Modality in Awàrà-Ìgbò

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines modality in Awàrà-Igbo. Descriptive approach was used in the analysis of data. The paper provides confirmation that modality is a semantic-pragmatic category anchored on context. Four forms of the modal verbs were established: the modal auxiliary verbs (example kweshi), the bound modal auxiliary verbs (examples ga, ma, ka), the periphrastic (examples nwe ike, kwe mee, ike kwe) and the modal suffix (example -lifo,). These modal forms were analyzed and the results revealed that they either express deontic or epistemic or both meanings. Also, the study reveals that tone plays a vital role in the dialect.

KEYWORDS: Modality, Awàrà-Ìgbò and Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis

Introduction

The core essence of language is for easy communication between people by allowing the expression of individual attitudes, utterances, judgments, etc., such as involvement in linguistic interaction. The context and the speaker's attitude towards the subject of discourse, result in the assignment of different interactive values to individual elements in an utterance. The speaker's aim in such a linguistic interaction may include: to inform, confirm, question, verify, command, request, contradict in order to sustain a mode of interaction, etc.

In a tonal language like Igbo, a difference in tone is just as significant as a difference in the sound (consonant or vowel) quality. This is to say that tone is phonemic in Igbo. For the purpose of this study, the tone convention used is that of (Green and Igwe, 1963) where high tones are unmarked while low and down-step tones are marked. Modality is concerned with the interpersonal function of language.

Modality

(Bybee et al. 1994) and (Greenbaum, 1996) define modality as a set of semantic categories, which include, possibility obligation, probability, perhaps, necessity and desire clauses. (Papafragou, 2000, p.7) focuses on a selected number of modals, such as; must, may, should, can and ought to. The main objective of her work was to explore the association of the lexical semantic information and pragmatic inference in relation to these modal verbs. Hence, she concludes that 'can, should and ought to' are semantically general and require free enrichment whereas 'must and may' are semantically incomplete and require pragmatically induced saturation. (Palmer, 2001) supports the explanations that modality is the attitude of the speaker towards the proposition in the statement he utters. All modal expressions reflect the speaker's or the writer's view of the world. Modality is a semantic-cum-pragmatic category which is a feature of the utterance rather than of the sentence.

Types of Modality

*Epistemic Modality***:** Epistemic modality has to do with the possibility, probability, or impossibility of a particular proposition. (Palmer, 2001) holds that epistemic modality is a sub-type of modality that has to do with a speaker's belief of the knowledge upon which a proposition is based.

*Deontic Modality***:** According to (Palmer, 2001), deontic modality is defined in terms of obligation and permission. With the deontic modality, the conditioning factors are external to the relevant individual. This force can come not only from the speaker but also from an unspecified third source (Lyons, 1977), (Frawley, 1992) and (Palmer, 2001).

The Semantic-Pragmatic Analysis of Modality in Awara-Igbo.

Modality is realized by modal verbs and have semantic-pragmatic implications (Nwigwe, 2004). In this study, we classify modality using features such as intention, necessity, obligation, possibility/probability, certainty, ability, desire etc. We will be examining the modal verb in Awara -Igbo.

Modal Verbs

These are verbs that have the capacity to express different modalities independently. According to (Igwe, 1987), they can function independently and can also be inflected.

A.   Mvù n'obì/uchè 'to have in mind' (intention)

This is always accompanied by a complementizer '*na'* to give a full meaning of intention. Examples:

1.   Evù m n' obì si a-mà èjhe ahìa tana.
        1sg Pref. carry in mind that 1sg will go market today
        I intend to go to the market today.

2.   Evu m n'obi si ọ gà ya emelifòo
        1sg Pref. in mind that 3sg can it do
        I thought he can do it.

3.   Echènù m si a gàni m abìa.
        1sg. Pref. think Pst. say 1sg. will come
        I thought I will come.

B.   Di ikpà 'necessity'

In Awara dialect, the copula '*di'* alongside the complement '*ikpà'* is used to express the modality of necessity. '*di ikpà'* is usually followed by a complementizer '*nà'* which is always on a low tone. The sentence always begins with the open vowel prefix '-ọ'. Example:

4.   Ọ dì ikpà nà I gà àbìarìrì tanà.
        It is necessary that you must come today.

5.   Ọ dì ikpà nà ì da ejhe ahìa tana
        It is necessary that she do not go to the market today.

C. **Gà/mà 'will, shall, must, have to'**

In Awara dialect, this modal verb is used to express future marker and also to mark anticipation like obligation, compulsion and prediction'. Examples:

'Gà/mà' **'Obligation'**

6.   Àda gà èshi hè.
     Ada Aux Fut, cook something.
     Ada will cook something.

7.   A mà abìa
     Isg aux come
     I will come

'Gà' **'Anticipation'**

8.   Ìhechi gà- àhụ Kèmma tanà
     Ihechi Aux -Ant. see Kemma today
     Ihechi shall see Kemma today.'

'Ga' **'Compulsion'**

9.   I gà èmerìrì ihe a m si gi mee.
     2sgAux. will Fut. do Emp. thing 1sg ask Pst2sg do
     You must do what I have asked you to do.

'Ga' **'Prediction'**

10. Imiri gà ezòrìrì tanà.
     Rain Aux Pref fall EMP today
     Rain must fall today.

Note that 'ma' can only be used when the expression is directly made by the speaker. Hence, it can only occur with an open vowel prefix 'a'. Most times in Awara dialect, the emphatic suffix '*riri*' is added to the modal verb to express strong obligation or compulsion or prediction. For (Uchechukwu, 2011), in the appropriate context, and with the right emphatic tone of voice, the verb –*gà* can be given a deontic meaning of 'compulsion or anticipation' or the epistemic meaning of a 'prediction' in any of these sentences. Thus, ascertaining that the auxiliary verb –*ga* can function alone as a modal auxiliary as well as explicitly combine with specific morphemes to express modality. This is referred to as the morphotonologically explicit forms of modality involving the use of –*ga* (Uchechukwu, 2011). We observed that '*gà/mà*' always occur with a low tone.

D. **kwe me 'be possible' (possibility)**

This is a verb of possibility and in Awara, this modality is expressed by '*kwe me*' (if possible) which always occur at the sentence initial position with the open vowel prefix 'o'. The modality implies that the proposition may be true. Examples:

11. O kwe me, a mà abìa
     If agree do, 1sg aux come
     If possible, I will come.

12.   O kwe me, ọgà alụ uchè
        If agree do, 3sg aux marry Uche
        If possible, he will marry Uche.

Examples (11 & 12) express epistemic meaning of possibility.

E.   Nwe ike 'be able/have the ability/permission' (Ability, Probability/Permission)

This modal looks quite polysemous in its meaning and requires a pragmatic knowledge about the subject NP for proper understanding of the speaker's intention. The intended meaning of the speaker is determined by not only the morpho -syntactic nature of the sentence, but the context of usage (that is some pragmatic factors). This periphrastic modal is a combination of verb and an NP. The verb *-nwe* on its own means 'to have/possess' which can be inflected in Awara. But – *ike* 'strength' which is an object NP cannot undergo inflection. The combination of *-nwe* and *-ike* expresses modality. This form expresses both deontic and epistemic meaning in Awara. Examples:

13.   Ìhechi nwe -re ike imelifu a
        Ihechi has -rv stative strength to do it
        Ihechi can do it.

14.   Tòbe nwe -re ike ibiya tana
        Tobe has -rv stative strength to come today
        Tobe might come today

15.   I nwe -re ike ijhe ahia echile
        You (sg) have -rv stative strength to go market tomorrow
        You can go to the market tomorrow.

16.   Imiri nwe-re ike izò
        Water have-rv stative strength to fall
        Rain might fall.

In example (13) above, the sentence expresses deontic meaning of ability, example (14) expresses epistemic meaning of probability. Example (15) expresses deontic meaning of permission and example (16) expresses epistemic meaning of prediction/possibility. We can observe the polysemous nature of '-*nwe ike*' and how it is being cleared using pragmatic knowledge.

F. kweshi   'supposed to', 'ought to', (necessity)

17.   O kweshi-ri ibia tanà
        He/she suppose -rv stative to come today
        He/she supposed to come today

18.   I kweshi-ri ikwu ezi okwu
        2sg ought to rv stative total truth
        You (sg) ought to say the truth

-kweshi is a modal verb capable of being inflected. Examples (17 & 18) display deontic meaning of necessity.

G. -lifo 'ability to do/perform'

In Awara, *-lifo* when used in isolation is meaningless because it is a bound morpheme which is incapable of occurring alone. It can only be affixed to the main verb to further express extreme ability to perform an action. It is a peripheral verb which could be used to express deontic and epistemic meanings of a statement. Examples:

19.   Ìhechi gà àsa-lifo ụ gbọ alì a
        Ihechi Aux Prog. wash able car
        Ihechi can wash the cars

20.   Kèmma gà èshi-lifo ori hè
        Kemma Aux. will Fut. to cook able food
        Kemma will be able to cook food.

The sentence in example (19) expresses deontic meaning of permission, example (20) expresses deontic meaning of ability.

H.   -ma 'know/ability to know how (to do something)

Ma can combine with certain modal suffixes such as *-rala* to express modality.

21.   Ìhechi ma-rala hè
        Ihechi MOD. know -Suff. something
        Ihechi is intelligent'

22.   Ọ ma-rala kpọ wa shì ègwu imiri
        S/he MOD. know how to swim water
         S/he has the ability to/can swim

23.   O ga ihe a ma.
        3sg Pref. Aux will something know
        He will be intelligent

Examples (21 & 22) express deontic meaning of ability. While example (23) expresses epistemic meaning of prediction.

I. ka 'bigger/more than/would have'

The morpheme -ka is used to express activities/events that should have taken place but did not take place. It is also used to mark comparison. When -ka is used to express an event/activity that should have taken place but did not, the suffix -nu is usually added to the verb to form -ka-nu.

24.   Ìhechi ka Okoro ima hè
        Ihechi is more Okoro know something
        Ihechi is more intelligent than Okoro

25.   Ha kà-nù ibi ya tanà
        3pl MOD. will -rv Part. to come today
        They would have come today.

26.   Òkoro kà-nù alu idom na ahwanu
       Okoro MOD. rv to marry Pst. woman this year
       Okoro would have gotten married this year

Example (24) expresses epistemic meaning of comparison while (25 &26) express deontic and epistemic meaning of possibility.

We observe that it is not all the various form for expressing modality in Igbo that have the deontic and epistemic meanings together. Some express only one meaning (either deontic or epistemic) while some express both deontic and epistemic meanings. For example, '*kwe me'* expresses only the epistemic meaning of possibility. '*nwe ike* expresses both deontic and epistemic modality. Hence Nwigwe (2004) and Igwe (2007) describe the modals that express only one meaning as periphrastic modals. But Uchechukwu (2011) argues for their classification rather as peripheral modals since they are realized at the periphery.

Note that the modal verbs are in two categories: the free modal auxiliary verbs and the hyphenated modal auxiliary verbs. While the hyphenated modal auxiliary verbs on their own make no meaning unless hyphenated to the main verb, e.g. -*ga*; the free modal auxiliary verbs can stand on their own and still make meaning irrespective of the main verb, as in the case of '*nwe ike'*.

Conclusion

Modality is a notional category that expresses the relation of the utterance to reality as stated by the speaker. In discussing the modality of Awara, we observed that for a complete understanding of the modal system of the dialect, semantics alone is not enough. Context of use must be taken into consideration, that is, the semantic-pragmatic analysis is required. Some of the modals can only be understood when related to context (pragmatically). Four forms for expressing modality in Awara were identified: the modal auxiliary verbs (example *nwe ike*) the hyphenated modal auxiliary verbs (examples ga-, ma-, ka-), the peripherals (example -*kwe me*, *ike kwe*) and the modal suffix (examples -*lifo*,). Modality in Awara could be grouped into the core and the periphrastic. The core modals express the deontic and epistemic modal meaning while the periphrastic modals express only one of the modal meanings. Tone plays a significant role in Awara dialect. We also observe that Awara uses more of high rising tone at the word final position though the high raising tone is not phonemic in the dialect. The rule of vowel harmony is also taken into consideration in the dialect.

Recommendations

1.   We hope that this study will motivate more scholars of Igbo language to undertake an in-depth study of other aspects of the grammar of Awara and related languages.

2.   This work recommends that both Government and Non-Government Agencies should put in effective parameters in place by encouraging language researchers to carry out detailed study in other aspects of the grammar of Awara. Researcher should be encouraged to develop basic teaching aids especially for the primary schools and junior secondary schools. This will aid proper codification and documentation of the dialect.

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