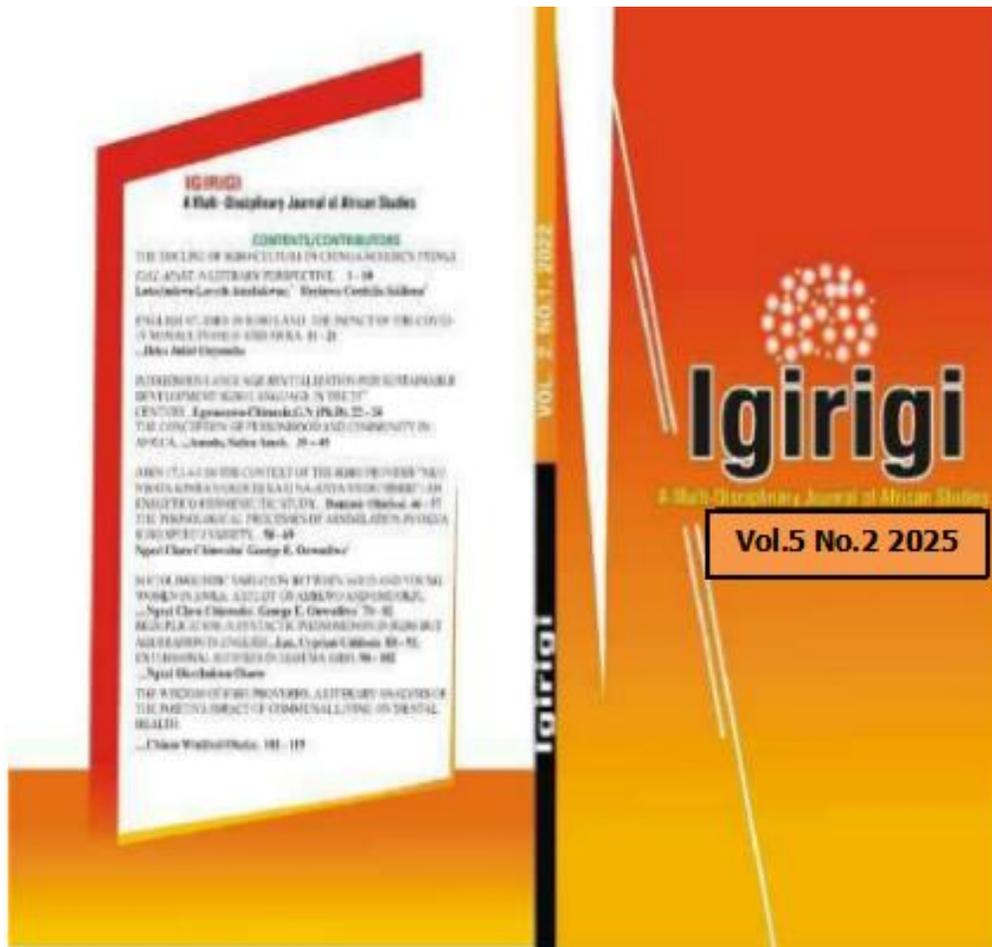




**PUBLISHED BY**

**NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY AWKA NIGERIA**





**IGIRIGI:**  
*A Journal of African Studies*  
**VOL. 5. NO.2, 2025**

**ISSN: 1116-5618**



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**ISSN: 1116-5618**

Journal website is powered by **Myrosoft Systems** ([www.myrosoft.com.ng](http://www.myrosoft.com.ng)) @ 78 Dr.  
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## **IGIRIGI**

**Vol. 5. No 2, 2025**

*Igirigi : A Journal of African Studies*, is a multidisciplinary peer-reviewed, original researches that focus on African issues relating to: arts, humanities, medicine, science, technology, geography, education. This annual journal accepts well researched and original submissions from: languages, linguistics, history, religion, philosophy, creative and performative arts, mass communication, sociology, anthropology, education, sciences, political science, information technology, and any study that relates to Africa.

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## ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICALISED COMPOUND MARKERS IN IGBO

By

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### Abstract

*The study of grammaticalisation has received attention of scholars across languages but few works have been done in this area of study in the Igbo language. To assist in bridging this gap among other things, this paper examines grammaticalisation of selected compound markers in the Igbo language. Specifically, the paper analysed grammaticalisation processes by which some Igbo lexical verbs grammaticalise as compound markers in v1-v2 structure. Data for the study were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. The theoretical principles of Hopper and Traugott together with Heine and Narrog were adopted as framework for analysis of data. The findings from data analysed show that some Igbo lexical verbs actually grammaticalise as compound markers in v1-v2 structures.*

### Introduction

Language change is a historical linguistic concept which has come to receive acceptance in the contemporary linguistic studies. The changing nature of language accounts for new forms which over time come to become part of an existing lexicon and other grammatical units of a given language. The changes which occur in different languages are by-products of language use in relation to time and events. This can be achieved through expansion or reduction processes also known as inclusion or exclusion processes of language change. Changes in ideas, world views and philosophies can lead to a shift or modification of lexical or grammatical units which results in either lexicalisation or grammaticalisation.

Grammaticalisation is one of the linguistic concepts which studies processes by which new forms are generated in languages. Having received the attention of many scholars cross linguistically in contemporary times, grammaticalisation has been defined in different ways by different scholars. Prominent among the earliest definitions of grammaticalisation is Kurylowicz (1965:69:) who defines grammaticalisation “as consisting in the increase of range of morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical, or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status”. He cites an example of grammaticalisation changes from derivative forms to inflectional forms. Givon (1971) sees grammaticalisation in its broadest sense as ‘a process by which grammar is created’. It is a process which seeks to unravel how grammatical units and constructions are generated from existing lexical items or grammatical units. Despite diverging views and approaches to the study of grammaticalisation, both the diachronic and synchronic approaches believe that grammaticalisation is a linguistic process of language change. In the process of grammaticalisation, already existing lexical items or other linguistic constructions which played certain grammatical functions in a given context may have to assume new grammatical roles. These roles may or may not be similar to the initial role which they played before the commencement of grammaticalisation. When grammaticalisation occurs, lexical or content words with referential meanings assume function roles, that is, forms which are defined by their roles; forms whose meanings are predicated on them by their grammatical contexts.



The word grammaticalisation was first used by Antoine Meillet in (1912). Meillet approached the study of grammaticalisation basically from the perspective of identifying language processes which result in creation of new categories and system changes. Grammaticalisation has been identified as a framework that is, a tool for linguistic analysis and also, a linguistic concept, that is, a concept which grammaticalisation principles, (framework) seeks to address. The principles of grammaticalisation include: layering, specialisation, divergence, persistence, host class expansion, phonetic erosion or attrition, semantic bleaching also known as desemanticisation and decategorisation. The study of grammaticalisation and what should constitute its processes has generated a lot of arguments in linguistic studies and this, has led to increased research in this area of study. However, only few aspect of grammaticalisation has been investigated by some Igbo scholars hence, the need for this present work.

The study of grammaticalisation in the Igbo language has received attention of very few scholars when compared to other languages hence, the need for this study. The works of Emenanjo (1978), Uchechukwu, (2008), Mbah (2020), Afuecheta and Ajoku, (2023), among others attest to the existence of grammaticalisation in the Igbo language. Igbo is a multidialectal, tone language spoken in the eastern part of Nigeria. The variations in different dialects of Igbo sometimes impede mutual intelligibility. However, such differences are checked by making use of the standard variety. The Igbo speaking states are: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi and part of Delta. Igbo refers to both the speakers of the language and the language itself. It belongs to Benue-Congo group of dialects. The work therefore attempts to bridge the existing gap in the existing literature by examining grammaticalisation of compound markers in Igbo. This study aims at analysing grammaticalisation processes by which lexical verbs grammaticalise as compound markers in v1-v2 structure in the Igbo language. The study adopts a qualitative bibliographic research design. Data for the study were sourced from both primary and secondary through critical reading and review of related literature on the subject. Information was also generated through researcher's introspection as a native speaker of the language. The study adopts the theoretical principles of Hopper and Traugott 2003 in conjunction with that of Heine and Narrog (2010) as framework for analysis of data. The two principles combined would to a large extent capture other principles by other scholars.

## Literature Review

### Conceptual Clarifications

For purpose of clarity, some of the grammaticalisation concepts that are analysed in this article are explained in this section of the study.

### Grammaticalisation

Hopper (1991) posits that grammaticalisation is a process by which lexical items and other linguistic constructions come into certain linguistic contexts to serve particular grammatical functions and once grammaticalised, continue to develop more grammatical functions. Hopper identifies five principles of grammaticalisation as layering, divergence, specialisation, persistence, and decategorisation.

#### (a) Layering

Layering involves generating new meanings of grammatical elements from already existing meanings. The new meanings may be more abstract than the existing ones and may with time completely replace the existing ones. When this happens, both meanings may have to exist simultaneously for a period of time. Hopper (1991) notes that the principle of layering refers to the fact



that very often, more than one procedure is available in a language to serve similar or even identical functions. Layering results in overlapping in words, which allows a gradual development of increasingly generic meaning. The new layers added to the existing words may or may not be discarded; rather, it expands the functional domain of the existing ones. This suggests that different changes in the syntactic behaviour have a way of affecting semantic modifications.

### (b) Divergence

Divergence, also known as split, deals with the extent to which a given sign deviates from other members of the group. Hopper and Traugott (2003) posit that when a lexical form undergoes grammaticalisation to either a clitic or an affix, for instance, the initial lexical form may still maintain its status as an autonomous unit and still undergo the same changes as an ordinary lexical item. Divergence results in pairs or multiples of forms which have common origin but different functions.

### (c) Persistence

Persistence refers to the grammaticalisation principle, which stipulates that grammaticalised elements may not completely lose their original meaning after undergoing the process of grammaticalisation. In this case, traces/shadow of the original lexical meanings of the grammaticalising elements will still be present after undergoing grammaticalisation. An example of persistence grammaticalisation of English future marker from movement verb, 'to go' by Bybee (2003), the progressive form, 'to go', which formerly exhibited only spatial (body) directional use, after a period of time, grammaticalised to what Bybee refers to "unambiguous future with no meaning of intention of movement implied.

Sent 1

(a) Let us go (release).

(b) Let's go to the circus tonight (involving urging or encouraging). This involves a case of layering and boundedness.

(c) Let's eat our liver now, Betty.

In the 'let's construction' above, there is a case of divergence because the pronominal element 'us' shifted to become part of a verbal category 'Let'. The initial form of 'us', which is first person plural is retained till date as an autonomous form alongside the grammaticalised form which is a clitic, 'let's'.

Hopper (1991) observes that the principle of persistence relates to both the meaning and function of grammatical form to its history as a lexical morpheme. However, such relationship may not be evident as the level of morphology but usually results in polysemous words, that is, words with same morphological and phonetic component with different semantic interpretations seen in the examples above. Usually, one or more of the polysemous words will still reflect a dominant earlier meaning. He identifies the development of object markers 'accusative cases' out of former serialised verbs like 'take' as a good example of persistence in the West African languages. He cites an example from Lord's (1982:286-288) study on the grammaticalisation of object markers (accusative case marker) out of serialised verbs in Ga, a Benue Congo language. See examples below:

Sent 2.

(a) E kɛ wolo<sup>m</sup>me- si.

She objbook lay-down

She laid the book down.

In example above, kɛ, which was originally a verb, meaning 'take' functions as an accusative marker. Hopper argues that this case of dual function of 'kɛ' as a full verb and a case marker is an instance of full verbs grammaticalising as case marker.



#### (d) Specialisation

This refers to the process of reducing features which determine the grammaticalisation of a linguistic construction to only the necessary ones, that is, the obligatory features. This is closely related to Lehmann's paradigmatic variability. According to Hopper (1991), specialisation refers "to the narrowing of choices that characterise an emergent grammatical construction". He observes that the principle of specialisation corresponds to Lehmann's obligatorification, the loss of choice, which occurs when a form is fully grammaticalised. Hopper cites the following example of specialisation of negation in modern French.

##### Sent 3

(a) Il ne boit pas de vin

He doesn't drink wine'

He observes that in the ordinary negative clause, the verb is straddled by two negators 'ne', which precedes the verb, and 'pas' following it. He identifies 'pas' as the general negative participle as in 'pas beaucoup' meaning 'not much' and 'ne' as the original negator. Nouns like 'pas' which means, 'step pace' could enforce the negation. Such reinforcing nouns were formerly tailored to the nature of the verb; hence, motion verbs could be reinforced with 'pas'. Other examples cited are verb of giving and eating 'mie' 'crumb' as in sentences below:

(b) He didn't eat crumb;

(c) He didn't give me crumb.

He observes that by 16<sup>th</sup> century, only 'pas', step/pace, 'mie', crumb, goutte drop, 'point'- drop or point were still used with negative force with 'pas' and 'point' as most prominent. In modern French, only two, 'pas' and 'point' retain the function of negator.

#### (e) Decategorisation

Decategorisation refers to a shift in the membership of a given category of parts of speech. Heine and Narrog (2010) observe that decategorisation leads to loss of morphosyntactic properties of lexical or other less grammaticalised forms, which result in a number of possible changes. These changes include: loss of inflectional ability, loss of the ability to take on derivational morphology, loss of ability to take modifiers, loss of autonomy, which leads to increased dependence on other constituents. Decategorisation also leads to loss of syntactic freedom such as constrained movements; loss of anaphoric reference and loss of paradigmatic relationship. When degrammaticalisation occurs, the grammaticalised elements change from open class, also referred to as lexical items, to closed or grammatical form.

Norde (2020) states that grammaticalisation is a gradual process by which a lexical item changes to become a grammatical item; a composite change that affects every aspect of language. Himmelmann (2004) identifies host-class expansion, syntactic context expansion, semantic-pragmatic context expansion as major principles of grammaticalisation. **Syntactic context expansion** refers to a process, which allows structural expansion of grammaticalising elements. For instance, the use of articles in the English language expands from core argument position to peripheral argument position. **Semantic-pragmatic context expansion** permits articles to expand during grammaticalisation from deictic reference to associative anaphoric use. Cuyckens (2018) notes that in Himmelmann's expansion criterion, the expansion is not a product of the individual linguistic element associated with a given expansion but the entire structure. Cousse (2016) observes that the grammaticalisation shift proposed by Himmelmann (2004) is in line with Lehmann's paradigmatic parameter of grammaticalisation. The strength of Himmelmann's approach is that it can be used to account for the paradigmatic features of Lehman while its major weakness is that, it is limited in its scope of operation because it cannot account for other parameters of Lehmann. Moreover, loss of paradigmatic variability cannot be captured either as a



paradigm or discourse marker.

Uchechukwu (2008) studied the grammaticalisation of prepositional markers in Igbo: the example of the verb root “nye” (give). The study aimed at showing that the Igbo language uses different structures to express prepositional meanings. The researcher argued that the structures designated as prepositional markers in the study arise from grammaticalisation and category change of the second verb in a compound verb structure from a verb<sub>1</sub>+ verb<sub>2</sub> to a verb + suffix construction. He analysed the semantic and tonal changes involved in the Igbo verb<sub>2</sub>+ verb<sub>2</sub> .verb + suffix grammaticalisation path using the verb “nye” (give). He cites examples with the combination of the simple verb ‘-kù’ hit, with ‘-da’ fall kùda (hit, fall----- hit/knock down) and bú carry with -bà enter, (buba) See examples below:

**Sent, 4**

(a) Óbi kù-dàrà òròma.

Obi hit- fall-rv (PAST) Orange.

Obi knocked down an orange.

Using Lehmann’s parameters of grammaticalisation, Uchechukwu analyses the spatial aspects of prepositional markers, that is, structures formed with “nye” The verb ‘nye’ was identified to involve the spatio-temporal domain, the control domain, the force dynamic domain and the domain of human interest. Findings from the study shows that at both syntagmatic and paradigmatic levels, there is a loss in the weight and variability of the structure ‘nye’ but a gain in cohesion. In the second component of a compound verb formation, “nye” loses in paradigmatic integrity and structural scope and can no longer function as a full verb in this context rather it becomes obligatory in the identified v<sub>2</sub> context. Its structural scope narrows to a VP instead of its clausal structural scope as a main verb. There was formal and semantic integration of ‘nye’ within a group of prepositional markers whose syntagmatic quality is bound to the identified V<sub>2</sub> context for the expression of prepositional meanings. Based on the result of findings, the researcher postulates that the recognition of this group of prepositional markers in Igbo can be used to address the issue of the category shift connected with such structures. The sentences below are drawn from Mmadike’s work:

**Sent 5**

(a) Gbà- nyá míli n’itè.

Pour in water in pot.

Pour in some water into the pot.

(b) Ọ gbà-nyà- mili n’ite.

He pour –in- IV (past) water in pot.

He poured in some water into the pot.

(c) Èméká kù-nyèlu Ijèoma ofe.

Emeka scoop-give-IVpast Ijeoma soup.

Emeka dished out soup for Ijeoma.

The contrasting pairs in sentences (a), (b) and (c) are ‘nya’ and ‘nye’. He observes that verbs with spatio-temporal meanings have the tendency to develop into prepositional markers through the persistence of their spatial meaning in a V<sub>2</sub> position.

Mmadike (2015) studies Igbo verbs of speaking with the aim of analysing their grammatical features. He provides an explanatory account of grammatical features of verbs of speaking in Igbo and discussed the unique features of the verb ‘sị’. He analysed the grammaticalisation process by which the complementiser ‘sị’ is derived from the verb sị ‘say’. He cites the following examples:



**Sent 6**

- (a) Ude sị m ga-abịa eleta unu.  
 Ude say 1sg Fut-come visit 2pl  
 Ude said: “I will pay you a visit.”
- (b) Ude kwuru sị“ m gà- àbịa èleta unu’.  
 Ude speak- pstsay 1sg Fut-come visit 2pl.  
 Ude said: ‘I will pay you a visit.’
- (c) Roza mà sị ukwu bụ egō.  
 Roza know COMP waist be money.  
 Roza knows that the waist is used in making money.

The findings from the sentences analysed show that verbs of speaking exhibit the same features as other Igbo verbs in terms of morphological structure but semantically, conveys idea of communication and co-occurs with NPs designated as ‘sayer’. He observes that in terms of grammaticalisation pathway, the quotative verb ‘sị’ functions as the main verb with the direct speech in the complement clause which means that the lexical verb ‘sị’ grammaticalised as complementiser in the indirect construction where it functions as a functional head of the complement clause.

In the work, Mmadike (2016) entitled, ‘A case for preposition in Igbo’. the researcher establishes the fact that in addition to ‘na’, Igbo makes use of other compound words like tupu, (before), maka (for), banyere, (about, against), and gbasara,(about) to express prepositional notions. This view is contrary to the earlier and widely accepted view which holds that ‘na’ is the only preposition in Igbo. He argues that Igbo makes use of extensional suffixes, complex verbs and verb serialisation as means of supplementing the number of prepositions in Igbo. He cites these sentences which he analysed using the theoretical principles of Principles and Parameters. **The use of kọ associative and rV(applicative).**

**Sent 7.**

- (ai) Ha bi-kọnụ.  
 3 PL live -with together.  
 They live in one place together.

**(b) The use of complex verbs rí-ba, (crawl-enter), ga-fe go- pass/cross.**

- (bi) Agwọ ga- aríba ebe a.  
 Snake fit-crawl- enter place this.  
 A snake will crawl in here.

**(c) Verbs with rVpst suffixes**

- (ci) Obi banyèrè ụgbọala ọnisha.  
 Obi enter into Past Vehicle Ọnicha.  
 Obi entered the Ọnicha bound vehicle.

**rV APPL. suffix**

- (cii) Okwu ahụ gbasara gi.  
 Talk that shoot-spread APPL.2 SG.  
 That discussion concerns you.

Mmadike observes that ‘banyèrè’ and ‘gbàsàrà’ in sentences (ci) and (cii) can be contrasted with those in sentence (di) below. Where **banyere** and **gbasara** function as prepositions.

- (di) O kwuru ihe banyéré há.  
 3SG say-past thing about 3Pl.  
 He said something about them.



(ei) Ha natara ozi gbàsárá onye ahù.  
 3Pl receive-past message about person that.  
 They received a message about the person.

From the sentences analysed, he shows that, like 'na' grammatical prepositions function as syntactic heads which govern and case-mark their complements. They can also be fronted with their complements as wh-phrases though they can also function as sentence fragments. In the sentences following:

(d) Bànyere ahụ ike nne ya<sub>I</sub> kà Polo jùrù dọkita t<sub>i</sub>.  
 About body strength mother 3SG her.that Polo ask past doctor  
 It was about his mother's health that Polo asked the doctor.

### Compound Verbs

Compound verbs refer to verbs which consist of two or more independent constituents. These constituents may be similar or different from one other. They are attested in Igbo. Mbah (2006) notes that Igbo verbs are morphologically classified as simple, complex or compound and are mostly derived from serial verb constructions. He observes that one of the basic features of Igbo verb compounds is that they subcategorise verb+ verb or suffix where the first verb v1 is a simple verb root and the second constituent can be a verb root or a suffix.(V1-v2) structure

### Analysis of Data

#### Grammaticalisation of Compound Markers in Igbo

##### Nyé grammaticalising as a compound marker

'Nye' is a lexical morpheme meaning, 'give', 'to hand over something to something or someone'. It is an activity/dynamic verb. Uchechukwu (2008) observes that 'nye' in its literal nature takes three arguments, a giver, an item to be given, and a recipient. The present researcher is of the view that the various changes which the lexical verb 'nye' undergoes are examples of grammaticalisation. This is illustrated in the sentences below:

Sent,8.

(a) [Nye] m akpa m.  
           V  
       Give pro me bag me.  
       Give me my bag.

(b) Bịa [nye] ya ego ya.  
           V  
       Come, give pro him/her money him/her.  
       Come and give him/her his/her money.

(c) [Bunye] m akwụkwọ ahụ.  
       Carry give me book that.  
       Bring the book for me.

(d) [Zunye] m anụ.  
       Buy me meat.  
       Buy meat for me.

(e) [binye] m ego ka m ji zuru ihe.  
       Lend pro money so I will use buypast something.  
       Lend me some money so that I can buy something with it.



(f) [Nwūnye] m ọkuko ahụ.  
 Catch give me fowl/chicken that.  
 Catch/ bring that fowl/chicken for me.

In sentences (8a) and (b), ‘nye’ is a lexical, activity verb but in sentence (8c)-(f), ‘nye’ functions as compound marker which converts simple verb to compound verbs in **bunye**, **zūnye** and **nwūnye**. Uchechukwu (2008) describes this type of verb as v1-v2 complex verb in Igbo. Obimalu and Mbagwu (2014) identify ‘nyé’ as a free morpheme which can combine to form v+ nye compound verbs. Onukawa (1999) and Uchechukwu (2008) identify the second v element ‘nye’ in banye as a verb. Mbah (2010) identifies ‘nye’ as category incorporated preposition. In the view of this present researcher, the v+nye is a grammaticalised form of the lexical verb, nye, (give). The principle of layering is satisfied. A new layer, the prefix, ‘ba’ is added to the lexical verb **nye**, the already existing form. The functional domain of **nye** is expanded from a lexical verb to a functional unit, a compound marker. The process of layering results in multiple expressions performing the same lexical or grammatical function. The principle of persistence is satisfied because part of the original meaning (give) is retained after grammaticalisation.

The principle of divergence is also satisfied. The initial lexical form ‘nye’, still maintains its status as autonomous element. Both the lexical ungrammaticalised form, **nyé** and the grammaticalised forms **bū+nye**, **zū+nye**, **tī+nye**; **bi+nye**, **nwū+nye** have common origin but perform different functions. In its grammaticalised form, ‘nye’ becomes bounded to its new host and so, loses some of its morphosyntactic properties as a lexical verb and assumes the nature of an affix. Like the ungrammaticalised **nye** (give), the grammaticalised forms also require three participants or arguments of a giver, something to be given and a receiver. This shows that the meanings of the grammaticalised forms were only bleached.

The principle of decategorisation is satisfied from simple lexical verb to an affix which is a functional element. ‘Nye’ maintained its high tone even in its grammaticalised environment while the host morphemes **bu, zu, ti** and **nwū** bear low tone, making it low/ high tones.

### Grammaticalisation of Dà (fall)

Dà is a lexical verb of motion which means ‘fall’ that is, to fall from a height. Dà has its infinitive as ịda. When dà combines with other lexical verbs it forms a compound marker. As a lexical verb, dà has generative ability and can receive affixes as seen in sentences 9 a-d below:

#### Sent. 9

- (a) Obinna dàrà n’ala.  
 Obinna past fall on ground.  
 Obinna fell on the ground.
- (b) Ogu dàrà elu osisi.  
 Ogu past fall top tree.  
 Ogu fell down from a tree.
- (c) Okechukwu dàrà **adà** na ntuliaka e mere.  
 Okechukwu past fail in election pro conducted.  
 Okechukwu failed in the election that was conducted.
- (d) Ngozi dàrà ule ya.  
 Ngozi past fail examination her.  
 Ngozi failed in her examination



### **Dà grammaticalising as compound marker dà (fall).**

In sentences (d-h), 'dà' grammaticalises as a compound marker. See examples below:

(e) Bu-**dà** akwukwo ahụ n'ala.

Carry-down the book to the ground.

Bring down the book to the ground

(f) Rì-**dà** n'elu osisi ahụ

Climb-down from that tree.

Get down from that tree.

(g) We-**dà** iko gị n'elu oche.

Bring-down your cup from the chair/table.

Bring down the cup from the table.

(h) Jee, gbu-**dà** osisi ahụ.

Go cut-down tree that.

Go and cut down that tree.

In sentences (a)-(d), the lexical verb 'dà' grammaticalised as a compound marker. The grammaticalised compound morpheme dà 'in the compound verbs **bu-dà**, **rì-dà**, and **we- dà** becomes bounded to their new hosts. A broader meaning of the morpheme dà' is generated as **carry-down**, **climb- down** and **bring-down**. The original meaning is bleached but not completely changed. A case of semantic bleaching.

New layers of 'dà' are formed which satisfies the principle of layering. Both the original forms and the grammaticalised forms still exist. The principle of layering permits that at some point more than one technique is available in a language to serve similar functions. There is an overlapping of words with the same generic meanings, a case of multifunctionality. This shows that grammaticalisation can lead to multifunctionality. The functional domain of the grammaticalising morpheme is broadened from that of a lexical morpheme to that of a grammatical morpheme. The principle of divergence is also satisfied from the original category which results in increased boundedness to the new host. Although there was decategorisation, no tonal shift was recorded.

### **Gbuo (kill) grammaticalises as compound marker**

The lexical verb 'gbuo' means 'kill'. It has its origin from the word 'to remove life out of a living thing'. Its infinitive form is igbu. (to kill). It can also receive a suffix as in gburu, or gbuo. (killed or kill). This is illustrated in sentences below:

(a) Ndidì jì mma **gbuo** agụ.

Ndidi use knife kill lion.

Ndidi killed a lion with a knife.

(b) **Gbuo** osisi ahụ nọchiri ụzọ.

Cut tree that block road.

Cut that tree that blocked your way.

(c) Nne ya **gburu** ya ilu.

Mother his/her beat past thoroughly.

His/her mother beat him/her thoroughly.

(d) O jiri osisi **kụ-gbuo** agwọ.

He/she used stick beat-to death snake.

He /she beat a snake to death with a stick.



(e) **Ti-gbuo** ewu ahụ riri ji gi.

Beat-death goat that eat Past yam you.  
Beat that goat that ate yam to death.

(f) **Nye-gbuo** ha na nri

Feed-kill them and food.  
Kill them with food/ Feed them very well.

(g) **Zụ- gbuo** ha.

Buy death them.  
Cheat them in your purchases.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, this present work has been able to show that grammaticalisation requires more study in the Igbo language. Some Igbo lexical verbs subjected to analysis using grammaticalisation principles of grammaticalised as compound markers in verbs with V1-V2 structure. Lexical verbs, ‘nye’ give, da fall and gbuo’ kill were found to grammaticalise as compound markers in compound verbs constructions in Igbo. The lexical verb ‘nye’ in V1-V2 structure which has been differently analysed by scholars; as ‘prepositional marker’ category incorporated preposition’ ‘free morpheme’ are actually identified in this present study as grammaticalised compound markers.

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