

Subject-Object Switching in Etulo: A Cognitive Approach.

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This paper investigates the phenomenon of subject-object switch (SOS) in Etulo, an Idomoid language of Niger-Congo family spoken in Nigeria. SOS construction is a type of construction in which the subject and object of the verb can switch positions without a conspicuous change in the meaning of the sentence. SOS constructions are not peculiar to Etulo. They have been attested in other African languages such as Igbo (see Uwalaka 1988, Uchechukwu 2007). In Etulo SOS constructions are linked to experiential verbs such as *kiɔ itɪŋga* 'be angry', *kwɔ okwɔ* 'cough' *wo imio* 'be afraid/frightened', and *ɔtse* 'be sick'. Etulo constructions involving experiential verbs such as *Anɪ le kwɔ okwɔ* and *okwɔ le kwɔ anɪ* 'I am coughing' have the same propositional meaning but involve a subject-object switch. This paper therefore, explores the Etulo experiential verbs in SOS constructions and accounts for the orientation or contexts that predetermine the choice between the alternating sentence pairs. Within the Cognitive approach, two grammatical possibilities for expressing the same situation are assumed to encode different ways of construing that situation. In this work, the theoretical concept of construal is used to account for the alternating expressions associated with the Etulo SOS constructions. Construal is a multifaceted cognitive approach that accounts for changes in how a scene is perceived (see Langacker 2008, Evans 2019). The human experience could be so rich that there is no one single way to represent a situation, and the desire to give prominence to certain aspects of a situation could necessitate the adjustment of the focus of attention in a construction, such that the mental imagery associated with a situation is altered. This is the case of SOS constructions in Etulo. The data for this research are obtained from native speakers of Etulo via elicitation using a structured questionnaire on experiential verbs. In addition, context based data are obtained via natural recordings of narratives and conversations centered on experiential verb based themes.

References

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