Image Schema of the Verb "Sè" in Igbo Semantics

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Abstract

The study of conceptual interaction has attracted the attention of many scholars. Analyses have been done on different areas of this field of study in English. Hardly has any work been done on cognitive semantics in the Igbo language. This study therefore looks at the semantics of the verb sè. Using a descriptive method, the meanings of the verb are analysed in the light of image schemas. The findings reveal that the meanings of the verb follow three image schemas: the containment, path and force schemas. It also reveals that the verb root is not an empty dummy as some writers contend.

1. Introduction

Cognitive semantics is generating a lot of interest in linguistics. There are indepth studies on the subject in some languages especially European languages. In Igbo, there is hardly any studies to attest its application to the Igbo language. The need arises to find out how the Igbo verb can be described using the approach. This study, against the view of some scholars that the Igbo verb root is a semantic dummy, examines how imaging and analogical mapping, two principles of cognitive semantics, may be used to analyse the Igbo verb. In the study, the tone of every verb marked.

2. Theoretical Framework

The central research of some linguists like Fauconnier (1995, 2002), Fillmore (1975, 1976), Lakoff (1987, 1992), Langacker (1975, 1991) and Talmy (2000a, 2000b) as well as Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2007) has come to be known as 'cognitive linguistics'. Its concern is the linguistic representation of conceptual structure. Talmy (2011:1) says that this field can be characterised by contrasting its 'conceptual approach with two other approaches, the 'formal and the 'psychological'.

Cognitive semantics is part of the cognitive linguistic movement. The main tenets of cognitive semantics are that (a) meaning is conceptualisation; (b) conceptual structure is embodied and motivated by usage and (c) the ability to use language draws upon the general cognitive resources and not a special language module.

The cognitive semantic approach rejects the traditional separation of linguistics into phonology, syntax, pragmatics etc. Instead, it divides semantics (meaning) into meaning construction and knowledge representation. Therefore, cognitive semantics studies much of the area, traditionally devoted to pragmatics as well as semantics. Saeed (2003:344) posits that cognitive semanticists take the view that meaning is based on conventionalised conceptual structures. Thus semantic structure, along with other cognitive domains, reflects the mental categories which people have formed from their experience of growing up and acting in the world. According to Johnson (1987), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and Clausner and Croft (n.d.) conceptual systems grow out of bodily experience, and are grounded in perception, body movement, and experience of a physical and social character. Concepts do not occur as isolated, atomic units in the mind, but can only be comprehended in a context of presupposed, background knowledge structures.

3. Empirical Study

Ferrando (1998) analyses the semantic structure of these three lexical units of the English language using the cognitive semantic approach. He says that the contrast between 'at', 'on' and 'in' does not lie in the Euclidean geometric distinctions relative to their complements. Rather, he argues in favour of three parameters namely, visual configuration (which includes topological considerations), force dynamic interaction (Talmy 1988) and functional configuration as the three aspects that define the relationship between trajectory and landmark.

Velasco (2001) examines the role three image schemas (namely, the CONTAINER, PART/WHOLE and EXCESS schemas) play in conceptual interaction, especially in relation to metonymy. The work reveals that image schemas have two basic functions: they structure the relationship that exists between the source and target domain of metonymic mapping and they provide the axiological value of an expression. Finally, they say that the appearance of image-schemas in conceptual interaction is more ubiquitous than it may seem at first sight and that conceptual interaction frequently invokes the activation of these three types of cognitive model (i.e. metaphor, metonymy and image schemas). Uchechukwu (2011) examines the meanings of the verb root -tu with the cognitive linguistics tool of image schema. This effort is connected with the general conclusion within the syntactic approach that the verb root is empty (cf Nwachukwu 1987:83). He argues that the Igbo verb root is not empty; neither does it become practically meaningless as a result of an increase in the number of verbal complexes formed with it.

4.   Conceptualisation of Inherent Complement Verb Constructions

According to Langacker (1987:138), "grammatical structure is based on conventional imagery" which arises from the mental processes connected with the given object of interaction and the communicative intention. It is this mental process that is termed perspective, conceptualisation or construal. Such construal operations can also involve what Langacker calls "alternate construals", which the author explains as our being capable of making adjustments, thereby transforming one conceptualisation into another that is roughly equivalent in terms of content but differs in how this content is construed (Langacker, 1987:138).

5.   Some -sè Based Sentences in Igbo

The senses described by the sentences below can be extended using metaphor, e.g.

Verbal structure	Sentence	Meaning types
sè ḿmīrī	Ágū̄ nà-ésè ḿmīrī	Concrete
	Agx is making rain	
	Ágū̄ nà-ésè ḿmīrī	
	Agu's behaviour causes problem.	Metaphoric
sè àmùmà	Àmùmà nà-ésè àmùmà	Concrete
	It is lightening	
	Ḿmá Ādā nà-ésè	Metaphoric
	Ada's beauty causes lightening.	
sè fòtó	Ādá nà-ésè fòtó	Concrete
	Ada snaps	
	Ādá nà-ésē ḿ fòtó	Metaphoric
	I can see through Ada's laps because she is not sitting well	
sè átx̄màtx̀	Ágx̄ nà-ésè átùmàtù̀ ū́lò̀	Concrete
	Agx draws building plan(s)	
	Ágx̄ nà-ésè átx̄màtx̀ ū́lò̀	
	Agx is planning how his home will be.	Metaphoric
sè ò̀gù	Ọ́nū̄ sèrè ò̀gù	Metaphoric
	Mouth drew/caused fight	
sèré áká	Ńgọ́zị̄ sèré áká n'ọ́kū̄	Concrete
	Ngọzị, remove your hand from fire.	
sèré áká	Ngọzị, avoid trouble ´	Metaphor
sèré x́kwx́	Ézè, sèré ū́kwū̄ nà bùrékì	Concrete
	Eze, remove hour leg from the brakes.	

Now let us look at compound verbs formed with –sè as the first compound either in the form of [sè + verb] or [sè + suffix) or even (-sè + verb + suffix).

Compound Verbs

jú "full"	[sè + verb]: -sèjú "draw full. [physical movement] [-sè + verb]: sèjú "tired of quarrelling	Concrete Metaphoric
fè "go by/beyond"	[-sè + verb]: séfè "draw across, beyond" [physical movement] [-sè + verb]: séfè "quarrel more than required or beyond expectation.	Concrete Metaphoric
chí "block/close"	[-sè + verb]: sèchí ihe "block/close something by drawing something on it.[physical movement] [-sè + verb + suffix]- sèchítéré ḿmádù "quarrel on someone's behalf.	Concrete
gbú "kill"	[-sè + verb]: sègbú "draw and kill: draw to death [-sè + verb]: sègbú "stress someone"	Concrete Metaphoric
dà "fall"	[-sè + verb]: sédà "pull down"[physical movement] [-sè + verb]: sédà "pull someone's business down.	Concrete Metaphoric
sà "apart"	[sè + verb]: sésà "draw apart: scatter [sè + verb]: sésà "tear apart	Concrete Metaphoric
-kọ "together	[sè +verb]: sèkọ "draw together	Concrete
bá "in/into"	[sè+verb]: sèbá "magnify	Metaphoric

Metaphor, as one type of cognitive structuring, is seen to derive lexical change in a motivated way, and provides a key to understanding the creation of polysemy and the phenomenon of semantic shift (Saeed 2003:352).

6. Image Schema

Image schemas have been shown to lie at the basis of numerous metaphorical constructions (cf Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Lakoff 1987; Ruiz de Mendoza 1997; Fornes and Ruiz de Mendoza 1998).

According to Saeed (2003:353), image schemas are an important form of conceptual structure in the cognitive semantic literature. The basic idea is that because of our physical experience of being and acting in the world - of perceiving the environment, moving our bodies, exerting and experiencing force, etc we form basic conceptual structures which we then use to organise thought across a range of more abstract domains. Uchechukwu (2011:45) explains it as condensed but abstract and dynamic re-description of perceptual interactions or experiences of human beings. They function as organising structures for partially ordering and forming human experiences, but are also modified by concrete human experiences. Hampe (2005:3) as cited in Uchechukwu (2011:45) asserts, "there is no mutual compatible definition of image schema in cognitive linguistics". The multiplicity of definitions has been seen by Johnson (2005:27) as a variation in the effort to "put flesh" on the "image schema skeleton".

Image Schema of the Verb Root –Sè

Here the image schema of the verb root shall be discussed under three image schemas namely: CONTAINMENT, PATH and FORCE Schemas.

Containment Schema

Johnson (1987) gives the example of the schema of containment, which derives from our experience of the human body itself as a container from experience of being physically locating us within bounded locations like room, beds and also of putting objects into container. Such a schema has certain experientially based characteristics. It has a kind of natural logic, including for example the rules below:

a. Containers are a kind of disjunction: elements are either inside or outside the container.
b. Containment is typically transitive: "if the container is place in another container the entity is within both as Johnson says: if I am in bed, and my bed is in my room, then I am in my room". The schema is also associated with a group of implications, which can be seen as natural inferences about containment.

Johnson's calls these 'entailments' and gives examples like the following (adopted from Johnson 1987:22).

i.   Experience of containment typically involves protection from outside forces.

ii.   Containment limits forces, such as movement, within the container.

iii.   The contained entity experiences relative fixity of location.

iv. The containment affects an observer's view of the contained entity, either improving such view or blocking it (containers my hide or display).
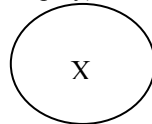
Figure (1) Containment

The schema can be extended by a process of metaphorical extension into abstract domain. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) identify; CONTAINER as one of a group of ontological metaphors, where our experience of non-physical phenomena is described in terms of simple physical objects like substances and containers. We shall use the sentences below to demonstrate the correspondence of the verb root –se with the containment schema thus:

11.   Ńgóźi sèrè ńŕi di̟   n̄'ímé ̀itè.

        Ngozi draw rV PAST food be PREP inside pot

        [literal: Ngozi drew food be inside pot]

    Ngozi drew the food in the pot.

Here, the pot is the container while the food inside it is the content.

Path Schema

According to Saeed (2003: 355), Johnson (1980) claims that this schema reflects our everyday experience of moving around the world and experiencing the movements of other entities. Our journeys typically have a beginning and an end, a sequence of places on the way and direction. Other movements may include projected paths, like the flight of a stone thrown through the air. Based on such experiences, the path schema contains a STARTING POINT /SOURCE (marked A), an END POINT/GOAL (marked B), and a sequence of contiguous locations connecting them (marked by the arrow) thus:

Path Schema

Figure (2)   A ——————————————→   B
                        Path
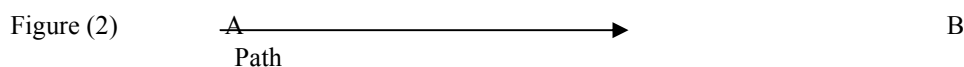
The path schema is associated with the following implications

a.   Since A and B are connected by a series of contiguous locations, getting from A to B implies passing through the intermediate point.

b.   Paths tend to be associated with directional movement along them, say from A to B.

c.   There is an association with time. Since a person traversing a path takes time to do so, points on the path are readily associated with temporal sequences. Therefore, the further along the path an entity is the more time has elapsed.

The correspondence of the verb root sè to the PATH schema can be illustrated with the following sentences given before and repeated below thus:

12.   Ńgóźi̟ nà-ésè ḿm̄īr̄i n'ò̟dó̟   ḿm̄īr̄i.

    Ngo̟zi̟Aux-draw water PREP pit water

    [Literal: Ngo̟zi̟ is drawing water from pit water].

    Ngo̟zi̟ is drawing water from the well.

In 12, the well is the SOURCE, the distance it travelled from the well to the level ground is the PATH and the level ground where the water was dropped is the END POINT/GOAL. There is a contact between the trajectory and the land mark.

13.   Ó̟nū̟ sèrè ò̟gù

Mouth draw rV PAST fight

    [Literal: mouth drew fight]

    Mouth caused fight

Here, ó̟nū̟ is the SOURCE, the direction of the fight is the PATH and the fight itself is the GOAL. The focus here is on the end-point of the path.

14. Ńgó̟zi̟   nà-ésè fòtó

    Ngo̟zi̟ Aux-draw photo

    [literal: Ngo̟zi̟ is drawing photo]

    Ngo̟zi̟ snaps picture/ Ngo̟zi̟ is a photographer.

Here, Ngozi is the SOURCE, the distance the flash travelled to get to the target object is the PATH and the target

object is the GOAL.

15. Ńgọ́zị̀ nà Ạ̀dá nà-ésè ókwū
Ngọzị CONJ Ada AUX-draw talk
[literal: Ngọzị and Ada are drawing talk]
Ngọzị and Ada are quarrelling

In (15), Ngọzị and Ada are the SOURCE, how long they have quarrelled is the PATH and the quarrel is the GOAL.
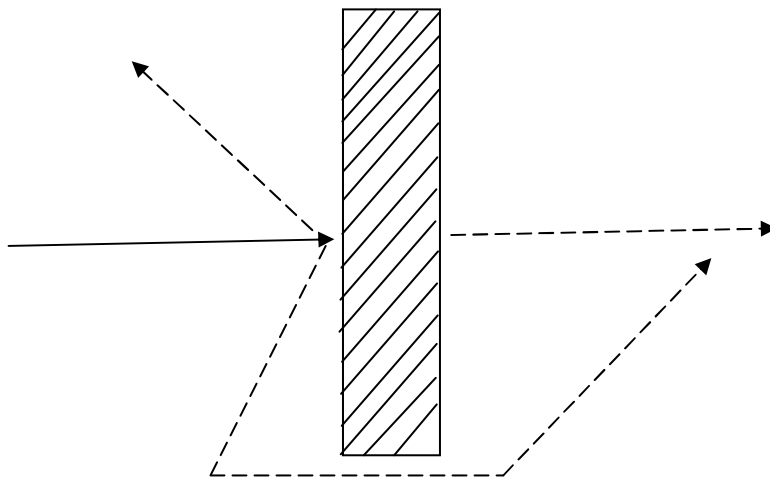
Force Schema:
The force schema includes the basic force schema of compulsion, blockage and removal of restraint.
Figure (3) Compulsion

In figure (3), we see a force schema of compulsion where a force vector F acts on an entity U. The essential element in this diagram is movement along a trajectory, the dotted line represents the fact that the force may be blocked or may continue.

Figure (4) Blockage

In figure (4), we see the specific schema of blockage; where a force meets an obstruction and acts in various ways; being diverted, or continuing on by moving the obstacle or passing through it.
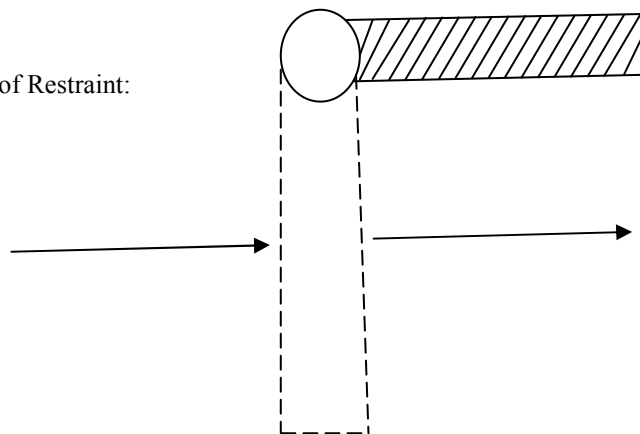

Figure (5) Removal of Restraint:

Figure (5) shows the related schema of removal of restraint, where the removal (by another cause) of blockage allows an exertion of force to continue along a trajectory. These force schemas like other schemas are held to arise from our everyday experiences as we grew as children, of moving around our environment and interacting with animate and inanimate entities. As with other image schemas they are held to be pre-linguistic and to shape the form of linguistic categories (Saeed (2003:357). In our examples below, we have more of the force schema of compulsion thus:

16. Ạ́gū̄ sèrè Íbè ḿḿányá

Agu draw rV PAST Ibe wine
[Literal: Agx drew Ibe wine]
            Agx booked Ibe wine

Here, Agx is the vector F that acted on Ibe the entity U.
Here, the verb –se is used for the real world of social obligation. This follows the usual metaphorical extension from the external concrete world to the internal world of cognition and emotion.

Force Schema
17.   Ágū nà-ésè ḿmīrī
      Agx AUX-draw water
      [Literal: Agx is drawing water]
      Agx makes rain.
Agx is the vector F, while rain is the entity U. Agx uses force to cause rain to fall. Here, it is evident that Agx makes rain. And we see this evidence as compulsion.
18.   Àmùmà nà-ésè nʼígwē
      Lightening AUX-draw PREP Cloud
      [Literal: lightening is drawing in the cloud]
      It is lightening.
Lightning is the vector that acts on the entity sky by forcefully causing light to shine in the sky
20.   Ńgóźị sèrè Àdáʼijè
      Ngozi draw rV PAST Ada walk
      [Literal: Ngozidrew Ada walk]
      caused Ada to walk about.
Ngozi the vector acted on the entity Ada by compelling her to trek a long distance. The idea here is that there is a conceptual link between Ngọzị physically pushing Ada in a direction and a moral force impelling her (Ada) to act in a certain way. Both are forces that can be resisted or accented to; in this manner, a common conceptual schema unites the characterisation of the two situations.

7.   **Summary of the Findings**
The cognitive semantic approach studies language structures as reflections of general conceptual organisation, categorisation principles, processing mechanisms and experiential and environmental influences. It assumes that there is no access to reality independent of human categorisation and as such, the structure of reality as reflected in language is a product of the human mind.   Using the inherent complement verb constructions, the conceptualsiation of the verb 'seˋ' was analysed. The meanings fell into three image schemas, namely containment, path and force schemas. These image schemas align with the presumption in cognitive semantics that the common human experience of maturing and interacting in the society motivates basic conceptual structures that make understanding and language possible, that language is not analysed as an abstract structure but as a human quality, that meaning is based on conventionalised conceptual structures, that metaphor and image schema can be used to extend the meaning of concepts or sentences. Finally, it is found out that the Igbo verb is not empty as speculated by some Igbo scholars.

In conclusion,   the verb 'se' provides additional evidence to the effect that meaning is conceptualisation and metaphor and image schemas extend the meaning of structures or sentences.

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