

Research Article

# A Contrastive Analysis of the Morphological and Syntactic Aspects of Urhobo and Ijaw Languages

Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba<sup>\*</sup> , Andrew Okiemute 

Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Yenagoa, Nigeria

## Abstract

The study undertakes a contrastive analysis of the morphological and syntactic aspects of Urhobo language and the Izon language, which are two indigenous languages spoken in the Niger Delta area in Nigeria. Contrastive analysis is used as the theory of preference to explore these languages, to show their similarity and points of divergence. The findings from the study attest to the similarity of these languages predictably as a result of their shared origin as they both are from the same Niger-Congo language family. There are cases of exact translations and linguistic interconnectedness between both languages in the morphological level. The study also confirms that there is noticeable difference in all levels of linguistics that makes both languages not mutually intelligible. The research's implications include recommendations for language teaching and preservation as both languages are highly relevant for intercultural communication. The study also recommends that further research should be done in Nigeria's indigenous languages as a way to respect and maintain unique linguistic identities. Scholars from different Nigerian languages should encourage the development and the growth of the indigenous languages to stop them from going into extinction. English language is the official language in Nigeria, it is the language of government, commerce, education, law, mass media and other areas of communication at the official level. The Nigerian language learner encounters so many problems in learning English. This paper reveals the importance of our indigenous languages.

## Keywords

Ijaw, Urhobo, Language, Contrastive, Morpho-Syntax

## 1. Introduction

Language is a dynamic and intricate medium that humans use for communication, expression of ideas, and thoughts, and construction of meaning. [10] The diversity of languages across the world shows interesting insights into the complex ways humans express their thoughts and relate to the world around them. [4] This study embarks upon a contrastive analysis between two closely related languages, in terms of the geographical location of their speakers and shared historic origin; exploring their linguistic characteristics to make con-

clusions about their similarities or divergences.

The Urhobo language and the Ijaw language (also referred to as the Izon) are two indigenous languages spoken in the Niger delta area of Nigeria. The Izon language, has a rich dialectal diversity and occupies an important position in the extensive linguistic landscape in Niger Delta. The Urhobo language is spoken by the Urhobo ethnic group, which shares both linguistic, historical and geographical link with Ijaw. Both of these languages are not only linguistic tools but also

<sup>\*</sup>Corresponding author: [bleugochi@yahoo.com](mailto:bleugochi@yahoo.com) (Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba), [uwasombabu@fuotuokey.edu.ng](mailto:uwasombabu@fuotuokey.edu.ng) (Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba)

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threads that weave the cultural identity of their speakers, encapsulating cultural heritage and history that spans generations.

#### *What is Contrastive Study?*

Also called contrastive analysis or contrastive linguistics, contrastive study is the investigation of the structures of two or more languages with the aim of identifying the relation, difference or interconnectedness that exist among languages of different linguistic environments. Lado, R. believes that the degree of difference between the two languages also correlated with the degree of difficulty. [7] This analysis of the differences and similarities also helps second language learning process. Contrastive analysis has intuitive appeal, and that teachers and linguists had successfully used “the best linguistic knowledge available in order to account for observed difficulties in second language learning”. [13] From the foregoing, it is clear that the primary aim of contrastive study is to investigate the distinction between two or more languages, especially one foreign and the other native with a view to understanding their differences and learning challenges.

### 1.1. Scope of the Study

This study undertakes a contrastive analysis of the morphological and syntactic aspects of the Urhobo language and Ijaw, highlighting all levels of linguistics but focusing on their morphological and syntactic aspects. This analysis aims to unveil the similarities and differences within both languages by closely examining their linguistic structure and patterns that define them. This investigation does more than illuminates both linguistic systems but also reveals that both languages are completely different, irrespective of the similarities identified in the course of the analysis.

### 1.2. Purpose and Significance

The significance of contrastive analysis lies in its capacity to reveal the subtle linguistic distinctions that set one language apart from another. This study will be particularly helpful to the native speakers of both language as it sheds light on interesting concepts that cuts across history and linguistics. Such investigations add to the documentation of the language, thus expanding the research relevance to scholars and the general public. Through a meticulous dissection of Ijaw and Urhobo's morphological and syntactic intricacies, this study not only enhances our understanding of these particular languages but also contributes to a broader comprehension of language typology and variation. [18]

Also, the revelations of this analysis have practical implications for language teaching, translation practices, and cross-cultural communication, ultimately facilitating effective communication across linguistic and cultural divides. [16]

### 1.3. Structure of the Study

The forthcoming sections of this paper embark upon an

exploration of the contrastive analysis between Urhobo and Ijaw. The data is preceded by the analysis which delves into the morphological attributes of both languages, in line with the data, unveiling the artistry of word formation in the languages, prefixes, suffixes, and inflections.

The discussion of the syntactic terrain is also preceded by a data set, consisting of sentences from both languages and their English translation. This holistic voyage aims to provide a comprehensive panorama of the linguistic complexities that characterize the two languages

The study of Ijaw and Urhobo languages beckons us into the captivating realm of linguistic diversity and complexity. By examining their morphological and syntactic characteristics, we forge a profound connection with the multifaceted essence of human language and its profound role in shaping cultural identities and facilitating meaningful communication. We also deduce that both languages are largely different irrespective of the shared similarities.

#### *Shared heritage within the Niger-Congo Language Family*

Ijaw and Urhobo are both languages interconnected by their membership in the vast Niger-Congo language family which is a linguistic lineage that covers the African continent. The language family comprises of a wide array of languages, each contributing to the tapestry of linguistic diversity and complexity within the region.

#### *Ijaw and Urhobo: siblings within Niger-Congo*

The Urhobo language and the Ijaw language both emerge as linguistic siblings within the Niger-Congo language family. They both share this lineage with numerous other languages in the Niger-Congo family, and closer affinity to especially Benue-Congo sub-branch which includes languages like Ogbia, Ogoni, Obolo and more. This thus presents a prime example of the intricacies that exist within this diverse linguistic tapestry. While this language has developed their own unique features over time, the undercurrents of their shared linguistic heritage remain embedded within their structures.

#### *Linguistic diversity and unity*

By tracing both languages' affiliation within the Niger-Congo family, the research illuminates the broader linguistic unity which underlies the distant Ijaw and Urhobo language. This thus provides a sketch for appreciating the shared linguistic traits they have carried over from their proto-language and the innovative divergence that arise in their respective trajectories.

### 1.4. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to conduct a contrastive analysis of the Urhobo and Ijaw languages of the Niger-Congo family, reviewing their morphological. Syntactic and pragmatic peculiarities and similarities.

Other relevant objectives include:

- 1) To compare the morphological structure of both languages in order to see instances of similarities or divergence

- 2) To analyze sentences from both languages in order to attain their syntactic characteristics.
- 3) To identify instances of pragmatic relationship in their unique characters.

### 1.5. Statement of the Problem

The Ijaw (Izon) language and Urhobo, indigenous to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, are rich repositories of cultural heritage and linguistic diversity that characterize the region. [12] At such, it is expected that these languages are utilized as subject for academic investigation for the advancement of linguistic knowledge and most importantly as documentation of cultural and linguistic peculiarities. Some scholars have undertaken investigations on various Niger-Congo languages. [14] However, despite the researches, there exist a gap in understanding the relationship between the morphological and syntactic aspect of Urhobo and Ijaw. This study thus thrives to add to the valuable but limited researches by undertaking a comprehensive contrastive analysis of the morphological and syntactic aspects of Ijaw (Izon) and Urhobo language. Understanding the intricate distinctions and commonalities between Ijaw and Urhobo languages is essential for linguistic scholarship, cross-cultural communication, language teaching, and preserving the cultural identities embedded within these languages. [11]

## 2. Empirical Review

Some scholars have used the contrastive linguistics theory to investigate the morphological differences between English, Izon and Isoko languages. They compared the orthography of English, Izon and Isoko, stating great differences amongst them. [5] The vowel and consonant charts of all three languages were reviewed in their investigation and great attention was paid to the morphological structure of the three languages. In their conclusion, they noted that differences exist between the L1 and L2 and that the only way to overcome this communication difficulty is to better understand the phonology and morphology of the English language. [6]

A contrastive and error analysis of Isoko L2 acquisition of English phonemes was done by a scholar. He collected data from participants' voice recordings and personal observations and reviewed the English consonant and vowel phonemes and that of Isoko. In his findings, he stated that English has 24 consonants while Isoko has twenty-eight. For the vowels, he discussed the different types of classification amongst both languages. [1]

A research on the contrastive tonal pattern in Urhobo and Ukwani. The research focused on the tonal pattern of both languages respectively and aimed to show that two different languages may have some tone pattern. [2] The researcher collected data from primary and secondary sources, comprising of oral interview with competent speakers of both languages, text books and journals. The researcher found that

the two languages were similar in tonal pattern which are high, low and a tonal phenomenon known as down step.

Language endangerment in south-south geo-political zone was overviewed: a focus on Ukwani, Urhobo and Ijaw languages. [3] They adopted the survey research design and collected data from questionnaire and observation for analysis. They found that improvements have been made in the preservation measures of these languages. They applauded the role of researchers and the use of local languages for television and broadcast.

An article titled a contrastive analysis of Urhobo and English prepositions. [9] He reviewed prepositions from both languages and compared them to see similarities or divergence using a simple parallel approach, by juxtaposing the Urhobo prepositions with those of English.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The research adopts contrastive analysis as the primary theory. Contrastive analysis systematically compares the linguistic structure of two or more languages to spot similarities and differences. [8] This theory will be used for the analysis of Urhobo and Ijaw language, aiming to expose the distinctions and commonalities in the level of phonology, morphology, syntactic, and pragmatics.

The phrase theory model proposed by Noam Chomsky was adopted for the analysis of the syntactic structures, providing a theoretical lens for exposing points of differences between the Urhobo and Ijaw languages.

By using this synergetic approach, the research aims to provide an extensive understanding of the linguistic dimensions of the Ijaw and Urhobo languages, giving insights into both their historical and linguistic heritage.

## 4. Method of Data Collection

The data for this analysis was collected by conducting a fieldwork in Urhobo and Ijaw speaking societies. This allowed for natural context and authenticity. By engaging with native speakers of the languages, and conducting interviews, we were able to collect spoken language samples, and document cultural nuances characterizing the languages. Audio recorder was also used for recording speaking communication and oral traditions of both languages. This was specifically valuable for the phonological and some morphological investigations.

Examples as shown below

**Table 1.** Data of words in Urhobo, Izon and English.

Urhobo	Izon	English
Upho	bara	hand

Urhobo	Izon	English
Evwe	minimotu	throat
Ame	obori	goat
Efi	bini	water
Uvi	inga	rope for climbing palms
Eta	yowei	paddle
Udu	odu	chest
Osa	saa	debt
Orhe	beriba	plantain
Ore	Andei	tsetse fly
Osho	Owei	Fear
Omo	Tobu	Child
Oshare	owikimi	Man
Omoshare	pesitobu	young man
Mo	bo	Come
Ololo	ololo	bottle
Do	do	thanks
Akpo	akpo	Life

#### *Morphological differences and similarities: Urhobo and Izon*

The comparison of the data from Urhobo and Izon languages reveals intriguing morphological differences and similarities that shed light on their linguistic characteristics. Let's delve into the observed patterns:

**Shared Morphemes and Exact Translations:** In some instances, Urhobo and Izon exhibit shared morphemes and even exact translations. For example:

"Akpo" in Urhobo and "Akpo" in Izon both refer to "life."

"Do" in Urhobo and "Do" in Izon both signify "Thanks."

"Ololo" in Urhobo and "Ololo" in Izon both refer to bottle in both languages

These cases of direct translation in the two languages shows similarities that may suggest the origination from the same protolanguage.

**Complex Noun Formation:** Both Urhobo and Izondemonstrate a complex noun system in naming. Instances like "Omoshare" in Urhobo (young man) and "kalatobou" in Izon (young man) reflect the use of combining elements to form compound nouns, to meet communicative purpose. Again, "Oshare" in Urhobo (man) and "Owikimi" in Izon (man) illustrate the construction of nouns with similar semantic meanings.

**Vowel Sound Endings:** A notable linguistic trait is that both Urhobo and Izon words often end with vowel sounds. This characteristic has implications for pronunciation and, as observed, sometimes leads to the insertion of vowels when pronouncing English words. This shared vowel-ending tendency contributes to the phonological distinctiveness of these languages.

**Loanwords and Vowel Endings:** Both languages have a propensity to adopt loanwords from English, a phenomenon observed in languages around the world. Interestingly, these loanwords often are given a forced vowel ending in cases of absence in the language they are loaned from. This is in order for the pronunciation to align with the phonological patterns of Urhobo and Izon. For instance, Ijaw "isilipase" in Izon (slippers) and Urhobo will loan glass from English and call it "Igalassi" demonstrates this borrowing tendency.

**Variability and Sound Correspondences:** While some words exhibit clear correspondences, others show variations in sound. For instance, "efi" in Urhobo corresponds to "Bini" in Izon for "water." This variation highlights the diverse linguistic influences that have shaped these languages over time.

The analysis of the provided data showcases the intricate interplay between morphological differences and shared linguistic traits in Urhobo and Izon languages. The presence of common morphemes, complex noun formation system, vowel endings, and the borrowing of English loanwords reflect the multifaceted nature of these languages. Despite variations, they maintain connections that offer valuable insights into their linguistic evolution.

**Table 2.** Data of sentences in Urhobo, Izon and English.

Urhobo	Izon	English
WokobiroOghene meh akpo	Ari inookoboowoyengi	Thank God for my life
Ba yaEki Yare	Foughomadouwaiybo	Go Market and come back)
KewehIsabato meh	Inesilippas moa kiniipiri	give me my slippers
Benegehughegbe	Temidibi dii	look at the mirror
Oghene me	Inewoyiny i	My god
Bikomo	Seiseibo	Please come
Dido de me?	Tekienare	What is my name?

Urhobo	Izon	English
Mavo	Tebiraa	How are you
Ono y ose we	Tikabokieda?	Who is your father?
Owoyavwoya a	Wonibuokiakiweniyemi	We use leg to walk
Kevweamagirena	Adeinkepire	Give me the knife

### *Syntactic Structures: A comparative analysis of Urhobo and Izon*

The comparison of the provided data sheds light on the syntactic structures employed in Urhobo and Izon languages. While both languages share certain syntactic features, they also exhibit distinct patterns that reflect their unique linguistic characteristics.

a. Plural Markers: In Izon, the plural marker is consistently affixed to the noun as an inflectional suffix. For example, "yams" is written as "ele" (ele + e) where the plural marker "e" is an integral part of the noun. In contrast, Urhobo employs a change in the word to indicate plurality. "Yam" is written as "ole," and "yams" becomes "ele," showcasing a difference in the approach to pluralization.

b. Definite article "the": Izon attaches the definite article "the" directly to the noun it identifies. For instance, "the man" is expressed as "kimibi" (kimi + bi), where "bi" indicates "the." In Urhobo, the definite article "the" is separated from the noun, resulting in "osharena" for "the man." This distinction in article attachment influences the ordering of noun phrases.

c. Sentence structures: SOP vs. SPO: In terms of sentence structures, Izon typically follows the Subject-Object-Predicate (SOP) arrangement, where the subject precedes the object and the verb comes last. For instance, "Ari inookoboowoyengi" can be broken down as "Subject: Ari ino / Object: okoboo / Predicate: woyengi." This structure allows for efficient communication of who is performing the action on what.

On the other hand, Urhobo employs a Subject-Predicate-Object (SPO) structure, which is closer to the English Subject-predicate-Object (SPO) arrangement. In the sentence "Give me my knife," the structure can be segmented as "Subject: Give / Predicate: me my knife." This structure emphasizes the action and the object of the action, with the subject preceding.

d. Predicate Complement Structure in Urhobo: An interesting feature in Urhobo is the use of the Predicate Complement structure, where the complement "amagirena" directly follows the predicate "give." This arrangement emphasizes the relationship between the predicate and its complement, "the knife." This structure serves to add precision and clarity to the sentence.

In summary, the comparative analysis of syntactic structures in Urhobo and Izon languages reveals fascinating in-

sights into their similarities and differences. While both languages follow distinct approaches to pluralization, article attachment, and sentence structure, they also exhibit commonalities. The influence of article placement on noun phrase order and the distinct sentence arrangement, SOP in Izon and SPO in Urhobo, showcase the complexity and uniqueness of these languages' syntactic patterns.

### *Sentence types and constructions: simple, compound and complex*

A comprehensive analysis of sentence types and constructions in Urhobo and Izon languages reveals distinct approaches to forming complex, compound, and simple sentences. Additionally, the examination of subordination and coordination offers insights into how these languages express relationships between clauses and phrases.

Simple Sentence Constructions: Simple sentences, characterized by a single independent clause, are fundamental to communication in both languages. These sentences often express straightforward ideas or actions. For example, the Urhobo sentence "Owoyavwoya a" (We use leg to walk) and the Izon sentence "Oghene me" (My god) are both simple sentence constructions that concisely convey a singular thought.

Compound sentence constructions: Both languages also employ compound sentence constructions to join two or more independent clauses. Coordinating conjunctions like "and," "but," or "or" are used to establish connections between clauses. For instance, Urhobo employs coordination in "Ba yaEki Yare, foughomadouwaiyo" (Go to the market and come back). Izon demonstrates coordination in "WokobiroOghene meh akpo, ariinookoboowoyengi" (Thank God for my life, thank God for my health).

Complex sentence constructions: In both Urhobo and Izon, complex sentence constructions play a vital role in conveying intricate ideas. These sentences often consist of a main clause and one or more subordinate clauses. Subordination is realized using subordinating conjunctions or markers. For example, in Urhobo, "Bikomo, dido de me?" (Please come, what is my name?) forms a complex sentence with a main clause ("Bikomo") and a subordinate clause ("dido de me?"). Similarly, Izon employs subordination, as seen in "Ono y ose we, tikabokieda?" (Who is your father, who is your mother?).

Subordination and Coordination: In terms of handling subordination and coordination, both languages exhibit notable patterns. Subordination involves marking dependent



clauses with conjunctions or markers, facilitating the expression of relationships between ideas. In coordination, coordinating conjunctions or markers are used to link independent clauses. Both Urhobo and Izon employ these strategies to create coherent and organized discourse.

The examination of complex, compound, and simple sentence constructions, along with the handling of subordination and coordination, showcases the linguistic intricacies of Urhobo and Izon languages. The ability of these languages to convey nuanced relationships between clauses and to create meaningful sentences highlights their adaptability and expressive capabilities within their unique syntactic systems. The five grammatical units in language acquisition (morpheme, word, phrase, clause and sentence) are necessary for grammaticality [17].

## 5. Findings, Results and Recommendations

### 5.1. Findings

The analysis revealed that both languages exhibit common morphemes and exact translations, indicating shared linguistic elements. Complex noun formation systems, involving compound nouns, were identified in both languages, showcasing their linguistic artistry.

Syntactic analysis showed that while both languages employ subordination and coordination, they follow different sentence structures. Izon typically follows the Subject-Object-Predicate (SOP) arrangement, while Urhobo uses a Subject-Predicate-Object (SPO) structure. These syntactic differences reflect their unique linguistic characteristics.

### 5.2. Results

The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and cultural interplay between Ijaw (Izon) and Urhobo languages, highlighting both their shared linguistic heritage and distinct linguistic features.

It underscores the importance of phonological, morphological, and syntactic factors in shaping language use and communication dynamics within these communities.

The research contributes to the field of contrastive linguistics, offering insights into languages with shared linguistic and cultural bonds, exemplified by Ijaw (Izon) and Urhobo. Our indigenous languages should be developed and standardized [15].

### 5.3. Recommendations

- 1) Encourage efforts to preserve and document these languages, as they are integral to the cultural identity of their communities. Language preservation initiatives should involve native speakers, linguists, and educa-

tional institutions.

- 2) Develop language teaching materials and programs that take into account the contrastive analysis findings. This can enhance language teaching strategies, making them more effective and culturally sensitive.
- 3) Promote cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills, particularly for those interacting with speakers of Ijaw (Izon) and Urhobo. Understanding the cultural nuances affecting language use is essential for effective communication.
- 4) Encourage further research on these languages, delving deeper into specific linguistic aspects and dialectal variations. Future studies can expand on this contrastive analysis and explore additional linguistic and cultural dimensions.

## 6. Conclusion

In culmination, the contrastive analysis of Ijaw (Izon) and Urhobo languages have provided a comprehensive exploration into the intricate nuances of these closely related linguistic systems. Through the examination of the morphological and syntactic aspects of these languages, a vivid tapestry of linguistic diversity and shared elements emerges.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Biography

**Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Her areas of research interest include: Morphology, Syntax, Nigerian Linguistics (Igbo) and Socio-linguistics.