PRO-FORMS IN IGBO LANGUAGE

NWODE, GOODLUCK CHIGBO.
Department of General Studies
Ebonyi State School of Health Technology, Ngbo.
Okparaernest @ Gmail.Com
+2348033513534

Abstract
This work examines the pro-form system of Igbo Language. A number of items used to replace other
Linguistic elements such as noun/NP, PP and adverbials are found and described. These gives us PN –NP,
PRO-PP and pro-adverbials. These are by no means exhaustive of all the pro-forms in the language. A
simple descriptive method of analysis is used in the analysis of data. Only the standard Igbo is examined.

1.0 Introduction
For both grammatical and stylistic reasons, different languages device different means of making
references to entities already mentioned or about to be mentioned in a grammatical construction or discourse
such reference mechanism reduce repetition and clumsiness and above all keep track of grammatical
relationship between elements in constructions, often, the discussion of references by replacement is limited
to pronouns alone. It has been established in grammars of different languages that it is not only nouns are
substituted in constructions, hence the employment of a wider embracing term pro-form to cover all instances
of substitution of an element from another.

Pro-forms refer collectively to the items in a sentence which substitute for other items or
construction (Crystal 2003:374). The term ‘Pro-form derives from the more central term ‘pronoun’, which
refers to items that substitute for noun phrases. Such labels as pro-adjective, proverbs, pro-adverbs, pro-
sentence and interrogative Pro-forms are employed beside pronouns to cover the range of grammatical items
and constructions that can be substituted in languages.

This work looks at the syntax of pro-form in Igbo with the view to exploring what gets substituted
and how in the language.

Pro-Forms
Pro-forms refer to the elements that substitutes for another element in a sentence or discourse.
Wikipedia (2013) defines a Pro-form as a type of function word or expression that stands in for (expresses
the same content as) another word, phrase, clause or sentence where the meaning is recoverable from the
context. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2000) similarly define Pro-form as a word that replaces another
word or expression found elsewhere in discourse or understood from the situational context.

There are different types of Pro-form. Five types are distinguished according to the kind of entities
substituted. They include
i) Pronouns
ii) Pro-adjectives
iii) Pro-locatives
iv) Pro-verb
v) Interrogative pro-form and pro-sentence

Of these, pronouns is the commonest and most popular. Fronkin, et al (2003:592) state this when
they say: “Pronouns are the best known pro-forms …”. The popularity of pronouns makes it seem that only
NPs are substitutable from empirical evidence, it has been shown that several other non-NP forms are
replaced, and often times, very cupiously; but we hardly notice them. Thus, we have beside pronouns those
other pro-forms as listed above.

Pro-adjectives or adjectival phrases. In English for instance, the sentence “I am hungry and so also
is my baby”, ‘so’ is a pro-adjective replacing ‘hungry’.
Pro-verbs are pro-forms that stand in the place of verbs. Example ‘did’ in “we have done our homework and you did too; so let us go fishing, replaced the verb phrase ‘have done our homework’. A pro-locative refers to an element that replaces a preposition or prepositional phrase, as in (1) ‘Look’ for it in the cupboard and you will find it there’ where ‘there’ is a pro-locative, replacing the pp, ‘in the cupboard’.

Interrogative pro-forms are those that replace entities that are questioned. All question words are pro-forms. Example:

(2) (a) I want to buy a house
    (b) What do I want to buy

The word ‘what’ in (b) is a pro-form standing for the NP ‘a house’. In our view, what is defined as interrogative pro-forms are simply interrogative pronouns, except for ‘how’ ‘why’ and ‘where’ which stand for adverbs, and prepositional phrases.

A pro-sentence replaces a whole clause or sentence, as in

3) (a) He will not own again
    (b) That is true

That in (b) replaces the entire sentence

(a) The full form of (b) is

4) He will not win again is true

In the foregoing, only English examples have been given. We in what follow, have deemed it necessary to look at the Igbo Language with the view to describing the kind of forms ‘pro-formal’ system of language.

Pro-Forms in Igbo

True to the statement of Fromkin et al that pronouns are the best known pro-forms, it seems that almost all the discourse of referent system of Igbo focuses on pronouns. This work recognizes subset pro-form to include:

1) Pro-Nps
2) Pro-Pps
3) Pro-adverbials

Pro-Nps

Pro-Nps are substituting elements used to replace noun phrases. This term is considered the most appropriate because as Luraghi and parody point out, the so-called pronouns have the same distributional properties of noun phrases. Consider the following example.

5) Ulo gi kam chòrò
   Ya kam chòrò

‘Ya’ obviously is a pro-Np replacing the NP ulo gi not the noun ulo. Although they do replace lexical nouns as in

6) Moto, kam chòrò; soso ya, kam chòrò

A paradigmatic considering of the word ‘moto’ in the context of the above example would show that it occupies a slot of Np as a cross-linguistic examination would also show.

7) Moto a car NOT car in the above context. Thus, it can be argued that the word is componentially +N+Det.

There are many types of Pro-Nps in Igbo. In the classification of Pro-Nps (Pronouns) by Emenanjo (1978) seven forms are distinguishable, all of which can be grouped into three functional types – pressure forms. Subject forms and the object forms. They can equally be grouped into two on the bases of the inflectional categories of number of number – singular forms and plural forms. We may touch on the details of these characterization as we make further instantiation below.

Pro-Nps are sometimes classified on the basis of the grammatical person they represent – whether the first, second or third person. Some other times they are described and classified from the perspective of the kind of referents or entities they represent and how they designate them (Nwankwegu and Nwode, 2012) from this perspective, we have personal pro-Nps, referring to those that stand for persons; reflective demonstrative, interrogative, relative, distributive etc. we shall adopt this last classification in our description of the Igbo Pro-Nps. We will however limit our attention to personal Pro-Nps, and few none Pro-Nps.
Personal Pro-Nps in Igbo

According to Okorji and Nwankwegu, (2010:32), the personal pronouns (person pro-Nps) are the most often and commonly used. According to Radford (1997), this category of pro-form are so-called not because they include grammatical properties of people (Cf Nwala 2006; okorji and Nwankwegu 2010).

According to Okorji and Nwankwegu, Speakers (Interlocutors) use personal pro-Nps to refer to themselves, and the person(s) or thing(s) spoken about. They are describable in terms of four major parameters: person, number, case/morphosyntactic form and gender. The last parameter mentioned is absent in Igbo.

In Pro-Np classification, using person parameter, the speaker is usually the reference point. In this respect, the speaker is the 1st person and the pro-Np he uses to refer to himself, the 1st person pro-Np. The listener or addressee and the person under discussion are called 2nd and their persons, respectively. Pro-Nps are also indicative of number—whether singular or plural. Their distribution or privilege of occurrence in the sentence in the sentence is also reflected in their forms and may be described in terms of case as subjective, objective or genitive/possessive. The table below gives an at-a-glance view of the form of the Igbo Pro-Nps.

Table I: Forms of Pro-Nps in Igbo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Person</th>
<th>Second Person</th>
<th>Third Person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singular</td>
<td>Plural</td>
<td>Singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Anyi (we)</td>
<td>Unu (you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object</td>
<td>Gi (you)</td>
<td>Unu (you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessive</td>
<td>Nke gi (yours)</td>
<td>Nke unu (yours)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Syntactic Characteristics of Igbo Personal Pro-Nps

First Person Pro-Np

This forms have both singular (Isg) and plural (IP1). The first person pro-Nps maintain the same shape in the subject and object positions.

Subject form

(a) M gbara oso (some how dialectical)
   Agbara m oso (standard)
   I ran
   The standard form brings to mind the discontinuous appearance of the Isg as ‘a—m’ or ‘e--m’, the morphosyntactic intricacies around this does not bother us here. We are interested in ‘m’ which is commonly known as the Isg in Igbo.
(b) Anyi gbara oso
   Ipl runpst race
   We ran

Object forms

9(a) Nye m egwu
    Gwe Isg music
    Give me music
   (b) Nye anyi egwu
    Give Ipl music
    Give us music

Possessive Forms

The possessive forms of the Igbo pro-Nps do not lend themselves to a straight forward explanation. In the first instance, the intantations in the table above shows that this form goes with Nke which functionally nominal in the contexts.

Emenanjo (1998: 62) has posited that the possessive forms are syntactically used as nominal modifiers. Okorji and Nwankwegu allign with this position in respect of Izhi dialect. To us, there is a different observation.

Recall from the definition of pronouns that they are forms that replace the entities they stand for. What Emenanjo describes or presents as possisive are rather possessive adjective, pronouns or the Pro-Nps replaces entirely the norms or the Nps for which they stand. Therefore, for instance, ‘anyi’ in (10) ulo anyi (our house) does not represent the entire Np. Even though it does, it does not function syntactically as pronoun but as adjective modifying ‘ulo’ (house). A cross-linguistic comparison of the
English our house (Det + Noun) would make it easier to understand the argument in igbo ‘ulo anyi’ (noun+Det) – Igbo being a head –initial grammar.

Therefore, to us, the possessive pronoun in Igbo is a compound for comprising ‘Nke and the appropriate pronominal element depending on person and number. Consider the following:

11 (a) Oru gi bu iza ulo
   Duty you be to sweep house
b) Nke gi bu iza ulo
   Be to sweep house

Yours is to sweep the house

Apart from the personal pronouns, there are other Np substitutes such as  

12) (a) Ano m Enugu (I am at Enugu)
   b) Ano m ebe a (I am here)

13) Agara m Onicha (I went to Onicha)
   A gara m ebe ahu (I went there)

Such pro-Nps as these are deitic as their interpretations depend on the locations of the speaker and the audience.

The following items, usually called question words are dr. pro-Nps. ‘ebe’ (where), ‘gini’ (what), ‘onye’ (who) examples

14) (a) Enugu ka m gara
   Enugu that I went
   (b) Ebe kam gara?
      Where that I went?
      Where did I go?

15) (a) Nna m bu Eze
   Father I be king
   b) Nnam bu gini?
      Father I be what?
      What is my father?

16) (a) Ebubechi came
   Ebubechi came

In the above, ‘Enugu’ ‘Eze’ and Ebube are nouns, respectively replaced with ‘ebe’, ‘gini’ and onye.

Other pro-forms in Igbo

We have dwelt on the Pro-Nps as though they are the only pro-forms. There are also Pro-pps or otherwise prelocatives are those substituting elements that stand in the pre-positional phrases/ for example, in the sentences below:

17) (a) Ulo nnam di na akuku osimiri Naija
   House father my be prep place side river Niger
   My father’s house is by the side of River Niger
   b) Ulo nnam di ebe ahu
   House father my be place that
   My father’s house is there

18) (a) Ebiri m na mba ofesi afo ano
   Live I Prep land oversee year four
   I lived overseas for four years
   b) Ebirim ebe ahu afo ano
   I lived there for four years

The form ebe ahu in set 9b) examples replaces ‘na akuku osimiri naija’ and ‘na mba ofesi’ both of which are prepositional phrases.

Pro-Adverbials

Pro-adverbial are those pro-forms that substitute for adverbials. Example:

19) Bulie ya elu elu
   Lift it up up
Lift it up
Lift it up/high
b) Bulie ya etu ahu
lift it how that
lift it like that
The form etu ahu (like that) replaced the adverbial up/high. Therefore, it is a pro-adverbial
We have also found pro-sentence such as
20(a) Kpoo m mgbe nna gi lotara
Call me when your father returns
b) Kpoo m mgbe ahu
call me then
There are two independent clauses joined by the relative ‘mgbe’ a coordinate linker kpoo m + nna gilotara. ‘ahu’ in (b) sentence is a pro-sentence replacing ‘Nna gi lotara’.

Summary and Conclusion
We had tried to survey the pro-form system of the Igbo language. Our choice of the term pro-form as against the popular term ‘Pronoun’ is due to the observations already made in language that not only nouns are replaceable. Preposition phrases and adverbial substitutes are all found in Igbo hence the favour of the term pro-form which is better covering term for all kinds of substitutes in the language.

We have found that what gets replaced in terms of nominals replacement is the Np, not just nouns as it has been made is to adopt pro-Nps in place of pronouns of all the pro-Nps, the possessive pro-Np is the one that does not land itself to a straightforward explanation. However, we have agreed that the occurrence of the possessive pro-form after a noun (in respect of the head initial parameter of the language) makes the possessive a determiner, hence the phrase an Np. The replacing elements are usually Nke + possessive adjective (nke m, nke ya etc).

Other non-Pro-Np types of pro-form found are Pro-PP and Pro-Adverbials.

References