

**Re AS A POST-VERBAL FREE FORM IN EDO:
A MORPHO-SEMANTIC RE-ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

*This paper takes a close look at the semantic import of Edo verbal units. It compares them with the resulting semantic output of the combinations. It is our conviction that an accurate interpretation of the semantic units and the general morphology of a language can lead to discovering the ways in which the native speakers of any language view and interpret the world. This paper seeks to discover how the Edo native speaker patterns common concepts through a morpho-semantic study of the internal structure of Edo verbs. The study re-examines Agheyisi's (1986) analysis of **re** as a post verbal free form in Edo and asserts that, contrary to Agheyisi's claim, **re** is a full-fledge verb in the language with specific verbal features ([±]), a distinct semantic interpretation and participates in transitivity alternations like every other verb of its kind in the language.*

1. Introduction

The Verb Phrase is a symmetrical projection of the headword, V. The verb has generally been referred to as the sentence predicator. Chomsky's (1986) tetrachotomy features identify the verb with the features [-N, +V]. Parametrically, languages are permitted to freely choose the appropriate constituents and lexical units that combine with the head word in phrasal projections. Edo verbs seem to select varying categorical lexical units. Such units can either be verbal, nominal prepositional or simply an affix. It should be interesting to determine whether the verbal element in Edo is a single semantic unit or a combination of units. The meaning of verbal elements derived from such combinations need to be further analyzed to determine if one unit depends on another to derive the appropriate meaning designated by the verb in question (Amayo,1976). Omuruyi (1986) broadly divides Edo verbs into two groups: Action verbs and adjectival verbs. Action verbs unlike adjectival verbs cannot undergo transformations. According to this study, a third group consist of verbs that are partly action verbs and partly adjectival. Agheyisi (1986) in turn, splits the Edo verbs into bi-morphemic and multi-morphemic verbs. The former are interpreted, as complex verbs while the later are compound verbs.

2. The Edo Verb

This section of the paper focuses on the internal structures of lexical units that constitute the verbal projection in the Edo verb phrase. The following examples show simple verbs in Edo:

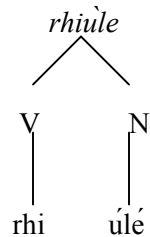
1. a) mú 'carry'
- b) rhié 'take'
- c) kpàá 'lift'
- d) ghèé 'look'
- e) lé 'cook'
- f) zé 'choose'
- g) rhuó 'boast'

The verbs in (1) are said to be simple verbs because each constitutes a single lexical unit and cannot undergo any further morphological or semantic divisions. The verbs in (2) are complex verbs (in the sense of Agheyisi 1986). They are bi-morphemic and consist of a combination of a verb and a nominal element.

2. a) ghèé + ègbé > ghègbé
 look body admire
- b) rhié + ùlé > rhiùlé
 take race run
- c) kpàá + ègbé > kpàègbé
 lift body > rise
- d) zé + èdú > zèdú
 choose translation interpret

The verbs in (2) are underlyingly a combination of two semantic units. The result of the combination surfaces in the like of the verbs in (1) that are a single morphological unit. An analysis of the meaning of each lexical unit at deep structure conveys a profound meaning that is not immediately evident at surface structure. Unlike the morpho-syntactic relations between the verb and other clausal constituents, which can easily be identified and analyzed, interpreting semantic relations demands the knowledge of the native speakers' worldview. Such semantic interpretations rely more on ones competence in the socio-cultural and sociolinguistic choices of the native speaker. For instance, *rhié* 'take' is a transitive verb that takes a concrete object complement. *rhiùlé* 'race', is an abstract nominal. The two lexical units in combination result in *rhiùlé* 'run'. *rhiùlé* reveals the general perception of 'flight' for the native speaker of Edo. An

individual doesn't just run, one engages in it. To engage in a race, it is either the individual involved is running after something, or away from something or somebody. A race is therefore, inherently conceived as a competitive activity. The native speakers' conception of 'run' is that of somebody engaging in a competition. Thus underlyingly, 'to run' for Edo native speakers is to take (something or somebody) on a race. The transitivity alternation of *rhié* is therefore fulfilled when the verb appropriately takes the nominal *ulé*. *rhiúle* can therefore be interpreted as a phrasal projection with the head V, subcategorizing for an nominal object complement as shown below;



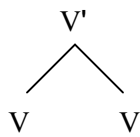
All the verbs in (2) can morphologically be analyzed as *rhiúle* above, understandably with appropriate semantic differences. The verbs in (3) below are derived from two distinct verbs.

- | | | | | | | |
|----|----|--------|---|--------|---|-------------------|
| 3. | a) | dò | + | rhie | > | dòrhié |
| | | secret | | take | | steal |
| | b) | gba` | + | khèé | > | gbàkhèé |
| | | tie | | wait | | waylay |
| | c) | mù | + | rré | > | mùrré |
| | | carry | | come | | bring |
| | d) | rù | + | khòó | > | rùkhòó |
| | | do | | evil | | err/sin/ill-treat |
| | e) | sì | + | kòkó | > | sìkòkó |
| | | pull | + | gather | > | assemble |
| | f) | yèé | + | rré | > | yèrré |
| | | recall | | come | | remember |

In (3a) *dò* 'secret, combines with *rhie* to derive *dòrhié* 'steal'. In English, the word steal principally relays an act of taking another person's property wrongfully. A stolen item is that collected unobtrusively without the permission of the owner. To the native speaker of Edo, one steals when he/she takes something surreptitiously. The secrecy surrounding the act of taking permits the agent to deny having performed the act of taking. *gbàkhèé* 'waylay' in (3b) is more

semantically loaded than its English translation of ‘waylay’ (to lie in wait with the intention to attack). *gbà* ‘tie’ portrays the traditional system of setting animal traps among the Edo people. Usually, a long flexible stick is firmly pinned to the ground near a suspected animal track. A strong rope is tied to its tip, pulled and connected to some heavy contraption. Once the unsuspecting animal enters this device, it unknowingly sets off a hook that releases the high-tension rope, which snaps, suspending the animal to the end of the stick. The animal usually dies in that position. If an Edo person intends to trap an animal, he/she does not only pin and ‘tie’ the trap rope; he/she also ‘waits’ for the animal to come by. *gbàkhèé* as a semantic unit hardly gives away the deeper meaning within the two words from which *gbàkhèé* is derived. *mùrré* ‘bring’ in (3c) comprises two verbs: *mù* ‘carry’ and *rré* ‘come’. The idea is that for some one to bring something, such an individual performs two activities: he/she comes to the speaker, bearing the requested item. *sì* ‘pull’ and *kòkò* ‘gather’ combine to realize *sìkòkò* ‘assemble’. The thought of ‘assemble’ is to extract desired items and bring them together. So again, we have two activities: extract (pull) and gather that yield ‘assemble’. Our last example is like (3c) given that *rré* ‘come’ is one of the semantic units that together with *yèé* ‘recall’, forms *yèrré* ‘remember’. So the act of remembering involves recalling something that happened sometime in the past and proceeding to bring back such memory to bear on the moment of speech.

(3a-f) each portrays a single verb at the surface structure level, designating a single activity. Inherently, this activity constitutes two separate consecutive actions that occur consecutively at the deep structure level. Interestingly this combinatorial output forms the native speaker’s semantic concept of the single verb. The dominating V’ is a complex head word



The syntactic ordering of the verbal units that project into V’ (as shown above), can be interpreted within constructions in which the predicate of a clause consists of two or more verbal elements, generally referred to as *serial verb constructions*. Verb serialization is a prominent feature of the Kwa group of languages to which Edo is a member. (We return to verb serialization in section 2.2 of this paper).

A rather simple observation that is obvious from (3) is that compound verbs in Edo consistently describe two activities with the first verb modifying the second. Agheyisi (1986) recognizes two

presentation impedes the full semantic interpretation of the morphemes involved. We view (5-6) within the general semantic combination of two related events within Edo syntax. Edo compound verbs are morphologically conditioned to derive conjoined clauses, which could be syntactically and semantically autonomous, for instance;

- 7.a) gba` + khe` > gbàkhèré → (you) tie + (you) wait
 tei wait waylay
 b) si` + kòkó > sikhòkó → (you) pull and (you) gather
 pull gather assemble

The literary translation of the verbs in (4a-e) and (5-6) indicates a process of movement towards the speaker. For instance, the native speakers' conception of 'remember' involves a process of recalling an event or something that happened sometime in the past and proceeding to bring his recollections(s) to bear on a current situation. Such a situation is understood to be occurring in the presence of the speaker. Put differently, the event is remembered and transported from the past to the present. The movement is [+ Speaker oriented]. Viewed from this perspective, (5 and 6) encodes a [+ speaker orientation] movement. Once comfort is interpreted as progressive appreciation of the Lagos environment by Ozo, the [+speaker] oriented movement of a pleasant perception is obvious. The approximate semantic and morphological lexical item in Edo that encodes the re interpretation is rre 'come'. It can rightly be said that re in example (4, 5, and 6) encodes movement that is [+ Speaker oriented]. If such movement can rightly be interpreted as 'coming', then Agheyisi cannot be correct in her conception of re as a post-verbal free form. Our semantic interpretation of re is supported by Edo complex verbs, which are inherently morphologically conjoined.

2.2 re as a verb and co-verb

Once we have sentences or phrases that serialize verbs, the first verb in the series modifies the second verb. For example;

8. a) Uyi sá àmè rre`
 Uyi fetch water come
 'Uyi fetched water'

b) Iyèn lélé Enòsá rrè
Iyen follow Nosa come
'Iyen came with Nosa'

c) Iyèn lá úgbó rrè
Iyen pass farm come
'Iyen came through the farm.'

Agheyisi correctly interprets *rrè* in (8a-c) as 'come', which is a full-fledged verb modified by the first verb in the series. The status of *rrè* as a verb could change once given a different semantic interpretation. For instance;

9. a) Úyì rhié ùlẹ́ rrè
Uyi take race come
'Uyi ran here'

b) Ozo tié Amẹ̀zẹ́ rrè
Ozo call Ameze come
'Ozo summoned Ameze'

c) Nòsà hìí íkẹ́kẹ́ rré
Nosa climb bicycle come
'Nosa rode on a bicycle here'

d) Iyèn mú ọ̀mọ̀mọ́ rrè
Iyen carry baby come
'Iyen brought the baby'

The paraphrase of the clauses in (9) relates conjoined activities. Examine (10) below.

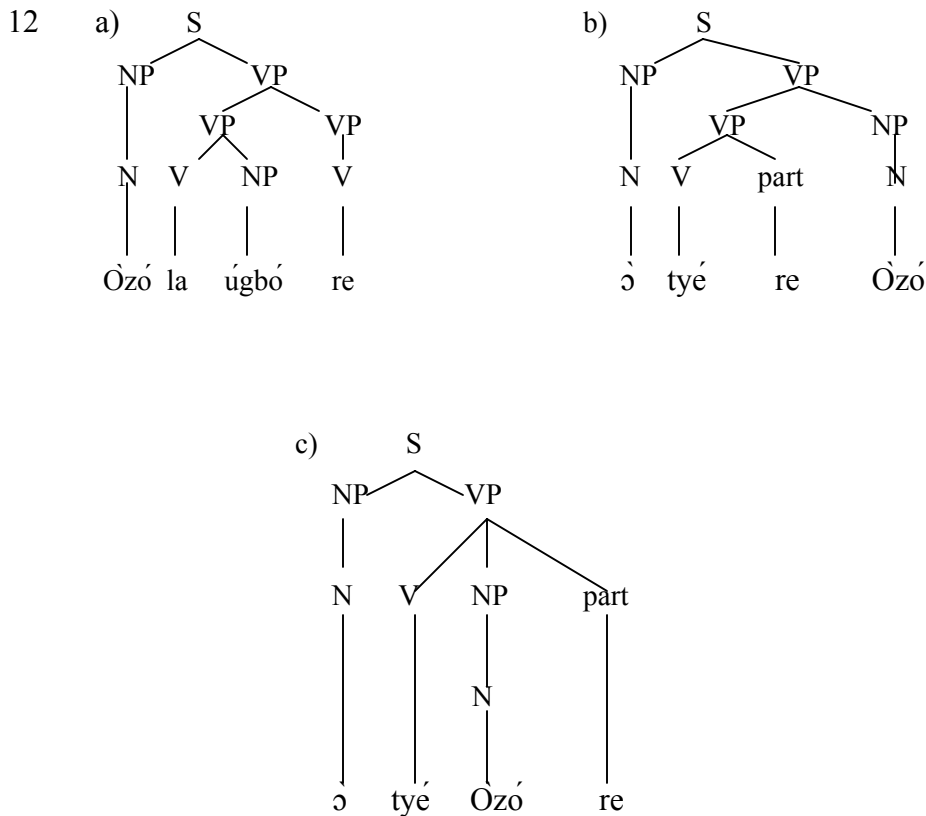
10 a) Òzó la úgbó re = Òzó la úgbó + Òzó re
Ozo pass farm come
'Ozo passed through the farm + Ozo came'

- b) Enòsà hiin íkéké re = Nòsà híí íkéké + Nòsá re
 Nosa climb bicycle come
 ‘Nosa rode on a bicycle + Nòsá came (here)’

As Agheyisi rightly observes, the second verb acts as a dietic modifier of the first verb. It is the second verb that semantically specifies the directional orientation of the activity designated by the first verb. The conceptual relationship between the main verb and the co-verb is what leads Agheyisi to tag the second verb as a particle. She employs the data in (11) to justify her claims.

11. ò tyé re Òzó = ò tyé-re Òzó
 ‘He called-come Ozo’
 ‘He summoned Ozo’

Her (11) ignores both transitivity alternation and the role of the subject NP in Edo clauses. She interprets *re* as an affix morpheme to *tyé* with no precise meaning. This interpretation leads her to conclude that *re* is simply a particle. It is this reading that motivates her proposition of the *Particle Movement Rule* in (12) below,



(12b), expectedly should exhibit a complex VP head with two V heads rather than the head V taking a particle complement. Our argument is that (11) is structurally identical to (10) as shown in (13)

13. Ò tyé Òzó re = Ò tyé Òzó + Òzó re
 ‘He summoned Ozo + Ozo came’

Once *re* is correctly interpreted as ‘come’, a verb that maximally projects to the VP, and syntactically follows the NP (Òzó), within the clause, her particle movement rule proffered in (12c) above, becomes irrelevant.

3. The Èdo Verb and the feature of Bi-directionality

Transitivity alternation within the Èdo verb phrase permits the head verb to determine the semantic relationships that exist between the verb and its object complement. The lexical features of each verb reveal the verbal argument structure of the verb and the lexical relations that exist between the head verb and its phrasal projections.

This section of the paper employs the Binarity Hypothesis in the analysis of Èdo verbs. Universal Grammar (UG) assumes a range of structural variations across languages and specifies two open value choices for every natural language. A natural language either has or does not have a given parameter. These two value choices have been referred to in the literature as Binarity.

3.1 [± Speaker Orientation]

Verbs in clausal constructions are known to specify the action of the nominal in subject position. The relationship between such a verb and its verbal complement (if any) has both semantic and morphological idiosyncrasies. We attempt an analysis of Èdo compound verbs set to reveal the semantic relationship the verb has with the components in subject position of the clause. In (14a-e) below, the verb *rre* ‘come’ is combined with other root verbs and the morpho-semantic output is analyzed in the light of the data in (4).

14.a)	yò	+	rré	>	yòrré
	go		come		arrive
b)	mù	+	rré	>	mùrré
	carry		come	>	bring

- c) dè + rré > dèrré
 buy come > purchase
- d) s̀ì + rré > s̀ìrré
 pull come > crawl
- e) rhié + ùlé + rré > rhùlèrré
 take race come > come with a run

Once rré is correctly interpreted, the semantic import of the resulting compound verb is unambiguous. Simply put, the action specified by the verb is embellished with a directional orientation i.e [+ Speaker Oriented]. Here, movement is specified to be towards the speaker. Hypothetically, two points exist. (Point X and Point Y). Assume the speaker to be at X, the action expectedly moves from Y towards X. (a type of right to left movement). Agheyisi interprets *re* as a meaningless particle. This paper claims that this interpretation of *re* as a semantically meaningless particle is faulty.

In (15) below, we present compound verbs that constitute the root verb with a verbal morpheme that is semantically opposed to *rre* in (14)

- 15.a) mù + kpàá > mùkpàá
 carry go remove
- b) sàán + kpàá > sàánkpàá
 jump go > jump away
- c) khiàn + kpàá > khiànkpàá
 walk go walk away
- d) t̀ìn + kpàá > t̀ìnkpàá
 fly go > fly away
- e) rhiùlé + kpaa > rhiùlékpàá
 run + go > run away

Unlike *rre* in (14), *kpaa* means ‘go’. The root verbs in (15) can be employed to issue orders (Imperatives). *kpaa* indicates the direction of movement the action of the root verb is expected to adopt. If we follow our two-point hypothesis, the speaker, in this case is assumed to be at X and the action moves from X to Y (left to right movement). To the native speaker, *kpàá* represents departure from the speaker [- Speaker Orientation].

Notice that each verb that constitutes a part of the compound verb retains its transitivity value in a clausal construction. The compound verb simply designates two activities in a stretch. Structurally, the Kwa group of languages exhibits this verb serialization feature. Expectedly, it is the action designated by the first verb that is qualified by the second verb. Universally, such languages are termed Head-First languages as against English-type languages that are Head-Last. In (16) below, we interchange verbal heads and observe the semantic output of such head swoops.

16. a(i) $mù + kòkó > mùkòkó$ ii) $kòkó + mú > kòkòmú$
 carry gather ‘cater for’ gather carry ‘carry together’
- b(i) $mù + lèré > mùlèré$ ii) $lèré + mú > lèrémú$
 carry hide ‘conceal’ hide carry ‘steal’
- c(i) $lèlé + kpàá > lèlèkpá$ ii) $kpàá + lèlé > kpàlèlé$
 follow go ‘go with’ ii) go follow ‘follow’

(17a-c) shows that the meaning of an Edo compound verb is dependent on the lexical ordering at the deep-structure level. Put differently, the head word determines the semantic interpretation of the verbal combination.

The above conclusion becomes suspect in the light of the data in (17) below where a swoop in the position of verbal units leads to an ill-formed output.

- 17.a(i) $saan + fi > sanfi$ (ii) $fi + saan > *fisaan$
 jumb throw jump into throw jump
- b(ii) $si + rre > sirré$ (ii) $rre + si > *rresi$
 pull come crawl (ii) come pull
- c(i) $fian + gbe > fiangbe$ (ii) $gbe + fian > *gbefian$
 cut join bless join cut
- d(i) $yo + rre > yórré$ (ii) $rre + yo > *rreyo$
 go come arrive come go

Languages that have the feature of serializing verbs respect the inherent order of cause and effect. For instance, if *Osarro* is said to have ate yam, cooked yam and bought, these activities will be serialized following their natural sequence of occurrence (Osaro bought yam, cooked and ate it). It is this natural sequence of consecutive events that the native speaker of Edo will recognize as having been violated in (17a-d). When the verbal combinations in 17(ii) above are isolated, each is capable of being grammatically employed in a clause. The components of complex verbs can also sloop positions. In each of such cases, focus is on the component that is being modified by the other.

4. Conclusion

This paper set out to analyze verbal units and their resulting morpho-semantic outputs. The study reveals that Edo compound words inherently represent two related events that are morphologically conditioned to derive conjoined clauses which otherwise are syntactically and semantically autonomous. The paper has shown that both the transitivity alternation and the syntactic ordering of serialized verbal units must be respected to avoid ill-formed derivations in Edo. Evidence from our analysis shows that *re* is not a meaningless particle as claimed by Agheyisi (1986). Our morpho-semantic specification of *re* and our [\pm Speaker orientation] interpretation is evidence to our claim that *re* is a verbal unit that does not only exhibits discrete lexical features but participates in transitivity alternation as well.

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