



## **A Morphological Analysis of English-Igbo Merged Verbs in Code-mixed Utterances**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the influence of Igbo morphemes on English verb structure in code-mixed/switched utterances. There is overwhelming evidence that English and Igbo languages interfere with each other in informal conversations of the Igbo-English bilinguals. This calls for researches to ascertain the degree of English dominance on Igbo language or vice versa. This paper, therefore, examines informal conversations of the Igbo-English bilinguals with particular focus on the verb structure. The paper adopted Corpus Linguistic framework for data collection and Token approach for data description. Data analysis and findings reveal that English verbs can easily be merged with Igbo affixes in code-switched utterances of the English-Igbo bilinguals. They also reveal that a new language known as Engli-Igbo has been formed by the merger. This leads to the conclusion that Engli-Igbo is a present reality. Based on this, this paper recommends further researches on Engli-Igbo linguistic merger in the areas of phonological, syntactic and other areas of morphology.

### **INTRODUCTION**

English language is dominating many Nigerian languages but its dominance on Igbo language is overwhelming. Research works on Igbo-English bilingualism have shown that Igbo language experiences the highest degree of English language influence among Nigerian native languages (Uduma, 2010, Ajunwa, 2008). This has made some Igbo-English language analysts to argue that Igbo language in its purity no longer exist since one can hardly hear a sequence of utterance in Igbo without the influence of English in either phonological, morphological or syntactical level of language. This is a clear evidence of language dominance: English language in this case is ranked high domains (Ogbonna, 2008). What people read from Igbo grammar books

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has, therefore, become a model for Igbo language usages; such Igbo language does not have native speakers.

On the other hand, researches in English as a second language (ESL) have also shown that the native languages are also influencing the structure of English grammar at different levels of linguistic analysis. Based on the above, this research seeks to examine the nature of influence of Igbo verbs on the English language verb structure. It also seeks to find out if the incorporation of English morphemes into Igbo verbs is as a result of lack of appropriate words/morphemes in Igbo to express the affected concept or if it is the case of language dominance. It is hoped that this research will help researches in the domain of bilingualism or interlanguage to have a better understanding of the nature of English influence on native Nigerian languages; it will also provide clearer view of English language dominance on weak languages of the world.

### **Theoretical Framework, Research Methodology and Data Description**

This research is hinged on Corpus linguistics framework. The aim of Corpus Linguistics is to analyse natural languages as to provide insight to how “language uses varies in different situations such as spoken versus written, or formal interactions versus causal conversations” (Reppen and Simpson-Vlach, 2010, p. 89). Corpus Linguistics relies greatly on “a large and principled collection of natural texts, known as a ‘corpus’ as the basis for analysis” (Conrad and Reppen, 1998, P. 4 cited in Reppen and Simpson-Vlach, 2010, P. 89).

In its recent application, Corpus Linguistics is computer based (i.e. computerized corpora). At the time of data collection for this study, there were no computerized English-Igbo corpora. We therefore, resorted to old manual method. Data were therefore collected at different conversational settings that involve both educated and non educated Igbo-English bilinguals. This research also adopted the Token approach to language description which examines the actual instances of language (Larson Freeman and Decarrico, 2010). The utterances collected are rendered in the forms they occur in their contexts of use.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

Morphology is a branch of linguistics which studies the internal structure of words. This is different from phonology which shows how sounds are systematically arranged to form words. Morphology is therefore a technical term given to the level of grammar “that studies the ways morphemes organize themselves to form words” (Anagbogu, Mba & Eme, 2010). Morphology, on the other hand shows how units of word (i.e. morphemes) interacts to establish some relationship. Morphological analysis therefore “consists of the identification of parts or constituents of words” (Haspelmath and Sims, 2010, P. 3) and how the units combine to yield words.

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It is believed that every language has its distinctive morphological entities or system of word combination. However, linguists have observed that the degree by which languages of the world depend on morphology varies (Haspelmath and Sims, 2010). Based on this, human languages are divided into two morphological continuum: analytic and synthetic languages. Languages that their morphology plays a relatively modest role are called analytic. Such languages include English, Yoruba, etc; whereas languages that have extra-ordinary dependence on morphology are called synthetic. In such languages, one word may correspond to a sequence of utterance in another language. Igbo language is one of such languages as shown below:

Example 1:

Igbo	O lala
Gloss	he go (past)
English	He has gone.

### **The Relationship between English and Igbo Languages**

In Nigeria, Igbo and English languages are constantly in contact with each other both at formal and informal settings especially in the South-east zone of Nigeria where Igbo speakers are domiciled. Igbo is both the native tongue and one of the official languages of the states in the South-East zone of Nigeria (FRN 1999). It is also one of the three (3) major languages approved by the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Statistics shows that approximately 20 million of Igbo descents in Nigeria speak Igbo (Wikipedia, 2012).

English language, on the other hand, is the official language of Nigeria as well as language of commerce, formal education, journalism, and legal proceedings (Ogbonna, 2008). The language came to Nigeria through colonialism between 1912 and 1960. Ever since then, English has played prominent roles in the affairs of the nation and its citizenry. Today in Nigeria, English is accorded greater role both in Nigeria's policy on language, education and the people's attitude (FRN, 1999, Ogbonna, 2008).

### **The Relationship between English and Igbo Verbs**

The Igbo verbs, like English verbs, express actions. That is, they state what the subjects do. Like the English verb, Igbo verb structure licences morphological operation of affixation, that is, the accommodation of prefix and suffix as demonstrated below:

	Verb	Root morpheme	Prefix	Suffix
Igbo	juo	ju	-	o
	ajuola	ju'	a	o/la
English	unacceptable	Accept	un	able

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Igbo verb structure, in many instances, behave like the English verb structure. In addition to the above example, the verb of both languages also accommodate double suffix.

Example 2:

Igbo	→	ju		juo	la	
				<sub>1</sub>	<sub>2</sub>	
English	→	forget		forget	ful	ness
					<sub>1</sub>	<sub>2</sub>

This may account for the easy assimilation of Igbo morphemes into English verb roots.

### **Data Analysis**

In data analysis, the italicized morphemes stand for Igbo morphemes while the non italicized one form the English verb morphemes. The letters in brackets are dropped in the English-Igbo verb constructions.

From Table 1, there is evidence that English verbs assimilates Igbo morphemes (prefix and suffix) easily in code-switched/mixed utterances. The analysis shows that the suffix is the most accommodated morpheme. Under the sub-heading method for classifying the verb category, we shall demonstrate how we reached to the conclusion that the isolated words are verbs and that the attached morphemes are Igbo verb morphemes.

There is also evidence of the English verbs accommodating more than one suffix which (though) is among the characteristics of affixation in Igbo and English. However, there are some English words that refused to be combined with Igbo affixes as exemplified in Table 2.

The verbs in table two find it difficult to accommodate Igbo morphemes. This shows that further research on this area will reveal many more such verbs. Why such English verbs refuse to co-join with Igbo verb affixes is beyond the scope of this study. However, the study arrived at the above conclusion based on the following facts:

- a) Within the period of data collection, there was no evidence of utterance presenting the verbs joined with Igbo morphemes.
- b) We tried to attach some Igbo morphemes to the verbs to see if they can be used in utterances as we presented them in table 2. We found no agreement between the verbs and the attached morphemes. It rather looked as if we were forcing Igbo morphemes on them

However, the English verb 'escape' presented a unique behaviour. In a code-mixed or switched Igbo-English utterance, 'escape' can be used in its pure form as in

**Table 1:** Analysis of English Igbo Verbs.

Utterances	Status of speaker	Verb	Number of morphemes	Language components		Status of morphemes			English translation	Igbo translation
				English	Igbo	Verb root	Prefix	Suffix		
a) O <i>likiri</i> Ada	Graduate/non-graduate	<i>Likiri</i>	3	lik(e)	<i>i/ri</i>	lik(e)	-	<i>i/ri</i>	likes	<i>huru n'anya</i>
b) O <i>housuru</i> madu isi	G/NG	<i>Housuru</i>	3	Hous(e)	<i>u/ru</i>	house	-	<i>u/ru</i>	housed	
c) O <i>painuru</i> m	G/NG	<i>Painuru</i>	3	Pain	<i>u/ru</i>	pain	-	<i>u/ru</i>	pained	<i>furu ufu</i>
d) O <i>headiri</i> ulo akwukwo for years	G/NG	<i>Headiri</i>	3	Head	<i>i/i</i>	head	-	<i>i/ri</i>	headed	<i>chiri</i>
e) O <i>suitighi</i> gi	G/NG	<i>Suitighi</i>	3	Suit	<i>i/ghi</i>	suit	-	<i>u/ghi</i>	does not fit or suit	<i>dighi mma</i>
f) O na <i>eheadi</i> ulo akwukwo		<i>Eheadi</i>	3	Head	<i>e/i</i>	head	E	<i>e</i>	heads	<i>na-achi</i>
g) I <i>writiala</i> letter ahu	G/NG	<i>Writiala</i>	3	writ(e)	<i>ia/la</i>	writ(e)	E	<i>ia/la</i>	have written	<i>de la</i>
h) Anyi <i>ereachiela</i> agreement	G/NG	<i>Ereachiela</i>	4	Reach	<i>e/ei/la</i>	reach	-	<i>ei/la</i>	have reached	<i>ekwerikotala (includes agreement)</i>
i) O <i>parkimataghi</i> motor ya.	G/NG	<i>Parkimataghi</i>	5	Park	<i>i/ma/ta/gh</i>	park	-	<i>mataghi</i>	did not park well	<i>dozighi edozi</i>
j) O <i>jumpuola</i> fence	G/NG	<i>jumpuola</i>	3	Jump	<i>uo/la</i>	jump	-	<i>uo/la</i>	has jumped	<i>mifela</i>
k) Argument ahu <i>adiyiala</i>	G/NG	<i>adiyiala</i>	4	di(e)	<i>a/yia/la</i>	die	a	<i>yia/la</i>	has died	<i>anwuola</i>
l) <i>Dyiarara</i> m shoe	G/NG	<i>dyiarara</i>	3	dy(e)	<i>ia/ra</i>	dye	-	<i>la/ra</i>	dye	<i>ghanwe ucha</i>
O <i>learnutara</i> the work	NG	<i>learnutara</i>	2	Learn	<i>Tara</i>	learn	-	<i>tara</i>	learnt well	<i>mutara</i>

Note: G = Graduate, NG = Non-graduate

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**Table 2:**

Verb	Attempted affixations	
	Prefix	Suffix
Know	* e knowyi m	*knowyiri
Come	* e comuola	*comuola
Escape	-	*escapuru

**Note:** \* Asterisk is used to indicate unacceptability or ungrammaticality in linguistics.

### Example 3:

*O mere* escape my memory.  
 It did escape my memory  
 It escaped my memory

In another utterance where its position and function changes as the only verb of a sentence, 'escape' undergoes some morphological changes:

### Example 4:

O scapuru m.  
 It escape (past) me.  
 It escaped me.

The verb in the above utterance *scapuru* underwent serious morphological modifications. In addition to accommodating the Igbo suffix - *uru*, its first letter -e was dropped. In isolation, it will be difficult to associate the word 'escape' to *scapuru*. One can see the relationship based context of usage.

**Table 4: Summary of Igbo suffixes attached to English verbs.**

Igbo suffixes	English verbs	Examples of Igbo Verbs
-uru-	shock, squat, house	shockuru, squaturu, housuru
-iri	like, change, fit	likiri, changiri, fitiri
ola	hue	su(e)ola
-i	stand, head, meet	standi, eheadi, gmeeti
-ighi	fit, warm	fitighi, warmughi
-ia	dress	dressia
-uo	comb, remove	combuo, removuo
-kwara	warm, park	warmukwara, parkikwara
-ala	dye, die	dyala, di(e)ala
lara	pass, park	passiara m, parkiara m
-oula	jump, reap	reapuola, jumpuola
-gwara	hit	hitigwara
-ie	heat	heatie, hitje
-ia	retouch, park	retouchia, parkia
-chala	mark	markuchala
-u	run	runu
-kari	jump	ajumpukari
yiala	high	highyiala
tara	pass, learn	passitara, learnutara

**Table 5:** Summary of Igbo Prefixes attached to English Verbs.

Igbo suffixes	English verbs	Examples of English-Igbo verbs
-e	respect, meet, change, hit, etc	<i>erespectiri, emeetie, echangi, ehit</i> , etc
-a	warm	<i>awarmu, ajumpu</i>

Utterance examples:

*I ga-awarmu ofe ahu*  
 You will warm soup the  
 You will warm the soup

*I ga-ajumpu fence*  
 You will jump fence  
 You will jump (the) fence

The Igbo morphemes (prefixes and suffixes) capable of joining with English verbs are not limited to the ones stated above. Further research may reveal more. The above examples present strong evidence that English-Igbo is overshadowing pure Igbo language in spoken conversations of Igbo-English bilinguals. It also confirms the dominance of English on Igbo language since English-Igbo utterances are used by both educated and non-educated Igbo natives. In addition, in the identified Engli-Igbo verbs, English verbs form the roots.

**Table 6:** The Igbo Auxiliaries and English Verbs.

Utterances	Verb	Main verb	Aux (Igbo)	Language components			
				English	Prefix	Suffix	
I awarmu ofe ahu	ga-	<i>ga-awarmu</i>	<i>awarmu</i>	ga	Warm	a	u
O erepeat okwu ya	ga-	<i>ga-erepeat</i>	<i>Eripeat</i>	ga	Repeat	e	-
O na-ajumpukari ogwe	na-	<i>na-ajumpukari</i>	<i>ajumpukari</i>	na	Jump	a	u/kari
M erepeat okwu m	ga-	<i>na-erepeat</i>	<i>erepeat</i>	na	Repeat	e	-

Table 6 shows evidence of attaching Igbo auxiliary morphemes to English verbs in English-Igbo utterances. In the examples above, English verbs still

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form the root of the main verbs while Igbo morphemes form the auxiliary and affixes.

### **Criteria for validating the status of the verbs**

We adopted three criteria often used in identifying word classes, namely: morpho-syntactic, distributional, and functional criteria (Tellerman, 2011).

#### **Morpho-syntactic criterion**

The form of a word which includes the form of affix(es) it takes often helps in distinguishing word classes. This criterion is evident in English and Igbo grammar. For instance, in English grammar, the verb class takes –ed as a suffix that indicates past actions as in ‘wanted’. In Igbo grammar, the grammatical class that takes –*ru* as a suffix is the verb as in *hapuru*.

However, this study found the morpho-syntactic criterion insufficient in distinguishing word classes. For instance, in English grammar, the morphemes can be attached to both noun and verb classes as in

<b>Example 5:</b>	<b>English</b>	boy/s	= Noun
		Pay/s	= verb.
	<b>Igbo:</b>	a)	O hapuru aka ya He remove (past) hand his He removed his hand.
		b)	Hapuru you Leave him Leave it for him

Based on the above, this research makes use of distributional and functional criteria as well.

#### **Distribution Criterion**

In using this criterion, the English-Igbo verbs are determined based on the positions they occupy in the sentences they appear in. Simple active sentence constructions in English and Igbo display SVO structure:

#### **Example 6:**

English	I	bought	a car	
Igbo		M	zuru	ugbo ala
		S	V	O

The words we identified as verbs in tables 1-6 occupy the V position of the sentences:

#### **Example 7:**

M	sendiri	letter	ahu	
I	send	(past)	letter	the
I	sent			the letter
S	V			O



O		
It	painuru	m
It	pain (past)	me
It	pained	me
S	V	O

**Function Criterion**

The semantic implication of the identified verbs also helps in determining their word classes. The identified English-Igbo verbs denote action or relay the state of affairs of the participants in the utterances. For instance:

**Example 8:**        m sendiri letter ahu

‘sendiri’ conveys the action of transferring something from source to a different location. Thus we validated that the words we ascribed to English-Igbo verbs truly belong to verb category irrespective of their morphological shape.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

1.        The affixation process in the formation of English-Igbo verbs is limited to Igbo morphemes. We did not receive any utterance in which Igbo language formed the root verb and English morphemes formed the affixes.
2.        It was also observed that English verbs of single and double morphemes are the most affected:

**Example 9:**

English single (free) morpheme:	pain	painuru
	reach	reachiri
Double morpheme:	report	reporturu
	return	returnuru

This does not mean that English verbs with multiple morphemes do not accommodate Igbo affixes:

**Example 10:**

E	demonstratiri	m
Pro	demonstrate (past)	me
I	demonstrated	

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*E completiela m oru ahu*  
 Pro complete (past participle) job the  
 I have completed the job

\* Pro stands for resumptive pronoun (see Mbah, 2011).

All the classes of English verb are affected but the most affected are the single and double morpheme verbs.

3. It was also observed that Igbo and English morphemes are conjugated into Engli-Igbo verbs when they appear in simple SVO structures and when they are used as compound verb of a simple SVO.

**Example 11: Simple SVO**

Subject	Verb	Object
O	representiri	anyanwu
He/She	represent (past)	Anyanwu
He/She	represented	Anyanwu
O	returnuru	ticket ahu
He/She	return (past)	ticket the
He/She	returned	the ticket
-	repeatie	your words
	Repeat (present)	your words
	Repeat	your words
O	painuru	m
It	Pain (past)	me
It	pained	me

**Example 12: Compound verbs of a simple sentence**

	V	O
1)	<i>Ga returnuo</i> Go (and) return	uwe ahu that dress
2)	<i>Bia repeatie</i> Come(and) repeat	okwu gi your word
3)	<i>Gbara pickie</i> Run and pick	otu uwe one dress

In example 12, the two words appearing side by side in V column are verbs. One is Igbo, the other, English-Igbo. The conjunction ‘and’ which supposes to join two verbs in a single utterance is dropped.

4. When the Engli-Igbo verbs go with Igbo auxiliaries, the verb must have a vowel prefix:

**Example 13:**

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- a) *O na-epainu m*  
It will pain me  
It pains me
- b) *O ga-esendi letter ahu.*  
He will send letter the  
He will send the letter

5. The Engli-Igbo verbs also display tense marking:

**Example 14: Past tense**

*O parkiri moto ya ebe a*  
He *park* (past) motor his here  
He *parked* his car here

**Example 15: Past continuous**

*O parkiala moto ya*  
He has *park* (past) motor his  
He has *parked* his car

**Example 16: Past perfect**

*O parkiri moto ya ebe a.*  
He *park* (past) motor his here  
He had *parked* his motor here.

**Example 17: Simple present**

*Repeatie okwu gi*  
Repeat (present) word your  
Repeat your word

**Example 18: Present continuous**

*O na epainu m*  
It is *paining* me

6. In simple SVO constructions with do support, the English main verbs do not undergo any morphological changes (Ref. example 3). Another example includes:

- Example 19. *O mere demonstrate his idea*  
He/she *did demonstrate* his idea  
He/she *demonstrated* his idea
- O mere enjoy ube ahu.*  
He/she *did enjoy* pear the  
He/she *enjoyed* the pear.

## CONCLUSION

This research study has shown how English verbs function in code-mixed utterances. Data analysis and findings show that English verbs usually form the root morpheme of English-Igbo verb conjugation, while Igbo morphemes perform the function of affixation. From data analyzed, it was observed that both educated and non-educated Igbo speakers are users of Engli-Igbo verbs. Based on the above observations, this research concludes that a different language known as Engli-Igbo is a present reality, it exists at least in a spoken form.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the course of data analysis, we observed that there are other linguistic manifestations in the process of co-joining English and Igbo verbs in code-mixed/switched utterances which this research did not cover. Such areas include: phonological manifestations in the conjugation of English and Igbo verbs, the hierarchical manifestations of the conjugated verbs, and the effect of Engli-Igbo verbal conjugation on sentence structures of code-switched utterances. Further researchers can also examine other grammatical categories as to trace the behaviour of adverbs, nouns etc. in Igbo-English code-mixed utterances.

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