

THE SELECTIONAL RESTRICTION OF VERBS IN QNĪCHA IGBO

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This research examines the noun-verb selectional restrictions in Qnĭcha Igbo, a version of Igbo spoken in the Onitsha metropolitan city of Anambra State in South Eastern Nigeria. Four verb clusters – buying, cooking, eating, and washing verbs – are chosen for this study. Our discourse will clearly show that there exists rich evidence of semantic selectional restriction between the verbs and their complements in the Qnĭcha dialect. It is however to be noted that the productivity of verb-noun selectional restriction may vary with verbs.

1.0 Introduction

This paper seeks to examine the extent to which verbs respond to the noun-verb collocations in Qnĭcha Igbo. That is to say how the verb in the verb phrase (VP) selects its nouns. Four clusters of verbs have been chosen for the analysis. The data for the analysis are taken from the Qnĭcha dialect spoken in Onitsha metropolis and its surrounding towns. Onitsha is one of the major towns of Anambra State in the South East Zone of Nigeria. The dialect is distinctly different from the central Igbo dialect due to the presence of aspiration and nasalization in the latter, two characteristics found in Owere Igbo. Qnĭcha dialect belongs to the northern dialects according to Ejiofor's classification (1982:11).

2.0 Background to the Study

Selectional restriction is, according to Ndimele (1999:80), a phenomenon which specifies the constraints on possible combinations of lexical items within a grammatical context. The constraints are stated with reference to the relevant inherent semantic features of a lexical item in an adjacent structural unit. Selectional restriction therefore is essentially a semantic constraint on the occurrence of words. The internal structure of words is rule-governed (Fromkin and Rodman 1998:69). Neweyer (1990:48) states that the principles governing the internal structure of words are quite different from those determining the internal structure of phrases. Following the orderly arrangement of linguistic items in words and phrases, we recognize that the Qnĭcha Igbo verbs (words) have a complex internal structure consisting of networks of words sharing significant properties with each other. The Qnĭcha Igbo verbs do not combine in

a haphazard manner with their complements. There is an internal constraint which determines the appropriate complement of a verb in a particular construction. Anoka (1983:171) lists seventeen different verb stems which can collocate with the verb stem *-zụ* 'to buy' in the Mbaise dialect of Igbo. He points out that each verbal form presented is limited in the number and type of complements that it can take.

The Onicha Igbo verb, like other verbs, consists essentially of a monosyllabic base which is the CV structure and a derivational vowel prefix *i-/j-*; both constitute the infinitive. The infinitive in turn combines with the noun or the complement in order to constitute a unit of thought. The infinitive in Onicha expresses a notion of the verb without predicating it of any subject (O.E.D. 1933:453). In isolation, the infinitive can be said to have a vague semantic notion; that is to say that it does not represent any definite semantic idea apart from the undetermined denotative sense.

3.0 Verbs of Buying – “The ‘Buy’ Cluster”

-go 'buy' is the nuclear or generic verb in the buy cluster in Onicha dialect and it has the widest collocational range. The common mode of the infinitive 'to buy' in Onicha dialect is *igō*. *izū* in Onicha does not specifically denote 'to buy'. Rather, its meaning is contextual because when *-zụ* co-occurs with the word *afīa* 'market', it denotes trade. For example:

1.	Emeka	nà	-	à zụ	afīa	
	Emeka	progr.		pref ² .verb		market
	Emeka is a trader					

i. *-go* is the only stem that can govern nearly all the objects of buying in Onicha. The other variants *-bu*, *-gba*, *-be*, *-mà*, *-gụ*, *-kpo* collocate with names of a few objects in the dialect as in the following:

ii. *-bu* as a buying verb may be glossed as 'buy'. It has another referential meaning of lifting or carrying which really seems to be the original denotation of the stem. *-bu* is normally associated with large quantities and bulky items such as bags of beans, rice, garri, cartons of fish. Examples:

2.	Bùte	ofu	àkpà	azù
	Carry	one	bag	fish
	Buy one bag of fish			
3.	Bùte	àkpà	àgwà	
	Carry	bag	beans	
	Buy a bag of beans			

2. Prefex

Apart from the likes of heavy commodities or bulky items mentioned in the examples above, *-bu* can also be glossed as 'buy' when speaking of heavy equipment and machines such as cars, etc.

4. Ike *bùtèlù* *ùgbòenū* *ofūū*
 Ike carry(+past) airplane new
 Ike bought a new airplane
5. Anyi *bùtèlù* *igwè* *òzọ*
 We carry(+past) bicycle another/again
 We bought another bicycle

-bu has been used in the preceding examples to demonstrate that the stem *-bu* could denote 'buy'. The stem mode of *-bu* as a verb of buying can be represented as:

V	VP	NP
-bu	a. <i>àkpà</i>	<i>akpu</i> 'cassava' <i>gari</i> 'garri' <i>àgwà</i> 'beans' <i>ose</i> 'pepper' <i>okà</i> 'maize' <i>òsikapa</i> 'rice'
	b. <i>nkàtá</i>	<i>azu</i> 'fish' <i>tomato</i> 'tomatoes'
	c. <i>akpàti</i>	<i>ntu</i> 'nails' <i>nchá</i> 'soap'
	d.	<i>ùgbòani</i> 'car' <i>igwè</i> 'bicycle'

iii. *-mà* collocates with all referential terms of commodities that are sold by measures such as with cigarette cups, tins and bowls as in the following:

V	VP	NP
-mà		<i>òsikapa</i> 'rice' <i>àgwà</i> 'beans' <i>nnu</i> 'salt' <i>ose</i> 'pepper' <i>égusi</i> 'melon'

ògbònò

Examples:

6. Màta ofu iko ọsẹ
 Buy one cup pepper
 Buy one cup of pepper
7. Fa málù iko ọsíkapa ise
 They buy(+past) cup rice five
 They bought five cups of rice

iv. -gba collocates with all referential terms of commodities that are measured in litres or other related 'fluid units'

VP

V

-gba

NP

a. ọfù ọtùlù

mmanụ 'oil'
 mmanya 'wine'

b. ọfù lità

ọgwù 'medicine'
 pètròòlù 'gasoline'

Examples:

8. Ọ gbàlù ọtùlù ọgwù ibúa
 He/she buy(+past) bottle medicine two
 He/she bought two bottles of medicine
9. Ànyị gá à gba mmanụ nní
 We fut³ pref.verb oil food
 We will buy cooking oil

Útabà 'snuff/tobacco' is not exactly a fluid item but it selects the stem -gba. The semantic affinity may be due to the body movements involved in discharging the commodity to the buyer - movements which are very similar to those involved in the sale of other fluids, and usually liquid items. It is pertinent to note though that slave purchase also selects the stem -gba.

v. -bẹ collocates with all referential terms of commodities that are measured before sales are made by cutting either with a knife (e.g. meat) or a pair of scissors (e.g. cloth) as in the following:

VP

V

-bẹ

NP

anụ 'meat'
 akwà 'cloth'

³ future

Examples:

10. Beta anụ nàjrà 111
 'Cut' meat naira ten
 Buy ten naira worth of meat

11. Unù bɛtálù akwà ọcha
 You cut(+past) cloth white
 You bought some white cloth

- vi. -*gu* can also be glossed as:
 'to sing' as in *gùọ egwū* 'sing a song'
 'to read' as in *gùọ akwukwọ* 'read a book'
 'to count' as in *gùọ fa ọnū* 'count them'
 'to buy' as in *gùọ jī* 'buy seed yams'

-*gu* as a buying verb collocates with referential terms of commodities that are counted in groups such as cobs (e.g. maize), etc.

V

VP

-*gu*

NP

ọkà 'maize'
 jī 'seed yams'
 mangalà 'dry fish'

Examples:

12. Gùtalù m azù ofu àkpà egō
 Count(imp⁴) me fish one bag money
 Buy me one hundred naira worth of fish

13. Fa gùtálù jī ọkùkò
 They count(+past) yam planting
 They bought seed yams

The stem mode -*gu* entails the referential terms of commodities that are measured by counting before sales are made.

- vii. -*kpo* co-occurs with terms referring to commodities that are displayed and sold from heaps placed either on mats or on tables. Usually though not necessarily, the commodities are lightweight items of individual sizes ranging from relatively small to quite tiny.

V

VP

-*kpo*

NP

ùbe 'pear'
 ọkwùlù 'okra'

imperative

añàlà 'garden
egg'
azù 'fish'

Examples:

14. Kpòte okwùlù nàjrà ili
Gather(imp.) okra naira ten
Buy ten naira worth of okra
15. O kpòòlù ùbe oḡu nàjrà
He/she gather(+past)pear twentynaira
He/she bought twenty naira worth of pear

The above are the buying verbs commonly used in Onicha dialect. It is the nature of the commodity that determines the stem of the verb. However, where manner of purchase, quality, and quantity of commodity is not emphasized, -go is used.

Next follow examples of deviant sentences which are unacceptable in the dialect because they do not possess the appropriate inherent, semantic properties in the buy cluster.

- *16. Ànyị matalù akwā àbàda
We bought some *abada* cloth
- *17. Unù gbatalù anụ n'afja
You bought meat in the market
- *18. O gùtalù mmanụ n'ụnò
He/she bought oil from the house
- *19. Fa betalù igwe nà nnukwu afja
They bought (a) bicycle in the big market
- *20. Ekpòtèlù m oḡwù ibà n'afja
I bought anti-malaria drugs in the market

3.1 Recapitulatory Table Of The Buying Verbs In Onicha

i.	-go +	N	+ buyable + slave
ii.	-bu +	N	+ buyable + portable + heavy
iii.	-mà +	N	+ buyable + measurable + grains or + powdery substance

iv. -gba +

N

+	buyable
+	liquid
+	slave
+	snuff

v. -be +

N

+	buyable
+	cutable

vi. -gu +

N

+	buyable
+	countable
+	plenty

vii. kpo +

N

+	buyable
+	heap or portion
+	countable

4.0 Verbs of Cooking – “The ‘Cook’ Cluster”

i. -sī is the nuclear verb of the ‘cook’ cluster. It has a wider collocational range than all the other modes of cooking. The common mode of the infinitive ‘to cook’ in Onjcha is *isī*. *isī* is normally associated with all commodities that are cooked with water in a cooking pot. The stem -sī can govern many of the objects of cooking. The other stems, -mε, -ye, -ru, -da, -te, -m] collocate with names of relatively few objects of cooking. All the verb stems however entail cooking as in:

V	VP	NP
-si		ji'yam'
		εδε 'cocoyam'
		òsikapa 'rice'
		àgwà 'beans'

Examples:

21. O slll jì taàtà
 He/she cook(+past) yam today
 He/she cooked yam today

22. Fa gá è si àgwà echi
 They fut. pref.verb beans tomorrow
 They will cook beans tomorrow

ii. **-mε** is a stem in which either the object food item is added to hot water in a container (as in the preparation of garri) or hot water is poured into the food item which is waiting in a container (as in the preparation of some cereals).

	VP		
V			NP
-mε		gàrj 'garri'	
		àkámù 'pap'	

Examples:

23. Ònyε mèlù àkámù à?
 Who do(+past) pap this
 Who prepared this pap?

24. Fa mèlù gàrj ìn òmplate
 They do(+past) garri in plate
 They prepared garri in a plate

iii. **-yε** collocates with food items that are cooked in oil without the addition of water. It is usually equivalent to the English 'frying'.

	VP		
V			NP
-yε		azù 'fish'	
		anù 'meat'	
		ọfε òsikapa 'stew'	
		jì 'yam'	
		ndùku 'potato'	

Examples:

25. O yelù ndùku n' òtùtù
 He/she fry(+past) potato in morning
 He/she fried potatoes in the morning

26. Ònyε yelù ọfε òsikapa à?

Who fry(+past) soup rice this
 Who made this stew?

iv. *-rɔ* collocates with all referential terms of commodities that can be cooked in an oven or directly over open fires without the need for containing vessels like cooking pots. Such methods of cooking usually do not require the addition of water and other ingredients.

	VP					
V						NP
-rɔ					ji'yam'	
					akwɔ	'palm nut'

Examples:

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------|--------------|----------|----|------|-----------|
| 27. | I | rùlù | ji | n' | ɔkɔ | |
| | You | roast(+past) | yam(s) | | in | fire |
| | You roasted yam(s) over fire | | | | | |
| 28. | Anyị | rùlù | akwɔ | n' | ɔkɔ | taa |
| | We | roast(+past) | palm nut | in | fire | chew(SVC) |
| | We roasted and chewed palm nuts | | | | | |

v. *-da* collocates with all referential terms of commodities that involve re-cooking (i.e. warming previously cooked food). In contemporary English usage, this concept is somewhat demonstrated by the general use of a grill or broiler to warm food prepared during an earlier cooking session.

	VP					
V						NP
-da					ɔfɛ	'soup'
					anɔ	'meat'
					nɪ	'food'

Examples:

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|-------------|------|----|--------|-----------|
| 29. | Ọ | dàlù | ɔfɛ | n' | ɔkɔ | |
| | He/she | warm(+past) | soup | in | fire | |
| | He/she warmed the soup | | | | | |
| 30. | Anyị | dàlù | nɪ | n' | ɔkɔ | n' |
| | We | warm(+past) | food | in | fire | in |
| | We warmed the food in the afternoon. | | | | | |
| | | | | | èfifiè | afternoon |

vi. *-tɛ* has a fixed collocation with soup. It exclusively entails the cooking of (different kinds of) soup.

VP

V
-tɛ

NP

Examples:

ɔfɛ 'soup'

31. Fa tɛlù ɔfɛ òsíkapa
They cook(+past) soup rice
They made some stew

32. Unù tɛlù ɔfɛ nnyàafù
You cook(+past) soup yesterday
You made some soup yesterday

vii. *-mɿ* collocates with all referential terms of commodities that can be cooked by passing through intense heat so as to remove liquid content (= drying).

VP

V
-mɿ

NP

anɯ 'meat'
azù 'fish'

Examples:

33. Unù gà - à mɿ anɯ à n' ɔkɯ
You fut. pref.verb meat this in fire
You will dry this meat

34. ɔ milli azù n' ɔkɯ
He/she dry(+past) fish in fire
He/she dried the fish

We now give examples of deviant sentences which are not acceptable in the dialect because they lack the semantic qualities necessary for appropriate co-occurrence.

*35. Ada gà - ɛ tɛ anũ
Ada fut. pref.verb meat
Ada will make meat

*36. Ifeoma ná - à rɯ ɔfɛ n' ɔkɯ
Ifeoma progr. pref.verb soup in fire
Ifeoma is roasting soup

*37. ɔ mill àkàmù n' afɛɛ
He/she dry(+past) pap in plate
He/she dried some pap in a plate

4.1 Recapitulatory Table Of The Cooking Verbs In Onicha

i. -si + N

+	cookable
+	care
+	food item
+	water

ii. -me + N

+	cookable
+	garri
+	alamu
+	water
+	care

iii. -ye + N

+	cookable
+	food item
+	oil
+	solid
+	care
-	water

iv. -ru + N

+	cookable
+	food item
+	solid
+	care
-	water

v. -da + N

+	cookable
+	previously cooked
+	short period of time
+	care

vi. -te + N

+	cookable
+	soup
+	care

vii. -mj + N

+	cookable
+	meat
+	fish
+	care

5.0 Verbs of Eating – “The ‘Eat’ Cluster”

i. -li ‘eat’ is the nuclear verb of the eat cluster. The common mode of the infinitive ‘to eat’ in Qnjcha dialect is *lii*. It has wider collocational range than its variants which are *-ta*, *-no*, *-lacha*, *-micha*.

ii. *-ta* can collocate with all edible substances which are solid (and strong). It primarily involves the use of the teeth as instruments and relates closely to the English alternative, *-chew*.

V	VP	NP
-ta		anū 'meat'
		azù 'fish'
		ojī 'kola'

Examples:

- 38. Ada gá - à ta anū
 Ada fut. pref.verb meat
 Ada will eat meat
- 39. Eze tálù ojī
 Eze chew(+past) kola
 Eze ate some kola

iii. *-no* collocates with edible lumps, tablet-like substances, as well as all forms of boluses. The English word closest in meaning to this variant is ‘swallow’.

V	VP	NP
-no		akpu: 'cassava'
		ogwù 'tablets'

Examples:

- 40. Fa nólù ogwù n' ùtùtù
 They swallow(+past) tablet in morning

41. They look some tablets in the morning
 Anyị gà - è no gàrị n' èfifiè
 We fut. pref.verb garri in afternoon
 We will eat garri in the afternoon.

iv. *-lacha* collocates with edibles whose nature requires that their ingestion be carried out by licking with the tongue as in the intake of chocolate, candy, and some kinds of fruits.

V	VP	NP
-lacha		ofe 'soup' òlòma 'orange' ùdàlà 'apple'

Examples:

42. Unù gà - à lacha ofe
 You fut. pref.verb soup
 You will lick (some) soup
43. O lachàlù òlòma
 He/she lick(+past) orange(s)
 He/she licked some oranges

v. *-micha* co-occurs with all the edibles that can be eaten by sucking movements of the mouth.

V	VP	NP
-micha		okpukpu 'bone'

Examples:

44. Ada nà - a micha okpukpu
 Ada progr. pref.(suck) bone
 Ada is sucking a piece of bone
45. Nwata à nà - a micha mkpisi aká
 yā Child this progr. pref.(suck) stick hand
 his

This child is sucking his fingers

The following sentences are deviant and unacceptable in the Onicha dialect because they do not possess the appropriate semantic qualities necessary for correct co-occurrence.

- *46. Uzo lachàlù

anụ

- *47. Uzo licked some meat
 Obi gà - àta òlòma
 Obi will chew some oranges
- *48. Ànyị nà - èno ofe
 We are swallowing some soup
- *49. Fa mịchàfù gàrị
 They sucked garri
- *50. Unù gà - àta ofe laàtà
 You will chew soup today

5.1 Recapitulatory Table Of The Eating Verbs in Onjcha

i. -li + N

+	edible
+	solid
+	soft

ii. -ta + N

+	edible
+	hard
+	dry, as of nuts
+	teeth

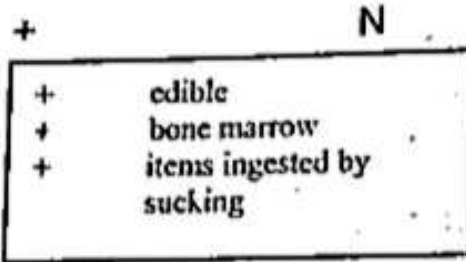
iii. -no + N

+	edible
+	soft/lumps/pulp
+	tablets

iv. -lacha + N

+	edible
+	soup
+	fruits

v. -micha



6.0 Verbs of Washing – “The ‘Wash’ Cluster”

Verbs in the wash cluster cannot be classified into nuclear (or generic) and non-nuclear because there is no variant that has a catholic application to all ‘washable’ nouns.

- i. -sɨ in Onicha Igbo may be glossed as:
 - ‘pound’ as in *isū nni*
 - ‘clear’ as in *isū ofiā*
 - ‘speak’ as in *isū asùsɨ*
 - ‘wash’ as in *isū akwà*

Unlike the verbs previously examined in this discourse, no stem or mode in the wash cluster can be regarded as a common mode. In other words, none of the stems can really be said to have wider or narrower collocational range than the others. The stems -kwɔ, -wɨ, -fiɔ can however be said to have a relatively fixed range. All the variants of the wash cluster appear in simple verb forms as in: -sa, -wɨ, -kwɔ, -fiɔ.

- ii. -sa collocates with all ‘washable’ nouns that describe instruments, equipment, and most body parts.



Example:

51. Uche nà - à sa afɛɛ
 Uche progr. pref.wash plate(s)
 Uche is washing/doing the dishes

- iii. -wɨ has a fixed collocation with the human body. Example:

52. Fa wùlù àrɨ n’ ùtɨtù
 They bathe(+past) body in morning
 They bathed in the morning

iv. -kwɔ has a fixed collocation with the human hands. Example:
 53. Ọ nà - à kwɔ akā
 He/she progr. pref.wash hand
 He/she is washing his/her hands

v. -fjɔ has a fixed collocation with the human face. Example:
 54. Jεε fiɔɔ irū gī n' ilo
 go wash face you in outdoors
 Go and wash your face outside

Next follow some examples of deviant sentences lacking semantic properties necessary for appropriate co-occurrence.

*55. lbe kwòlù akwà
 lbe washed some clothes.

*56. Anyị gà - àwụ afele
 We will wash some plates.

6.1 Recapitulatory Table Of The Washing Verbs In Ọnicha

i.	-sụ +	N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + washable + clothing/fabrics + soap/detergent + squeezable + at least two hands
ii.	-sa +	N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + washable + body parts + instrument + equipment
iii.	-wụ +	N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + washable + human subject + instrument
iv.	-kwɔ +	N	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + washable + at least two hands

v. -fiq +

N

+	washable
+	human face
+	hands as instruments

Conclusion

We have so far been examining the co-occurrence possibilities of four verb clusters in the Onicha Igbo dialect. Evidence from the data we have presented in this discourse strongly suggests that there exists a strong selectional restriction between verbs and their complements. Most of our examples have shown that certain verbs can co-occur only with particular NP objects and not with others. The research has also shown that there is a high degree of verb-noun selectivity in the dialect.

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