

## Re-examination of Comitative Strategies in Igbo

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### Abstract

This paper is focused on the strategy for the realization of the comitative in the Igbo language.<sup>1</sup> It is built on the assumption that the morphological marking on nouns to indicate individuals or entities in whose company an event takes place is only one of the several strategies for coding the sense of accompaniment that is traditionally associated with the comitative marker. Other strategies that have been confirmed in the literature include the use of adjectives, verbs, prepositions that mean ‘with’, and conjunctions that mean ‘and’. On the basis of these new insights, the paper examines the two morphemes, the suffix =*kɔ* ‘together (with)’ and the verb *sò* ‘follow’, whose comitative functions have not been investigated in Igbo language studies. It can be confirmed that both structures are involved in the expression of the comitative in the language. The verb *sò* expresses the comitative in a serial verb construction where it indicates that NP1 follows/joins/participates in the execution of an act initiated by NP2. This is different from the suffix *kɔ* which assigns equal status to both NP1 and NP2 as either co-subjects or co-objects of the same verb. Finally, this division agrees with Zhang’s (2007) classification of comitatives into symmetrical and asymmetrical groups, whereby the suffix =*ko* expresses the symmetrical comitative while the verb *so* expresses the asymmetrical.

**Key words:** Comitative strategies; Accompaniment; Symmetrical; Asymmetrical

<sup>1</sup> The Igbo language is spoken by approximately 40 million speakers in South-East Nigeria; also spoken in parts of Equatorial Guinea. It belongs to the Niger/Congo language family.

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### INTRODUCTION

The comitative, like the nominative, accusative, dative, etc., was originally conceptualized as a morphologically expressed case form. This traditional focus on the morphological marking is evident in Trask’s (1993:49) explanation that “Comitative is the case form that indicates an individual in whose company something is done”; and also in Crystal’s (2003:83) remark that the comitative “refers to the form taken by an NP when it is expressing the meaning ‘along with’ or ‘accompanied by’”.

However, recent studies have described the comitative as not merely morphological but a strategy, bearing in mind those languages that do not have morphological case markers (Stolz, Stroh & Urdze, 2006, 2008; Trawinski, 2012). Hence, all languages have ways of expressing accompaniment, and the comitative can be realized as a case form (in languages that adopt morphological case as in Basque) or as a strategy (in languages that use other methods).

This paper relates all of the above to the verb Igbo *so* ‘follow’ and the suffix =*ko* ‘together (with)’, for these two lexical items seem to express such accompaniment relations which have been described in the literature as the comitative. The rest of the paper goes into this as follows. Section 2 is a review of the literature on comitative, while section 3 describes the comitative attributes of the identified Igbo language structures. Section 4 summarizes and concludes the paper.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Comitative involves 'accompaniment' (Trask, 1993, p.49), and accompaniment is a relation between two participants (NPs) in a construction where one is the accompanee and the other is the companion. The strategies for its realization could be through morphological markers, or through other parts of speech like the preposition (such as 'with' in English), adverbs, adjectives or serial verb constructions. The accompanee and the companion in such relations are prototypically human beings who are involved in the same situation, activity or event (Stolz, Stroh & Urdze 2008, p.602). In a comitative construction, the accompanee is given prominence whereas the companion is somewhat marginalized. This is because the constructions are mostly oriented towards the accompanee. Generally, the linguistic encoding of the relation between the participants have been classified in various ways. For ease of overview, they are summarized in this paper below as (a) morpho-semantic classification, (b) Classification according to morphology and constructions types, and (c) classification according to nature of the roles of the participants.

### (a) Morpho-Semantic Classification

Trawinski (2012), whose classifications are summarised below, best represents this group. The author starts with the traditional case marking, but goes further into verbal aspect, nouns and verbs, clausal indicators, and prepositions.

a. The comitative case, which appears in the Uralic, Altaic, Nakh-Dagestanian, Dravidian and Finno-Ugrian languages, as well as in Yukaghir, Chukot and Osetin.

b. the comitative verbal aspect which is a verbal morphological category that indicates the accompaniment of an action by something or somebody; exists in many American Indian and Turkic languages.

c. nouns and verbs which contain affixes indicating comitativity such as English *co-* (*coauthor*, *cooperate*), German *mit-* (*mitmachen* 'to take part in/ participate', *Mitverfasser* 'coauthor') or *zusammen-* (*zusammenspielen* 'conspire', *Zusammenarbeit* 'collaboration'), Russian *so-* (*souchastvovat* 'to take part', *sonaslednik* 'coheir'), Polish *wspó-* (*wspópracowa* 'c'collaborate', *wspózycie* 'cohabitation').

d. verbs describing a joint action of two agents or their joint being such as *to meet*, *to border*, *to compete* etc.

e. subordinate comitative clauses, i.e. clauses that indicate an accompanying circumstance, mainly introduced by subordinate conjunctions such as *when*.

f. expressions containing comitative prepositions such as the English *with*, Polish *z*, German *mit*, French *avec*, Portuguese *com*, Spanish *con* or Russians.

### (b) Morphology and Constructions Types

According to Stolz et al (2008), the comitative can be expressed through the following four major strategies:

a. Affixation: the comitative relation is expressed through affixation, by prefixation, (e.g. in Totonac *ta'*: as in *ta':minlhkiamigo* 'He came with my friend'), by suffixation (e.g. in Hungarian *-val/-vel* as in *családval* 'with family'), and by circumfixation (e.g. in Chukchi *ge-. . . -e/ga-. . . -ma* as in *gemilgere/gamelgarma* 'with the rifle').

b. Adpositional constructions: this strategy involves the use of prepositions, postpositions and circumpositions. The prepositions are exemplified in French *avec* as in *avec samère* 'with his/her mother'. Postpositions are used in Wayãpiléwé 'with' as in *yãyãléwé* 'with (my older) sister' and circumpositions are used in Bambara *ní . . . yéas* in *níMúsayé* 'with Músa'.

c. Adverbial constructions: adverbs most times depend on the adpositions to mark comitative relations, i.e. they both act in an almost similar way. A language that exemplifies the use of adverbials is Latvian *līdz(i)* 'along' as in *eseju [jums] līdz* 'I 'come along [with you]' where the adverb may also be responsible for the dative case on the pronoun *jums* 'you [dative plural]'.

d. Serial-verb constructions: here, comitatives are usually expressed by a co-verb whose basic meaning corresponds to English *to follow* (e.g. in Chinese *g'en* 'to follow' as in *w'og-ent-ashuohuà* 'I am conversing with him').

### (c) The Roles of the Participants

Zhang (2007) classifies the comitative into two: the symmetrical and asymmetrical comitatives. Comitative constructions are symmetrical when both participants play equal roles in achieving or satisfying the requirements of the verb. The two nouns together satisfy the selection requirements of a collective verb (e.g. *compare*, *mix*) or predicate (e.g. *be friends*) and the NP1 plays a role of equal importance as NP2 in the event. In the asymmetrical comitative construction, both participants do not share the same value or importance with regard to the execution of the event expressed through the verb.

(1) a. John is friends with Bill.

b. John mixed the rice with the powder.

In the above example, 1(a) exemplifies the symmetrical comitative where both participants, *John* and *Bill*, share the same level of importance to the selection requirements of the verb. Example, 1(b) on the other hand, exemplifies the asymmetrical comitative where one participant is the accompaniment of the other. The next section examines the Igbo structures in the light of the above.

## 3. THE IGBO LANGUAGE STRUCTURES

As the comitative is yet to become a major research topic in Igbo language studies, the effort here is to focus on the most transparent structures in this regard. These are the

verb *sò* which literally means ‘follow’, but encompasses such senses as *join*, *accompany*, *participate*, and so on. The second is the verbal suffix *kò* whose various senses are presented in section 3.2 below, but whose central sense is ‘together (with)’.

With the Progressive Marker:

(2)<sup>a</sup> **Òbí** *nà-èrì* **ńrĩ**  
Obi AUX-eat food  
‘Obi is eating.’

a<sup>2</sup> **Òbí** *nà-ésó* **m̄**  
Obi AUX-follow me  
‘Obi is following me.’

With the Auxilliary:

b<sup>1</sup> **Òbí** *gà-èrì* **ńrĩ**  
Obi AUX-eat food  
‘Obi shall eat.’

b<sup>2</sup> **Òbí** *gà-ésó* **m̄**  
Obi AUX-follow me  
‘Obi shall follow me.’

Imperative Sentence:

c<sup>1</sup> **Òbí**, *rié* **ńrĩ!**  
Obi eat food  
‘Obi, eat!’

c<sup>2</sup> **Òbí**, *sòró* **m̄!**  
Obi follow me  
‘Obi, follow me!’

In the above sentences, the verbs *rí* and *sò* are used with the progressive auxiliary verb in (2a<sup>1</sup>) and (2a<sup>2</sup>), with the future auxiliary in (2b<sup>1</sup>) and (2b<sup>2</sup>), and in the imperative forms asin (2c<sup>1</sup>) and (2c<sup>2</sup>). ‘So’ functions in

### 3.1 The verb “So” and its Comitative Functions

In this section, the verb *sò* shall first be presented as a simple verb, before presenting it in its comitative function. In the examples below, similar sentence structures are formed with it and the verb *rí* ‘eat’ to illustrate its function as a simple verb.

these sentences like any other simple verb of the language with a CV structure. Observe the difference in the use of *sò* in the sentences below, where its comitative usage involves serial verb constructions.

(3) **Ndidi** *sò-rò* **Ifeanyi** *gáá* **ń’** **ébé** **á** *nà-àgbá* **bòlù**  
Ndidi follow-PST Ifeanyi go PREP place PRN AUX-play ball  
‘Ndidi accompanied Ifeanyi to the football arena/playground.’

(4) **Chima** *sò* **Dinta** *gbúó* **ánú** **áhù**  
Prop N follow hunter kill meat that  
‘Chima killed the animal with the hunter.’

In sentence (3), no form of transitive activity is carried out, only the movement of NP1 (Ndidi) and NP2 (Ifeanyi) to a location. However, *Ndidi* ‘follows’, that is ‘joins’ and does not initiate the movement herself; instead, she accompanies Ifeanyi who is the initiator of the movement. Similarly, in sentence (4), with a transitive verb there are two agents that function as NP1 (*Chima*) and NP2 (*Dinta*) respectively. While both NPs participate in the action of

killing the animal, NP1, *Chima*, plays a subordinate role. Hence, although NP1 (*Chima*) is the first subject of the sentence, it is actually Agent2 instead of Agent1, because he does not initiate the action expressed through the verb *gbúó* ‘kill’. Instead, he ‘follows=>joins=>accompanies’ NP2, *Dinta*, in the execution of the act initiated by NP2. Similar expressions of accompaniment are illustrated in the sentences below:

(5) **Ídí** *órū* **sò** **ínà** **há** **úkwú** **rié** **ihē**  
People work follow father PRN big eat thing  
‘The workers ate with their boss.’

(6) **Í** **sò** **ónyé** **òká-íkpe** **gúó** **iwú** **áhù**  
I follow person expert-judgement read law DET  
‘I studied that rule with my lawyer.’

The NP1 in (5), *Ńdí ́órū* ‘the workers,’ joins NP2, *ńnà há úkwú* ‘their boss,’ to eat. In (6) the NP1, the first person singular pronoun *M* ‘I’, joins NP2, *ónyé ́káká-íkpe* ‘the lawyer,’ to study the particular rule.

As has already been pointed out earlier, and also evident in all the sentences above, the verb *sò* exercises the comitative function in serial verb constructions. The serial verb structures in the above sentences are *sòrò ... gáá* in (3), *sò ... gbúó* in (4), *sò ... rié* in (5), and *sò ... gú’ó* in (6).

(7) *Échí, Oby gá-ésò dí yā gáá ul’ò níri yà*  
 Tomorrow, Oby aux-follow husband pro to go house food his  
 ‘Tomorrow, Oby shall accompany her husband to his restaurant.’

(8) *Ada, é-sò-là Nneka gáá ígwù mímírí*  
 Ada prefix-follow-NEG Nneka go to-swim water  
 ‘Ada, do not accompany Nneka to swim’.

(9) *Òsò-ghì ná ndí dà-rà iwú*  
 Pro follow-NEG in pro fall-rV(PAST) law  
 ‘He/she is not among the law breakers/defaulters’.

(10) *Ńdíábù è-sò-ghì ndí égwū bíá àkwámózá áhù*  
 Singers prefix-follow-NEG dancers come funeral that  
 ‘Singers didn’t accompany the dancers to come to (attend) the funeral’.

The verb *sò* is modified in the above sentences as follows:

- (a) It co-occurs with the auxiliary *gá* and realized as *gá-esò* in (7)
- (b) It combines with the negative imperative marker ‘e...la’ and realized as *ésòlà* in (8)
- (c) It is negated with the standard negation marker *ghì* and realized as *sóghì* in (9) and *èsóghì* in (10). Note that the *é* prefix in (10) is simply to mark agreement with the subject *Ńdí ábù* ‘the singers’.

Finally, in line with the two classifications of the comitative by Zhang (2007) into the symmetrical and asymmetrical comitative, the Igbo *sò* comitative exemplifies the asymmetrical because in all the sentences above, it does not indicate any form of collectivity or equality in the status of both participants with regard to the execution of the action. Instead, one participant joins the other in the execution of an act. Even in its ordinary sense (*so* ‘follow’), a follower does not initiate the motion; it is the person being followed that does. This is in line with the roles of the participants in the asymmetrical comitative construction: they do not have equal status; neither do they meet the requirements of the verb at the same rate. There is thus always a clear distinction between the accompanee NP (the one who does the action) and the companion NP (the person who follows or assists in the execution of the action. This situation stands in contrast to the suffix *kò* whose comitative attribute involves equal

In all these examples, the verb *sò* no longer has the literal meaning of ‘follow’; instead, it now means ‘join in an activity’, the nature of which is specified by the second verb. Hence, in its comitative function, the verb *sò* requires another verb in a serial verb construction to form a complete comitative strategy. This requirement is maintained, even where other inflectional morphemes are affixed to the verb as in the sentences below:

status for the accompanee and the companion. The next section goes fully into this.

### 3.2 The -Kò Comitative Construction

The verbal suffix *kò* has been treated in Igbo linguistics and grammar books as an “extensional suffix”, which means that it generally helps to extend the meanings of the verbs. It has been translated as “together” (Williamson 1972, pp.208-209) and “CONGREGATIVE. Together in one place” (Emenanjo 1978, p. 112). Emenanjo later gives it the meaning: “FELLOWSHIP. Together as a team, in company with” (Emenanjo 2015, p. 247). Apart from such general but meaningful classifications, this suffix has never been examined in relation to comitativity and its role in the formation of comitative constructions in the language. In fact, as shall be seen in the sentences below, the suffix actually expresses two senses of the comitative, each of which involve a different syntactic function. The first sense involves not less than two participants as co-subjects, while the second sense involves not less than two participants as co-objects. As a result, the suffix *kò* can actually be seen as having a valency increasing effect, because the modified verbs are forced through the presence of the suffix to demand either two or more subjects, or two or more objects. The sentences below are presented in line with this division. group (A) presents the not less than two subject sentences, while group (B) presents the not less than two object sentences. Note the effect of the absence of the suffix in the *b* sentences.

(A) Equal Participation of Two or More Subjects of a Verb

(11) a. Nkechi **nà** Nnanna **nà-égwù-kò** **égwū** **n'èzí**  
 Nkechi and Nnanna AUX-play-together play PREP outside  
 'Nkechi and Nnanna are playing together outside.'

b. Nkechi **nà** Nnanna **nà-égwùégwū** **n'** **èzí**  
 Nkechi and Nnanna AUX-play play PREP outside  
 'Nkechi and Nnanna are playing outside.'

(12) a. Okpara **nà** **ínà** **yá** **gà-kò-rò** **úgbō**  
 Okpara and father his go-together-PAST farm  
 'Okpara and his father went to the farm together'.

b. Okpara **nà** **ínà** **yá** **gà-rà** **úgbō**  
 Okpara and father his go-PAST farm  
 'Okpara and his father went to the farm'.

In the above sentence pairs, the absence of the suffix marks the event as an activity that is not jointly executed. In (11a) the two subjects play together both syntactically as the co-subjects of the verb as well as semantically as co-participants in the activity. In (11b) they are simply playing, not necessarily together or involved in the same type of game. Similar observations apply to (12a) and (12b) where the absence of the suffix does not imply a joint activity by the co-subjects. However, the change

in the verb from *gà-kò-rò* to *gà-rà* in (12) is for the following reasons. The simple past tense morpheme, the rV-(Past), changes its vowel, depending on the structure to which it is attached. Hence, as a result of its attachment to the suffix in (12a), it is realised as *rò*, while in its attachment to the verb root *gá* in (12b) it is realised as *rà*. This change is caused by vowel harmony agreement and does not relate to the expression of the comitative in the language. Further examples are presented below.

(13) a. Há **nà-àrú-kò** **órū** **n'** **ótù** **úlò-órū**  
 Pro AUX-work-together work PREP one house-work  
 'They work together in the same work place.'

b. Há **nà-àrú** **órū** **n'** **ótù** **úlò-órū**  
 Pro AUX-work work PREP one house-work  
 'They work in the same work place.'

(14) a. Úlò **ákwúkwó** **ányí** **níílē** **gà-kò-rò** **èzùmíké.**  
 House school pro all go-together-PAST holiday  
 'All our schools went on holiday together.'

b. Úlò **ákwúkwó** **ányí** **níílē** **gà-rà** **èzùmíké**  
 House school pro all go-rV(Past) holiday  
 'All our schools went on holiday.'

In sentence (13a) the plural subjects, *Há* 'They', not only work in the same place, but they also work together there, in contrast to (13b) in which the absence of the suffix indicates not working together although the subjects work at the same venue. The same applies to (14a) and (14b), for in (14b) the lack of any form of joint participation in the holiday is indicated through the absence of the suffix. Hence in all the (a) sentences, all the subjects are equal participants in the events expressed through the verbs.

The situation is different in the examples below, where there is a sense of jointly functioning as co-objects of the verb whose requirement for more than one object is

indicated through the presence of the suffix *kò*. Sentence (15 a-c below) shall be used to illustrate this. In (15a) the verb *gbú*, which ordinarily is neutral with regard to the number of objects it requires, now requires 'more than one subject' because of the addition of the suffix, hence *gbù-kò* 'kill together'. Note that the ungrammaticality of (15b) is because the verb *gbù-kò* has one object instead of the required two or more, while (15c) without the suffix is neutral with regard to the number of objects and as a result can have one or more objects, but no co-objects as in (15a). This optionality is indicated through the brackets in the first line of sentence (15c). The same explanation applies to all the other examples below, from (16a-c) to (18a-c).

- (15) a. **Ónyé óhī áhụ̀ gbù-kò-rò̀** **nné yā nà nnà yá**  
 Person thief DET kill-together-rV(PAST) mother his and father his  
 ‘That thief killed his mother together with his father.’
- b. \***Ónyé óhī áhụ̀ gbù-kò-rò̀** **nné yā**  
 person thief DET kill-together-rV(PAST) mother his
- c. **Ónyé óhī áhụ̀ gbù-rù** **nné yā (nà nnà yá)**  
 Person thief DET kill-rV(PAST) mother his (and father his)  
 ‘That thief killed his mother and father.’
- (16) a. **M̄ hụ̀-kò-rò̀** **yá nà ndí ényì yá**  
 Pro see-together-rV(PAST) PRN and PL friends pro  
 ‘I saw him (together) with his friends.’
- b. \***M̄ hụ̀-kò-rò̀** **yá.**  
 Pro see-together-rV(PAST) pro
- c. **M̄ hụ̀-rù** **yá (nà ndí ényì yá)**  
 Pro see-rV(PAST) PRN (and PRN friends pro)  
 ‘I saw him and his friends.’
- (17) a. **Èdú sì-kò-rò̀** **àgwà nà òsíkápá**  
 Edu cook-together-rV(PAST) beans and rice  
 ‘Edu cooked beans together with rice.’
- b. \***Èdú sì-kò-rò̀** **àgwà.**  
 Edu cook-together-rV(PAST) beans
- c. **Èdúsi-rì** **àgwà (nà òsíkápá)**  
 Edu mix-rV(PAST) beans (and rice)  
 ‘Edu cooked beans and rice.’
- (18) a. **M̄ tà-kò-rò̀** **ázù nà ánụ̀**  
 Pro chew-together-rV(PAST) fish and meat  
 ‘I ate fish together with meat.’
- b. \***M̄ tà-kò-rò̀** **ázù**  
 pro chew-together-rV(PAST) fish
- c. **M̄ tà-rà** **ázù (nà ánụ̀)**  
 Pro chew-rV(PAST) fish (and meat)  
 ‘I ate fish and meat.’

The joint objecthood in the above sentences can be summarized as follows. In sentence (15a) the act of killing involves killing two patients, **nné yā nà nnà yá** ‘his mother and his father’, simultaneously, not one after the other. Likewise in (16a), the act of seeing involves a simultaneous perception of the plural objects, **yá nà ndí ényì yá** (him and his friends). This phrase has the literal meaning of ‘together with his friends’ because of the simultaneous presence of the objects within the range of vision of the subject. Likewise in (17a) the objects **àgwà nà òsíkápá** ‘rice and beans’ are simultaneously cooked together; and in (18a) the agent, ‘m’ (I), chews the objects (**ázù nà ánụ̀** ‘fish and meat’) together, not one after the other.

Finally, it can be seen from the above sentences that the addition of the comitative marker *kò* to a verb forces

the verb to demand either two or more equal participants as co-subject, or two or more equal participants as co-objects.

## CONCLUSION

Languages without the morphological case markers express the accompaniment relation through other strategies. The analysis in this paper clearly indicates that the comitative exists in Igbo and is marked by two morphemes. The first morpheme is the verb *sò* whose comitative function is usually through a serial verb construction where it indicates that the action performed in the event is always initiated by one of the participants who is then accompanied or helped by another participant to execute it. The second is the verbal suffix *kò* which

functions differently by causing any verb to which it is attached to require not less than two co-subjects or co-objects. These findings seem to agree with Zhang's conclusion that comitatives can generally be divided into symmetrical and asymmetrical types. *K*<sub>o</sub> belongs to the symmetrical group, while *s*<sub>o</sub> belongs to the asymmetrical group. Finally, it is our hope that this work would ignite further interest in this area of Igbo grammar.

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