

Suffix Variations in Verbal Constructions of Dialects in Oyi Local Government Area, Anambra State

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Abstract:

This study investigates the linguistic landscape of Oyi Local Government Area in Anambra State, Nigeria, focusing on suffix variations in verbal constructions across its diverse dialects. The research documents and analyzes how suffixes are used in past tense, future tense, perfective aspect, and negation constructions in the dialects spoken in Awkuzu, Nteje, Ogbunike, Nkwelle Ezunaka, and Umunya. A descriptive and comparative linguistic approach was employed, involving fieldwork and structured interviews with native speakers from these towns. The data collected were transcribed and analyzed using phonological and morphological frameworks to identify patterns and variations. Through a detailed analysis, it was found that past tense constructions generally featured a common prefix and root verb across most towns, with Umunya notably employing a distinct suffix pattern. Future tense constructions relied heavily on auxiliary verbs, with towns like Awkuzu and Ogbunike using 'ga-' while Nkwelle Ezunaka utilized 'na-'. In perfective constructions, a consistent suffix was observed, but root verbs and immediate suffixes varied slightly, as seen with Nkwelle Ezunaka's use of 'je-ve' compared to others using 'je-be'. Negation constructions revealed the most diversity, with Awkuzu and Nteje using the standard suffix '-ghi', while Umunya, Ogbunike, and Nkwelle Ezunaka employed distinct negation markers like '-ra', '-rɔ', and '-zi', respectively. These findings highlight the rich linguistic diversity within the region and underscore the importance of documenting and preserving these dialectal variations.

Keywords:

Suffix; variation; morphology

I. Introduction

The linguistic landscape of Oyi Local Government Area in Anambra State is characterized by a rich tapestry of dialects, each with its unique suffix variations in different tenses. This linguistic diversity offers a captivating opportunity to delve into the intricate nuances of language structure and evolution within a specific geographical area. The research aims to meticulously document and analyze the suffix variations employed across different tenses in the diverse dialects of Oyi Local Government Area. By doing so, it seeks to uncover the underlying linguistic patterns and cultural significance embedded within these variations. Furthermore, the study aspires to contribute to the broader understanding of linguistic diversity and language evolution, with potential implications for language preservation and revitalization efforts within the region. To provide a comprehensive overview of the topic, this study draws upon the influential works of esteemed authors in the field of linguistics and cultural studies. Notable scholars such as Chomsky (2002), renowned for his groundbreaking contributions to the field of generative grammar and language acquisition, as cited in Wardhaugh (2015), Labov, a prominent figure in the study of sociolinguistics and language variation, de Saussure (1916), known for his seminal work in structural linguistics, as cited in Saville-Troike, M. (2003), Hymes, (1972) a key figure in

the development of ethnography of communication, and Tannen (1994), recognized for her research on language and gender, have all made significant contributions to the study of language structure, variation, and sociolinguistics. Their collective body of work provides a robust foundation for understanding the complexities of language variation and the cultural significance embedded within linguistic structures, serving as a valuable resource for this in-depth exploration of dialectal nuances and linguistic diversity within Oyi Local Government Area. The study of suffix variations in verbal constructions of dialects in Oyi Local Government Area, Anambra State holds significant importance in the field of linguistics and cultural studies. This region is known for its rich linguistic diversity, with numerous dialects in a relatively small area. The purpose of this study is to explore and document the variations in suffixes used in different verbal constructions across these dialects, shedding light on the unique linguistic characteristics of the area. This research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of linguistic diversity and language evolution, with potential implications for language preservation and revitalization efforts. This study seeks to provide valuable insights for linguists, anthropologists, and language educators by delving into the specific nuances of suffix usage in various dialects. Furthermore, Nwaozuzu (2017) and Ikekonwu (1987) have also done extensive justice in the classification of Igbo dialects based on their phonemes which suffixes are inclusive. Their works serve as a springboard for other research carried out on dialects.

In the context of suffix variation in the tenses of dialects in the Oyi local government area of Anambra State, the term "suffix" refers to the final phonological segment or sequence of segments attached to a word stem, serving as a marker of grammatical categories. Ballard (2001:51) defines a suffix as "an affix added to the end of a word". Essentially, a suffix alters the meaning of a word. Take the word "enjoyment" for example - "enjoy" is the root and "ment" is the suffix attached to it. Suffixes come in various forms, including vowel harmony and glide formation. These phonological rules are evident in multiple dialects, including those spoken in towns such as Nteje, Awkuzu, Ogbunike, Nkwelle Ezunaka, and Umunya, all situated within the Oyi Local Government Area in Anambra State. These dialects mentioned are classified under the same group, East Niger Group of Dialects (ENGD) in Nwaozuzu (2017) and Inland West Igbo in Ikekonwu (1987). The work was aimed at identifying the affixes variations between the aforementioned dialects of Igbo within the lens of past tense construction, future tense construction, perfective construction, and negative construction, which are all under the umbrella of inflectional morphology, a sub-group of the Igboid cluster of languages, which is part of the broader Benue-Congo family. Recognizing the importance of preserving and studying minor languages in Nigeria, particularly given its vast linguistic diversity comprising approximately three hundred minority languages, the Anambra State Language Development Project has advocated for research initiatives. It emphasizes the significance of understanding and promoting all languages equally, considering their socio-political, religious, and cultural relevance within their respective communities. Such endeavours are crucial for fostering inclusivity and safeguarding linguistic heritage.

II. Review of Literature

The Oyi Local Government Area (LGA) is situated in the northern part of Anambra State, within the southeastern region of Nigeria. The geographic coordinates of Oyi LGA are Latitude 6° 10' 0" N and Longitude 7° 6' 0" E. This area shares its boundaries with Ayamelum, Onitsha North, Onitsha South, and Ogbaru LGAs within Anambra State. The population of Oyi LGA is estimated to be around 239,700 based on the last census conducted in 2022, with the majority being of Igbo ethnic descent. The primary language spoken in the area is Igbo, which reflects the linguistic diversity within the region, including various dialects. Additionally, there

might be other minority languages spoken by smaller ethnic groups or communities within the LGA. Oyi LGA has a rich cultural heritage, with various festivals, rituals, and traditional practices celebrated by its residents. The area is also home to historical landmarks, traditional institutions, and cultural sites that hold significance for the local communities. In terms of socioeconomic activities, agriculture is a major economic driver in Oyi LGA, with fertile land supporting the cultivation of crops such as yam, cassava, maize, and vegetables. Trade and commerce also play a significant role in the local economy, with markets serving as important centers of economic activity and social interaction.

While specific studies might not focus solely on the Oyi dialects, several works on Igbo phonology and morphology can provide valuable insights into linguistic features that may apply to the dialects spoken in Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State. The diverse population, rich cultural heritage, and significant contributions to the socioeconomic development of the state and the region as a whole make Oyi LGA a noteworthy area within Anambra State, Nigeria. Moving on to the discussion on phonological and morphological features of the Igbo language, phonology is the branch of linguistics that studies the sound system and the ways we can uncover the underlying systems governing speech. The study of phonology aims to understand and describe how a sequence of sounds can convey meaning, and this cannot be done without considering the presence of tone in a tonal language like Igbo. Morphology, on the other hand, deals with the structure of words and how they are formed. In Igbo, like many other languages, morphology plays a crucial role in conveying meaning. For example, Igbo is known for its extensive use of prefixes, suffixes, and infixes to indicate tense, aspect, mood, and other grammatical categories. Understanding the morphological features of Igbo is essential for grasping the intricacies of the language and its rich linguistic heritage and this cannot take place in the absence of tone because Igbo language is a registered tone language.

The Igbo language is recognized as a tonal language, where pitch differences on syllables are essential in distinguishing between words and meanings. Tone plays a critical role in both lexical and grammatical functions within the language (Mbah & Mbah, 2022). In Igbo, variations in tone can change the meaning of a word, similar to how different consonants or vowels can change meaning in non-tonal languages. Generally, Igbo is known to have three tones: high, low, and downstep. Another aspect of inquiry in Igbo phonology is the patterns of tones within words and across utterances. Research examines how tones interact with each other and how they are distributed within syllables, morphemes, and words. This analysis helps to comprehend the organized nature of tone in Igbo and its impact on word formation and sentence structure. Igbo, as in many tonal languages, has specific rules governing how tones change or interact when words are spoken in succession. Tone phenomena may involve tone assimilation, tone spreading, or other tonal processes that occur at morpheme or word boundaries. Certainly, prosodic features cannot be discussed in the absence of sounds or phonemes. Every language consists of consonants and vowels. Nwachukwu (1990) opines that in Igbo, the vowel inventory typically consists of five basic vowel phonemes: /i/, /e/, /a/, /o/, and /u/. According to Emenanjo (2015), the Igbo vowel system consists of seven vowel phonemes: /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /a/, /ɔ/, /o/, and /u/. This classification is widely accepted and reflects the basic vowel contrasts in the language. Emenanjo's analysis is foundational in the study of Igbo phonology, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the sound system of the language. However, Okolo (2001) offers a slightly different perspective, suggesting that the Igbo vowel inventory includes a different set of seven vowel phonemes: /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /o/, and /u/. On the other hand, according to Anagbogu, Mbah, and Eme (2010, p.114), the Igbo language consists of eight vowels, which are /ɪ a ɔ ʊ i e o u/. This variation highlights the complexities and regional variations within the Igbo language, as different dialects may exhibit slight differences in vowel

pronunciation. These vowel phonemes are represented in different tongue positions and mouth shapes, resulting in distinct vowel sounds when produced. There is also a rule guiding the usage of these vowels in word formation known as vowel harmony. It is a phonological process whereby vowels within a word tend to share certain phonetic features such as frontness, backness, roundedness or Advanced Tongue Root which can be grouped as –ATR or + ATR. In Igbo, vowel harmony may occur in certain morphological contexts, where vowels within a word harmonize or assimilate with each other in terms of their tongue position or other phonetic characteristics. For example, certain verb suffixes in Igbo may trigger vowel harmony, leading to changes in the quality of the vowel sounds to maintain phonetic harmony within the word. In Igbo, the verb "kwụ" (to die/suicide) changes to "kwụrụ" in the perfective aspect due to vowel harmony triggered by the suffix. In Igbo, vowel reduction processes may occur in certain phonological environments, such as unstressed syllables or in rapid speech, leading to changes in the articulation of vowel sounds. In Igbo, the vowel /a/ can be reduced to a schwa /ə/ in certain unstressed syllables. For example, the Igbo word "nna" (father) is pronounced as "nə" when the first syllable is unstressed. This reduction in vowel quality helps to maintain rhythmic patterns in the language and optimize articulatory effort during speech production. The concept of consonant inventory pertains to the collection of consonant sounds utilized within a language. Dialectal variations often result in differences in consonant inventory, as explained by Trudgill (2004) in his exploration of consonantal changes in dialects. In Igbo, there exists a diverse consonant inventory comprising stops, fricatives, nasals, approximants, and laterals, each representing distinct places and manners of articulation. Allophonic variation refers to the phenomenon whereby a single phoneme can manifest as different allophones, or variants, depending on its phonetic context. It can bring about difference in meaning depending on the language or dialect under study. For example, the pronunciation of the Igbo alveolar stops /t/ and /d/ may vary depending on whether they occur in word-initial, intervocalic, or word-final positions. Furthermore, consonant clusters refer to sequences of two or more consonant sounds occurring within a single syllable. These clusters can occur at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. However, research on Igbo consonant clusters examines the patterns of permissible consonant combinations and the phonotactic constraints governing their occurrence. In Igbo, certain consonant clusters may be more common or preferred, while others may be restricted or prohibited based on the language's phonological rules and constraints. The study of a language is complex and interconnected. Therefore, it is important to thoroughly understand all related aspects before delving into the main subject, which in this case is morphology. Morphology is the central focus of the study.

In the field of linguistics, morphology is considered the third level of study, focusing on the internal structure of words and the formation of complex words through the combination of morphemes. Aronoff and Fudeman (2022) define morphology as the study of how these smallest meaning-bearing units of language come together to form words, and how these structures interact with other linguistic aspects such as syntax and phonology. Lieber (2019) further elaborates on morphology as a subfield of linguistics that investigates the rules and processes involved in word formation, including inflectional and derivational processes. These processes modify and create words to fit grammatical contexts and lead to the formation of new words. According to Anagbogu, Mbah, and Eme (2010), morphology delves into the organization of morphemes to create words and examines the varying processes of word formation across different dialects, consequently influencing vocabulary and word structure. In the context of the Oyi dialects of the Igbo language spoken in Nigeria, these word formation processes may display unique characteristics compared to the standard Igbo language. According to Brinton and Brinton (2010), word formation processes include derivation and compounding. However, Anagbogu, Mbah & Eme (2010) suggest it can be divided into two types: inflectional and

derivational. Inflectional morphology describes predictable changes in a word due to syntax, without affecting the word's lexical category. For example, the word "sing" remains a verb in both "sing" and "singing." On the other hand, derivational morphology explores how words are formed from morphemes. Traditionally, it is believed that when a word is derived from another word, its lexical category changes. For instance, "darkness" (noun) is derived from "dark" (adjective), and "develop" (verb) is derived from "development" (noun). However, in some cases, the derived word retains its original lexical category, for example, "happy" (adjective) is derived from "unhappy" (adjective). Aikhenvald (2007) provides an extensive examination of how dialectal variations manifest in different linguistic features, such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar in various dialects of a language. This includes the variation in inflectional morphology, specifically in the forms and usage of inflectional affixes and grammatical markers. For example, differences in the conjugation of verbs to indicate past tense can be observed across dialects, where each dialect may employ different suffixes or distinct morphological processes. In the context of English, the variation in the plural form of "you" serves as a notable illustration. While Standard English uses "you" for both singular and plural, some dialects employ "y'all" or "youse" to distinguish between singular and plural forms, thus indicating a dialectal variation in the grammar and vocabulary of different English dialects. Dialectal variation in morphology is a significant area of study as it offers insights into how linguistic elements like affixes and grammatical markers are adapted to local contexts within different communities. Ongoing research investigates the impact of these variations on language processing, acquisition, and evolutionary changes (Bauer & Trudgill, 2021). Recent studies underscore how dialectal variations in morphology, including the use of different inflectional suffixes and markers, can signify broader patterns of linguistic change and contact between language varieties. Moreover, these variations often function as markers of regional or social identity (Hickey, 2020). The diverse nature of inflectional morphology across dialects, particularly in the use of past tense markers or plural forms, emphasizes the dynamic evolution of language and its adaptation to varying social and communicative needs (Chambers & Schilling, 2019).

The study of tense and aspect in the Igbo language has been a subject of significant scholarly interest, particularly concerning how these grammatical categories are represented in both Standard Igbo and its various dialects. Researchers have approached this topic from different perspectives, analyzing the types and functions of tenses, as well as the distinctions between tense and aspect in Igbo. Nwanze (1991) provides a foundational classification of tenses in Standard Igbo, identifying three primary tenses: present, past, and future. This tripartite division serves as a basic framework for understanding temporal reference in Igbo, yet further studies have revealed more complexity in the language's tense system. Ikegwuonu (2011) focused on the analysis of the present and past tenses in Igbo, contributing to a deeper understanding of how these tenses function within the language's grammatical structure. Nweze's (2009) research on the Ìmìlikè dialect introduced additional nuance by identifying four types of tenses in both Standard Igbo and the Ìmìlikè dialect: progressive, past, future, and unfulfilled tenses. This work underscores the variability of tense across different dialects of Igbo, suggesting that dialectal variations can lead to a richer and more differentiated tense system than what is observed in the standard language. Egwim (2008) reinforces this idea by emphasizing the existence of three tenses in the Igbo language: future, past, and unfulfilled tenses. This perspective aligns with Uwalaka's (1997) assertion that the Igbo language also includes a pluperfect tense in addition to the more commonly recognized present and past tenses. Uwalaka's work expands the temporal landscape of Igbo, highlighting the complexity of expressing time in the language. A significant contribution to the understanding of Igbo verbal systems comes from Emenanjo (1987), who argued that in Igbo, it is the aspect rather than tense that plays a more critical role in conveying temporal meaning. According to Emenanjo, the Igbo language emphasizes duration rather than

absolute time reference, making aspect a more appropriate category for analyzing Igbo verbs. He observed that the distinction between tense and aspect in Igbo is subtle, with many structures relying more heavily on aspectual forms. This observation has profound implications for how linguists categorize and analyze Igbo verbs, suggesting that many cases previously identified as tense-related may actually pertain to aspectual distinctions. In addition, dialectal variation in Igbo further complicates the picture of tense and aspect. Aikhenvald (2007) notes that historical factors such as sound shifts, lexical borrowings, and language contact can lead to divergent paths of inflectional development across different dialects. Social factors like geographic isolation, cultural practices, and social stratification also contribute to these variations. Oha (2004) argues for the necessity of an in-depth dialectical study of Igbo, emphasizing that the current Standard Igbo is lexically and grammatically inadequate in fully addressing the expressive needs of Igbo speakers and writers. According to Nđimele (1992), understanding the full scope of the Igbo language requires studying individual dialects to uncover their unique features and how they relate to the standard language. Given these observations, the importance of dialectal studies becomes clear. As Oha (2004) and Nđimele (1992) suggest, the peculiarities of each dialect must be explored to set the parameters of the entire language. This approach not only enriches our understanding of Igbo as a whole but also ensures that the language's diverse dialects are adequately represented and preserved.

2.1 Suffix variations in verbal constructions of dialects in Oyi Local Government Area, Anambra State

In Igbo, a language predominantly spoken in Nigeria, the role of suffixes in verbal variation is central to expressing a wide array of grammatical features. Verbs in Igbo are often inflected with suffixes to denote tense, aspect, mood, and agreement, allowing for nuanced and precise communication. Understanding these suffixes is critical for both conversational fluency and effective written communication in Igbo. Tense and aspect are key elements of suffix verbal variation in Igbo. Recent studies have expanded on how these grammatical features are marked by specific suffixes. For instance, tense in Igbo is indicated by suffixes that denote past, present, and future time frames. Emenanjo (2015) discusses the complexity of these tense markers, noting that certain suffixes are used specifically to indicate perfective and imperfective aspects, which further refine the temporal and aspectual meaning of verbs. This level of specificity allows speakers to convey not just when an action occurs, but also its nature whether it is ongoing, completed, or habitual (Uwalaka, 2018). Mood in Igbo is another area where suffixes play a crucial role. According to Mbah and Mbah (2020), mood suffixes in Igbo verbs express the speaker's attitude towards the action, such as certainty, possibility, or necessity. These mood markers are integral to the formation of conditional and imperative statements. Additionally, agreement in Igbo verbs is achieved through suffixes that align with the subject or object in terms of person, number, and sometimes gender (Ezenwafor & Okeke, 2019). This agreement system ensures that verbs are correctly inflected to match the grammatical characteristics of the associated nouns or pronouns. Negation in Igbo can also be conveyed through specific suffixes attached to the verb. Recent linguistic research highlights how these negation suffixes vary across different dialects of Igbo. For example, Nwachukwu (2021) points out that while Standard Igbo typically uses the suffix '-ghi' for negation, several dialects employ alternative forms, reflecting the rich diversity within the language. Dialectal variation is a significant aspect of Igbo morphology, particularly in how past tense is marked. The study by Okafor and Ejiofor (2016) provides a detailed analysis of affixes in the Idemili and Onicha dialects of Igbo, emphasizing the regional morphological variations and the unique affixation patterns observed in each dialect. In Idemili, a range of affixes is used to mark tense, aspect, and mood in verb constructions. For instance, the past tense is often indicated by the suffix '-la,' while the future tense is marked by '-ga.' Additionally, variations in aspectual suffixes, such as '-na' for ongoing actions and '-ri' for

completed actions, are highlighted. On the other hand, the Onicha dialect employs different affixes, such as ‘-nma’ for past tense and ‘-buru’ for future tense. Aspectual distinctions in Onicha use suffixes like ‘-de’ for progressive aspect and ‘-ma’ for habitual actions. Uzochukwu (2020) provides an in-depth analysis of these variations, noting that dialects may use different suffixes such as ‘-la’ or ‘-na’ to indicate past tense, depending on historical and phonological influences. This diversity underscores the importance of understanding regional differences in Igbo verb morphology, as these variations can significantly impact communication and comprehension within the Igbo-speaking community. A thorough understanding of suffix verbal variation in Igbo is essential for mastery of the language. By comprehending how suffixes function to express tense, aspect, mood, agreement, and negation, speakers can communicate more effectively and accurately in diverse contexts. The study of dialectal variations further enriches this understanding, providing insights into the linguistic and cultural diversity that characterizes the Igbo language.

2.2 Analyzing the suffix variations in the dialects of the Oyi Local Government Area in Anambra State

Table 1. Oyi Local Government Area

Town	Perfective marker	Negation marker	Past tense marker	Future tense marker
Awkuzu	Ngozi ejebego avĩa	Ngozi ejebeghi avĩa	Ngozi ejela avĩa	Ngozi ga-eje avĩa
Nteje	Ngozi ejebego avĩa	Ngozi agabeghi avĩa	Ngozi ejela avĩa	Ngozi ga-aga avĩa
Umunya	Ngozi agago afĩa	Ngozi agara afĩa	Ngozi gara afĩa	Ngozi ka ga-aga afĩa
Ogbunike	Ngozi ejebego afĩa	Ngozi ejerọ afĩa	Ngozi ejego afĩa	Ngozi ga-eje afĩa
Nkwelle Ezunaka	Ngozi ejevego avĩa	Ngozi ejezi avĩa	Ngozi ejego avĩa	Ngozi na-aga avĩa

2.3 Perfective Construction

In Igbo, the perfective aspect is commonly marked by adding specific suffixes to the verb root. These suffixes typically indicate that an action has been completed. A frequently used perfective suffix in many Igbo dialects is ‘-la’ or ‘-ra’ depending on the verb root and phonological context. Contrary to the above statement, all the towns that constitute Oyi local government use the same suffix ‘-go’ to mark the perfective aspect. There is variation in their root verbs as well as their immediate suffixes. For instance, Awkuzu, Nteje, Ogbunike, and Nkwelle Ezunaka have the same verb root ‘je-’; however, Nkwelle Ezunaka varies in the immediate suffix after the verb root by using ‘-ve’ instead of ‘-be’ like the other three towns. Finally, Umunya uses ‘-ga’ as its verb root and no immediate suffix before the perfective aspect marker. It's important to note that there is variation in perfective aspect among the towns that constitute the Oyi local government area of Anambra State, however, there are verb roots variations and this shows the rich diversity of the Igbo language and its verb morphology. This variation may be influenced by historical, cultural, or linguistic factors specific to each town. The influence of vowel harmony, a visible phenomenon, and the lack of consonant assimilation, which cannot be observed from the collected data, significantly affects the application of perfective suffixes. This demonstrates the complex nature of Igbo verb morphology and

highlights the significance of taking into account the phonological environment in linguistic analysis.

2.4 Negation Construction

In Igbo, negation is often marked by specific suffixes attached to the verb root. The most common negative suffix is ‘-ghi’ which is used to negate the verb. This suffix is typically placed after the verb stem and interacts with the tonal structure of the verb. The application of negative suffixes can vary depending on the tense and aspect being negated. For example, negating a perfective action may involve different morphological patterns than negating an imperfective or future action. Different Igbo dialects may use various suffixes or combine them with other morphological markers to express negation. In the case of the dialects of towns in Oyi local government of Anambra state, Awkuzu and Nteje use the same negation marker ‘-ghi’ as it is in standard Igbo; however, their root verb varies. Umunya uses ‘-ra’ to mark negation, and has the root verb with Nteje. Then, Ogbunike marks negation with ‘-rɔ’ while Nkwelle Ezunaka marks with ‘-zi’. One visible fact about both towns is that they share the same root verb with Awkuzu. From the negation construction used in this analysis, it is obvious they are all past tense constructions being negated.

2.5 Past tense constructions

In Igbo, past tense is often marked by the addition of specific suffixes to the verb root. These suffixes may vary depending on the verb class and the dialect of Igbo being spoken. Common suffixes include -rV (where "V" represents a vowel), which attaches to the verb stem to signal a past action. Different Igbo dialects may use distinct suffixes or combine suffixes with tonal changes differently to indicate past tense. However, in the study of Oyi dialects of Igbo, the concentration is just on the suffix. From the above table, we would observe that all the towns that comprise of Oyi local government area have the same prefix ‘e-’ and root verb ‘je’ except Umunya which has no prefix at all and its root verb is ‘ga’. Also, Awkuzu and Nteje use the suffix ‘-la’ to mark past tense while Ogbunike and Nkwelle Ezunaka use the suffix ‘-go’ to mark their past tense. On the other hand, Umunya uses the standard Igbo pattern -rV ‘ra’ to mark its past tense.

2.6 Future Tense Construction

In many cases, the future tense in Igbo is not primarily marked by suffixation but by the use of auxiliary verbs. This fact is visible in all the dialects of Oyi local government, however, their auxiliary verb remains peculiar. For instance, Awkuzu, Nteje, Umunya and Ogbunike use the same auxiliary verb ‘ga-’ which is similar to that of the standard Igbo for marking future tense except for Umunya which has ‘ka’ before the auxiliary verb ‘ga-’. Conversely, Nkwelle Ezunaka remains distinctively different from the abovementioned towns. It uses the auxiliary verb ‘na-’ instead. Furthermore, another visible variation that exist in their future tense marker is differences in their root verb. For instance, Awkuzu and Ogbunike use the same root verb ‘-ga’ alongside a prefix ‘a’ while Nteje, Umunya and Nkwelle Ezunaka use the root verb ‘-je’ alongside the prefix ‘e’. The choice of the prefix is based on the rule of vowel harmony in the Igbo language.

III. Result and Discussion

In Igbo, a language predominantly spoken in Nigeria, suffixes play a central role in expressing a wide array of grammatical features such as tense, aspect and negation. These suffixes enable nuanced and precise communication, essential for both spoken and written Igbo. Recent analyses reveal that specific suffixes mark tense and aspect in Igbo. For instance, the past

tense is commonly marked by suffixes like ‘-rV’ (where ‘V’ represents a vowel), while the perfective aspect often uses suffixes like ‘-la’ or ‘-ra.’ The dialectal analysis within Oyi Local Government Area of Anambra State shows that while towns like Awkuzu and Nteje use ‘-la’ for the past tense, others like Ogbunike and Nkwelle Ezunaka use ‘-go.’ This indicates a significant variation in suffix usage across different dialects. On the other hand, negation in Igbo is marked by the suffix ‘-ghi,’ although dialectal variations exist. For example, while towns like Awkuzu and Nteje use ‘-ghi,’ Umunya employs ‘-ra,’ and Ogbunike uses ‘-rQ’ to negate verbs. These variations highlight the diversity within the language. In the perfective aspect, suffixes like ‘-la’ or ‘-ra’ are common, but the towns in Oyi Local Government Area show a unique pattern where some use the suffix ‘-go.’ This variation, along with differences in verb roots and immediate suffixes, underscores the richness of Igbo verb morphology. Finally, the future tense in Igbo is often marked by auxiliary verbs, the analysis shows dialectal differences in the auxiliary verbs used. For instance, Nkwelle Ezunaka uses ‘na-’ while other towns use ‘ga-,’ revealing another layer of linguistic diversity. These findings illustrate the significant variation in how Igbo suffixes are used across different dialects, particularly in the marking of tense, aspect, and negation. Understanding these suffixes and their variations is essential for mastering Igbo and appreciating its linguistic diversity.

IV. Conclusion

The analysis of suffix-based verbal variation in Igbo sheds light on the complex and varied nature of the language's morphology. Suffixes play a pivotal role in conveying tense, aspect, and negation, therefore serving as essential components for effective communication. The examination of dialectal variations within Oyi Local Government Area underscores the profound linguistic diversity present in Igbo, showcasing how diverse communities have crafted distinct morphological patterns influenced by historical, cultural, and phonological elements. This diversity not only enhances the language but also offers profound insights into its underlying structure. A comprehensive grasp of these suffixes and their variations is indispensable for mastering Igbo and gaining a profound appreciation for its cultural and linguistic heritage.

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