Transitivity is a central property of language use. In this paper, we follow the transitivity parameters of Hopper and Thompson (1980) to determine the grammatical and semantic prominence of transitivity in three Igbo folktales. The results of our investigation show that there is no correlation between high transitivity and foregrounding in Igbo folktales or between low transitivity and backgrounding. This is contrary to the findings of Hopper and Thompson (1980) where high transitivity is correlated with foregrounding and low transitivity with backgrounding. We attribute the result to the oral background of Igbo folktales. The telling of Igbo folktales is motivated by the need to entertain and educate the audience. In this wise, the narrator engages in oral performance and each utterance is directed at the ultimate goal of keeping the audience engrossed with the story. When these stories are transcribed exactly as they are told, the motivation for each utterance is lost, but these utterances formed the data for our study. For the English narratives in Hopper and Thompson (1980), the narrators’ goals were just to tell sequentially a series of events and this may be why our result is different.

1. Introduction
The issue of transitivity in Igbo is a yet unresolved problem. This is because over the years various scholars have approached this issue from as many perspectives as there are scholars. These scholars have all concentrated on the difference between a transitive and an intransitive verb in Igbo. This focus on the transitivity features of the Igbo verb may have been influenced by the verbo-centric nature of the Igbo language. A study of the Igbo verb is a study of the language. This assertion has been made by Igbo scholars over the years (Ubahakwe, 1976; Emenanjo, 1975; 1978; 2005; Nwachukwu, 1984; Uwalaka, 1988). These scholars in various ways have tried to clarify the concept of transitivity or complementation in the Igbo.

The Igbo verb obligatorily co-occurs with a noun that some scholars have termed complements (Emenanjo, 2005) and others have called objects. (Ubahakwe, 1976; Nwachukwu, 1984; Uwalaka, 1988). In other words, there is no consensus in the literature on the status of the obligatorily co-occurring nominal element of the verb. This has led scholars like Emenanjo (2005) to speculate that there is no transitivity in Igbo but complementation while the other school of thought posit that Igbo has transitive and intransitive verbs (Nwachukwu, 1984; Uwalaka, 1988). Agbo and Yuka (2011), following Hopper and Thomson (1980), argue that transitivity in Igbo is in degrees and not a strict division into transitive and intransitive verbs. This conclusion is based on Emenanjo’s (2005:479-497) classification of Igbo verbs into five categories. Agbo and Yuka (2011) assign the General Complement Verb (GCV) of Emenanjo, (2005) the highest score on the transitivity continuum because these verbs occur in clauses where the agent in actual fact transfers an action to the patient. The lowest score in degree of transitivity is assigned to the Ergative Complement Verbs (ECV). This class of verbs occurs in clauses where there is actually no transfer of an...
action from the agent to the patient. The other classes, i.e., the Inherent Complement Verb, the Bound Complement Verb and the Prepositional Complement Verb occur in a range between the GCVs and the ECVs.

The notion of transitivity is beyond the verb and its complements. Halliday, (1969: 179) defines transitivity as relating to the ‘experiential component of meaning’ which includes the verbs, subject, predicate and other features and conditions of the clause. In Halliday, (1967:52), the terms ‘transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ denotes the potentiality of the verb to belong to a transitive or intransitive clause in a particular context. Givon (1995:76) cited from Arrese (1997) identifies three core features of a typical transitive clause. They are the agent, patient and the verbal modality. The agent is the causer and controller of the transitive event while the patient registers the effect of the action of the agent. The verb of the typical transitive clause codes an event that is ‘completed, real and perceptually-cognitively salient’. There is a distinction between semantic and morphosyntactic transitivity. Ross (2002) bases the idea of semantic transitivity on clauses denoting two participants in an event, while morphosyntactic transitivity is based on the idea that there are two core arguments in a clause. A core argument must have a morphosyntactic relationship to the verb. This relationship is coded on the verb in the case of agreement affixes or on the argument in case-marking.

It is evident that in the literature, the idea of transitivity involves two participants (an agent and a patient) in the clause and the transfer of an effective action from the agent to the patient. We are pursuing this line of investigation in this paper. For Nwachukwu (1984:105), ‘the direction of the action or situation is immaterial’ for the participants of the clause. However, the traditional argument is that the action must be effective and intense and it must be directed from the agent to the patient. We follow this traditional view in our identification of transitive clauses in Igbo folktales. Our analysis is in line with the transitivity hypothesis of Hopper and Thompson (1980), where transitivity ‘is understood as a global property of an entire clause’. This hypothesis does not have an explicit formal status but investigates a composite of scores of morphosyntactic and semantic parameters to describe a transitivity continuum. Our approach differs from the former approaches to transitivity in Igbo because we are not basing transitivity on a rigid division between transitive and intransitive verbs. Rather we identify and rank clauses based on a scale of morphosyntactic and semantic parameters. We explain below these parameters according to Hopper and Thompson (1980).

1.1 The Transitivity Hypothesis
In the transitivity hypothesis of Hopper and Thompson (1980) the ‘carrying over’ of an action from one participant to another leads them to clarify transitivity by defining its ten component parts, which they call parameters. The parameters are listed in (1) below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters</th>
<th>Property</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>2 or more</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Kinesis</td>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Non-action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: components of transitivity (Hopper and Thompson, 1980:252)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Telic</th>
<th>Atelic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>Punctual</td>
<td>Non-punctual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Volitionality</td>
<td>Volitional</td>
<td>Non-volitional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Affirmation</td>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>Realis</td>
<td>Irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Agence</td>
<td>Agent high in potency</td>
<td>Agent low in potency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Affectedness of object</td>
<td>Totally affected</td>
<td>Not affected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Individuation of object</td>
<td>Object individuated</td>
<td>Object not individuated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The parameters spelt out in (1) above leads to the Transitivity Hypothesis of (2) below.

2. If two clauses (a) and (b) in a language differ in that (a) is higher in Transitivity according to any of the features in (Table 1 above), then, if a concomitant grammatical or semantic difference appears elsewhere in clauses, that difference will also show (a) to be higher in Transitivity.

(Hopper and Thompson, 1980: 255)

These ten semantic parameters when present in a clause give the complete idea of a transitive clause. As Delaney (1987:53) succinctly put it:

The canonical transitive clause has two participants, reports a kinetic event, is punctual and perfective, and a definite, referential, individuated and wholly affected patient and a volitional agent which ranks high on the animacy hierarchy and is affirmative and realis.

In the folktales we are studying in this paper, we shall concentrate on the parameters of participants, aspect, kinesis, affirmation/negation, volitionality and mode. The parameters of affectedness and individuation of object are redundant in our data. This is because where there are two participants in a clause the object usually has the properties of high affectedness and individuation. Again, the parameter of punctuality has the same frequency count as those of aspect and kinesis.

1.2 Transitivity and grounding in narrative

In any narrative event some parts of what is said is more significant than other parts. These parts of the narrative that present the main points of the story is classified as the foreground, while the parts that serve to add details to the main points is identified as the background. ‘Linguistic features associated with the distinction between foreground and background are known as grounding’ (Hopper and Thompson, 1980: 280). Vetters (1992) distinguishes between foreground and background based on the tenses in the narrative. The perfective tenses belong to the foregrounded clauses while the imperfective fall into the backgrounded clauses. Vetters (1992) approach is
influenced by the works of Weinrich, (1964) and Labov (1972). Weinrich assigns the simple past tenses to the foregrounded clauses while the imperfect tenses are assigned to the backgrounded clauses in a narrative. For Labov, the sequential order in which events occur belong to the foreground while other textual elements that give a running commentary to this sequential order belongs to the background. Labov proposes a necessary link between perfective tenses and foregrounding and imperfective tenses with backgrounding. This proposal also influences Hopper and Thompson (1980) seminal approach to the study of the relationship between transitivity and grounding. They support the claim that ‘the foci of high Transitivity and low Transitivity correlate with the independent discourse notions of foregrounding and backgrounding respectively’ (Hopper and Thompson, 1980: 294). They affirm that their findings have cross-linguistic validity, especially in narrative texts.

A number of researchers have supported this claim (Wallace, 1982; Tomlin, 1984; Reinhart, 1984, Vetters, 1992). These works are based on English written narratives. Our purpose in this study is to test the validity of Hopper and Thompson claim for Igbo narratives, especially of the folktale genre.

2. The Igbo Folktale
The literary origins of all Igbo narrative texts are the Igbo Oral Tradition (Emenyonu, 1978; Igboanusi, 2002). This Oral tradition is now generally referred to as Oral Performance (Abimbola, 2004). This includes such performances as folksongs, folktales, riddles, proverbs and prayers from which the rich sources of Igbo culture and worldview can be collected (Emenyonu, 1978; Chukwuma, 1994 Igboanusi, 2002; Mbunda, 2007).

The features of Igbo folktales include the fact that it is always shown as taking place in the distant past, i.e. ‘once upon a time’. The stories are usually told by older women to their children gathered around them in the evening times (Emenanjo, 1977; Emenyonu, 1978; Abimbola, 2004). The stories are used to teach and delight the children and are also moralistic tales intended to be memorable. The characters in these folktales are extraordinary beings who find themselves in unusual circumstances. Where the characters are animals or spirits, they are imbued with the characters of men. According to Emenanjo, (1977), the human characters are of two types: the unnamed type and the stock type. The unnamed type is usually a character that remains anonymous throughout the story. This anonymity of character may add to the myth associated with folktales. The stock type portrays an important point of view and theme in the folktale. Animals and spirits may also share in this kind of characterization.

Igbo folktales are typically woven around a strange human condition. They are creative fantasies meant not only to delight but also to echo the sociocultural conditions and human experiences of the societies in which they occur.

3. The data for the study
We have sourced the data for this study from three Igbo folktales found in famous collections of folktales. They include *Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ* by F.C. Ogbalu, *Omalinze* by C.N. Ugochukwu and *Omenuko* by Pita Nwana. The story *Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ* comes from a collection of folktales titles
Agbo: Transitivity & Grounding in Igbo folktales

*Nza na Obu* by F.C. Ogbalu. *Omalinze* is also from a collection of stories with the same title and edited by E.N. Emenanjo. Our data in *Omenuko* is the first chapter of the pioneer Igbo novel of the same title by Pita Nwana.

We have chosen these three stories because they are prototypical folktales with amazing incidents and human characters. The folktales collection in Emenanjo, (1977) according to him is intended for serious Igbo studies because the manner of presentation of the stories is close to the actual oral performance involved in their telling. F.C. Ogbalu’s stories, according to him, are meant to expose the story telling techniques before the acquisition of writing skills by Igbos. *Omenuko*, which comes from the first chapter of the novel of that title, consists of the creating of the conflict that drives the plot of the novel. Emenyonu, (1978:155) makes the important claim that the novel *Omenuko*, ‘bears very distinct imprints of the traditional Igbo artist’s narrative techniques, devices, and skill.’ The three stories consist of about 6000 words.

3.1. Identification of clauses

Our approach to the issue of transitivity makes us to spell out a number of criteria for coding clauses in our data. We follow the approach to coding in Thompson and Hopper (2001), where four types of utterances containing a predicate are counted as clauses in their English data. These four types of clauses include: simple clauses, subordinate clauses, adverbial clauses and elliptical clauses. In our data we were not able to identify clauses belonging to the category of elliptical clauses, which incidentally were also uncommon in Thompson and Hopper (2001) analysis. In example (3) to (5) below we present from our data the occurrences of this grouping of clauses.

3. Simple clauses
   a. Ụmu nwanyi nà-enwe àfụ ọnụ di kà ụmụ nwoke children woman PROG-have beard like children man
      ‘women are having beards just like men’

      (*Nza na Obu: Ihe mere umu nwanyi ejighi agba afu onu*)

   b. Otù ezè ukwu ná-àlu ọtụtụ ndị inyom
      One king big PROG-marry several women
      ‘one great king is marrying several women’

      (*Omalinze: Omalinze*)

   c. Omenụko nwèrè nne nà nna
      Omenuko have mother and father
      ‘Omenuko has a mother and a father’

      (*Omenuko: Omenuko*)

---

1 The folktales and their translations are too bulky (about 10000 words) to be included as appendix to this paper. However, they would be left with the editors of this journal for anyone interested in consulting them.
4. Subordinate clauses
   a. Complement clause
      O bù ezie nà e ji ọlà èdò wee mee olà a
      3s COP true that PRON hold ore gold dV do ore Det
      ‘It is true that this jewelry was made of gold’
      (Nza na Obu: Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ)
   b. Adverbial clause
      Mgbè o nà-èdu ọtụtụ madụ à ga ahia...
      Time 3s PROG-lead several person PRON go market
      ‘When he was leading a lot of people to the market…’
      (Omenuko: Omenuko)
   c. Relative clause
      Ọ bù otù nwanyi aha ya bù Nkemdiche mèrh ihe..
      3s COP one woman name 3s (obj) COP Nkemdiche do something
      ‘It is a certain woman whose name is Nkemdiche that caused something…’
      (Nza na Obu: Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ)

5. Clauses taking a clausal complement (the complement is not an argument of the main clause)
   a. Ọ kọ̀rọ̀ ha akụkọ banye-re otu nwoke aha ya bụ Akpọ
      3s tell 3pl story enter TNS one man name 3s (obj) COP Akpọ
      He told them a story concerning one man called Akpo’
      (Omenuko: Omenuko)
   b. Ọ jùrù iri nri ụmụ nwanyi nile ahu a hùrù n’anya..
      3s refused to eat food women all DET PRON love
      ‘He refused to eat the food of all those women that were loved..’
      (Omalinze: Omalinze)
   c. O wee jua nwata ahu ihe nà-emé ya
      3s d V asked chile DET thing that do 3s
      ‘He asked the child what was troubling him’
      (Nza na Obu: Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ)

3.2 Foreground-Background distinction in clauses
In differentiating between foregrounded and backgrounded clauses in our data, we implement the perspective of Hopper and Thompson (1980) and Thompson and Hopper (2001), where foregrounded clauses belong to those parts of the narrative that are essential to the storyline while the backgrounded clauses are those that do not necessarily contribute to the narrator’s goal in telling the story. This perspective is in line with previous views of the foreground-background distinction in (Grimes, 1975: Hopper, 1977; 1979: Labov, 1972; Labov and Walenzky, 1967).

In our data, the foregrounded parts of the folktale belong to the succession of the plot of the story while the backgrounded elements are the detailed statements designed to evaluate the plot of the story.

Hereunder, we present an example of how we distinguished between foreground and background in one of the folktales in our data. The foregrounded clauses are in bold print.
Title: ṃ̀malite izu ahia omenụkọ

beginning to buy market Omenuko

a. ‘The beginning of Omenuko’s trading activities’

b. Omenuko nwè-rè nne nà nna

Omenuko have-TNS mother and father
‘Omenuko had a mother and a father’

c. Nne ya m̀-rù ha ụmù ndikom ̀nọ na umù ndinyom àbùo.

Mother 3s (obj) born-TNS 3pl child male four and child female two
‘The mother had four male and two female children’

d. Nne ha na nna ha bù ndi ogbenye. Ha enwe-ghi ego ukwu u?

mother 3pl and father 3pl COP people poor 3pl have-NEG money much
‘Their mother and father were poor people. They didn’t have enough money’

e. Ma ha nwè-rè ji, ma ọ bụ-gị ọtụtụ

But 3pl have-TNS yam, but 3s COP-NEG much
‘but they had yams but it not much of them’

f. Ebe ha enwe-ghi ego ha weere ụmụ ha ndikom nye n’aka ndi ahia

Since 3pl have-NEG money 3pl take child 3p male give in hand people market
‘since they weren’t rich they gave out their sons to traders’

g. Bu ndi nà-azu, nà-erekwa kà ụmụ ha were muṣa izụ ahia

COP people PROG-buying PROG-selling COMP child 3pl take learn to sell market
‘who are buying and selling so that their children will learn how to trade’

h. Ma nwoke ahù a nà-àkpọ Omenuko nòdùrụ n’aka onye nà-ẹzi ya izu nà ire

And man DET PROG-call Omenuko stay in hand person teach 3s to buy and to sell
‘and the man called Omenuko stayed with the person teaching him how to trade’

i. Wee tolite. Ahà onye nwe ya bu Omemgboji. Nna ya ukwu wee nye ya ihe dV grow. Name person have 3s COP Omemgboji. Boss dV give 3s thing
‘and grew up. His name was Omemgboji. His boss then gave him the things’

j. Q gà-ẹjì malite izu ahia nke ya. Omenuko wee kelee nna ya ukwu ekele

3s FUT-hold rise to sell market own 3s. Omenuko dV greet boss 3s (obj) greet
‘he would use to begin his own trading. Omenuko thanked his boss very well’

k. Omemgboji si-ri ya ‘ka ihe dikwara gi mma; ka ndi gi feekwa gi ofufe di ka fere m

Omemgboji tell-TNS 3s ‘let thing be 2s good; let people you respect you like you respect me.
‘Omemgboji told him,’let things be good for you; let your apprentices show you the type of respect you gave me.’

l. Gaa nke ọma. Omemgboji wekee zuwa ihe nke aka ya

Go well Omemgboji dV buy thing own hand 3s (obj)
‘Go well. Omemgboji then started his own trading’
The beginning of Omenuko’s trading activities

Omenuko has a mother and a father. His mother gave birth to four male children and two female children. His mother and father were poor folks. They didn’t have money but they had some yams but it wasn’t much. Since they didn’t have money they gave out their male children to traders so that they could learn how to trade. And that man called Omenuko stayed with the person teaching him how to trade until he was grown up. The name of his owner is Omemgboji. His boss then gave him the things he would use to start his own trading. Omenuko then thanked him a lot. Omemgboji told him ‘let things be good for you; let your apprentices respect you the way you have respected me. Go well’. Omenuko then started his own trading.

In this short passage from one of our folktales titled ‘Omenuko’ the heading in clause (6a) indicates the subject matter of the passage. Clauses (6b, f, h, i, j and l) provide the crucial information needed to understand the heading under discussion. These clauses tell us about Omenuko’s family conditions and why and how he started trading. Since the clauses give us the necessary information that contributes to the narrator’s goal in telling the story, we classify clauses (6b, f, h, i, j and l) as foreground. For clauses (6c, d, e, and g), the information supplied include commentaries and elaborations on the subject matter under discussion. Although these clauses are very important in helping the audience to understand better the circumstances of Omenuko family, they do not contribute essentially in advancing the plot of the story. In other words, we classify these clauses as background. In the next section we analyse the data gathered from our three folktales.

4. Data Analysis

A careful look at the distribution of foregrounded and backgrounded clauses in Table 2 below reveals a marked difference between the three folktales under consideration. Emenanjo (1977) has identified three different types of folktales in Igbo. They are the ‘Moral’ or didactic, the ‘Why’ or etiological stories and the ‘Tortoise’ stories. The folktales in our data belong to the didactic and etiological categories. Specifically, the folktale, *Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ* fall into the class of ‘Why’ or etiological stories while the tales Omalinze and Omenuko are Moral or didactic stories. The difference in the allocation of foreground and background clauses is related to the categories which these tales belong to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nza na Obu</th>
<th>Omalinze</th>
<th>Omenuko</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number and percentage of foregrounded and backgrounded clauses are almost equal in *Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ ọnụ*. Indeed, while there are 82
foregrounded clauses, there are 80 backgrounded clauses. This translates to 50.6% and 49.4% respectively. The story *Ihe mere ụmụ nwanyị ejighi agba afụ onụ* gives the reasons why women no longer have beards like men. ‘Why’ stories always involve a lot of logical explanations of events and this is why there is a high number of foregrounded clauses. These clauses as earlier mentioned in Section 1.2 show the main events of the story. In the story, *Nkemdiche*, who was the cause of women losing their beards, is described as having serious character flaws which leads her to offend the king by stealing his cherished gold bar. This theft when discovered made the king to shave off the beards of all women in the land making them to be beardless up to this day. The foregrounded clauses drive the plot of this story but in order to make the audience understand the story better there is also a lot of interpretations of the character and actions of *Nkemdiche*, consequently a lot of new information. Note that folktales are usually told to children and etiological stories need a lot of explanations.

For the other two stories *Omalinze* and *Omenuko* the numbers of foregrounded clauses are lower in percentage than the backgrounded clauses. *Omalinze* has 43.5% of its clauses as foreground and 56.5% as background. While *Omenuko* has 33.8% and 66.2% as foreground and background respectively. We have stated that these stories belong to the category of didactic tales, which normally have the objective of educating children and adolescents about the values and beliefs of the community. The percentage of foregrounded clauses in *Omalinze* and *Omenuko* parallels the investigation of Hopper and Thompson (1980: 284) where for a number of languages, foregrounded clauses were consistently much lower than backgrounded clauses in narrative text.

### 4.1. Number of participants and grounding

In determining the number of participants in a clause we took cognizance of the fact that a typical transitive clause involves two participants where an effective and intense action is carried from one participant, usually the agent, to the other, usually the patient. As stated in Section 1 above Agbo and Yuka (forthcoming) identifies Emenanjio’s (2005) General Complement Verb as having the highest score in the transitivity continuum. In our data, all clauses with two participants have GCVs, while those with one participant range from the ICVs to the ECVs mentioned in Section 1.

#### Table 3: Number of participants in a clause and grounding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two participant clauses</th>
<th>Nza na Obu</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Omalinze</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Omenụkọ</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>139</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| One participant clauses | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | | Number | % | | Number | % |
| Foreground | 43 | 55.9 | | 11 | 50 | | 2 | 4.4 |
| Background | 34 | 44.1 | | 11 | 50 | | 43 | 95.6 |
| Total | 77 | 100.0 | | 22 | 100.0 | | 45 | 100.0 |
Table 3 above shows that for foregrounded clauses the percentage of two participant clauses in *Nza na Obu* and *Omalinze* are 45.9% and 42.4% respectively while that of backgrounded clauses are 54.1% and 57.6% respectively. But for *Omenuko*, the result is quite different. 71.4% of the foregrounded clauses have two participants while 28.6% of backgrounded clauses have two participants. The higher percentage of two participant clauses in the backgrounded clauses of *Nza na Obu* and *Omalinze* contrasts with Hopper and Thompson (1980) prediction that foregrounded clauses contain higher percentages of two participant clauses. In our data, some of the backgrounded clauses have their second participant outside the clause and this is why the high percentage of two participant clauses. We illustrate with example (7) below.

7.

a. *mgbe mmiri ruuru ha puta n’ebé otu agadi nwanyị na-ama ụkwa*
   
   *when water carry 3pl reach place one old lady AUX-Peel breadfruit*
   
   ‘when they were carried by the water to a place where an old lady was peeling breadfruits’

b. *ebere ha mere ya*
   
   *mercy 3pl do 3pl (obj)*
   
   ‘she had pity on them’

c. *O wee guputa ha*
   
   *3s dV took out 3pl*
   
   ‘she rescued them’

d. *kpokoro ha lawa n’ulọ ya*
   
   *carry 3pl go in house 3s (obj)*
   
   ‘Carried them to her house’

e. *Mgbe mmiri rùuru ha pùta n’ebé òtú ágádí nwanyị nà-ama ùkwà ébere ha mèrè ya O wee guputa ha kpokoro ha lawa n’ùlọ ya* (Omalinze: p. 2)

The two participants in the clauses in (7a-c) are unambiguous but in example (7d) the Igbo speaker knows that the agent of the clause is the same agent as the one in example (7c). The clause in example (7) typically occurs in many of the backgrounded clauses in *Nza na Obu* and *Omalinze* and this may explain the high percentage of two participant clauses. *Omenuko* is the first written Igbo novel (Emenyonu, 1978). The writer was consciously writing for a literary contest in indigenous African languages. Unlike the other two stories, it was not transcribed from the oral performance. Again, the text is taken from the first chapter of the novel which sets out to create the conflict in the novel. So the consciousness of the writer and the objective of the first chapter of the novel may have contributed to the writing of sentences that introduce the main plot of the story. This is why we have a high percentage of two participants in the foregrounded clauses. Note that this result is in consonance with the findings of
Hopper and Thompson, (1980) where the languages studied have a high percentage of two participants in foregrounded clauses.

The one participant clauses in *Nza na Obu* record a higher percentage in the foregrounded clauses than the backgrounded clauses while that of *Omalinze* has a 50-50 percent occurrence in the foregrounded and backgrounded clauses respectively. For the story in *Omenuko*, the foregrounded clauses with one participant have a percentage of 4.4 while the backgrounded clauses with one participant have a high percentage of 95.6. The reason for this result in *Nza na Obu* and *Omalinze* may still be due to the fact that many of the backgrounded clauses have their second participants outside the clause and this can only be known intuitively by the Igbo speaker. This result is still at variance with the predictions of Hopper and Thomson (1980), where for the languages studied, there were higher percentages of one participant clauses in backgrounded sentences.

For *Omenuko*, the occurrence of one participant clauses in the foregrounded and backgrounded clauses reckon with the results of Hopper and Thompson (1980) and the explanation for this has been given in the preceding paragraphs.

### 4.3 Volitionality and grounding

Table 4 shows the result for the parameter of volitionality where the agent of the clause is presented as willfully acting on the patient of the clause.

#### Table 4: Volitionality and grounding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nza na Obu</th>
<th>Omalinze</th>
<th>Omenuko</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For *Nza na Obu*, the percentage of clauses with volitional agents in foregrounded clauses is 72.5, while that for the backgrounded clauses is 27.5. This result seems to be influenced by the nature of the story. All the characters in the story are human, who act consciously and willfully but more importantly most of the clauses in the story are in the completive aspect. Completive clauses in Igbo usually have two participants where there is a willful transfer of a completed action from the agent to the patient. This result agrees with Hopper and Thompson (1980), where there are more foregrounded clauses with volitional agents than backgrounded clauses.

For *Omalinze*, the foregrounded clauses have 31.6% of volitional agents while the backgrounded clauses have 27.5% of same and for *Omenuko* the percentage for foregrounded clauses is 29.9 and for backgrounded clauses is 70.1. This result is different from what we obtained from *Nza na Obu* because the two stories contain a lot of clauses in the incompletive aspect. Igbo clauses in the incompletive aspect usually contain one participant, an agent, which may or may not be acting willfully. If the participants are acting willfully, there would be no patient where the action of the agent can be registered and seen to be the result of the willful action. This result does not align with the Hopper and Thompson (1980) investigation.
4.4 Completive/Incompletive aspect and grounding

Completive clauses in Igbo have verbs which denote actions that are viewed from their endpoints - in other words, telic actions. The incompletive clauses denote verbs with atelic actions. In Tables 5 and 6 below we present the analysis of kinesis and aspect for the clauses in the stories we are studying. Kinesis is the feature which shows that an action can be transferred from one participant to the other while aspect is the feature of transitivity that determines the telicity or atelicity of a clause.

Table 5: Kinesis and grounding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nza na Obu</th>
<th>Omalinze</th>
<th>Omenuko</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A careful look at Tables 5 and 6 shows that for Nza na Obu there are more foregrounded clauses with the feature of kinesis and aspect than backgrounded clauses, while for Omalinze and Omenuko, the percentage is lower for foregrounded clauses than for backgrounded clauses. The reason for this has been explained in Section 4.3 above.

Table 6: Aspect and grounding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nza na Obu</th>
<th>Omalinze</th>
<th>Omenuko</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5 Mode (Real/unreal events) and grounding

A real event in a story is an action which actually occurred in a factual manner, i.e. in a manner that can be believed to be possible. An unreal event is an action in a story that is more or less far-fetched.

Igbo folktales consist of arcane stories that are at once bizarre and exciting. However, within these stories one can fathom events that could be said to be real and possible and others that are way out of this world. Negative clauses are classified as depicting unreal events. In Tables 7 and 8 we identify clauses that give a picture of real and unreal events as the case may be.
Many of the clauses in the stories we are studying have indicative verbs. The indicative verb in Igbo ‘indicates the salient facts about a verb’ (Emenanjo, 1978:170). In other words, the indicative verbs refer to observed facts that are actually true. These kinds of verbs abound in our folktales because the clauses indeed state what is factual. In Table 7 above, we observe that the number of negative clauses for both foregrounded and backgrounded clauses is few for all the stories we are studying. However, the clauses with negative readings are more for the stories in Nza na Obu and Omalinze than for Omenuko. This is because the stories in the former, as earlier observed have more clauses in the in completive aspect than the later. Clauses in the in completive aspect are usually not indicative. Note that the result for negation in Omenuko is not in line with the findings of Hopper and Thompson (1980). This is because of the many completive, hence indicative clauses in the story.

The play out of real and unreal events is presented in Table 8 below. According to Hopper and Thompson (1980), the number of clauses with unreal events should be higher in the backgrounded clauses than in the foregrounded clauses. This is true for Omenuko but untrue for Nza na Obu and Omalinze according to the result in Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: mode and grounding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nza na Obu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason for the higher number of unreal events for foregrounded clauses in Nza na Obu and Omalinze has to do with the fact that they are actually narrated stories which were transcribed exactly the way they are narrated. Nza na Obu falls into the category of ‘Why’ stories in Igbo and the narrator sets out to tell the audience the reason why a particular state of affairs exist. The narrators include a lot of sub-plots to the main plot of the story and all these contribute to the foregrounded clauses. This is the reason why Nza na Obu has a high number of unreal events in the foregrounded clauses. The same reason can be adduced to Omalinze, however, in this case, the didactic story, contains a lot of sub-plots to explain the values and beliefs of the people. Omenuko on its part is a carefully written story and as we stated earlier, it is the first chapter of a novel that creates the conflict in the novel. Because it is written there is a carefully narrated main plot that avoids unnecessary details. This is why the result for Omenuko agrees with the findings of Hopper and Thompson (1980).

4.6 Transitivity and grounding
For the languages investigated in Hopper and Thompson (1980) the findings confirm that the features of high transitivity are more in the foregrounded clauses than in the backgrounded clauses. For the English narratives the percentage of high transitivity is 78 for the foregrounded clauses and 39% for backgrounded clauses (Hopper and Thompson, 1980: 288). In Table 9 below we present the average percentage for the transitivity in the folktales we have studied.
### Table 9: grounding and high transitivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Nza na Obu</th>
<th></th>
<th>Omalinze</th>
<th></th>
<th>Omenuko</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Foreground</td>
<td>Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two participants</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>57.6</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One participant</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesis</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspect</td>
<td>51.3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negation</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volitionality</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>62.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>55.8</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average features for high transitivity in the foregrounded and backgrounded clauses show only a slight difference in *Nza na Obu* and *Omalinze*. The difference in the percentage figures of 55.8 and 44.2 for foreground and background respectively in *Nza na Obu* is not as high as that of the English narrative in Hopper and Thompson (1980). However, the result corresponds to Hopper and Thompson (1980) suggestion that high transitivity is found more in foregrounded clauses than in backgrounded clauses. A look at the percentage figures for *Omalinze* show that the foregrounded clauses are lower in transitivity than the backgrounded clauses, and, for *Omenuko* the result is the same except that the difference is much, 39.5% for foregrounded clauses and 60.5% for backgrounded clauses. This result for *Omalinze* and *Omenuko* does not correlate with the findings of Hopper and Thompson (1980). This suggests that the result for high transitivity for *Nza na Obu* in Table 9 may well be a coincidence. However, our result can also be explained by the closely looking at the fundamental facts concerning the foreground-background distinction. Hopper and Thompson (1980) in concluding their investigation give a caveat about transitivity and grounding.

... while we claim that the discourse distinction between foregrounding and backgrounding provides the key to understanding the grammatical and semantic facts we have been discussing, we also explicitly recognize that grounding itself reflects a deeper set of principles – relating to decisions which speakers make, on the basis of their assessment of their hearers’ situation, about how to present what they have to say.

(Hopper and Thompson 1980: 294)

They further propose that each individual sentence in a narrative text must be evaluated for transitivity based on the inspiration of the speaker for uttering the sentence.

As stated earlier in Section 2 the narration of the Igbo folktale engages is Oral Performance. The telling of a typical folktale includes the performance of folksongs, the use of proverbs and audience participation. These stylistic devices are incorporated
into the body of the story to make it more demanding for the children to understand. In other words, the utterance of each sentence is motivated by the need to primarily entertain and educate the children. This influences the transitivity features of the kind of clauses we have studied in our data. This is why our result looks different from Hopper and Thompson (1980) report for narrative texts in English and other languages.

5. Conclusion
This study has been an attempt to apply the transitivity parameters of Hopper and Thompson (1980) to Igbo in determining the transitivity features of three Igbo folktales. Our findings reveal that there is no correlation between high transitivity and grounding in Igbo folktales. This is in contrast to the result in Hopper and Thompson (1980) where the investigation showed a correspondence between high transitivity and grounding. The reason for our result is because of the oral performance involved in the telling of Igbo folktales, where the motivation for the utterance of each sentence is to entertain and educate the audience. However, for the English narratives studied in Hopper and Thompson (1980) the motivation was different. The speakers were just narrating events as they occurred. Besides, the Igbo Oral Performance is a unique feature of Igbo language and literature in particular and African languages and literatures in general.
References


