LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 7 : 3 March 2007

PREDICATE COGNATE CONSTRUCTIONS IN UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR

C. U. C. Ugorji, Ph.D.

PREDICATE COGNATE CONSTRUCTIONS IN UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR

C. U. C. Ugorji, Ph.D.

---

0. Preliminaries

The paper provides a description of cognate constructions occurring in grammatical predicates and proposes that such constructions be viewed essentially as semantic not syntactic operations. This position which is endorsed by Chomsky1995, Marantz1995 among others, conceptualises "Language" as comprising "meaning" and "form" (Uwajeh1996, 2002). Our data are drawn from English, Edo and Igbo. Whereas English is spoken as the official language of Nigeria, the latter two are regional and national languages respectively. Edo is a minority language spoken in the western region, and Igbo is one of the most populous ethnolinguistc groups, occupying the east and parts of the Niger-Delta region. Both languages belong to the New Benue-Congo phylum (Williamson and Blench2000).

1.0 Introduction

David Crystal (1980) defines (predicate) COGNATE as a term applied to the description of some kinds of SYNTACTIC RELATIONS: a cognate object is one which has the same historical derivation as the VERB which governs it (or, more loosely) is SEMANTICALLY dependent upon the action of the verb.

For further explications, an examination of "grammatical objects" is needful as such is necessary in providing insight into other concepts such as "syntactic relations," "semantic dependence," and "phonological semblance" which follow later. The grammatical object is realised by as NP (a noun phrase) Brown and Miller (1980:230). This may be characterised by four grammatical features in active declarative constructions, namely, the object directly follows the verb; it is not in construction with a preposition; it can become the subject-matter of the corresponding passive sentence and it is an obligatory constituent with transitive verbs. Brown and Miller further state that the most clear-cut cases of objects are those constituents traditionally referred to as direct objects or affected objects. They, thus, adopt syntactic criteria in defining objects which are themselves semantically specified as "affected objects".

This is apparently what David crystal tries to capture as being "semantically dependent upon the action of the verb"; although his "syntactic relation" betrays a recognition for syntactic criteria, his definition fails to sustain it, as it slips into semantic criteria via a morphological note, not to undermine formal cognacy. "Syntactic relation" may be explained simply as Brown and Miller suggest by a frame, as shown in 1, below:

1. NP ---- NP

This frame is stated in prose in Brown and Miller's first condition, namely, that it directly follows the verb. Consider the following sentences:

2. (a) we shall kill *a goat* (at Christmas)
   (b) we shall sing *a song* (at Christmas)

The italicised elements constitute the predicate nominals (NP)s and comprise the second NP of the frame shown in 1, above. Each of *a goat* and *a song* occurs directly following the verb, 'kill' and 'sing', respectively. Thus, as far as position is concerned, the syntactic criterion is satisfied by both 2(a) and (b), but the semantic criteria rule out *a song* as a direct object since it is not an affected object; that is, affected by the 'action' of the verb. However, it is semantically dependent on the verb, 'sing' and therefore qualifies as a cognate complement of the verb 'sing', completing the action suggested by the verb, 'sing'. Syntactic criteria therefore prove inadequate to account for cognate constructions.

1.2 **Predicate Constructions**

Traditionally, 'predicate' refers to 'a word or a group of words doing or saying something about the subject'. In other words, a 'subject' is the 'topic' of discussion and the predicate is the statement about the topic. Modern linguistics recognizes a predicate phrase to comprise a verb or a verb phrase among other phrases such as nominals and adjectivals (see Allerton1979). An object is then one member of a predicate construction.

Considering examples such as 'sing a song', 'run a race', etc., which Hartman and Stock (1972) suggest, cognate constructions comprise NPs usually morphologically derived from their verb forms or at least seem to be overt reflexes of historical derivations involving particular verbs in relation to particular nouns in the predicates whose morphological features appear 'copied' onto their relevant collocating nouns. We continue with discussions on morphological criteria in section 3.

Brown and Miller (1980) have classified them as 'range' nouns which should not be seen as objects of their verbs. If this is true, as we assume, it is another indication that cognate constructions are issues for semantics not syntactically explained. In summary then, 'predicate cognate constructions' refer to those constructions in the predicate which contain verbal heads whose form and meaning are copied onto their respective (nominal) complements.

2. **Predicate Cognate Constructions: Types**

Using three languages, English, Edo and Igbo, we propose three types: the 'completive' type which occurs in the three languages, the 'semantically bound type' and the verbal type. Consider the following data for English (some were suggested earlier):

3. sing a song
4. run a race

5. die a death
6. dream dreams
7. fight a good fight

They comprise V + NP structure with the form and meaning of the verb copied onto the NP, see earlier comments; and for Brown and Miller (1980) the NPs should not be seen as objects of their verbs but should be seen as merely complementing the sense initiated in their respective verbs. Further more, such NPs cannot become the subjects of their corresponding passive sentences and are not obligatory constituents with their verbs, neither do the constructions in which they occur pass the transitivity tests.

In Edo[1], predicate cognate constructions pattern after the English forms in being 'completive' or (complementary) as they tend to complement the thought suggested in their verbs. They may be grouped into two (see also Omoregbe1996, Ejele1990 and Ugorji2001).

Class1[2]	(8)	gbìnáˊ	ìgbìnà
		Fight	fight
	(9)	rò́ó	irô
		Think	thought
	(10)	xwɛ́	àxwɛ́
		Bathe	bath
	(11)	giɛ́	ògiɛ
		Laugh	laughter
Class11[3]	(12)	gbé	ùgbémɱɛ́
		Dance	dancing
	(13)	tiã́	ùtiamɱɛ́
		Praise	praise/worship
	(14)	dé	ùdémɱɛ́
		Fall	falling

It is observed that the NPs are not obligatory constituents of their predicates as 15, below suggests:

(15) a) Amen gie 'Amen is laughing'
b) Amen gie ogie 'Amen is laughing'

15(a) and (b) do not have different readings apart from pragmatic considerations, which may prefer (b) to (a) to achieve mild emphasis. Notwithstanding whether or not the cognate NPs appear in surface forms, they are understood to be present (cf.Ejele1990, Ugorji2001); and Ota (personal communication) insists, "they are assumed to be there" whether or not the cognate NPs are articulated. We will continue with this in section 3. Thus, the NPs operate as some kind of semantic echoes of the 'actions' suggested by their respective verbs; when not overt, they are understood by native speakers to be there. This is in consonance with Hartman and stock1972, that such are part of a verbal phrase which is required to make it a complete predicate in a sentence.

Both English and Edo exhibit the completive type of predicate cognate constructions. Igbo also has forms, which appear to complement the meanings of their verbs but not quite the same way as it operates in English and Edo (already discussed). The Igbo examples include the following:

(16) bù ábù 'sing song'
(17) gbá òtó 'be naked'
(18) gbá óso 'run race'
(19) lé ùlé 'examine examination'

Like English and Edo, the NPs appear to complement the verbs but unlike them, the NPs are free forms while the verbs cannot stand alone. In fact, they would be either semantically indistinct or completely empty (cf. Emenanjo1978) if isolated. Arising from this, it seems convenient to suggest 'specify' instead of 'complement' for the Igbo constructions above. There are some other cognate forms in this language which show some difference in properties. Consider the following data:

(20) wú èwù 'be in vogue'
(21) dá àdà 'fall'
(22) zá ázá 'be swollen'
(23) chá áchá 'be ripe'
(24) ká áká 'surpass'

These forms constitute indivisible semantic units and the complements are verbal not nominal (Nwachukwu1985). Notice that these forms may not readily permit nominal complement in any predicate structures where they occur; thus:

*wú NP èwù
*wú èwù NP

There is yet another class whose predicates are scarcely cognate, and the forms are usually intransitive. They include *ígbú* 'to kill', *írí* 'to eat', *íkú* 'to beat', etc. These may or not select cognate complements. Consider the following:

(25) a) íri mmadù 'to eat humans'
b) íri anu 'to eat meat'
c) íri nri 'to eat food'

In 25, the verb is perceived by native intuition as 'action' or 'activity' which is directly experienced by the nouns. 25 c) actually involves a cognate predicate and if we allow the general notion that cognate predicates are intransitive to becloud this perception, then we must be in a position to prove that transitivity is not involved in 25 a) and b). Generally, such clouds seem to be cast by problems of translation and one language being viewed through the frame of another in which the analysts may have earlier training. Note also that the syntactic frame, 1, is also satisfied by this type and the nominals are free.

3. Predicate Cognate Constructions and Meaning

Our position in this paper is that linguistic meaning or semantics is essential to the notion of predicate cognate constructions not syntax. We have already tried to define 'predicate' and (cognate) objects. We shall now take up 'meaning' before we commence another bit of our exposition on the core role of semantics to our subject-matter. Stated in precise terms, we refer to meaning simply as 'thought' or 'conception'. Signs or linguistic forms represent 'thoughts'; and 'thoughts' are the thoughts, which the forms call up, and there is nothing in-between the thoughts and the forms (cf. Uwajeh1996, 2002). The relationship is like that of the two sides of a coin; there is nothing in-between. Like Locke's ideational theory and Searle's representational theory, a true theory of semantics is mentalistic; meaning being a mental construct.

From Traditional Grammar to recent times, studies of form classes (parts of speech) are essentially based on a semantic definition as the classification of lexical items is. A 'verb' for instance "expresses an action, state or condition" and a 'noun' is "the name of a person, place or thing" Boadi, et al (1968:19). Though grammar has largely been made to be as it were, a study of forms not of meaning, such form classes defined as semantic types have remained as semantic kinds.

This is not surprising, because the plain fact seems to be that semantics and the study of forms are what a scientific study of language should be concerned with. It seems a common knowledge following Alexandre (1972) that "it is impossible to proceed to a satisfactory analysis before having at least an approximate understanding of the notional or semantic content of a language and of the message to analyse. Without this it is impossible to go beyond the phonic system of the language one is studying."

Thus, language classification and comparative linguistics would be impossible without an ability to ascertain the meanings of forms in given languages; and it is these meanings that help to define the nature of forms and to classify them (into, say, 'nouns', 'verbs', etc.) Similarly, all the concepts that enable the analysis and provide clarity as so far considered in this study are essentially semantically defined. They include 'objects', 'predicates', 'transitivity', and so on. So far syntactic criteria have no impact. We shall return to this.

There is no prejudice against morphology. It may help in identifying forms but does not say much about the exact nature of such forms. Obviously, outward appearance may not properly identity an entity and when it does identify, it may not do so consistently. Take for instance that plurality in English may be marked by 'S', but lexical items with 'S' ending may either be plural nouns (e.g. girls) or singular nouns (e.g. physics) or singular verbs (e.g. makes). Moreover, morphological criteria are non-universal. In Igbo, nouns are generally not marked for plurality, neither are verbs. And in fact, plurality is generally not marked. In Edo, verbs are marked and so on. Therefore, morphology does not contribute much to the analysis of our subject-matter, since the core issues of the exact nature of the component phenomena are not handled by morphology.

The problem with syntactic criteria is already noted. We view that as unsatisfactory because such criteria assume that an item is what it is by virtue of where it occurs. This will be tenable perhaps if an item has only one position in sentences and others collocating with it also have fixed positions. If not, a linguistic entity or unit loses identity. In languages, there are no fixed positions for lexical items. In addition, positions are not universal in language, since all languages do not have same patterning. Some are SVO, subject-verb-object, while others are VSO, SOV, etc.

Finally, it is neither the appearance of a lexical item nor its position that says what it is, though they may help to identify it. It is rather the nature of such an item that assigns it certain form(s) and positions (Uwajeh, personal communication). It is all the more convincing that meaning is very essential to our subject since it is the thought or conception which the form stands for, and for that, it is relatively invariant and proves satisfactory as a criterion both for form classification and for the general analysis of predicate cognate constructions.

Before closing this section, we shall recall our data in section 2 for some emphasis on the role of meaning in our subject-matter: in 'die a death' and 'dream dreams' for examples, both the verb and the noun are free forms essentially defined by semantic criteria as earlier discussed; and we found syntactic criteria inadequate. Like the Edo data, when the phonic parts of the NPs are not realised, they are understood to be there. In other words, speakers' thoughts or meaning are articulated if such constructions include those here referred to as completive NPs, with or without the phonic parts.

Chomksy's Minimalist Program (MP) promises an elegant explanation (Chomsky1992, 1995 and Marantz1995). According to this model, three operations are involved in the 'computational machine', namely 'operation select', 'operation merge' and 'operation move. Since no movement is involved in the structures we are studying, the former two operations account for the derivations: 'operation select' selects the lexical items from the 'lexical resources' of the language into the 'computational machine'[4], the 'working area', and 'operation merge' 'maps' the items as appropriate.

Since all derivations head towards LF, at 'spell out' no branching occurs to make such (NPs) to be phonetically realised, but derivations continue to LF and actually converge (are not ill-formed). See Yuka1998 for more details. Thus, whether we say 'he sang a song' or 'he sang' we are essentially saying the same thing less pragmatic considerations because the thought is complete (with semantic NP) even when the phonic NP (the cognate form) is not actually articulated.

From the above, we see that cognate relations in the predicate are essentially semantic relations (not primarily based on relationship of forms). Similarly, the Igbo verbal complexes examined are not, as syntax and morphology suggest, two units of language but rather, they constitute 'single' thoughts or meaning respectively and are therefore inherently inseparable as shown.

This core position of meaning in the analysis of cognate predicate constructions holds pertinent implications for human language in general. First it proves wrong both the Traditional Grammar and Generative Grammar that held that meaning was peripheral to language, at least at earlier stages (Harris1954, Chomsky1957, etc.). This peripheral position was sustained until the rise of Generative Semantics (Lakoff1965, Katz and Postal 1964, J. Fodor1977). It had proposed a dominance of semantics instead, over and above syntax but have rather a confused picture of meaning in which both meaning and form were inter-convertible. The ideology was nevertheless short-lived because as Newmeyers1980 points out, Chomsky spared nothing fighting it (see Chomsky1970 and 1975).

Our study proves these schools wrong in their view of semantics, but supports de Saussure and later Uwajeh and others who view meaning in a bipartite paradigm, comprising 'form' and 'meaning' (cf. Uwajeh1996, 2002, Dash2004, etc.) The 'form' represents 'meaning' and 'meaning' is the meaning of the form. Thus, any language unit comprises form and meaning and both are not inter-convertible. There are structures of meaning and structures of form and nothing else.

One pertinent question: what happens to the priority of syntax, which Generative Grammar pursued for more than three decades? It seems obviously a misadventure which Chomsky who championed it now tries to atone for. His Minimalist program is a giant stride in this direction. He has already in this model predicted the demise of syntax. According to him, the language faculty is interacting with only two systems: an Articulatory-Perceptual system, A-P (=PF) and a Conceptual-Intentional system, C-I (=LF) Chomsky (1995:390). The edifice of Syntax is already dismantled in this conception; and I suppose that the reason for this agreeably is the ground and justification for the viewpoint of the present study.

Conclusion

It is so far shown that meaning is at the core of predicate cognate constructions in grammar. Following explications of the major terms involved in the grammar of predicates as well as the concepts of grammatical categories and the patterning of items in such constructs, it is made obvious that they are issues for linguistic meaning or semantics and not of syntax. As part of the foregrounding, predicate cognate constructions, defined as those constructions in predicate formations which contain verbal heads whose form and meaning are copied onto their respective (nominal) complements, point to such constructions being semantic types; and 'predicate' is that part of a sentence apart from the subject which carry what the subject says, does or simply the verb phrase (VP) of the sentence.

Also in this line of evidence for meaning are the different manifestations of predicate cognate forms across the three languages so far considered, particularly in suggesting that such formations are semantic units essentially. Generally, this claim is richly endorsed in traditional grammar, implicated in Generative Grammar's use of grammatical categories,

and more interestingly propagated in its later bi-componential conception of the language faculty within its Minimalist Program. This study seems therefore merely to re-echo semantic basis for the definition of form classes from traditional grammar until now as well as assert that a true theory of language putatively is a bipartite one, comprising only form or linguistic signs and thought or meaning.

Notes

1. Similar analysis for Esan, a language Cognate with Edo is documented in Ejele (1990) and similar features are revealed for both languages in Edo State of Nigeria.
2. The motivation for selecting which vowel occurs in each case as a nominal prefix to any particular verb is uncertain except that Omozuwa (personal communication) opines that it may owe to some vowel harmony operations in the historic past whose trace is lost. The tonal patterns of such forms in Edo are discussed elsewhere (Omozuwa1997).
3. Class 11 comprises forms whose NPs are derived from their verbs by affixing a discontinuous morpheme, [u…ɱɛ]. In Esan, the morpheme is [u…mi].
4. If the computational machine fails, the outcome is unstructured which fails to converge at the two interface levels: PF and LF.

References

Alexandre, Pierre (1972) *An Introduction to Languages and Language in Africa*. London: Heinemann Ed. Books.

Allerton, D.J. (1979) *Essentials of Grammatical theory*. London: Routledge and kegan Paul.

Boadi, L.A.; W. Grieve; Bridget Nwankwo (1968). *Grammatical Structure and Its Teaching*. Ibadan: African Universities Press

Brown, E.K.; J.E. Miller (1980). *Syntax: A linguistic Introduction to Sentence Structure*. London: Hutchinson & Co.

Chomsky, Noam (1957). *Syntactic Structures*. The Hague: Mouton

Chomsky, Noam (1965. *Aspects of the theory of Syntax.* Cambridge Mass. MIT Press

Chomsky, Noam (1970). "Remarks on Nominalisation" in R.A.Jacobs and P.S. Rosenbaum (eds.) *Readings in English Transformational Grammar*. Pp184-221

Chomsky, Noam (1992). "A Minimalist Program for Linguistic Theory". *MIT Occasional Papers in Linguistics*.

Chomsky, Noam (1995). "Bare Phrase Structures" in *Government and Binding theory and Minimalist Program*. Gert Webelhuth (ed.) Blackwell Publishers.pp385-468.

Crystal, David (1980). *A First Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. London: Andre Deutsch.

Dash, Anirban (2004) "Bhartrhari: The Father of Indian Semantics" in *Language in India* 4, 4

Ejele, P.E. (1990). "A Case Study of Cognate Relations Between Verbs and Nouns in Esan". A Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria in the University of Calabar, July 29 to August 2, 1990.

Emananjo, Nolue (1978). *Elements of Moderm Igbo Grammar*: Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Fodor, J. (1977). *Semantics: Theories for Meaning in Generative Grammar*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press

Harris, Zellig (1954). "Transfer Grammar" in *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 20:259-270

Hartman, R.R.K.; F.C. Stork (1972). *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*. England: Applied science Publishers.

Katz, J.J.; P.M. Postal (1964). *An Integrated Theory of Linguistic Descriptions*. Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press

Marantz, Alec (1995). "The Minimalist Program" in *Government and Binding Theory and Minimalist Program.* Gert Webelhuth (ed.) Blackwell Publishers.pp.351-381.

Newmeyer, F.J (1980). *Linguistic Theory in America*. New York: Academic Press

Nwachukwu, P.A (1985). "Inherent Complement Verbs in Igbo" in JOLAN. 3:61-74.

Omoregbe, Esohe M (1996) "Cognate Verbs and Cognate Nouns in Edo" in EJOLLS. 8:53-66.

Omozuwa, V.E. (1997) "Vowel Elision and Tones in Edo CV#VCV(CV) Constructions" in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 53:113-121.

Ugorji, C.U.C. (2001) "Cognate Constructions in Edo" in JONLAC. 2:12-18

Uwajeh, M.K.C. (1996). "Literal Meaning in Performative Translatology" in *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*. 4,2:189-201.

Uwajeh, M.K.C.(2002) *Beyond Generative Grammar: A Course in Performative*

Linguistics. Ibadan: Spectrum Books

Yuka, Constantine. (1998) "The Lamso! Noun Class System and the Chomskyan Computational Machine". Seminar Paper: Department of Linguistics, University of Ibadan.

C. U. C. Ugorji, Ph.D.
School of English
(Instytut Filologii Angielskiej)
Adam Mickiewicz University
al. Niepodległości 4
61-874 Poznań,
Poland
ugorji@ifa.amu.edu.pl