

## **A Contrastive Analysis of Adjectives in English and Idoma Sentence Structures: Implications for Language Education**

Olayemi Oluwakemi Titilola<sup>1</sup> and Amuta Sunday<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of English, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Nigeria

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Olayemi Oluwakemi Titilola, Email: [kemi.olayemi@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng](mailto:kemi.olayemi@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng)

### **Abstract**

*English Language and its structural patterns share both similar and different features when contrasted with other languages. In this paper, the syntactic patterns of modification of the Noun Phrase (NP), a term rooted in Chomsky's grammatical category, are examined in English and Idoma languages. The aim is to highlight potential implications for the Idoma learners of English language as a second language. Using Government and Binding theory for data analysis, the study draws insights from Contrastive Analysis. To provide data for analysis, two episodes of Okonone, a radio programme presented in Idoma and aired on Joy FM, are recorded and transcribed. Findings reveal that both languages have predicative adjectives and they function as subject and object complements. Adjectives can also occur after the indefinite pronouns in both English and Idoma sentence structures. Unlike in English language, adjectives are observed to predominantly occur post-nominally in Idoma Syntax. Similarly, while nouns can be used as adjectives in the English sentence structure, Idoma language does not provide for such a usage. To compare adjectives in English, standard morphological processes allow users to generate single words. Since Idoma speakers rely heavily on post-nominal modification, comparison is often embedded within the adjectival structure using two or three words. The study concludes that these similarities aid smooth learning of the English language while the dissimilarities impede the proficiency of Idoma learners of the English language.*

*Keywords:* Idoma adjectives, Idoma sentence, modification, sentence structure

English is practically a unifying factor among Nigerians from diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as it bridges the communication gap that these differences in linguistic backgrounds naturally impose. Moreover, English is the language of politics, education, commerce and judiciary. The prestigious status accorded the English language in Nigeria makes it almost indispensable as Nigerians strive for proficiency in the language (Bamgbose, 1991). One of the indigenous Nigerian languages is Idoma. Belonging to the Idomoid ethno-linguistic of the larger Benue-Congo language family, Idoma language is spoken largely in Benue State, Nigeria where the Idoma people constitute the second largest ethnic group in the state.

Irrespective of their origin or status, every language has its unique structure. The structure of a language is the aspect commonly referred to as the syntax. It describes the order of words that form a correct sentence in a language. Every language has rules that guide the arrangement of the constituents of sentences to generate intelligible utterances (Van Valin, 2001). One of the constituents of the sentence structure is the adjectival phrase. An adjectival phrase is a single adjective or a group of words with an adjective as the head, it provides additional information to a noun or pronoun (Noun Phrase). Studies in syntax (Kadir, 2015; Udemmadu and Lauretta, 2017; Maamuujav et al., 2021; Zhang & Kang 2022) have shown that no two languages have exactly the same structure. And it is more likely so when comparing the use and positioning of adjectives in English and Idoma languages.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of the research is to do a contrastive analysis of adjectives in English and Idoma languages and discuss the implications of the differences between the two languages for Idoma users of the English language. The specific objectives are to:

- i. identify the similarities in the modification and complementary functions of adjectives in English and Idoma sentences.
- ii. highlight the differences in the modification and complementary functions of adjectives in English and Idoma sentences.
- iii. discuss the implications of the observed features in the modification and complementary functions of adjectives in the two languages on ESL.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Existing research works have focused on the Idoma relative clause (Umaru, 2016), the Idoma noun phrases (Adejoh, 2014) as well as the phonological systems of Idoma dialects. However, a few studies have been carried out on contrastive analysis of modification of nouns and pronouns in English and Idoma languages. To fill the identified vacuum, the current study attempts a contrastive analysis of the modification of nouns and pronouns in English and Idoma languages, adopting Government and Binding theory as the theoretical framework. The intention is to show likely points of convergence that could aid learners of English language who use Idoma as L1. However, there could be potential difficulties if there are significant differences in the syntax of both languages.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Modification in the English NP Structure**

In grammar, the act of providing additional information about another lexical entity can be described as modification. Words or group of words employed to achieve this purpose are regarded as modifiers. A Modifier is a subordinate element. It is a word or a group of words that affects the meaning of a headword in that it describes, limits, intensifies, or extends the meaning of the word that it modifies. Modifiers can be a word, phrase or clause (Leech, 2006).

One purpose that modification achieves is clarity in communication. Different grammatical categories can modify and be modified. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives and other adverbs. The modifiers have adverbs as the head words in these instances of modification.

**Examples:**

Sentence 1: John walked **slowly**.

Sentence 2: She is **very** handsome.

Sentence 3: He walked **very** slowly.

In sentence 1, the word, ‘slowly’ is an adverb, modifying the verb, ‘walked’. In sentence 2: the word ‘very’ is an adverb, modifying the adjective, ‘handsome’. Similarly, in sentence 3, the word ‘very’ is an adverb, modifying another adverb, ‘slowly’.

**Attributive Adjectives**

Attributive adjectives often occur before nouns in a way that imparts the meanings of nouns by providing more information about them. Huddleston and Pullum (2002) suggest that through their syntactic attachment to nouns, attributive adjectives elucidate nuanced distinctions, bringing to the fore the English Language as a potent tool for clear description. For Swan (2005), the syntactic feature of English which identifies attributive adjectives facilitates precise communication and contributes to clarity and coherence. It embellishes the language with its stylistic appeal, which marks the competence of its users in both scholarly discourse and extensive communicative context.

**Examples:**

Sentence 4: The **notorious armed** robber has been apprehended.

Sentence 5: The **black** cat attacked her.

In sentences 4 and 5, the adjectives, ‘notorious armed’ and ‘black’ modify the nouns, ‘robber’ and ‘cat’ respectively. These types of adjectives are also called pre-modifiers, because they precede the nouns they modify. There are also occasions where nouns and pronouns are post-modified, with the modifier coming immediately after the nouns or pronouns.

**Examples:**

Sentence 6: The people **involved in the crime** have been arrested.

Sentence 7: The man **concerned** is here.

Sentence 8: Something **terrible** just happened.

Sentence 9: What **else** do you need?

Sentences 6 and 7 demonstrate how the adjectival elements, *involved in the crime* and *concerned* post-modify the nouns, ‘people’ and ‘man’ respectively. In the same vein, sentence 8 and 9 show that the adjectives, ‘terrible’ and ‘else’ post-modify the indefinite pronoun and the interrogative pronoun, ‘something’ and ‘what’ respectively.

### **Predicative Adjectives**

Predicative adjectives, as outlined by Huddleston and Pullum (2002), involve the utilisation of adjectives or noun phrases linked with copular verbs like 'be' to describe subjects or objects in a sentence. For instance, in the sentence, 'The flower is beautiful,' the adjective, 'beautiful' serves as the predicative adjective describing the flower. This grammatical structure, as discussed in Brinton and Brinton (2015), adds layers of meaning and detail to communication. Downing and Locke (2006) further emphasise its role in facilitating clear and nuanced expression. Moreover, its versatility in both spoken and written discourse, enables effective communication and persuasive argumentation. Such linguistic tools, as elucidated by Swan (2005), are fundamental in constructing coherent and impactful messages.

#### **Examples:**

Sentence 10: The girl is **intelligent**.

Sentence 11: He met the man **sad**.

Sentence 12: She is **beautiful**.

Sentence 13: I considered him **fortunate**.

In sentence 10, the adjective, 'intelligent' provide more information about the noun, 'girl' while in sentence 11, the adjective, 'sad' is used as complement of the noun, 'man'. The adjectives in these sentences are subject and object complements in that order. Moreover, sentences 12 and 13 demonstrate that the adjectives, 'beautiful' and 'fortunate' give more information about the pronouns 'she' and 'him'. They are subject and object complements.

### **Contrasts Between English Syntax and Other Languages**

Previous studies have examined the structure of sentences and their constituents in different languages. Comparing English syntax with Korean (Kim, 2010); Turkish (Abushihab, 2012), Yoruba (Adelabu, 2014), Idoma (Raji, 2014) and Arabic (Momani & Alterher, 2015) languages, reveals that the native languages have distinctive features from the target language. Their syntax, are guided by different linguistic conventions which play out in transitivity, modification, and morphology. While noting that the Arabic language shows similarity with English in the use of conjunctions, Salah (2021) claims that Jordanian students could leverage on that positive transfer of linguistic knowledge to the learning of English.

Considering the Nigerian languages, analysis of adjectives in English and Yoruba reveal significant differences which pose challenges to learners of English. Findings by Adelabu (2014) indicate a higher error margin, proving that Yoruba learners of English have problems with the use of English adjectives. Learners are deficient in the derivation, comparison and arrangement of adjectives, the use of adjectives as noun phrase, possessive adjectives, nouns as adjectives, quantifiers and quantitatives, Adelabu (2014) therefore, suggests that curriculum planners should be conscious of these existing differences while

teachers should also administer the language in manageable units with adequate practices.

A few related researches have been carried out in Idoma language. Raji (2014) examines focus construction in Otukpa dialect of the Idoma language. The study uses Chomsky's (1981) Government and Binding as theoretical framework. The study speculates that pronouns are focused in Otukpa dialect, verb phrase focusing involves movement, content questions involve focusing, however, conjunctions such as 'but' cannot conjoin two constituents focusing together in the dialect. The study then concludes that Otukpa dialect operates variables of focus markers in diverse constructions including focusing, pronouns and negation.

Exploring the structure of Idoma relative clause, Umaru (2016) uses Government and Binding to show that Idoma relative clauses are introduced by the relative pronouns. Like in English, /n/ 'who', 'which', and 'whom', which is realised as alveolar /n/; *onyè*, which also means 'who' is used in situations where a relative clause introducer is used at the beginning of the clause; in Idoma, the relative pronoun is always the first member of a relative clause, no matter its position in the deep structure of the sentence in which it is found. Also, Idoma relative clauses are embedded in the main clause, which, in effect modifies the subject, NP. Considering the existing studies, there is a dearth of research in contrasting the English and Idoma noun and pronoun modification, hence, the present study intends to fill this vacuum.

### **Implications of Contrasting Linguistic Features for English-as a-Second-Language (ESL) Users**

Recent scholarly discourse on the challenges of first language (L1) interference on English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition highlights multifaceted complexities impacting language learners. In the Nigerian ESL situation, scholars like Adesanoye (2004), Bello (2009), and Olayemi (2010, 2014) have drawn the attention of users of English to the widening gap between standard usage and their linguistic competence and proficiency. Olayemi (2019) makes a case for the timely detection and correction of wrong patterns of usage by L2 learners. As revealed in the study, non-native speakers of English language within the university system have developed patterns of speaking English with the typical feature of omitting the headword in the noun phrase structure.

To account for these variations from a linguistic perspective, recent research delves into the role of L1 transfer in ESL acquisition, exploring how grammatical structures, phonological patterns, and lexical items from learners' first languages may impede or facilitate English proficiency (Odlin, 2015). Studies underscore the significance of understanding learners' L1 backgrounds to address potential interference and leverage transferable skills effectively (Cook, 2016). From the perspective of psychology, scholars investigate the cognitive mechanisms underlying L1 interference, examining factors such as language aptitude, working memory capacity, and metacognitive strategies in

ESL learners (Skehan, 2018). Insights from cognitive psychology inform pedagogical approaches that promote metalinguistic awareness and facilitate the selective transfer of linguistic resources between L1 and L2 (Ellis, 2015). Sociocultural perspectives shed light on the social dynamics influencing ESL learners' language acquisition experiences, including acculturation stress, identity negotiation and communicative competence in diverse sociolinguistic contexts (Norton, 2013).

### **Theoretical Framework**

To pursue the goals of this study objectively, linguistic principles are drawn from Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis. The approach guides scholars in the comparison of a native language, usually L1 with a target language, in this case English. It is most likely that scientific description of language offers a more efficient analysis parallel description of the native language of the learner. This assertion is premised on the assumption that such comparison will not only reveal the differences and similarities between the two languages but it is also reliable because the comparison is scientifically done. These comparisons are capable of highlighting difficulty or ease in learning the target language.

Based on the foregoing, the study is anchored on Transformational Generative Grammar (henceforth TGG), one of the most scientific approaches to the study of language. TGG is the theory of grammar propounded by Noam Chomsky (1957) because of the limitations of theories of grammar that existed before it; examples of which being traditional and structural grammar. TGG attempts to describe the innate ability of a native speaker to form and understand sentences in his native language. TGG is regarded as a very effective theory in that it does not only deal with the structure of sentences but also involves transformations that make sentence description more detailed and clearer. Chomsky later strengthened the theory by proposing Standard Theory (STD) (Chomsky, 1965), Extended Standard Theory (EST) (early 1970s), Revised Extended Standard Theory (REST) in late 1970s, Government and Binding Theory in early 1980s and Minimalist Program in the 1990s. In TGG, the tree diagram (e.g., Figure 1) has been found a useful tool for sentence analysis as it lays bare the internal constituents of the sentence (Ndimele, 1999).

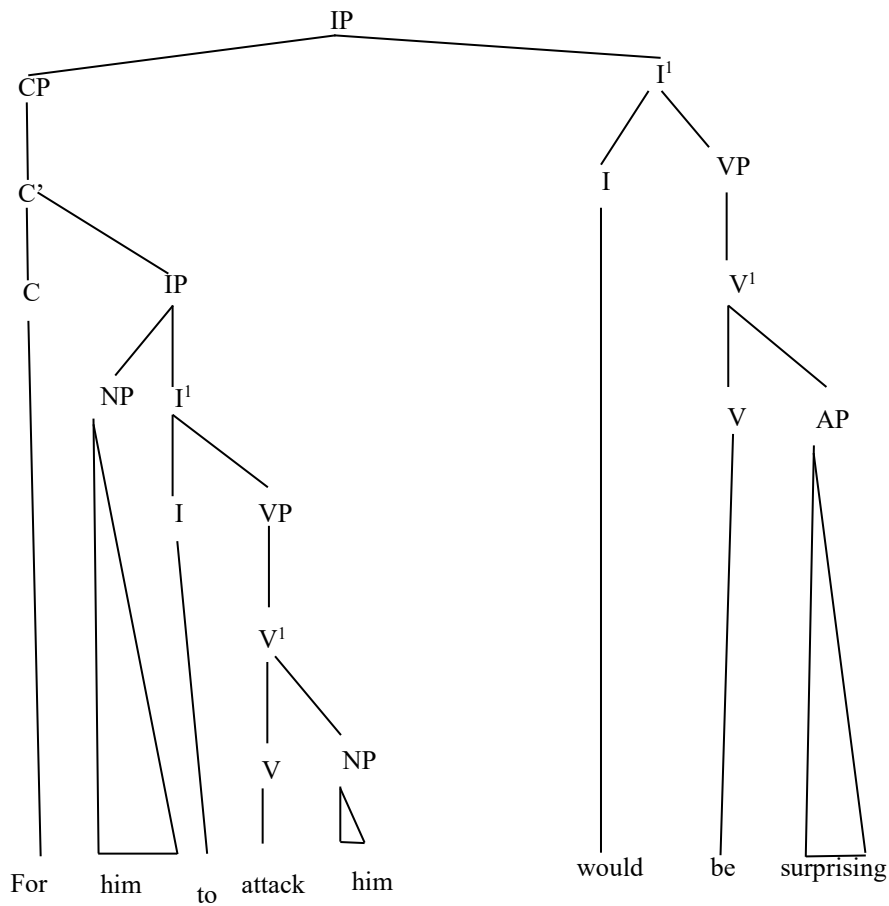


Figure 1: Tree diagram analysis of a sentence (Haegeman, 1994)

**Key:**

- IP=Inflectional Phrase
- CP=Complementiser Phrase
- I=Inflection
- C=Complementiser
- VP=Verb Phrase
- NP=Noun Phrase
- AP=Adjective Phrase
- V=Verb

As stated earlier, one of the latest and most popular models of Chomsky's TGG is Government and Binding theory (GB). It is significantly different from other models of theory by him because it emphasises the system

of principles. GB is basically a network of sub-theories and principles which work together to produce grammatical constructions.

Government and Binding emerged as an improvement on existing models of TGG. The improvement is needed to cater for latest developments in the field. It is also important to indicate that GB has sub-theories that enrich its application in sentence analysis. Some key concepts in GB also include base component and phrase structure rules, transformational component and its rules and semantic component and sub-categorisation rules (Chomsky, 1982).

With reference to the review above, one of the justifications for the adoption of Government and Binding theory for analysis in this study is its vast array of components, such as X-bar theory, binding theory, bounding theory, case theory and theta theory available to analysts. In addition, the principles in Government and Binding facilitate a lucid account of the interconnections in the constituents of the sentence. Similarly, the theory is adjustable to account for cross-linguistic variation. This implies that it can be applied to different languages because of its flexibility. Importantly, the GB theory makes the internal structure and hierarchy of phrases clearer to understand.

### **Methodology**

Data for this study was sourced from two episodes of *Okonone* aired on Joy FM in Otukpo, Benue State. The programme is suitable for the study, as it is presented purely in Idoma Language. After recording the episodes, they were transcribed and translated to English Language. Relevant sentences were selected, analysed and compared with the syntactic structures of modified NP in the language. By doing this, common and dissimilar features were highlighted and further discussed.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Similarities in the Modification and Complementary Functions of Adjectives in English and Idoma Languages**

##### ***1. In both English and Idoma languages, predicative adjectives function as complements.***

##### ***Examples:***

Sentence 14a: Idoma: *Agbo le ohi.*

Sentence 14b: English: Agbo is handsome.

Sentence 15a: *Idoma: O bo obi.*

Sentence 15b: English: He is wicked.

In sentences 14a and 14b, the words, *ohi* and ‘handsome’ occurring after the verbs, *le* and ‘is’ are both adjectives used predicatively to describe the noun, ‘Agbo’ in Idoma and English sentences respectively. Also, sentences 15a and 15b are instances of how the adjectives, *obi* and ‘wicked’ describe the pronouns, *o* and ‘he’ in the Idoma and English sentences respectively. The adjectives in these sentences function as complements which provide more information about the nouns and pronouns.



**2. In both English and Idoma sentences, few adjectives can occur post-nominally.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 16a: Idoma: *Ai ewo lowe ipu ewu a mabu nu ta e.*

Sentences 16b: English: The countries **involved in the war** have ceased fire.

Usually, most adjectives in English language occur pre-nominally. However, sentence 16b demonstrates an example of few adjectives that can be used post-nominally in English. Thus, the modifier, ‘involved in the war’, occurring immediately after the noun, ‘countries’, modifies the noun. Most adjectives in English do not occur immediately after the nominal element they modify. In sentence 16a, the adjective, *lowe*, comes after the noun, *Ai*, which it modifies in the sentence. These examples show the similarity between the modification by adjectives in both English and Idoma sentence structures.

**3. Adjectives can also occur after the indefinite pronouns in both English and Idoma sentence structures.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 17a: Idoma: *O yo ode bobi.*

Sentence 17b: English: He did something **evil**.

Sentence 18a: Idoma: *Odadu lobo le ohi.*

Sentence 18b: English: Anything **cold** is ok.

In sentences 17a and 18a, the Idoma adjectives, *bobu* and *lobo*, come after the indefinite pronouns, *ode* and *odadu*. Similarly, in the English sentences 17b and 18b, the adjectives, ‘evil’ and ‘cold’ occur after the indefinite pronouns, ‘something’ and ‘anything’. Therefore, it is evident that the sentence structures of both English and Idoma are similar as the adjectives occur after the indefinite pronouns.

**Differences in the Modification and Complementary Functions of Adjectives in English and Idoma languages**

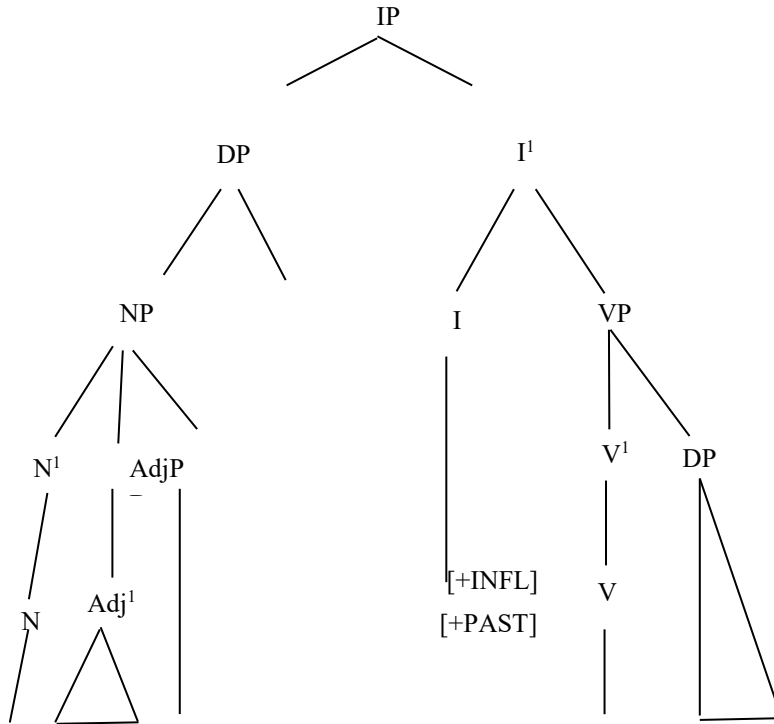
**1. While most adjectives occur pre-nominally in English, some adjectives occur post-nominally in Idoma sentence structure.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 19a: Idoma: *Onyilo bobu a gekwuochi a.*

Sentence 19b: Transliteration: Man wicked the die morning this.

Sentence 19c: English: The **wicked** man died this morning.



*Onyilo bobi a*

Man **wicked** the

*gekwu ochi a*

die morning this

Figure 2: Tree Diagram analysis of a simple sentence in Idoma

**Key:**

- IP=Inflectional Phrase
- DP=Determiner Phrase
- I=Inflection
- NP=Noun Phrase
- VP=Verb Phrase
- AdjP=Adjective Phrase

The tree diagram in Figure 2 above substantiates the claim that in the Idoma sentence structure, the adjective comes after the nominal element while they occur pre-nominally in English sentence structure. The linguistic features in bold, *bobi* and ‘wicked’, in the figure which are the adjectives, modifying the nouns, *onyilo* and ‘man’ in the Idoma and English sentences show that the

adjective occurs post-nominally in the Idoma sentence structure and pre-nominally in English. Generally, they modify the nouns.

**2. Whereas in Idoma, possessive adjectives are used with the nucleus to the left of the nominal element both in the subject and object positions, they are used to the right in English.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 20a: Idoma: *Ewo **kun** gedegba otudodu.*

Sentence 20b: English: **My** dog barks every night.

Sentence 21a: Idoma: *Ọẹ **kuwa** iyọla ẹnẹ.*

Sentence 21b: English: **Their** house got burnt yesterday.

Table 1

*Representation of Sentences 20a and 21a*

Subject		Verb	Adverbial
<b>Nominal</b>	<b>Possessive Adj.</b>		
Ewo	<b>Kun</b>	Gedegba	Otudodu
Ọẹ	<b>Kuwa</b>	iyọla	Enẹ

Table 2

*Representation of Sentences 20b and 21b*

Subject		Verb	Adverbial
<b>Possessive Adj.</b>	<b>Nominal</b>		
<b>My</b>	Dog	Barks	every night
<b>Their</b>	House	got burnt	Yesterday

Table 1 shows that the possessive adjectives in Idoma, *kun* and *kuwa*, occur after the nominal elements, *ewo* and *ole*, while Table 2 presents its English counterparts in which the possessive adjectives, ‘my’ and ‘their’, come before the nominal elements, ‘dog’ and ‘house’.

These sentences have been captured in the tree diagram in Figure 3. The linguistic elements in bold in the sentences in the figure are the possessive adjectives occurring before the nominal element in the English sentence structure, but they occur after the nominal element in the Idoma sentences. The use of the possessive adjective, ‘kun’ (My), in the sentence in Figure 3, attests to the existence of the Genitive Case in the Idoma sentence structure. It shows possession.

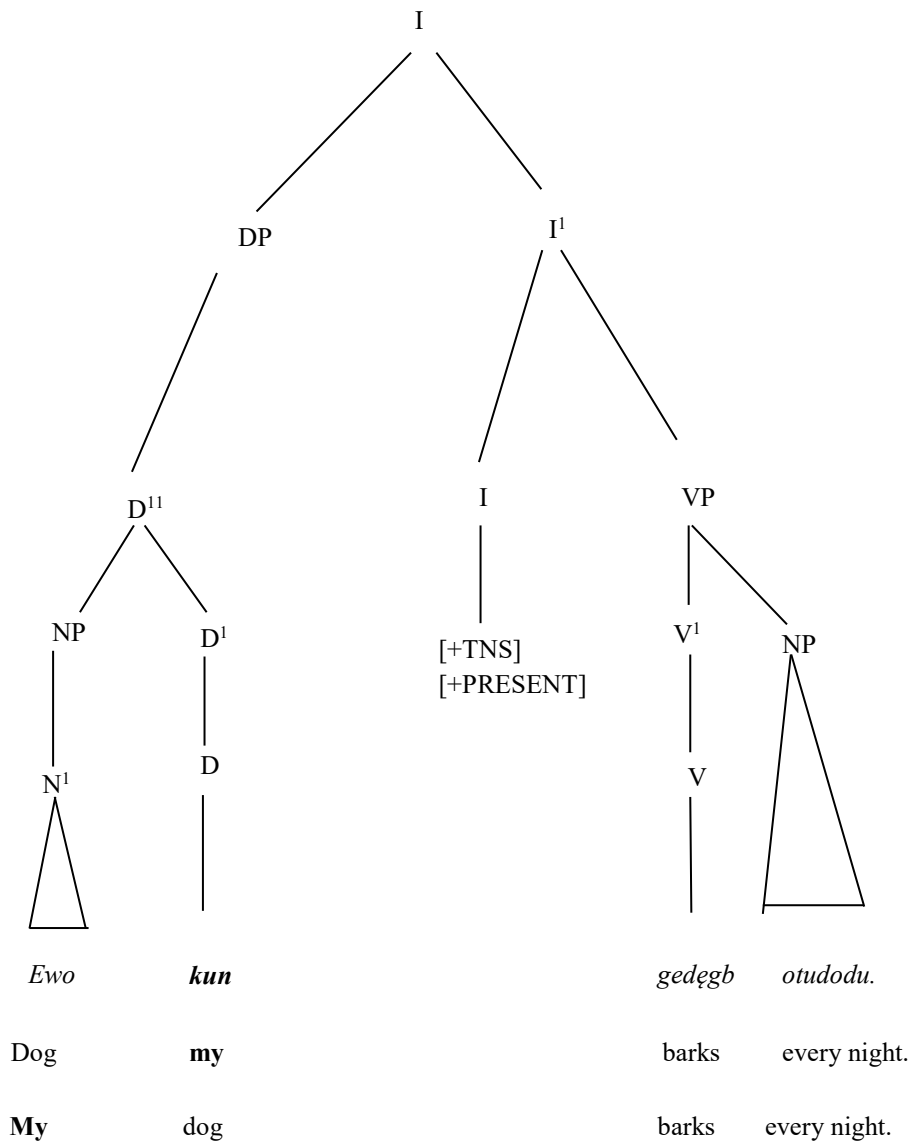


Figure 3: Tree diagram analysis of a simple sentence in Idoma and English

**Keys**

- IP=Inflectional Phrase
- DP=Determiner Phrase
- I=Inflection
- NP=Noun Phrase
- VP=Verb Phrase
- AdjP=Adjective Phrase

**3. English permits recursive pre-nominal modification in its sentence structure while Idoma sentence structure allows recursive post-nominal modification by adjectives.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 22a: Idoma: Ewu **jokwu tobi** a gekwuęę.

Sentence 22b: English: The **fat black** goat died yesterday.

A careful observation of the Idoma sentence 22a shows that the adjectives, *jokwu* and *tobi* modify the nominal element, *ewu*, postpositively while in the English sentence 22b, the adjectives, ‘fat’ and ‘black’ occur before the nominal element, ‘goat’. This shows that the sentence structure of these two languages differ significantly in the way the nominal element is modified.

**4. While nouns can be used as adjectives in English sentence structure, Idoma sentence structure does not have the equivalent of such noun adjectives.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 23a: Idoma: *Uhostel k'achenya a blinyi*.

Sentence 23b: English: The **female hostel** is dirty.

Sentence 24a: Idoma: *N le ekpa k'iyawu eyi*.

Sentence 24b: English: I have a **travel bag**.

Sentence 25a: Idoma: *Uwa la ehi k'ome epa*.

Sentence 25b: English: They bought two **clay pots**.

A cursory look at the English and Idoma sentences 24a to 24b shows that there are differences between the sentence structures of the two languages. In sentence 23a, 24a, and 25a, the noun adjectives, *achenya*, *iyawu*, and *ome* post-modify the nominal elements, *uhostel*, *ekpa*, and *ehi* while in the English sentences 23b, 24b and 25b, the noun adjectives, ‘female’, ‘travel’ and ‘clay’ pre-modify the nominal elements, ‘hostel’ ‘bag’ and ‘pots’. Besides the fact that nouns functioning as adjectives occur post-nominally in Idoma and pre-nominally in English sentence structures, there are intervening prepositions, *k'*, in the Idoma examples, unlike in English where the adjectives immediately precede the nouns they modify. So, instead of ‘female hostel’, for example, the Idoma translation will be ‘hostel of female’. It can be deduced from this analysis that instead of the noun that functions as adjective to occur immediately after the nominal elements they modify, the pronoun, *k'* (of) comes between the adjective and the nominal element, signifying the dissimilarities in the modification system of the two languages.

**5. While in English sentence structure, a comparative adjective that modifies a noun is a single word, in Idoma, they are not.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 26a: Idoma: *Okome kun gbe fiye eko*.

Sentence 26b: English: My pig is **bigger** than yours.

Sentence 27a: Idoma: *Umoto kuwo lohi fiye ekun*.

Sentence 27b: English: Your car is **better** than mine.

Sentence 28a: Idoma: *Eyi chokpenu fiye enyi a.*

Sentence 28b: English: blood is **thicker** than water.

In English sentences 26b, 27b and 28b, the comparative adjectives, ‘bigger’, ‘better’ and ‘thicker’ are each made up of a single word, while in Idoma sentences 26a, 27a and 28a, the comparative adjectives, *gbe fiye*, *lohi fiye* and *chokpenu fiye* are made up of two lexical elements. This implies that while the adjectives in its bare form changes to comparative form through the process of suffixation, (that is addition of suffixes to the bare adjectives) in English, the Idoma counterparts are composed of two separate words to form the Idoma comparative adjectives to compare the two nominal elements in the given sentences.

**6. While in English sentence structure, a superlative adjective that modifies a noun constitutes one or two words, in Idoma, they are more than two.**

**Examples:**

Sentence 29a: Idoma: *Ada a lije fiye du liupu ewo a.*

Sentence 29b: English: The man is the **richest** in town.

Sentence 30a: Idoma: *Imeri we ochennya lohi fiye du linu ojokpa kunu a.*

Sentence 30b: English: Mary is the **most beautiful** girl in her class.

The adjectives, ‘richest’ and ‘most beautiful’ in English sentences 29b and 30b are superlative adjectives showing the highest level of comparison of the rich people in the town, while in the Idoma sentences 29a and 30a, the adjectives, *lije fiye du* and *lohi fiye du* are the Idoma versions of the superlative adjectives in the sentences. A careful study of the structure of the English and Idoma comparative adjectives in the sentences reveals that they are different. While sentence 29a shows that three separate words constitute the Idoma adjective, *lije fiye du*, the English translation is just one word, ‘richest’. Similarly, the Idoma adjective in sentence 30a, *lohi fiye du*, is composed of three different words while the English translation has only two words, ‘most beautiful’. This indicates that they are structurally different. The reason is that Idoma language does not have the equivalents of these adjectives. So, the Idoma versions are literally descriptive.

### **Implications of Dissimilarities and Similarities Between the Modification and Complementary Functions of Adjectives in English and Idoma Languages on the Performance of Idoma Learners of English**

The preceding analysis has established that there are structural differences and similarities in the modification and complementary functions of adjectives in English and Idoma sentence structures. It has been observed that the areas of differences have some implications on L2 acquisition. In L2 acquisition, it is believed that the L1 influences the learning process either positively or negatively, as a result of transfer of linguistic elements from the L1 to L2. Such transfer usually has the consequence of either inhibiting or facilitating the learning of the target language. On the occasion that such transfer makes the learning of the target language easier, the influence is said to

be positive but if the transfer hinders the learning of the target language, it is a negative influence.

Confirming this submission, Yule (2010) asserts that some errors in learning L2 can be caused by ‘transfer’ which is also referred to as ‘cross-linguistic influence’. To this effect, Yule (2010:191) refers to transfer as ‘...using sounds, expressions or structures from the L1 when performing in the L2’. Yule further points out that transfer is of two types - positive and negative. On the one hand, positive transfer, according to him, aids learning of the L2 because the feature transferred from L1 to L2 is similar. Negative transfer, on the other hand, involves the transfer of dissimilar feature between the two languages which inhibits learning of the L2 (Yule, 2010). Explained in another way, negative transfer is known as interference (Yule, 2010). It is therefore possible that L<sub>2</sub> users of English may negatively transfer features of their L<sub>1</sub> to the target language.

The differences between the features of NP modification English and Idoma sentence structures make Idoma learners of English commit errors in the target language. For instance, in the Idoma sentence, *Onyilo **bobi** a gekwu ochi a*, the word in bold (*bobi*) is the adjective post-modifying the noun, *Onyilo*. In English the translation is realised as: ‘The **wicked** man died this morning’. **Wicked** is the adjective, pre-modifying the noun, ‘man’. With these examples, it is obvious that unlike in Idoma, English adjectives can pre-modify nouns. Therefore, transferring such syntactic structure from Idoma to English will definitely lead to a woeful performance by an Idoma learner of the English language. On the contrary, the similarities between the two languages facilitate learning of the English language since those similar elements will lead to smooth transfer of elements from Idoma to the English language.

### Conclusion

Having examined a contrastive analysis of English and Idoma adjectives, using Government and Binding theory, the study concludes that there are differences in the modification and complementary functions of adjectives in English and Idoma languages. In English sentence structure, the adjectives basically pre-modify nouns while Idoma sentence structure shows post-modification by adjectives. In terms of similarity, both English and Idoma languages show that adjectives occur predicatively in their sentence structures. The findings again confirm that no two languages have the same syntactic structures. More so, each peculiarity of use suggests that Idoma learners and teachers are likely to manifest errors in both speech and writing, as shown in similar studies in which L<sub>2</sub> learners of English import the syntax of their L<sub>1</sub> into the target language.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that Idoma language curriculum planners should take cognisance of the areas of differences in the occurrence of adjectives, either attributively or predicatively. Idoma teachers of the target language should also create awareness in these areas of differences in the modification of nouns and

pronouns and complementary functions of adjectives in the sentence structures of the English and Idoma languages.

To align with studies that emphasise the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that validate learners' linguistic repertoires and foster intercultural communicative competence (Kanno & Norton, 2017), it is recommended that the learning of English among Idoma students be aided with radio programmes anchored by proficient users of English. Pedagogically, scholars explore innovative instructional strategies to mitigate L1 interference and optimise ESL learning outcomes. Research emphasises the role of task-based instruction, explicit language awareness-raising activities, and differentiated scaffolding to address learners' diverse needs and promote autonomous language development (Ellis & Shintani, 2014). Therefore, learning English should be activity-based, to promote students' proficiency in both written and oral tasks.

Moreover, technology-enhanced learning environments offer opportunities for personalised instruction and authentic language practice, facilitating the integration of L1 and L2 resources in meaningful ways (Stockwell, 2015). Teachers can leverage this to incorporate computer-aided instruction focused on the identified differences in the native and target languages.

### References

- Abushihab, I. (2012). Syntactic contrastive analysis of Turkish and English. *DACOROMANIA*, 17(2), 230-244.
- Adejoh, M. O. (2014). Idoma Noun Phrases: Syntactic Analysis [Unpublished. PhD thesis]. Department of Languages and Linguistics, Nasarawa State University, Keffi.
- Adelabu, B. (2014). A contrastive analysis of adjectives in English and Yoruba. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2(4).
- Adesanoye, F. (2004). The English language in Nigeria: The case of a vanishing model?
- Owolabi, K., & Dasyilva, A. (2004). *Forms and functions of English and indigenous languages in Nigeria*. Ibadan. Group Publishers.
- Bamgbose, A. (1991). *Language and the Nation: The Language question in Sub-saharan Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bello, O. (2007). Code-mixing or code-mix up: A sociolinguistic study of semi-educated Yoruba-English bilinguals. In Adeyanju, D. (Ed). *Sociolinguists in the Nigerian Context*. Ile-Ife. OAU Press.
- Brinton, L. J., & Brinton, D. M. (2015). *The linguistic structure of modern English* (2nd ed.). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Chomsky, N. (1957). *Syntactic structures*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1982). *Some concepts and consequences of the theory of Government and Binding*. Chicago: MIT Press.



- Cook, V. (2016). *Second Language learning and language teaching*. Routledge.
- Downing, A. & Locke, P. (2006). *English grammar: A university course* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R., & Shintani, N. (2014). *Exploring language pedagogy through Second Language Acquisition research*. Routledge.
- Haegeman, L. (1994). *Introduction to Government and Binding Theory* (2nd ed.). UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2002). *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kadir, A. K. (2015). 'A contrastive analysis of between Mekongga and English Syntax.' *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 3(3), 110-115.
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2017). *Language, education, and neoliberalism: Critical studies in sociolinguistics*. Routledge.
- Kim, J. (2010). A contrastive analysis between English and Korean comparative constructions. *English Language and Linguistics*, 16(1), 137-162.
- Lado, R (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Leech, G. (2006). *A glossary of English grammar*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd.
- Momani, M. M., & Altaher, A. M. (2015). A contrastive analysis of English and Arabic from a syntactic perspective. *Canadian Open English and Literature Journal*, 2(1), 1-8.
- Maamuujav, U., Olson, C. B., & Chung, H. (2021). Syntactic and lexical features of adolescent L2 students' academic writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*. 53:100822. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jslw.2021.100822>
- Ndimele, O. (1999). *Morphology and syntax*. Port Harcourt: Emhai Printing & Publishing Co.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation* (2nd ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Odlin, T. (2015). *Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Olagbaju, O. O. (2014). 'Multilingual education in Nigeria: Policy, practice, challenges and solutions.' *Journal of Education and Practice*. 5(6) 66-73.
- Olayemi, O.T. (2010). Some Common Errors of Nigerian ESL Users. Dare, S and Balogun, T (eds). *Techniques and Mechanics of Practical Discourse*. Ago Iwoye: Olabisi Onabanjo University Press.
- Olayemi, O. T. (2014). *Like as a Substitute for Content Words in Nigerian English Usage*. *Awka Journal of English Language and Literary Studies*. 5 (1) 83-97.

- Olayemi, O. T. (2019). Gaps and absences in the English expressions of some staff and students in an English as a Second Language setting. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria*, 22(2), 228-247.
- Raji, E. B. (2014). *Focus construction in Otukpa Dialect of the Idoma Language* [Masters Thesis]. Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Salah, R. (2021). Jordanian University students' use of English: Urban-rural dichotomy and university location. *Advances in Literary Study*, 9, 105-113. <https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2021.93012>
- Skehan, P. (2018). *Cognitive approaches to Second Language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stockwell, G. (2015). *Computer-assisted language learning: Diversity in research and practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English usage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Udemmadu, T., & Chinyeaka, L. (2017). A contrastive study of English and Igbo structures. *Interdisciplinary Journal of African & Asian Studies*, 1(3).
- Umaru, J. Y. (2016). The syntax of relative clause constructions in Idómà: A Government and Binding approach [Unpublished Ph. D Thesis]. Nassarawa State University, Lafia.
- Yule, G. (2010). *The study of language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Valin, Jr. R. D. (2001). *An introduction to syntax*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Zhang, C. & Kang, S. (2022) A comparative study on lexical and syntactic features of ESL versus EFL learners' writing. *Frontier Psychology* 13:1002090. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1002090>