

The Grammar of Adposition in English and Ịzọn

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Abstract

The standard of students' use of English is exacerbating by the day, even though the English language serves as the language of instruction at all levels of Nigerian educational system. Although, various causative factors have been identified, this study considers parametric variations between English and indigenous languages as one of the factors hindering students' proficiency in English. Thus, this study examines the grammar of adposition in English and Ịzọn languages to ascertain the variations there are that could affect the learning of the English language. The study employed Chomsky's Minimalist Program (MP) and Robert Lados's Contrastive Analysis (CA) and used the descriptive design. It noted that whenever the systems of learners' L1 and those of the target language are conflicting, there is bound to be a learning problem. This corroborates the core assumptions of CA that the differences between the systems and patterns of learners' L1 and those of the target language will trigger transfers of learners' L1 systems into the target language. The study carefully examined the behaviour of adpositions in English and in Ịzọn by juxtaposing structures in order to ascertain the areas of dissimilarities affecting the Ịzọn English learners. The study discovered that there is a structural variation in the grammar of adposition. The adpositions occur at the right side after the object in Ịzọn constructions, while the adpositions in the English constructions precede the objects of the constructions. This difference is a major challenge to the Ịzọn English learners.

Keywords: English, Ịzọn, adposition, preposition, postposition

1. Introduction

Universal Grammar describes the human language faculty which comprises principles and parameters (Cook, 2008). The principles are the common language features that cut across all human languages (Chomsky 1981). On the other hand, the parameters describe fundamental language features specific to individual languages. In the words of Cook (2008) "principles are the aspects of language present in all human minds and parameters as the aspects of human language that vary from one language to another within tightly set limits" (p. 33). Language is an integral and indispensable part of man. It is what defines man; his dynamism, actions, relationships with fellow man, and his environment. Okoh (1998) cited in Okoh (2006) alluded to the usefulness of language when he averred that language permeate and pervades virtually every aspect of man's life. It is one of the major defining and connecting factors of a community.

The world as a global village invariably depends on some form of language that connects it adequately in the arts, sciences, technology, commerce and politics, which has also culminated into the learning of second and foreign languages.

Language like other concepts has been described differently by scholars. Wardhaugh (1998), considered language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication.

The above description foregrounds salient attributes of language. One of which is the fact that language is systematic and rule-governed. Unlike other animals, man has the capacity to adequately use language for his day to day activities, hence language is said to be both complex and diverse. Every language is structured in a unique and orderly way with peculiar rules and principles, yet there are common principles that cut across all-natural languages. The rules governing a particular language account for the acceptable patterns by which words of that language are concatenated to produce larger units, such as phrases and sentences. Espousing the argument above, Anyanwu and Otagburuagu (2002) noted that, language as a means of communication comprises symbols, signs and vocal acts, arbitrarily created and conventionally used to express ideas, emotions and thoughts.

Language is like an interconnected system of network with different levels of analysis that can also be studied differently (Nwala, 2015). In this regard, we have phonetics and phonology which is concerned with the description of the sound system of a language and patterning of the sounds with respect to individual languages; morphology which studies the internal structure of morphemes and words; syntax which studies the combination of words in phrases, clauses and sentences, and then, semantics together with its brother pragmatics, which studies meaning logically and contextually. Syntax, which is the thrust of this study, is linguistically language-specific, no matter the common principles of human language.

The parametric variations in languages of the world: position and directionality of sentence elements such as determiners, adpositions, adjectives, negations, conjunctions and other conditions are explicitly delineated in the grammar of that language. Hence, the knowledge of the grammar of a language is required to construct syntactically correct and semantically acceptable structures. The aim of this study is to examine the grammar of adposition in English and Iẓon languages to ascertain the variations there are that could affect the learning of the English language. The grammar of adpositions validates the argument that Universal Grammar (henceforth, UG) provides a pool of language properties which languages of the world draw from. According to Kwokwo (2012) adpositions constitute a class of grammatical elements which primary function is creating a relationship among things and events in space and time in a given construction. He argued that this class consists of *prepositions* and *postpositions*. Although these two categories of functional elements play the same role in a construction, they also create a syntactic variation which triggers parameters for languages to draw from. They are used to express direction, time and location of the objects of sentences. They are called prepositions in languages where they precede the nouns, noun phrases or other equivalents in sentences, usually SVO languages. In such instances they introduce the objects of the sentences. In other languages where they succeed the nouns, noun phrases or other equivalents in sentences they are called postposition, mostly SOV languages. As the name implies, *prepositions* have the grammatical feature of preceding the noun, noun phrases or pronouns which serve as the objects of the sentences they show direction, time and location. On the other hand, postpositions exhibit the grammatical feature of succeeding the noun or noun phrases they relate in a derivation.

Some prepositions found in English are: at, to, in, on, from, by, under, etc.

1. Brilliant stood *at* the door
2. Suzi went *to* Bayelsa
3. The book is *in* the bag
4. My pad is *on* the table
5. John returns *from* Abuja today
6. The man standing *by* my Ferrari

In the sentences above, the words that are italicised are the prepositions. As observed in the sentences, they precede the object nouns or noun phrases, hence, the name preposition. The position these functional elements occur is what differentiates *prepositions* from *postpositions*, the former is mostly found in SVO languages and the latter in SOV languages as the study shall show later. When these elements are introduced by the objects of the sentences, that is occur after the object noun or noun phrases in constructions they are referred to postposition. They carry out the same function like the prepositions, and are basically found in languages like Iẓon, Chinese etc. which has the SOV syntactic structure. Some postpositions found in Iẓon are *duo*, *bolou*, *gho*, *ogono*, *ukukuru*,

7. Lucy **Yenagoa** *duo* bo dou
8. Fun bi **akpa** *bolou* emi
9. Eni fun **akasi** *ogono* emi
10. Ilayefa **Abuja** *gho* mu emi
11. Suzi **ama** emi

The words in bold face are the nouns or noun phrases which double as the objects of the sentences, while the words that are italicised are the functional elements showing the relationship among the subjects and the objects in the sentences above

2. Literature Review/Theoretical Perspective

There are numerous parametric studies carried out on Iẓon and other Nigerian indigenous languages which attempt to compare these indigenous languages with the English language.

Priye and Nwala (2019) in their study of Variation in headedness: Insights from the Iẓon and English languages argued that the two languages have head-initial and head-final structures. They noted that there are similar positional features in the use of adjectives, nouns and appositives demonstratives, and numerals. The determinants of both languages also share certain traits except the articles. They gave the following examples:

Article	The man	<i>keme bi</i>
		N D
		[man (the)]

Demonstratives:	This man	<i>bi keme bi</i>
		(D)N+D
		[(this) man the]

Drawing from the examples above, they surmised that since the obligatory articles in the NP can only occur in head-final position English is mostly head-, while Iẓon is majorly head-initial as the frequently used articles occur in final position.

Similarly, Kwokwo (2015), in his study of Determiner Phrase (DP) in Iẓon and English described the behaviour and position of the determiner in Iẓon and English. He noted that while the English obligatory determiner (article) takes the initial position of the phrase, thereby

functioning pre-nominally, the Iẓon determiner (article) takes the final position of the DP, hence, it functions post-nominally. The study showed the disparity in terms of the grammar of headedness. Although headedness is a major aspect of variation study, such studies are limited to phrases like the Noun phrase, Verb phrase etc.

Kwokwo (2012) carried out *A morphosyntactic analysis of functional categories in English and Iẓon languages*. In his work, he focused on the identification and description of functional categories in English and Iẓon. Corroborating Kayne (2005) position that syntactic parameters are features of functional elements, Kwokwo's study primarily based on investigating the derivational processes involving functional elements. The crux of the study was on how features of functional elements such as the Determiner, Aspect, Agreement and Tense are checked in the Minimalist tradition; head, Specifier and complement features; as well as the head parameter and Wh-parameter. The other areas the study looked at were case feature checking and negation. The work succeeded in studying the Iẓon language side-side with the English language.

Although, the works we have reviewed in this study are related and have shown strong points and relevance to this study and other such studies, there is an overt gap in literature. None has specifically considered the overt variations that exist between English and Iẓon on the grammar of adposition, a gap this study intends to fill. The Minimalist Program (hereafter, MP) was introduced by Chomsky in 1995. It is a refinement or a modification of his earlier models of the Generative Grammar. The MP is a total walk-out from the excessive complexities that characterised earlier grammatical models as it aims to create a model of language that sheds off unnecessary steps in the representation of the derivation of a sentence (Chomsky, 1995). The major task in MP has been to simplify the theory of the syntax of natural language to the greatest possible extent. Allot (2003) noted that, the leading idea of minimalist program is the rejection of all devices and constructs apart from those that are absolutely essential on conceptual ground. The core assumption of the MP is that grammars are minimally complex, perfect systems of optimal design. According to Razaghi et al. (2015), the thrust of the MP is economy in derivation and the simplicity of grammar resulting in uniformity, rapidity, and ease of language acquisition on the part of human language acquirers. The syntactic component in the MP is made up of the computational system and the lexicon. The computational system is the hub of the operations in the MP. As the name implies, it is an abstract computational system that carries out the combinations and arrangements of lexical items in a particular order. Some of the operations of the computational system include *Operation Select*, *Operation Merge*, and *Operation Move*. The computational system generates structures or derivations by selecting lexical items from the lexicon. The second operation (*merge*) is to combine lexical items selected from the lexicon to form larger structures. Further, the lexicon is a key concept in the MP. The MP like the earlier generative grammatical concepts holds that the lexicon contains all the words of a language. In addition, MP holds that the lexicon is the language faculty where all lexical items are sorted out and fully inflected before lifting them to the computational component, (Marantz, 1995). Going by the above premise, Radford (1997) added that "the lexicon is a mental dictionary that contains the list of all the words in a language and their idiosyncratic linguistics properties" (p. 248). The rationale for the MP is its assumption that the lexicon houses all the lexical items of a language; fully inflected and providing the conditions for their cohabitation. This assumption foregrounds the position a lexical item is likely to occur in relation to other lexical items in a construction. A construction that defies the conditions of the lexicon is considered ungrammatical (Nwala, 2016). On the other hand, Contrastive Analysis (henceforth, CA) according to Gast (2014), is a

scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner. The thrust of CA propounded by Lado in his *Linguistics Across Cultures* according to Al-Khresheh (2016), is that, it is possible to identify areas of difficulties a particular language present to L₂ speakers by systematically comparing the two languages. CA is a tool that is designed to aid the teaching and learning of second language by carefully studying the structures of both languages with the view to contrasting and comparing their structures. Oluikpe (1981) cited in Al-Khresheh (2016), noted that CA concerns itself with the similarities and dissimilarities existing between two or more languages at specific levels such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. He noted that as a descriptive tool of languages in parallel, it involves a systematic examination of the languages with the identification of the structural similarities and dissimilarities in view, by employing a desired theoretical framework.

CA as a theory is built around three major assumptions, they include:

- i. First language interference is the primary cause of difficulties in learning a new language.
- ii. The difficulties caused by the first language are predictable by contrastive analysis.
- iii. In order to reduce difficulties L2 learners face in the learning process, teaching materials should be products of CA.

Lado (1957) cited in Al-Khresheh (2016) averred that “in the comparison between native and foreign languages, lies the key to ease or difficult in second language learning. Those elements that are similar to the (learner’s) native language will be simple, and those elements that are different will be difficult” (p. 15).

3. Methodology

The study which employed the descriptive research design sourced its data from utterances of literate and illiterate native speakers of the central Iẓon dialect and other literature in Iẓon. The data for this study were analysed using the descriptive and comparative methods. The descriptive analysis provided explanations to the structures and its elements.

4. Data analysis

The study presents and analysed the English data before those on Iẓon. it also employed the aid of simple tree diagrams to further show the structural difference between English and Iẓon on the grammar of adposition.

1. (a) English: from Yenagoa {preposition}

Figure 1a: Tree diagram showing the structure of English verbal group with postposition

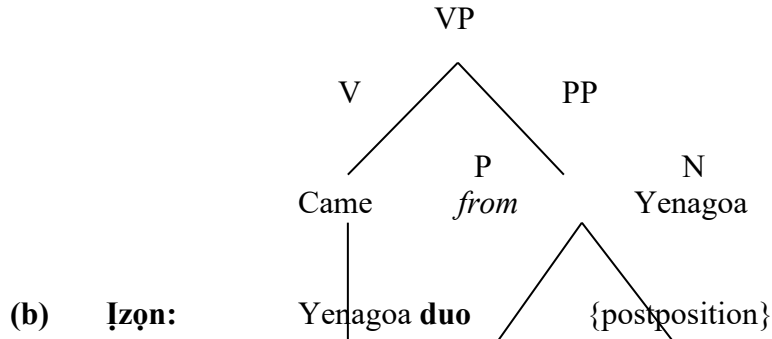
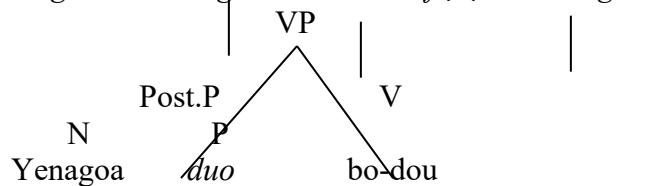


Figure 1b: Tree diagram showing the structure of Iẓon verbal group with postposition



2. (a) English: in the bag {preposition}

Figure 2a: Tree diagram showing the structure of English verbal group with postposition

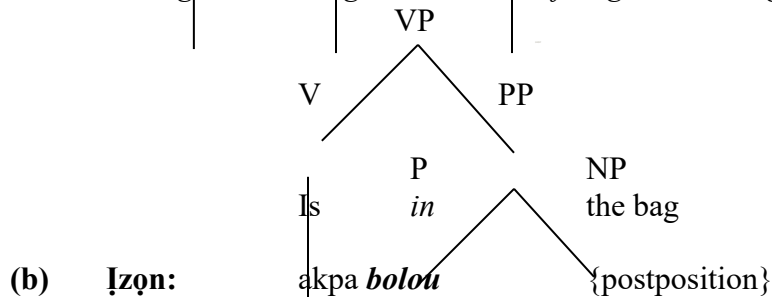


Figure 2b: Tree diagram showing the structure of Iẓon verbal group with postposition

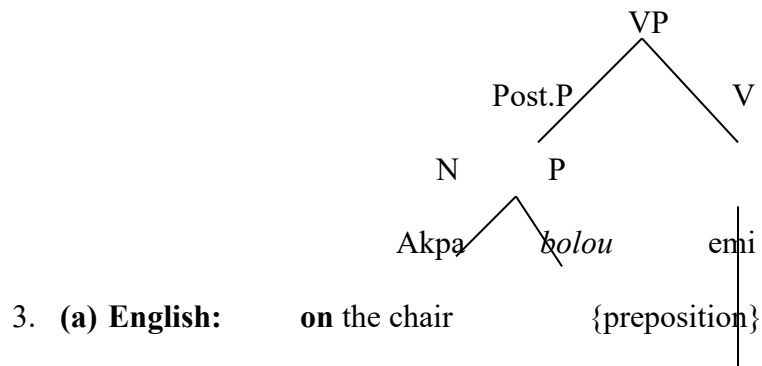


Figure 3a: Tree diagram showing the structure of English verbal group with postposition

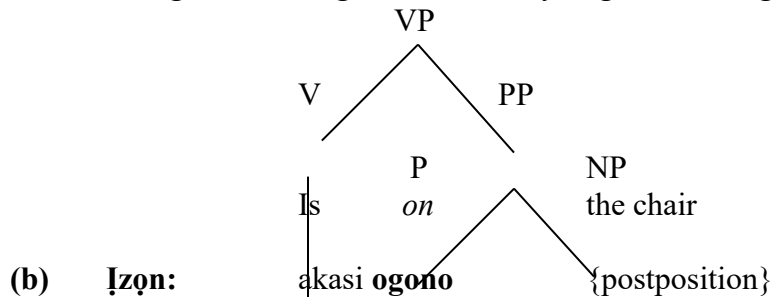


Figure 3b: Tree diagram showing the structure of Izoñ verbal group with postposition

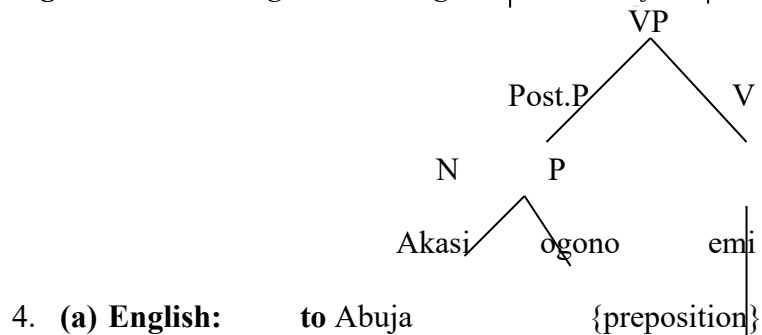


Figure 4a: Tree diagram showing the structure of English verbal group with postposition

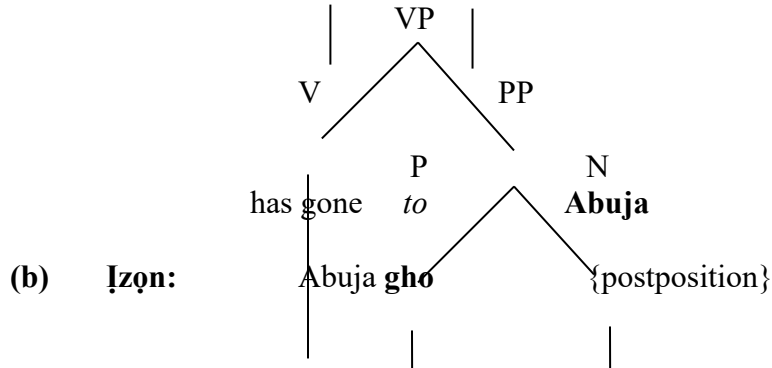
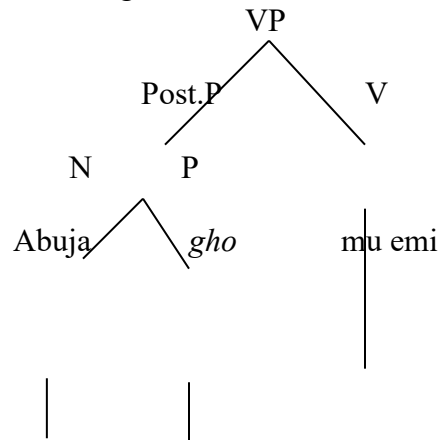
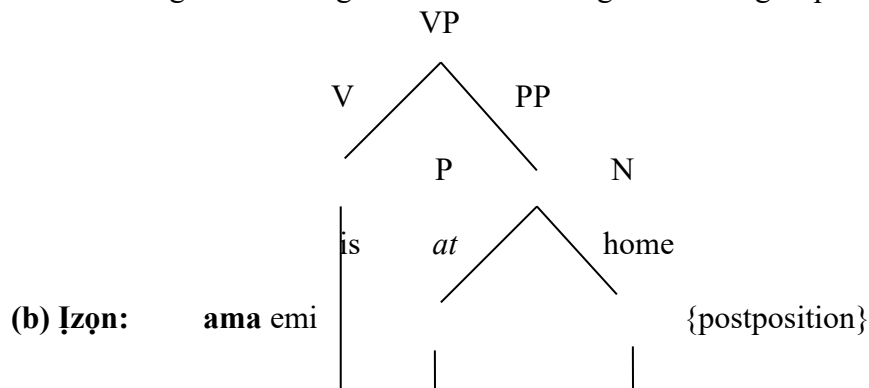
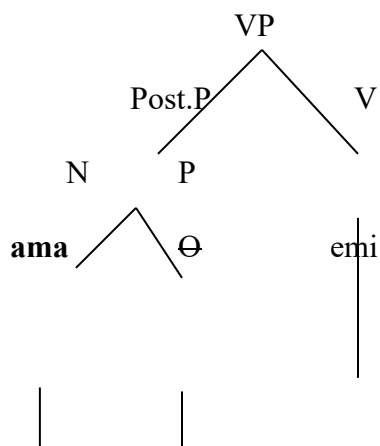


Figure 4.53b Tree diagram showing the structure of Iẓon verbal group with postposition

Evident from the illustration above is the syntactic variation of the adpositions which are in bold faces in Iẓon and English. The Iẓon constructions have the adpositions at the right side, after the object, while the adpositions in the English constructions precede the objects of the constructions. It then follows that for a construction to be adjudged grammatical and converge both at the PF and LF levels in Iẓon, such construction must religiously follow this specification rule. The researchers noted earlier that the MP is very suitable for this study because of its assumptions. The MP holds that every native speaker of a language is naturally endowed with a mental dictionary called the lexicon which houses all the lexical items of the language, and most especially, specifies the conditions for the cohabitation of lexical items in the language. Following this argument, the Iẓon man is naturally equipped with a lexicon that houses the Iẓon lexical items and the specification rules guiding the concatenation of same. Thus, the variations in the constructions above are mere manifestations of the rules guiding the co-occurrence of lexical items.

5. (a) English: **is at home** {preposition}

Figure 5a: Tree diagram showing the structure of English verbal group with postposition**Figure 5b:** Tree diagram showing the structure of Iẓon verbal group with postposition



The tree diagrams are used to further elucidate the structural parametric variation the researcher discovered in the grammar of adpositions in Izo and English sentences. Although, it has been established that Izo is an SOV structured language, for the purpose of emphasis, the researchers' observation shows that the V nodes terminate all the Izo tree diagrams, while in English, it is the NP or N nodes that ends the constructions. These structural variations observed in these languages are manifestations of the different parameters in the grammar or more precisely, in the lexicon of the languages. .

Furthermore, the adposition (postposition) in data 5b is not morphologically realized (which is marked as Θ Empty Category EC) yet well captured in the tacit knowledge of native speakers. This is a remarkable feature in Izo which is not found in English and may be a source of possible difficulty for the Izo/English learner as such learner may find it difficult to replicate such sentence in English, or end up transferring this Izo feature into the English language, resulting in errors.

For instance, Suzi *ama emi* (Suzi is AT home) the adposition in this sentence is *at* but because in Izo the adposition is not realized morphologically the Izo English learner is not only confronted with the temptation of leaving out the adposition, deciding the suitable preposition for such construction becomes another challenge. This has remained a major challenge to speakers of English as second language. Below the Izo adpositions are moved to the position before the objects as found in the English variants

6. *Ari bo dou *duo* Yenagoa
7. *Fun bi emi *bolou* akpa
8. *Eni fun emi *ogono* akasi
9. *Ilayefa mu emi *gho* Abuja

The constructions 6-9 are all ungrammatical because the lexical items are not ordered following the conditions for cohabitation obtainable in the Izo lexicon.

5. Conclusion

The Izo rules allow adpositions to occur after the objects of sentences. On the other hand, in English, the rules are different. Adpositions by English rules must precede the objects in constructions, any structure that goes contrary to these automatically results in ungrammaticality and such cannot converge at the PF and LF levels. As observed above, moving the Izo adpositions to the position before the objects as found in the English variants will result to ungrammaticality, and such construction will definitely crash. The ill-formed constructions

above corroborate the assumptions of CA that the differences existing between languages constitute learning problems for non-native speakers who always transfer structures acquired from the L1 to the target language which result to ungrammatical constructions.

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