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## A comparative study of Epie and Izon languages

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Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba<sup>1\*</sup>, Collins Oyimini<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1&2</sup>*Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa, Nigeria,*  
[bleugochi@yahoo.com](mailto:bleugochi@yahoo.com)<sup>1</sup>, [ovis1990@gmail.com](mailto:ovis1990@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup>

\*Corresponding author

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**Abstract:** This study presents a comparative study of Epie and Izon languages of Bayelsa State. The multilingual nature of the Yenagoa metropolis, citizens of Epie find it difficult communicating effectively in the language as different Bayelsa languages co-exist within the Yenagoa metropolis which is primarily the domain of the Atissa and Epie people. This study aims at examining the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic differences between the Epie and Izon languages. Specifically, the study intends to investigate consonant clusters as well as the orthography of the two languages and differences. The work reveals that this study will provide linguistic information that could be used for further description of Epie and Izon language. This paper shows that both the Epie and Izon languages operate with the IPA, there are differences in their orthography and both Epie and Izon adopt a much more flexible consonant system. Data for this study were collected through a random sampling technique using oral interviews, structured observational list as well as comparative structure tests. The data were collected through the primary and the secondary methods. The sampling method was done randomly in the generation of words and sentences from the two languages. The findings reveal that the Izon language has the subject-object-verb (SOV) word order while the Epie language has the subject-verb-object (SVO) word order arrangement. Epie and Izon are two distinct languages.. This will help the development and growth of the languages.

**Keywords:** Epie, Izon, Language, Morphology, Syntax

**Biographical notes:** Dr. Blessing Ugochi Uwasomba is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Her areas of research interest include: Morphology, Syntax, Nigerian linguistics and Socio-linguistics. She is one of the pioneer lecturers of the school since 2012.

Collins Oyimini is a Post graduate student of the department of English and Communication Studies, Federal University, Otuoke, Bayelsa State Nigeria.

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### 1. Introduction

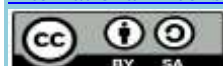
Epie and Izon are two languages that are distinct from another. Though the languages are spoken in the same geographical area, but they have differences ranging from the phonological, morphological, syntactical and semantic level. What then is the missing link? Are there certain phenomena that are responsible for the differences? It is to get answers to these salient questions that this work is centered on, with special attention on their Morphology and Syntax. Epie and Izon are among the numerous indigenous languages that are spoken in Nigeria. While Izon is spoken among a cluster of people from across the various states that make up the Niger Delta, as well as some other inhabitants of the coastal area in some parts of West Africa. Epie is spoken by the people of Epie and Atissa in Bayelsa. According to (Prezi, 2014: 263). The Izon people are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria. They are scattered all over the Niger Delta Region in several States of Nigeria, namely: Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, and Ondo (Prezi, 2014: 262). On the other hand, Epie language is spoken pre-dominantly in two kingdoms (Epie/Atissa) of Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

#### 1.1. Brief history of the Ijaw tribe

The Ijaw (Ijo) are a collection of people mostly in the forest region of Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States within the Niger Delta in Nigeria. (Martin, 2013) observes that, some are resident in Akwa-Ibom, Edo and Ondo States in Nigeria. One of the past presidents of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan is an Ijaw person from Ogbia. Izon is one of the

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languages in the ethnic group of Ijaw. The Epie belongs to the popular 'Niger-Congo' Language family. Though there is no definite date on the history of the Epie (Epie-Atissa) people yet, writers and linguists have been able to write down something remarkable, (Williamson, 2004). Oral tradition about the origin of the people all speak of a common descent from the "Old Benin kingdom". Sixteen out of the 29 towns in Epie-Atissa, claimed to have migrated from Benin. They probably migrated through Isoko land, crossed the River Niger and drifted into Orashi or Engenni River where they landed at a place called Oguan, before they finally moved to their present settlements. The people's religion which is also similar to that of Engenni and Udekama, all lend credence to the fact that Epie-Atissa people and their two brothers namely, Engenni and Udekama, all migrated from the Old Benin Kingdom.

In head final languages such as Kolokuma and other Ijoid group of languages spoken in the Nigeria Delta, The head come last in a phrase. In head-initial languages, such as English, Igbo, Efik and Others, the head precedes its complements (Uwasomba, 2019: 30). Every language has its own rules for combining words. Languages are generally constrained to combine words in one order or the other. Hence word order is crucial in the combinatory process. Ejele (2014: 116) asserts that there are three basic word orders which are common in languages, namely, SVO (Subject-Verb-Object), SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) and also VSO (Verb-Subject-Object). It is natural to every native speaker of a language to sub-categorize and select lexical categories that are in the lexicon of the language and then combine both syntactically and semantically well-formed constructions, (Uwasomba, 2020:80).

### 1.2. Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of the study is to create the awareness of the generative capacity in relation to the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic analysis in the comparative system of Epie and Izon Languages. Some of the objectives of the study are;

- To arouse interest among the speakers to study their language.
- To give credence to language one (L1) mother tongue education.
- To put more effort in the development of the languages and their orthographies.

### 1.3. Research problem

Yenagoa metropolis has many people with different languages of Bayelsa State. The languages are unintelligible among the speakers. This problem makes it difficult for a second language learner to acquire. Yenagoa is the domain of Atissa and Epie people. The Epie speakers are not comfortable with the complexity of many languages in their domain.

### 1.4. Key findings

The study reveals that the Epie and Izon are two independent languages. They are mutually unintelligible. The two languages belong to the same language family of Ijoid group. They belong to the same ethnic group in Nigeria known as the Ijaw. The Ijoid group has many languages that are unintelligible in the Niger Delta. The two languages have different word order arrangement and they have been in the writing system for years now. Take this one to recommendations/suggestions.

### 1.5. The Orthography of Epie And Izon

Structurally, there are similarities and differences between the Epie and Izon languages. There are 30 alphabets in Epie language whereas the Izon language is made up of 30 alphabets too.

The following are the letters of the alphabet in the two languages:

EPIE:	A	B	D	D	E	E	F	G	I		
	I	(J)	K	L	M	N	O	O	P	R	
	S	T	U	U	V	W	Y	Z	GB	GH	
	KP										
IZON:	A	B	D	E	E	F	G	GB	H	I	I
	J		K	L	M	N	η	O	O	P	KP
	R		S	T		U	U	V	W	Y	Z

It should be noted that, it is the correct combination of these letters that can make one to be able to spell words correctly in any human language.

**Phonology** is the study of the ways in which sounds form systems and patterns in human language. Phonology relates to the study of sound patterns in language generally, and specifically to the sound patterns of a particular language (Ejele, 2014: 72).

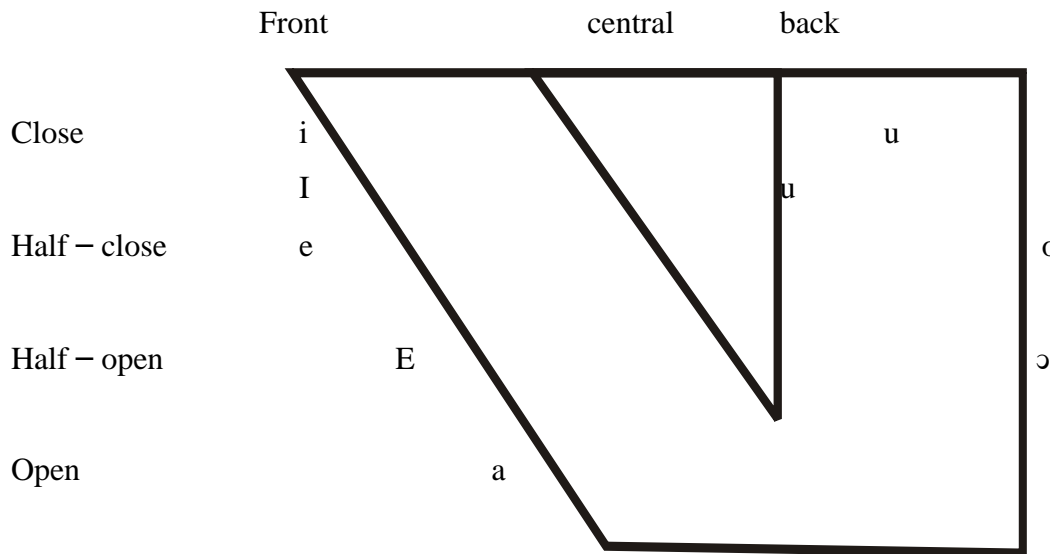


Figure 1: Izon Vowel Chart Copied from Prezi (2014: 265)

Front vowels are i, e, a

Back vowels are u, O, o

Izon has Nine (9) Vowels and Twenty One (21) Consonants)

Epie Vowels. There are nine (9) vowels in Epie Language.

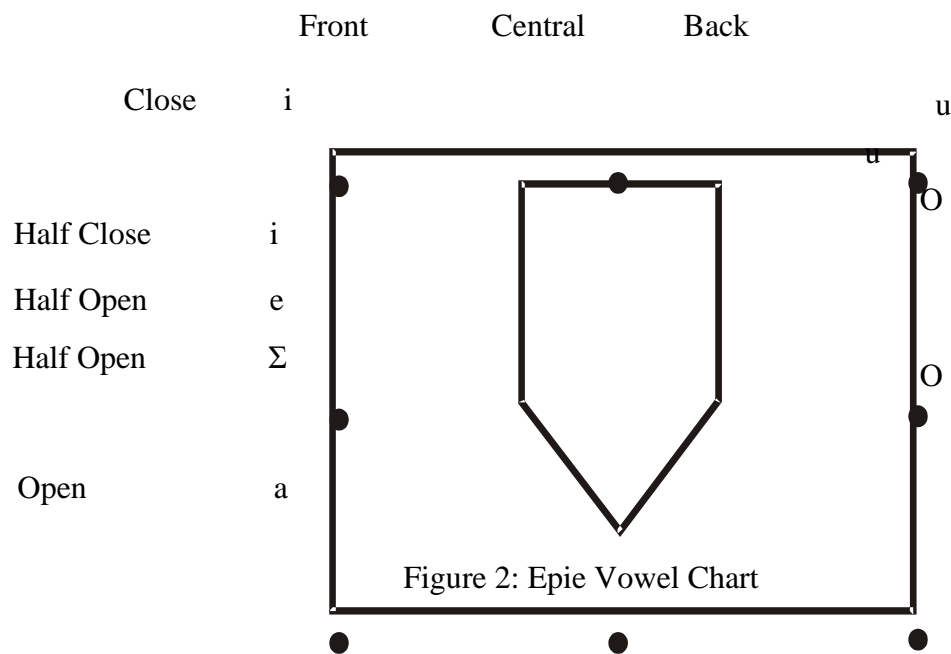


Figure 2: Epie Vowel Chart

Table 1: Epie Consonant Chart

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation							
	Labial		Alveolar		Palatal	Velar	Labio velar	Labialized velar
Nasal	m		N					
Plosive	p	b	t	d		k	g	kpgb
Implosive	b		d					
Fricative	f	r	s	z			r	
Tap			r					
Approximate					j			w
Lateral			l					

Table 2: Izon Consonant Chart

Manner of articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labio dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio velar	glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		k g	kpgb	
Nasal	m		n	ɲ			
Fricative		f v	s z				h
Trill			r				
Lateral			l				
Approximant				j		w	

2. Literature review

This study adopts contrastive linguistics theory. Language acquisition starts at the point the L1 speaker is able to produce meaningful sounds of his or her L1. At this point, such a learner is passionate about learning his/her mother tongue in order to communicate effectively with his immediate environment. According to (Kusor, 2012:1) Children do not need explicit instructions to learn their first language but they seem to just pick the language up in the same way they learn to rollover, crawl and walk. It should be noted that, these two languages (Epie and Izon) cannot be used in official context rather, L1 speakers of these languages resorts to English Language their L2 whenever they want to carry out official activities since English Language has been made the official language of Nigeria.

2.1. What is Contrastive Study?

Contrastive study also called contrastive analysis or contrastive linguistics, is the study of the structures of two or more languages with the aim of identifying the relation or differences that exist among languages of different linguistic environments. Crystal (2008) defines contrastive analysis (CA) as a general approach to the investigation of languages (contrastive linguistics) particularly carried on in certain areas of applied linguistics. Gast (2016) opines that contrastive studies mostly deal with the comparison of languages that are 'socio-culturally linked, that is languages whose speech communities overlap in some way, typically through (natural or instructed) bilingualism. Gast (2016) shows that Contrastive Analysis teaches the teacher to compare areas of the target language like tense, aspect, the verbal group and nominal group with those of the learner's mother tongue. It is expected that by so doing, the teacher will be able to explain errors committed by learner and be able to prevent further occurrences of such errors. From the foregoing, it is clear that the primary aim of contrastive study is to investigate the distinction between two or more languages, especially one foreign and the other native with view to understanding their difference.

3. Research methodology

Data collected for this study were done through a structured observational list as well as comparative structure tests. The researchers collected data through the primary method where they engaged in the interactive oral discussion as well as interviews on the generation of words and sentences from the two languages. The secondary method was also used through the written materials in the two languages. The sampling method was used. The researcher ensured that doubtful data were always cross-checked for accuracy by the competent native speakers.

4. Findings and discussions

4.1. The Structure of Epie and Izon Morphology

Morphology is the level of grammar which studies the internal structure or forms of words, and their meaningful parts, primarily through the use of morpheme concepts as well as the rules by which words are formed (Ejele, 2014: 88). Finding shows that while, the English Language makes use of consonant clusters, the Epie and Izon Languages have a special structure where words, especially those copied from the English are spelt as they are pronounced.

Table 3: Syllable Structure of Words in Epie and Izon (Loan Words)

Epie English	Word Structure	Izon English	Word Structure
Abana Plantain	VCVCV	Sose Church	CVCV
SemeneListan	CVCVCV	Sukulu School	CVCVCV
Tuulu To borne	CVVCV	Buredi Bread	CVCVCV
Uviin Paddle	VCVVC	Tisa Teacher	CVCV

Source: Oral interview with Mr. Afekuro J. O. (Izon)

The above table shows that majority of the Epie and Izon words follow a patterned morphological structure of CVCV. It shows that Nigerian languages do not have consonant cluster. This was also the view of Udemmadu and Chinyeaka (2017) when she averred that "Igbo word structure does not accommodate consonant clusters". It should be noted that

through Linguistic borrowing, consonant Clusters in English are simplified to CV or VCV in Epie Language. Nevertheless, the IZONS have some level of consonant cluster system as can be seen below:

Preye	-	CCVCCV
Bra	-	CCV
Pre	-	CCV

It should be noted here that Majority of Epie and IZON words begin in vowels, as such, in trying to articulate English words, the Epie learner normally imposes vowels on words that are originally sourced from the English, while the IZON Learner seems to retain it.

**Table 4:** English Words Borrowed into Nigerian Languages

English	Word	Epie	Word	Izon	Word
Church	CCVCCC	Isosi	VCVCV	Sose	CVCV
School	CCCVVC	Isughulu	VCVCCVCV	Sukulu	CVCVCV
Bread	CCVVC	Iburedi	VCVCCVCV	Buredi	CVCVCV
Teacher	CVVCCVC	Itisa	VCVCV	Tisa	CVCV

**Source:** Oral Interview with Mr. Afekuro J. O. (IZON); The (Epie) words were gotten from Adu Go IbiEpie Primary 1

Note: In spelling and pronunciation of words, the Epie and IZON learners of English apply the CVCVCV structure, on like the English. As stated earlier, the spelling pattern of words in Epie and IZON have a one-to-one correspondent with their pronunciation, thereby facilitating the spelling and pronunciation processes, while the English has words that have different spellings from their pronunciation.

**Table 5:** Some words of Epie and IZON

English	Epie	Izon
One / /	Ovu / /	Keni / /
Two /tu:/	Ive / /	Mamu / /
Ear / /	Iso / /	Beri / /
Eye / /	Adu / /	Toru / /

**Source:** Interview with Mr. Anemi, M.P. (IZON); The (Epie) words were gotten from Adu Go IbiEpie Primary 1

#### 4.2. Findings

The syllable structure of Epie is VCVCV as in ;*Isosi* ‘church’ while the syllable of IZON is CVCV as in *sose* ‘church’. The syllable structure of the two languages is different from each other. Udemmadu & Chinyeaka, (2017: 5) point of view is correct about the Epie and IZON Languages, especially when there is no clear linguistic affinity and when there is a noticeable morphological difference. To this end, undertaking a contrastive analysis or study will no doubt help in differentiating the morphological systems of the Epie and IZON languages respectively, thereby helping the language learners to understand them.

#### 4.3. The Syntactic Structure Of Epie And IZON languages

Syntax as a branch of linguistics, studies sentence structure, how sentence structure interacts with other dimensions of linguistic information such as morphology, semantics, pragmatic and phonology (Uwasomba, 2022). Mathews (2007: 39) defines syntax as the study of grammatical relations between words and other units within the sentence. Yusuf (2007) defines syntax as the study of the arrangement of words to form sentences. Syntax refers to linguistic structure above the word level. Findings have shown that, syntactically, Epie and IZON, have distinct rules guiding the grammatical structure of the languages. These can be seen below:

#### 4.4. Syntax of IZON (IZON Sintakisi)

Example of ‘SOV’ sentence in IZON includes:

1. Ovie cake tanmi (Ovie cake love)
2. Beibi gee gbasa. ( This is a pen)

#### 4.5. Syntax of Epie (DibeniAgbeni EpieWo)

This work reveals that the word order of Epie is the subject-Verb-Object (SVO) while the order of IZON is Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) arrangement. The word order arrangements of the two languages are distinct in nature. This indicates that they are two different languages. Examples of simple sentences of Epie include:

1. Oviebelem cakebo (Ovie loves cake).
2. Oyiminisilewo (Oyimini is running).

Example of simple sentence in IZON is demonstrated below;

3. ArauOboribami. (SOV)

The subject is *Arau*, while the object is *Obori* and verb is *bami*

#### 4.6. Arrangement of words and particles to form Phrase or statement

To communicate verbally in Epie language you need certain rules or guide to enable you link words with particles, positioning of verbs, objects and nouns in their proper places, to make meaning. Personal pronouns: You must know the first, second, third persons in the language of communication like I, me, you, he, him, she, her, they, them, (English) and mi, mo, wo, ayi, igweyo, igbaniyon.

**4.7. Use of Particles or Articles**

In English Language the article 'the' precedes the subject or object, but in Epie Language, it comes after the nominal/object as suffix. For instance, 'The man' translates to 'oyon yon (man the). Also, this man translates to: Oyon ne, in Epie (man this). Oyon is person or man, you is 'the' and ne 'this'. Thus, the man is coming translates to-oyon yon yiwo.

Note that though come is yo, yi is rather used, just like you can't say, the man is come. Oyon yon 'the man' is the subject as the particle 'the' Ikpeseyo; the clothes or ibiyo, the book. Also, oyigbewo, means; he is going; wo, which is 'is' comes last.

**4.8. Use of Tenses:**

- i. Present Tense: Ovie, yo; means 'ovie, come' you is in the present tense.
- ii. Present Continuous Tense: 'coming'yo becomes yi + wo = 'yiwo', 'yi' is suffixed by wo. I'm coming because Mi + yi + wo = (Miyiwo).
- iii. Past Tense: In the past tense, yo becomes yo + mini = yimini. This 'I've come' translates to miyimini (mi+yi+mini). Mini is sometimes shortened to 'm'yim, meaning I've come; Similarly, Makumewulu mini becomes makumewulum in the short form, which means 'makume has done it.
- iv. Past participle: For came, 'yo' becomes 'ye'. Ovie came, because Ovie ye.
- v. Future Tense: 'Will come' because yewo. Thus, Ovie will come' becomes Ovieyewo.

Note: Statement in the present continuous and future tense both end in wo.

**Table 6:** Common Nouns in Epie and Izon

Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
Uko (canoe)	Ukobubu(Canoes)	Toru (eye)	Toru's (eyes)
Ugba (knife)	Ugbabubu(Knives)	Fun (book)	Funbo (books)
Aki (pot)	Akibubu (Pots)	Olotu(Champion)	Olotubo (Champions)

**Table 7:** Proper Nouns in Epie and Izon

English	Epie	Izon
Man	Imosi	Owei
Woman	Ifina	Ere
Yenagoa	Aken	Sagbama

**Table 8:** Differences between Epie and Izon numbers:

English	Epie	Izon
One	Ovu	Keni
Two	Ive	Maamu
Three	Isaa	Taaru
Four	Inii	Noian
Five	Ision	Soron
Six	Yinsan	
Seven	Sovee	
Eight	Ive-momgbe	
Nine	Ovu-momgbe	
Ten	Igbe	

**Table 9:** Days of the week in Epie and Izon

English	Epie	Izon
Sunday	Adesondi	Opusondebai
Monday	Odenemadeovu	Monidebai
Tuesday	Odenemadeive	Tusidebai
Wednesday	Odenemadesaan	Wenesebai
Thursday	Odenemadeinii	Tosidebai
Friday	Odenemadeision	Firaidebai
Saturday	Okuloghulogili	Kalasondebai

### 3. Implications of the study

This research work implies that ‘a comparative study of Epie and Izon languages’ is very important to the Ijoid group of languages. Nigeria is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic country with over 500 languages. More research should be done in relation to the phonological and the grammatical analysis of the languages (Uwasomba, 2016: 251). The youths from the indigenous language should learn how to speak and write very well in their languages. English language is the official language of Nigeria (L2) while the indigenous languages remain their (L1) mother tongue. No native speaker should ignore his/her mother tongue because it is the person’s identity and ethnic recognition.

### 4. Contribution of the study

This work will contribute a lot to the growth and development of Epie and Izon Languages. They belong to the Ijoid group of languages. This study will help to distinguish the difference in word order arrangement between the Epie and Izon. The Izon language has the subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word arrangement while the Epie language has the subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word arrangement. This paper will help to arouse the interests of other scholars in the language under review to contribute their own research work positively. Students from Epie and Izon languages will learn the correct forms of the phonological, morphological syntactical and semantic implications in the study of the indigenous languages. This will help to build up the orthography and the standardization of the languages. These languages are serving the communicative functions of a language to the native speakers.

### 5. Conclusion

This paper investigated ‘A comparative study of Epie and Izon Languages’. The languages belong to the Ijoid language family. The work shows that Epie and Izon are two distinct languages that are mutually intelligible. The researchers made a comparative study on the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic analysis of the two languages. The result shows that Epie has Subject-verb-object (SVO) arrangement while Izon has the subject-object-verb word order arrangement (SOV). Grammatically their word order arrangements are different from each other which gave rise to two different languages.

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### ORCID

Blessing UgochiUwasomba  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8930-2432>

Collins Oyimini  <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-8851-2653>

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