

A LEXICOSTATISTICS COMPARISON OF YORÙBÁ, ÌGBÒ AND OLÙKÙMI DIALECTS¹

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Abstract

This is a preliminary report on an ongoing research work on Olùkùmi, a Yoruboid language enclaved by the Igbo communities in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta state of Nigeria. The paper examines Olùkùmi as it is spoken today; an amorphous language on the verge of extinction. We examine the Ugbodu and Ukwunzu varieties of Olùkùmi along with Yorùbá and Igbo languages. With their location, the effect of Igbo language and culture on the Olùkùmi language and people cannot be over-emphasized. Olùkùmi is a language struggling for survival. The paper carries out a comparative and lexico-statistical analysis of two varieties of Olùkùmi; Ugbodu and Ukwunzu with Yorùbá and Igbo, drawing data from the Ibadan Four Hundred (400) Word List of Basic Items. The data were collected from native speakers of the languages. The essence of the comparative work is to discover the similarities and differences that exist among the languages. It also made it possible to examine the level of mutual intelligibility that exists among them. We found that the two varieties examined are very different from each other. The Ugbodu variety of Olùkùmi is closer to Yorùbá while the Ukwunzu variety is closer to Igbo. The lexicostatistic analysis show higher percentage (77.61%) of cognates between Ugbodu and Yorùbá and between Ukwunzu variety and Igbo (82.1%) thereby betraying closer affinity between the two sets. The effort of the Ugbodu community in reviving the language is also examined. The language as it is spoken now is a hybrid of Yorùbá, Igbo, Igala and Esan languages.

Keywords: Olukùmi, lexicostatistics, comparative method, cognates, nouns, verbs

1.1 Introduction

This study examines the Úgbódù and Úkwúnzù varieties of Olùkùmi (also called Ólùkùwùmi, or Ónùkùwùmi) along with Yorùbá and Igbo. These languages belong to the Niger Congo language family. Ugbodu, Ukwu-Nzu, Ubulubu, Ugboba, Idumogo, Ogodor and Anioma form the seven towns that make up the Olùkùmi clan (Eleshin, 2012). Olùkùmi is a Yoruboid language spoken in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria. It belongs to Edekiri of the Yoruboid group in Kwa family of Niger –Congo phylum (Lewis, 2009). The Olùkùmi people have different stories of origin, one of which is that they migrated from Òwò, a Yorùbá town where a dialect of Yorùbá is spoken. The fact however remains that they speak a language that is very close to Yorùbá in all forms. According to Obisesan (2012), the speakers acknowledge the fact that they speak a language that has close resemblance with Yorùbá language but do not see themselves as Yorùbás.

The Olùkùmis are located in the midst of the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria and the language is struggling for survival. There is the Ugbodu and the Ukwunzu varieties. The Olùkùmi spoken in Ugbodu is much closer to Yorùbá while the variety spoken in Ukwunzu is highly

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adulterated with Igbo. The word *Olùkùmi* means my friend in Igala and Owé; Igala is a Yoruboid language spoken in Kogi state while Owé is a dialect of Yorùbá.

According to the National Population census of 2006, *Olùkùmi* has a population of 13,750. Despite the fact that the population of the *Olùkùmi* people is increasing in number, this does not have an effect on the language speakers as it keeps on decreasing. This is because the young ones are not using the language; they have been dominated by the language of their environment, Igbo and the Nigerian Lingua Franca, English language.

1.3 Ugbodu Variety

The Ugbodu variety of *Olùkùmi* is spoken in Ugbodu town which is the largest speaking community of *Olùkùmi* language. Ugbodu is the reduced form of Ugbodumila, which simply translates as ‘bush saved me’ in *Olùkùmi* and also some dialects of Yorùbá. Another tradition believes that Ugbodu means *ugbó odù* ‘forest of odu’ which is then contracted to *ugbodu*. The Ugbodu community is very aware of the endangered status of their language and is making efforts at revitalization.

1.4 Ukwu-Nzu

Ukwu-Nzu variety of *Olùkùmi* is spoken in Ukwu-Nzu village which is only a few kilometers away from Ugbodu. They speak a variety of *Olùkùmi* that is not supposed to be too different from the Ugbodu variety but is now so different. The Ukwu-Nzu people have not paid as much attention to their language as the Ugbodu people. There however still exist a high level of similarity between the two dialects i.e. Ukwunzu and Ugbodu and also Yorùbá and Igbo respectively. These similarities are brought about by different reasons. The diagram below shows the genetic classification of the language.

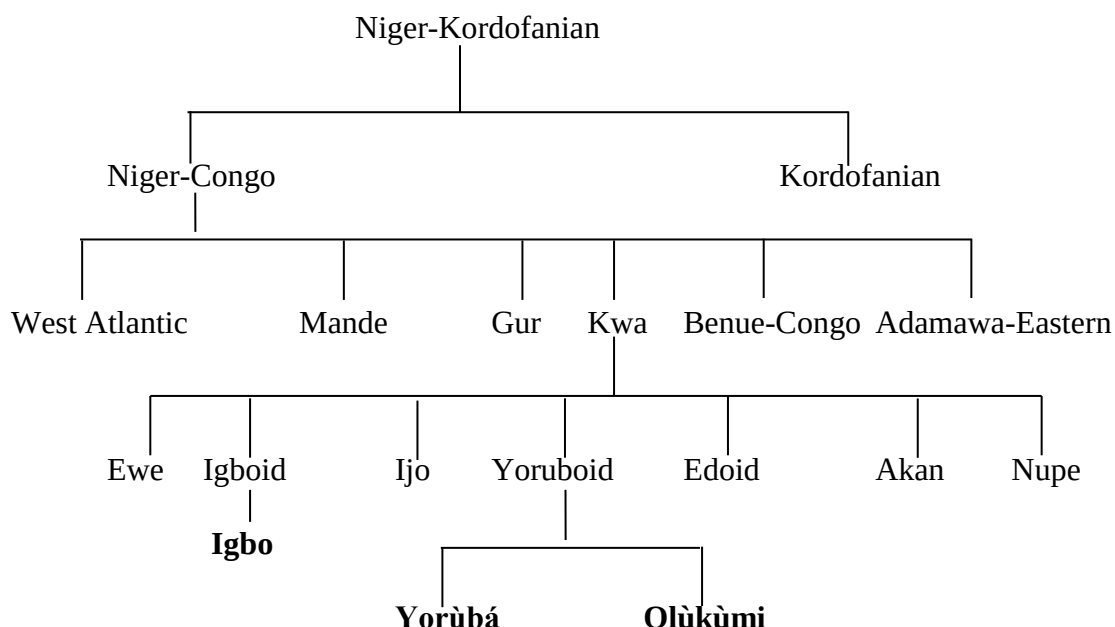


Figure 1: Adapted Genetic classification of the *Olùkùmi*, *Yorùbá* and *Igbo* languages

From the diagram, we can see that *Olùkùmi* falls directly under the Yoruboid group where *Yorùbá* also belongs while *Igbo* is of the Igboïd group.

that kills everybody and thereby leading to language extinction; that is a case of sudden language death. Another reason is language contact whereby the bigger and perhaps more prestigious language is adopted by the speakers of a smaller language. In this case, the language dies gradually. Language contact is brought about migration or colonization.

The Olùkùmi people migrated to their present location from Òwò and passed through different Edo communities. The vestiges of Edo words can still be found in Olùkùmi language. At present, the real Olùkùmi language is going into extinction and their biggest challenge is how to protect their language and culture in general because once a language is gone, a culture and a heritage also die.

The Ugbodu community is making efforts at revitalization. The elders are more connected to the language than the youths and the youths are the future of the language. The Olùkùmi that is spoken now is an amorphous language, a hybrid of Yorùbá, Igbo and some other languages like, Benin, Ishan, Urhobo and Igala. According to an elder in Ugbodu town “..... this language may die if care is not taken.”

1.7 Methodology

Data were collected from native speakers of the languages using the *Ibadan Four Hundred Word List of Basic Items*. Lexical items from the languages are divided into different sets of **liquid nouns, part of the body, edible nouns, human nouns, animal nouns, place nouns, location nouns** and **verbs** to make for easy to comparison.

A comparative and lexicostatistic approach is adopted for the study. The comparative method compares lists of related words in order to discover cognates. Cognates refer to words that have the same meaning and descended from common ancestors. The essence of comparative method is to discover whether the languages have historical connection. In this study, we see the languages are related in more ways than one. We compare the languages to discover the differences and similarity, and relying on our genetic classification we are able to arrive at a conclusion. We examine different sets of words in order to determine the relationship among the languages. Different levels of cognates were discovered between the groups and different levels of mutual intelligibility were discovered.

Lexicostatistics aims at establishing linguistic relations on the basis of a quantitative comparison of vocabulary; it is the statistical study of vocabulary to discover whether languages are historically related by counting the percentage of cognates (Romaine, 2000, Matthews, 2007, Chantanaroj, 2007). The method sees a code form as a dialect of a language once they share between 81 to 100% cognates but if they share between 28% to 81% cognates, then they are regarded as languages within a family. This means that the higher the cognates, the closer the relationship.

1.8 Data Presentation and Analysis

For our analysis, the different sets of lexical items will be compared. On the lexicostatistic analysis, a simple percentage of all the sets will be determined. Any word that does not belong to either Yorùbá or Igbo will not be used in the analysis.

1. Liquid Nouns

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
omi	omi	mili	mmílí	‘water’
itò	itò	mma mmílí	mma mmílí	‘urine’
otí/ ẹmu	ẹmon	nwányà	mmáńyá	‘wine’
epo pupa	ekpo ope	ńné-ńkwú	ńkwú	‘oil palm’
itò	itò	ájọ	ásó	‘saliva’
ẹjẹ	ẹzẹ	édéké	édéké	‘blood’

From the data above we can see that Yorùbá and the Ugbodu variety share cognates while Igbo and the Ukwu-Nzu variety also share cognates. The differences noticed in ‘oil palm’ can be explained. Some sound correspondences are also noted in ẹmu~ẹmon ‘wine’ and ẹjẹ~ẹzẹ ‘blood’.

2. Parts of the Body

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
ọwọ	ọwọ	áká	áká	‘hand’
inú	inan	áfọ	áfó	‘belly (external)’
orí	orí	ìsì	ísí	‘head’
eyín	eyín	éze	éze	‘teeth’
ara	ara	àhú	àhú	‘body’
irun	irun	ádẓí	ází	‘hair’
inú	inan	ímé-áfọ	áfó	‘stomach (internal)’
ìdì	ùdí	íkè	íkè	‘buttocks’
etí	etí	ńtí	ńtì	‘ear’
imú	imọn	ímí	ímí	‘nose’
ẹnu	ẹrun	ónlẹ	ónú	‘mouth’
ojú	ozu	ányá	ányá	‘eye’
ọkàn	ẹdọ	obì	óbì	‘heart’
itan	ọgbọdọgbọ	ọgbọdọgbọ	àpàtà	‘thigh’

The data of parts of the body is more diverse. Like the liquid nouns, we can see that Yorùbá and the Ugbodu variety share higher number of cognates while Igbo and the Ukwu-Nzu variety also share cognates. We also discovered some similar forms in ‘ear’, ‘nose, and ‘mouth’. The word for heart in Ugbodu is ẹdọ which is not used in standard Yorùbá but used in dialects of Yorùbá and also in Igala. The two Olùkùmi dialects have the same word for ‘thigh’. Regular sound changes are also noted in the data.

3. Edible Nouns

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
isu	usu	jí	jí	‘yam’
obì	obì	ójí	ójí	‘kola nut’
ọgèdè wéré	ọgèdè wéré	ọgèdè ntítí	únè	‘banana’
ẹwà	akpaka	ágwa	àgwà	‘beans’
iyọ	ohun	ńnú	ńnú	‘salt’
ọbẹ	ọbẹ	ófé	ófé	‘soup’
ẹyin	ẹghen	àkwá	àkwá	‘egg’
ilá	ilá	ókwùlú	ókwùlù	‘okra’

Looking through the data of edible nouns above, we can see that Yorùbá and the Ugbodu variety share cognates while Igbo and the Ukwu-Nzu variety share higher degree of cognates. Ugbodu refers to ‘salt’ as *ohun*, a term also used by some dialects of Yorùbá as against *iyò* of standard Yorùbá. Other differences between Yorùbá and Ugbodu cognates are explained by regular sound changes. Ukwu-Nzu refers to banana as *ògèdè ñtiti* derived from a combination of Yorùbá and Igbo words. *Ògèdè* is banana in Yorùbá while *ñtiti* is small in Igbo.

4. Concrete Nouns

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
igbá	ugba/ ughogho/uko	ńbubò	ùgbá	‘calabash’
òkúta	òkúta	òkúte	òkwúte	‘stone’
owu	owu	olùlù	òbúlú/òwú	‘cotton’
apèrè	ńkàtá	ńkàtá	ńkàtá	‘basket’
odó	udo	ódo	ódó	‘mortar’
ilé	ule	únọ	únọ	‘house’
ẹní	enin	útè	úté	‘mat’
asọ	aso	ákwà	ákwà	‘cloth’

This set of examples presents exciting features. There seem to be many borrowed words here. This shows that Yorùbá and Igbo also have cognates which could be as a result of language contact. We can see cognates in words for ‘calabash’, stone cotton and mortar. The two varieties of Olùkùmi borrow the word for ‘basket’ *ńkàtá* from Igbo.

5. Human Nouns

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
ènìyàn/ẹni	ẹnẹ	ńmádù	ńmádú	‘person’
obínrin	obinrin	òkpòfò	nwúwà	‘woman’
ọmọ	oma	ńwádu	ńwátà	‘child’
ọmọkúnrin	omokunrin	nwáókèyí	nwá nwóké	‘son’
bàbá	ba	ńnà	ńnà	‘father’
ìyá	ìye	ńné	ńné	‘mother’
okúnrin	okunrin	ókèi	nwókè	‘man’
òrẹ	olùkù	óyí	óyí	‘friend’

The data of human nouns is very interesting. Ugbodu still retains the word that names the language, *olùkù* ‘friend’ compared to *òrẹ* ‘friend’ in Yorùbá. This has been substituted for *óyí* in Ukwu-Nzu. Some differences are noted between Ukwu-Nzu and Igbo in words like ‘woman’ and ‘man’. The word *òkpòfò* ‘woman’ is a borrowed word from an Edoid language. Regular sound changes are also noted in the data as exemplified in data (6).

6. Animal Nouns

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
olongbo/musu	busu/ologbo	pusu	ábú/ ólógbó	‘cat’
pépéyẹ	kpékpéyẹ	ọbág ^w u	ọbógwù	‘duck’
ẹşin	ẹşin	àjìnyàn	ìnyìnyà	‘horse’
ẹyẹ	ẹyẹ	únunù	ńnùnù	‘bird’
igún	ugúnugún	údeně	ùdènè	‘vulture’
ẹfan	ifẹfẹn	ánwú-ńtà	ánwú-ńtà	‘mosquito’
ewurẹ	eran ule	éwu	éwú	‘goat’

àgùtàn	àgùtàn	átúlu	átúlù	‘sheep’
màálù	ẹla	éfí	éfí	‘cow’
ajá	azá	ńkítá	ńkítá	‘dog’

From the animal nouns data above, it was discovered that the Olùkùmi varieties share the word for ‘cat’ along with Yorùbá while Igbo also borrows the word. Ugbodu borrows the word for ‘mosquito’ from another language while *eran ule* ‘goat’ describes it. The word *ẹlá* ‘cow’ is also used by dialects of Yorùbá, e.g. Owé, while *ẹlá* is meat in Igala. Apart from ‘cat’, Ukwu-Nzu and Igbo share cognates.

7. Place Nouns

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
ìlú	ile	óbódó	òbòdò	‘town’
agbo ilé	òde	ezí	èzí	‘compound’
ìyàrá	uga	àkò’tjè	òbí	‘room’
odò	omin	otjìmìlì	òsìmìlì	‘river’
ilé	ule	únò	únò	‘house’

Looking through these examples, we noted a lot of differences in the Yorùbá and Ugbodu variety. The words even though they are not cognates are Yorùbá words used by dialects. Some have extensive or restricted meanings. Ukwu-Nzu and Igbo share cognates.

8. Verbs

Yorùbá	Ugbodu	Ukwunzu	Igbo	Gloss
yín	ta	gbá	gbáá	‘shoot’
pa	pa	gbù	gbúó	‘kill’
tíí	de	kpotjì	kpotjìé	‘close’
sunkún	ekun	k ^w á	kwáá ákwá	‘weep’
lò	lo	g ^w é	gwéé	‘grind’
fò	fo/to	wúdà	wùò	‘jump’
yàn	yan	wèlì	wéré	‘choose’
wá	wá	bìá	bìá	‘come’

Most of the verbs in Ukwu-Nzu and Igbo are similar, e.g. gbá(á) ‘shoot’, gwéé ‘grind’, bìá ‘come’. For Yorùbá and Ugbodu, there are cognates, e.g. pa ‘kill’, fò ‘jump’, wá ‘come’. There are also instances where Ugbodu uses another word used by dialects of Yorùbá. There are sixty seven randomly selected lexical items.

In order to find the percentage of cognates for Ugbodu and Yorùbá and between Ukwu-Nzu and Igbo, we counted the number of all the lexical items and then find the percentage of cognates from the sum total of all lexical items i.e. the number of cognates divided by the total number of lexical items multiplied by hundred as indicated below.

$$9. \quad \frac{\text{Cognates}}{\text{Total Number of Lexical Items}} \times 100$$

In order to determine the level of relatedness between Yorùbá and Ugbodu, we counted 52 cognates and subject it to a lexicostatistics analysis as follows:

$$10. \quad \frac{52}{67} \times \frac{100}{1} = 77.61\%$$

In order to determine the level of relatedness between **Ukwu-Nzu** and **Igbo**, we counted 55 cognates and subject it to a lexicostatistics analysis as follows:

$$11. \quad \frac{55}{67} \times \frac{100}{1} = 82.1\%$$

To determine the level of relatedness between **Ugbodu** and **Ukwu-Nzu**, we counted only 4 cognates and subject it to a lexicostatistics analysis as follows:

$$12. \quad \frac{4}{67} \times \frac{100}{1} = 5.97\%$$

1.9 Findings

From our analysis, we found 77.61% of cognates between Yorùbá and Ugbodu variety of Olùkùmi which means that they fall within the same language family. Between Ukwu-Nzu and Igbo, the percentage is 82.1% which means that Ukwu-Nzu has practically become a dialect of Igbo since it falls within the 81 to 100% mark. Only 5.97% of cognates between Ugbodu and Ukwu-Nzu which were supposed to be dialects of Olùkùmi were discovered. The results of the lexicostatic analysis tally with that of the comparative method. With this temporary analysis, there seems to be a reclassification of the languages.

We noted the fact that there are some lexical items which are still being used in Olùkùmi but which the Yorùbá language no longer attests or used in that context, adding these words to the Ugbodu and Ukwu-Nzu dialects would have increased the percentage. These words include *èdò* ‘heart’, *olúku* ‘friend’, *ẹlá* ‘cow’, etc. these words are used in Owé and Igala (Arokoyo, 2007, 2012).

1.10 Conclusion

From the analysis, we conclude that that Olùkùmi is gradually shifting and becoming a dialect of Igbo. In fact, the situation in Ugbodu is being stemmed due to the conscious efforts at revitalization by the community. How successful this will be remains to be seen. Efforts at revitalization should be made. Parents, especially the elderly who are more connected to the language should make efforts to speak the language to their children as the youth are the future of the community. The language as it is spoken now is a hybrid of Yorùbá, Igbo, Igala and Esan languages. We conclude that the language either survives, or evolves into an entirely different language; an amorphous language.

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