

The Conditional Clause in Igbo

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Abstract

It is a well established fact that no two linguistic codes are ever the same in their sound systems, morphology, syntax, meaning mechanisms, and so on. When two such languages co-exist in a contact situation – with all the far-reaching implications of this – the need arises to conduct a methodic contrastive study of selected aspects of the two languages to discover their linguistic similarities and differences and thereby give an insight into the implications of such similarities and differences for teaching and learning purposes. In line with this, we restrict ourselves in this paper to the grammar of Igbo, and the aspect identified for detailed contrastive study with English is the conditional clause. Our investigation reveals that just as in English, the conditional clause is one of the adverbial clauses in Igbo, and it proposes the condition under which something would or would not happen; that there are three types, which respectively express possibility; regret; and a wish, desire, denunciation or recommendation; that the verb form in the first type is usually present, past, continuous or future tense, but only past or past perfect in the second type, and present or past tense in the third type. Structurally, the conditional clause can occur before or after the main clause, dropping or taking on a variety of subordinating conjunctions, the commonest of which is (mà) ọ buru na; it is also possible to state only the conditional clause without the main clause, or the main clause without the conditional clause, with the missing clause usually quite obvious from the context. Finally, it is also quite possible to express the conditional clause as

an independent statement all on its own. The study thus reveals that the conditional clause in Igbo is semantically and syntactically versatile, sharing numerous characteristics with its counterpart in English, but exhibiting distinct peculiarities as well.

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1.0: Introduction

The study of language is usually undertaken for several reasons. First, to know how the language works, that is, the set of rules it employs, what kind of components it has and the relationship between these components. Secondly, to discover how the language conveys meaning and the devices it employs for this purpose – for example, proverbs, idioms and figures of speech. Thirdly, to chart the developments that the language has gone through over the ages and is still going through. Then there is need to establish the strengths and weaknesses of the language as a vehicle of wider communication. That is, how capable or otherwise the language is to cope with concepts outside the traditional context of its use, for example, concepts like science and technology. By doing all of this, linguists help to develop the language and to teach it.

However, the discipline of language is such a vast field and has several distinct levels, the most obvious of which are the levels of sounds (*phonetics and phonology*), of words (*lexis*), of grammar (*syntax*), and of meaning (*semantics*). So the linguist studying a language starts methodically, looking at one level at a time. Even so, each level is in itself so vast that within it, the linguist or researcher often has to narrow himself down further to a specific area or areas. By and large, it is the totality of such studies that ultimately give us a comprehensive picture of the language.

In line with this observation, we restrict ourselves in this paper to the grammar of Igbo, and the aspect identified for detailed study is the conditional clause. It will be recalled that a conditional clause is a subordinate clause that expresses a hypothesis or condition under which the proposition in the main clause would or would not happen. For example: “*If you ask him*

nicely, he will help you.” However, since no two languages are ever the same in their sound systems, meaning mechanisms, structural aspects, and so on, it is worthwhile to study conditional clauses in a different language from English, in this case Igbo, to discover their linguistic similarities and differences and thereby give an insight into the nature of this clause type in the latter language.

2.0:Literature Review

Several writers have written extensively on various aspects of the Igbo language, including its grammar. A few of these are Ward (1936), Green and Igwe (1963), Carnochan and Iwuchukwu (1963), Carnochan (1967), Carrel (1970), Okonkwo (1974), Ogbalu and Emenanjo (1975), Emenanjo (1978), and Oluikpe (1979 and 1981). However, only Oluikpe (1979) appears to have given worthwhile attention to the conditional clause in Igbo, and we will attempt below a brief review of what he has to say.

Put briefly, a clause is a part of a sentence greater than a phrase, which is complete in itself in the sense that it makes a complete statement and can be detached from the original sentence to stand on its own as a complete sentence. In other words, a clause is what originally existed as a sentence, but which has been combined with another sentence or other sentences to form a larger sentence.

In such a combination, some clauses are rendered dependent on others, and are known as subordinate clauses, while the independent clauses are known as main clauses. The subordinate clauses are so called because they cannot stand on their own but must depend on the main clause to make their meaning complete.

Subordinate clauses usually function like some word classes (or parts of speech) – and thus take their names from these. For example, subordinate *noun* clauses are those that occur in the place of a noun and perform any of its numerous functions, for example, as the subject of a verb or its object, as in the following:

1. *How he knew my name* is what baffles me.
(*How he knew my name* = subject of the verb “is”.)
2. *Where he got such a large sum of money* is what we do not know.
(subject of “is”.)
3. She thinks *that you will help her*. (object of “thinks”)
4. I know *what he’s thinking*. (object of “know”)

Another example is the adverb clauses which occur in the place of adverbs, and which like adverbs tell us the time, place, manner, reason, purpose, result, condition, etc., for the action that the verb in the main clause indicates. For example:

5. She returned from the market *when it was raining*.
(*when it was raining* = adverbial clause of time)
6. You can go *wherever you want to go*. (adverbial clause of place)
7. They chased him *as a cat chases a lizard*. (adverbial clause of manner)
8. Uche ate all the food *because he was very hungry*.
(adverbial clause of reason)
9. They finished the job quickly *so that they could get home early*. (adverbial clause of purpose)
10. He was so angry *that he hit the boy*. (adverbial clause of result)
11. *If I were you*, I would take his advice. (adverbial clause of condition)

The last example of adverbial clause – the adverbial clause of condition – is what this paper is concerned with.

Writing about the conditional clause in Igbo, Oluikpe (1979:166 – 168) uses the Ngwa dialect example and the transformational grammar model. He observes that the subordinate clause of condition is introduced by *mà*, which can optionally occur with *ọ buru là* – “if it is that”. The conditional clause can occur at the beginning of the whole sentence, that is, before the main clause, or after the main clause. Oluikpe says that *mà* together with *ọ buru là* is optionally deleted when the conditional clause occurs before the main clause. That is to say, they may or may not be present in this position. His examples are:

12. Ø *Ị chọọ*, ọ *gà* ịbịa.
13. *Ma* ị *chọọ*, ọ *gà* ịbịa.
14. *Ma ọ buru* ị *chọọ*, ọ *gà* ịbịa.
(If you want, he will come.)

Also, according to Oluikpe, if the conditional clause occurs after the main clause, *mà* can be optionally deleted if the verb of the main clause is intransitive. However, in his examples, it is actually *ọ buru là* (and not *mà*) that is optionally deleted. The examples include:

15. Ọ *gà* ịbịa *mà ọ buru* ị *chọọ*.
16. Ọ *gà* ịbịa *mà* Ø ị *chọọ*.

Again, Oluikpe states that when a conditional clause occurs, the verb form of the main clause invariably has the auxiliary verb *gà* if this main clause is a statement sentence. Thus, *gà* occurs in the main clause in all his examples. Our observation here, however, is that exceptions are possible. For example, consider:

17. Ọ *buru* na ị *chọọ*, o nwere ike itinyere ị aka.
(If you want, he will be able to help you.)

Here, the conditional clause is –
Ọ buru na ị chọọ

and the main clause is –
o nwere ike itinyere gi aka.

This main clause is a statement sentence, but it does not occur with *gà*, as it should, according to Oluikpe, but has *nwere ike* instead. However, we could concede that his observation here applies only to the Ngwa dialect of Igbo.

All told, Oluikpe's discussion gives us a useful insight especially into the forms and the structural behaviour of conditional clauses in Igbo.

Our purpose in this paper is to conduct a further examination of the Igbo conditional clause to discover further insights into its forms as well as its meaning implications. By so doing, we hope that the paper will contribute in its own little way to the illumination of this significant aspect of Igbo grammar. Secondly, by analyzing the Igbo conditional clause structure in detail, we hope to provide ready material for those interested in comparative studies who may wish to contrast the Igbo conditional clause with that of another language, say English, to reveal similarities and differences. Such a contrastive study is known to be of some importance in the way it often helps to account for interlingual errors among second language users.

3.0: The Data

The data analyzed in this paper are taken from the following sources:

- i. sentences produced by native speakers of Igbo and recorded through the simple (non-participant) observation method;
- ii. sentences documented in secondary sources;
- iii. conditional clause structures translated from English to Igbo in this paper; and
- iv. this writer's introspection as a competent native speaker of Igbo.

The forms used throughout are taken from Central

Igbo. This is to make the work more relevant to the language as a whole. An interesting follow-up might then be to compare the conditional clauses in Central Igbo with those of any particular dialect of the language to discover contrasts, if any.

No particular theoretical model is used in this study. Instead, the methodology is eclectic – drawing freely from any method of analysis that best recommends itself for our purpose. We are, thus, not saddled with the need to expound a theoretical framework and provide a justification for choosing it.

4.0: The Sentence Structure in Igbo

We begin this section by assuming that the English sentence types according to *form* are already well known. These are, first, a division into the two initial classes of *major* and *minor* sentence types, and subsequently, a categorization of major sentences into *simple*, *compound* and *complex* (or *simple*, *compound*, *multiple*, *complex* and *compound-complex*). It will be recalled that compound and complex sentences are formed by the combination of two or more simple sentences in specific ways.

Structurally, Igbo sentences themselves fall into two initial categories, namely:

- a. those that are *basic* (i.e., simple) structures; and
- b. those that are *derived* from the basic sentences.

4.1: Igbo Basic Sentences

These are simple declarative sentences. For example:

18. Uche b̄́ara. (Uche came.)
19. Obi gara ozi. (Obi went on an errand.)
20. Ha riri ji. (They ate yam.)

Igbo basic sentences have the following characteristics:

- i. they contain only one verb;
- ii. they do not contain any coordinating conjunctions except phrasal conjunctions (e.g., “Ha riri *ji na ede*” [“They ate *yam and cocoyam*”], where the conjunction “na” links “ji” and “ede” to form a compound noun phrase);

- iii. they are declarative and do not involve secondary operations such as questioning, commanding, negation.

4.2: Igbo Derived Sentences

These come in a variety of forms, namely:

(a) Questions, Commands, and Negations:

These involve the addition of secondary operators to declarative sentences to change them into questions, negations, commands, etc. For example:

21. Uche b̄jara. (Uche came.) (declarative)
21a. Uche ab̄iaḡhi. (Uche did not come.) (negation)
21b. Uche ̄o b̄jara? (Did Uche come?) (question)

(b) Compound Sentences:

These involve the coordination of two or more simple sentences (or *clauses*) in such a way that each retains a separate identity and an equal status, and none dominates the other(s). For example:

22. Ada na-aḡu akw̄ukw̄o ya *ma* Obi na-egwu egwu.
(Ada is reading her book *but* Obi is playing.)

(c) Complex Sentences:

These involve the subordination of one or more clauses to another clause, so that there is a main clause dominating one or more other clauses, known as subordinate clauses. These subordinate clauses occur in various forms. These are:

- i. *The relative clause:* Here the clause is embedded in a main clause and modifies a noun phrase, optionally employing the relative pronouns “nke” (singular), “ndi” (plural). For example:

23. Uwe (*nke*) Ada zur̄u dara oke ̄nu
(The dress (*that*) Ada bought is very costly.)
24. ̄m̄aka (*ndi*) b̄jara n’*ebeaa* bu ̄munne m.
(The children *who came here* are my relations.)

ii. *The nominal clause:* This is an embedded clause which functions like a noun in the main clause, example:

25. *Na ha gbara akwukwo n'izu uka gara aga gbagwojuru madu n'ile anya.* (*That they wedded a week ago baffles everyone.*)

26. *Ihe butere nsogbu bu na Obi gbara igwe n'ime ahia.*
(*What caused a problem is that Obi rode a bicycle inside the market.*)

iii. *The non-finite clause:* Here, the verb form of the embedded clause remains unchanged regardless of the grammatical form of the verb in the main clause. Examples are:

27. *Ada choro iga ahia.* (*Ada wants to go to the market.*)

28. *Ha bidoro riwe nri.* (*They started to eat.*)

iv. *The adverbial clause:* This is an embedded clause that tells us the time, place reason, manner, purpose, result or condition for the action indicated in the main clause. For example:

29. *O si ahia lota mgbe miri n'ezo.*
(*She returned from the market when it was raining.*)

30. *Uche richapuru nri ahu n'ih na agu gusiri ya ike.*
(*Uche ate up all the food because he was very hungry.*)

31. *M buru gi, a ga m anabata ndumodu ya.*
(*If I am you, I will take his advice.*)

The last example – the conditional clause – is the focus of this paper, and is taken up in subsequent sections.

(d) Focus Constructions:

This is the last type of derived construction discussed here. In this type, specific constituents of the sentence are focused upon for emphasis by being brought to the fore of the sentence. These constituents could be the subject, the verb, the object,

adverbs, noun qualifiers, and so on, and focus markers such as *na, ka, bu, mgbe*, are used. Examples are:

- 32a. Nnamdi zuru ugbo-ala.
(Nnamdi bought a car.) (basic sentence)
- 32b. *O bu ugbo-ala ka* Nnamdi zuru.
(*It is a car that* Nnamdi bought.) (focus construction)
- 33a. Obi choro gi.
(Obi wants you.) (basic construction)
- 32b. *O bu gi ka* Obi choro.
(*It is you that* Obi wants.) (focus construction)

5.0: The Conditional Clause in Igbo

As we would have gathered from the discussion so far, the conditional clause is one of the adverbial clauses in Igbo. The term “adverbial” is applied to them because they occupy adverb positions and function like adverbs. The conditional clause itself gives the *condition* under which something would or would not happen.

5.1: The Semantic Structure of Igbo Conditional Clauses

In terms of meaning, we can classify the Igbo conditional clause into three broad types, namely:

Type I: Those in which the condition is open. Here, the question of the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the condition is left unresolved. That is, the condition may or may not be fulfilled. Examples are:

34. A ga m azu ugboala ma o buru na m nweta ego.
(I will buy a car *if I have the money.*)
35. I ga-aga ma o buru na ha akpoo gi?
(Will you go *if they invite you?*)
36. *O buru na o bia*, a gaghị m agwa ya.
(*If he/she comes*, I won't inform him/her.)

Type II: Those in which the condition cannot be fulfilled because the opportunity to fulfil it is already past or has been

overtaken by events. For example:

37. *Ọ buru na m maara*, a gaara m abia.

(*If I had known*, I would have come.)

38. *Ọ buru na a kpọrom*, a gaara m aga.

(*If I had been invited*, I would have attended.)

39. *A si na anyi maara maka ya*, anyi gaara abia.

(*If we had known about it*, we would have come.)

Type III: Those in which the condition cannot be fulfilled because the conditional clause is hypothetical. That is, it is humanly impossible to fulfil the specified condition. Examples:

40. *Ọ buru na m bu ghi*, a gaghi m ekwe.

(*If I were you*, I won't agree.)

41. *Ọ buru na mmadu bu chi onwe ya*, ntam ahuhu agaghi adi na-elu uwa a.

(*If man were his own God*, there will be no suffering in this world.)

We can see from the examples then that the first category of conditional clauses usually implies the possibility of the condition being fulfilled; the second category, on the other hand, usually expresses some regret by the speaker because of the unfulfilled condition; while the third category merely expresses a wish or desire (or a strong denunciation or recommendation [cf. *If I were you...*]) on the part of the speaker. We can also distinguish between what we may call *positive condition* and *negative condition*. Positive condition is introduced by subordinators such as *ọ buru na*, *a si na* (*if...*); *anyi/ha/i/unu/ọ/m mara na* (*if we/they/you[sg]/you[pl]/he or she/I know that...*); *ọ mata na* (*if he/she finds out that...*); (*ọ buru na*) *ọ bia* (*if he comes...*), and refers to the condition to be fulfilled (*ihe ọ ga abụ e mee*) for some positive action to take place in the main clause. On the other hand, negative condition expresses in the main clause what will not be done unless the condition specified in the subordinate clause is fulfilled (*ihe ọ ga abụ e meghi*). In other words, the positive and negative conditional clauses in Igbo are equivalent to English *if...* and *unless...* clauses respectively. Negative condition is introduced

by subordinators like *naani mà ọ bu(ru)*, *sọsọ mà ọ bu* (all meaning *unless*).

Examples are:

(a) Positive Condition:

42. *Ọ buru na i hụ ya, si ya lota ngwa ngwa.*

(If you see him, ask him to return quickly.)

43. *Ọ buru na anyi mà ebe o bi, anyi ga aga hụ ya.*

(If we know where he/she lives, we will go and see him/her.)

(b) Negative Condition:

44. *Sọsọ mà i kwuru m ugwo i ji m, a gaghị m ahapu ulo gi taa.*

(Unless you pay me what you owe me, I won't leave your house today.)

45. *Naani mà i nyere m ego, a gaghị m agwa gi ihe i choro imata.*

(Unless you give me money, I won't tell you what you want to know.)

However, in speech the negative conditional clauses are more likely to be rendered as:

44a. *Ọ buru na i kwughị m ugwo i ji m, ...*

45a. *Ọ buru na i nyeghi m ego, ...*

When the forms in sentences 44 and 45 are used, they usually lay more emphasis on the condition given by the clause.

5.2: The Morphology and Syntactic Structure of the Conditional Clause in Igbo:

In this section, we examine the verb forms and the syntactic structures of the conditional clause.

5.2.1: The verb form in the Igbo conditional clause:

The different verb forms in English are all possible in the conditional clause in Igbo, with some minor restrictions.

In the *Type I* conditional clause, the following forms can occur:

(a) The *present tense*, example, *lota*, *bịa*, as in:

46. *Ọ buru na ọ lota, si ya na m bịa.*

(If he returns, tell him that I came.)

47. *Ọ buru na ọ bịa, si ya chere m.*

(If he *comes*, ask him to wait for me.)

(b) The *past tense*, example, *lotara*, *hurū*: The past tense forms of the verb can also be used in Type I, but when this is done the tense of the verb in the main clause must make it clear that the condition is still open, that is, may or may not be fulfilled. Examples:

48. Ọ bụrụ na ọ *bịara*, sị ya chere m.
(*If he *came*, ask him to wait for me.)
49. Ọ bụrụ na ị *hurū* ya, mee ka anyị mara.
(*If you *saw* him, let us know.)

(c) The *continuous tense*, example, *na-ekwu*, *na-eri*, as in:

50. Ọ bụrụ na ọ *na-ekwu* ezi okwu, anyị ga ama.
(If he *is telling* the truth, we will know.)
51. Ọ bụrụ na ọ *na-eri* nri, hapụ ya ka o richaa.
(If he *is eating*, let him finish.)

However, the verb forms *na-ekwu* and *na-eri* can also be used when the action is habitual, so that again it is the main clause that determines conclusively whether this is continuous or not.

(d) The *future tense* form, example *ga-abia*, *ga-alota*: These forms occur when the fulfillment of the condition is anticipated in some future time, as in:

54. Ọ bụrụ na ọ *ga-abia* echi, nsogbu agaghị adị.
(If he *will come* tomorrow, there'll be no problem.)
55. Ọ bụrụ na ọ *ga-alota* echi, ọ ga adị nma.
(If he *will return* tomorrow, this'll be fine.)

Future condition can also be expressed by the simple present tense, as in:

- 54a. Ọ *bịa* echi, ...
- 55a. Ọ *lota* echi, ...

Here, it is the future time adverbial – *echi (tomorrow)* – that places the fulfillment of the condition in the future.

In *Type II*, we noted that the condition cannot be fulfilled because the opportunity to fulfil it is already passed. So the verb

form in the clause is usually past tense or past perfect. For example:

Past tense:

56. A sị na ọ *bịara*, anyị gaara ahụ ya.
(If he *came*, we would have seen him.)

Past perfect tense:

57. A sị na ọ *bịaworo*, anyị gaara emechaala.
(If he *had come*, we would have finished.)

58. A sị na i *mechaworo* ya, ọ gaara akara gị nma.
(If you *had completed* the job, it would have been better for you.)

It is not usually possible to delete the subordinator *ọ buru na* or *a sị na* from the Type II conditional clause.

In *Type III*, where the condition is hypothetical, that is, logically impossible to fulfil, the present tense verb form is mostly used. (This is quite unlike in English where the hallmark of the hypothetical clause is the past tense verb, *were*.) For example:

59. Ọ *buru* na m *bu* gị, a ga m eje.
(If I *were* you, I would attend.)

60. A sị na ụmụ anụmanụ *nwe/nwere* agughọ isi, ha ga ama ihe ka mmadụ.
(If animals *had* intelligence, they would be as knowledgeable as humans.)

We can see from our discussion in this section that the form of the verb in the conditional clause often has to be taken together with the verb form in the main clause to make the intended meaning complete.

5.2.2: The syntactic characteristics of the conditional clause:

The conditional clause has the following syntactic characteristics:

(a) It can come before or after the main clause, as in the following examples:

61. Ọ *buru na* o *righi* ya, gwa m.
(If he *doesn't eat it*, tell me.)

62. Ọ *buru na* ha *agaa*, ọ ga ekwe
(If they *go*, he will agree.)

63. *Ọ buru na ọ bia, mee ka m mara.*
(If he comes let me know.)
64. *Gwa m mà ọ buru na o righi ya.*
(Tell me if he doesn't eat it.)
65. *Ọ ga ekwe mà ọ buru na ha agaa.*
(He will agree if they go.)
66. *Mee ka m mara mà ọ buru na ọ bia.*
(Let me know if he comes.)

(b) When the conditional clause occurs after the main clause, *mà* is inserted between them, but *mà* is absent if the conditional clause comes first. The examples in (a) clearly illustrate this.

(c) The subordinator *ọ buru na* can be dropped in the open conditional clause, that is, in Type 1, whether the clause occurs before or after the main clause, but if the conditional clause occurs after the main clause, *mà* is retained even if the subordinator is dropped. Examples are:

67. *Ø Ọ lota, gwa m.*
(Ø He comes back, tell me.)
68. *Ø Ọ jù ije ahia, gbaa ya nkiti.*
(Ø He refuses to go to the market, ignore him.)

(d) Sometimes it is possible to state only the conditional clause without supplying the main clause. This happens especially when the main clause is already known or is quite obvious and therefore is taken for granted. When this happens, it is often intended as a warning, a threat, or an expression of regret. Examples are:

67. *Nna gi mekata chọputa ihe i na-eme, ...*
(If your father ever finds out what you do, ...)
68. *Ndi mmadu mekata mata, ...*
(If people ever find out, ...)
69. *I kwuo ya ozọ, ...*
(If you say that again, ...)
72. *A si na i biara, ...*
(If only you had come, ...)
73. *Ọ buru na m maara, ...*
(If only I had known, ...)

74. M hụ gi n’ebe a ọzọ,...
 (If I ever see you here again, ...)
75. Onye isi anyị hụ gi, ...
 (If our boss sees you, ...)

As the examples show, the subordinator *o buru na* is usually not present in the clause. The plausible explanation for this is that since the main clause is not intended to be spoken, there is then no need for this subordinator, which functions solely as a conjunction; since the main clause is not present, there is nothing to be joined to the conditional clause.

(e) Sometimes, the conditional clause occurs all alone as in (d) above, but as a complete statement, rather than as a sentence with some of its parts missing. When this happens, the condition is implied and not spoken, but it is usually quite obvious. Some examples are.

76. Ka m ejikwala ntị nụ na ị lụrụ ọgụ ọzọ.
 (Let me not hear that you ever fought again.)
77. A bjakwala ebe a ọzọ.
 (Don’t ever come here again.)
78. A rịọzikwala m ego ọzọ.
 (Don’t ever beg me for money again.)
79. E mekwala ka ọ mata.
 (Don’t ever let him know.)
80. A gwazikwala m ụdị okwu a ọzọ.
 (Don’t ever talk to me this way again.)

These examples mean something like the following respectively:

- 76a. M jiri ntị nụ na ị lụrụ ọgụ ọzọ (a ga m emesi gi ike).
 (If I hear that you fought again, [I will deal with you].)
- 77a. Ị bịa ebe a ọzọ (onweghi onye ga-anabata gi).
 (If you come here again, [no one will welcome you].)
- 78a. Ị rịọ m ego ọzọ (a gaghi m enye gi).
 (If you beg me for money again, [I won’t give you].)
- 79a. I mee ka ọ mata (nsogbu ga-adi).
 (If you let him know, [there will be trouble].)
- 80a. Ị gwa m ụdị okwu a ọzọ (anyi ga ese okwu).
 (If you talk to me this way again, [I will fall out with you].)

From most of the examples, it appears that this kind of conditional statement is made when the listener is being warned against a repetition of something that has happened before. So the statement is usually negative.

(f) Finally, it is also possible to state only the main clause and imply the conditional clause, without stating it. Here again, the unstated conditional clause is usually quite obvious. Some examples:

81. Ndi mmadu ga ata gi uta.
(People will blame you.)
82. Nna m agaghi eji nti nu udi okwu a.
(My father won't hear about this kind of talk.)
83. Aka ga akpara ya otu ubochi.
(He will be apprehended one day.)
84. Ndi mmadu ga asi na o joro njo.
(People will condemn it.)
85. Nna gi ga abara gi mba.
(Your father will scold you.)

Here again, these examples mean something like the following respectively:

- 81a. Ndi mmadu ga ata gi uta (ma ha nu).
(People will blame you [if they hear about this].)
- 82a. Nna m agaghi eji nti nu udi okwu a (ma i gwa ya).
(My father won't hear about this kind of talk [if you tell him].)
- 83a. Aka ga akpara ya otu ubochi (ma o kwusighi ihe a o name).
(He will be apprehended one day [if he doesn't stop what he's doing].)
- 84a. Ndi mmadu ga asi na o joro njo (ma ha mata).
(People will condemn it [if they get to know].)
- 85a. Nna gi ga abara gi mba (ma o nu ihe i mere).
(Your father will scold you [if he hears what you did].)

We might add that in the case where either the main clause or the conditional clause is dropped, as in (d), (e), and (f) above, the spoken clause often has to be taken together with what has been said previously in order for the implied clause to be understood. For example, our last sentence in (f) might be part

of a sequence such as:

86. Ihe i mere jorọ njo. Nna gi ga abara gi mba.

(What you did is bad. Your father will scold you.)

When we follow such a sequence, it is then easy for us to figure out the implied conditional clause enclosed in brackets below, that is:

87. Ihe i mere jorọ njo. Nna gi ga abara gi mba (mà o nù ihe i mere).

(What you did is bad. Your father will scold you [if he hears what you did].)

What we have discussed here appears to be the major syntactic characteristics of the conditional clause. A more detailed investigation might perhaps reveal a few other minor variations.

6.0: Summary and Conclusion

We summarize our findings about the conditional clause in Igbo as follows:

6.1 Just as in English, the conditional clause is one of the adverbial clauses in Igbo, and it proposes the *condition* under which something would or would not happen.

6.2 There are three types of conditional clause, based on their meaning.

These are:

Type I: in which the condition is open, and may or may not be fulfilled;

Type II: in which the condition cannot be fulfilled because the opportunity to fulfil it is already past; and

Type III: in which the condition is humanly impossible to fulfil, and is therefore only hypothetical.

6.3 *Type I* mostly expresses *a possibility*;

Type II mostly expresses *regret*; while

Type III mostly expresses *a wish or desire, a denunciation or recommendation* by the speaker.

6.4 The verb form in the Type I conditional clause, with open condition, can be *present tense*, *past tense*, *continuous tense*, or the *future tense* form.

But in Type II, because the opportunity to fulfil the condition is already past, the verb form is usually only *past* or *past perfect*.

Finally, the verb form in Type III, where the condition is humanly impossible to fulfil, is usually *present* or *past tense*, though the present tense appears to be more frequently used than the past.

6.5 Structurally, the conditional clause can occur *before* or *after* the main clause. When the conditional clause occurs after the main clause, *mà* is inserted between them, but this *mà* is absent if the conditional clause comes first.

Also it is quite possible to drop the subordinator *ọ buru na* from most conditional clauses. It is also possible to have variations of this subordinator, such as: *a sị na*, *sọsọ mà ọ bu na*, *naani mà ọ bu na*, *naani mà ọ buru na*. These are all possibilities in Central Igbo; many more dialect variations are also possible.

It is also possible to state only the conditional clause without the main clause, or the main clause without the conditional clause. And when this happens, the missing clause is usually quite obvious from the context.

It is also quite possible to express the conditional clause as an independent statement all on its own. This is done mostly as a *warning* to the listener against a *repetition* of what has happened before.

6.6: Conclusion

We can see from all the above that the conditional clause is a useful structure in Igbo. One final observation here is that the subordinator, *ọ buru na*, when used, tends to make the conditional clause more deliberate, more formal and more emphasized. It therefore appears mostly to be omitted in normal informal usage, and inserted only when the speaker is laying emphasis on the condition or when the usage is formal.

This paper has run its course, and we hope that in its own little way, it:

- (a) has thrown more light on the forms and functions of the conditional clause in Igbo; and
- (b) will prove a useful contribution to further explorations of the various structural constructions of the Igbo language.

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