On enclitics in the Igbo Language

Thecla Udemmadu & Chinyere J. Anidobe

Abstract

Clitics are generally known to resemble words but cannot stand on their own as words could. To function, they depend on a neighbouring word. The relation between them and the words they depend on is close to the relation between affixal elements and their bases or roots. Hence, the following major classification of the clitics has been made: proclitic and enclitic. While the proclitic depends on a following word, the enclitic depends on a preceding word. This study focuses on the enclitic in the Igbo language with a view to determining their distribution and function. This provides more material to support existing account of the elements in the language. The data for the study are from library sources and are verified by the authors who are native speakers of the language. The data are descriptively analyzed. The study confirms the finding in previous studies that the enclitic in Igbo could take any word from any of the word classes as its host. However, it discovers that enclitics could take prepositions as their hosts contrary to the claim that this is not possible. In other words, the Igbo enclitics take all word classes as their hosts. As determined, the primary function of enclitics is semantic. They modify the meaning of their hosts and in many cases modify the meaning of the entire structure in which their hosts occur.
Introduction

A good amount of studies has been done on enclitics in the Igbo language. For Ngoesi (1989), the enclitic is a word that adds meaning to a sentence. In talking about its position, he says that it can be placed anywhere in a sentence structure, but in most cases it is placed side by side with the verbs, nominal and nominal modifiers. If it is beside a verb, the two are written together as one word, but is written separately as independent word if it is following a member of another word class.

According to Emenanjo (1978), enclitics feature so consistently and so prominently in the Igbo language that each group qualifies to be called a part of speech in the context of this language. Enclitics are bound but optional elements. In addition, like most suffixes, enclitics have a CS structure. Partly because of these facts and partly, perhaps, because of insufficient data which results in incomplete analysis, suffixes and enclitics were until fairly recently lumped together and collectively called ‘suffixes’. This supports Green and Igwe (1963) who state that most of the enclitics in the Igbo are described as suffixes, for instance, -kwa suffix, -sị suffix, -tụ suffix, -dị suffix, etc. Okoye-Ogbalu, Ofoegbu and Nzidegwu (1997) assert that enclitics make a sentence to be firm and emphatic.

Ugoji, Ume and Dike (1989) note that enclitic is one of the word classes that can follow a verb. It is like a suffix since it can be preceded by other word classes apart from preposition. In differentiating between enclitic and suffix, they remark that enclitic resembles suffix when it has a preceding verb. Suffix can only come after a verb but it is different from enclitic because the enclitic can take any position. It can be preceded by all word classes apart from preposition. Enclitic can even be preceded by
another enclitic. Emenanjo (1991) ascertains that enclitic is not a verb neither is it a suffix instead it is a small word that can be preceded by any word apart from preposition. Ofomata (1994) says that enclitic is another type of affix found in the Igbo language; it is an affix that gives full meaning to a word. Ofomata (2004) adds that enclitic is an affix which manifests very prominently in a word. It is prominent because unlike an affix, it can stand independently in a sentence without leaning on other words. It projects the meaning of the sentence in which it is positioned. Ikekeonwu, Ezikeojiaku and Ugoji (1999) state that enclitic is also a morpheme that can be affixed to a verb which brings about a little difference. Anytime it is following a verb immediately, it is written together with the verb. This is why it is expedient to discuss it under extensional suffix. It is true that it is written together with other word classes. Nze and Imo (2006) note that the, enclitic is one of the word classes that adds more meaning to a sentence. It can take any position in a construction but in most cases it is preceded by verbs, nominal and nominal modifiers.


From the foregoing, clitics are linguistic elements that are not words and are not affixes. Their form does not permit them to stand independently. Hence, they require a host. Obviously, clitics in Igbo are not contracted elements as it is the case with clitics in other languages especially English. For instance, Shell (1994) exemplifies enclitics in English with ‘n’t’ in ‘can’t’.
Test for enclitics

In this work, we regard enclitics in Igbo to be any items whose presence or absence in a construction does not contribute to well-formedness of the construction syntactically or semantically. In other words, our test for enclitichood is deletion. The deletion of an enclitic preserves the well-formedness of the construction from which it is deleted. This is the dividing line between an enclitic in Igbo and a suffix. The deletion of a suffix from its base or root affects the grammatical orientation of the structure from which it is deleted.

Enclitics in Igbo

Studies on enclitics in Igbo have determined a good number of elements as enclitics in the language. Some of them are: tụ, dự, nú, nó, sị, cha, nwa, nnọọ, rị, rị, ga, kwa, and zi. In the subsection below, we show the distribution of the enclitics.

Distribution of Igbo enclitics

Enclitics can take a verb as its host. When it does, it follows the verb directly before any affixal elements:

1.a. nyetụghị
   Vr-encl-suff
   give-small-not
   did not give a fraction of

b. nyetụrụ
   vr-encl-suff
   give-small-pst
   gave a fraction of
c. ejekwaghị
pref-vr-encl-suff
pref-go-again-not
did not go again
d. jekwara
vr-encl-suff
go-again-pst
went again

Enclitics can take auxiliaries as their hosts:

2.a. Ana kwa m agụ akwụkwọ
Pref-aux-encl me pref-read book
I am certainly reading
b. Ebere ganọọ abịa echi
Ebere aux-encl pref-come tomorrow
Ebere will certainly come tomorrow
c. Ha jizi ya eme ọnụ
They aux-encl him pref-do mouth
They are then proud of him
d. Anyị nacha egwu egwu
We aux-encl play play
We are all playing
e. Ha kakwa unu mma
They aux-encl you fine
They are certainly better than you (pl)
f. Isioma mazi esi nri
Isioma aux-encl pref-cook food
Isioma can now cook
Enclitics have been found to occur following nouns:

3.a. Ụzọka *nnọọ* ka ụ kpọrọ
     Noun encl that you call-pst
     Uzoka is just the person you called

b. Ebere na Akaeze *cha* bjara akwụkwọ
     Noun and Akaeze encl come-pst book
     Ebere and Akaeze all came to school

c. Azụ *rii* jurụ gi ọnụ
     Fish(noun) encl full-pst you mouth
     So, fish filled your mouth

They can follow pronouns:

4.a. Ha *zi* riri nri ahụ
     Pro(They) encl eat–pst food that
     So, they ate that food

b. Unu *nnọọ* chọrọ iti ya ihe
     Pro(you)(pl) encl want-pst pref-beat him something
     So, you people wanted to beat him

c. Mụnwa kpọrọ gi
     Pro-encl call-pst you
     I myself called you

They have been found to follow numerals:

5.a. Atọ *cha* dị n’ime ya
     Num(three) encl be prep-inside it
     As many as three are inside it
b. Oroma asaa zi ka o nyere gị Orange num(seven) encl that he give-pst you
    He then gave you seven oranges

c. Otu na ọkara mnọọ zuuru Osita
    Num-one and half encl be.enough.for-pst Osita
    Only one and half was enough for Osita

Enclitics also follow Interrogatives in:

6.a. Gịnịzi mere?
    Wh-encl do-pst
    What then happened?

b. Onyedu tùrù gị okwute?
    Wh-encl throw-pst you stone
    Who was that that threw stone on you?

c. Olezi juru ite ahụ?
    Wh-encl fill-pst pot that
    How many then filled that pot?

The enclitic is found to occur with the conjunction, na ‘and’ to form a complex conjunction:

7a. Azụka nakwa Iruka ka a kpọrọ
    Azuka and-encl Iruka that someone call-pst
    Azuka and also Iruka were called

b. Toochi, Ifeanyị nakwu Chiọma bjara
    Toochi, Ifeanyi and-encl Chioma come-pst
    Toochi, Ifeanyi and even Chioma came

Enclitics could follow adjectives:
8a. Nwoke ojii zi ụrụ ya
   Man black-encl marry-pst her
   A black man later married her

b. Atụrụ ọcha ri na-aga
   Sheep white-encl PROG-pref-go
   So, a white sheep is passing

c. Oshimiri ukwu nwa ọ na-eri mmadụ?
   Sea big-encl it PROG-pref-eat person
   Does that great sea drown people?

Enclitics have been found to follow adverbs:

9.a. Nwayọnwayọ nnọọ ka o ji ekwu okwu
    slow.slow encl that he use pref-talk talk
    He just talks slowly

b. Ngwangwa zi ka m mere ya
    quick.quick encl that me do-pst it
    I then did it quickly

c. O kwuru okwu ahụ oṣiṣọ ri
    He talk-pst talk that fast.fast encl
    So he said it quickly

Enclitics have been found to follow demonstratives in the language:

10.a. Onye a kwa ụ bụ enyi ọjọ
      Person dem encl be friend you
      Just this person is your friend

b. Ebe ahụ zi ka ọ nọ
   Place dem encl that he stay
   He later stayed in that place
c. Ihe ahụ \( nọọ \) mere ya abịa
   Thing dem encl do-pst him pref-come-neg
   Just that thing made him not to come

Quantifiers could be hosts to enclitics:

11.a. Ůfọdụkwa ga-abịa
   Quantifier-encl aux-pref-come
   Some will definitely come
b. Mmadụ niile zi bjara
   Person quantifier encl come-pst
   Everybody eventually came
c. Olemaole ri dị mma
   Quantifier encl be good
   Just few are good

We have found that there are cases in which the enclitics take prepositions as their hosts:

12.a. Ha bjara gbasaran\( nọọ \) okwu ahụ
   They come-pst prep(about)-encl talk that
   They came because of the matter
b. Nneka na-eche banyeri
   Nneka aux-pref-think prep(about)-encl
   ihe ahụ e mere ya
   thing that someone do-pst her
   Nneka is thinking just about the thing done to her

If the expressions in examples 12a and b are grammatical, it then shows that enclitics can occur with preposition as their hosts. This
is contrary to the claim by earlier analysts that enclitics do not occur with prepositions as their hosts.

**The function of Igbo enclitics**

From the preceding section, it is clear that the only syntactic relevance of enclitics is that of adding to phrasal structures. In doing this, we see them modify the meaning of their host. Of course, in some cases, we see that their meaning modify the entire construction in which they appear. In other words, the basic function of enclitics is primarily semantic, that is, adding more meaning to an expressed meaning. Evident meaning of some enclitics is exemplified below:

13. **Kwu**

   Esokwu
   Pref-follow-encl(also) me
   I am also included

*Kwu* here means ‘inclusion/addition’

14. **nù**

   a. **Ndeewonù**
      Hello-all
      Greeting to more than one
   b. **Bjanù**
      come-all
      You (pl) come
   c. **Rienù**
      Eat-all
      You (pl) eat
Nò in the expressions indicates plurality.

15. \textit{Nwa}

a. \( N\quad \text{na-eme}\quad \text{nke ndị nwa}\quad lụrụ\quad \text{di}\)
   She aux-pref-do of those encl(just) marry-pst husband
   She is posing just because she got married

b. \( A\quad \text{da na-eti}\quad \text{iwu}\quad \text{nke ndị isi nwa}\)
   Ada aux-pref-beat command of those head encl(just)
   She is autocratic because she is just the head

The enclitic \textit{nwa} in the examples is derogatory. However, in the example below, the same enclitic is an emphatic marker.

c. \( G\quad \text{ịnwa}\quad k\quad \text{ọ na-akpọ}\)
   You-encl that he aux-pref-call
   You are the person he is calling

16. \textit{cha}

a. \( N\quad \text{dı\quad a\quad cha}\quad \text{bụ nke ya}\)
   These this encl(all) be of you
   All these are his

b. \( Q\quad \text{bụ ya\quad nwecha\quad ya}\)
   He be him have-encl(all) it
   He owns all of them

c. \( Q\quad \text{bụcha\quad ha\quad nwe\quad ya}\)
   It be-encl(all) they have it
   They all own it

d. \( I\quad \text{he\quad ndị\quad a\quad bụ nke gị\quad cha}\)
   Thing these this be of you(sg) encl(all)
   All these things are yours(sg)
The enclitic *cha* as in 27a-d, indicates plurality but in 28, it is derogatory.

17. Ọ ga-ekwucha
He aux-pref-speak-encl(derog)

18. *zi*
   a. *Nkịta zi* ka ọ zutara
     dog encl(later) that he buy-pst
     He later bought a dog.
   b. Gịnịzi mere?
     What-encl(then) do-pst
     What then happened?
   c. *Ọ dzi mma*
     it be-encl(later) good
     It is now good
   d. *Onyezi metụrụ m aka?*
     Who-encl(later) do-pst me hand
     Who later touched me?

*Zi* indicates that something happened later. However, in 18e&f below, we see the same enclitic express other nuances of meaning. For instance, in 18e, we see the item express surprise while in 18f, it indicates a tone of authority.

   e. *Onyezi metụrụ m aka?*
     Who-encl(not expected) do-pst me hand
     Who (surprisingly) touched me?
   f. *Onyezi metụrụ m aka?*
     Who-encl(autocratically) do.touch-pst me hand
     Who (autocratically) touched me?
19.  

\( t_u \)

a.  
\[ \text{Nyet}_u \text{ ya oroma} \]
\[ \text{give-encl(small) him orange} \]
\[ \text{Give him a fraction of the orange.} \]

b.  
\[ \text{Gwat}_u \text{ m aha g}i \]
\[ \text{tell-encl(politely) me name you} \]
\[ \text{Tell me (in a polite manner) your name} \]

\( T_u \) expresses a fraction of a whole. However, we see that in 19b, it marks politeness.

20.  

\( s_i \)

a.  
\[ \text{Nd}i \text{ a } s_i \text{ gafere n’ule } ahu \]
\[ \text{These this encl(all) go-cross-pst in examination that} \]
\[ \text{All these people passed that examination.} \]

b.  
\[ \text{Ha } bs_i \text{ nke ya} \]
\[ \text{They be-encl(all) of him} \]
\[ \text{They are all his.} \]

\( S_i \) expresses plurality in the above sentences. In the contrary, it expresses completion and exhaustiveness in 20c.

c.  
\[ \text{Ireka nyes}i_rj \text{ ya nri ahu} \]
\[ \text{Ireka give-encl(all)-pst him food that} \]
\[ \text{Ireka gave him all the food.} \]

One thing is obvious about the enclitics: they provide the locus for expression of meanings that the language lacks words for even though we know and have seen that the exclusion of the
meanings would not affect the syntactic or semantic well-formedness of the constructions in which they appear.

**Conclusion**

In this study, we have noted that enclitics in Igbo are elements that do have the status of words and that of affixes, particularly suffixes. By their form, they require a host on which they depend to function. The distinguishing line between them and the suffixes is that they are not required for well-formedness of the structure in which they appear. Their presence or absence in the structure is equivalent to that of a grammatical adjunct. However, we have seen that they syntactically enlarge the constituent structure of phrases in which they appear. In doing this, they function semantically in modifying the meaning of the hosts on which they depend and in some cases complement the meaning of the entire structure in which the hosts are constituents of.

More importantly, we have confirmed previous findings on enclitics in Igbo, especially the fact that they can have as hosts any of the members of the Igbo word classes. However, we have shown that contrary to claims, by many an Igbo linguist that they do not occur with prepositions, that there are cases in which they do so. See again 12a&b.

**References**


*Thecla Udemmadu is an Associate Professor in the Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka*

*Chinyere J. Anidobe is a principal lecturer in the Department of Linguistics, Igbo and Other Nigerian Languages, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, Anambra State.*