Morph Syntactic 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.
Key words: Verb Inflections, Verb Root, Infinity, Focus, Subject Agreement, Object Agreement

1.0 Introduction

Igikuria is in group 40 together with Ekegusii, Logooli(Kenya) Zamaki (Tanzania). Luhya(Kenya) Guthrie (1967:48). Abakuria live both in Kenya and Tanzania. In Kenya they live in kuria district and in Tanzania they live in both Mara and Musoma districts.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. 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 Omondi (2008), it's important to this study because it's a Bantu language and therefore offers insights to Igikuria language which is also closer to Ekegusii in terms of regionalism as they are neighbors.One must rely on lexical specification of nominal elements, combined grammatical factors such as constituent structure as well as functional systematic structure (Mugane (1998). 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 the study because it's a Bantu language and also delves into issue of agreement an element under study in Igikuria language.Kanyoro(1983 investigates Abaluhya dialect- providing morph-syntactic description on the structure of the Luhya language in terms general syntactic structure using the standard theory framework. 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.Igonga (1991) carries out a synchronic comparative analysis of the phonological, lexical, and morpho-syntactic aspects of Ekegusii, Lulogooli and Lwitakho.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 Kikamba 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 bases its analysis within the Minimalist framework. Data on feature-checking for agreement during movement is used.

2.0. Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework is a general set of assumptions about the nature of phenomena. To understand theoretical framework, an analysis of theories has to be made. For this study, theoretical frame work is The Minimalist Program.

The Minimalist Program is built on the theory of principles and parameters which in a nutshell is principle of economy in derivation and representation. Movement is directed by the interacting principle of economy, the Minimal link conditions, the principle of procrastinate and Greed.

The Minimal link condition states that movement is only possible into the nearest only position. Procrastinate makes sure that movement only takes place if there is need for it and if it is licensed by any morpho syntactic or lexical evidence from the language. Additionally, the Last Resort principle guarantees that a short movement is preferred over a longer one. Related to it, is the Greed Principle, which is some sort of self-serving Last Resort. It ensures that movement is only possible if the requirements for movement of the element are satisfied in terms of spell-out and convergence (Chomsky 1995:200) these principles have possibilities for variation called parameters. In other words languages vary in the parametric values they select for each parameter in question. Minimalist program can be summarized as syntactic representation that minimizes levels of representation and adopts a justified structure. This theory is appropriate for my study because Igikuria language is agglutinative and has strong morphology.

3.0. Research methodology

This study uses analytical research design which uses facts or information already available and analyses these to make critical evaluation of the material data .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.

 This study uses purposive sampling as a method whereby the researcher purposively 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.

4.0 Findings discussions and analysis
4.1.0 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.

4.1.1 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 -u*ku* 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)

4.1.2 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
         1pp – 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'

Table I: Summary of the Igikuria subject – agreement:

Person	Number	Morpheme marker
1st	Singular	ko
1st	Plural	to-
2nd	Singular	ta-
2nd	Plural	mo-
3rd	singular	a-
3rd	Plural	ba-

The subject markers are obligatory in the sentence structure; they appear before the verb root hence considered prefixes of the verb roots.

4.1.3 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).   ta-n-rog-er-a
>   Foc- 2pp –Ipo – cook – BEN –fv
>   'You cook for me'
> 11b).   n-ko- to- rog- er- a
>   Foc- Ips –2pso- 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-1pS - 3pso – cook – BEN – fv
>   'I cook for him/her'

Table II: Summary of object agreement markers

Person	Number	Morpheme marker
1st	Singular	n-
1st	Plural	to-
2nd	Singular	ko-
2nd	Plural	ba-
3rd	Singular	mo-
3rd	plural	ba-

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.

4.1.4 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

               N – 2ps-cook – Asp – fv

            'You (s) did not cook'

The negator can follow the subject marker as shown below.

12b).   mo-ta – rug-ir-e

             2pp-N– cook – Asp – fv

            'You (p) did not cook'

In the case below the negator 'ta' comes after the subject

    12c).   ta-ta – rug-ir-e

             3ps- N – cook – Asp – fv

            'He did not cook'

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.

4.1.5 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
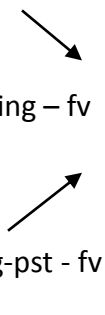   'John did eat'

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.

4.1.6 Questions

The Igikuria language uses intonation to bring out the questions from statements. The statements have a falling intonation(whereby the first syllables are articulated louder as the last syllables are articulated on a low voice) which when changed to rising intonation(whereby 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.

4.1.7 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 ǹ-à- rè-eỳ- e
                 John foc –agr-p.tns- eat – fv
                 'John ate'   (recent past).

        15b).   John ń-a – ŕe –́ey –́e
                 John foc –agr-p.tns- eat – fv
                 'John ate' (distant past)

The lexical tone is the tone realized on the lexeme or the word morpheme, when the tone on particular words change the grammatical function of the structure, then its referred to as grammatical tone, in the case a above the Igikuria can be described as having grammatical tone because, the low tone in the first sentence gives it a recent past tense and when the tone changes to high on the same sentence then it acquires a distant past tense as shown on the sentence above.

Conclusion

The Igikuria verb structure has verb roots that are incomprehensible unless accompanied by the final vowel which changes according to the mood, the infinity is also marked. Igikuria language has subject marker, the object markers, negations, focus, 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, tense, and aspect. The verb has a final vowel *–a* which can change its form to *–e* depending on the type of tense used. It is also noted that the *–re-* morpheme determines the type of tense. Auxiliary verbs inflected on the verb play a key role in marking aspect. Affixations used on the verb root have specific roles to play. Igikuria makes use of subject morpheme markers which are prefixed as a morpheme for number whether

singular or plural. Igikuria use infinitive forms *–uku* and *ugu-* in the same slot as that of the subject marker.   It is also noted that the verb can accommodate negation marker which include *te* the underlying form which can be realized as *ta* in other forms. Negation markers are used as part of the verb. The subject marker is inflected on the verb and it incorporates person and number. The verb also inflects for focus marked by *n-*.The language also makes use of tone whereby low tone on syllables indicate recent past tense while high tone brings out distant past tense. The falling intonation brings out statements while rising intonation creates questions. The verb is important in Igikuria because other elements depend on it and any inflections on it that meet the PFI make a sentence construction grammatical.

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