

INVESTIGATING MATERIAL CLAUSES IN THE IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper investigates material clauses in the Igbo language. Material clause is one of the six kinds of clauses that account for transitivity. The investigation is based on the theoretical framework of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) developed by Halliday. Systemic Functional Grammars is organized into three modes of meaning - experiential mode, textual mode and interpersonal mode. The system of transitivity is the focus of the experiential mode. Both paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of the experiential grammar of the Igbo language clause are investigated. Data used in the analysis were generated by the author, who is a native speaker of the Igbo language, from oral utterances. The data are categorized into participant and process, which are core elements of transitivity system on the perspective of SFG. As expected, the investigation confirms that material processes in the Igbo language are verbs of actions and happenings. The processes have Actor, Goal and Beneficiary in addition to Circumstance as participants. While the Actor is an obligatory participant, Beneficiary, Goal and Circumstance are optional participants. On the difference between doing and happening material clauses, it is observed that while the Actor inputs the required energy for the realization of the process, and impacts on the Goal in some Actor + Process configurations; the Process rather impacts on the Actor in some instances of Actor + Process configurations of doing material clauses. Moreover,

in a happening material clause, the process is represented as a happening and the Actor serves as the medium through which the happening is actualised.

Key Words: Systemic Functional Grammar in Igbo; SFG Transitivity in Igbo, Igbo Material Clauses/Processes

List of Abbreviations

M.pr:	material process
Part:	participant
PART:	participle
PST:	past tense
SFG:	Systemic Functional Grammar
1SG:	first person singular

Introduction

Material clause is one of the six aspects of transitivity in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). The study is targeted at observing, analysing and arriving at a conclusion on the material clauses in the Igbo language. SFG framework is adopted for this study in view of the position of Halliday and Matthiessen (2014: 20) that “languages evolve - they are not designed, and evolved systems cannot be explained simply as the sum of their parts. Our traditional compositional thinking about language needs to be, if not replaced by, at least complemented by a ‘systems’ thinking whereby we seek to understand the nature and the dynamic of a semiotic system as a whole”. This model of grammar perceives language as a functional system. According to Butt and colleagues (2000), “Systemic Functional Grammar is a way of describing lexical and grammatical choices from the system of wording so that we are always aware of how language is being used to realize the meaning”. Lamidi (2008:17) states that “Halliday considers grammar to be a network of systems of

interrelated contrasts. Here particular attention is paid to semantics and pragmatics in the expression of meaning such that the theory cannot be separated from daily experience”.

Accordingly, Systemic Functional Grammar is a viable framework for describing and modelling language, and also a potent resource for making meaning and choices. This theoretical model treats language beyond its formal structures and takes the context of culture and the context of situation in language use (Halliday 1985, 1994, Matthiessen 1995, Martin & Rose 2003). Systemic Functional Grammar is a form of grammatical and meaning description, and is a part of the systemic functional linguistics which is a social semiotic approach. Systemic Functional Grammar is a theory of grammar based on the view that language is a system for making meaning. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014:23), “Systemic theory gets its name from the fact that the grammar of a language is represented in the form of system networks, not as an inventory of structures”. The term **systemic** refers to the fact that every grammatical structure of a language involves a choice from available sets of options, against the earlier notion that grammar is a composite of rules. **Functional** stands for the fact that every time we make a choice from the available options, we are doing so in order to fulfil a communicative purpose; while **grammar** refers to the fact that there is an overall organisation to the possible options. The adoption of the SFG, no doubt, increases and diversifies the number of grammatical theories that have been applied on the study of the Igbo language.

Transitivity in Systemic Functional Grammar

Transitivity in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) is a summation of process types. Process, which forms the nucleus of the clause, is realised by the verbal group. Halliday (1994, 2014),

Thompson (2013), Eggins (2004) and Martins et al (1997) have identified three major processes to include material process, mental process and relational process; and three other process types which include verbal process, behavioural process and existential process. Halliday (1967:199) gives the meaning of transitivity as “the set of options relating to cognitive content, the linguistic representation of extra linguistic experience, whether of the phenomena of the external world or of feelings, thoughts and perceptions”. Transitivity analysis is the realisation of the experiential strand of ideational metafunction (Martin et al 1997). By experiential strand, a clause is construed as a representation of experience. It is used to explore the content or the experiential meaning in a clause. A clause is defined as a realization of events.

The role of transitivity in a clause is summarised by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) who argue that the system of TRANSITIVITY provides the lexicogrammatical resources for construing a quantum of change in the flow of events as a figure – as a configuration of elements centred on a process. It also accounts for “who or what does what to whom or what?” (Iwamoto 2008). Thompson (2013: 95) describes transitivity as “a system for describing the whole clause, rather than just the verb and its objects” and compares transitivity in SFG and transitivity in TGG by stating thus “it does, though, share with the traditional use of focus on the verbal group, since it is the type of process which determines how the participants are labelled” (Thompson 2013: 95). Transitivity system takes care of the doings, happenings, saying, sensing, beings and existence in a clause. Transitivity analysis is helpful in revealing the participants involved in an action, how they relate to others and if they take an active or passive role in a clause (Nguyen, 2012).

Transitivity covers all phenomena and anything that can be expressed by a verb: event, whether physical or not, state, or relations (Halliday 1985, 1976:159). Transitivity is represented as a configuration of a **process**, **participants** involved in the process, and ways in which the participants may unfold called **circumstances**.

Material Processes: Processes of “Doing” and “Happening”

Material clause accounts for the outer world of actions and events. Material process represents “doing or happening”. It involves physical actions which makes it to correspond with the traditional definition of verb as a ‘doing word’ (Thomson 2004:90). Examples of material process include the following verbs: running, throwing, eating, dancing, walking, playing, etc. A material clause is usually made up of an **actor** (the participant who does or performs the action of the process), a **goal** (the participant that is impacted by the action) and at times a **beneficiary** (a participant benefiting from the action). Some material clauses have a **range/scope** participant (which specifies the scope of the action). A material clause can be probed with the questions “What did *x* do?” and “What happened to *x*?” in which case *x* is a participant.

1. The man flogged the boy.
 Actor M.pr Goal
2. The boy was flogged by the man.
 Goal M.pr Actor
3. Franklin gave Paul a pen
 Actor M.pr Beneficiary Goal
4. The President celebrated his homecoming.
 Actor M.pr Scope

Examples (1), (2), (3) and (4) are material clauses. Example (1) can be probed with the question “What did the man do?”, example (2) can be probed with “What happened to the boy?”, example (3) can be probed with the question “What did Franklin do”, while example (4) can be probed with “What did the President do?”. “The man”, “Franklin” and “the president” are **Actors** because they are participants which respectively perform actions in those clauses; “the boy” and “a pen” are **Goals** as a result of being the participants which are affected by the action of the **Actors**; “his homecoming” is **Scope** because it limits the celebration of the President to a particular event; “Paul” is **Beneficiary** because he enjoys or benefits from the action of Franklin in (3); while “(was) flogged”, “gave” and “celebrated” are Material processes because they indicate actions performed by “the man”, “Franklin” and “the President”, respectively.

Material Processes in Igbo

Material processes are processes that express whatever an entity does and what happens to an entity. In other words, material processes usually indicate physical actions or happenings. They are resources for construing experience of dynamic change in the flow of events in the world around us, comprising the happenings and activities of the physical world and our own participation in its unfolding drama (Mwinlaaru 2017: 259). Material clauses in Igbo can be examined based on the following analytical areas:

- Verbs classified as material processes in Igbo
- Participants involved in material processes in Igbo
- Circumstance in material processes in Igbo
- How material processes in Igbo are probed

- Differentiating doing material clauses from happening material clauses in Igbo

Verbs Classified as Material Processes in Igbo

Material processes involve verbs that indicate actions - 'doing' - and verbs that indicate events - 'happening'.

. They include such verbs as in table (1).

Table 1. Examples of material processes in Igbo

S/N	Material Process	Gloss
1.	gbu	kill
2.	wè	take
3.	saa	wash
4.	si	cook
5.	gbu	kill
6.	nye	give
7.	ga	walk
8.	bu	carry
9.	rì	climb
10.	kù	plant
11.	dee	write
12.	kwọ	grind
13.	su	pound
14.	mèpee	open
15.	mèchie	close
16.	jìde	hold
17.	hapù	leave
18.	fe	fly
19.	guzò	stand
20.	kee	tie

Participants Involved in Material Processes in Igbo

Material processes may involve only one core participant **Actor** (the doer entity in the material clause), two or three participants - obligatory **Actor** and any or both optional **Goal** (entity that suffers or bears the action of the Actor) and **Beneficiary** (the entity which benefits from the material process or the entity for whom or to whom the process is said to take place) as exemplified in examples (5 - 7).

5. *Uzò* *ahụ* *mèpèrè.*
 Door the open+PART
 Part: Actor M. pr

"The door opened."

6. *Nneka* *kèrè* *azịà.*
 Nneka tied broom
 Part: Actor M.pr. Part: Goal

"Nneka tied the broom."

7. *Amaka* *nyèrè* *Adaeze* *egò.*
 Amaka give+PST *Adaeze* money
 Part.Actor M.pr Part.Beneficiary: Recipient Part.goal

"Amaka gave Adaeze some money."

The only involved participant in example (5) is the Actor *Uzò*. However, we have two participants - the Actor *Nneka* and Goal *azịà* in example (6) and three participants in example (7) - the Actor *Amaka*, Beneficiary *Adaeze* and Goal *egò*. **Beneficiary** comes in two forms. It can either be a **Recipient** or a **Client**. **Beneficiary** is a **Recipient** when it is the receiver or recipient of

something from the Actor via the Process (one to whom something is given). **Beneficiary** is a **Client** when it is the receiver or recipient of service from the Actor via the Process (one to whom a service is rendered). For instance, while the Beneficiary **Adaeze** in example (7) is a **Recipient**, the **Beneficiary** (Adaeze) in example (8) is a **Client**.

8. Amaka nyèrè egò makà Adaeze.
 Amaka give+PST money because Adaeze
 Part.Actor M.pr Part.Goal Beneficiary: Client
 "Amaka donated some money because of /for Adaeze."

The structural difference between **Recipient Beneficiary** and **Client Beneficiary** is that while **Client Beneficiary** usually involves the use of the complementizer "maka" or "maka ... ka" (as in examples '7', '9' and '10'), **Recipient Beneficiary** usually involves the use of the complementizer "ka" or non-inclusion of any complementizer (as in examples '8', '11' and '12').

9. Nneka nyèrè onyinye makà lfeanyi.
 Nneka give+PST gift for lfeanyi
 Actor M.pr Goal Beneficiary: Client

"Nneka gave an offering for lfeanyi."

10. Makà lfeanyi kà Nneka jìrì nye ònyinye
 For lfeanyi Com Nneka Aux+PST give gift
 Beneficiary: Client Actor M.pr Goal

"Nneka gave an offering because of lfeanyi."

11.	Nneka	nyèrè	Ifeanyi	ònyìnye.
	Nneka	give+PST	Ifeanyi	gift
	Actor	M.pr	Beneficiary: Recipient	Goal

"Nneka gave Ifeanyi a gift."

12.	Ifeanyi	ka	Nneka	nyèrè	ònyìnye
	Ifeanyi Com		Nneka	give+PST	gift
	Beneficiary: Recipient		Actor	M.pr	Goal

"It was Ifeanyi that Nneka gave a gift."

The structural insertion of *màkà* complementizer before a Client Beneficiary occurs whenever a Client Beneficiary appears post-Process. But whenever a Client Beneficiary appears pre-Process, it is usually preceded by 'maka' and 'preceded by 'ka'. Similarly, the structural non-inclusion of a complementizer in a material clause with Recipient Beneficiary usually takes place when Recipient Beneficiary appears post-Process (as in example '11'). However, 'ka' complementizer is usually inserted after a Recipient Beneficiary whenever a Recipient Beneficiary appears pre-Process (as in example '12').

Unlike what we have in the English language where *Beneficiary* and *Goal* are reversible in some structures, the Igbo language does not allow any structural reversal of *Beneficiary* and *Goal*. This is demonstrated in table (2).

Table 2. Non-Reversal of Beneficiaries and Goals in Igbo

S/N	The Igbo language	The English language			
1.	John zìjèrè an envelope to Tony	Tony	envelope	John	sent

John	send+PST	Tony	envelope	Actor	M.pr
Goal	Beneficiary				
Actor	M.pr	Beneficiary	Goal		
"John sent an envelope to Tony."					
2. *John	zìjèrè	envelope	Tony	John	sent
Tony	an envelope				
John	send+PST	envelope	Tony	Actor	M.pr
Beneficiary	Goal				
Actor	M.pr	Goal	Beneficiary		
"John sent an envelope to Tony"					

In table (2), while the reversal of **Goal** and **Beneficiary** in "2" does not affect the grammar or change the meaning of the clauses in "1" and "2" of the English language, the case is not the same in Igbo. The reversal of **Beneficiary** and **Goal** renders the clause in "2" of the Igbo language ungrammatical and meaningless.

Circumstance in Material Processes

Clauses with Material processes may be extended to accommodate circumstances. For instance, the clauses in examples (5) and (6) are re-written in examples (13) and (14) with the inclusions of circumstances.

13. Uzo ahù mèpèrè n'ùtùtù.
Door the open+PART in morning
Part: Actor M.pr Circumstance
"The door opened in the morning"
14. Nneka kèrè azịà n'ime ulo.
Nneka tied broom inside house
Part: Actor M.pr Part: Goal Circumstance
"Nneka tied the broom inside the house."

Probing Material Processes in Igbo

Material processes can be probed in different ways depending on the kind and the place of participants. They can be probed with the question formats: *x mere gini?* and *Gini mere y?* where *x* stands for an **Actor participant** and *y* stands for a **Goal participant**. Specifically, **Client participants** and **Recipient participant** can be probed with *Onye/Gini ka?* For instance, examples (5), (6), (7) and (8) can be probed with *x mere gini?* As in:

Ụzọ ahụ mètè gini?

15. Ụzọ ahụ mètèrè.
 Door the open+PART
 Part: Actor M.pr
 "The door opened."
 Nneka mere gini?
16. Nneka kètè azịzà.
 Nneka tied broom
 Part: Actor M.pr. Part: Goal
 "Nneka tied the broom."
 Amaka mètè gini?
17. Amaka nyètè Adaèze egō.
 Amaka give+PST Adaèze money
 Part.Actor M.pr Part.Beneficiary: Recipient Part.goal
 "Amaka gave Adaèze some money."
 Nneka mètè gini?
18. Nneka nyètè ònyinye màkà Ifeanyi.
 Nneka give+PST gift for Ifeanyi
 Actor M.pr Goal Beneficiary: Client
 "Nneka gave an offering for Ifeanyi."

Examples (44), (45) and (46) can be probed with *Onye ka ...?* as in:

19. Onye kà Nneka jìrì màkà ya nye ònyinye?

20. M̀kà̀ Ifeanyi kà Nneka jìrì nye ònyinye
 For Ifeanyi Com Nneka Aux+PST+give
 Beneficiary: Client Actor M.pr Goal

"Nneka gave an offering because of Ifeanyi."

Onye kà Nneka nyèrè ònyinye?

21. Nneka nyèrè Ifeanyi ònyinye.
 Nneka give+PST Ifeanyi gift
 Actor M.pr Beneficiary: Recipient Goal

"Nneka gave Ifeanyi a gift."

22. Ifeanyi kà Nneka nyèrè ònyinye.
 Ifeanyi Com Nneka give+PST gift
 Beneficiary: Recipient Actor M.pr Goal

"It was Ifeanyi that Nneka gave a gift."

The actions of material clauses may or may not be directed from one entity to another entity. This leads to *doing* and *happening* material clauses.

Differentiating Doing Material Clauses from Happening Material clauses

A doing clause involves the extension of the process from one participant (the Actor) to another participant (the Goal) and impacts it in some way. Such a material clause represents a

doing (or an action). On the other hand, a happening material clause is a material clause where the outcome of the process does not extend to a Goal but confines to the Actor. Examples (23) and (24) below demonstrate doing and happening clauses respectively:

23. Emeka gbàrà ùlò ọkū
 Emeka burn+PST house fire
 Actor M.pr Goal pr.COMP
 "Emeka burnt a house."

24. Ùlò gbàrà ọkū
 House burn+PST fire
 Actor M.pr pr.COMP
 "A house got burnt."

The Actor in example (23) brings about the unfolding of the process. We can logically conclude that Actor is derived from transitive clauses, as it inputs the required energy for the realisation of the process and impacts on the Goal participant. In the example, the Actor + Process configuration goes through to impact on the Goal - ùlò. However, the role of the Actor in example (24) does not fall into the above definition and configuration. The Actor + Process configuration in example (24) does not pass through. The Actor behaves differently as the process simply impacts on the Actor. As demonstrated in example (24), the process is represented as a happening and the Actor serves as the medium through which the happening is actualized. For instance, the Actor - Ùlò - in example (24) represents an entity which logically does not have the capacity to bring about the unfolding of the process by itself. The difference in a doing clause and in a happening clause or between the Actor

of a doing clause and the Actor of a happening clause in Igbo is made clearer in examples (25 a,b) and (26 a,b) below:

- 25a. Nneka gbàjiri òsìsì.
 Nneka break+PST stick.
 Actor M.pr Goal
 "Nneka broke a stick."
- 25b. Òsìsì gbàjiri
 stick break+PST
 Actor M.pr
 "A stick broke."
- 26a. Asùrù m ikē akwù.
 AGR+pound+PST 1SG bunch palmfruit
 M.pr Actor Goal
 "I pounded a bunch of palmfruits."
- 26b. Ikē akwù sùrù m.
 bunch palmfruit hit+PST 1SG
 Actor M.pr Goal
 "A bunch of palmfruits hit on me."

While example(26a) is a doing material clause, example (26b) is a happening material clause. Examples (26a) and (26b) only differ in agency but similar in content meaning. While (26a) portrays the clause as action with Actor and Goal, (26b) portrays it as a happening impacting on the Actor. However, the case is different in examples (27a) and (27b). The two clauses do not portray common experience. They portray different experiences since while the Actor in (27a) brings about the process of 'pounding' and the Actor in (27b) brings about the process of "hiting" which have different experiences (meanings). It is worthy of mention that the reversal of the Actor and the Goal of a doing material clause does not always result to another doing

material clause as we have in examples (26a) and (26b). This is demonstrated in examples (27a) and (27b) below:

27a. Azàrà m ùlò.
 AGR+sweep+PST 1SG house.
 M.pr Actor Goal

"I swept a house."

27b. *Ùlò zàrà m
 house sweep+PST 1SG
 Actor M.pr Goal

Unlike what we have in (26a) and (26b), the reversal of the Actor and Goal of example (27a) in (27b) renders the structure ungrammatical.

We can deduce from examples (26a) and (26b) that the Actor/Process configuration in doing material clauses in Igbo does not follow a particular linear order. In other words, while the configuration in (26a) appears in Process + Actor order, the configuration in (26b) appears in Actor + Process order.

Summary and Conclusion

As shown on table (1), material processes in Igbo are verbs of actions and happenings. The processes accommodate Actor, Goal and Beneficiary as participants. While the Actor is obligatory, Beneficiary and Goal are optional. Beneficiary could be in the form of Recipient or Client. It is observed that the structural difference between Recipient Beneficiary and Client Beneficiary is that while Client Beneficiary usually involves the use of the complementizer *maka* or *maka ... ka* as demonstrated in examples (7), (9) and (10), Recipient Beneficiary usually involves the use of *ka* or non-involvement of any complementizer as demonstrated in examples (8), (11) and (12). Unlike what is obtainable in some languages like the English language, Beneficiary and Goal are irreversible in the Igbo

language. This is illustrated in table (2). Material clauses can be probed with the question formats *x mètè gini?* and *Gini mètè y?*, where *x* stands for an Actor and *y* stands for a Goal. It is also observed that while the Actor inputs the required energy for the realization of the process, and impacts on the Goal in some Actor + Process configuration; the Process rather impacts on the Actor in some instances of Actor + Process configuration. Moreover, in a happening material clause, the process is represented as a happening and the Actor serves as the medium through which the happening is actualized.

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