

### Three types of serializing *exceed* comparatives in Igbo

**Introduction.** While Igbo is well-known for small class of adjectival property concept (PC) predicates, little is known about the syntactic and semantic properties of PC nouns and verbs (Dixon 1982). In this paper, we will first demonstrate that although Igbo PC verbs obligatorily combine with their respective PC-nominal in some contexts, the noun becomes optional in compounding comparatives, showing that this class of verbs denote a PC by themselves. Based on this observation, we further explore the compositional properties of PCs verbs in three types of *exceed* comparatives (Stassen 1985).

**PC verbs.** In Igbo, semantically intransitive unergative verbs are idiosyncratically formed by a semantically bleached light verb and an inherent nominal complement (1b) (Nwachukwu 1987). Although PC predicates pattern like unergative verbs in necessarily combining with a nominal predicate in predicative contexts (1a), the nominal and verbal constituents of a class of PC verbs are independently attested as PC nouns and PC verbs (2). This suggests that both the PC noun and verb are semantically meaningful and their co-occurrence in predicative contexts is a purely syntactic requirement in Igbo on the internal argument slot to filled, viz. the occurrence of syntactically intransitive unaccusative verbs (cf. Hale et al. 1995).

- (1) a. *Àdá bù-rù \* (ìbù).*      b. *Àdá gbà-rà \*(égwú).* UNERG.      c. *Àdá byà-rà. (àbyá)* UNACC.  
 Ada be.fat-ASP fatness      Ada LV-ASP music      Ada come-rV BVC  
 ‘Ada is fat.’      ‘Ada dances.’      ‘Ada comes.’

**Comparative compounds.** Crucial evidence for the independent semantics of PC verbs comes from Type-I-comparatives, in which PC-verb forms a compound together with complex comparative verb *ká-rí* ‘exceed-climb’ (2). In this context, the object slot is occupied by the comparison standard with the PC noun optionally introduced by a prepositional phrase. While serialized *exceed*-type comparatives are commonly attested, comparative verbal compounds have been observed comparatively rarely (cf. Dixon 2012).

- (2) *Àdá bù-kà-rì-rì Òbí (n’-ìbù).*  
 Ada be.fat-exceed-climb-ASP Obi PREP-fatness  
 ‘Ada is fatter than Obi.’

**Comparative serialization.** Igbo also exhibits two types of serialized ‘exceed’ comparatives, which differ in the syntactic status of ‘exceed’: While in Type-I-comparatives, *ka* ‘exceed’ function as the main predicate taking the PC predicate as its complement (3a), the PC predicate functions as the main predicate in Type-II-comparatives (3b). Note that the distribution of *rì* ‘climb’ corresponds to the different syntactic functions of ‘exceed’, calling for a decompositional analysis of the comparative verb (cf. Howell 2013 on *ju lọ* in Yoruba).

- (3) a. *Àdá kà Òbí bù-ó ìbù.*      b. *Àdá bù-rù ìbù kà-rì-rì Òbí (dì).*  
 Ada exceed Obi be.fat-OVS fatness      Ada be.fat-ASP fatness exceed-climb-ASP Obi COP  
 ‘Ada exceeds Obi in being fat.’      ‘Ada is fatter than Obi (is).’

**Implications.** Our study therefore establishes the special status of PC verbs in Igbo, showing that PCs can be realized across categories (adjectives, verbs, and nouns; cf. Hanink et al. 2019), and adds a novel perspective to the ongoing investigation of *exceed* comparatives in Niger-Congo languages (Clem 2019 on Tigwa, Bochnak 2015 on Luganda, Howell 2013 on Yoruba; cf. Beck et al. 2009).