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## Body-part terms in the grammar of Igbo

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**Abstract:** This article examines the grammar of body-part terms in Igbo (Benue-Congo). We present an inventory of expressions used for body parts. The data show that Igbo has a large number of complex terms used for body parts. These nominal expressions involve associative constructions. We further explore the grammar of body-part phrases in terms of how they relate to spatial relations and fixed idioms. In addition to the associative construction which is commonly used in body-part expressions, we documented six other syntactic constructions that are used in body-part terms and expressions.

### Introduction

This article presents a systematic account of the grammar of body-part terms in Igbo. The study of body-part terms, that is, terms that typically are used to refer to some part of the human body, in linguistics has become apparent, largely based on the idea that these terms are present in all languages as every speaker possesses a body (see Enfield et al. 2006). Nevertheless body-part terms have had their meanings extended in the sense that they are not only used to refer to parts of the human body. Instances of the use of body parts, for example, have been noted to form part of the grammar of spatial and temporal expressions (e.g. 'back' for 'behind' – spatial, and 'after' – temporal) as well as for notions of pointing and counting in many languages (see Heine and Kuteva 2002; Dingemanse 2006). In Igbo, body-part terms also feature prominently in idioms and proverbs, and there are a number of syntactic constructions that they are found in.

The article is structured as follows: In the remaining part of this introductory section, we provide a brief background on Igbo, highlighting the important aspects of its phonology, morphology and syntax that are necessary for a better understanding of the discussion in the following sections. Next, we provide a brief literature review on body-part terms, with a special focus on previous studies on the phenomenon in Igbo. The second section provides detailed lists of body-part terms and discusses their morphophonology and meaning, and highlights some fundamental parts of the body that figure prominently in the grammar of Igbo. The third section examines the grammar of body-part terms with respect to terms referring to parts of the body, spatial relations and fixed idioms. In the fourth section, we consider the different syntactic constructions that are used in the language in various expressions involving body-part terms. The fifth section briefly highlights the important role of body-part terms in proverbs in the language. The sixth section summarises and concludes the article. Unless otherwise indicated, the data for this article come from a combination of our intuitions and consultation with other native speakers of Igbo. Elicitation of body-part terms was conducted with the guide provided by Enfield (2006a).

### *A brief background on the Igbo language*

Igbo is a Benue-Congo language spoken by some 29 million people ([www.ethnologue.com/language/ibo](http://www.ethnologue.com/language/ibo)) in southern Nigeria. There are various geographical dialects, but the standard variety is largely based on the Owerri, Umuahia and Onitsha dialects (Emenanjo 1978). Igbo is widely used in literature, on radio and TV and in movies, and it is taught as a subject in school. The general grammatical properties of Igbo are described in Green and Igwe (1963), Welmers and Welmers (1968), Emenanjo (1978; 2015) and Manfredi (1991). Igbo is a tone language with three tones: high, low and downstep. In this study, all three tones are marked. High tone is marked (á), low tone is



marked (à) and downstep is marked (ã). Tones play important lexical and grammatical functions in the language. For instance, tone is part of the grammar of associative (genitive) constructions, negation, imperfectives and questions (Green and Igwe 1963; Carrell 1970; Uwalaka 1988; Nwachukwu 1995; Amaechi 2020). Another phonological feature of the language is vowel harmony. Vowels in the language are distinguished based on the advanced tongue root [±ATR] feature, and vowels in a phonological word must come from the same ATR set. The language has rich verbal inflectional, derivational and extensional morphology (Nwachukwu 1983). Most of these verbal affixes are harmonising in that they take on the ATR value of the verbal stem.

In terms of word order, the language is SVO (1a–b). Igbo is a head-initial language and adjuncts occur in clause-final position.

- (1a) *Ádá hù-rù gị.*  
Ada see-rv you  
'Ada saw you.'
- (1b) *Òbí gà-èrì jī échí.*  
Obi FUT-NMZL.eat yam tomorrow  
'Obi will eat yam tomorrow.'

Igbo has one preposition *nà* that is often reduced to *n'* when it occurs before a noun beginning with a vowel (2a). In ditransitive constructions, the indirect object occurs before the direct object (2b).

- (2a) *Ó jè-rè nà mgbèdè.*  
3SG go-rv P evening  
'S/he went in the evening.'
- (2b) *Ádá nyè-rè Òbí jí.*  
Ada give-rv Obi yam  
'Ada gave Obi yam.'

Igbo has a number of verbal complexes, such as serial verb constructions (3a), compound verbs (3b), inherent complement verbs (3c) – that is, verbs that take an obligatory complement in their citation form – and bound verb complements, a verbal particle which derives from and is bound to its verb (3d) (see Lord 1975; Emenanjo 1978; Nwachukwu 1987; Uwalaka 1988; Ihionu 1992).

- (3a) *Òbí bù-rù mmanjá b́á.*  
Obi carry-rv wine come  
'Obi brought wine.'
- (3b) *Ézè gbà-gbù-rù mgbàdà.*  
Eze shoot-kill-rv antelope  
'Eze killed an antelope by shooting at it.'
- (3c) *Úchè gbà-rà ósọ́.*  
Uche run-rv race  
'Uche ran.'
- (3d) *Ógè dà-rà á-dà.*  
Oge fall-rv NMZL-fall  
'Oge fell.'

Most of these verbal complexes, especially the inherent complement verbs and the bound verb complements are used in some expressions involving body-part terms.

### **Previous studies on body-part terms**

Body-part terms have formed part of earlier works comparing these terms in bilingual dictionaries (see dictionaries by Welmers and Welmers 1968; Williamson 1972; Echeruo 1998; Awde and Wambu 1999; Eke 2001). Historical comparative linguists also depended on body-part terms to determine



cognates and reconstruct protolanguage. This explains why a part of most wordlists is devoted to body-part terms. Such terms often form a small part of some descriptive grammars of languages. For instance, the grammar by Swift et al. (1962) contains 13 body-part terms in the vocabulary items list.

Nwoye (1992; cited in Okoye and Mmadike 2016) investigates Igbo body-part metaphors, associating human traits such as strength, frailty, wickedness and beauty with certain parts of the body. Okoye and Mmadike's (2016) study is based on the Igbo body parts in idioms. They enumerated 17 body-part-based idioms, out of which six are based on the head, six on the hand, four on eyes and one on teeth. Ugwu (2014) listed 53 body-part terms involving the face, its parts and other external parts of the body. He also listed 24 sentences, 12 in the frame *I have [body-part term]* and the other 12 sentences have the frame *This/These is/are my [body-part term]*. In the Igbo metalanguage published by the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture in Nigeria, there is a small list of 44 items relating to parts of animals' bodies. Igbo is also featured in the Boston University's 200 Word Project (<https://www.bu.edu/200word/igbo/body/>), a database of video clips of native speakers pronouncing each word. The database contains 28 Igbo body-part terms. Oli et al.'s (2013) English-Igbo medical dictionary contains many more body-part terms for both internal and external parts of the body.

### An inventory of Igbo body-part terms

In this section, we provide a detailed overview of the lexicon of Igbo body-part terms. These terms are provided in tables with three columns: the Igbo terms are listed in the first column, the second column gives an approximate English translation and the third column provides, if necessary, explanations and/or glosses. The body-part terms are represented in the tables as to whether they are simplex (monomorphemic) or complex (polymorphemic). We consider and group binominal expressions as complex.

#### The head and the face

Table 1 lists the terms for the head and the face and their various parts, including parts that are inside the mouth. The list contains 19 simplex terms for different parts of the head and face. The 23 complex terms are associative constructions. There are complex terms relating to the nose, ear, eyes, face and mouth. While most of these complex terms express an association relation, the term relating to the head *òpùn/ísí* 'fontanelle' (lit. 'growth in head') appears to express a relation of location with a clear reduced form of the preposition *nà* (see (2a)).

|     |            |   |          |   |            |   |              |
|-----|------------|---|----------|---|------------|---|--------------|
| (4) | <i>òpù</i> | + | <i>n</i> | + | <i>ísí</i> | = | 'fontanelle' |
|     | growth     |   | P        |   | head       |   |              |

The complex term *àhụ ọnụ* 'mark mouth' is ambiguous as it can be used for either moustache or beard. Enfield (2006b) reports a similar case in Lao, a Tai language spoken in Laos, Thailand and Cambodia. The words *é/ū* 'top' and *à/à* 'ground' are used to distinguish the upper lip from the lower lip. These words make the terms for upper and lower lips more complex (that is, poly-lexemic nominals) given the fact that the word for lip in Igbo is not a simplex one. The term *ólú* 'neck' is also used for voice. There is no distinction between the pupil and iris both are *nwátà ányā*, lit. 'small child eye', or *ányá ojii*, lit. 'eye black', for most speakers. This description of the pupil conforms to the common cross-linguistic depiction of equating the pupil with a human being or human-like object (cf. Majid 2006). The face in Igbo has the common semantic extension FACE > FRONT. Consider the sentences in (5). In (5a–b) the face refers to the part of the body, while sentences in (5c–d) exemplifies the extension to the meaning front.

- (5a) *Ọ sà-rà íhú yā.*  
 3SG wash-rv face 3SG.POSS  
 'S/he washed his/her face.'



Table 1: Parts of the head and face

| Igbo term                | Translation                              | Additional information   |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Simplex</b>           |                                          |                          |
| <i>ísí</i>               | head                                     |                          |
| <i>ńtị</i>               | ear                                      |                          |
| <i>ányá</i>              | eye                                      |                          |
| <i>ímí</i>               | nose                                     |                          |
| <i>ńtùtù</i>             | hair (of the head)                       |                          |
| <i>ọnụ</i>               | mouth                                    |                          |
| <i>ézē</i>               | teeth                                    |                          |
| <i>ágbùrùgáda</i>        | molar                                    |                          |
| <i>ágbùrùgá</i>          | premolar                                 |                          |
| <i>íré</i>               | tongue                                   |                          |
| <i>àgbà</i>              | jaw                                      |                          |
| <i>ákpó</i>              | chin                                     |                          |
| <i>ńtị</i>               | cheek                                    |                          |
| <i>ólú</i>               | neck                                     |                          |
| <i>ákpírí</i>            | throat                                   |                          |
| <i>ékò</i>               | Adam's apple                             |                          |
| <i>ányụrụ</i>            | gum                                      |                          |
| <i>íhú</i>               | face                                     |                          |
| <i>àkpó</i>              | palate                                   |                          |
| <b>Complex</b>           |                                          |                          |
| <i>àhụ ọnụ</i>           | moustache, beard                         | lit. 'mark mouth'        |
| <i>úkwù ézē</i>          | part of the teeth that is inside the gum | lit. 'waist teeth'       |
| <i>íkèrè ézē</i>         | wisdom teeth                             | lit. '?? teeth'          |
| <i>ńtùtù ísí</i>         | hair on the head                         | lit. 'hair head'         |
| <i>égedége íhū</i>       | forehead                                 | lit. 'fore face'         |
| <i>óghéré ńtị</i>        | hole of the ear                          | lit. 'hole ear'          |
| <i>ìkù ānyà</i>          | eyebrow                                  | lit. 'fan eye'           |
| <i>ńpúpè ányā</i>        | eyelash                                  | lit. '?? eye'            |
| <i>ńbùbù ányā</i>        | eyelash                                  | lit. '?? eye'            |
| <i>ábúbà ányā</i>        | eyelid                                   | lit. 'feather eye'       |
| <i>ńkpúrụ ānyā</i>       | eyeball                                  | lit. 'seed eye'          |
| <i>óghéré ímí</i>        | nostril                                  | lit. 'inside nose'       |
| <i>ètítì ísí</i>         | crown of head                            | lit. 'centre head'       |
| <i>òpùnísí</i>           | fontanelle                               | lit. 'growth in head'    |
| <i>égbùgbèrè ọnụ</i>     | lip                                      | lit. 'side mouth'        |
| <i>égbùgbèrè ọnụ élū</i> | upper lip                                | lit. 'side mouth top'    |
| <i>égbùgbèrè ọnụ àlà</i> | lower lip                                | lit. 'side mouth ground' |
| <i>ńkpó ùdà</i>          | vocal cord                               | lit. 'call sound'        |
| <i>nwátà ányā</i>        | pupil-iris                               | lit. 'small.child eye'   |
| <i>ányá ójílí</i>        | pupil-iris                               | lit. 'eye black'         |
| <i>ányá égō</i>          | pupil                                    | lit. 'eye money'         |
| <i>ányá ọchá</i>         | sclera                                   | lit. 'eye white'         |
| <i>óghéré ézē</i>        | gap teeth                                | lit. 'hole teeth'        |



- (5b) *Íhú yā zà-rà àzá.*  
face 3SG.POSS swell-rv NMZL.swell  
'His/Her face is swollen.'
- (5c) *Íhú ùlò áhù àmáká.*  
front house DET very.beautiful  
'The front of the house is very beautiful.'
- (5d) *Ó nò n'Íhú.*  
3SG be.LOC P-front  
'S/he is in the front.'

The face is a fundamental part of the body, and it appears in a number of utterances that describe facial expressions.

- (6a) *Mé-sà-pú Íhú!*  
do-wash-out face  
'Be happy/Put up a smiling face.'
- (6b) *Íhú bù yá sòsò ọchị.*  
face be 3SG only laughter  
'S/he is so happy.'

Another fundamental part is *ísí* 'head', which is conceived of as the centre of thinking and reasoning, and it appears in a lot of idioms in the language (see Okoye and Mmadike 2016). The sayings 'His/her head is not good' (7a), or 'His/her head is not complete' (7b) mean that the person being referred to is intellectually challenged.

- (7a) *Ísí ádí-ghī yā rímā.*  
head be.PRED-NEG 3SG good  
'S/he is mentally retarded.'
- (7b) *Ísí ézú-ghī yā òkè.*  
head complete-NEG 3SG completeness  
'S/he is mentally retarded.'

The eye is also a fundamental part that occurs frequently in expressions involving body-part terms (8a). The eye also features in many idioms in Igbo (8b–e). The verb *love*, for instance, seems to be an idiomatic expression with the literal meaning 'to see in eye' (8b).

- (8a) *Ó nwè-rè ányá àbùf.*  
3SG have-rv eye two  
'S/he has two eyes.'
- (8b) *Ó hù-rù gị n'ányá.*  
3SG see-rv 2SG P-eye  
'S/he loves you.'
- (8c) *Ányá dò-rò gị.*  
eye clear-rv you  
'You are careful.'
- (8d) *Ányá bù-rú gị ọwa!*  
eye be-rv you readiness  
'Be very vigilant.'
- (8e) *Ó nwè-rè ányá ọkụ*  
3SG have-rv eye fire  
'S/he is jealous.'



Other body-part terms that form part of the head and the face, especially the morphologically simplex terms, also appear in some idioms in the language.

### **External parts of the body**

This section describes the external parts of the body, excluding parts of the head and face and parts of the hands, fingers and toes that we will explore next. Both the front and backsides of the body ( $n = 57$ ) are documented in Table 2.

The word for body is *àhụ* and refers to the whole organism. The term can generally be used to refer to a human, animal or plant body. There are no terms for the upper and lower parts of the body, or expressions the equivalent of English 'trunk' or 'torso'. The term for body is fundamental in expressions pertaining to human health, such as *àhụ ikē* 'well-being' (lit. body strength), *àhụ mgbū* 'body aches' (lit. body pain), *àhụ ókū* 'fever' (lit. body fire). The sentence in (9a) is uttered to indicate the state of one's health as not good. The body is also used in context to describe the body's size (9b).

- (9a) *Àhụ ádí-ghī m̃.*  
body be.PRED-NEG me  
'I am not feeling well.'
- (9b) *Nné m̃ nwè-rè àhụ.*  
mother 1SG.POSS have-rv body  
'My mother is fat.'

In simplex terms, there are two words for the leg, *úkwú* and *ókpa*. The simplex terms *ótù* and *íkò* encode no distinction between 'vulva' and 'vagina'. It is interesting to note that Igbo has a term *àgàdà* for the space between the legs, or more specifically between the thighs. Also notable is that there are different terms for the English 'hair'. The hair of the head is referred to as *ntùtù*, facial hair around the mouth is *àhụ ónū* 'moustache/beard' (see Table 1) and the hairs that grow on the other parts of the body such as the chest, armpit, nostrils, pubic area are called *ájí* (see Table 2). The term *ájí* is also used to refer to fur. The grey hair of old people is referred to as *ísí áwō*. Interestingly, the hair of the eye, the eyebrow, is not 'hair' but 'fan' in Igbo (see Table 1). See Terrill (2006) on Lavukaleve, Enfield (2006b) on Lao, Wegener (2006) on Savosavo and van Staden (2006) on Tidore, for languages with various terms for hair on parts of the body.

Like the face, the back has the semantic extension BACK > BEHIND (see Heine and Kuteva 2002). Consider the sentences in (10a–b) that illustrate the use of the back as a term referring to a part of the body and its semantic extension to behind for spatial relations. The terms for right and left are those for the right and left hands, and are commonly used in the sense of 'side/direction' (11a–b).

- (10a) *Ázú nà-ègbú m̃ mgbú.*  
back IPFV-kill me ache  
'I have backache.'
- (10b) *Ó hụ-rụ yá n'ázú óchē.*  
3SG see-rv 3SG P-back chair  
'S/he saw it at the back of/behind the chair.'
- (11a) *Ó nò n'áká n̄r̄ n̄nà.*  
3SG be.LOC P-hand food father  
'S/he is at the right (hand) of the father.'
- (11b) *Lèé ányā n'áká èkpè gí.*  
look eye P-hand curse 2SG.POSS  
'Look to your left.'



**Table 2:** External parts of the body

| Igbo term      | Translation                                        | Additional information   |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Simplex</b> |                                                    |                          |
| àhụ            | body                                               |                          |
| áká            | hand                                               |                          |
| úkwù           | leg                                                |                          |
| òkpà           | leg                                                |                          |
| óbì            | chest, soul                                        |                          |
| ará            | breast                                             |                          |
| ékwò           | upper part of spine (in the neck)                  |                          |
| ótùbò          | navel                                              |                          |
| àzù            | back                                               |                          |
| ábù            | armpit                                             |                          |
| úkwù           | waist                                              |                          |
| òkpù           | hip                                                |                          |
| ìkè            | buttocks                                           |                          |
| òtèlè          | buttocks                                           |                          |
| òtù            | vulva-vagina                                       |                          |
| ìkpò           | vulva-vagina                                       |                          |
| òhụ            | vulva-vagina                                       |                          |
| ámù            | penis                                              |                          |
| úgwù           | foreskin                                           |                          |
| ákùkù          | side                                               |                          |
| éhé            | groin                                              |                          |
| ìkpèrè         | knee                                               |                          |
| opokiri        | thigh                                              |                          |
| àgàdà          | space between the legs                             |                          |
| <b>Complex</b> |                                                    |                          |
| ájí àhụ        | body hair                                          | lit. 'hair body'         |
| ájí óbì        | chest hair                                         | lit. 'hair chest'        |
| ájí ábù        | hair of armpit                                     | lit. 'hair armpit'       |
| ísí áwò        | the grey hair of old people                        | lit. 'head ???'          |
| ájí ámù        | male pubic hair                                    | lit. 'hair penis'        |
| ájí òtù/ìkpò   | female pubic hair                                  | lit. 'hair vulva-vagina' |
| élú òtù/ìkpò   | female mons pubis<br>(area where pubic hair grows) | lit. 'top vulva-vagina'  |
| ákpúkpó àhụ    | skin                                               | lit. 'hide body'         |
| ákpúkpó ísì    | scalp                                              | lit. 'hide head'         |
| ìkpèrè ákà     | elbow                                              | lit. 'knee hand'         |
| ìkè ákà        | elbow                                              | lit. 'buttock hand'      |
| àpà ákà        | forearm                                            | lit. 'scar hand'         |
| ógwè ákà       | upper arm                                          | lit. '?? hand'           |
| ùbù ákà        | shoulder                                           | lit. 'carrier hand'      |
| ngwòjí ákà     | wrist                                              | lit. 'break hand'        |
| njíbi ákà      | wrist                                              | lit. 'joint hand'        |
| ókpòrò ákà     | arm                                                | lit. 'stick hand'        |
| ónú árá        | nipple                                             | lit. 'mouth breast'      |
| àpàtá úkwù     | thigh                                              | lit. '?? leg'            |
| ógwè úkwù      | shin                                               | lit. 'face leg'          |
| ngwòjí úkwù    | ankle                                              | lit. 'break leg'         |
| àpà úkwù       | calf of leg                                        | lit. 'scar leg'          |
| ìkiri úkwù     | heel                                               | lit. 'bottom leg'        |
| àlà úkwù       | foot                                               | lit. 'ground leg'        |
| àkpà ámù       | scrotum                                            | lit. 'bag penis'         |
| ìré òtù        | clitoris                                           | lit. 'tongue vagina'     |
| àgàmà òtù      | clitoris                                           | lit. '?? vagina'         |
| àzù ísì        | back of the head                                   | lit. 'back head'         |
| ísí ùbù        | shoulder blade                                     | lit. 'head carrier'      |



| Igbo term        | Translation     | Additional information |
|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| <i>l̀kè r̀sĩ</i> | anus            | lit. 'buttock faeces'  |
| <i>ònú l̀kè</i>  | anus            | lit. 'mouth buttocks'  |
| <i>áká èkpè</i>  | left hand/side  | lit. 'hand curse'      |
| <i>áká r̀rĩ</i>  | right hand/side | lit. 'hand food'       |

The common grammaticalisation path of BODY > REFLEXIVE attested in many languages, e.g. Yoruba (Dingemanse 2006), is not found in Igbo. The word *ònwé* 'self' is used in the reflexive (12).

- (12) *Ádá hụ-r̀r̀ ònwé yā n'ènyò.*  
 Ada see-rv self 3SG.POSS P-mirror  
 'Ada saw herself in the mirror.'

The term *óbì* 'chest' is very common in many expressions in Igbo. It is conceived of as the source of emotional and psychic reactions. An example is *jídé óbì* (lit. 'hold chest') which can be translated as 'take heart/be strong'. Someone could be encouraged to be brave with the expressions *óbì káá gĩ* (lit. 'chest mature you'), *óbì sié gĩ l̀ké* (lit. 'chest be strong you strength'). Feelings of happiness are described as *óbì ídĩ ùtò* (lit. 'chest is sweet'), and sadness as *óbì r̀ngbáwá* (lit. 'chest breakage'). To be startled is literally that the chest is thrown out as in *óbì máp̀r̀r̀ r̀* (lit. 'chest throw.out me'), and a wicked person is described as having their chest at the back in the expression *óbì d̀i yá n'ázú* (lit. 'chest is in the back').

As for the complex terms, these are noticeably restricted to details of the arms, genitals and the hair of the different parts of the body and legs. The complex terms are associated with the leg *úkwú*, rather than *òkpà* used in these cases. Furthermore, the terms for parts of the arm are mirrored in parts of the leg.

### Hands, fingers and toes

The term for digits *r̀kp̀s̀j̀* is common to both fingers and toes, with a distinction made with the words *áká* 'hand', or *úkwú* 'leg' as modifiers to refer to either the digits of the hand, that is, fingers, or those of the leg, which are toes, see (13) and Table 3.

- (13a) *Í nwè-r̀è r̀kp̀s̀j̀ ákā írí.*  
 2SG have-rv digit hand ten  
 'You have ten fingers.'

Table 3: Hands, fingers and toes

| Igbo term                    | Translation      | Additional information      |
|------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>r̀kp̀s̀j̀ ákā</i>         | fingers          | lit. 'stick hand'           |
| <i>r̀kp̀s̀j̀ úkwú</i>        | toes             | lit. 'stick leg'            |
| <i>r̀b̀p̀ ákā</i>            | finger nail      | lit. 'nail hand'            |
| <i>r̀b̀p̀ úkwú</i>           | toe nail         | lit. 'nail leg'             |
| <i>òb̀p̀ úkwú</i>            | sole of the foot | lit. 'centre.of.field leg'  |
| <i>ázú ákā</i>               | back of hand     | lit. 'back hand'            |
| <i>òb̀p̀ ákā</i>             | palm of the hand | lit. 'centre.of.field hand' |
| <i>ònú r̀kp̀s̀j̀ ákā</i>     | fingertip        | lit. 'mouth stick hand'     |
| <i>ísí ákā</i>               | thumb            | lit. 'head hand'            |
| <i>òsòtè ísí ákā</i>         | index finger     | lit. 'follow head hand'     |
| <i>r̀kp̀s̀j̀ ákā ogologo</i> | middle finger    | lit. 'stick hand length'    |
| <i>òsòtè r̀wá ákā</i>        | ring finger      | lit. 'follow child hand'    |
| <i>r̀wá ákā</i>              | little finger    | lit. 'child finger'         |
| <i>r̀chíkí ákā</i>           | knuckles         | lit. 'joint hand'           |



- (13b) *Íkpísí íkwū m ná-àfú m ùfú*  
 digit leg 1SG.POSS IPFV-pain me pain  
 'My toes hurt.'

The terms for (finger)nails and the palm are also being mirrored in terms for parts of the foot. The sentence in (14), for instance, without the particular reference to the association of the nail to either the hand or the leg is ambiguous. *Mbó* 'nail' is also used for reference to animal claws.

- (14) *Mbó yā ètóká.*  
 nail 3SG.POSS be.very.long  
 'Her fingernails/toenails are very long.'

The terms to distinguish the fingers do not include the label *mkpísí* 'digit', rather the label *áká* 'hand' is found in these terms, e.g. the thumb is *ísí ákā* (lit. 'head hand'), and the little finger is *ñwá ákā* (lit. 'child hand'). The index finger and the ring finger are described as fingers that follow the thumb and the little finger respectively (see Table 3). The middle finger is described as the long finger.

### Internal body parts/organs

Table 4 lists terms for internal parts and organs of the body like bones, fat, kidneys, heart, etc. The terms for heart *mkpúrú óbì* and testes/testicles *mkpúrú ámù* are described as 'seed' of the chest and the penis respectively, while the womb, bladder and lungs are treated as 'bag', for instance, *àkpà māmírī* 'bladder' is literally a bag of urine. The equivalent of womb is *àkpà ñwā* (lit. 'child bag'). Similar expressions have been reported for other languages (see Majid 2006). Wegener (2006) observed an expression which literally means 'child house' in a number of Austronesian languages.

One fundamental part among the internal parts of the body is *áfó* 'stomach'. It figures in a host of expressions relating to emotional and cognitive states and qualities of individuals. Consider the sentences in (15).

- (15a) *Áfó ná-àsá m.*  
 stomach IPFV-wash me  
 'I have loose stools.'
- (15b) *Ó nwè-rè áfó òjújú.*  
 3SG have-rv stomach fullness  
 'S/he is contented'

Sentence (15a) exemplifies the stomach as a term referring to a part of the body. In (15b), the stomach is regarded as the site for feelings of satisfaction.

### Bodily emissions

Terms for different body products and/or excretions such as sweat, saliva, blood, urine, etc. are given in Table 5. Saliva has two terms, one simplex *ásó* and the other complex *ónú māmírī* (lit. 'mouth water'). The mucus from the nose *ímí* (the same as the term for nose) and the mucus from the mouth *íkwárà* (the same term for cough) are both assumed to be caused by *ázùzù*, the inflammation of the mucous membrane.

### Other terms

Table 6 contains other terms associated with the body. These are terms for different marks and/or lesions found in or on the body such as acne, wrinkles, scars, birthmarks, boils, goosebumps, etc. The table also lists term such as shadow *ènyùnò* and itch *ókó*.

The term for dandruff *òkpísíléngō* is a polysynthetic word consisting of three morphemes: *òkp-* 'barber', *ísí* 'head' and *éringō* 'ringworm'. The birthmark term *ahumarachi* is also polysynthetic. *Áwáká ónū* 'cold sore' is assumed to be a symptom of *ìbà* 'fever/malaria'.



Table 4: Internal body parts/organs

| Igbo term        | Translation         | Additional information      |
|------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Simplex</b>   |                     |                             |
| ókúpúkpú         | bone                |                             |
| ákwàrà           | vein                |                             |
| àbùbà            | fat                 |                             |
| ùbùrù            | brain               |                             |
| àkùrù            | kidney              |                             |
| awa              | kidney              |                             |
| ùméjū            | liver               |                             |
| áfọ              | stomach, gut, belly |                             |
| ngù              | lung                |                             |
| ńchì             | placenta            |                             |
| íchì             | placenta            |                             |
| ùmì              | marrow              |                             |
| ìlìghìlì         | bile                |                             |
| <b>Complex</b>   |                     |                             |
| ánụ áhụ          | flesh               | lit. 'meat body'            |
| ńkpísí ngù       | rib                 | lit. 'stick lung'           |
| àkpà úmē         | lung                | lit. 'bag breath'           |
| ọwà ńrī          | oesophagus          | lit. 'passage food'         |
| ọwà ákpírí       | pharynx             | lit. 'passage throat'       |
| ághíríghá ákwàrà | capillary           | lit. 'pieces vein'          |
| òwú ákwàrà       | capillary           | lit. 'thread vein'          |
| àkpà ńwā         | womb, uterus        | lit. 'bag child'            |
| ùzọ àkpà ńwā     | cervix              | lit. 'way bag child'        |
| érírí àkpà ńwā   | umbilical cord      | lit. 'rope bag child'       |
| érírí ótùbò      | umbilical cord      | lit. 'rope navel'           |
| épùpè áfọ        | appendix            | lit. 'section stomach'      |
| ńkpúrù ámù       | testis/testicle     | lit. 'seed penis'           |
| ńkpúrù óbì       | heart               | lit. 'seed chest'           |
| àkpà ńmámírí     | urinary bladder     | lit. 'bag urine'            |
| àkpà ilìghìlì    | gall bladder        | lit. 'bag bile'             |
| ńgbírí áfọ       | intestines          | lit. 'rope stomach'         |
| érírí áfọ        | intestines          | lit. 'rope stomach'         |
| ókókóró ísī      | skull               | lit. 'empty.container head' |
| ókúpúkpú ólū     | collarbone          | lit. 'bone neck'            |
| ókúpúkpú óbì     | chest bone          | lit. 'bone chest'           |
| ókúpúkpú āzū     | spine, backbone     | lit. 'bone back'            |
| ókúpúkpú úkwù    | pelvis              | lit. 'bone waist'           |
| ókúpúkpú áhụ     | skeleton            | lit. 'bone body'            |



**Table 5:** Terms for bodily emissions

| Igbo term      | Translation  | Additional information |
|----------------|--------------|------------------------|
| <b>Simplex</b> |              |                        |
| òsúsó          | sweat        |                        |
| ímí            | snot, phlegm | mucus from the nose    |
| úkwàrà         | phlegm       | mucus from the mouth   |
| ásó            | saliva       |                        |
| ágbòǒ          | vomit        |                        |
| òbàrà          | blood        |                        |
| hìsì           | faeces       |                        |
| ábù            | pus          |                        |
| ùhè            | semen        |                        |
| ímámírí        | urine        |                        |
| ahurú          | fart         |                        |
| <b>Complex</b> |              |                        |
| ónú ímírí      | saliva       | lit. 'mouth water'     |
| ímírí árà      | milk         | lit. 'water breast'    |
| ányá ímírí     | tears        | lit. 'eye water'       |
| ímírí ùtù      | semen        | lit. 'water penis'     |
| ímánú hí       | earwax       | lit. 'oil ear'         |
| ímánú áhū      | sebum        | lit. 'oil body'        |

**Table 6:** Further terms

| Igbo term      | Translation      | Additional information   |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| <b>Simplex</b> |                  |                          |
| ákìkà          | wrinkles         |                          |
| ákpù           | lump/node        |                          |
| ótító          | boil             |                          |
| ákpúkpá        | pimple           |                          |
| ónyá           | wound, sore      |                          |
| àpà            | scar             |                          |
| hkwòchá        | blister          |                          |
| ùkò            | blister          |                          |
| ùwèrè          | slough           |                          |
| ókò            | itch             |                          |
| ùfú            | irritation, pain |                          |
| ájù            | dizziness        |                          |
| ènyùnyò        | shadow           |                          |
| <b>Complex</b> |                  |                          |
| áwáká ónū      | cold sore        | lit. '?? mouth'          |
| ákpátá óyí     | goosebumps       | lit. 'causer cold'       |
| mbùpùtá ùwà    | birthmark        | lit. 'bring.forth world' |
| àpà ùwà        | birthmark        | lit. 'scar world'        |
| ahumarachi     | birthmark        | lit. 'see.know.god'      |
| òkpísíéríngō   | dandruff         | lit. 'barber.ringworm'   |
| mḡkq ahụ       | wrinkles         | lit. 'shrink body'       |



### Body-part terms in the grammar

Following Dingemanse (2006), we make three broad distinctions of body-part terms in the grammar based on:

- i body-part terms simply referring to parts of the body;
- ii body-part terms metaphorically referring to a certain part of, or region contiguous to, another entity, either another body-part, or any other object; and
- iii body-part terms in fixed (i.e. lexicalised) idioms.

#### *Body-part terms simply referring to parts of the body*

All the body-part terms listed above can be used in sentences to refer to the different parts of the body that a term serves as a label for. The example sentences in (16) illustrate this use of body-part terms.

- (16a) *Ísí nà-àwá m̃.*  
head IPFV-break me  
'I have a headache. / My head aches.'
- (16b) *Ítì nà-átà m̃.*  
ear IPFV-bite me  
'My ear is aching. / My ear aches.'
- (16c) *Úkwù nà-ègbú m̃.*  
waist IPFV-kill me  
'My waist is aching. / My waist aches.'
- (16d) *Úkwú gbà-jì-rì yá.*  
leg hit-split-rv 3sg  
'His/Her leg is broken.'
- (16e) *Óbì nà-ètí m̃.*  
chest IPFV-beat me  
'My heart is palpitating.'

#### *Spatial relations*

In addition to body-part terms used in referring to parts of the (human) body, some of the terms can also be used metaphorically to refer to a certain part of, or region contiguous to, another entity, another body part (17a–b), or any other object (17c–h). This use of body-part terms in grammar expresses spatial relations. The constructions are associative constructions where two nouns occur side by side with some observable tonal changes which can be on either noun. The first noun in this sequence is often the noun for the body-part term, that is,  $N_{BPT} + N$  (17c–h).

- |       |                 |                |                                                                   |
|-------|-----------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (17a) | <i>Ísí ákā</i>  | (head hand)    | 'thumb'                                                           |
| (17b) | <i>Ọnú árá</i>  | (mouth breast) | 'nipple'                                                          |
| (17c) | <i>Ísí àkwà</i> | (head bed)     | 'the head of the bed where the head is during sleep'              |
| (17d) | <i>Ólú ákwà</i> | (neck cloth)   | 'collar (the part of a dress or shirt that goes around the neck)' |
| (17e) | <i>Úkwù ājā</i> | (waist soil)   | 'the base of the wall'                                            |
| (17f) | <i>Àhú ájā</i>  | (body soil)    | 'wall'                                                            |
| (17g) | <i>Ọnú úzọ</i>  | (mouth door)   | 'door way'                                                        |
| (17h) | <i>Áká ódō</i>  | (hand mortar)  | 'pestle'                                                          |

Igbo has a particle *̀nè*, which can occur in possessive constructions (18). The particle appears between the possessor and the possessed nouns. Nevertheless, what is important in the discussion here is that this particle is incompatible in spatial relational expressions illustrated in (17) (see (19)). This suggests that the nouns in spatial relational terms are more closely associated than nouns in other possessive constructions (see Dingemanse 2006, for similar constructions, particles and conclusions based on data from Yoruba).



- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>(18a) ákwà m̄<br/>cloth my<br/>'my cloth'</p> <p>(18c) jí Èzè<br/>yam Eze<br/>'Eze's yam'</p> <p>(19a) *ísí òkè ákã<br/>head PRT hand<br/>intended: 'thumb' (cf. 17a)</p> <p>(19b) *úkwù òkè ājà<br/>waist PRT soil<br/>intended: 'the base of the wall' (cf. 17e)</p> <p>(19c) *áká òkè ódō<br/>hand PRT mortar<br/>intended: 'pestle' (cf. 17h)</p> | <p>(18b) ákwà òkè m̄<br/>cloth PRT my<br/>'my cloth'</p> <p>(18d) jí òkè Èzè<br/>yam PRT Eze<br/>'Eze's yam'</p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Generally, the body-part term of *ísí* 'head' is used for denoting the upper part of an entity. The term *íkè* 'buttock' is for the bottom of something. Other terms are *íhú* 'face' for front, *ázú* 'back' for back/behind, *ónǔ* 'mouth' for hole, opening, or tip, and *áká* 'hand' for handle. All these occur frequently in expressions for spatial relations in Igbo.

### Fixed idioms

Igbo body-part terms feature in many idioms in the language (see Okoye and Mmadike 2016 for some of these idioms). The following are some characteristics of these body-part-term-based idioms (Dingemanse 2006: Enfield 2006b):

- i. the expressions are fixed, i.e. their elements are not freely modifiable;
- ii. the original meaning of the body-part term has faded; it is an integral part of the expression, which has become lexicalised as a whole;
- iii. often, their meaning is not obvious; and
- iv. idiomatic references to body parts often pick out precisely these functional components of meaning.

The idiom *ínyē áká* 'to help' (lit. 'to.give hand') can occur in expressions such as the sentence in (20a), but the body-part term in the idiom *áká* 'hand' when modified with *írí* 'food' to give the label for right hand *áká írí* in the language alters the meaning of the sentence, so only the literal meaning is available in (20b). The same is true for the idiom *íbū ónǔ* 'to fast' (lit. 'to.carry mouth') in (20c–d). In (20d), the complement of the verb *ónǔ* 'mouth' is modified by the third personal singular possessive pronoun. This means that *ónǔ* 'mouth' in the idiom in (20c) does not literally refer to Obi's mouth. In the two idioms, the verb and the noun parts have become lexicalised as a whole. We can also have more complex idioms such as *íkū ògàjì n'ézē* 'to eat' (lit. 'to.hit spoon at teeth') in (20e) and *ítò ntị n'àlà* 'to listen carefully' (lit. to.put.down ear on ground).

- (20a) Ó nyè-e-rè m̄ áká ònyáhụ.  
3SG give-APPL-rv me hand yesterday  
'S/he helped me yesterday.'
- (20b) Ó nyè-e-rè m̄ áká írí ònyáhụ.  
3SG give-APPL-rv me hand food yesterday  
'S/he gave the right hand for me yesterday.'  
# 'S/he helped me yesterday.'



- (20c) *Òbí bù ọ̀nụ̄.*  
Obi carry mouth  
'Obi is fasting.'
- (20d) *Òbí bù ọ̀nụ̄ yā.*  
Obi carry mouth 3SG.POSS  
'Obi is carrying his mouth.'  
# 'Obi is fasting.'
- (20e) *Há nà-àkụ̀ ògàjì n'ézē.*  
3PL IPFV-hit spoon P-teeth  
'They are eating.'

Many of the simplex terms such as *ísí* 'head', *áká* 'hand', *óbì* 'chest', *àzú* 'back', *ńtị* 'ear', *ányá* 'eye' and *áfọ* 'stomach' are very common terms in Igbo idioms.

### The syntax of body-part terms

This section describes in detail the syntactic structure of the body-part terms listed in this article. In addition, we also consider the structure of phrases and expressions where some of these body-part terms are found. About 43% of these terms are simplex words. The remaining 57% are complex nominals, with most of them being formed via the so-called associative construction. In addition to the associative constructions, we document six other syntactic constructions in the language that are used in body-part terms and expressions. We discuss the associative construction and the other constructions in the following subsections.

#### Associative construction

Associative construction, also referred to as possessive or genitive construction, consists of juxtaposing noun phrases in the order possessed-possessor. This relationship of syntactic dependency is often marked by a tone change in Igbo (Nwachukwu 1995; Emenanjo 2015). Consider the following example:

- |       |               |   |            |   |                                           |
|-------|---------------|---|------------|---|-------------------------------------------|
| (21a) | <i>jí</i>     | + | <i>Chí</i> | → | <i>jí Chī</i>                             |
|       | 'yam'         |   | 'Chí'      |   | 'Chí's yam'                               |
| (21b) | <i>ọ̀nwụ́</i> | + | <i>dí</i>  | → | <i>ọ̀nwụ́ dī</i>                          |
|       | 'death'       |   | 'husband'  |   | 'death of a husband' (Nwachukwu 1995: 19) |

Williamson (1986) and Hyman (2011) argue that the associative marker in Igbo is a high tonal morpheme (21), that is, a floating tone that can either dock to the right or the left of the tone-bearing unit.

- (22) *àgbà* + ' + *ènwè* → *àgbá ènwè*

In example (21), the floating high associative morpheme docks to the right and causes the final high tone of the second noun (N2) to become downstep (Clark 1990). This downstep is only observed when the N2 bears a high tone. In (22), on the other hand, the floating high tone overwrites the low tone of the final tone-bearing unit of the first noun (N1). There are also cases where a final downstep on either N1 or N2 becomes high under the associative construction (Emenanjo 2015). Some relevant examples with complex body-part terms are illustrated in (23).

- |       |                       |          |
|-------|-----------------------|----------|
| (23a) | <i>áká</i>            | 'hand'   |
|       | <i>̀m̀kp̀s̀j̀ ákā</i> | 'finger' |
|       | <i>ísí ákā</i>        | 'thumb'  |



- (23b) *ányá* 'eye'  
*nwátà ányā* 'pupil-iris'  
*m̀kpúrú ányā* 'eyeball'
- (23c) *áhū* 'body'  
*ákpúkpó áhū* 'skin'  
*ánū áhū* 'flesh'
- (23d) *ónū* 'mouth'  
*ónū árá* 'nipple'  
*ónū m̀mírī* 'saliva'

In example (23a–c), the final high tone of N2 becomes a downstep in the complex terms, while (23d) demonstrates a downstep tone overwriting on N1.

When it comes to complex body-part terms, we also see different combinations with regard to the nouns that are being juxtaposed. In (24), for instance, the two nouns, that is, both possessed and possessor are body-part terms, whereas in (25) and (26), only one of the nouns is a body-part term and the other is not. The data in (27) indicate that we can have two nouns and no body-part term.

- (24)  $N_{BPT} + N_{BPT}$   
 (24a) *m̀bó ákā* (nail finger) 'finger nail'  
 (24b) *ísí ákā* (head hand) 'thumb'
- (25)  $N + N_{BPT}$   
 (25a) *érírí áfō* (rope stomach) 'intestine'  
 (25b) *m̀kpúrú óbì* (seed chest) 'heart'
- (26)  $N_{BPT} + N$   
 (26a) *áká n̄rī* (hand food) 'right hand'  
 (26b) *áká èkpè* (hand curse) 'left hand'
- (27)  $N + N$   
 (27a) *àkpà n̄wā* (bag child) 'womb'  
 (27b) *àkpà m̀mámírī* (bag urine) 'urinary bladder'

In (25), the possessor is a general body-part term, whereas the possessed is not a body part term, but rather a noun describing a characteristic of the referent. We can think of this as a taxonomic relation between the possessor and the resulting associative construction. Most of the N-N constructions referring to body-part terms in this study are of this type. The terms in (26), where the general body-part term functions as the possessed and not the possessor, has the associative construction referring to a feature associated with that body part. Finally, the data in (27), where none of the words in the associative construction is a general body-part term is the case of metaphoric body-part term (Wegener 2006), the so-called figurative labels for body parts (Brown and Witkowski 1981).

### Other constructions

Apart from the association constructions used in expressing different body-part terms, there are a number of constructions in Igbo available for expressing situations and events involving body parts. We document and examine six such grammatical constructions in the language. One is an intransitive construction, four have transitive structures, with different kinds of noun phrases as either the subject or the complement, and one is a ditransitive construction with a prepositional phrase.

#### Intransitive constructions

In this type of construction with an intransitive structure, the body-part term is, together with its possessor, in the same grammatical role, and that of subject and the predicate is an intransitive verb.



- (28)  $S_{BPT+POSS} V$   
 (28a)  $\dot{U}kw\acute{u} y\bar{a}$   $gb\grave{a}-j\grave{i}-r\grave{i}$ .  
 leg 3SG.POSS hit-split-rv  
 'His/Her leg is broken.'  
 (28b)  $\acute{E}z\acute{e} g\bar{i}$   $\grave{a}d\acute{a}-p\grave{u}-l\acute{a}$ .  
 teeth 2SG.POSS fall-out-PFV  
 'Your teeth have fallen off.'  
 (28c)  $\acute{M}b\acute{o} \bar{m}$   $n\grave{a}-\grave{a}gb\acute{a}-w\acute{a}-s\acute{j}$ .  
 nail my IPFV-hit-break-CL  
 'My nails are breaking.'

*Transitive constructions with body-part term as subject*

In this first type of transitive construction, the body-part noun fulfils the role of subject, whereas its possessor is found in the object position. This construction is always about events and states that come about involuntarily, most often in unpleasant situations, e.g. of some body part inflicting pain, or a bad feeling on its owner. The subscript number indicates grammatical/semantic agreement.

- (29)  $S_{BPT-1} V O_1$   
 (29a)  $\acute{I}s\acute{i}$   $n\grave{a}-\acute{a}w\acute{a}$   $\bar{m}$ .  
 head IPFV-break me  
 'I have headache.'  
 (29b)  $\acute{A}f\acute{o}$   $n\grave{a}-\acute{a}s\acute{a}$   $y\bar{a}$ .  
 stomach IPFV-wash 3SG  
 'S/he has diarrhea.'  
 (29d)  $\acute{E}z\bar{e}$   $n\grave{a}-\acute{a}m\grave{i}$   $\bar{m}$ .  
 teeth IPFV-suck me  
 'My teeth ache.'

*Transitive constructions with body-part terms as object*

This is a transitive sentence with the body-part term in the role of object, with its owner (in the subject position) performing a certain action on it (or, less commonly, with it).

- (30)  $S V O_{BPT}$   
 (30a)  $\acute{O}$   $s\acute{a}-r\acute{a}$   $\acute{i}h\acute{u}$ .  
 3SG wash-rv face  
 'S/he washed his/her face.'  
 (30b)  $\acute{A}n\acute{y}\acute{i}$   $kw\acute{o}-r\acute{o}$   $\acute{a}k\acute{a}$ .  
 1PL wash-rv hand  
 'We washed our hands.'  
 (30c)  $\acute{O}b\acute{i}$   $kp\acute{u}-r\acute{u}$   $\acute{i}s\acute{i}$ .  
 Obi barbe-rv head  
 'Obi barbed his hair.'

*Transitive constructions with a bound verb complement*

In this transitive construction, the body-part noun fulfils the role of subject, whereas its possessor is found in the object role; and after the possessor object, we have the bound verb complement (BVC), a verbal particle which derives from and is bound to its verb. The BVCs in this construction indicate some kind of emphasis (Déchaine 1993).

- (31)  $S_{BPT+POSS} V$  BVC /  $S_{BPT-1} V O_1$  BVC /  $S V O_{BPT}$  BVC  
 (31a)  $\dot{U}kw\acute{u} y\bar{a}$   $gb\grave{a}-j\grave{i}-r\grave{i}$   $\acute{a}-gb\grave{a}-j\acute{i}$ .  
 leg 3SG.POSS hit-split-rv NMZL-hit-split  
 'His/Her leg is broken.'



- (31b) Áfọ nà-à-sá yā à-sá.  
 stomach IPFV-wash 3SG NMZL-wash  
 'S/he has diarrhea.'
- (31c) Ọbí kpù-rù ísì yā à-kpù.  
 Obi barbe-rv head 3SG NMZL-barbe  
 'Obi cut his hair.'

The sentence in (31a) illustrates the BVC following the intransitive clause in (28a). The BVC in the example is formed from a compound verb which is the predicate in the construction. The BVC is formed via the nominalising prefix *a-* (or *e-* if the immediately following vowel in the verb stem is a +ATR vowel).

#### *Transitive constructions with inherent complement verbs*

Inherent complement verbs (ICVs) are verbs with a transitive structure where certain verbs in the language take an obligatory complement in their citation form (Nwachukwu 1987). The verbs are often semantically vacuous, while their so-called inherent complement (IC) of the verbs is semantically loaded. In these constructions, illustrated in (32), the body-part noun fulfils the role of subject, whereas its possessor is found in the object role. Note that the possessor object, that is, the first person pronoun in the sentences in (32), occurs between the ICV and its IC.

- (32) S<sub>BPT-1</sub> V<sub>ICV</sub> O<sub>1</sub> IC
- (32a) Ányá nà-àfú m̃ òfù.  
 eye IPFV-pain me pain  
 'My eye hurts.'
- (32b) Ụkwù nà-ègbú m̃ m̃gbú.  
 waist IPFV-kill me ache  
 'My waist is aching.'
- (32c) Ọnụ nà-à-má m̃ jìjì.  
 mouth IPFV-shake me IDEO  
 'My mouth is shaking.'

Unlike the BVC, where the formation of the complement is morphologically carried out via nominalising prefixation on the verb stem, the IC is not formed in the same way. In most cases, the ICs are not morphologically similar to the ICV they co-occur with.

#### *Ditransitive constructions with prepositional phrases*

In the ditransitive constructions (33), the body-part term is encoded in a prepositional phrase, where its function is to specify the location of something that is happening to its possessor. This always concerns actions by others, or effects from other entities. The body part thus does not play an active role in this construction (Dingemanse 2006).

- (33) S V O<sub>1</sub> (O<sub>INSTR</sub>) P-BPT<sub>1</sub>
- (33a) Ó fè-ré m̃ m̃mírì n'àhù.  
 3SG sprinkle-rv me water P-body  
 'S/he sprinkled me with water.'
- (33b) Ọtítí tò-rò yá n'íkè.  
 boil grow-rv 3SG P-buttocks  
 'S/he has a boil on his/her buttocks.'
- (33c) Ákpù fù-rù yá n'ìkpèrè.  
 lump swell-rv 3SG P-knee  
 'S/he has a lump on his/her knee.'



In some of the constructions, we can have an instrumental object introduced, and this occurs before the prepositional body-part term object (33a). The body-part terms are introduced by the preposition *nà*, reduced to *n'* in the data in (33) as the body-part terms all begin with vowel segments.

### Proverbs

This section documents a few Igbo proverbs that feature body-part terms. Proverbs are a rich part of the speaking culture of the Igbo people. They describe proverbs as *ílú bù mmánú ndí lgbò jì èrí ókwū*, which literally means 'a proverb is the oil which the Igbo people use to eat words'. Many simplex body-part terms and a few complex terms are found in Igbo proverbs.

- (34a) *Áká ájá ájā nà-àbúté ọ́nụ́ mmánụ́ mmānụ́.*  
hand sand sand IPFV-bring mouth oil oil  
'There is no food for a lazy man./He who works eats.'
- (34b) *Ísì kòté èbù ọ́ gbáá yā.*  
head bring wasp it sting it  
'Trouble begets trouble.'
- (34c) *Á gwá ntị mà ọ́ nụ-ghị é gbú-wé ísī ntị ésò-ró.*  
IMP tell ear but it hear-NEG IMP cut-INCEP head ear follow-rv  
'Stubborn flies follow the corpse to the grave.'
- (34d) *Íjiri ntị ikē nà-ésò ózú alá n'ílì.*  
fly ear strong IPFV-follow corpse go P-grave  
'Stubborn flies follow the corpse to the grave.'
- (34e) *Á ná-ényò ísì à ná-àpùtá.*  
IMP IPFV-peep head IMP IPFV-come.out  
'The more you look the less you see.'
- (34f) *Íré ọ́má kà éjùlà jì àgá n'ógwū.*  
tongue good FOC snail take go P-thorn  
'Wisdom is power.'
- (34g) *Ótù mkpísí ákā rùtá mmánụ́ ọ́ zùó ọ́hà ọ́nụ́.*  
one digit hand touch oil it reach multitude mouth  
'A sin of one is a sin for all.'
- (34h) *Ụ́kwú jíé ágụ̀ mgbàdà àbía-rá yā úgwō.*  
leg break tiger antelop come-rv it debt  
'A beggar is not choosy.'
- (34i) *Ágbúsì gbáá òtèlè/íkè ọ́ mụ-rụ́ ákō.*  
black.ant sting buttock it learn-rv wisdom  
'Experience is the best teacher.'
- (34j) *Ányá ná-èbè ímí àná-èbē.*  
eye IPFV-cry nose IPFV-cry  
'What affects one affects the other.'

### Conclusion

This study presented an inventory of Igbo body-part terms. A total of 186 items are documented. The article demonstrates that the vast majority of these terms are instances of noun-noun juxtaposition, the so-called associative construction. In addition to the associative construction, the study identified six other clausal constructions used for expressing situations and events involving body parts. The use of body-part terms in spatial relations, idioms and proverbs in Igbo were also highlighted in the article.



## Abbreviations

1SG/1PL = first person singular/plural  
 2SG = second person singular  
 3SG/3PL = third person singular/plural  
 APPL = applicative  
 CL = clitic  
 DET = determiner  
 FOC = focus marker  
 FUT = future  
 IC = inherent complement  
 IDEO = ideophone  
 IMP = impersonal pronoun  
 INCEP = inceptive  
 IPFV = imperfective  
 LOC = locative  
 NEG = negation  
 NMLZ = nominaliser  
 P = preposition  
 PFV = perfective  
 POSS = possessive  
 PRED = predication  
 PRT = particle  
 rv = /r/ insertion and reduplication of the vowel in the verb stem

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