‘Sị’ as a pronoun in the Igbo language

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Abstract
Pronoun is a nominal and a grammatical category named for its function of standing for (pro) the noun. Pronoun in the Igbo language is a close class. Linguists and grammarians have identified several pronouns in the language but none has included ‘sị’ as a pronoun. Based on this premises, therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether the lexical item ‘sị’ is really a pronoun or not. The investigation will be done based on the distribution, grammatical function and the grammatical relation of the lexical item in question. The test for the linguistic item will be by replacement of the claimed lexical element with nouns. The data were gathered through the researcher’s intuitive knowledge of the language. A descriptive method of data analysis was adopted. The study disclosed among other things that; ‘sị’ can function as a pronoun in the Igbo language; that the word ‘sị’ can take only subject position in constructions; and that it can be classified as an impersonal pronoun. The researcher then recommends further investigation into the claim so that the lexeme ‘sị’ can be popularized as an Igbo impersonal pronoun.

1.0 Introduction

Some lexical elements that belong to pronoun have been ignored by linguists and grammarians. ‘Sị’ which the researcher claims to belong to impersonal or indefinite pronoun will be x-rayed in this research work and the claim will be supported with some linguistic facts and illustrations. The work is divided into sections. An overview of what pronoun is all about is in the first section. The second section looks at

types of pronoun in the Igbo language, and the treatment of 'sị' as a pronoun in the Igbo language is found in the third section, then, the findings and conclusion.

2.0 Pronoun: An overview

Pronoun is any word that can replace a noun in a syntactic structure. Malmkjer (2002:249) asserts that the pronoun is a part of speech that can substitute for the proper noun of anyone and that indicates a definite person. According to most traditional grammars, there are eight parts of speech, namely: noun, pronoun, adjective, verb, preposition, conjunction, adverb and interjection. Palmer (1981) sees nouns as "a word used for naming anything, where 'anything' may be a person, quality, action, feeling, collection, etc. The pronoun is a word used instead of noun…" Crystal (1987:85) declares that if a language has a gender categories in noun, it has gender categories in the pronoun. Palmer (1981:91) adds that since the early days of grammatical study, words have been grouped into word classes, traditionally labeled the 'parts of speech'. A pronoun is a part of speech used to replace nouns.

There are different types of pronoun; the first person, second person and third person. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2003) note that when semantic rules and contextual interpretation determine that a pronoun is co-referential with a noun phrase, one can say that pronoun is *bound* to that noun phrase antecedent. If *her* in the previous example refers to 'the woman', it would be a bound pronoun. But when a pronoun refers to some object not explicitly mentioned in the discourse, it is said to be free or unbound. The reference of a free pronoun must ultimately be determined by the situational context.

Radford, Atkinson, Britain Clahsen and Spencer (1999:152) state that pronoun is an important type of function word which the members (roughly speaking) stand for a noun expression (like John, the president, a book of mine, etc). The commonest pronouns are the personal pronouns, which can be (partially) described in terms of number (singular/ plural) and person (1st person when the speaker is included, 2nd

person for the addressee when the speaker is excluded and 3rd person in other cases). Bussmann (1996) writes that pronoun also *shif word* is a part of speech named for its function of standing for ('pro') the noun.

Pronouns form a very heterogeneous group in regard of syntax and semantics. All pronouns share the property of deixis, but differ from nominal expressions in that nominal expressions such as proper nouns always refer to the same elements in the real world, independent of the specific speaker's context, while pronouns refer to various objects in the real world in a way that is dependent on the specific linguistic context of the utterance. Thus, the proper name *Mozart* usually refers to the same individual, irrespective of the linguistic context, while the reference of a pronoun like *he* can only be determined from the context of the utterance that is the man last mentioned, the individual pointed to by the speaker, etc. Morphologically, pronouns in inflectional languages generally have a complex inflectional pattern and are subject to agreement with their antecedents. Pronouns are divided into several syntacto-semantic subgroups, including personal, reflexive, possessive, demonstrative, indefinite, interrogative and relative pronouns, as well as pronominal adverbs.

Pronouns in Romance languages behave like proclitics. Thus, in Spanish the unstressed pronouns me 'me' and las 'them' appear immediately before the verb in

Me las ensena
Me them(he) shows
He shows them to me
(copied from Radford et al (1999:174)

Straus (2001) postulates that a pronoun (I, me, he, she, herself, you, it, that, they, each, few, many, who, whoever, whose, someone, everybody, etc) is a word that takes the place of a noun. In the sentence *Joe saw Jill, and <u>he</u> waved at <u>her</u>,* the pronouns *he* and *her* take the place of *Joe* and *Jill,* respectively. There are three types of pronouns: Subject (for example, he), Object (him) or possessive (his). Straus enumerates some

principles or rules governing the use of pronouns in English constructions, among which are:
Rule 1: Subject pronouns are used when the pronoun is the subject of the sentence. Subject pronouns can be remembered easily by filling the blank subject space for a simple sentence
Example 1. ____ did the job
I, he, she, we, they, who, whoever, etc, all qualify and are, therefore, subject pronouns.

Rule 2: Subject pronouns are also used if they rename the subject. They will follow *to be* verbs, such as, is, are, was, were, am, will be, had been, etc. Example,
2. It is he.
3. This is she speaking.
4. It is we who are responsible for the decision to downsize.

Rule 3: This rule surprises even language watchers: When *who* refers to a personal pronoun (I, you, he, she, we, they) it takes the verb that agrees with the pronoun, for instance,

5. It is I who am sorry (I am)
6. *It is I who is sorry
7. It is you who are mistaken (you are)
8. *It is you who's mistaken

Impersonal Pronoun

Among the types of pronouns is Impersonal Pronoun. Impersonal pronoun is the type of pronoun that does not have a specific reference. The reference is unspecified by the speaker and unknown to the hearer.
www.grammarbank.com/impersonal-pronouns.html (2015) postulates that one can use impersonal pronouns to talk about people in general or for unspecified objects. For example, *one, they, you, it*. 'One' can be used to talk about people in general, for instance,

'It' is one of the most commonly used impersonal pronouns in English. '*It'* can refer to many unspecified subjects depending on the context. For example,
9. It is very cold today (the weather)
10. It is Saturday today

https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/english-grammar/pronoun/indefinitepronouns (2015) declares that Indefinite pronouns are used to refer to people or things without saying exactly who or what they are. Pronouns ending in –body or –one are used for people and pronouns ending in –thing are used for things

11. *Everybody* enjoyed the concert
12. I opened the door but there was *no one* at home
13. It was a very clear day. We could see *everything*

The lack of specification is a key when it comes to understanding how impersonal pronouns work. An example of an impersonal pronoun can be found in the following sentence:

14. Anyone could have slammed door.

Since the word 'anyone' does not reveal who is being discussed, it is an impersonal pronoun. Other examples of impersonal pronouns include no one, everyone, it, nobody and anybody, though there are many others as well.

Bussmann (1996) adds that indefinite pronoun is a group of pronouns which serve to represent a person or thing without specifying gender (one, everyone, someone) and/or number (everyone, someone, no one); their reference, however, may be indefinite (example, everyone, no one).

2.0 Types of Pronoun in the Igbo language

There are different types of pronoun in the Igbo language. Ngoesi (1993:54-55) classifies Igbo pronouns into: personal, impersonal, reflexive, emphatic, possessive, and relative pronouns.

Personal pronoun is the pronoun that replaces a person or an object. This type of pronoun has number; it can be singular or plural and it has persons, first, second and third persons. This can be illustrated in the table below.

	Number	
Persons	**Singular**	**Plural**
First	m, mụ	anyị
Second	i, ị, gị,	unu, ụnụ
Third	o, ọ, ya	ha

Table 1: Personal pronouns in Igbo

Impersonal pronoun is the pronoun that is not so precise in showing whom or what it replaces. From its syntactic position, impersonal pronoun replaces a third person singular pronoun. Impersonal pronouns in the Igbo language are ‘a’ and ‘e’

Reflexive pronoun is the type of pronoun that talks about one’s self like; onwe m, onwe ya, onwe ha, onwe unu, onwe anyị

Emphatic pronoun focuses on one’s self emphatically such as, mụ onwe m, anyị onwe anyị, gị onwe gị, unu onwe unu, ya onwe ya, ha onwe ha.

Possessive pronoun discusses about what belongs to one, for instance, ego m, ụlọ ya, ewu ha, akpa anyị, ugbo unu,

Relative pronoun refers to the person or something that has earlier been mentioned and is being repeated. It is mainly found in

relative clause where the NP in the matrix sentence is replaced by the relative pronoun which introduces the subordinate clause. For instance,

15. Akpa *ndị* m zụtara dị mma.
16. Ewu ahụ *nke* tara ji ya agbafuola.
17. Nwoke ọcha *onye* wuru ụlọ elu ahụ bi ala Bekee

In the Igbo language, relative pronouns are: ndị, nke, onye

3.0 Sị as a pronoun in the Igbo language

Pronoun is a nominal that replaces noun in construction. It can take subject position or object position in a structure. The lexical element 'sị' belongs to the grammatical category of pronoun due to the following:

Its syntactic position:
Sị can take subject position in a structure, that is, it can be at the sentence initial position, for instance;

18. *Sị* mete ndị ọbịa anyị mma
    Someone do well pl visitor we good
    Someone should take proper care of our visitors
19. *Sị* sie nri
    Someone cook-imperative food
    Someone should cook food

Sị can replace noun in a structure, for instance;

20. Sị kpọọ ya
    Someone call-imperative him

Sị can be replaced with a noun like

21. _____ kpọọ ya
    Ngọzi kpọọ ya
22. Sị nye m ego
    Someone give me money

The word under investigation can be replaced with a noun
23._____ nye m ego
Eze nye m ego
24. Sị sie nri
Someone cook-imperative food

A noun can be used to take position of sị, as in
25. _____ sie nri
Nneka sie nri
If sị can adequately be replaced with a noun as in the examples above, there is no doubt that it is a pronoun

Like other nominals sị can precede the auxiliary 'na' as in
26. Sị na-enye ya ihe oriri
Someone aux-pref-give him thing eating
Someone should be feeding him
27. Sị na-asa ụgbọala ahụ kwa ụbọchị
Someone aux-pref-wash vehicle that every day
Someone should be washing the vehicle every day

Sị can precede a verb

When the linguistic item takes the subject position in a structure, it is followed by a verb or verb phrase as the Igbo language has SVO structure, for instance,
28. Sị nye m akwụkwọ m
Subj VP
Someone give me book mine
Someone should give me my book

Equally, sị can comfortably stand as an NP in a syntactic analysis and can immediately be followed by a VP. It can be the head of an NP, example,
29. Sị kwuo okwu
NP VP

Someone talk-imperative talk
Someone should talk

It is obvious that sị is always found in the environment of imperative construction. It cannot be comfortably applied in other inflected verbs like past tense, negation, etc. It is ungrammatical in the language to say,

30. *Sị riri nri
Someone eat-pst food
Someone ate food
31. *Sị abịaghị
Somebody pref-come-neg
Somebody did not come.

But in negative imperative, sị can function well, for example,

32. Sị abịala
Somebody pref-come-neg-imperative
Somebody should not come
33. Sị ekwula okwu
Somebody pref-talk-neg-imperative talk
Somebody should not talk

Sị as a homonymous lexical item

In some cases the lexeme *sị* can perform other functions other than pronoun. It can also function as a verb. One should be very careful to decipher when sị is functioning as a verb and when it is functioning as a pronoun in order not to confuse issues.

Sị as a verb

When sị is functioning as a verb, it follows an NP, for instance,

34. Ọ sị ya bịa
He say him come
He told him to come

35. Emeka sị Ngozi wete ego
    Emeka say Ngozi bring money
    Emeka told Ngozi to bring money

Sị can also be used as an introducer

That is, a lexical item introducing an independent clause. It serves as a link or connector between a subordinate clause and an independent clause in a relative clause, for example,

36. Too kwuru sị, "ana m abịa"
    Too said, "I am coming"
37. A jụrụ ya sị, "ebee ka ị nọ"
    He was asked, "where were you"

When the lexical item under study is functioning as a verb, the verb can be inflected to past tense, negation, etc, for instance,

38. Too sịrị na ya anaghị abịa
    Too say-pst that he pref-aux-neg pref-come
    Too said that he is not coming
39. Too asịghị na ya anaghị abịa
    Too pref-say-neg that he pref-aux-neg pref-come
    Too did not say that he is not coming

But the above examples are different from when sị is functioning as a pronoun. Sị as a verb is not the thrust of this research work. This is the homonymous function of the lexeme. The homonymous nature of sị can be in the structure. Their position and semantics distinguish their grammatical functions. For instance,

40. Sị sị ya bịa
    Someone say him come
    Someone should tell him to come

It is worth mentioning that anytime sị precedes an NP, the sị is not a pronoun but a verb as in

41. Sị m bịa
    Verb NP Verb
    Tell me come
    Tell me to come

The subject of the above construction is implied. It is not obvious in the surface structure of the sentence but is obvious in the structural analysis.

42. Ifeanyị sịrị sị sị ya pụọ
    Ifeanyị say-pst someone say him go-out
    Ifeanyị said someone should tell him to go out

The first sị in the sentence is an inflected verb indicating past tense, the second sị is where the item is functioning as an impersonal pronoun while the third sị is also a verb of an independent clause.

From the above declarations sị can be classified as an impersonal pronoun and as a third person singular pronoun.

The popular impersonal pronouns in the Igbo language are 'a' and 'e'. They are classified as impersonal pronouns because they do not refer to a particular known person. In a construction where they are used, they are not anaphorous and antecedent of any reference because the object they represent are not traceable within the discourse. The lexeme under study (sị) can be grouped as an impersonal pronoun because it does not refer to any identifiable object within the discourse. For instance,

43. Sị sie nri
    Someone cook-imperative food
    Someone should cook food
44. Sị nye ya ego
    Someone give him/her money
    Someone should give him/her money

In the arrangement of words in a construction, sị (NP) precedes a V and the verb in most cases is in an imperative form. Sị like other impersonal pronouns cannot take an object position in a construction, as in,

45. *Udo kpọrọ sị
46.*Ha chọrọ sị

4.0 Findings and conclusion

Pronoun as a linguistic element that takes the place of a noun in a construction can function as a nominal and can take the subject position. It was pointed out in this work that one of the lexical entities (sị) that should be addressed as a pronoun is ignored as such in the Igbo language. Sị has all the status and qualities of a pronoun considering its syntactic position and grammatical function. It can precede a VP and can take the position of an NP and a subject of a sentence. Judging from its semantic and connotative functions including its syntactic position, sị can be categorized as an impersonal pronoun. Sị cannot take an object position in a sentence just like other impersonal pronouns in the language and in number it is a third person singular pronoun. The researcher therefore, recommends that the status of sị as an impersonal pronoun be highlighted and popularized in teaching in post primary, secondary and tertiary levels of learning.

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