A Variation Study of English and Ịzọn Adjectives

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Abstract
Variation between first languages and target languages have been highlighted as the bane to gaining proficiency in second languages. Thus, conflating Lado's Contrastive Analysis and Chomsky's Minimalist Program, this study examined the behaviours of adjectives in English and Ịzọn languages in order to highlight areas of dissimilarities that could hinder the learning of the English language by native speakers of the Izon language. The study employed the descriptive methodology. The data for the study were obtained from grammar texts and interpreted by native speakers of Izon. The study discovered overt variation in the grading of adjectives as well as the positions of the predicative adjectives. It therefore, recommends that teachers of Ịzọn/English bilinguals adopt teaching strategies that will assist learners overcome the challenges that ensue as a result of the variation and to depend on empirical researches like this study as instructional material. The study concluded that the morphological variations and the structural divergence in the adjectival representations in both languages make Ịzọn learners of the English language vulnerable to errors.

Keywords: *Language, adjective, English, Ịzọn, Variation.*

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1. Introduction

Every language is structured in a unique and orderly way with peculiar rules and principles. 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 (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. The variation in the basic sentence structure of a language: position and directionality of sentence elements such as adjectives, determiners, prepositions, 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. Nwizug and Nawala (2021) noted that "syntactic constructions can be equated with building in architecture. Every finished well-constructed architectural design is a result of the proper placement of the blocks. These blocks are laid properly on one another in

order to achieve a complete structure" (p. 2). Similarly, a sentence is adjudged to be grammatical if and only if it religiously follows the specification rules guiding the structural arrangement of sentences in the language. Drawing from the position above, it follows that the position a constituent occurs in a sentence is very crucial. This is to say constituents of derivations are not put together haphazardly; for any combination of morphemes and words to qualify as a sentence, such combination must follow specific grammatical rules. Consider the examples below;

1. Release, not to be executed
2. Release not, to be executed

The two constructions above are identical structurally and otherwise. However, the first example is the direct opposite of the second. The difference in the meanings of these constructions is triggered by the position of the coma (,). If a coma that seems so insignificant could trigger such, it means all sentential elements, and the positions they occur are very important in the construction of meaning. The art of combining linguistic items is not new to second language learners, as such learners are considered linguistic adults who already have the knowledge of the workings of a language (L1). However, it is argued in the literature that an L2 learner is likely to produce ungrammatical constructions if the system of his L1 is different from the system of the target language. The premise above is the motivation behind this variation study of the adjectival class.

English is arguably the dominant language in Nigeria. This is because it has assumed an unquestionable position in the country. In the midst of over 450 indigenous languages (Adegbite, 2003) the English language plays the role of language of instruction from the kindergarten to the highest level of education in Nigeria. This is in spite of the language policy on education that proposed the use of indigenous languages at some levels. The English language has become a scar on the forehead of Nigerians and a cancer in the heart of Nigerian indigenous languages.

This dominance has also impacted speakers of Ịzọn language, who now use English as a second language. In this situation, native speakers of Ịzọn learn English as a second language. With the soaring status of English world over, it has become the tool with which even native speakers of Ịzọn use at the global scene. As such speakers of Ịzọn who learn English as a second language must strive to be proficient, at least attain near-native speakers' competence in the use of English.

Adjectives fall under the open word class. They basically modify or qualify a noun and tell more about the noun or its equivalent. Nwala (2016) insisted that adjectives act in different ways, foregrounding the imports of expressions. In every language, adjectives used in expressions inform us about the properties of the noun referred to. The English language according to Quirk and Greenbuaum (1973), categorised adjectives according to their position in a construction, and the three categories are attributive adjectives, predicative adjectives and the postpositive adjectives.

However, the behaviours of adjectives differ from language to language. For instance, in English language, according to Nwala (2016) adjectives do not inflect like the nouns but have the propensity of gradability. According to him, English has three major classes taking different morphological process of gradability; those taking the - *er* and *est* which are regarded as the regular morphological markers for grading (big – bigger – biggest); the next class uses periphrastic comparative markers such as *more* and *most*. The last class of adjective follows an irregular process – *good – better – best*; *bad – worse – worst*.

2. Theoretical Framework

The Minimalist Program

The Minimalist Program (hereafter, MP) is a theory of Universal Grammar which conceives language as an optimal product of the Phonological Form and Logical Form interfaces conditions.

This position corroborates Zwart (1998) argument that the MP deals with the issue of linking sound and meaning. In the MP, language is considered to be in operation as a network in the cognitive domain of its users. MP holds that there is a section of the brain that is totally dedicated to language operations, Chomsky (1995) referred to this section as faculty of language (FL) and I-language and noted that it is made up of two systems; the *cognitive and the performance systems.*
The MP as a theory is built around some core concepts. One of these is the lexicon. The lexicon is the word hub of the language faculty. According to Marantz, 1995) in the lexicon, all lexical items are sorted out and fully inflected before lifting to the computational component.

Contrastive Analysis
According to Gast (2014) CA 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 L_2 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.
CA holds that the more the structures of the source language are different from those of the target language, the more difficulty is expected. It is argued in the literature that the differences between languages constitute learning problems for non-native speakers who always transfer structures acquired from their L1 to the target language, probably an L2 or FL.
These theoretical perspectives afford this study the necessary tools for the careful examination of the operations of Adjectives in English and Ịzọn.

Literature Review
Adjective is a critical component of linguistic structure and has been extensively studied for its syntactic, semantic, and typological characteristics. Syntactically, adjectives can be attributive or predicative, and research has examined their hierarchical order when multiple adjectives modify a noun. Semantically, adjectives are analysed for their gradability, intersective, subsective, and privative properties, affecting the meaning they impart to nouns. Typologically, languages display significant variation in adjective usage, with some utilizing distinct adjective classes and others employing stative verbs or participles. This diverse linguistic behavior underscores adjectives' integral role in language, enhancing descriptive precision and nuance.
Many empirical parametric research that have attempted to compare the English language with indigenous languages in Nigeria, such as Ịzọn, have been conducted. The various criteria used in the formation of complex sentences in Ịzọn and English were examined by Richard (2024). In contrast to dependent clauses, which only appear at the beginning of complex constructions, independent clauses in English are promiscuous and can arise at any point in complex structures, according to the study. English dependent clauses, particularly relative clauses, were likewise found to be susceptible to embedding. I.e., a clause enclosed in another clause. That being said, Ịzọn does not have this parameter. According to the study's findings, the parametric deviations found would provide significant difficulties for Ịzọn-leaners of English language.
Similar to this, Kwowo (2015) discussed the behaviour and positioning of the determiner in his study of determiner phrases (DP) in English and Ịzọn. According to the study, the English obligatory determiner (article) always appears first in a phrase. On the other hand, this particular determiner appears at the end of the DP in Ịzọn. According to the study's findings, there is a blatant

difference in the grammar of headedness. It examined some aspects of the linguistic variation between English and Ịzọn, but not the issues raised by this study, even though it was a comparative study. Similarly, Priye and Nwala (2019) looked into the differences between headedness in English and Ịzọn. The study contended that although there are obvious structural differences between the languages in terms of where the heads are in noun phrases, there are also commonalities in other areas, such as how demonstratives, adjectives, and appositives behave. A few other studies (Adeji, 2018; Farinde & Omolaiye, 2021; Kwokwo, 2016) have examined syntactic differences between English and other Nigerian languages; however, none have made an effort to look into the various factors that apply to the usage and behaviour of adjectives in English and Ịzọn. The goal of this work is to close this gap.

3. Methodology

The descriptive research design was employed in the study, using both primary and secondary data. Data on Ịzọn were derived from native speaker's intuition and introspection and other Ịzọn literature while data on English were sourced from select expression from English grammar textbooks. The data then were analysed using a comparative analysis of adjectives in English and Ịzọn languages.

4. Data Presentation and Discussion

This section presents the English and Ịzọn adjectives in terms of their behaviour and structure contrastively for analysis. It looks at major areas of variations between the two languages such as the position adjectives occur in sentences and adjective gradings.

Data 1

Table 1: English Adjectives

	Positive Form	Comparative Form	Superlative Form
1.	Tall	Taller	Tallest
2.	Big	Bigger	Biggest
3.	Good	Better	Best
4.	Bad	Worse	Worst
5.	Beautiful	More beautiful	Most beautiful
6.	Expensive	More expensive	Most expensive

(Eyisi, 2008)

Table 2: Equivalent of Ịzọn Adjectives

	Positive Form	Comparative Form	Superlative Form
1.	Dangai	Dangai dein	Dangai dein
2.	Duba	Duba dein	Duba dein
3.	Ebi	Ebi dein	Ebi dein

4.	Feu kuro	Feu kuro dein	Feu kuro dein
5.	Ebi	Ebi dein	Ebi dein
6.	Sei	Sei dein	Sei dein

Tables **one** and **two** present selected adjective in English and Ịzọn. In English, unlike the nouns, adjectives do not inflect for number or tense as do the verbs, rather, adjectives are graded. The grading of adjectives in English follow three different morphological methods. The first category like examples 1 and 2 on table **one** are those adjectives that are graded regularly using the 'er' and 'est' inflectional markers to show their comparative and superlative forms. The second, are those that are graded following irregular process like examples 3 and 4 on table **one**, and the last category use the periphrastic markers 'more' and 'most' to mark the comparative and superlative forms like example 5 and 6 However, unlike the English adjectives, adjectives in Ịzọn behave quite differently as observed in table **two**. As illustrated above, all Ịzọn adjectives follow the same pattern of grading. That is, the comparative and superlative forms take the periphrastic marker '*dein'* In other words, Ịzọn does not show any difference in the grading of the comparative and superlative. Further, Ịzọn adjectives are not categorised into groups like English adjectives.
The marker, *'dein'* which means *than* is added to the base form of all adjectives in Ịzọn in order to realise either the comparative or the superlative forms. This is further illustrated below in sentences

Tall

1. ENG: Tari is tall
   ỊZỌN: Tari dangai emi
   [*Tari tall is*]

2. ENG: Tari is taller than Ebiere
   ỊZỌN: Tari dangai Ebiere dein emi
   [*Tari tall Ebiere than is*]

3. ENG: Tari is the tallest in the house
   ỊZỌN: Tari dangai dein wari bolou bi
   [*Tari tall than house in the*]

The English adjectives as illustrated in the sentences above manifested different morphological behaviour to show the corresponding gradings. From **tall** which is the base form we realized **taller** the comparative form and then **tallest** the superlative form. However, unlike the English adjectives, the Ịzọn adjective **dangai** which equals **tall** in English does not manifest these traits. The Ịzọn adjective *dangai* takes the periphrastic marker *dein* to mark its comparative and superlative forms.

Good

4. ENG: Seiyefa is good
   ỊZỌN: Seiyefa ebi emi
   [*Seiyefa good is*]

5. ENG: Seiyefa is better than Tonye
IZỌN: Seiyefa ebi Tonye dein emi
[*Seiyefa good Tonye than is*]

6. ENG: Seiyefa is the best in the team
IZỌN: Seiyefa ebi dein ogbo bolou bi
[*Seiyefa good than group in the*]

Expensive

7. ENG: The house is expensive
IZỌN: Wari bi tubo-kuro emi
[*House the buy-strong is*]

8. ENG: The house is more expensive
IZỌN: Wari bi tubo-kuro dein emi
[*house the buy-strong than is*]

9. ENG: The house is most expensive
IZỌN: Wari bi tubo-kuro dein emi
[*house the buy-strong than is*]

The sentences above presented us with the behaviour of adjectives in English and Izọn languages in terms of grading. The aim was to understand if the adjectives in both languages behave or manifest the same gradable features. In English, adjectives are grouped into regular, irregular and adjectives that take periphrastic words to mark grading. While the regular adjectives as in sentence 1 above *tall* is a regular adjective that marks it comparative and superlative forms through the morphological process of adding 'er' and 'est' respectively. Furthermore, sentence 4 presents us with the irregular adjective *good.* This, unlike the regular English adjectives do not follow any regular, pattern or maintain consistency in marking its comparative and superlative forms. Like the irregular English verbs, the realisation of the comparative and superlative forms of this category of adjectives is usually unpredictable. Hence from the positive form *good* the comparative is *better* while the superlative form is *best.*

The third category is that which marks its comparative and superlative forms through periphrastic words *more* and *most* respectively. This is as we see in sentence 7 above. While the positive form of the adjective is *expensive,* to mark the comparative, *more is added*, hence we have *more expensive* same with the superlative which becomes *most expensive.*

On the other hand, as we observed in the sentences above, there is an overt variation is the behaviour of Izọn adjectives. First, adjectives in Izọn are not categorized differently as we see in English. Second, the grading of adjectives in Izọn morphologically manifest only the positive form and the comparative form. The case of superlative is not realised morphologically, but implicated through the context. For instance, in sentence 1, the adjective *dangai* is in its base/positive form, the comparative of this adjective now takes a periphrastic marker *dein* post adjectively. Hence, *dangai dein* as the comparative grading. The case of the superlative, as mentioned above, is not realised differently from the comparative grading. In other words, it follows the process of the comparative grading. Thus, morphologically, one cannot differentiate the comparative from the superlative. However, from the context, native speakers are able to infer that the adjective is in its superlative form. It can also be argued that Izọn adjective grading does not realise the superlative form morphologically.

Further, in sentence 4, we sampled another class of adjectives, precisely what is termed as irregular in English language. However, unlike the English irregular adjectives, the Ịzọn equivalents maintained the same features as the case of the first category of adjectives. The same was observed in the description of the last category of adjectives (periphrastic). The sentences are recast below for better understanding:

Category one (Regular Adjectives)

ENG:	Tari is tall	(positive)
ỊZỌN:	Tari dangai emi	
ENG:	Tari is taller than Ebiere	(comparative)
ỊZỌN:	Tari dangai Ebiere dein emi	
ENG:	Tari is the tallest in the house	(superlative)
ỊZỌN:	Tari dangai dein wari bolou bi	

Category two (Irregular Adjectives)

ENG:	Seiyefa is good	(positive)
ỊZỌN:	Seiyefa ebi emi	
ENG:	Seiyefa is better than Tonye	(comparative)
ỊZỌN:	Seiyefa ebi Tonye dein emi	
ENG:	Seiyefa is the best in the team	(superlative)
ỊZỌN:	Seiyefa ebi dein ogbo bolou bi	

Category three (Periphrastic Adjectives)

ENG:	The house is expensive	(positive)
ỊZỌN:	Wari bi tubo-kuro emi	
ENG:	The house is more expensive	(comparative)
ỊZỌN:	Wari bi tubo-kuro dein emi	
ENG:	The house is most expensive	(superlative)
ỊZỌN:	Wari bi tubo-kuro dein emi	

From the foregoing, as already observed above, the Ịzọn adjectives in all category maintained the feature of sameness in its gradings.

Structural Variation of English/Ịzọn Demonstrative Adjectives

In English, adjectives are also described based on the positions they occur in phrases or sentences. In this regard we have the attributive adjectives which syntactically precede the noun they modify. The other category is called the predicative adjectives which according to Nwala (2015) occurs within the predicate slot of the sentence. Such adjectives are usually part of the predicate. In other words, they occur at a position after the verb. This is illustrated with the sentences below:

10. The *tall* man is coming **attributive**
11. The good man came **attributive**
12. The *handsome* boy came **attributive**

13. The man is *tall* **predicative**
14. The house is *beautiful* **predicative**
15. The boy is *handsome* **predicative**

Sentences 10-15 are all constructions having adjectives. While sentences 10-12 are attributive sentences, 13-15 are predicative adjectives. As shown above, all the attributive adjectives precede the nouns they modify. That is, they linearly occur at a position before the nouns they modify. The predicative adjectives as shown in sentences 13-15 linearly occur at the predicate environment. In examples above, they are the last constituents on the constructions. This then has given us syntactic behaviour of adjectives in English. Now we turn to their Ịzọn equivalents as presented in the following sentences:

16. *Dangai* kimi bi bo emi **attributive**
17. *Ebi* tobou bi bo dou **attributive**
18. *Ebi* tobou bi bo dou **attributive**
19. Kimi bi *dangai* emi **predicative**
20. Wari bi *ebinimi* **predicative**
21. Tobou bi *ebinimi* **predicative**

From the sentences above, it is observed that Ịzọn adjectives like those of the English also occur attributively, that is before the nouns they modify and predicatively, occurring at the region of the predicate. This is observed to be a common feature between the two languages. However, a variation is observed with the position of the predicative adjectives. Apart from the established knowledge of Ịzọn verbs occurring at the final positions of construction, being an SOV language, the structure of the comparative and the superlative periphrastic adjectives is another area of variation observed in this study. This is presented below:

ENG: The house is *more* **expensive** (comparative)
ỊZỌN: Wari bi **tubo-kuro** *dein* emi

ENG: The house is *most* **expensive** (superlative)
ỊZỌN: Wari bi **tubo-kuro** *dein* emi

In English, the periphrastic morpheme *more* and *most* usually precedes the adjectives they are grading. However, in Ịzọn the reverse is the case. As observed above, the periphrastic morpheme in Ịzọn *dein* occurs after the adjective it grades. This is another area of variation as observed in this study.

Implications for the Ịzọn/English bilinguals

The study through the analyses of both English and Ịzọn data has observed enormous variations in the behaviour of adjectives. Thus, corroborating the assumptions of CA, these areas of differences pose potential problems to the Ịzọn learners of the English language. CA assumes that the differences prevalent in two languages are bases for errors that occur in L2 learning. Furthermore, MP as a mentalist grammar insists that the second language learner is a linguistic adult who has already possessed the systems of his first language in his lexicon. This is argued to work as a computational system (Chomsky, 1995). In other words, the system of selecting, merging and moving the constituents of construction is automated to follow the specification rules of the L1 and the brain of native speakers are already wired to function as such. Thus, selecting the

constituents of structures in the L2 may yield ill-formed structures as a result of the differences in the specification rules of the L2. For instance, because Ịzọn does not categorise adjectives into regular, irregular and periphrastic adjectives, but has a simple system of adding the marker *dein* to realise the comparative grade, the Ịzọn learner of English may end up producing it erroneously and also fall to the temptation of overgeneralising of the English regular grading *big – bigger – biggest* to other categories of adjectives like *bad - badder – baddest.*

Another area of potential challenge is the structure/position of the adjective in derivations. As noted above, the periphrastic morphemes marking the comparative and superlative adjectives in English *more* and *most* usually precede the adjectives they are grading. Unlike English, in Ịzọn the periphrastic morpheme *dein* occurs after the adjective it grades. This difference could also complicate and hinder the formation of grammatically accepted derivations.

Conclusions

This study has succeeded in its aim by bringing to the fore aspects of morphological variation as well as structural variation in English and Ịzọn adjectives. Findings have shown that there are variations in the behaviour of adjectives in English and Ịzọn. The study has noted that apart from the established knowledge of Ịzọn verbs occurring at the final positions of construction, being an SOV language, this study has shown that the structure of the comparative and the superlative periphrastic adjectives is another area of variation between English and Ịzọn.

Furthermore, the morphological variations and the structural divergence in the adjectival representations in both languages make Ịzọn learners of the English language vulnerable to errors. Succinctly, this discourse has not only advanced the assumptions of CA and Universal Grammar, it has also added to scholarly studies on the Ịzọn grammar.

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