Morphosyntactic Analysis of Verb Inflections in Igikuria Language: A Minimalist Program

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Abstract
The Igikuria verb structure has verb roots that are incomprehensible unless accompanied by the final vowel which changes according to the mood. Igikuria language has subject markers, the object markers, negations, focus, infinity, question formation and tone are also captured. The study looked into the structure of the Igikuria verb root and determined that it is morphologically inflected to denote, person, number, infinity, subject, object, negations and focus.

INTRODUCTION

The homeland of the Abakuria is between river Migori to the east and Estuary of river Mara to the West. On the eastern side the area stretches from Migori district in South Nyanza in Kenya to Musoma district of Tanzania on the western side. To the south, the land borders the Transmara district on the Kenya side and Nguruma area in Tanzania. To the north is Lake Victoria. The immediate neighbors are the Abagusii, Maasai, Ngurumi. This paper is based on the Abakuria in Kenya who speak Igikuria language.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY IS:
To analyze the Igikuria verb morphology in terms of inflections for; person, number, infinity, subject, object, negations and focus.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Omondi (2008) Tense and Aspect in Ekegusii: Minimalist Analysis, observes that MP can adequately account for verb inflection in Ekegusii, though the study is limited to tense and aspect only, it’s important to this study because it’s a Bantu language and therefore can offer insights to Igikuria language which is also closer to Ekegusii in terms of regionalism as they are neighbors.

Mugane (1998) concludes that one must rely on lexical specification of nominal elements, combined grammatical factors such as constituent structure as well as functional systematic structure. This is important to this study because Igikuria is also a Bantu language.

Marete (1981) gives an account of concordial agreement in Ki-Meru hence the link between the modules of syntax and morphology. This is important to our study because it’s a Bantu language and also delves into issue of agreement an element under study in Igikuria language.


Dahl (1985) carries out a research project on tenses, aspects and moods and creates a data base with very relevant comparable data on the tense and aspect systems of many languages. This study seeks to investigate verbal structure in Igikuria and Dahl’s contribution is relevant to this research because it will help in showing the categories that are expressed morphologically, and those expressed by auxiliary constructions.


Namulemu (2004) did research on Lunyole (Uganda) basing his scope on tense, aspect and mood in Lunyole grammar and narrative discourse. His study will provide information on the markings of the verb in Igikuria. It is established that Lunyore marks the periphrastic tense using auxiliary verbs that are not morphologically marked on the verb.

Nzioka (2007) carries out a study on the Kikambta tense and aspect under the Minimalist Program. She proposes that aspect and tense features exist in this language. Kikamba is a Bantu language like Igikuria and relevant data on the verb will be used in this study.

Mbugua (2008) in her study of the morpho-syntax of the Maasai Valence using the Minimalist Approach provides relevant information to this study since it will base its analysis within the Minimalist framework. Data on feature-checking for agreement during movement is used.
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data in this study was collected from Igikuria native speakers and verified with Abakuria professionals who are more competent native speakers. Data was collected through oral interview and use of questionnaires. The library was also a source of information which provided theoretical content on the Igikuria language. Research design used is descriptive.

This study uses purposive sampling as a method whereby the researcher purposely targets a group of people believed to be reliable for the study (Kombo and Tromp 2006: 82). For this study the number included; twenty teachers; ten primary school teachers and ten secondary school teachers, Igikuria speakers of over eighteen years old, professionals both men and women (primary and secondary school teachers from Abakuria tribe) were involved. These informants are all native speakers of Igikuria language.

Data Analysis is done in terms of the features of the verb.

FINDINGS – THE VERB ROOT

Igikuria is highly agglutinative; the verb can have several morphemes which have different grammatical functions. Odero, (2008) in his analysis of the verb structure of Ekegusii explains that “The Ekegusii verbs can be polymorphemic” (2008:2). This assertion is important because Igikuria language is classified together with Ekegusii in zone E Guthrie (1967:48).

The basic Igikuria verbs have the obligatory roots that are incomprehensible basically marked by vowel –a affixed to them. “A root is the irreducible core of a word, with absolutely nothing else attached to it,” (Katamba 1993:41). Igikuria verbs have the mandatory root and because the verb in Igikuria just like in other languages of the Bantu cannot stand alone, hence it occurs with one or more affixes. As such, the verb root may comprise of the stem together with the imperative suffix and occur in a pre-determined slot.

The verb encodes various aspects of grammatical information represented by affixes as morphemes attached on the main verb, (Mchombo, 1999). The root is the nucleus of the verbal cluster with basic syllabic structures, Aarts (1988). The root can be elaborated with a single or several bound morphemes to elongate or change semantic connotations.

According to Gleason (1965), “Morphemes are the real units of grammar since they affect tense, aspect and number as is indicated by the verb.” Aarts (1988) states that the verb phrase (VP) consist of verbal forms only with the lexical (main) verb as the principle part of the VP. The Igikuria verbal phrase has affixes and verbal forms together with the main verb. This is indicated in the following sentences;

1) ikar - a  
   rv – fv
   ‘Sit’

2.) rug-a  
   rv-fv
   ‘cook’

3.) gend-a  
   rv-fv
   ‘Go’

4.) rar-a  
   rv-fv
   ‘sleep’

The final vowel is marked by – a which can change into vowel –e depending on the mood, tense and agreement, the following changes on the final vowel can be seen;

5a) rug-a  
   rv-fv
   ‘cook’

5b) n-a-rug-ir-e  
   Foc-3ps-cook-asp-fv
   ‘He cooked’

6a.) ikar-a  
   Rv-fv
   ‘Sit’

6b) n-a-ikar-e  
   Foc-3ps-sit-fv
‘He sat’
The final vowel –a changes to –e due to mood, the verb roots ‘cook’ and ‘sit’ have final vowel –a but when put into sentences; ‘He cooked’ and ‘He sat’ then the final vowel changes to –e. This can be attributed to agreement because of the third person singular ‘he’ and the action which is put in the past.

THE INFINITIVE
The infinitive in Igikuria is realized by prefixation of either uku – or –ugu for the verb roots as shown below. Palmer (1986:156) defines the infinitive as “A form of a verb unmarked for person, tense, aspect, mood or concordial agreement i.e. basic form of a verb.” In Igikuria, the infinitive takes the same position like that of the subject prefix and it comprises of the prefix -uku and ugu- together with the verbal stem and can behave as a gerund or as a verbal subject. This is the case because the infinitive marker and the subject marker are mutually exclusive, Kanyoro (1983:103), as is shown in the sentences below.

7a) ikar – a
   rv – fv
   ‘Sit’
7b). ugu – ikar – a
    inf.- sit – fv
   ‘To sit
8a). rug -a
   rv – fv
   ‘Cook’
8b.) uku – rug – a
    inf – cook – fv
   ‘To cook’

The infinitive marker is phonologically conditioned in the sense that when the root verb begins with a voiceless stop /k/, the infinitive becomes voiced velar stop /g/, and the vowel /u/ which comes before and after it, hence ‘ugu’. while in the second case the voiced sound /g/ becomes the voiceless stop /k/ in the infinitive form. The phonological process realized here is dissimilation ‘... when one sound segment exercises influence on the closer segment so as to be more or less like it or different from it.’ (Crystal1997:12)

THE SUBJECT MARKER
The subject-verb agreement is mandatory except when reference is made to the second person singular and plural e.g.

9). Rug-a
   ‘Cook – fv’

In the above case, the verb ruga {cook} is the root form but it is understood to be addressing both second person singular and plural. The first and the third persons must be marked for both person and number e.g.

10a). ko-ikar-a
     lps – sit – fv
     ‘I sit’
10b). to – ikar – a
     lpp – sit –fv
     ‘we sit’
10c). ta– ikar –a
     2ps – sit –fv
     ‘You (s) sit’
10d). mo– ikar-a
     2pp – sit –fv
     ‘You (p).sit’
10e)  a – ikar – e
     3ps – sit – fv
     ‘He sits’
10f)  ba – ikar- e
     3Pp – sit – fv
     ‘They sit’
SUMMARY OF THE IGIKURIA SUBJECT – AGREEMENT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Morpheme marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>ta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>mo</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>singular</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>ba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I: The Igikuria subject agreement morpheme markers
The subject markers are obligatory in the sentence structure; they appear before the verb root hence considered prefixes of the verb roots.

THE OBJECT AGREEMENT
Igikuria verbs mark agreement with the object by prefixation through morphemes “n” and “to” for the first person, “ko” and “ba” for the second person and “mo” and “ba” for the third person singular and plural respectively e.g.

11a). \( n\)-ko - to- rog - er- a
    ‘You cook for me’
11b). \( n\)-ko- to- rog- er- a
    Foc- Ips –2psco- cook – BEN –fv
    ‘I cook for you (singular)’
11c). \( n\)-ko- ba- rog- er – a
    Foc-Ips – 3ppo- cook- Ben – fv
    ‘I cook for them’
11d) \( n\)-ko – mo – rog – er- a
    Foc-lpS - 3ppo - cook – BEN – fv
    ‘I cook for him/her’

SUMMARY TABLE OF OBJECT AGREEMENT MARKERS

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Singular</td>
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<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Plural</td>
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<td>singular</td>
<td>mo</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>plural</td>
<td>ba</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table II: The Igikuria object agreement markers
The Igikuria object markers are obligatory ‘n’ is used for the first person singular, ‘to’ is for the first person plural, ‘ko’ is for the second person singular, ‘ba’ is for the second person plural, ‘mo’ is for the third person singular and again ‘ba’ doubles up for the third person plural. The native speaker is able to make the difference in meaning in the use of ‘ba’ as second person plural and third person plural.

NEGATION
In Igikuria negation is morpho – syntactically marked by prefixation to the verb root. The underlying negation morpheme is ‘te’ though realized as ‘ta’ depending on number and person. “A negative clause is one which asserts that some event, situation, or state of affairs does not hold…” (Payne1997:282).

The negator comes first followed by the subject marker ‘ta’.

12a). \( te\) – ta-rug-ir-e
    ‘You (s) did not cook’
12b). mo-ta – rug-ir-e
    ‘You (p) did not cook’
12c). ta-ta – rug-ir-e
    ‘He did not cook’

In the case below the negator ‘ta’ comes after the subject
In the case below the negator ‘ta’ comes before the subject marker ‘ba’

12d). ta– ba – rug-ir-e
N – 3pp – cook – Asp – fv
‘They did not cook’

In the case below the negator ‘ta’ comes after the subject marker ‘n’ which doubles up as focus as well.

12e). n – ta – rug-ir-e
N – ips/foc – cook – Asp – fv

In the case below the negator ‘ta’ comes after the subject marker ‘to’.

12f). to – ta – rug-ir-e
1pp-N - cook – ASP- fv
‘We did not cook’

In the case above the negator comes after the subject marker. The placement of ‘ta’ or ‘te’ does not reveal any phonological conditioning as it depends on the native speaker’s competence of the morphosyntax of his language.

The negation marker can vary its position depending on the subject for instance.

FOCUS
According to Payne focus refers to part of sentence that is given prominence. In Igikuria it is marked by prefixation “n” to the root verb. Payne (1997: 267) gives three approaches of understanding the term focus which include:

a) As a term applied to some morpho syntactic operations or category whose function has not adequately been analyzed.

b) Focus is a term applied to one element of every clause or asserted information.

c) Focus describes a condition of some pragmatically marked clauses.

‘focus particles play an important role in the development and formal make up of a variety of constructions and are related to various semantic domains.’ Konig (1991:1) The Igikuria sentences below shows how focus is marked;

13a). John a-rey-e
John Agr.-eat- - fv
‘John ate’

13b). John n-a-rey-e
John- foc-agr-eat-fv
‘Did John ate?"

Focus in Igikuria is marked by ‘n’ which comes as a prefix of the root verb it indicates that there is some stress laid on the action for instance the above case means that actually John ate some food.

QUESTIONS
The Igikuria language uses intonation to bring out the questions from statements. The statements have a falling intonation(wherby the first syllables are articulated louder as the last syllables are articulated on a low voice) which when changed to rising intonation(wherby the first syllables are articulated on a low voice as the last syllables are articulated on a louder voice); the questions are realized as shown in the sentences below;

14a). n-a – re-atir- i
foc – agr-pst – sing – fv
‘She sang’

14b). n-a-re-atir – i
foc – agr-pst – sing-pst - fv
‘Did she sing?’

In the above case intonation pattern changes statement into question, the intonation changes from falling of the declarative to rising of the interrogative as shown above. When the falling intonation is used the declarative is realized, and when sentence changes to rising intonation, the interrogative sentence is achieved.

TONE
Tone languages are defined as “languages having lexically significant but relative pitch on each syllable pike (1948: 43).Igikuria distinguishes the recent past and distant past tenses through high and low tones. Cruttenden (1986:8-9) comments that many African languages have ‘a characteristic tone which is sensitive to word structure and affixation. Pike (1948:3) also asserts that pitch distinguishes meanings of words. This is shown in the sentences below;

15a). John n-a- re-cëy- e


