e.g. the door opened, and Miren opened the door where the door is both the object and the subject). In the words of Iloene (2007:130) "viewed from this perspective especially within the GB framework, the notion of ergativity is sometimes applied to some unaccusative verbs". Trask (1993:290) "the term unaccusative is used to refer to intransitive verbs or predicates or constructions involving verbs or predicates whose subject NP is not an agent or (sometimes) an actor, rather, the surface NP subject is underlyingly a (direct) object. Keyser and Roeper (1984) postulate that ergative verbs denote a subgroup of unaccusatives which can function both transitively and intransitively.

Existing literature shows that many languages exhibit ergative features. Some of them include English, Basque, etc. In English language, for instance the patient of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive verb are treated alike. Lyons (1968) further points out that the actor-goal criterion is in systematic conflict with ergative constructions. There are verbs in English that combine with one or two arguments in the sentence nuclei, the relationship between the object of a two-place and the subject of the same predicate results in ergativity. Consider these sentences taken from Lyons (1968:362):

- 1a. John is growing tomatoes well
- 1b. Tomatoes are growing well
- 2a. Nkechi lost the coin
- 2b. The coin got lost
- 3a. The captive sank the ship
- 3b. The ship sank

Sentence 1a, 2a and 3a have two-place predicates involving agent-patient roles but 1b, 2b and 3b have only the subject, there is no recipient of an action and therefore no patient role. Tomatoes, stone and the ship are objects of the transitive constructions as well as the subject of the intransitive counterparts. In the light of this analysis, Lyons (1968) upholds the views of Crystal (1980) and Dixon (1973) that subjects of intransitive clauses are marked the same as direct objects, while subjects of transitive clauses are marked differently.

From the above constructions, one can observe that the patient NP functions both as intransitive subject and as transitive object with no change in the morphology of the verb or of the NP. This implies that ergativity in English language is manifested syntactically.

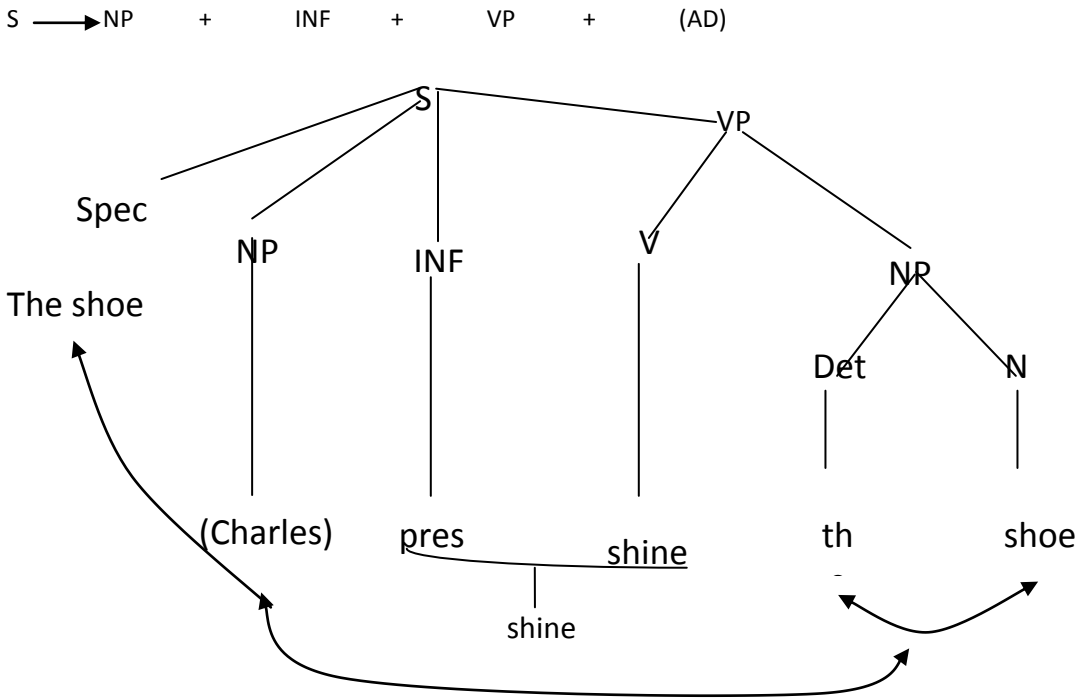
Lyons (1968) further noted that there are pairs of different verbs between which the same syntactic and semantic relationship holds in corresponding transitive and intransitive sentences. He illustrated with the sentences below -

- 4a. James killed Janet
- 4b. Janet died
- 5a. He pushed Jack
- 5b. Jack fell down

The relationship between the verbs 'kill' in 4a and die in 4b or 'pushed' and fell are semantically expressed which confirms that ergativity is also manifested semantically in English. Although the study is a descriptive one which does not use any framework, we wish to mention that the ergative transitive variants in English are based largely on syntactic

models that involve movement, particularly in transformation. Ndimele (1992) observes that for the movement of the object NP there has to be a matching empty slot in SPEC-I Position. Example -

- 6a. Charles shines the shoe
- 6b. The shoe shines



In intransitive sentences, the subject of the transitive is deleted and the object is topicalized as above.

Hence the intransitive member of the ergative pair is derived through the processes of movement and deletion from its underlying structure. In some cases, the deletion may be contextually determined and recoverable for purposes of semantic interpretation in particular utterances.

Consider the sentences from Lyons (1968:354) below -

7a. She never drinks at 6.00am

7b. She never drinks water at 6.00am

Though the word drink is inherently transitive, we can delete the object 'water' which is also recoverable given the right context.

In most ergative languages, transitivity and intransitivity are related by means of causativity. Causativity is one of the major properties of ergative language and we shall briefly discuss how it applies in the language under examination (English).

Levin (1983) asserts, causative/anti-causative refers to a pair of semantically related verbs that are distinct in terms of causation. Lyons (1968) also notes that the same verb is used in constructions of both types without modification of the verbs. For instance, in the sentences 4-7 above, sentences 4a and 5a are causative in meaning; they describe objects that brought about a particular change of state. In other words, the objects of the transitive verbs 'ice' and 'dress' in the causative sentences (sentences that have agentive source as the initiator of the action) become the subject in the non-agentive (causeless) construction. Crystal's view (1980) is that ergativity is applied to uncausative verbs which can function both transitively and intransitively, but one important thing to note about the two constructions (causative/uncausative) is that both the subject and patient maintain the same semantic role, that is, the object which is also the subject in the alternate constructions, remains the entity affected.

Keyser and Roeper (1984) postulate that there is an ergativization process which enables the transitive verb in causative construction to become intransitive in causeless construction: the ergative verb in the causeless sentence behaves like an intransitive and therefore demonstrates that it can appear in pronominal position. They went further to refer to these pairs as ergative pairs. Example from (Nweze 2006:20)

8a. Felicia poured that oil (causative)

8b. That oil poured (Anti-causative)

9a. The company retrenched Janet

9b. Janet was retrenched

From the data above, we can observe that in causative/anticausative constructions, there is similarity in role by the fact that the single argument of the anti-causative verb is its direct object (d. object) of the causation.

Examining the case system of Basque (Spain), Antanas (1973) points that Basque is the only ergative-absolute European language and marks the subject of transitive verbs distinctly from the subject of intransitive verbs. In Basque, the subject of a transitive verb is expressed by means of a suffix-k. Basque demonstrates a distinctive case marking of the subject of a transitive verb. Crystal (1980) observes that ergativity can be manifested morphologically in the case marking of argument NPs and in verbal agreement or syntactically in the control of pronominalizations of NPs."

Let us consider these sentences from Basque -

- 10a. Gizona etorri da - The man has arrived  
 10b. Gizonak mutila ikusidu - The man saw the boy.  
 Trost (1973:48)

In this language, Gizon is 'man', mutil is 'boy' and a suffixed 'a' shows the definite form (the Gizon is different depending on whether it is subject of a transitive or intransitive verb. Sentence '10a' is in the absolutive case, and "10b" is accusative /transitive (marked by a suffix - k). In other words, - "k" morpheme is used for identification of the subject of a transitive construction in Basque.

Below are more examples taken from Levin (1983:301-302)

- 11a Atea ireki da - The door opened  
 11b Mirenek atea ireki du - Miren oped the door.  
 12a Miren haserretu da - Miren got  
 angry  
 12b Jonek Miren haserretu du - Jon made Miren  
 angry.

Using the data before us, we can observe that the presence of the morpheme -"k" signifies that the word is the subject of the transitive sentence. Moreover, the possibility of generating accusative (transitive) sentences from ergative structures is obtainable in the language just as in English. The notion of causativity is also expressed in Basque, that is, it has a way of realizing an initiator of an action. Levin (1983) claims that production of causative construction in Basque are formed using the verb 'erazi' to effect a cause. The causative verb "erazi" requires that the embedded verb of its complement clause be in the root form of verb also found in subjunctives and imperatives." For instance, let us consider these sentences -

- 13a Etorri da - He came

13b	Etor erazi	-	I made him come
14a	Liburua irakur du	-	He read
14b	Liburua irakur erazi diot	-	I made him read the book

These sentences illustrate Levin's view. Sentences '13a and 14a' are causeless in meaning because they bear no agent (erazi) of the action performed. This expression involves a non-verb otherwise referred to as unmarked. Sentences "13b" and "14b" are corresponding causative sentences involving an argument (marked) that bears the causer/initiator 'erazi' of the action. Furthermore, the morpheme - 'k' is also used in Basque for expressing the agent role. For example, take a look at these sentences -

15a Oinak Zerbitzatzan du eskua  
"The foot serves the hand"

15b Eta eskuak oina  
"The hand serves the foot"

In 15a, 'Oin' means foot, 'a' stands for the definite form (the) while - 'k' is the Basque case marker for subject of the transitive sentence which is present in the word 'Oinak' - the foot, making it the initiator of the action. In the same '15a' one would notice that the word 'eskua' does not have the - k while eskuak in '15b' has the - 'k' ending indicating the subject which is also the agent of the action.

## 2. Transitivity and Ergativity

This section features a brief survey of transitivity and its alternation for the purpose of finding out the relationship between transitivity and ergativity. Transitivity observes Asher (1994), is derived from the Latin terms trans 'across and ire'go. Mathews (1997:383) says that "transitive verb is a construction in which a verb related to at least two nouns or their equivalent, whose semantic roles are characteristically those of an agent or patient". Transitivity is controlled in languages by verbs and their argument properties in syntactic construction. According to Finch (2000), the term argument is used by linguists to describe the role played by particular entities in the semantic structure of sentence. He postulates that every verb has an argument and it is by the nature of the argument that they are distinguished grammatically.

Trask (1993) observes that verbs are distinguished by the fact that each verb requires the presence of a specified set of NP argument each of which has a semantic role and each of which may be required to appear in a grammatical form. The VP may have a number of arguments. Arguments can be one, two, three or even four in a construction. For instance, the verb



'eat' has two arguments, one bears the agent role, its referent is the performer of the action and the other bears the patient role, its referent is the entity Carine (2007) observes that the property of transitivity refers to how many arguments that follow verbs. Robins (1971) admits that the patterning between transitive and intransitive verbs depends on the distinction between those verbs that may take a second noun and those that may not. Isaac (2010:2), writing on transitivity states as follows:

Transitivity constitutes a problem in most African languages. In the Benue Congo languages, Igbo for example, Scholars have their different views on the universality and parametric features of transitivity; issues such as the functional status of Inherent Complement Verb (ICV, Bound Verb Complement (BVC) and cognate object phenomena in the language further compound the controversy.

This implies that there is a divide of opinions on the subject matter on whether a construction with one argument should be named intransitive while the one containing two or three arguments should be regarded as transitive. Ubahakwe (1976) and Nwachukwu (1976) hold that there is transitive and intransitive patterning in Igbo verbs. Emenanjo (1984) and Mba (1999) disagree with this view for the fact all Igbo verbs have complements and therefore transitive. The details of the argument are not within the scope of this work, however, the work agrees with the view that Igbo verbs like most languages have this distinction. The analysis of the data below illustrates our point.

- |     |  |   |                    |
|-----|--|---|--------------------|
| 16. | O <del>o</del> roma <del>n</del> cha <del>n</del> ra | - | Orange ripped      |
| 17. | O <del>n</del> ri <del>n</del> ri n <del>a</del> ri  | - | He ate food        |
| 18. | Chi <del>n</del> we <del>n</del> kxwara ite          | - | Chinwe broke a pot |

The above data show that the verb in '16' has no object although it is complementized, it is therefore intransitive. Haegeman (1992:308) observes that "some groups of verbs have properties which led some linguists to treat them as unaccusative. The verb 'chara' is unaccusative, it has no patient role or argument". Those in '17 and 18' have two arguments; they have objects that experience the effect of the action. It is also important to note that in sentence '17' the transitive verb cannot be used intransitively. This transitive/intransitive variant is referred to as transitive alternations/diathesis alternation. From the analysis though not detailed, we observe that not all Igbo verbs with complements can be used transitively in one context and

intransitively in another. The capacity of a verb to partake in this alternation is referred to as ergativity.

### 3.0 Ergative Constructions in Igbo (Imiryike Dialect)

In the previous section '1.1', we discussed ergativity otherwise known as diathesis alternation in some languages. As noted earlier in the introductory part of the study, not much has been done about this phenomenon in the dialect under study. In lamentation, Nwachukwu (1976) confirms that only little is known about Ergative constructions in African languages. Although many researches on it have been carried out in English, Basque, etc to differentiate between grammatical subject and the grammatical object of a transitive verb, Igbo (an African language), has received very little attention with regards to the topic but linguists such as Nwachukwu (1976.), Ogwueleka (1987), Keyser and Roeper (1984) have thrown some light on this subject. Nwachukwu (1976, (1987) postulates that in Igbo, some classes of constructions can be described as ergative. He says that middle construction is regarded as the output of a transitive alternation involving verbs that we describe as ergatives. Mbah (1999) discussing transitivity claims that some verbs in English which are said to be intransitive in English have been found to be transitive in Igbo. They include unergative and unaccusative verbs as: verbs of sounds/ communication by animals as (bark), verbs of bodily process as (cough), verbs of manner of speaking (shout) etc unaccusative verbs such as verbs of change of existence and occurrence e.g. (exist) verbs of appearance and disappearance are also found to be transitive. He gave the following examples: 'O tiri mkpu' (He shouted), 'Nkita gbọrọ ụja' (A dog barked)- (Mbah 1999:154). His argument is that they subcategorize for complement. From Mbah's perspective, it is important to ask the question- "are all complements arguments? The view of the researcher is that all complements are not arguments. There must be an agent and a patient (object) either at the surface or deep level, the object of which is capable of occupying the NP slot in the ergative pair. In the sentence 'Nk[ta gbqrq xja', 'xja' cannot occupy the subject slot and be grammatical.

This implies that ergativity is a feature of transitivity alternation. Anyanwu (2005) observes that in languages like English and Igbo which lack morphological case to reflect grammatical function (subject or object) ergativity is equivalent to causativity. Consider these sentences:-

- |                             |   |                    |
|-----------------------------|---|--------------------|
| 19a. Eze rang kere mgbariga | - | Eze rang the bell  |
| b. Mgbariga rang kere       | - | The bell rang      |
| 20a. Ogu tore dqrare ekwere | - | Ogu tore the dress |

- b. Eakwa dqkarə - The dress tore  
 21a. Ngqzi tikporə ite - Ngqzi broke the pot  
 b. Itē tikporə - The pot broke

In the above constructions, we have verbs participating in transitivity alternation which evidently have resulted in ergativity. One can attest that the grammatical objects of '19a, 20a, and 21a' function as grammatical subjects of '19b, 20b, and 21b'. Another observation is that there are no particles, no inflections or morphological markers used to differentiate between the object of a transitive verb and the subject of the ergative counterpart as is the case in Basque. There are also no changes in the morphology of both the verbs and the NPs involved in both the transitive and their ergative counterparts. This goes to prove that ergativity is manifested syntactically in these sentences.

Nwachukwu (1986) holds that in Igbo, it is possible to relate the grammatical object and the semantic recipient of the action of a transitive verb. The following sentences from the dialect are used to substantiate this view. The data on the standard Igbo on the table below are reproduced from Nwachukwu (1987:26)

Imiryike	Standard Igbo	Gloss (English)
22a. O shiə rə aənx n'qkx	Oə siri anx n'qkx	She cooked meat on the fire
b. Aənx shiə yirə n'qə kx	Anx sir n'qkx	Meat is cooking on the fire
23a. Chiəkə gwuə ru azə n'ala	Chike gwuru osisi n'ala	Chike erected the pole on the ground
b. Aəzə gwuyirə n'ala	Osisi gwurx n'ala	The pole is standing firmly on the ground
24a. Heə hə rə jiə n'qkx	Ha hrx ji n'qkx	They roasted yam
b. Jiə hə yirə n'qkx	Ji hrx n'qkx	Yam is roasting on the fire
25a. Oə yeə rə qka 'qkx	O ghere qka n'qkx	She fried corn
b. Oə kaə yeyirə n'qkx	Qka ghere n'qkx	Corn is frying

From the examples above, we observe that the syntactic objects of the transitive verbs in, the 'a' sentences above become the subjects of the ergative pair in the 'b' versions. Nwachukwu

(1976:125) claims that "the verbs involved in transitive/ergative pairs are phonologically identical, but whereas the verbs in '22a', '23a', and '24a' and '25a' are patently transitive, their (b) versions are definitely intransitive". This implies that certain transitive verbs can be used intransitively. The data reveals that the verbs in the transitive/ergative pairs in the dialect are not phonologically identical as in the case in standard Igbo. In the dialect under study there is a simple stem in the transitive sentences which are replaced with compound stem-'yirə' in the ergative counterpart. Therefore, for the formation of ergatives in the progressive aspect in Imiryike, the syllable structure is "cvcvrv" which are consistent as in -heyirə, yeyirə, gwuyirə etc.

In this dialect, there are also pairs of different verbs as in English between which syntactic/semantic relationships exist in corresponding transitive and their intransitive counterparts. Below are illustrations drawn from the dialect.

- 26a. O~~n~~ ti~~n~~nyuru q~~a~~kx - She extinguished the fire  
 b. Q~~a~~kx nyx~~r~~rx / (ii) ti~~n~~nyuru - The fire went off
- 27a. O~~n~~ gbu~~r~~rə oke - He killed a rat  
 b. O~~k~~e~~n~~ nwu~~r~~rə - A rat died
- 28a. Ha~~n~~ kwa~~n~~tu~~r~~ru Chi~~n~~we~~n~~ - They pushed Chinwe  
 b. Chi~~n~~we~~n~~ darə - Chinwe fell down
- 29a. Q~~a~~nwx gbu~~r~~ru I~~a~~je~~n~~o~~n~~ma - Death killed Ijeoma  
 b. I~~a~~je~~n~~o~~n~~ma nw~~x~~rx - Ijeoma died

Here, the relationships between the verbs in each pair are expressed semantically, which shows that ergativity is also manifested semantically in Imiryike'. A closer look at these sentences reveals not only that the dialect manifests the ergative perspective semantically but also notes that there may be two variants of an intransitive sentence as in example '26a'.

The verb 'tinyu' in '26' serves as a synonym and also suggests a suppressed agent whereas 'nyxrx' in '26a' does not. The usage of the (b) variant of '26' is not common with the standard Igbo.

### 3.1 Semantic Classes of Ergative Verbs in the Dialect

The verbs of ergativity fall into different semantic classes. For the purposes of this distinction, it is pertinent to outline the verbs that undergo transitive alternation in the dialect.

- i. verbs denoting destruction: *tiakpo/tiawe/waak/kuarar* (break) *kpqawa* (split) *maaji/gbaajii/nyawaa* (break) *daajii/kpawa/kpaabu/kpaasa* (scatter) *dqaka/dqarar* (tear) *tahu taahu* (ripped open) *gbuawe/buwea, gbuaji/buajii* (cut)
- ii verbs of killing: *gbua/tiagba/juabgu* (kill) *tianyu/hxnyx* (extinguish) *tqgbua* (strangle) *kwuabgu* (hang) *gbaabgu* (shot dead)
- iii. verbs of body injury: *maarar/dxarx* (stab) *tiora* (beat) *tara*
- iv. verbs of cooking: *shia* (cook) *yea* (fry) *nyaa/haa/rxa* (roast) *daa* (warm) *m[aa]* (dry/smoke)
- vi. verbs of selling: *rea/zaa* (sell) *kpqa* (not selling) *naara* (loose market)
- vii verbs of alarm: *kaara* (ring), *taa xaxz* (shouts/applause)

### 3.2 Causativity in Imiryike Igbo: Agentive causative Ergative Verbs

In our earlier discussion we noted that certain agentive constructions have causative sources as the initiator of the action. Ogwueleka (1987) holds that in Igbo and some other languages, there are some verbs which can be used in a sentence with a causative source in order to express the action of the verb. Below are our examples:

- 30a. *Nakechii gbaara ama* - Nkechi leaked the information
- b. *Aama gbara* - Information leaked
- 31a. *Chinedu kaara eakwe* - Chinedu rang the wooden gung
- b. *Eakwe kaara* - The wooden gung rang
- 32a. *Qashua hwuru eashxshua* - The forest grew weeds
- b. *Eashxshua huuru* - Weeds grew

The syntactic positioning of words in 'a and b' in the above examples show that the object now turns out to be the subject the construction. All the above sentences have two nominals one of which is the direct object, which shows that they contain causative agents. All constructions in 'a' part of the illustration have initiator of the action and consequently the entity that experiences the effect of the actions of the verb.

In both variants 'a and b', the objects of the causative sentence remains the entity affected by the transitive expression of the verb, even though in the alternate construction it appears as a subject. In other words, there is

a similarity of role between the object of 'a' and subject of 'b' just as in Basque and English.

The glaring difference between the agentive and ergative pairs lies in the presence or absence of the causative agents. However, some linguists like Mbah (1999) and Jackendoff (1977) argue that some of the verbs in the causeless constructions are transitive since they have agents responsible for the actions expressed.

Let us consider the data from the dialect to find out whether the postulation is true:-

33a. Ngozi t<sub>g</sub>q<sub>g</sub>r<sub>g</sub>r<sub>g</sub> x<sub>g</sub>ma<sub>g</sub> n'q<sub>g</sub>p<sub>g</sub>e<sub>g</sub> - Ngozi kept the knife on the basket

b. X<sub>g</sub>ma<sub>g</sub> tor<sub>g</sub> n'q<sub>g</sub>p<sub>g</sub>e<sub>g</sub> - Knife is on the basket drier.

34a. Chi<sub>g</sub>ke<sub>g</sub> ma<sub>g</sub>r<sub>g</sub> Ada<sub>g</sub> x<sub>g</sub>ma<sub>g</sub> - Chike stabbed Ada with knife

b. X<sub>g</sub>ma<sub>g</sub> mar<sub>g</sub> Ada<sub>g</sub> - The knife stabbed Ada

35a. U<sub>g</sub>che<sub>g</sub> ter<sub>g</sub> O<sub>g</sub>do<sub>g</sub> mkpu<sub>g</sub>me<sub>g</sub> - Uche threw stone at Odo

b. M<sub>g</sub>kpu<sub>g</sub>me<sub>g</sub> ter<sub>g</sub> O<sub>g</sub>do<sub>g</sub> - A stone struck Odo

From the following constructions, one can agree with Ogwueleka (1987) that the same verbs used in a sentence with causative agents as initiators can also be used in another sentence without an expressed causative initiator.

The sentences in the non-agentive constructions here (b versions of 33-35) are transitive though as usual the objects of the transitive in the agentive construction take the position of the subjects and they still remain the entities affected. With this reasoning Ogwueleka argues that the verbs in ergative constructions are transitive both in causative and causeless alternations. In these causeless constructions, the direct object or in most cases indirect objects of the transitive counterpart such as 'xma' in '34b' become in the surface structure agent that caused the action which affected the entity. Nwachukwu disagrees with this view, arguing that an action expressed by a transitive verb must have a causative agent as well as the experience (object) of the action. We partially agree with Ogwueleka because there are objects as well as agents in the causeless constructions, though they are just acting, that is, the real agents here are limited to the deep structure levels. A close look at the causeless sentences will reveal that it is the indirect objects that act as agents in the causeless constructions. Nwachukwu (1976) is still in order because all transitive constructions must have a surface agent. In any case, we wish to emphasize that this argument can only arise when a transitive verb has three-place nominals

(involving only those transitives that can take part in diathesis alternation).

### 3.3 Ergative Verbs with uncausative Agents

Our previous discussion reveals that there are ergative verbs that have on the surface structure an agent to an action experienced by an entity in the sentence. By this, we mean that such ergative verbs have direct and indirect causation and in such constructions, the theme of the expression of the verb is not always tied up with the initiating causer but is instead tied up with the immediate causer. This therefore, permits the expression of the verb in causeless construction without the initiating causer. Our major concern here is to examine or identify those groups of transitive verbs that have no agents in the alternate construction. Keyser and Roeper (1984) maintain that the transitive verb which appears in the causative sentence undergoes ergativization and becomes intransitive to be able to appear in causeless construction. The ergativization process involves the deletion of the agent in the causative construction which is recoverable if desired. In other words ergativity is more of surface phenomena.

Nwachukwu (1976) holds that we can also relate the grammatical object and semantic recipient of the action of a transitive verb to the subject of its intransitive counterpart.

Ogwueleka (1987) made it clear that some verbs can be used in a sentence to express an action but without an expressed agentive source.

The following are our illustrations:-

- 36a. O~~g~~u~~g~~u d~~g~~karə ɛkwa m - Ogu tore my dress tore  
 b. A~~g~~fe m dokarə - My dress tore
- 37a. O~~g~~ shi~~g~~re n~~g~~arə - She cooked food  
 b. Nrə yerə - Food is done

In the above agentive constructions there is an initiator/causative agent of the action but in the ergative counterparts, there is no overt agent. It is the agentive constructions that have undergone ergativization process as well as transformation.

- 38a. Eze gbara ama  
 b. Ama gbara

The observation that transitive/ergative alternation involves movement as in English is evident here. It is necessary to note that it is not always obligatory that a

causative sentence is uttered before a causeless one. Causeless sentences may arise out of questions, excitement, fear, sorrow etc. just as causatives. For example - G[n[ mere? Odo nwxrx, qakx gbaarə, Ego tuhu ru etc.

This implies that without altering an agentive construction in discourse or allowing the process of transformation on the deep structure, we can still understand these sentences as ergatives. Although there is no causer of the action at the surface level of these ergative non-agentive constructions, one would realize that at the deep structure level, there is an underlying subject which is the initiator to the expressed action. But this omission of the causative agent in ergative should not in any way paint the picture that non-agentive constructions have no initiator of actions for we know that every action must be carried out by somebody or something.

### **Summary, findings and conclusion**

Ergativity, which is distinctively manifested in different languages -morphologically, syntactically and semantically, is simply a formal relationship existing between the direct object of a transitive verb and the subject of its transitive counterpart. That all Igbo verbs have complement does not rule out the necessity of the distinction of Igbo verbs into transitive and intransitive subsets.

Our finding is that there are certain transitive verbs that cannot take part in this diathesis alternation in both Imiryike and the standard dialect as in the instance of sentence '17'. The uncausatives such as the verbs of sounds cannot be ergativized because not all complements are arguments. Ergativity is manifested both syntactically and semantically in Imiryike variety just as in the standard form. The rule responsible for the formation of ergatives is move - Alpha. The object of the transitive verb is externalized taking the subject initial position. The verbs that easily yield to transitive alternations in the dialect include verbs of destruction, cooking, killing, alarm, verbs denoting body injury etc. The verbs of destruction and killing use disyllabic stems in transitive constructions while the ergative counterparts use monosyllabic stems. Others use simple stems. Not all verbs in the dialect which can undergo ergativization can do so in standard Igbo, such words as "ituhu", (to lose), "iya" (cause not to hold) etc. In other words, although ergativity is a feature of Igbo syntax, the verbs involved vary from dialect to dialect. Ergative constructions denoting cooking in the progressive aspect in



the dialect use compound stem while the standard form use simple stems. The data reveal that the transitive/ergative pairs are not phonologically identical unlike the case of standard dialect.

In conclusion, ergative verbs in Imiryike dialect of the Nsukka dialect cluster do not have a one-to-one correspondence in core and or standard Igbo.

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