



Igbo Verb Mood: A Syntactic Characteristics

¹Benadette Chinasoakwu Chukwu, ²Jighjigh Leo Justus Ishima

¹Department of Igbo Language and Culture, School of Secondary Education, Language Programmes, Federal College of Education, Obudu, Cross River State.

²Department of Languages and Linguistics, Benue State University, Makurdi.

¹chukwubenadette@gmail.com 09018152181 ²jishima@gmail.com 08060443326

ABSTRACT

Mood is one of the verbal categories that refer to the way in which a verb is used to express certain meaning by the speaker at the time of making an utterance/sentence. The verb expresses the mood of the speaker in a sentence whether the verb is in the imperative mood – realis, subjunctive mood irrealis - which is not real and uncertain, indicative etc. Some scholars/linguists have studied mood of verbs from different languages in general and in Igbo language in particular with little attention paid to the syntactic characteristics of Igbo verb mood. The aim of this seminar work is to investigate verb moods in Igbo language while the specific objectives are: 1. to determine its syntactic characteristic 2. to identify tonal structures of Igbo verb mood. The study made use of primary and secondary sources of data collections. The primary sources of data collection include in-depth interview, observation method and researcher's intuitive knowledge as a native speaker while the secondary sources of data collection include sourcing of data from relevant books written by renowned linguists/scholars, journals, and internet materials while a study sample of twenty (20) native speakers aged 50 - 70 years (10 males and 10 females) purposively selected for their proficiency and who have been permanent residence in these towns Owerri, Umuahia, and Onitsha for up to 30 years. The study adopted qualitative and descriptive research design. This study also made use of cluster sampling technique in order to save time and money because the three Igbo towns selected are large. The theoretical framework adopted is x-bar theory. This theory is a theory of syntactic structures. This theory is used because it deals with sentence analysis in terms of heads, specifiers, clauses etc. Findings based on the objectives revealed that Igbo verb mood is broadly characterized into four types; imperative, indicative, subjunctive, and interrogative mood and each with sub – classes. Syntactically Igbo verb mood functions as; a statement, request, assertion, question, advice, reports, facts etc. Findings from the study revealed that syntactically, the imperative and interrogative Igbo verb mood can be used without a subject or can be used with a complement. Wh- words exception of 'kedu' can occur at the sentence initial position, medial or final position. Also tone plays an important role in determining the mood of verb mood in Igbo language. The study recommends that further work should be made on the other Igbo verbs mood in the language. The study concludes that Igbo verb mood is syntactically and ontologically marked.

Keywords: Igbo language, syntax, Verb Mood, Ontology characteristics

Introduction

Language is a system of speaking and writing, common to a group of people and the most fundamental means of human communication. The ability to speak one's language well is a sign of good interaction as the intended message is conveyed and passed on. Language as a means of human communication consists of bundles of sounds which are called speech sounds. These speech sounds are produced by using organs of speech which exist in every normal human being.

Every language is syntactically and morphologically structured in a way that a competent speaker of the language must have mastered the language as to be able to produce and understand individual words and sentences also to know whether a sentence made in that language is correct or incorrect. Prezi, Ikekeonwu, Agbedo and Mbah (2013) opine that language can only perform its function among the members of the speech community when there is understanding of language structures among the language users. Anozie (2007) in Odokara (2014:5) asserts that the study of language operates in these three levels;

- i. Sound (speech)
- ii. Form and structure otherwise known as the level of grammar
- iii. Meaning.

The study of language in a scientific way is called linguistics. Syntax as one of the most important branches of linguistics is the study of the rules that govern the ways in which words combine to form larger structures like phrases, clauses and sentences. It is one of the major components of grammar. Mbah (2011) observes that in traditional grammar, the syntax of a language is described in terms of its classificatory list of the range of different types of syntactic structures found in a language. The most important of syntactic analysis in traditional grammar is that phrases and sentences are built up of a series of constituents (syntactic units), each of which belongs to a specific grammatical category and serves a specific grammatical function.

In linguistics and precisely in grammar, mood refers to the way in which a verb is used to express certain meanings by the speaker or writer. Sometimes, mood is referred to as mode and is used to refer to a verb form which indicates whether the verb expresses a fact (indicative) a command (imperative), a question (interrogative), or possibility (subjunctive). These verb indications suggest that there are four types of mood in grammar-declarative, imperative, interrogative, and subjunctive.

Statement of the problem

Many linguists/scholars at various points in time have carried out research works on verb mood in different languages of the world in general and in Igbo language in particular. The perspectives from each of these scholars studied verb moods are not always the same. Williamson (1980) studied mood in Onicha dialect, Nwadike (2014) carried out study on Mood in Awara- Igbo, Kassatan (2022) studied "A variationist analysis of the subjunctive mood in a sociolinguistic corpus of spoken Francoprovençal" etc. In view of these gaps, the study aims to provide a syntactic characteristics and tonal features of Igbo verb mood using the application of x-bar theory of Jackendoff (1977) with the aim of filling the knowledge gap found to exist in this subject matter.

Aim and objectives

The aim of this seminar work is to carry out an investigation of Igbo verb mood in Igbo language while the specific objectives are to;

- i. Identify the syntactic characteristics of Igbo verb mood in Igbo language
- ii. Determine the tonal features of Igbo verb mood

Research question

1. To what extent can Igbo verb mood be syntactically characterized?
2. What are the tonal structures of Igbo verb mood?

Literature review

Mood belongs to a closed class and is characterized by the state of verb in a sentence or utterance. A verb mood shows the mood in which an action occurs. In other words, the mood of a verb is the way an action is carried out. Mood has to do with sentence types which reveal whether a sentence is in the indicative, imperative, and subjunctive moods etc. Mood is also one of the verb categories in Igbo language. Other verb categories in Igbo include; aspect, person, number, gender, and tense. According to Emenanjo (2015), Mood is used to refer to a verb category or form which indicates whether the verb expresses a fact (indicative mood), a command (the imperative mood), a question (interrogative mood), a condition (conditional mood), or possibility (subjunctive mood). Emenanjo (2015) further says that whereas tense locates the statement or event in static time, mood describes it in real or hypothetical time. He classifies mood into five – verb that expresses a fact (indicative mood) a command (imperative), a question (interrogative mood), a condition (conditional mood) or possibility (subjunctive mood). He further states that interrogative sentences in Igbo are marked by interrogatives, proclitic tone patterns and features of intonation Bhatt (1999) maintains that mood points to the reality of an event, that is, whether the event is a reality or only a possibility.

Palmers (2003: 3) argues that “languages have either mood or modality, but not both”. There are two major classifications of mood- realis (indicative) mood and irrealis (subjunctive) mood.

Ejele (2004) identifies three types of mood in Esan language. They are; - Indicative mood, - imperative mood and the -subjunctive mood. He opines that Questions in grammatical classification of sentence types contrast with statements and they typically seek information about a specific person/ people/ place/ thing etc.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach as research method because data are analyzed based on the intuitive knowledge of the researcher. The Areas of study for this seminar work are Owerri, Onitsha, and Umuahia. As these three towns are too large to be examined, area or cluster sampling method was adopted because it will consume both time and money to use the entire towns while the population samples of 10 adult males and 10 adult females who are both educated and uneducated and between the ages of 50 and 70 years were randomly selected from each of the three towns (Owerri, Umuahia and Onitsha) in Igbo land. The choice of this age brackets is because they are knowledgeable native speakers of the standard Igbo and have lived in those towns for up to 30 years. The instruments used for data collection in this study are- observation technique and oral interview. The methods for data collection for the study include; primary and secondary sources. Primary sources for data collection include introspection, observation method and in-depth interview while secondary data collection sources include sourcing of data from relevant books written by renowned linguists in Igbo language, internet materials, and journals etc. Supplementary information by the researcher’s intuitive knowledge as a competent native speaker of the language shall be supplied. The tone marking convention of Green and Igwe 1963 was adopted. This convention states that all high tone syllables should be unmarked while all low tones and down- step tones should be marked.

Theoretical framework

This seminar work adopts X-bar theory of Jackendoff (1977) which was formally proposed by Chomsky in (1957). This theory is a model of phrase structure grammar and theory of syntactic category. Why X- bar theory as theoretical framework? Since the grammar of languages (which Igbo is one) constitute a system, it needs to be described and correlate with syntactic structure of verbs within the discourse. According to Ozo - Mekuri (2001) VP is one of the principal syntactic category which appear to be universally present in all languages and Igbo language being a verb centered language, this theory is very suitable for the data analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis.

2.2 Syntactic characteristics of Igbo verb mood

2.2.1 Simple Imperative affirmative unsuffixed verb form

1(a) Kwú!

Talk!

(b) Gbá!

Run/ shoots

2.2.2 Simple Imperative Affirmative Suffixed Verb form with OVS (CV + -e/a = verb)

2. Lèe anyà ebe a biko!

Look - ovs eye here

Look here

2.2.3 Complex/Compound Imperative Affirmative Mood

3. Okóro gbáa òsò!

OkoroNOM run - run

Okoro run

2.2.4 Simple Imperative Negative Mood

4. Erína/la !

Eat (neg)

Don't eat!



(fig.1) Tree diagrams breaking down of the VPs and suffixes

2.2.5 Complex/Compound Imperative Negative Mood

5 (a) DS: Unù apùna/la ébe a
 2SPL leave (NEG) SUF ADV DEM
 You don't leave here

- (b) SS: 1 2 3
 Ø ap̀̀na/la ebe a
 leave NEG ADV DEM
 Don't leave here

6. Kp̀̀bata ya n'ime ̀̀lo
 Call into 2SG PREP inside house
 Call him inside the house

Syntactically, in examples (1a and b) above, the imperative verbs are in the base forms and lack overt subjects. They function as command, appeal or instruction. The imperative marker *biko* (please) in example (2) functions as a request and makes the sentence not to sound irritating or harsh. In constructing an imperative sentence, *biko* can involve movement at the sentence initial or final position. From the example in (3) above, the complex imperative verb has subject (*Okoro*) followed by the predicate (*gbaa ̀̀so*).

Syntactically, there is no subject in the imperative negative mood sentence except for the purpose of conveying some emphatic meaning as seen in example (4) above. Again, in example (5a) above, the complex and compound imperative negative mood are characterised with the second person plural '*unu*' (you) as subject which can be deleted at the surface structure to show that the addressee is known only by the speaker and the second person plural '*unu*' 'you' is more cleared in Igbo language than in English. When one says '*you*' in English it maybe singular or plural but it is very clear in Igbo because of the plural '*unu*'. In example (5b), there is transformation from deep to surface structure by the deletion of the subject. However, in example (6) the syntactic head of the imperative compound verb occurs as verb initial and selects object.

2.2.6 Imperative Affirmative Progressive Mood

7. Ná – àza ya
 AUX- PROG sweep it
 Be sweeping it

2.1.7 Imperative progressive negative

8. Ada anala ab̀̀ja ̀̀ka n'az̀̀ oge
 Ada go neg come talk prepo back time
 Ada don't be coming to church late

In example (7) the imperative progressive verb mood syntactically, functions as a command or as an advice which is ongoing and has complement/object whereas the deletion of the progressive marker *ná* in (7) makes the sentence meaningless. However, the sentence in example (8) functions as warning or prohibiting an act. Again, *Ada* as the subject if deleted still makes the sentence meaningful.

2.2.8 Indicative Affirmative Mood

- 9 (a) DS: Emeka siri nri
 EmekaNOM cook pst food
 Emeka cooked food
 (b) SS: Nri ka Emeka siri t1
 FoodN FOC Emeka cook-pst
 It is food that Emeka cooked

2.2.9 Indicative Negative

10. Emeka ab̀̀gh̀̀ onye ara.
 EmekaNOM is (neg) who mad.
 Emeka is not a mad person.

Indicative verb mood is characterized in the affirmative and in the negative verb form. The example in (9a) is a declarative statement in the past verb mood. In example (9b) transformation has taken place from the level of D- structure to S- structure, the verb *siri* (cooked) has been moved to the front position. The *ka* complement functions as focus marker which shows that it is only food that *Emeka* cooked nothing else. Without the insertion of *ka* the sentence in example (9b) would have been meaningless and ungrammatical. Structurally, the sentence is characterized by subject, verb and object.

Syntactically, declaratives in Igbo language is not marked by any specific marker. It is a default mood because it does not require any prefix or suffix rather it is marked in Igbo language by *-rV* past. Characteristically, it contains a nominal or pronominal occurring before a verb (as an SVO language).

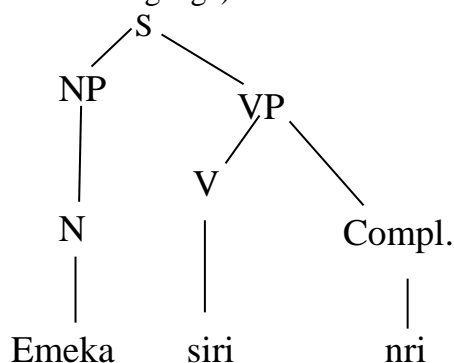


Fig. 2: Tree diagram illustrating indicative verb mood characterized by nominal before the verb

2.1.10 Content/ WH –Questions

- 11 (a) DS: Aha gị bu gini?
Name 2SG be QW?
What is your name?
- (b) SS: Gini bu aha gị ti?
What be name you (sg)?
What is your name?
- 12 (a) Ònye?
QW- Who?
- (b) DS: Ò gwara onye?
3SG tell QW?
Who did h/she tell?
- (c) SS: Onye ka o gwara?
QW FOC 3SG tell- pst?
Who did h/she tell?
- 13(a) Ebee?
QW
Where?
- (b) DS: Ebee ka i gara t1?
QW FOC 2SG go –rv pst ti?
- (c) SS: I gara ebée?
2SG go rv pst QW?
You went where?
- 14 (a) Òlé?
QW

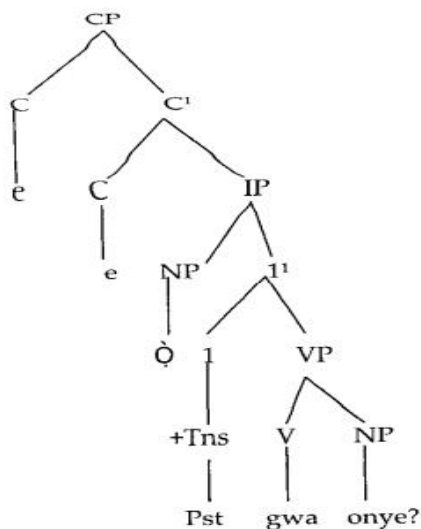
- (b) DS: Òle ka ò zụrụ?
 QW FOC 2SG buy rv ps
 How many did he/she buy?
 (c) SS: Ò zụrụ òlé?
 3SG buy pst QW
 How many did he/she buy?
- 15 (a) Kèdụ?
 QW-Who?
 (b) Kèdụ onye Okoro hụrụ?
 QW who OkoroNOM see (pst)?
 Which person did Okoro see?
 *(c) Okoro hụrụ onye kedụ?
 OkoroNOM see pst who QW
 Okoro see pst which who?
 (d) Kèdụ nke i choro?
 QW FOC 2SG want
 Which one do you want?

In examples (11b), transformation has taken place from deep structure to surface structure. The Wh- word 'gini' is unbounded, that is it can be moved from sentence initial to sentence final or clause position which is the extraction site, it then moved to initial clause position leaving a trace which is being represented by 't1'.

Syntactically, the insertion of *ka* at the surface level functions as a focus marker followed by second person resumptive pronoun 'i/o' can be compulsorily introduced to break sequence of the two Nps. In example (12b) the Wh-phrase Ònye 'Who' has undergone move- α leaving its extraction site to complement initial position. Syntactically, the interrogative word 'onye?' at the object position in example (12b) has been moved to the left most edge of the sentence initial position of the clause followed by the focus marker 'ka'.

Apart from *kedu* (how/what?) the other interrogative Wh-words are unbounded, that is they can be moved and are instances of move - α but '*kedu*' can only be generated in the main clause as in example (15b). In example (15b), *kedu* and *onye* occurred in the same syntactic environment. When this co-occurrence happened, *kèdụ* must precede *ònye* for the sentence to be grammatical. However, in example (15d), *kèdụ* functions as specifier and head of maximal projection. All the wh- words in Igbo can function as head initial projection.

- 16 (a) Ò gwàrà ònye?
 DS:



- (b) Ònye ka Ò gwàrà?
 SS:

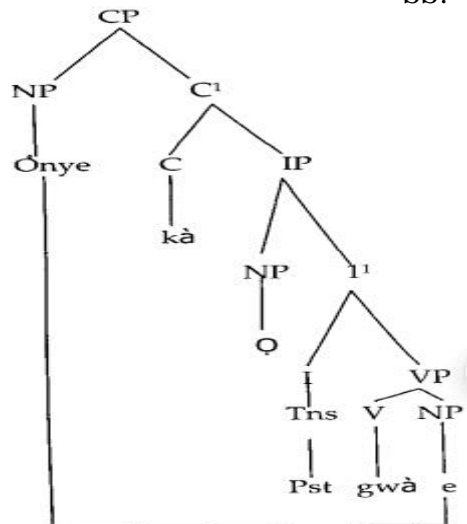


Fig. 3: Tree diagram illustrating syntactic movement of ‘*onye*’

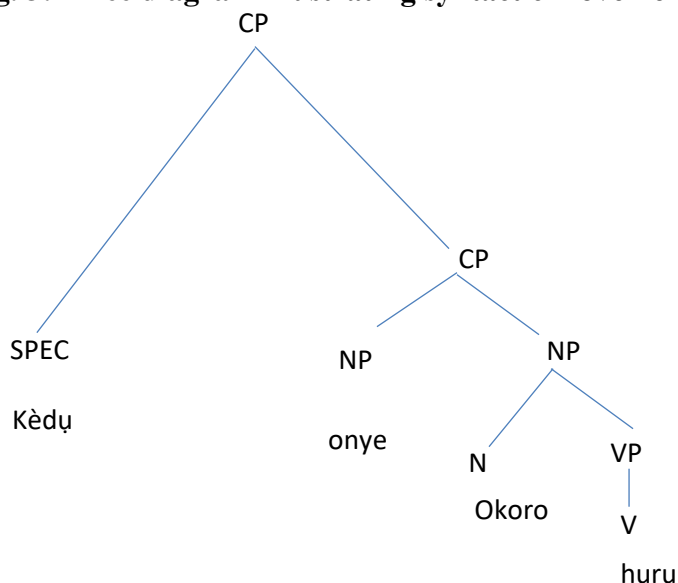


Fig. 4: Tree diagram illustrating co-occurrence of *kedụ* and *onye* showing *kedụ* as the head and specifier

2.2.11 Yes/ No or Polar Questions

- 17(a) Uche ò tara aki?
 UcheNOM 3SG-Q bite kernel
 Did Uche chew kernel?
- (b) Ò aki ka Uche tara?
 QW kernel that Uche chew pst?
 Is it kernel that Uche chewed?

2.2.12 Tag question

- 18(a) Ngozi tara aki, o kwa ya?
 NgoziNOM chewpst kernel, is not it?
 Ngozi chewed kernel, isn't it?
- (b) O bukwa ya Ngozi biara?
 Is it not true, NgoziN comepst?
 Is it not true, Ngozi came?

The yes/no question in example (16a) consists of subject and pronoun ò on a low tone indicating question and in example (16b), the pronominal is at the initial position, without the insertion of *ka*, the sentence will no longer function as interrogative rather a statement. Tag questions in Igbo syntactically are not bound rather involve the movement of the entire question form either to the initial or to the final position of the sentence. The proform *ya* (it) represent the entire declarative sentence from which the tag question was derived. The subject can also be moved to precede the verb immediately as in examples (16a and b). The deletions of the tag question markers transform the sentences into simple affirmative declarative mood.

2.3 Tonal features of Igbo Verb Mood

2.3.1 Simple Imperative Affirmative Unsuffixes Verb Mood

- 18 (a) Gwà
IMP- tell L
(b) Tà
IMP- chew

2.3.2 Simple Imperative Affirmative (suffixed) Verb Mood

- 19 (a) Gàa n'ụlọ gị LH
IMP go PREP house 2SG
Go to your house
(b) Jèe ahịa LH
IMP goPROG market
Go to the market

2.3.3 Complex/ Compound Imperative Affirmation Verb Mood

- 20 (a) Ibe bubà oche a HL
IbeNOM carry chair DEM
Ibe carry this chair in
(b) Patawa nkụ HHH
IMP-carry firewood
Bring in the fierwood

2.3.4 Imperative Negative Verb Mood

- 21(a) Emena/la m̀kpọtụ HH
IMP do-Neg noise
Don't make noise
(b) Ada erila ji ahụ HH
AdaNOM eat NEG-yam DEM
Ada don't eat that yam

2.3.5 Imperative Affirmative Progressive Verb Mood

- 22 (a) Na-egotara m akwa
AUX PROG-buy ISG clothe
Keep on buying clothe for me
(b) Na- ańụ ọgwụ gị oge dum
AUX PROG medicine 2SG ADV all
Be taking your medicine all the time

2.3.6 Imperative Progressive Negative

- 23 (a) Anala/na eme m̀kpọtụ
MOD- neg do noise
Don't be making noise
(b) Anala atụ asi
MOD say- PROG lie
Don't be telling lies

2.3.7 Imperative Unfulfilled Negative

- 24 (a) Ákà àgàla ahịa LHLL
MOD go-FUT market Adv
Don't go to the market yet.
(b) Ákà esila agwa LH
MOD cook-FUT beans
Don't cook the beans yet

From examples (18- 21) the tone structures of the imperatives verb's mood are low or high (L or H) and the verbs belong to tone (LTVs) and (HTVs). The suffixes are

consistently on a low tone and this is according to the principles of vowel harmony while in examples (22a and b) the imperative progressive affirmative marker has a high tone and the participle following the progressive marker has low tone feature. Again, in examples (23a and b) the negative auxiliary is on a step tone (S) while examples (24a and b) imperative progressive unfulfilled marker is on a low (L) and the prefix /a/ is also on a high tone.

2.3.8 Indicative Affirmative Verb mood

- 25(a) O gbùrù agwọ LL
3SG kill- pst snake
He killed snake
(b) Ada chòrò oche LL
AdaNOM FUT- want chair
Ada wants chair

2.3.9 Indicative Negative

- 26 (a) Ànyị énweghị egō L
3PLU have neg money
We do not have money
(b) Ada achóghị oche
AdaNOM want NEG chair
Ada does not want a chair

The tone structure in examples (25a and b) is LT the verb root and the prefix have low tones while in examples (26a and b) the nominal is on the low tone (LT) and the first element on the verb stem is step tone (S) followed by the negative suffix on a low tone (L).

2.3.10 Polar/No Question

- 27(a) Emeka ò jere Aba
EmekaNom pron go -rv Aba
Did Emeka go to Aba?
(b) Okoro ọ nọ n'ime ụlọ
OkoroNOM PRON stay PREP in house
Is Okoro in the house?

2.3.11 Interrogative Content/Wh- question

- 28 (a) Èbee ka eze gàrà?
QW FOC EzeNOM go -rv PST
Where did Eze go to?
(b) Ònye kụwara efere a?
QW break PST plate DEM
Who broke this plate?
(c) Gịnì bụ nke a
is this DEM
What is this?

2.3.12 Interrogative Tag Question

- 29(a) Ego bìàrà taa, Ọ kwa ya
EgoNOM come PST ADV, is it not true
Ego came today, isn't it?
(b) Ego bìara, ọ bughị ya
EgoNOM comePST is not 3SG
Ego came, didn't she?

In examples (27- 28a and b) the tonal structures of the verbs are low, low (LL) and the interrogative words are also low tone. In example (28c) the interrogative word *gìnì* has high

and down step (HS). However, in examples (29a and b) the verb is on low tone (L) and the tag question marker is also on low tone. In Igbo standard language, verb mood is marked by tone. Tone distinguishes declarative statement from interrogative sentence

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In line with the set objectives of the paper, the following findings have been made;

Igbo verb moods are syntactically characterized into; forms, types and functions.

The forms of imperative verbs mood are characterized into affirmative and negative mood. The affirmative has simple, complex and compound verbs. The study discovered that the negative functions as a prohibition of an act. The imperative verb mood in Igbo has no subject except for an emphasis. The study discovered that indicative verb mood syntactically issues a statement in Igbo. It is marked by -rV marker. The interrogative Igbo verb mood syntactically, is characterized into – wh – question/ content question, Yes/ No or polar question and tag question. They are used to asked question in Igbo.

The study also observed that the tonal structures of Igbo verb mood varies from simple imperative verb mood which is either on a high tone or on a low tone while the complex and compound imperative verb mood is also high low or high tone as seen in the analysis. The study discovered also that the indicative verb mood in Igbo language is marked by high high tone. The study observed that all the Igbo interrogatives is marked by low tone exception of *Kedu* (how) that is on high tone.

Conclusion

This study discussed in details the syntactic characteristics and tonal features of Igbo verb mood in Igbo language. The study observed that verb mood in Igbo is syntactically characterized into – Imperative, declarative, and interrogative. It was observed that interrogative and the declarative verb mood share the same morpho- syntactic relationship, their only difference is in their syntactic arrangement and tonal structure. Tone plays a very important role in determining the mood of verb in Igbo language.

Recommendations

The study recommends that Government, donor agencies and private individuals should support or sponsor more work on tonal structures of Igbo verb as much has not been done on it. Further studies on Igbo verb moods other than the ones under study should be carried out by other researchers using different instrument and statistics.

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