

Modality: Can *-sie ike* qualify as a modal suffix, and *ma* and *ka* as modal auxiliary verbs in Igbo?

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Abstract

Past studies on modality in Igbo have discussed various ways for expressing modality in the language. They have identified the use of forms like *fu/pu*, *nwe ike*, *kwesi*, *ike kwe/eleghi anya*, *-nwu*, *ga/ya/la/le* for expressing modality in Igbo. This paper is confronted with the question on whether the forms *sie ike*, could serve as a modal suffix, while *ma* and *ka* serve as modal auxiliary verbs in Igbo. The forms are found in Ogbunike dialect of the language. They have not been captured anywhere as forms used to express modality in Igbo. Semantically, modality expresses two meanings: deontic and epistemic (Saeed, 2003; Uchechukwu, 2011). Relying on this view, the forms are semantically analysed and the results reveal that each of them expresses deontic and epistemic meanings. It is, therefore, concluded that *sie ike*, could serve as a modal suffix, while *ma* and *ka* serve as modal auxiliary verbs in Igbo.

Introduction

Every language has a way of expressing modality. Modality refers to the way in which a speaker can express his attitude towards a situation in interpersonal communication (Hartmann and Stock, 1972:140). It also allows speakers to signal stronger and weaker commitment to factuality of statement (Saeed, 2003:135). In the opinion of Igwe (2007), it is used to describe the meanings, which are usually associated with mood. This accounts for why Saeed (2003:138) notes that when modality distinctions are marked by verbs endings which form distinct conjugations, there is a tradition of calling them moods.

In the English language, modality is usually expressed by the use of modal auxiliaries written as simple lexical items, such as: can, could, may, might, must, ought, should, will, would, and so on. The modal auxiliary verbs occupy the first position of a verb phrase and sometimes have several words which may intervene between them and the main verb, e.g. ‘*when will you meet your doctor?*’, ‘*you may not see your doctor today*’. Modal auxiliary verb is used by the speaker/writer to indicate his mood or attitude with respect to whether or not the action, event, etc, denoted by the verb can be regarded as obligatory, necessary, permitted, possible, probable, certain or hypothetical (Arema, 2004:92; Nnamani, 2004).

Although Uchechukwu (2011) considers the study of modality in Igbo as a new development, a lot of contributions have been made by many scholars on modality in Igbo. Winston (1993) cited by Uchechukwu (2011) points out that extensional suffixes play very important role in the expression of modality in Igbo. Uchechukwu examines the grammatical use of these extensional suffixes in the language as presented by different scholars and suggests their reclassification as modal suffixes. Igwe (2007), in his own study of modality in Achi dialect, identifies some other ways for expressing modality in Igbo. In this paper, some other forms found in Ogbunike dialect, such as *sie ike*, *ma* and *ka*, are investigated on the basis of the two meanings presented by Saeed (2003) and re-echoed by Uchechukwu (2011) which modality expresses, that is, deontic and epistemic meanings. A review of past literature is first done in order to show the different forms earlier identified and their use to express deontic and epistemic meanings, followed by discussion of the suspected forms.

The data are tone-marked on the basis of the Green and Igwe’s (1963) tone-marking convention of leaving high tone unmarked in Igbo, the low tone marked with grave accent / ` /, and the down step tone marked orthographically with a macron / ¯ /.

Literature review

Saeed (2003) and Uchechukwu (2011) separately assert that modality is used to express deontic and epistemic meanings: While the epistemic meaning qualifies those assertions in which the speaker exhibits some degree of familiarity or knowledge of the situation of things, deontic meaning qualifies those assertions that express

obligation, responsibility, permission and ability. Some past studies have discussed modality in Igbo and have identified forms used to express modality in the language. These past studies are reviewed below:

A. *fu/pu* ‘be equal to/be able’ (Welmers and William, 1968; Igwe, 2007)

Welmers and William (1968) and Igwe (2007) present the use of *fu/pu* ‘be equal to/be able’ to express modality in Igbo. These are two dialect variants that express the same meaning ‘go out’, as in:

- 1 a. Obi fūrū/pūrū n’ ama obodo
 Obi go rV stative PAST PREP square town
 ‘Obi went to the village square’

These two words *fu* and *pu* serve as the main verb ‘go’ in (1a). They can be as they are or be inflected by suffixing rV. They are also modal verbs and can be used to express modality in Igbo, both deontic and epistemic (Uchekukwu, 2011). In this case, the main verbs are usually in their infinitive form. This is illustrated below:

- 2 i. Obu fū(rū)/pū(rū) ìgū egō
 Obi is able (rV stative) to count money
 ‘Obi can count money’
- ii. Òbì fù(rù)/pù(rù) ìnò n’ ama òbòdò ùgbuà
 Obi be able (rV stative) to be PREP square town/village now
 Obi may be at the village square now
 ‘Obi may likely be at the village square right now’

The *fū/pū* in 2(i) expresses the deontic meaning of ability, while in 2(ii), it expresses epistemic meaning of speculative possibility and prediction.

B. *nwe ike* (from *inwē ike*) ‘have strength/might/power; be able; can; may; be capable, strong, able; may be possible’ (Welmers and William, 1968; Williamson, 1972; Igwe, 1987; Igwe, 1999; Nwigwe, 2003; Igwe, 2007)

Welmers and William (1968), Williamson (1972) and Igwe (1999) identify *nwe ike* as a verb; Emenanjo (1978) regards it as suffix; Nwigwe (2003) sees it as a modal verb, and Igwe (1987; 2007) regard it as a periphrastic form. It is a combination of verb + noun. When the verb *–nwe* stands alone, it becomes a simple assertion which its truthfulness is difficult to ascertain. In other words, the assertion can be true or false. It also has its full meaning as verb of possession and can be inflected. On the other hand, *–ike* is an object NP. When the verb *–nwe* and the noun *–ike* are combined, it expresses modality. In this case, the verb *–nwe* can be inflected, while the noun *–ike* cannot. Uchekukwu (2011) points out that this form expresses both deontic and epistemic meaning. Below are some examples:

- 3 (i) Chinàza nwè –rè ike ìrū sọm afù
 Chinaza have –rV stative strength to do sum ADJ
 ‘Chinaza can do that sum.’
- (ii) ì nwè –rè ike ìgaba ùgbuà
 2nd PERS. SING have –rV stative strength to leave now
 ‘you can leave right now’
- (iii) Nonso nwè –rè ike ìkpō afīfīa afù
 Nonso have –rV stative strength to pack rubbish DET
 Nonso has strength to pack that rubbish
 ‘Nonso might have packed that rubbish’
- (iv) Nne m̄ nwè –rè ike igōta ji taà
 Mother POSS. have –rV stative strength to buy yam today
 my mother has strength to buy yam today

‘my mother might buy yam today.’

The statement in 3(i) expresses deontic meaning of ability, 3(ii) expresses deontic meaning of permission. 3(iii) expresses epistemic meaning of possibility and 3(iv) expresses epistemic meaning of prediction/possibility.

C. –*kwesi* ‘supposed to’, ‘ought to’, ‘deserves’ (Igwe, 2007)

–*kwesi* is a modal verb and can be inflected. When it appears in a sentence, the main verb will be in its infinitive form.

- 4 (i) Èmekà kwèsì –rì ificha ụlò taà
Emeka ought –rV stative to mop house today
‘Emeka ought to mop the house today’
- (ii) Èmekà kwèsì –rì ifū ego à
Emeka be able –rV stative to see money DET
‘Emeka could have seen the money’

The statement in 4(i) expresses deontic meaning of necessity and obligation, while that of 4(ii) expresses epistemic meaning of possibility.

D. –*ike kwe/eleghi anya* ‘possibly’, ‘may/might’, perhaps (Igwe, 2007)

The adverb –*ike kwe/eleghi anya* are used to express the same meaning. When used in a sentence, they come first followed by a coma, then, a simple sentence with reference to past, present or future. While Nwigwe (2003) describes them as periphrastic modals, but Uchechukwu (2011) suggests regarding them peripheral modals since they can only express one modal meaning. Below are examples of the use of the forms:

- 5 (i) elēghi anya, ọ rù rù ọrụ ahù
Possibly, he do –rV PAST work DET
Possibly, he did that job
‘he might have done the job’
- (ii) ike kwe, ọ nà- àbja
Perhaps, he AUX PRES. come
Perhaps, he is coming
‘he may be coming’
- (iii) ike kwe, ọ gà- àrụ yā
Possibly, he AUX FUT. do PRO
Possibly, he will do it
‘he may possibly do it’

The statements in 5(i), (ii) and (iii) express epistemic meaning of possibility.

E. –*nwu* ‘ability to do/perform’ (Emenanjo, 1978)

Emenanjo (1978:117) identifies –*nwu* as a suffix. It does not stay on its own, but is affixed to the main verb to convey meaning. According to Uchechukwu (2011), it could be used to express both deontic and epistemic meanings of an assertion. This is illustrated below:

- 6 (i) Nechè nà- àsa –nwu afele
Nechè AUX PROG. wash – PART –able plates
Nechè is able to wash plates
‘Nechè can wash plates’
- (ii) Nechè gà - apụ –nwu ùgbuà

Nechè AUX FUT. leave –PART –able now
 ‘Nechè can leave now’

- (iii) Nechè gà – àşu nwu akwà
 Neche AUX wash –PART –able clothes
 ‘Nechè can wash clothes’

The statements in 6(i) and (ii) express deontic meaning of ability and permission respectively, while 6(iii) expresses epistemic meaning of possibility.

F. –ga ‘shall/will’ (Igwe, 2007; Uchechukwu, 2011); y (a)/y(e), la/le (Igwe, 2007)

The morpheme –ga, y(a)/y(e), la/le ‘shall/will’ are allomorphs of future morpheme in Igbo. They function as markers for both the future and a sense of anticipation. The following examples from Uchechukwu (2011) illustrate the semantic and syntactic applications of –ga:

- 7 (i) Emeka gà- èri akpū
 Emeka AUX –FUT –eat –PART cassava
 ‘Emeka shall eat cassava’
- (ii) Èmekà gà- àhụ Uchè taà
 Emeka AUX –FUT –see –PART Uche today
 ‘Emeka shall see Uche today.’

The expression of modality that involves the use of the morpheme –ga can be divided into morphotonologically implicit and explicit forms (Uchechukwu, 2011). Uchechukwu (2011) cites examples from different authors to illustrate the implicit modal meanings, as presented below:

Emenanjo (1978:127-128):

- 8 (i) Nnennà gà- àbịa ebe à
 Nnenna AUX come –PART place DET
 ‘Nnenna will come here.’
- (ii) Nnennà gà- ìbīa
 Nnenna AUX to come
 ‘Nnenna is going to come’

Emenanjo (1985:127)

- (iii) Ekhè gà- èri yā
 Ekhe ANT eat – PART it
 ‘Eke will eat it’
- (iv) Ekhè gà irī ya
 Eke ANT –to eat it
 ‘Eke must eat it’

Igwe (1973:496):

- (v) Ọ gà- ème yā
 he AUX do – Part it
 ‘he will probably do it.’
- (vi) Ọ gà ìmē ya
 he AUX to do it

‘he will probably do it’

The verb *-ga* in the sentences in Emenanjo (1978; 1985) above have an additional modal meaning that Emenanjo (1985) glosses as ANT (anticipation) in sentences 8(iii) and (iv). There is the occurrence of participle in the 8(iii) example in Emenanjo (1985) and the infinitive in the 8(iv) example in Emenanjo (1985). A combination of auxiliary *-ga* with the participle of the modified verb could yield deontic meaning of compulsion as in 8(iv) and 8(vi). Uchechukwu (2011) points out that Igwe (1973) in his example above merges the future – anticipative and modal meanings. He attributes the mix up of both usages to mainly his decontextualization of his gloss. He concludes that in the appropriate context, and with the right emphatic tone of voice, the verb *-ga* can be given a deontic meaning of COMPULSION or the epistemic meaning of a deductive PREDICTION in any of these sentences, thus, confirming that the auxiliary *-ga* can function alone as a modal auxiliary and can explicitly combine with specific morphemes to express modality. This is referred to as the morphotonologically explicit forms of modality involving the use of *-ga* (Uchechukwu, 2011). The modal suffixes which the auxiliary verb *-ga* can combine with, according to Uchechukwu (2011), are *si/siri*, *nata*, *riri*, *lili*. He says that the auxiliary verb *-ga* and the suffixes are bonded morphologically, e.g. *gà ... lili*, *gà... nata*

Examples from Uchechukwu (2011:53):

- 9
- (i) Ọnịchà: Ọ gà – èli nata ñli afù
 - (ii) Ịgbòuzò: Ọ gà – èli lili ñni ọ
 - (iii) Mbièrì: Ọ gà – èri riri ñri ahù
 - (iv) Obòòwò: Ọ gà iri riri ñri ahù
 - (v) Ishiadù: Ọ gà iri riri ñri ahù
he AUX – eat – COMP food DET
‘he must eat that food.’
 - (vi) Ngwà: (a) I n - gà sị iri ñri ahù
you PRF - AUX - COMP to eat food DET
‘you must eat that food’
(b) Ọ n - gà sị iri ñri ahù
s/he PRF - AUX - COMP to eat food DET
‘s/he must eat that food’

All the examples in (9), in the opinion of Uchechukwu (2011), express deontic meaning of compulsion and obligation. The examples in (10) and (11) express different meanings.

- 10
- (i) Ọnịchà: Obi gà – anọ nata n’ ụnọ
 - (ii) Ịgbòuzò: Obi gà – anọ lili n’ ụnọ
 - (iii) Mbièrì: Obi gà – anọ riri n’ ụnọ
 - (iv) Obòòwò: Obi gà – anọ riri n’ ụnọ
Obi AUX – be – COMP PREP house
 - (v) Ishiadù: Obi gà – inọ riri n’ ụnọ
Obi AUX – to be – COMP PREP house
‘Obi must be at home’
 - (vi) Ngwà: Obi n - gà – riri inọ n’ ụnọ
Obi PRF AUX – COMP to be PREP house
‘Obi must be at home’

The examples in (10) express epistemic meaning of possibility.

- 11
- (i) Ọnịchà: mmirì gà – ezò nata (n’ anyàsị)
 - (ii) Ịgbòuzò: mmirì gà – ezò riri (n’ abàlị)
 - (iii) Mbièrì: mmirì gà – ezò riri (n’ abàlị)
 - (iv) Obòòwò: mmirì gà – ezò riri (n’ abàlị)
water AUX – rain – COMP (PREP night)
 - (v) Ishiadù: mmirì gà – izò riri (n’ abàlị)
water AUX – to rain COMP (PREP night)
‘it must rain (in the night)’

Nwigwe (2003:135):

- (vi) Ngwà: O n - gà – sì ìbū uchè
 it PRF - AUX - COMP to be Uche
 ‘it must be Uche’

The examples in (11) express epistemic meaning of deductive speculation.

Just as noted by Uchechukwu (2011), it is not all the various form for expressing modality in Igbo that have the deontic and epistemic meanings. Some express only one meaning. For example, *eleghi anya/ike kwe* express only the epistemic meaning of possibility. However, that they express only one meaning does not preclude them from expressing modality. That is why Nwigwe (2003) and Igwe (2007) describe them as periphrastic modals. But Uchechukwu (2011) argues for their classification rather as peripheral modals. This paper agrees with Uchechukwu (2011) since they are realized at the periphery. It also agrees with him that the prototypical modal structure of the Igbo language to be adopted for full spectrum of deontic and epistemic modal meanings should be the modal verbs and the modal suffixes, but notes that the modal verbs are in two categories: the free modal auxiliary verbs and the hyphenated modal auxiliary verbs. While the hyphenated modal auxiliary verbs on their own make no meaning unless hyphenated to the main verb, e.g. *–ga*; the free modal auxiliary verbs can stand on their own and still make meaning irrespective of the main verb, e.g. *nwe ike*.

It is evident from the review that none of the past studies includes *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka* as forms for expressing modality in Igbo. In the next section, these forms are presented and analyzed.

3. Argument for the use of *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka* to express modality in Igbo

Few examples are presented below from where it could be concluded whether or not *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka* can be said to express the two meanings expressed by modality.

3.1 *sie ikē* ‘be capable/be strong/be able’

This is a verbal complex structure comprising free verb root/verbal suffix *–sie/siri* ‘have/be/able/ability to’ and the noun *ike* ‘power/strength’. When it functions as a main verb, it can be combined with any adjective. When used to express modality, *siri/sie* is suffixed to the verb root and has a collocational bond with the noun *ike*.

- 12 (i) Mmesoma sì -rì ike
 Mmesoma verb – rV suffix power
 Mmesoma have (-rV suffix) power
 ‘Mmesoma is strong’
- (ii) Mmesoma sì -rì nnukwu ike
 Mmesoma verb root (– rV suffix) Adj. power
 Mmesoma have (-rV suffix) much power
 ‘Mmesoma is very strong’
- (iii) Mmesoma jì – sie ike, ò merie
 Mmesoma hold – able – power, she conquers
 ‘if Mmesoma can be steadfast, she will conquer’
- (iv) Mmesoma ga – sie ike, ọ gà –àhu yā
 Mmesoma go- PART – quickly, PRO AUX – see possibly it/her/him
 ‘if Mmesoma will be fast, she will possibly see it/her/him.’

In 12 (i) and (ii), *siri* functions as the main verb. It can combine with an adjective. 12(iii) expresses deontic meaning of ability, while 12(iv) expresses epistemic meaning of possibility.

3.2 *–ma* ‘knows/ability to perform a task’

The vowel *–a* is not prefixed to the modal aux verb *–ma* except when *–ma* is used to express a sense of negation and is being preceded by a noun or plural pronoun. In this case, a homorganic vowel *a* or *e* will be prefixed to the main verb in agreement with the rule of vowel harmony in Igbo.

- 13 Nече mà akwùkwọ
Lit. Nече knows book
 ‘Nече is intelligent’

‘ma’ plays the grammatical role of a verb in (13) and stands on its own in the sentence. Apart from being a verb, It can be used to express modality. In this regard, it can be inflected.

14. (i) ọ ma- ede yā
 s/he NEG write PART it
 ‘s/he will not write it’
- (ii) ọ mà- ède yā
 s/he AUX – write it
Lit. s/he knows how to write it
 ‘s/he can write it’
- (iii) Nече amā abja echī
 Nече AUX NEG – come PART tomorrow
 ‘Nече will not come tomorrow’
- (iv) ọ mà anyà ụgbọlà
 s/he knows drive PART vehicle
 s/he knows how to drive a vehicle
 ‘s/he can drive a vehicle’
- (v) ọ mà ịzū afia
 s/he knows (ability) – to trade/to buy market
 s/he is good at trading
 ‘s/he can trade’
- (vi) ọ ma – enene une à
 s/he AUX – NEG – write exam DET
 ‘s/he will not take the exam’

14(i) and (iii) express epistemic meaning of prediction. 14(ii), (iv) and (v) express deontic meaning of ability. Finally, 14(vi) expresses deontic meaning of refusal. The effect of tone in differentiating the meanings of expressions that look alike is witnessed in 14(i) and (ii).

-ma can combine with certain modal suffixes to express modality. The suffixes are *nata*, *riri* and *lili*. In this case, the AUX and the suffix can be written together and they precede the main verb or the AUX is prefixed to the main verb, while the suffix (COMP) follows. Just as Uchekukwu (2011) has noted in the case of *-ga*, the auxiliary verb *-ma* and the modal suffixes are ‘morphotonologically’ bonded.

- 15 (i) ọ ma-ejenata afia taà
 s/he AUX-NEG –go – COMP market today
 ‘s/he must not go to market today’
- (ii) Chinaza mànàtà anyà ụgbọlà
 Chinaza AUX – COMP drive vehicle
 Chinaza definitely knows how to drive a vehicle
 ‘Chinaza should know how to drive a vehicle’
- (iii) nnà m màlịlị nà ọ pùrù
 father my AUX – COMP that s/he leave – rV suffix PAST
 ‘my father must be aware that s/he left’
- (iv) Chinaza mà- lili ife melunū

Chinaza AUX – COMP something happened
'Chinaza should know what happened'

15(i) expresses deontic meaning of blunt refusal, while 15(ii) and (iii) express deontic meanings of ability and permission respectively. 15(v) expresses epistemic meaning of possibility.

3.3 -ka 'bigger than/should have/would have'

The morpheme *-ka* functions as marker for comparison and expression of events that should have taken place but did not take place.

- 16 Nече kà Chinaza
Nече verb+adj Chinaza
'Nече is bigger than Chinaza'

When *-ka* is used to express modality in Igbo and it is preceded by a subject NP or a plural pronoun, the vowel *-a* is prefixed to it and a homorganic vowel *a* or *e* is also prefixed to the main verb. In this case, *-ka* is not hyphenated to the main verb, but stands on its own. When *-ka* is preceded by a singular pronoun, vowel *-a* is not prefixed to it and it does not stand alone. It is rather hyphenated to the main verb. The modal auxiliary verb *-ka* can be inflected. When inflected, the main verb it precedes will be in its infinitive form. It can be used to express both deontic and epistemic meanings.

- 17 (i) Nzùbe àka abjá taà
Nzùbe AUX – come – PART today
'Nzùbe would have come today'
- (ii) Nzùbe kà rì ìbĩa taà
Nzùbe AUX –rV suffix to come today
'Nzùbe would have come today'
- (iii) Chijìòkè àka adì ndù
Chijìòkè AUX remain PART life
'Chijìòkè would have been alive'
- (iv) Agha kà rì inwē egō
Agha AUX –rV to have money
'Agha would have had money'
- (v) Nzùbe kà rì irūcha ya
Nzùbe AUX –rV suffix to finish work it
'Nzùbe would have been able to finish it'
- (vi) Àdaobi àka adì na- àga akwūkwo
Àdaobi AUX remain PART AUX –go PART book
'Àdaobi should have been going to school'
- (vii) Àdaobi kà rì idī na- àga akwūkwo
Àdaobi AUX –rV suffix to remain AUX –go PART book
'Àdaobi should have been going to school'
- (viii) m kà- edē ya
1st PERS. SING. AUX – write – PART it
'i would have written it'

17(i, ii & viii) express deontic meaning of certainty. 17(iii & iv) express epistemic meaning of possibility. 17(v) expresses deontic meaning of ability. Finally, 17(vi & vii) express deontic meaning of permission.

Summary and conclusion

This paper set out to answer a question on whether *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka* could be used to express modality in Igbo. Past works on modality in Igbo were reviewed in order to draw insight on the nature of modality in the language. Also, data were presented showing instances of the application of *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka*. The data were analysed to bring out the deontic and epistemic meanings in them. The results reveal that the morphemes *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka* can be used to express modality in Igbo in addition to their primary functions. The paper classifies the forms for expressing modality in Igbo into four: the peripheral, e.g. *elēghị ānya/ike kwe*; the modal auxiliary verbs, e.g. *nwe ike*; the hyphenated modal auxiliary verbs, e.g. *ga-*, *ka-* and *ma-*; and the modal suffixes, e.g. *-nwu*, *sie ike*.

It can be concluded that this paper has answered the question earlier posed and that in addition to the forms earlier identified for expressing modality in Igbo, *sie ikē*, *ma* and *ka* can be used to express modality in Igbo. Modality in Igbo could be grouped into the core and the peripheral. The core modals express the bipartite meanings – deontic and epistemic and are syntactically housed in the infl, while the peripheral modal express only one of the modal meanings.

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