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## Variation in the structure of complex sentences in English and Iẓon languages

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**Abstract:** The learning of a new language is usually challenging. This is because the learning process is usually complicated by differences in the linguistic parameters of the learner's first language and those of the target language. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the structures of English and Iẓon complex sentences in order to know the different parameters these languages apply in the construction of complex sentences. The study, which employed Chomsky's Minimalist Program (MP) and Robert Lados's Contrastive Analysis (CA) used the descriptive design. Data for the study were drawn from native speaker's competence and interviews. Findings revealed that although English and Iẓon share few parameters, there are overt parametric variation in the formation of complex sentences. Findings revealed that English independent clauses are promiscuous; they could occur at any position of the complex structures, while Iẓon dependent clauses occur only at the initial positions of complex constructions. It was also discovered that English dependent clauses, especially relative clauses could be embedded. That is, a clause within a clause. However, this parameter is not found in Iẓon. The study, which concluded that the parametric variations discovered would pose major challenges to the Iẓon English learners, recommended that, teachers of English as a second language should concentrate on the areas with overt differences in order to overcome the challenges facing the Iẓon bilinguals.

**Keywords:** Complex sentence, Iẓon, English, Language structure, Variation

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### 1. Introduction

Every language is structured in a unique and orderly way with peculiar rules and principles. This position validates Wardhaugh (1998) which opined that language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for human communication. It shows that language indeed is systematic and rule-governed. The rules governing a particular language account for the acceptable patterns by which words of that language are combined to produce larger units, such as phrases and sentences.

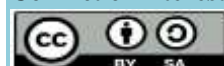
The logical arrangement of lexical items in the formation of larger structures stem from good understanding of the grammar of the language. Further, that language uses arbitrary vocal symbols does not also mean words are combined arbitrarily in the formation of larger structures. As Plag et al. (2007) surmised, lexical items are the building blocks in the formation of sentences. Like the laying of blocks in the construction of a house follows convention and not done haphazardly, words are not also combined arbitrarily in the construction of sentences. Similarly, Abdulkadir (2023) argued that language starts from the word and grows up to a sentence and so on... just few words give birth a a sea of words. However, the principles guiding the building of larger linguistic structures are usually outlined in the grammar of the language. The premise above validates the argument of Deng and Lin (2016, cited in Nwala, 2015) who noted that grammar is a rule-governed system which deals with the conventional concatenation and relationship of linguistic units in a language.

Although Universal Grammar (henceforth, UG) holds that there are common core principles of language from which every language selects its repertoire, "there are also sets of parameters, which specify a finite set of alternatives. The non-shared attributes of particular language marked the cross-linguistic parameterized variations of individual grammar" (Nwala, 2015: 197). For instance, the context sensitive rules, which include selectional rule and strict-subcategorization rule differ from language to language. Even though in every language these rules place semantic and syntactic constraints on lexical items. According to the rule, lexical items must occur in an environment where they are syntactically and

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semantically compatible (Nwala, 2015). Hence, the knowledge of the grammar of a language is required to construct syntactically correct and semantically acceptable sentences.

Consequently, a sentence is adjudged to be grammatical if and only if it religiously follows the rules guiding the structural arrangement of sentences in the language. One of the linguistic variations of human languages is the sentence variation. The variation in the basic sentence structure of a language: position and directionality of sentence elements such as determiners, prepositions, adjectives, negations, and conjunctions among others. Ndimele (1999) posited that the major task of a linguist analysing a particular language, is to examine the correct pronunciation of sounds by native speakers of a language; how the different sound segments are combined into meaningful morphemes or words; how the words are strung together to realise larger units such as phrases, clauses and sentences.

Similarly, Eyisi (2006) surmised that, it is an incontestable fact that proficiency in a particular language stems from adequate familiarity with grammatical components of the language. Although the English language remains the language of instruction in the Nigerian educational system as well as the official language, it is learnt as a second language in Nigeria, and its falling standard is currently exacerbating. This could be attributed to especially, areas of grammatical variations between the English language and indigenous languages in Nigeria. Thus, while other studies such as Priye and Nwala (2019) and Kwokwo (2015) have looked at variations in the head directionality between English and Ịzọn and the behaviours of determiner phrases, this study is focused on the constructions of complex sentences in order to bring to the fore the linguistic diversity and universal principles of language structure, especially between English and Ịzọn.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to examine the variations in the structures of complex sentences in English and Ịzọn. Accordingly, the study will be guided by two research questions:

- i. What are the variations in the structures of complex sentence in English and Ịzọn.
- ii. What are the implications of the structural disparities for the Ịzọn/English bilinguals.

### **1.1. The Ịzọn Language**

Williamson (1990) classified Ịzọn as belonging to the Ijoid sub-group of the Niger Congo family of languages. The Ịzọn language is further divided into Western and Eastern Ịzọn. The western Ịzọn has the following dialects; Oruma Okordia and Biseni, while the Eastern Ịzọn is comprised of Akassa, Nembe, Okrika, Kalabari, Ibani and Nkoro. Apart from the division above, Kwokwo (2012) argued that there are many dialects of Ịzọn which follow clan divisions. The Ịzọn people spread from Nkoro in the extreme east of Rivers State, westwards to the towns of the Arogbo clan in the Ondo State of Nigeria, and from the Atlantic Coast in the South to Elemebri in the Niger. Ịzọn is also called *Ijaw* or *Ijo*. However, Williamson and Blench (2000) argued that *Ijaw* is an anglicised version of the original spelling (Ịzọn). This argument was premised on the fact that Ịzọn phonetics does not have the sound /dʒ/, and the letter “j” is not found in its orthography. Although, the anglicised form, “*Ijaw*” is used to refer to the people, Ịzọn refers to both the language, as in *Ịzọn beḗlì* (Ịzọn language) and the people as in *Ịzọn-otu* (Ịzọn people).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Theoretical framework**

#### **2.1.1. The Minimalist Program**

The Minimalist Program (hereafter, MP) is the language description model proposed by Chomsky in 1995. It conceives the faculty of language as a computational system which works through some operations – select, merge, and move. The MP holds that every native speaker of a language is naturally endowed with a workbook where all the lexical items in that language are housed and the conditions for their occurrence specified. Radford (1997) described this workbook as a sort of mental dictionary, technically called *lexicon*. MP sees the lexicon as the language faculty where all lexical items are fully inflected; all sorts of combinations of words are carried out for meaningful outcomes. It corroborates our argument that words are not arbitrarily strung together by discretion; there are certain conditions for words to collocate in forming larger units. Marantz (1995: 360) noted that “the lexical items available in the lexicon are completely formed words, fully inflected for use”. This is a vivid description of the tacit/innate knowledge a *native speaker* possesses which enables him to produce grammatically correct sentences in his language.

The MP accounts for the possibility of different languages having different conditions for the occurrence of lexical items as a result of different parameters, a position that is also espoused by the assumptions of Contrastive Analysis.

### **2.2. Contrastive analysis**

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is a scientific tool that aids the learning of a second language through a careful comparison of the language systems of learners’ L1 and the systems of the target language. CA holds that by carefully comparing the target language to the learners’ L1 the areas of similar language systems will aid the learning of the target language, while areas that are dissimilar will pose some challenges to learners. The thrust of CA propounded by Lado (1957) in his *Linguistics Across Cultures* is that it is possible to identify areas of difficulties a particular language presents to L<sub>2</sub> speakers by systematically comparing the two languages.

The task of a CA analyst, therefore, is to study the structures of the languages under consideration with the aim of predicting possible areas of difficulties and proffering solutions. 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.

According to Yang and Xu (2001), the likely errors to be committed in the process of learning a second language are a direct result of the L1 features the learner would transfer to the target language. The assumptions of the MP and CA are suitable for this study as they are both concerned with the tacit knowledge of the native speaker. MP conceives the human mind/brain as a computational system which has automated the production derivations through its operations. In the same vein, CA is concerned with the language structure of learners L1 and that of the target language, in this case, the systems of complex sentences in English and İzoñ. The assumptions of the MP and CA are suitable for this study, as they provide us with a requisite framework to explain the possible challenges the İzoñ/English bilinguals are likely to encounter in the learning of the English language.

### 2.3. Conceptual review

Written discourses are always based on sentences. A Sentence according to McGregor (2009: 105) “is the largest linguistic unit showing grammatical structure, the largest unit over which grammatical rules or patterns apply”. McGregor’s position overtly shows that, for any combination of morphemes, words, and phrases to qualify as a sentence, such combination must follow specific grammatical rules. Sentences are usually described according to structure and function. According structure we have the simple sentence, the complex sentence, the compound sentence, and the compound complex sentence. This study is concerned with sentences according to structure and precisely, the complex sentence.

#### The complex sentence

Complex sentences are constructions built by joining together one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. The idea in the independent clause is usually foregrounded over and above that of the dependent clause. As the names suggest, the independent clause is able to occur alone, that is, the independent clause will remain meaningful even if the dependent clause(s) is/are clipped. However, this cannot be said of the dependent clause, as it must be attached to an independent clause to sustain its import, otherwise, whatever it stands for cannot be meaningful. The independent clause which is also called the Alpha clause is the main clause, while the dependent clause which is otherwise known as the Beta clause is the subordinate clause.

The subordinate clause usually begins with subordinators such as *since, unless, although, before* and many more. The presence of a subordinator signifies the existence of a relationship between two ideas expressed in a construction. For example:

- i. *since he came,*
- ii. *unless I admit,*
- iii. *although she was in class,*
- iv. *before he began.*

The thoughts in the constructions above are not fully expressed; this is because there is a missing link. The above assumption has posed a major question to linguists. That is, how to qualify the concept of complete thought of a sentence. A sentence is said to be a group of words that express a complete thought. This is why the constructions above are said to be incomplete in thought. The addition of Alpha clauses to the Beta clauses above will give the construction a sense of completeness as shown below:

1. *Since he came, we have not slept*
2. *unless she admits, I will not pay her fees*
3. *although she was in class, she did not take the exams*
4. *before he began, we had already completed our work*

Further, the positions of the constituents are very important as the various units making the whole are not combined haphazardly. The lexical items forming the whole are placed in an environment where they are semantically and syntactically compatible. In the structures above (1-4) the subordinate clauses occur at the initial positions of the constructions, while the main clauses take the final position of the structures. The examination of a complex sentence cannot be complete without describing the status of the clauses making up the sentence. This is what enables one to appropriately classify the sentence. As noted above, a complex sentence consists of one independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses. Among these clauses, the independent clause which is the main clause remains the central focus of the sentence. It is technically called the alpha clause which is represented with the symbol ‘ $\alpha$ ’. The subordinate clause overly relies on the Alpha clause for survival and meaningfulness and it is otherwise called the Beta clause and represented with the symbol ‘ $\beta$ ’.

The Beta clause could be identified with binders that subordinate it to the alpha clause. The Beta clause could also be known with the presence of a non-finite verb. Such as verbs in the *ing* form, *infinitive* and *participle*.

5. **The man yielded having lost the first round,**
6. **Aggrieved by the ruling, the party appealed the case.**
7. **Tari was in great fear to see his angry father again.**

Sentences 5-7 are also complex sentences. Unlike sentences 1-4, in sentences 5 and 7, the main clause occurs at the initial position of the complex structure, while sentence 6 maintains the earlier structure of the subordinate clause at the initial position and the main clause at the final position. The mobility feature of English clauses in complex sentences could pose some challenges to the Izo/English bilinguals, especially if this feature is alien to Izo.

## 2.4. Empirical review

There are numerous parametric studies on Izo and other Nigerian indigenous languages which attempted to compare these indigenous languages with the English language. Kwowo (2015) in his study of determiner phrase (DP) in Izo and English described the behaviour and position of the determiner. The study discovered that English obligatory determiner (article) takes the initial position of the phrase. However, in Izo, this obligatory determiner occurs at the final position of the DP. The study concluded that there is an overt disparity in the grammar of headedness. Although as a comparative study on English and Izo, it addressed an aspect of the linguistic diversity between these languages, it did not address the concerns of the present study.

Similarly, Priye and Nwala (2019) investigated the variation in headedness in Izo and English. The study argued that the languages have overt structural variation in terms of the position of the heads in NPs, yet, there are other areas of similarities, such as the behaviours of appositives demonstratives, numerals and adjectives. Some other studies (Adeji, 2018; Farinde & Omolaiye, 2021; Kwokwo, 2016) have considered aspects of syntactic variations between English and other Nigerian languages, however, none has attempted to investigate the different parameters applicable in the construction of complex ideas/sentences in Izo and English. This study intends to fill this gap.

## 3. Research methodology

This study adopted the descriptive research method. Descriptive design is suitable for such study which falls within diachronic linguistics. Diachronic linguistics studies the immediate nature of language, describing data as they are. The study employed primary and secondary data. While the English data were sourced from select English grammar texts, the Izo data were collected from native speakers' competence and expressions from Izo grammar texts. The data collected from the primary and secondary sources were analysed by comparing the English and Izo structures.

## 4. Findings and discussions

### Data 1. English Complex Sentence Pattern one

1. Since Preye came, we have not slept.
2. Although she was in the house, she did not eat.
3. Having lost his friend, the man gave up

Dependent/subordinate clause

*Since Preye came*

*Although she was in the house*

*Having lost his friend*

Independent/main clause

*we have not slept*

*she did not eat*

*the man gave up*

### Izo Equivalent of Complex Sentence Pattern-One

4. Preye bo se, woni na siainbunugha  
Preye come since  
'since Preye came'
5. Arau wari bi timiwerimi, meni arau fiyai fugha  
She house the stay, though, she food eat +negative  
'although she was in the house, she did not eat'
6. Wow ekiowei fi wo leighmo, eri barasin mi  
His friend die, he made him leave it  
'Having lost his friend, the man gave up'

Dependent/subordinate clause

*Preye bo se,*

*Arau wari bi timiwerimi*

*Wow ekiowei fi wo leighmo*

Independent/main clause

*woni na siainbunugha*

*arau fiyai fugha*

*eri barasin mi*

The complex sentence pattern-one above shows selected English and Izo complex sentences. In this study, we have explicated the form of the complex sentence, noting that it is usually made up of two clauses; one independent/main clause that carries the main idea of the construction and a dependent/subordinate clause that is attached to the independent clause. In the data above, the dependent clauses are underlined, occurring at the initial positions of the sentences. While the independent/main clauses are the parts of the constructions not underlined, occurring at the final positions of the sentences. The complex sentences are dissected below to further show the clauses;

The sentences above better reveal the individual clauses in the complex sentences both in English and Iḡon equivalent, and the environment they occur. Sentence pattern-one shows that the dependent clauses in all the complex sentences occur at the initial positions of the constructions, while the independent clauses occur at the final positions. The data above affirm that both the English grammar and Iḡon grammar on complex sentence formation allow subordinate clauses to precede the main clauses they are attached to.

Following the assumption of CA, since this specific system is shared by both languages, the formation of complex sentences with the subordinate clause occurring at the initial position will not pose any form of challenge to the Iḡon learner of English. In other words, learning will be facilitated.

**Data 2. English Complex Sentence Pattern-Two**

7. We have not slept, since Preye came
8. She did not eat, although she was in the house
9. The man gave up, having lost his friend

The data in English sentence pattern-two, are transformations of the same sentences in sentence pattern-one. In pattern two, the positions of the main clauses and the subordinate clauses are inverted. Hence, here, while the main clauses occur at the initial positions of the constructions, the subordinate clauses occur at the final positions. Below we attempt to show the outcome of a similar movement in Iḡon.

10. Woni na siainbunugha, Preye bo se  
we not well slept, Preye come+pst since  
'we have not slept since Preye came'
11. \*Arau fiyai fughu meni, Arau wari bi timiwerimi  
She food eat-not and she house the stay+ing  
'She did not eat, although she was in the house'
12. \*Eri barasin mi, Wow ekiowei fi wo leighmo  
He hand remove our friend death made it  
'having lost his friend, the man gave up'

Sentences 10-12 are results of the attempt to invert the positions of the subordinate clauses and the main clauses of the complex sentences as we did with the English data. The result above shows that in Iḡon, linguistic items or sentential units do not move unless it is very necessary, else such construction will crash. This corroborate the principle of greed in the Minimalist Program. The result indicates that while sentence 10 is grammatical, 11 and 12 could not reach full interpretation. This reveals variation, that unlike English, such movements in Iḡon are very rare. From the result, it follows that while English subordinate clauses in complex sentences could occur at the initial positions as well as the final positions, Iḡon does not allow it, except it is very necessary.

**Iḡon Equivalent of Complex Sentence Pattern Two**

13. Preye bo se, woni na siainbunugha  
Or  
13b. Woni na siainbunugha, Preye bo se
14. Arau wari bi timiwerimi, meni arau fiyai fughu  
She house the stay+past, though she food eat+negative  
'Although she was in the house, she did not eat'
15. Wow ekiowei fi wo leighmo, eri barasin mi  
His friend die, he made him leave it  
'Having lost his friend, the man gave up'

Sentences 14 and 15 are the Iḡon equivalent of sentences 8 and 9. The clauses remain at the in-situ positions, like in sentence pattern-one, this is because the independent/dependent clause inversion was not possible with them. The attempt made above resulted in ungrammatical construction. However, sentence 13 is an equivalent of the English sentence 7. Here, the independent/dependent clauses inversion was possible, and the outcome of that movement is sentence 13b. The illustrations above further reveal distinction between English and Iḡon complex sentence structure.

**Data 3. English Complex Sentence Pattern-Three**

16. The girl, that came here this morning, is beautiful
17. The man, that brought the car yesterday, is dead
18. The boy that gave us the money is very rich

The sentences 16-18 above are all complex sentences, however, in the cases above, the subordinate clauses are all relative clauses embedded in the sentences. The English complex sentence could also be formed with embedded clauses intervening with the main clause of such construction. For instance, adjectival/relative clauses could be inserted within a

given clause to make it complex. In such an instance, the relative clause occurs in a position immediately after the subject of the clause. Below is a recast of the constructions above, here, the main clauses are in bold face while the embedded clauses are enclosed in parenthesis.

19. **The girl**, (who came today), **is my sister**
20. **The vehicle**, (that broke down yesterday), **has been repaired**.
21. **The man**, (that brought the money), **is wealthy**
22. **The house**, (that got burnt), **is mine**

The clauses are better represented below;

<b>The girl</b> (who came today) <b>is my sister</b>	
<i>The girl is my sister</i>	independent clause
... <u>who came today</u>	embedded clause
<b>The vehicle</b> (that broke down car yesterday) <b>has been repaired</b>	
<i>The vehicle has been repaired</i>	independent clause
... <u>that broke down yesterday</u>	embedded clause
<b>The man</b> (that brought the money) <b>is wealthy</b>	
<i>The boy is very rich</i>	independent clause
... <u>that gave us the money</u>	embedded clause
<b>The house</b> (that got burnt) <b>is mine</b>	
<i>The house is mine</i>	independent clause
... <u>that got burnt</u>	embedded clause

The structure of the English complex sentence as described above, shows so much promiscuity. With the complication noticed above, the Iẓon/English bilinguals are likely to encounter difficulties in the formation of such structure. This observation corroborates the position of CA, that the more differences there are between the systems of learners' L1 and the target language, learning will be difficult and transfer of L1 features in to target language is imminent.

Below we demonstrate the Iẓon equivalents of the English complex sentence pattern-three to reveal if the system of embedding a clause within another clause is possible.

#### **Iẓon Equivalent of Complex Sentence Pattern Three**

23. Bei pekei bjo bo tobou ma ebinimi.  
This morning here come girl the beautiful  
'The girl, that came here this morning, is beautiful'
24. Bı̄bai bı̄yọ̄u bo aru mo bo kimi bi fidou  
Yesterday here come car and come man the dead  
'The man, that brought the car yesterday, is dead'
25. Sele na wopiri tobou bi perenimi.  
money we give man the rich is  
'The boy that gave us the money is very rich'
26. Iyọ̄un wari bi inein  
burn house the mine  
'The house that got burnt is mine'

The behaviour of Iẓon data above show parametric variation from the English data. Like sentence pattern-one, pattern-two and three have maintained sameness in the position of the clauses of the complex sentences. The subordinate/dependent clauses have maintained the feature of occurring at the initial positions in constructions. However, the same cannot be said about English. Clauses in English complex sentence as described above, show so much promiscuity; occurring at initial positions, mid positions as well as final positions of constructions. In other words, English subordinate clauses can occur at any position of the complex structure. With the conflicting behavior and structure revealed, the Iẓon/English bilinguals are likely to encounter difficulties in the formation of such a structure. However, this work will serve as a guide to the Iẓon/English bilinguals, as it reveals the areas of system variations.

#### **5. Implications for the Iẓon/English bilinguals**

The study, which examined the structures of complex sentence in English and Iẓon observed areas of similarities and areas of differences. The data indicates that English and Iẓon complex sentences are made up of two clauses; usually an independent/main clause and at least one dependent/subordinate clause. Further, it was observed that English and Iẓon dependent clause could occur at the initial position of the complex sentence. Similarly, the rule that dependent/subordinate clauses do not occur in isolation, but must be attached to independent clauses is upheld by both languages.

In spite of the sameness noted, there are areas of structural variation in the formation of complex sentences in English and Iẓon. It was revealed in the data, that the subordinate clauses in English complex sentences could occur at the initial position. Iẓon subordinate clauses also have similar behaviour of occurring at the leftmost edge of complex sentences. However, from findings it was discovered that English subordinate clauses are promiscuous; occurring at initial positions, mid positions as well as final positions of construction. In other words, English subordinate clauses can occur at any position of the complex structure. This behaviour is alien to Iẓon. Furthermore, while the English language allows the embedding of a clause within another clause, this parameter is not familiar to Iẓon. Similarly, it was observed that unlike English, Iẓon relative clauses do not take overt wh-operators.

Consequently, these areas with overt variations will complicate the learning of the English language by Iẓon natives. This will therefore, result in the transfer of the system and patterns of Iẓon in the process of learning the English language. The position above corroborates the position of Contrastive analysis.

Another implication is that, apart from the tendencies of linguistic transfer, learning will be very difficult. Especially, for the construction of sentences with embedded clauses. This is because, the language parameter of embedding a clause within a construction is not part of the Iẓon grammar. This will result in far reaching complication and difficulty.

This study therefore, recommends that teachers of English as a second language should depend on empirical studies like this as instructional material and concentrate on the areas outlined with overt linguistic parametric variations in order to overcome the challenges of transfer and difficulty in learning the second language. (English).

## 6. Conclusion

This study has brought to the fore, patterns of complex sentences as well as the areas of variation in the structures of complex sentence in English and Iẓon. one major findings in this study is the fact that English has 3 patterns of constructing complex sentences while Iẓon has just one pattern. The study concludes that the areas of variations as observed would make Iẓon learners of English, as well as English learners of Iẓon produce ungrammatical structures. English construct complex sentences by embedding adjectival clauses, a parameter alien to Iẓon, thus, the Iẓon L2 learner who lacks this system is likely to reproduce ungrammatical structures. Thus, the Iẓon/English bilinguals have to adjust to these English parameters which are absent in Iẓon.

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