
A Contrastive Study of the Progressive Marker in English and Ikwerre Languages

Florence Nne Agwu (PhD)

Department of English & Literary Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University,
Nkpolu-Oroworokwo, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijellr.13/vol12n12431>

Published January 14 2024

Citation: Agwu F.N. (2024) A Contrastive Study of the Progressive Marker in English and Ikwerre Languages, *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, Vol.12, No 1, pp.24-31

Abstract: *The Ikwerre and English languages differ in some linguistic features due to their different linguistic backgrounds. One of such linguistic features is the inflectional markers/affixes which are used to mark different grammatical categories. These differences often create problems to the Ikwerre learners of English as a second language. This paper, therefore examines the progressive markers in English and Ikwerre languages so as to identify areas of differences in both languages that may pose problems to the Ikwerre learners of English as well as areas of similarities that make the learning and proficiency in the use of the progressive marker in the target language easier. The data were collected from the language samples and analysed using the descriptive method. The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Robert Ledo's contrastive analysis (CA). The findings of this study revealed that in both languages, the progressive inflectional markers are suffixes. The study also revealed that while English language marks the progressive verb form with the "-ing" suffix, Ikwerre language marks the progressive verb form with the '-ga' suffix. This paper further revealed that while English language marks the present progressive verb forms with the present forms of the auxiliary verb (be), main verb and the "ing" marker, the Ikwerre language marks the present progressive form with the 'ga' suffix. This paper further observes that while English forms its past progressive forms with the past form of the auxiliary verb (be), the main verb and the "ing" marker, the Ikwerre language forms its past progressive with the presence of the suffix 'ga' followed by the factative rV suffix. This paper therefore recommends that Ikwerre learners of English should make conscious effort to master the areas of differences in the use of the progressive markers in both languages so as to avoid transfer of rules to the English language.*

KEY WORDS: inflectional affix, progressive marker, suffix, linguistic features, Ikwerre language.

INTRODUCTION

The study of any language entails a study and mastery of the levels of language such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Ndimele 36). Effective communication and

proficiency in any human language is dependent on the proficiency of the learner in these levels according to which language is organised. In spite of the area of language study, the pivotal part of language study which is essentially relevant to human communication is the word. Morphemes which are the smallest meaningful unit of expression in any human language combine to form words. Words play integral role in human communication. Native speakers structure their words following the rules of grammar of the language by combining morphemes to form words and words to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. A study of the internal structure of words (morphology) in any language is aimed at discovering and making clearer the rules, patterns, principles and processes that underlie the formation of words in that language.

In Nigeria, the English language is used as a medium of instruction at various levels of education hence intense pursuit by all and sundry to be proficient in the language. kamal affirms that ‘English is an international medium of communication spoken as the second language in Nigeria and it is the official language (20). However, in a multilingual society like Nigeria where learners acquire their first language and are then exposed to the second language for effective communication and interaction, with individuals who share different codes, learners often encounter problems resulting from differences in the linguistic features of both languages.

Every language is unique; hence different languages have diverse ways of forming new words. This study therefore aims to discover the use of the progressive marker /affix in the Omuanwa dialect of Ikwerre language and to contrast it with the progressive marker in the English language so as to identify the areas of differences in both languages that may pose problems to the Ikwerre learners of English as well as the similarities that would make the mastery of the progressive marker in the English language easier.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Contrastive Analysis (CA)

The theoretical framework adopted in this study is Contrastive Analysis (CA) which provides the basis of comparing and contrasting the features of two or more different languages. Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the 1960’s and early 1970’s as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the Behaviourist theory prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. The difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L₂) therefore, depends on the differences between the learner’s first language (L₁) and the target language.

Pit Corder opines that when a learner is learning a target language, he is not learning language for the first time but rather, he is learning a particular realisation or manifestation of human language (225). In other words, he is trying to use a new linguistic data which is different from that of his mother tongue to communicate with people. Fries quoted in Lado, confirms the above view by saying that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language to the foreign language and culture both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture (9). Fries contends also that the problems of learning second language do not arise because of the difficulty in the features of the new language itself but because of the already existing habit formed as a result of the first language (9). In view of this, the learner already has existing habits and these existing habits have formed a set of blind spot in receiving any new language and often times, once a habit is formed, it is difficult to overcome. However, it is also possible for one to learn two habits one after another without dropping any of the two habits. Lado further explains that ‘the elements that are similar to the learners native language will be simple for him, why those that are different will be difficult’ (2). To him, similarity is related to simplicity while differences are related to difficulty. Whiteman and Jackson quoted in James, do not agree with Lado’s view. They argue ‘that relative similarity rather than difference is directly related to levels of difficulty’ (180). The similarities and differences therefore influence his learning of the target language because he is learning the target language against the background of the mother tongue, hence, the learner normally refers back to his mother tongue when he is in difficulty. Contrastive analysis of the first and the target language therefore helps to identify the differences and similarities between the two languages so as to predict difficulties the learner may encounter while learning the target language.

Affixes and Affixation

An affix is a bound morpheme which is always attached to the root or base of a word. Agbedo defines an affix as ‘A speech sound which is added to a word and which changes the meaning or function of the word’ (89). Affixes do not have independent existence.

Affixation according to Ndimele can be defined as ‘a morphological process of attaching an affix to the root or base of a word’ (22). He further affirms that affixes are classified based on two criteria. The first criteria is the position in which the affix occurs relative to the location of the root of the word while the second is the function an affix performs when it is attached to the root or base of a word. Positional classification of affixes yields the prefix, suffix, infix, interfix, circumfix and superfix or suprafix. Affixes perform three functions when they are attached to the root or base of a word and they include Inflectional, Derivational and Extensional functions (Ndimele, 37). This paper focuses on the progressive marker/affix which is one of the inflectional affixes.

The inflectional affixes

An inflectional affix is an affix which performs grammatical functions without changing the part of speech of the word to which it is attached. They are not used to create new words; rather, they are used to show number of nouns, tense of verbs, comparative and superlatives of adjectives and

adverbs, possession and so on. The inflectional affixes/markers in English according to Ndimele (38) and Umera-Okeke and Nwankwo (24):

- s (plural marker)
- s (3rd person singular simple present maker)
- ed (past tense marker)
- ing (progressive marker)
- en (past participle marker)
- er (comparative marker)
- est (superlative marker)
- 's (possessive marker)

The authors further explain that all the inflectional affixes in English are always suffixes and they do not change the syntactic category of the word. Bloomfield refers to the inflectional morphemes as the outer layer of morphology of word forms (222). Ndimele further explains that inflectional morphemes are morphemes of the outer layer because it is not possible to have another suffix after an inflectional affix (38).

The Progressive inflectional affix /marker (-ing)

The progressive marker (-ing) is an inflectional affix used to indicate the present participle or continuous verb forms. It is an affix attached to the end of action (dynamic) verbs to express progressive/continuous actions. It is used to show that the action of the verb is ongoing /uncompleted. For example:

1. The dog is barking.
2. The teacher is writing on the board.

In other words, the progressive marker when attached to an action (dynamic) verb shows that the subject is performing an ongoing action that is not yet completed, hence the progressive marker do not co-occur with stative verbs (verbs that refer to a state or condition which is not changing or likely to change).

Agwu &Wosu affirms that in English, stative verbs cannot be used in the continuous forms hence they do not co-occur with the –ing progressive marker. (104)

This explains why the (a) sentences in 3-5 below are ungrammatical:

3. **a)** *She is knowing my name.
b) She knows my name.
4. **a)***This book is belonging to me.
b) This book belongs to me.

5. a)*He was seeming upset last night.
b) He seemed upset last night.

The Progressive Inflectional marker in Ikwere

Ikwere is an Igboid language spoken in four Local Government Areas (LGA's) of the twenty three LGA's of Rivers State, Nigeria (Alerechi, 25). The author further affirms that the language comprises 24 divergent dialects which are mutually intelligible (25). Emenanjo cited in Alerechi and Kari asserts that verb inflections in Ikwere are marked predominantly by suffixes, sparingly by auxiliaries accompanied by prefixal elements and/or tonal alternations.

According to Alerechi and Kari (92), the progressive verb form is a combination of the verb base and the suffix *'-ga'* (92). The authors explain that 'Ikwere distinguishes the present progressive and past progressive' and that the 'present progressive is marked by the suffix *'-ga'* whereas, the past progressive is marked by the presence of *-ga* followed by the factative *-rV* suffix (92).

The Present Progressive in Ikwere

The present progressive is used to denote a present action that continues through time (Ndimele 43). In Ikwere, it is marked by the suffix *-ga* (Alerechi & Kari 92). The authors further explained that the tonal behaviour of pronominal subject markers, nominal subjects and objects, verb base and progressive-marking suffixes is like what obtains in the factative verb form. Similarly, the vowel of the factative suffix, completely assimilates to the vowel of the immediately preceding syllable, which in this case is the progressive suffix *'-gà'* (93).

Consider the examples below from Alerechi 2015 cited in Alerechi and Kari (93):

6. Kele te-gà usne
 PN pound-PROG pepper

Kele is pounding pepper

7. O zu-gà uwo
 3SG buy-PROG cloth

She/he is buying a cloth

Other examples include:

8. Ngozi zà-gà oro m
 PN sweep-PROG house-POSS PRO

Ngozi is sweeping my house

9. Ikechi se-gà oro

PN draw-PROG house
Ikechi is drawing a house

The authors also noted that ‘certain verbs like **la** ‘resemble’ which take the -rV assertive suffix cannot take the factitive -rV suffix because of the semantics of such verbs.’(89). The authors further affirm that ‘it is unlikely for the facial resemblance of someone with another to be affected by time’(89).

The Past Progressive in I kwerre

The past progressive is used to denote a past action or event (Ndimele 43). In Ikwere, it is marked by the presence of -ga followed by the factative -rV suffix (Alerechi and Kari 92)

10. Kele te-gà rà usne
PN pound-PROG-FACT pepper
Kele was pounding pepper

Constrictive Analysis of the Progressive markers in English and Ikwere Languages

- i) The English Progressive verb form is marked by the suffix ‘-ing’ while the Ikwere progressive verb form is marked by the suffix ‘-ga’

	English	Ikwere
11.	Ngozi is sweep-ing my house	Ngozi zà-gà oro m
12.	Uche is wash-ing my pot	Uche su-gà itne m
13.	Emeka is going home	Emeka là-gà oro

ii) The English progressive marker is a suffix and so also is the Ikwere progressive marker. In other words, both markers are suffixes.

iii) The present progressive in English is marked by the present form of the auxiliary verb such as am, is, are, plus the main verb and the ing marker. The present progressive in Ikwere on the other hand is also used to denote a present action that continues through time and is marked by the suffix -ga as in examples 11 and 13 above

iv) The past progressive verb form in English is marked by the past form of the auxiliary verb (be) such as was, were, plus the main verb plus the ‘-ing’ suffix, whereas in Ikwere it is marked by the presence of the suffix ‘-ga’ followed by the factative -rV suffix

Examples include:

	English	Ikwerre
14.	Uche was sweeping my house.	Uche zà-gà-rà oro m.
15.	Emeka was going home.	Emeka là-gà-rà oro.
16.	Nkechi was going to the farm	Nkechi jne -gà-rà ubi

CONCLUSION`

This paper reveals that while the English language marks the progressive form with the progressive marker (-ing), Ikwerre language marks its progressive form with the progressive marker -ga. This paper also attests to the fact that the progressive markers in both languages are suffixes. The paper further highlights that both language has the present progressive verb forms. While English progressive verb forms take the form of the present forms of the verb (to be- am/is/are) plus the main verb and the progressive marker -ing, the Ikwerre language forms its progressive verb form with the verb base and the suffix ‘-gà’

The paper further reveals that while the English past progressive verb form is formed with the past form of the verb (to be) which include was/were plus the main verb and the progressive maker -ing , the Ikwerre language forms its past progressive verb form with the presence of -ga followed by the factative -rV suffix .

The findings of this paper clearly reveal that there are differences and similarities in the progressive verb forms in both languages. The paper also observes that the similarities and differences will be of little or no aid to the Ikwerre learners of English as a second language unless they make conscious efforts to master the areas of differences in both languages so as to avoid transfer of rules from the L1 to the target language.

This paper therefore concludes that Ikwerre learners of English should make conscious effort to master the areas of differences in both languages so as to avoid transfer of rules from Ikwerre language to English.

REFERENCES

- Agbedo, Chris. *General Linguistics: An Introductory Reader*. Nsukka: ACE Resource Konsult, 2000.
- Agwu, Florence Nne. "Contrastive Analysis of Pluralisation of Nouns in English and Ikwerre (Omuanwa). *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*. Vol 10, no. 1, 2022, pp.123-127.

- Agwu, Florence N. and Okachukwu Onuah Wosu. *Practical Functional Grammar and Usage*. Maesa Publishing, 2023.
- Alerechi, Roseline I. C. “Negation in the Omuanwa Dialect of Ikwere”. In Ndimele, O. M. (eds)*Language endangerment: Globalisation and the fate of the minority languages in Nigeria*. Grand orbit Communications and Emhai Press, 2015 pp.527-54
- Alerechi, Roseline I. C. “Nominal modifiers in Ikwere” *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*, vol.37,2017, pp.25-34
- Alerechi, Roseline I. C. “Serial Vreb Construction in Ikwere”. *Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education*. Vol.12, no. 1, 2018, pp.16-47.
- Alerechi, Roseline I. C. and Ethelbert Kari.”Verb Inflectional Morphology in Ikwere” *Studies in Linguistics* 48, 2018, pp.79-113.<http://dx.doi.org/10.17002/sil...48.201807.79>Bloomfield, Leonard. *Language*. London: George Allen and Unwin Limited., 1933
- Emenanjo, Nolue. Verb Derivational Morphology. In P.A. Nwachukwu . (Ed.) *Readings on the Igbo Verb*. Onitsha: African FEP Publishers Limited, 1983.
- Fries, Charles. *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1945. Print.
- James, Carl. *Contrastive Analysis*. Essex: Longman, 1980.
- Kamal, Aligu. *Language for Academic Purposes*. Zaria; Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2010
- Lado, Robert. *Linguistics Across Cultures*. Ann. Abbor: University of Michigan press, 1957.
- Ndimele, Ozo-Mekuri. *Readings on Language*.Emhai, 2001
- Ndimele, Ozo-Mekuri.*Morphology and Syntax*. Grand orbit Communications, 1999
- Umera Okeke, Nneka, P. and Uju C.Nwankwo. *Studies in Morphology and Syntax of English*. Awka: Mount Camel Printing and Publishing Limited., 2009.