

VERB CLUSTERS IN IZI

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I. INTRODUCTION

In linguistic analysis when data is scrutinized clear patterns emerge which form the basis for the establishment of categories which function within an interrelated system. Frequently, though, there is ambiguous data which does not fit easily into the over-all system, and instead of categories being differentiated boldly in a clear-cut way there is a cline from one category to another.

Verb clusters in Izi¹ illustrate this point. A verb phrase can be set up with certain specific characteristics and so, too, can a serial construction. But several other constructions occur which have some of the characteristics of the serial constructions and some of the characteristics of the phrase. There is a cline between the phrase and the serial construction with no immediate obvious break-point marking off one category from the other.

This paper² will give some of the details of these constructions and discuss their analysis.

2. THE VERB PHRASE

In Izi it is useful to distinguish two types of verb phrase: the simple verb phrase and the complex verb phrase. The simple verb phrase consists of a verb³ with the following characteristics: (a) it may be in any aspect, (b) it may be suffixed by one or more extensor suffix, of which there are more than twenty. For the understanding of this paper it should be noted that verbs occur in three forms, termed A-form, B-form and C-form. On the basis of these forms and tonal patterns a system of verb aspects is established.

The simple verb phrase may be either affirmative or negative. With negative forms, the negative particles, *te* 'not' and *teke* 'not yet' occur immediately before the verb and the negative suffix occurs as one of the verb suffixes.

Two types of complex verb phrase are distinguished. Type 1 has a very similar structure to the simple verb phrase but includes in addition the verb particle, *gege* 'obligative'. This particle occurs immediately before the verb in affirmative verb phrases. In negative verb phrases the negative particle may precede or follow the verb particle *gege*. The status of this particle is discussed in section 5.

Complex verb phrase type 2 also has a similar structure to the simple verb phrase but includes in addition the verb auxiliary, *shi* 'completed past'. This auxiliary occurs im-

¹ Izi is spoken by some 200,000 people living around and to the east of Abakaliki in eastern Nigeria. It is related to Ibo and many lexical and grammatical similarities with Ibo are found.

² This paper results from discussions with Mr and Mrs P. E. Meier, who have been carrying out field-work among the Izi for the last three years under the auspices of the Institute of Linguistics (West Africa) in co-operation with the University of Nigeria. Mrs Meier is responsible for the Izi examples. The paper was first presented at the Seventh West African Languages Congress in Lagos, 1967.

³ For details of the Izi verb see 'Some features of the Izi Verbal System', J. T. Bendor-Samuel and Inge Meier a paper presented at the 6th West African Languages Congress, 1966, and due to appear in *JOURNAL OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES*, vol. VI, no. 1.

