(REVIEW ARTICLE)

Argument structure of cut and break verb in Ezza dialect

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Abstract

Verbs are separated into two classes, namely cut verbs and break verbs. The two classes are distinguished based on the semantic properties of the verbs, which supposedly influences their syntactic behavior. This study examined the argument structure of cut and break verbs in Ezza dialects of Igbo language. A data elicitation session was conducted from the Bohnemeyer video clips. These videos consisted of various scenes, depicting different types of cutting and breaking events. The reading of the verb 'cut' in this study describes separation, damage of an object or entity and generally involves the use of a bladed instrument (for example a knife, machete, and scissors) which is used by an agent to carry out the action, finally leading to a separation or a change in the 'material integrity' of the object. The cut verbs can participate in different constructions, while the Break verbs have the ability to occur spontaneously without the involvement of an agent. The instruments are indicated by the verbs which refute the claim of linguistic literatures that one distinguishing feature of break verbs is that the type of instrument used for the activity is not denoted.

Keywords: Cut and break verb; Argument structure; Ezza dialect; Igbo language

1. Introduction

Separation verbs are grouped into two classes, namely cut verbs and break verbs (C&B verbs, hereafter) [1]. The two classes are distinguished based on the semantic properties of the verbs, which supposedly influence their syntactic behavior. For instance, break verbs participate in the causative/inchoative alternation in which the transitive sentence expresses an agent acting on a patient/theme while its intransitive counterpart expresses the theme entering into a state (e.g., John broke the cup vs. the cup broke). (1) Claim that cut verbs do not participate in the causative/inchoative alternation. Instead, their intransitive counterparts, if a language allows it, are only supposed to be middle constructions (the bread cuts easily).

The purpose of this study is to determine the argument structure patterns of cut and break verbs in Ezza dialect. The rest of this paper goes into this issue by first reviewing the relevant literature on the subject, followed by the presentation and analysis of data. It concludes with a summary of the findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Argument Structure

Linguists employ thematic roles to describe aspects of the interface between syntax and semantics, in particular, to characterise the link between the semantic classification of its participants that are inherent in a verb's meaning and the grammatical relations they support [2]. The author's analysis is based on the syntactic structure of the Igbo

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sentences and their semantic import. This is because for a sentence to be grammatical, it must be syntactically well-formed. But the syntactic well-formedness is not always a guarantee to semantic well-formedness.

- 1a. Íké gbùrù Íbe
- Ike kill RV (past) Ibe
- 'Ike killed Ibe' GBU (Ike, Ibe)
- b. Íbè gbùrù Íké
- Ibe kill RV (past) Ike
- 'Ibe killed Ike' GBU (Ibe, Ike)

From the two sentences above, the author discovers the principles of Universal Grammar (UG), (a grammar that highlights the structural similarities in languages) in terms of argument structures. Sentences (1 a-b) above show the orderedness that operates in the Igbo sentences. In spite of the fact that both Ike and Ibe are the arguments of the verb 'gburu', the two sentences do not convey the same semantic import. In (1a), Ike is the agent while Ibe is the patient of the verb. In 1b, the reverse is the case as Ibe now becomes the agent in the sentence, while Ike is the direct object of the verb.

The affirmation by [4] is that the morphosyntactic structure of the Igbo verb 'is made up of three mutually obligatory and complementary elements.' These obligatory elements comprise the verb itself, the complement, and the bound cognate noun (BCN). The construction below with the verb nye 'give' illustrates the argument structure of the Igbo verb.

2a. Óbì nyere Áká égō

Obi give RV (past) Aka money

'Obi gave Aka some money'

NYE (Obi, Aka, Ego)

Example 2 supports the general claim in the literature that the verb 'give' (NYE) has three arguments. Again, the sentence highlights the view that 'ego' (money) is the direct object in the construction, while Aka, the recipient, and is the indirect object or what is known as the recipient of the sentence. The second translation shows clearly that Aka is the indirect object/ recipient of the verb.

Relying on cross-linguistic evidence claims that the subject (external argument) of the verb is the participant in the clause that initiates the action represented by the verb [4], while the object (internal argument) is the participant that is completely affected by the action of the subject as it is represented by the verb. The author illustrates this using the example below

- 3a. Òbí bè-rè áká yá èbè
- Obi cut-IND feast EMPH
- 'Obi indeed cut his hand'

The author opines that Èbè is a morphological derivation of the verb bé 'cut' and it serves as an emphasizer morpheme, which is known as the Bound Cognate Noun or BCN. All Igbo verbs have the BCN, which always occurs bound to the verb as suggested by the author.

2.2. Cut and Break Verb

Separated verbs into two classes, namely cut verbs and break verbs. The two classes are distinguished based on the semantic properties of the verbs, which supposedly influence their syntactic behavior. For instance, break verbs participate in the causative/inchoative alternation in which the transitive sentence expresses an agent acting on a patient/theme while its intransitive counterpart expresses the theme entering into a state (e.g. John broke the cup vs. the cup broke). The authors claim that cut verbs do not participate in the causative/inchoative alternation. Instead, their intransitive counterparts, if a language allows it, are only supposed to be middle constructions (the bread cuts easily).They argued that the syntactic differences between cut and break verb classes are semantically determined (i.e., they are derived from lexical conceptual structure, as shown in the example below:

- **4** a. Floyd broke/cracked/shattered the vase.

- b. The vase broke/cracked/shattered.
- c. Floyd cut/cubed/sliced the bread.
- d. *The bread cut/cubed/sliced.
- e. Floyd cut (*/cubed */sliced) at the bread.
- f *Floyd broke/cracked/shattered at the vase.

An important characteristic of the "break" class is that its members participate in the causative inchoative alternation in example a and b. In contrast, the members of the "cut" class do not in c and d. Instead, they undergo the so-called "conative" alternation in e as seen above, which is not available to the members of the "break" class in f. However this hypothesis is not universally verified and a third category should therefore be included as some languages like German, Biak, Mandarin and Yukatek display bipolar C&B verbs which are specific both on the state change and on the cause and do not participate in such alternations.

CUT-type verbs as verbs that bring about a "separation in the material integrity" of a theme or an object with an instrument [6]. The examples of CUT verbs in English include chip, clip, cut, hack, hew, saw, scrape, slash, snip, etc. (7). They are classified under the broad category of "contact verbs", because a bladed instrument usually comes into contact with a theme to bring about a change in state. According to them, the meanings of the verbs in this category involve the notions of motion/movement, contact and effect. The verbs are distinguished according to the type of instrument used to bring about the result. For example, cut the carrot will include the notion of using a knife or scissors, which may or not be sharp whereas slash the carrot involves the larger set of sharp instruments. The authors analyzed two critical differences that distinguish the verb slash from cut. The first has to do with the sharpness of the instrument: slash involves the use of a sharper instrument, whereas for cut the instrument may or may not necessarily be sharp. The second is with reference to the manner in which the cutting is done; slash connotes some form of violent action whereas cut does not. They opines that, BREAK verbs are described as being pure change of state verbs as their overall meaning does not provide information about how the change of state occurred i.e. they lexicalize the result rather than cause. Their examples of BREAK verbs in English include break, chip, crack, crash, rip, smash, snap, tear etc.

CUT verbs as those verbs that involve a type of action that causes separation and includes a delivery of force [8]. While BREAK verbs on the other hand involve a change of state in the theme or object that undergoes the action described by the verb. The author further posits that, when BREAK verbs occur in intransitive constructions, they describe the result or state of the entity involved.

The semantic domain of object of separation and destruction has been much discussed in the linguistic literature, with most studies characterizing two primary classes of predicates according to certain shared semantic and syntactic properties [9]. Cut-like verbs specify the type of action that causes separation (the causing sub-event) and cannot occur in intransitive alternations, e.g. the bread cut. Break-like verbs specify the type of change in the object (the state change sub-event) and can be predicated of the semantic theme, e.g. the vase broke.

The most important semantic features C&B verbs lexicalize are the following [10]:

- Properties of the theme object: e.g. Long thin hard flexible round and hard.
- Spatial properties of the action in relation to the theme's axes or parts, e.g. Across/along the long axis.
- Result: e.g., completion of resulting c&b effect on the theme.
- Manner: e.g., sharp blow
- Type of instrument: relevant for just a few verbs: e.g., sharp blade, hands.

"Cut" verbs are change-of-state verbs that co-lexicalize the type of action that brings about a change, the type of instrument or instrument part, and the manner in which a change occurs. By contrast, the author agrees that, break verbs co-lexicalize either the type of object or the type of change. The author further suggest that "cut"-verbs are unergative while breaks verbs are unaccusatives. For example "break" verbs participate in the causative inchoative alternation constructions but "cut" verbs don't.

(10) states that the following features are relevant for the choice of divergent verbs for the description of divergent C&B events: – no control vs. control of the locus of separation; – the theme being whole or having been previously detached from another entity; – the verb specifying a specific manner or instrument; – the state change happening in a stereotypical or in an unexpected way.

From the reviews, it is observed that CUT verbs as those verbs that involve a type of action that causes separation and includes a delivery of force. While BREAK verbs on the other hand involve a change of state in the theme or object that undergoes the action described by the verb.

3. Methodology

A data elicitation session was conducted with pictures from the video clips created by (3). These videos consisted of various scenes, depicting different types of cutting and breaking events. This preliminary survey will be made up of 3 informants, native speakers from Nsukka dialect of Igbo language. . The consultants would be shown pictures gotten from the videos and would be asked to describe what they saw after each scene, where they will be asked to provide their dialectal equivalents. The researcher will note down their responses, while the digital recorder will be on, as well, to record every other vital (linguistic) information that she may elicit from the native speakers. This method will be adopted for a reliable and qualitative data collection whereby the respondent can be asked to repeat a statement or response that is not clearly captured by the researcher.

4. Argument Structure of Cut and Break verbs

4.1. Cut Verbs

4.1.1. To Slice/ Chop/ Dice (Edibles)

Ezza Dialect

- 18. O ò-**bi** karọ̄ọ̄tụ̀
- *3s PROG -slice carrot*
- 'He is slicing carrots'   [3]
- 19. O **bì-**wè-rù anyụ mmirī ọ̀nọ uzọ̀na-àbụ̀
- *3s cut-EMPH-COMPLwater melonDETway two*
- 'She cut the water melon into two'   [3]

The verbs *bi, gbu, jìa* 'to cut' in Ezza dialect, can also be used to describe the process of slicing, chopping and dicing as in the case of fruits, vegetables. The AGENTS in the sentences above are the doers of the action 'to cut' while the PATIENTS are the receivers of the action 'to cut'. The action affected the patients (carrots, watermelon, yam, and cassava) in such a way that their surface, texture and shape never remained the same again. There is an involvement of an INSTRUMENT used for carrying out the action of cutting which brings about change in the state of the patient.

4.1.2. To cut a cloth (for sewing)

Ezza Dialect

- 30. mmà bụ o gudè **bè**-e ekwà
- *Knife is 3s use cut-COMPL cloth*
- 'He cut the piece of cloth with a knife'   [3]
- 31. O **bè**-wa-rụ ekwā ọ̀nọ màkà ọ̀kwụkwa
- *3s cut-EMPH-COMPL cloth DET because sewing*
- 'He cut the clothes for sewing'   [3]

The verb *bè* in Ezza 'to cut' collocates with the NP *ekwà/akwà* 'cloth' to describe the process of cutting textile to destroy it as seen in clip 4 and cutting outa textile for the specific purpose of sewing (a purposeful type of cutting). It is the case that suchfabrics usually come in full pieces (12 yards), with six yards being (half of the whole). Clip 8 shows where a piece which is assumed to be cut from a larger piece of fabric is being cut again with a scissors to get the desired style and shape.

The verbs *bè* 'to cut' involve an AGENT, the one who cuts the cloth, the PATIENT, the receiver of the action of cutting which is the cloth and an INSTRUMENT, may be a scissors used in cutting the cloth which is not overtly marked in the sentences. The ACTION also results to change in state of the material; it was no longer whole but divided.

4.2. Break Verbs

4.2.1. To Crack/Shatter/Dash

Ezza Dialect

- 92. ọ**kù-wà**-shị̀-rụ̀ ìté
- *3s hit-ESUF-EMPH-COMPL pot*
- 'She broke the pot'   [3]
- 93. ọ**kù-wà**-shị̀-rụ̀ efere
- *3s hit-ESUF-EMPH-COMPL plate*
- 'She broke the plate'   [3]

The video clip number 39 displays a lady that broke a pot into pieces with a hammer. In video clip number 40, a lady broke a plate into pieces with a hammer. The verb *ti-we* in the dialect is used to describe the action of breaking into pieces. Objects that can be cracked or shattered are either made of glass or ceramics i.e. objects that commonly collocate with this verb are either made of glass or ceramics. These items afterundergoing the actions described by the verb do not only become disintegrated or non-integral or simply being broken into two parts, but most importantly, they are reduced to many small pieceswhich can sometimes be indistinguishable. Also, food items such as nuts and eggs (i.e. those food items with shells) can also be expressedwith the verb *ti-we* 'to break, crack (open)'.

4.2.2. To Tear (off)

Ezza Dialect

- (131) ọ**là-kà**-ràekwà ọ̀nọ èbụ̀ọ
- *3s tear-ESUF-COMPL cloth DET two*
- 'She tore the cloth into two'   [3]

The video clip (1) shows how a lady tore a piece of cloth into two with her hands. The verbs in the examples are separation verbs that describe the process of pulling or ripping things apart or intoseveral pieces. This can be done by an agent with the hands or sometimes with an instrument.There are also situations where the tearing occurs spontaneously. The objects that undergotearing are often thin and soft in nature, and include things like paper, fabrics and leaves. Whereas *dọ-waa*'to tear' describes generic forms of tearing and is not restricted to a particular style and shape.

4.2.3. To Break/To Crack'

Ezza Dialect

- (104) ọ **gbà-jì**-rì oshishi ọ̀nọ èbụ̀ọ
- *3s break-ESUF-COMPL stick DET two*
- 'He broke the stick into two'   [3]

The video clip (42) demonstrates how a lady broke a stick into two with her hands. In example (11), the subject, in this case the third person singular pronoun *ọ* acts asthe AGENT of the action. He is described as the one who breaks the stick. Notice that in thissentence, the breaking activity could have been brought about without the help of anyone or machine. If an instrument is involved in the action, the verb would have been *kù-jìrì* instead of *gbà-jìrì*. The former describes the involvement of stick or vehicle, which is used by the agent to achieve the end result, though not overtly represented.

5. Conclusion

The effort in this paper is to establish the argument structure patterns of cut and break verbs in Ezza dialect. The reading of the verb 'cut' in this study describes separation, damage of an object or entity and generally involves the use of a bladed instrument (for example a knife, machete, and scissors) which is used by an agent to carry out the action. This bladed object is made to come into contact with the entity; finally leading to a separation or a change in the 'material

integrity' of the object. This separation ranges from complete to partial separation. Therefore the change in 'material integrity' does not necessarily have to affect the NP object as a whole; rather it could be effected on a part of the NP object. The cut could vary from a slight mark on an object, to a deep cut. Possible NP collocants that go with the verb *be* 'cut' in order to yield the 'cut/cut off' interpretation are of a wide range. They include food items, materials, trees and body parts. The break verb refers to actions that generally bring about object disintegration or separation. This separation could either be complete or partial separation. The objects that go with the verbs to derive this reading are physical objects, which can be [+rigid] such as sticks and furniture or [+firm]. The break might occur at the point at which the instrument makes contact with the object (e.g. the point at which a stroke of a hammer falls) or when contact is applied elsewhere on the object. Break verbs have the ability to occur spontaneously without the involvement of an agent. The instruments are indicated by the verbs which refute the claim of linguistic literatures that one distinguishing feature of break verbs is that the type of instrument used for the activity is not denoted.

Compliance with ethical standards

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Disclosure of conflict of interest

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