
Some Linguistic Features of the Ikwere Language

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an overview description of some linguistics features of the Ikwere language. Ikwere is spoken in four (Emohua, Ikwere, Obio/Akpor and part of Port Harcourt) local government areas of Rivers State of Nigeria. It comprises twenty-four mutually intelligible dialects. Ikwere is an Igboid language of the West Benue-Congo family of the Niger-Congo Phylum of languages. The language records twenty-eight phonemic consonants, nine phonemic oral vowels and eight phonemic nasalized vowels. As a tone language, it has two level (high [´] and low [˘]) tones; a downstep [↓], and two contour (falling [ˆ] and rising [˜]) tones. The syllable structures of the language are V, and N, CV and CGV. Among other things, the work observed that verb inflections in Ikwere are marked predominantly by suffixes, sparingly by auxiliaries accompanied by prefixal element, and or tonal modifications. Conversely, verb derivation is predominantly marked by attaching prefixes to verb root to form gerunds, agentives, instrumentals, etc. It is believed that this study will be relevant to scholars interested in language study as the insight provided here will serve as a motivation to explore certain linguistic features of other languages.

KEYWORDS: Ikwere, orthography, Ikwere sound system, Ikwere word structure, Ikwere Word classes.

Introduction

Speakers of the Ikwere language refer to both their language and themselves as ‘Ikwere’, which is written as ‘Ikwere’ in the Ikwere orthography. The present work uses single ‘-r-’, as in the orthography since it represents the exact pronunciation of Ikwere but double ‘-rr-’ when referring to official documents.

Speakers of the Ikwere language occupy four out of the twenty-three Local Government Areas (LGA) of Rivers State, namely, Port Harcourt, Obio/Akpor, Emohua and Ikwere LGAs. The Ikwere people constitute one of the major ethnic groups of Rivers State of Nigeria and their language is one of the major languages of Rivers State. Thus, like Kana, Kalabari and Ekpeye, which are the other major languages of Rivers State, Ikwere is used in broadcasting in the electronic media. It is the L1 of most indigenes born and bred in the rural areas of the Ikwere language communities and the L2 of some others, particularly, those born in the urban areas.

The territory of the Ikwere people is bounded on the north by Imo State and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA of Rivers State; on the west by Ahoada East LGA; on the south-west by Abua/Odual LGA, on the south by Asaritoru and Degema LGAs; on the south-east by

Okirika, Eleme LGAs and Abia State; and on the east by Etche LGA. Map 1.1 shows the location of Ikwere. Crozier and Blench (1992:55) and Grimes (1996:349) put the population of Ikwere at about 200,000, as contained in the National Population Census of 1963. This figure, however, rose to 674,402 and 1,235,412 as contained in the final results of the National Population Census of 1991 and 2006, respectively.

The Occupation of Ikwere

The traditional occupation of the Ikwere people is farming. Their main farm produce are yam, cocoa-yam, three-leaf-yam, cassava and plantain. Other farm produce are pepper, corn, pumpkin, melon, okra, garden egg, orange, pear, apricot, etc. The Ikwere people also do some palm-wine tapping and hunting. Those that live along the river coast engage in fishing, in addition to farming. Currently, a greater percentage of the adult population of the working group have acquired Western education and the major source of their occupation has shifted to jobs in the public service, teaching in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, etc. Those who are not so fortunate to acquire western education, engage in some form of menial jobs and/or trading.

A Brief History of Ikwere

Concerning Ikwere history, there are divergent hypothetical views of the origin of the Ikwere. Nduka (1993:22) gives a summary of four hypotheses of the origin of Ikwere. The first hypothesis claims that the Ikwere people migrated to their present abode from Ogba and Ekpewe, further tracing their origin to the Bini Kingdom of old. The second hypothesis traces Ikwere migration from Arochukwu Igbo. A third hypothesis also sees Igbo land as the ancestral home of Ikwere. The fourth hypothesis traces part of Ikwere descent to the Ijaws.

Linguistic Classification

Linguistically, Williamson (1988:67, 71) classifies Ikwere as one of the Igboid group of languages. Williamson and Blench (2000:31) locate Igboid under the node of the West Benue-Congo family of the Niger-Congo Phylum of languages.

Ikwere Language Communities

Politically, the communities that speak the Ikwere language are located in Ikwerre, Emohua, Obio/Akpor and some parts of Port Harcourt LGAs of Rivers State. Some individuals and groups of persons have made attempts to group the Ikwere communities according to their linguistic relatedness.

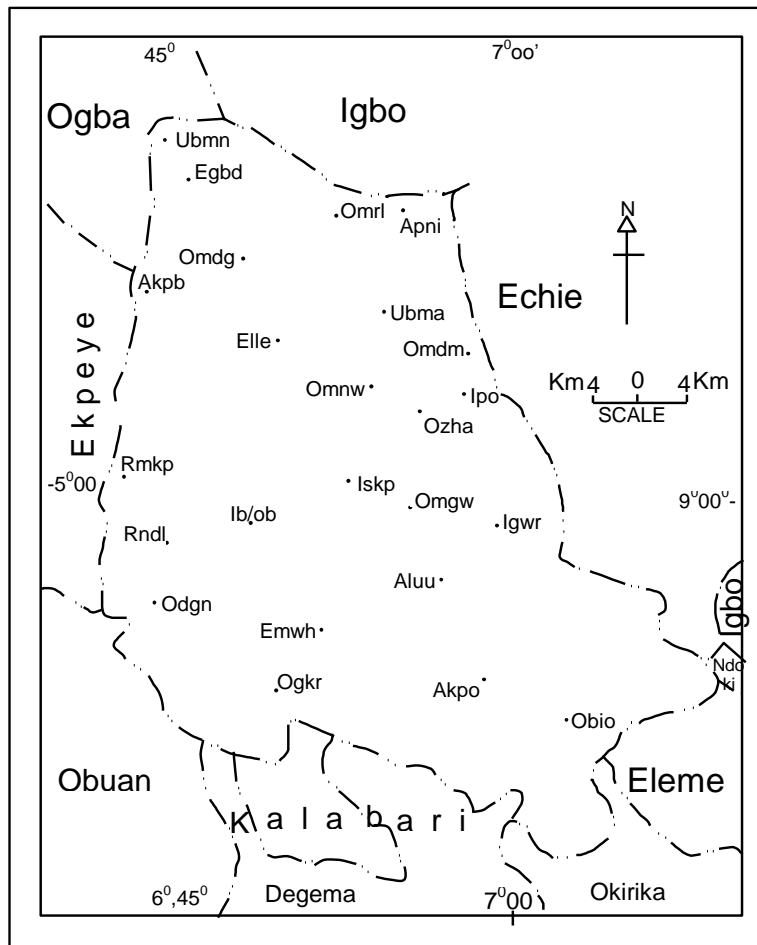
Amadi (1993:34) suggests seven major groups of communities in Ikwere. They are Eleele, Isiokpo, Rumuji, Emowha-Ogbakiri, Aluu-Igwuruta, Akpo and Obio. The problem with this grouping is its inability to specify which communities can be classified as belonging to or not belonging to one of the major group of the communities in Ikwere. This classification was not done on clear linguistic grounds.

Ogbakor Ikwerre convention, the body that makes vital decisions concerning the generality of the Ikwere people, recognized four major groups of communities in Ikwere. The first among them is Risi-Mbam, which comprises Eleele, Omudiogna, Ubimini, Omerelu, and

Egbedna. Next is Risi Mini (Reo) consisting Rumuji, Ẹmowha, Ọgbakiri, Ọdeegnu, Rumuekpne and Rundele. Another is Esilawuru incorporating Al̩u, Igwuruta, Isiokpo, Ipo, Ọmuanwa, Ozuaha, Ubima, and Ọmademe. Finally, is ỌPA, which includes Obio, Port Harcourt and Akp̩. Our impression is that the latter grouping is clearer than the former grouping because it is somehow closer to the dialectal differences, which will be discussed in this work. There are also certain communities that are not accounted for. Some of these are Akpnabu, Ibaa/Obele and Apnani.

A more scholarly attempt at a reliable linguistic grouping is that proposed by Kay Williamson (1980). She uses the terms Southern and Northern Ikwere, i.e., two major grouping, according to the linguistic spread of the Ikwere communities. The southern Ikwere includes Ndele, Ẹmowha, Ọgbakiri, Akp̩, and Obio, while Egbena, Omerelu, Apnani, Eleele, Ibaa, Ọmagwna, Isiokpo, Al̩u and Igwuruta belong to the Northern Ikwere. This grouping, reliable as it is, does not represent all the communities and consequently the dialects. It is simply a sample selection of dialects corresponding to the southern and northern Ikwere communities.

Alerechi (2007a, 2007b, 2008a) recognize twenty-four dialects of Ikwere. Using different linguistic features, she identifies three different types of north and south dichotomy of the dialects of Ikwere; East and West division; East, West and Extreme North dialects; East-Central, West-Central, and North and South dialects, etc. while some of the groupings conform to earlier grouping, others do not. The communities whose dialects Alerechi (2007a) identifies are shown on Map 1. They are Rumuekpne, Rundele, Ọdeegnu, Ẹmowha, Ọgbakiri, Akp̩, Obio, Al̩u, Igwuruta, Ọmagwna, Isiokpo, Ibaa/Obele, Ipo, Ozuaha, Ọmuanwa, Ubima, Akpnabu, Egbedna, Ọmademe, Eleele, Ọmudiogna, Ubimini, Omerelu and Apnani.



IKWERE LANGUAGE COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURS

Key

| | | | | | |
|--------|-----------|---------|------------|--------|-----------|
| Rmkp - | Rumuekpne | Igwr - | Igwuruta | Akpb - | Akpnabu |
| Rndl - | Rundele | Omgw - | Omagwna | Egbd - | Egbedna |
| Odgn - | Odeegnu | Iskp - | ísiokpo | Omdm - | Omadeeme |
| Emwh - | Emowha | Ib/Ob - | Ibaa/Obele | Elle - | Eleele |
| Ogkr - | Ogbakiri | Ipo - | Ipo | Omdg - | Omudiogna |
| Akpo - | Akpo | Ozha - | Ozuaha | Ubnm - | Ubimini |
| Obio - | Obio | Omnw - | Omanwa | Omri - | Omerelu |
| Aluu - | Aluu | Ubma - | Ubima | Apni - | Apnani |

The Orthography

After the Nigerian independence and the creation of states, the Ikwere people, like other ethnic groups began to assert their independence. The newly created Rivers State Government also recognized Ikwere as one of the major languages of Rivers State. *The Rivers Peoples' Golden Age* (1967) records the first translation into Ikwere of the speech of the first military Governor of Rivers State. One of the works produced in Ikwere as part of the efforts to assert Ikwere as a language is the orthography. Alerechi (2007a) observes some discrepancies in the

orthography of some of the early works in Ikwere, which she traced to the old Protestant Igbo orthography in which the Bible, the Anglican prayer book and hymnbook were written (Ogbalu, n.d., C. 1951).

One of the early works written in Ikwere orthography is Ekwulo's (1970) *Ikwere Mbom*. In 1981, Ekwulo revised *Ikwere Mbom* and this time, Ikwere bears double –rr- as *Ikwerre Mbom*. The following is a list of the letters of the alphabet in the two editions for easy comparison:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|----|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1970 edition: | a | b | ɓ | d | e | f | g | gh | i | - | j | k |
| 1981 edition: | a | b | gb | d | e | f | g | gh | i | ì | j | k |
| 1970 edition: | l | m | n | ñ | o | o | p | kp | r | s | sh | t |
| 1981 edition: | l | m | n | ñ | o | o | p | kp | r | s | - | t |
| 1970 edition: | u | - | v | w | y | z | ch | gw | kw | nw | ny | wh |
| 1981 edition: | u | ù | v | w | y | z | ch | gw | kw | nw | ny | wh |

The lists above show that the first edition gives 35 letters of the Ikwere alphabet, while the second edition gives 36. The letter 'b' written with a diacritic in the first edition, is replaced with the digraph 'gb' in the second edition. While 'sh' in the first edition is not included in the second edition, the new orthography includes 'ì' and 'ù', which are omitted in the first. The letters of the alphabet were changed to agree with the orthography used in the Rivers Readers Project. The discrepancy in the orthography of the two editions of *Ikwere Mbom* shows that some works in Ikwere were influenced by the Igbo orthography while some others followed the approved orthography of Ikwere.

The Rivers Readers project was formed to develop the local languages in Rivers State of which Ikwere was one. The first official textbook, Wugo's (1970) *Okwukwo ke Mbom n'Ikwerre* was written for elementary one pupils and published by the Rivers Readers Project. This textbook was published along with *Teachers Notes on Okwukwō Ke Mboṁ nu Ikwerre* and *Reading and Writing Ikwere*. As the name suggests, *Reading and Writing Ikwere* explains the way learners can read and write the Ikwere language. This work has relevance for the final solution of any problem in the orthography, language teaching, and language development and communication technology in Ikwere.

In 1985, Donwa-Ifode and Ekwulo presented the Ikwere orthography at a language conference organized by the Federal Ministry of Education in Lagos. In 1987, it was published in *Manual V of Orthographies of Nigerian Languages*. All the recent works in Ikwere are based on this orthography. Alerechi (2007a), however, recognizes 'ẹ' a ninth vowel that is not included in the Ikwere orthography.

Recent Effort in Developing the Language

The Ikwere language is yet to develop a standard dialect. Currently, works of interest to the Ikwere ethnic nationality such as the Ikwere orthography, the New Testament Bible translation and the ongoing curriculum development in Ikwere for primary and secondary school pupils tend to follow mainly the southern (Obio) dialects and sometimes with a mixture of the northern (Alu) dialects. Obio seems to be particularly favoured because people from other areas are exposed to it as it is the dialect used in the capital territory of Rivers State, while Alu is used because it is the dialect of late Mr. S.A. Ekwulo who had done much work on Ikwere. Scholarly

researches also are being carried out in different dialects of the language. Students of the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies of the University of Port Harcourt are encouraged to carry out research on Ikwere. Ikwere is used in broadcasting in the electronic media.

Ikwere Sound System

There are twenty-eight phonemic consonants in Ikwere namely, /m n ɲ ŋ ɰ p b t d k g k^w g^w β ʃ tʃ dʒ f v s z ɣ h^w h r j w l/. They are orthographically represented as ‘m n ny ñ nw p b t d k g kw gw kp gb ch j f v s z ghwh h r y w l’, respectively. Alerechi (2007a:98) observes that the number of the phonemic consonants in each of the dialects, however, varies. It ranges from twenty-six to twenty-eight. Normally, the Ikwere consonants occur in morpheme initial and morpheme medial position in verbs and sometimes in nouns. It is only /m/ that occurs morpheme-finally. Examples of the various distributions of consonants in the language are given in (1a-1c):

1a. [gò] ‘deny’ b. [òhárā] ‘sweat’ c. [ákám] ‘thatches’

The language has nine phonemic oral vowels /i ɪ e ɛ a o ɔ u ʊ /, orthographically represented as ‘i ɪ e ɛ a o ɔ u ʊ’, respectively, and eight phonemic nasalized vowels /ĩ ĩ̃ ẽ ẽ̃ õ õ̃ ã ã̃ / . The nasalized vowels are represented in the orthography by inserting ‘n’ between the consonant and vowel of the affected syllable. The vowels occur in all environments (morpheme initial, morpheme medial and morpheme final positions) in the language as in [úbèrè] ‘belch’.

Vowel Harmony

The vowels of Ikwere are divided into two sets by a principle called vowel harmony, ‘a principle which rules that vowels of a neighbouring syllables have similarity with each other’ (Westermann and Ward 1990:127). Ikwere vowels may be distinguished by the expansion of the pharyngeal wall by advancing the root of the tongue, or by lowering the larynx or both. Conversely, the pharynx may be contracted by either retracting the root of the tongue, or by raising the larynx or both (Williamson 2004, Alerechi 2009:119).

Tones

Williamson (1980), Worukwo (1983), Alerechi (1987) and Azunda (1987) identify five tones in the language. The five tones consist of two basic tones, low (`) and high (´) tones; a downstep represented here as (˘), and two contour tones - falling (ˆ) and rising (ˇ) tones. As noted in the literature, the presence of a floating tone between two high tones causes either the raising of the preceding tone or the lowering (down step) of the following tone (Clement 2000:153). In Ikwere, the floating tone causes the lowering of the following high tone. On the other hand, the falling and rising tones can be analyzed as a combination of high and low (HL) and low and high (LH) tones, respectively. Rising tone is rare in some of the dialects of Ikwere. Tones can be used to distinguish the meaning of identical words or sentences as in (2) and (3), respectively:

2a. àznù ‘back
b. áznù ‘fish’

3a. Ò jnè-gà órò

3SG go-PROG house
'He is going home'

b. Ò jné-gá òrò
3SG go-PROG/NEG house
'He is not going home'

Tone, therefore, performs lexical and grammatical functions in the language. Lexically, example (2) illustrate that the meaning of a word depends totally on tonal placement, while (3) show the grammatical function of tone. Alerechi (2007a) and Williamson et al (2010) identified eight noun tone classes in Ikwere. This number, however, ranges from four to eight depending on the particular dialect in question. The different noun tone classes observed in the different dialects are based on disyllabic nouns. Conversely, the verbs are classified into three tone classes of mono-syllabic verbs.

The Syllable Structure

The syllable structures of Ikwere are V, CV, N, and CGV. Examples are given in (4):

| | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|----------|---------|--------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|
| | 'chief'/'king' | 'in-law' | 'loose' | 'draw (ear)' | 'give (name)' | 'market' | 'swallow' |
| 4a. | é.zè | b. ó.gò | c. tò | d. dọ | e. g ^w ù | f. á.hjá | g. rwé |
| | V.CV | V. CV | CVCV | CV | V.CGV | | CGV |
| | 'Beauty' | | | | | | |
| h. | m.mā | | | | | | |
| | N.CV | | | | | | |

The syllable structure of Ikwere can be summarized as:

T
(C(G)) *S*, where

C = consonant e.g /p/, G = glide e.g. /w/ /j/, T = tone e.g. `/, S = vowel or syllabic nasal e.g /o/,
CS = consonant and vowel e.g /ré/ 'sell', CGS = consonant, glide and vowel e.g /swé/ 'grow'

Ikwere Word Structure

The level of linguistics that studies the structure of words in any language is morphology. Morpheme is the basic unit of morphology. It is the minimal indivisible unit which has meaning or a specific grammatical function (Amfani 2007:139; Anagbogu et al 2010:140). In Ikwere, for example, the word *jnèbé* 'start going' comprises the morphemes *jnè* 'go' and *-be* 'start', which are meaningful. However, while *jnè* occurs in isolation, *-be* cannot. Thus the language has both free and bound morphemes.

A free morpheme, usually full word, can stand on its own in an utterance. Examples are, *áwhó* 'belly', *ákâ* 'hand', *rá* 'lick', *gnù*, 'read', *m̄mā* 'beauty', etc. On the other hand, bound morphemes such as *o-ò-*, *-ga*, *-le/-la/-ne/-na*, *-kọ*, etc., cannot stand alone in an utterance. They must be attached to a verb root to be meaningful. Thus Ikwere verbs consist of a root to which affixes can be attached. The affixes may be attached before or after the root known as prefix or suffix, respectively. Affixes in Ikwere are classified as prefix and suffix based on their position in relation to the root to which they are attached. They further can be classified into inflectional and derivational affixes based their grammatical function in an utterance. This implies that some

affixes in the language may be inflectional in nature when they are added to certain root, while others are derivational when attached to certain others.

Verb inflections in Ikwere are marked predominantly by suffixes, sparingly by auxiliaries accompanied by prefixal element, and or tonal modifications. Such inflections are used to express grammatical categories such as factative, habitual, progressive, present perfect, inceptive perfect, durative, potential and negation. Examples are given in (5) – (14):

5. Óchì dī-rì n' áhiá.
PN be-FACT PREP market
'Ochi was in the market'
6. Ézè jnè-kò úbì (Emphatic)
PN go-HAB farm
'Eze goes to the farm'
7. Kèlé tè-gà úsnè
PN pound-PROG pepper
'Kele is pounding pepper'
8. Ò zà-lá ọ̀rò
3SG sweep-PERF house
'S(He) has swept the house'
9. Ò sè-bè-lé ákwâ
3SG draw-INCEP-PERF egg
'S(He) has started drawing the egg'
10. Ò dè è-rí míní
3SG FUT-AUX PR-drink water
'S(He) will drink water'
11. Ò jnè-kàtà-rà íjnè, ínwē gwú ā
3SG walk-DUR-PST walk breath finish 3SG
'S(He) walked until s(he) got tired'
12. Ò gnù-lì érí
3SG sing-POT song
'S(He) can sing'
13. Í rì-è
2SG NEG eat-NEG
'Don't eat'
14. Ò kpé-è mọnó-mọnô
3SG be-NEG oil-oil
'It is not red in color'

Examples (5) – (14) demonstrate that respectively the suffixes –rV, -kò, gà, -lá, -kàtà, -lì, -è, etc. are used to express past, habitual, progressive, perfect, durative, potential state or action in Ikwere. It is noted that the vowel of the past, perfect, negation or prohibition have variant forms based on the pharyngeal, nasal and or lip features of the vowels of the verb host, while markers of habitual, progressive, durative, potential are unaffected by the quality of the vowels of the verb root in terms of expandedness or non-expandedness, nasal or lip rounded features.

Conversely, verb derivation is predominantly marked by attaching prefixes to verb root to form gerunds, agentives, instrumentals, cognate noun, qualificatives, etc. Examples are given in (15) – (20):

| | | | |
|---------|-----------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| 15. zà | ‘sweep’ | òzìzá | ‘(act of) sweeping’ |
| 16. shì | ‘cook’ | Òshi nri | ‘one who cooks (a cook) |
| 17. Vò | ‘comb (v)’ | mívò | ‘comb (a tool for combing)’ |
| 18. Jò | ‘ugly (become)’ | njo | ‘badness’ / ‘ugliness’ |
| 19. chì | ‘laugh’, | òchì | ‘laughter’ |
| 20. gnú | ‘count’ | ógnū | ‘count(n)’ |

Examples (15) – (20) show the attachment of a prefix o-/ò-/m-/n- to the verb root to derive agentive, instrumental and qualificative noun in the language, while (15) demonstrates that in addition to attaching the o-/ò- prefix to the verb root, gerund is formed by a partial or complete reduplication of the verb root. Note that while the choice for o-/ò- is based on the expanded or non-expanded feature of the vowel of the root that of m-/n- is dependent on homorganicity.

Ikwere Word Classes

The meaning of words is not fully realized in isolation. For speakers to communicate meaningfully with each other, words are combined in particular order to form larger grammatical unit. By implication, certain rules govern the manner in which words are put together to form meaningful and grammatical phrases, clauses and sentences. In fact, Ikwere is an SVO (subject verb object) language. This section identifies some of the word classes that combine with each other to form phrases, clauses or sentences. They are classified into open and closed classes. The open class words are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, while those in the closed class are pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, determiners and auxiliaries. For lack of space, brief comments are made on some of them in the following sub-sections.

Ikwere Nouns

Nouns in Ikwere are used to name persons e.g., *Ihuoma*, places e.g., *Omuanwa*, objects e.g., *àmú mú* ‘sharpening stone’, things as in *mônô* ‘palm oil’ ideas as in *úchè* ‘thought’, etc. The foregoing examples show that nouns in the language can begin with either a vowel or a consonant but note that those beginning with vowel are more predominant than those that begin with a consonant. Nouns in Ikwere are head of noun phrase as in *órò m* ‘my house’. Syntactically, they function as the subject, object and complement of the sentence. Examples are shown in (21) – (22):

21. Ihuoma zù mọnō n' áhiá
PN-SUBJ buy oil-OBJ PREP market
'Ihuoma bought the oil at the market'

22. Áwhnà á bŭ Ógè
Name 3SG be COMP
'Her name is Oge'

Examples (21) – (22) demonstrate that noun can function as the subject, object, complement, etc. in the language.

Ikwere Verbs

A verb is used to express an action or a state of affair. All verbs in Ikwere are consonant initial. They are more often monosyllabic (containing one root) in nature as in ré 'sell', tà 'chew' zò 'step on', etc., than those consisting of two independent root as in kwù-gbú (beat kill) 'beat', rí-jné (climb go) 'climb up', etc. or a root and a verbal extension as in bnànyâ 'enter towards the speaker'.

Verbs in Ikwere may be classified as either dynamic or stative verb in terms of semantic notion. While a dynamic verb is used to express an action or event, the stative verb expresses a state of being. Examples of dynamic verb are zà 'sweep', dnà 'fall', while those of stative verb are dì 'be', dnù 'live', etc.

Ikwere verbs may also be divided into main verbs (lexical) or auxiliary (helping) verbs. While the main verbs can occur independently in a sentence, an auxiliary verb is always followed by a lexical verb, which comprises a participle prefix and the verb root in the language. Whereas a lexical verb in Ikwere has an independent semantic content, an auxiliary verb may be used to mark future aspect or negation as examples (23) – (25) demonstrate:

23. kele gbā ásó
PN run run
'Kele ran'

24. kele dà à-gbá ásō
PN AUX-FUT PR-run run
'Kele will run'

25. kele mâ à-gbá ásō
PN AUX-NEG PR-run run
'Kele did not run'

While example (23) show the lexical verb gbá occurring independently, (24) and (25) demonstrate the presence of the auxiliary verbs dà and mâ marking future aspect and negation, respectively, in the language.

Adjectives

Like in many African languages, the Ikwere language records few adjectives. Alerechi (2016) specifically, identifies six adjectives, and they may be arranged in three antonymous pairs as *oma* ‘good’ and *ojoō* ‘bad’; *ochnichna* ‘white’ and *ujiji* ‘black’/ ‘dark’, and *kwu* ‘big’ and *ogbede / nti* ‘small’. Adjectives in Ikwere are preceded by the noun they modify. This implies that they occur attributively in the language. See examples in (26) and (27):

26. ewu + ochnichna ewu ochnichna

goat white ‘white goat’

27. ewu + ujiji ewu ujiji

goat black ‘black goat’

Adverbs

According to Anyanwu (2007:203), ‘adverbs provide specific information about place, time, or manner to the meaning of a verb, an adjective or even a whole sentence’. In Ikwere, adverbs may be expressed by *amaa* ‘well’ or nominal elements, which are usually totally reduplicated or with an ideophone. It is interesting to note that the morpheme *-kwa* used to mark how well an activity is carried out is attached to the verb root in addition to the adverb *amaa* to mean ‘very well’. See examples in (28) – (30):

28. Ógè kpà-kwà-rà íshì á àmáà
PN shave-well-PST head 3SG well

‘Oge shaved his head very well’

29. Íké snù ọ̀nù á ògbèdè-ògbèdè
PN wash mouth 3SG small-small

‘Ike washed his mouth slowly’

30. Ọ̀ dnà kpùrùkném
3SG fall suddenly

‘S(He) fell suddenly’

While the nominal element can be moved to sentence-initial position with a periphrastic phrase, *àmáà* ‘well’ and *kpùrùkném* ‘suddenly’ cannot be focused. Consider examples (31) – (32):

31. ògbèdè-ògbèdè bù hné Íké jì snù ọ̀nù á
small-small be thing PN use wash mouth 3SG

‘It is slowly that Ike washed his mouth’

*32. Àmáà bù hné Ógè jì kpà-kwà-rà íshì á
Well be that PN use shave-well-PST head 3SG

Pronouns

Ikwere records pronouns such as the personal, reflexive, interrogative, demonstrative and logophoric pronouns. The personal pronoun marks three distinct grammatical persons such as the first person (the speaker), the second person (the addressee) and the third person (the non-participant referent). It can also mark distinction in terms of number lexically. Thus, we recognize the singular (one entity) and the plural (more than one entity) forms of the personal pronouns. There is no gender distinction. Personal pronouns in Ikwere also record different cases in relation to their syntactic positions or function in the sentence. They are the subjective or nominative, the objective or accusative and the possessive or genitive cases. There is, however no overt morphological case marking in the pronominal system of the language. For lack of space, the summary of personal pronouns in Ikwere taken from Alerechi (2008b) is shown in table1.

Table 1: Summary of Ikwere personal Pronouns

| Number | Person | Subject | Object | Possessive |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| <i>Singular</i> | 1 st | mé, (N)...m ‘I’ | mé, m ‘me’ | m ‘my/ mine’ |
| | 2 nd | gé, i/ì ‘you’ | gé, i/ì ‘you’ | i/ì ‘yours’ |
| | 3 rd | yá, o/ọ ‘s(he)/it’ | yá, á ‘him/her/it’ | a ‘his/hers/its’ |
| <i>Plural</i> | 1 st | ayî ‘we’ | áyí/àì ‘us’ | ai ‘ours’ |
| | 2 nd | anî ‘you’ | ánî ‘you’ | ánî ‘yours’ |
| | 3 rd | wé ‘they’ | wé ‘them’ | wé ‘theirs’ |

Prepositions

Preposition is used to express some kind of relation with respect to time or space between things and events (Hursford, 1994). In Ikwere, it is marked by *nì/ nù*, which derives its meaning as ‘in’, ‘on’, ‘for’, ‘at’, etc., based on the context of usage. It is noted that *nì/nù* is a homophonous item as it represents a preposition, an additive coordinator and also serves as a subordinator that introduces noun clauses in Ikwere. The vocalic element of the preposition assimilates completely to the vowel of the following word if it begins with a vowel but remains invariant if the following word begins with a consonant. See examples in (33) – (34):

33. Ò dì ná áhiá
3SG be PREP market

‘S(He) is at the market’

34. Ájnā dì nì mọnô
Sand be PREP oil

‘There is sand in the oil’/ ‘The oil is sandy’

Whenever the vocalic part of the preposition is identical with the contiguous vowel right to it, it is contracted and written with an apostrophe in the orthography as in n'áhiá 'at the market'.

Conjunction

Conjunctions in Ikwere may be used to link items that are of equal or unequal status; or offer a choice between two things or a list of things from where one of the possible alternatives can be made. While *nì* 'and' is used to link objects and persons, *mà nì* 'but that', which is optional, is used to connect facts that are opposed to each other. See examples (1) – (4):

35. mé nì gé
1SG CONJ 2SG

'You and I'

36. Ézè bja ọ̀rò (mà nọ) ọ mà à-hnú m̄
PN come house but that 3SG AUX-NEG PR-see 1SG

'Eze came to the house but he did not see me'.

According to Joshua and Alerechi (2018:39), Ikwere records two alternative coordinators marked with the phrase *mà ọ̀bù* 'or it be' and *sì ọ̀bù* 'or it be', whose English equivalent is 'or'. Whereas, *mà ọ̀bù* 'or' is used for commands, *sì ọ̀bù* 'or' is used for alternative questions. Examples are given in (37) – (38):

37. Gwè-ré úbnē mà ọ̀bù ọ̀yikpà!
Take-ASRT pear but it be corn
'Collect pear or corn!'

38. Ọ gbà-gà ásọ sì ọ̀bù ọ̀jnè-gà íjnè?
3SG run-PROG race or 3SG be 3SG go-PROG walk
'Is s/he running or walking?'

Conclusion

This paper reveals that Ikwere is an Igboid language comprising twenty-four mutually intelligible dialects. The dialects have been dichotomized into major groups such as North and South; East and West; East-Central, west-Central and North-South groups, etc. using different linguistic features. The language has nine phonemic oral vowels and eight nasal vowels. It also records twenty-eight consonants. Among other linguistic features identified in this paper are the tones, syllable structure, word structure and some word classes. Areas such as the phrases, clauses, sentence types, etc. are not treated here and so require further investigation.

Recommendations

This work gives a brief overview of the linguistic features of the Ikwere language. While some of these features have received fair description from some scholars, others are yet to be explored. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Scholars should carry out more investigation into different aspects of the linguistic features of indigenous languages like Ikwere for their development and preservation.
2. Government and non-governmental agencies should encourage researchers through grants in order to document and describe indigenous languages such as Ikwere as that implies documenting aspects of African cultures

Endnotes:

The following abbreviations are used in this paper: ASRT = Assertive, AUX = Auxiliary verb, COMP = Complement, CONJ = Conjunction, DUR=Durative, 1SG = First person singular, 2SG = Second person singular, 3SG= Third person singular, FACT = Factative, FUT = Future, HAB=Habitual, NEG=Negation, OBJ = Object, PERF = Perfective, PN =Proper name, POT = Potential , PR = Prefix, PREP = preposition, PROG = progressive, PST=Past, SUBJ = Subject

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