# A Contrastive Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of Nkoro and English Di-Transitive Verbs

By

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**Abstract**

This paper is a contrastive morpho-syntactic analysis of Nkoro and English di-transitive verbs. The theoretical frameworks are the contrastive analysis theory and the theta and the case sub-theories of the government and binding (GB) theory. The study employed descriptive research design. The data were collected by means of introspection and through relevant textbooks. The data were described, interpreted and analyzed contrastively. The findings revealed that the major dissimilarity between Nkoro and English is di-transitive verb placement in the sentence. Whereas Nkoro is a verb last (final) language, English, on the other hand, is a verb first (initial) language. Again, Nkoro is an SOV (subject-object-verb) word order language but English is an SVO (subject-verb-object) word order language. It is also noted that inflections play differential role; while English language uses „s‟ and „es‟ when using the present tense single-worded verb phrase (SW VP), the Nkoro speaker on the other hand, uses the uninflected or root form of the verb both in the present and in the past tenses which together form the non-future tense. It is also discovered that English has no future tense, but Nkoro does. We noticed that the future tense marker in Nkoro is the [-mu◎] suffix. In conclusion, di-transitive verbs in Nkoro and English have been discussed using relevant data; noting differences that exist in both languages. The study recommends that the grammar of Nkoro should be studied widely while di-transitive verbs in Nkoro should be given the most needed attention.

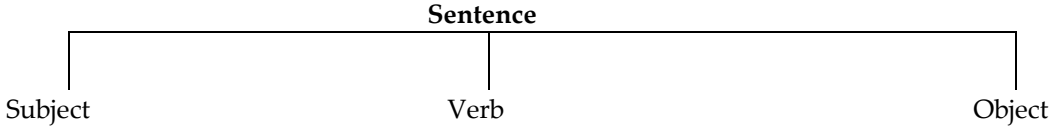
**Keywords: Morpho-syntax, di-transitive verbs, contrastive analysis, Nkoro language.**

**Introduction**

Verbs are words that belong to the open categories in human languages. They are universal words. There is hardly any human language that does not have the verb group. Verbs are essential elements of sentences. There is no meaningful thought or expression that can be conveyed without verbs in any human language. Little wonder, Nwala and Obisike (2014, Pp. 66) hold that:

> Descriptively, verbs can simply be described as message carriers. Verbs, one may say, determine when expressions make meaning and when they do not. Suffice it to say that without a verb there is hardly any sentence with maximum meaning. As a message carrier, the verb co-ordinates and links all the other elements in the clause. It links the subject and the object and shows their array of relationships.

Similarly, Nwala (2016, Pp. 45 - 46), while discussing verbs and verbals diagrammatically illustrates that "the hypothetical tree diagram explicates the function of verb in clauses. It is at the centre of sentence formation".




Nwala (2016) further explains that the verb takes the action initiated by the subject and passes it onto the object. Nwala adds that this link role is what makes messages possible.

The fact remains that every human communication revolves around the verb to make it much more meaningful and understandable. This paper contrasts Nkoro and English ditransitive verbs with a view to showing their morpho-syntactic dissimilarities.

**Statement of Research Problem**

The Nkoro language which, in this paper, is studied side by side with the English language is an understudied, underdeveloped and under-documented di-transitive verb-based Ijoid language. The Nkoro speakers of English language, like any other Nigerian natives who acquire and use English as a second language (L2), are squarely faced with the challenge of mother-tongue interference (MTI), a socio-linguistic situation in which the knowledge of one language (usually the mother-tongue or L1) interferes with or influences the use of the other (normally the second language or L2) due to language contact. This paper thus,

faces the problem of contrasting Nkoro and English di-transitive verbs, with the view to uncovering areas of dissimilarities in both languages.

**Aim and Objectives of the Paper**

The aim of this paper is to contrast Nkoro and English di-transitive verbs. The objectives of the paper therefore are to:

a. identify di-transitive verbs in Nkoro language;
b. identify di-transitive verbs in English language;
c. uncover the dissimilarities between Nkoro and English di-transitive verbs.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions are designed to guide the paper:

a. How does Nkoro language operate di-transitive verbs?
b. How does English language operate di-transitive verbs?
c. What are the dissimilarities between Nkoro and English di-transitive verbs?

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopted the contrastive analysis theory and the theta and the case subtheories of the government and binding (GB) theory.

**Contrastive Analysis Theory**

The theoretical foundations for what became known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis were formulated in Lado"s *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957). Lado claims that those elements which are different will be difficult; while this was not a novel suggestion, Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and the suggestion of a systematic set of mechanical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. This involved describing the languages (using structuralist linguistics), comparing them and predicting learning difficulties.

Contrastive study was extremely used in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in the 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of a target language (TL) were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation and this could be reinforced or impeded by already existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (SL) depended on the differences between the learner"s mother-tongue (MT) and the language he or she is trying to learn.

**Theta Theory**

The theta theory appears as a reformulation of earlier works by Gruber (1965) and Fillmore (1968) cited in Ogbulogo (1995, p. 17). The justification for attempting to incorporate thematic structures into the theory of grammar is that, apart from providing details about categorical, sub-categorisation and selectional properties of lexical items, rules of grammar should provide information about lexical entries – cf Chomsky (1981c; 1986a); Sells (1985) and Horrocks (1987).

In its reformulated form, theta theory seeks to determine the circumstances under which an NP can be the argument of a verb. The lexicon specifies inherent properties of lexical items, highlighting in particular, the sub-categorisation frames and theta-marking properties of lexical items which occur as the heads of constituents. Based on the theta criterion, theta-marking properties are specifications of theta roles (such as agent, theme, goal, etc) which lexical items assign to given structural positions.

**Case Theory**

Case theory relates to the assignment of case to overt nominal elements that are in case-marked positions. The theory ensures that whether case is morphologically realized or not, every overt nominal element receives abstract case by virtue of its position in the sentence. This is provided for by the case filter (Chomsky 1980a) cited in Ogbulogo (1995, p. 20) which states that any sentence containing an overt NP (i.e. an NP with a phonetic content) is ill-formed if the NP is not case-marked. An NP is deemed to receive case, just as if it were governed by a case-marking category. The case assigning categories (a subset of the governors) are V, P and the head of INFL, (AGR). The head of INFL, (AGR) assigns the nominative case to the NP it governs; V assigns accusative case; while P assigns oblique case.

The choice of these (contrastive analysis theory and the theta and the case subtheories of the government and binding (GB) theory was based on the fact that the researcher sets out to study the di-transitive verbs of Nkoro and English languages, in order to find out possible dissimilarities.

**Review of Related Literature**

**Empirical Review**

Onoyovwi (2003) conducted a research on an aspectual contrast in Urhobo. She found out that:

i. In Urhobo language, tense and aspect are contrast in the VP.

ii. In the language, tense and aspect are distinctively marked, and even where both share the same syntactic representation, there is a distinction at the semantic level. For example:

1. Efe dje one (re).
   (PN run race prog)
   „Efe is running."
2. Oke mi vwo te etiyi, Efe dje one (re).
   (When 1SG aux got there, PN run race PST)
   „When I got there, Efe was running."
3. Ene rode je Efe dje one re.
   (By this time tomorrow adv. PN run race)
   „By this time tomorrow, Efe will be running."

Aziza (2007) surveyed the grammatical features of the Urhobo verbs. Her findings show that whereas the lexical or main verbs in Urhobo language have independent semantic content, AUX verbs are used to express aspectual contrast. Again, she identified only two auxiliary verbs in Urhobo language. Also, she found that each of the auxiliary verbs in the languagehas two realizations. These are, che/cha „shall, will" and se/sa „can". For example:

4. O che sivwin omo na.
   (3SG will save child the)
   „S/he will heal the child."
5. O cha ta.
   (3SG will say- it)
   „S/he will say it."
6. Wo se ruo.
   (You can do- it)
   „You can do it."
7. Ese sa ta.
   (PN can say- it)
   „Ese can say it."

**Methodology**

This paper adopted the descriptive design. Working within this framework, the data which was got from both the primary sources (introspection) and the secondary sources (textbooks and journal articles) were analyzed.

**Data Presentation**

Nkoro:

8. Boma o◎bo◎ ri ◎ wa◎ de◎ re-◎m ◎ pi ◎ri ◎.
   PN goat PRT man-Def. give

Boma gave the man a goat.

9. Aniparaworima n◎d◎ i ◎ wa◎ Idango pi ◎ri ◎.
   PN fish PRT PN give

Aniparaworima gave Idango fish.

10. Ngerebo ki ◎◎ gi ◎ wa◎ na◎ma-◎m ◎ p◎◎l ◎◎.
    PN knife PRT meat-DEF cut

Ngerebo cut the meat with a knife.

English:

11. They bought David a car.
12. We wrote Mark a letter.
13. John gave me the cloth.

**Data Analysis**

**Nkoro:**

**English:**

| Root | Non-Future (Present/Past) Tense | Future Tense |
|---|---|---|
| pĭrĭ "give" | pĭrĭ "give" | pĭrĭ-mú "will give" |
| pɛ̀lɛ́ "cut" | pɛ̀lɛ́ "cut" | pɛ̀lɛ̀-mú "will cut" |

**English:**

| Base | Present Tense | Past Tense |
|---|---|---|
| Buy | buy | bought |
| Write | write | wrote |
| Give | give | gave |

**Di-transitive Verb**

Di-transitive verbs are a subset of transitive verbs. Di-transitive verbs are verbs that take two objects. These objects are the direct object and the indirect object of a sentence.

Nwafor (2001), Murthy (2007), Kirkpatrick (2010) and Onugha (2019) agree that direct object refers to the person or thing that is directly affected by the action described by the verb. The direct object can be a noun, pronoun, noun phrase, and a noun clause. For example:

14. The boy kicked the *ball*.
15. We have bought *a large Victorian house*.
16. I know *what he means*.
17. The dog bit *the child*.

Murthy (2007), Umera-Okeke and Nwankwo (2016) and Onugha (2019) note that a sentence may have one or two objects. When the sentence has two objects, one of them is the direct object while the other is the indirect object. Indirect object is the person or thing indirectly affected by the action of the verb. It precedes the direct object as the receiver of the action of the subject. Unlike the direct object which can occur alone in a sentence, there must be a direct object for an indirect object to be there. Indirect object refers to the person to whom something is given or for whom something is done. For example:

18. She bought him a pen.
19. James gave Jack a cap.
20. My father wrote me a letter.

**Formation of Di-transitive verb in English**

The morphological form of the di-transitive verb in English is usually not the same form of the verb in its root or base form, except that the bound morpheme „-s‟ is obligatorily suffixed to the verb root for third person concord realization. For example:

21. She buys him a pen.
22. James gives Mark a car.
23. He writes her a letter.

**Formation of Di-transitive verb in Nkoro**

Verbs in the double NP complement and verb structure functions as three place argument verbs. This verb phrase structure consists of two internal arguments which are traditionally known as direct object (Od) and indirect object (Oi). The direct object immediately appears after the subject (external argument) of the sentence whereas the indirect object occurs

immediately before the verb. Both the direct object and the indirect object are usually separated by a particle "wa◎" which serves as a direct object marker. For example:

24. Boma óßórĩ wá dèrè-ṁ pĩrĩ
PN goat PRT man-DEF give
Boma gave the man a goat.

25. Aniparaworima ùdʒì wá Idango pĩrĩ.
PN fish PRT PN give
Aniparaworima gave Idango fish.

26. Ngerebo kĩŋgî wá námá-ń pɛ̀lɛ́.
PN knife PRT meat-DEF cut
Ngerebo cut the meat with a knife.

**Comparison of Nkoro and English Di-transitive verbs**

Di-transitive verbs as we noted earlier refer to verbs that can take both direct and indirect objects in a sentence. The present tense is the unmarked tense in both languages and it is the stem of the verb in its present form in English. In the analysis, the verbs: pĩrĩ, pɛ̀lɛ́, buy, write and give are in their present or base forms:

pĩrĩ "give"

pɛ̀lɛ́ "cut"

The following examples are the simple present tense in English:

buy

write

give

Although both English and Nkoro languages have simple present tense, there exist obviously, some dissimilarities in the morpho-syntactic structure of the di-transitive verbs (see examples 21, 22 and 23 above). Observe that the di-transitive verbs in English, agree with the subjects of the sentences. This is not achievable in Nkoro.

English is an agreement rich language, hence, the morpheme –s is always affixed to the subjects to show third person concord agreement. But it is not added in first person and second persons respectively. But in Nkoro, (which is a non-agreement rich language), the morphological structures of the verbs remain in their base forms (see examples 24, 25 and 26 above).

Even though both English and Nkoro languages show verb and two NPs complement, there still exists some level of differences in the placement of syntactic components in sentence construction. In English, the di-transitive verb appears immediately after the subject (S) of the sentence, followed by the two NPs; that is, S + V + NP + NP. For example:

27. They bought David a car.
    S V Oi Od
28. We wrote Mark a letter.
    S V Oi Od
29. John gave me the cloth.
    S V Oi Od

However, in Nkoro, the di-transitive verb appears at the very last position in the sentence; giving rise to an NP + NP + NP + V. In which case, the first NP functions as the S of the sentence while the other NPs serve as the complement of the V. For example:

30. Boma óßórí wá dérè-mì pĭrí
    PN goat PRT man-DEF give
    Boma gave the man a goat.
31. Aniparaworima ǹdʒĭ wá Idango pĭrí.
    PN fish PRT PN give
    Aniparaworima gave Idango fish.
32. Ngerebo kĩŋgî wá námá-mí pèlɛ́.
    PN knife PRT meat-DEF cut
    Ngerebo cut the meat with a knife.

Again, in English, the V is the first element (word) that appears in the VP. For example:

33. They bought David a car.
    S V Oi Od

34. We wrote Mark a letter.
    S V Oi Od
35. John gave me the cloth.
    S V Oi Od

Observe that in examples 33, 34 and 35 above, the first elements (words) "bought", "wrote" and "gave" are all Vs in the respective VPs.

But, in Nkoro, the V is usually the last element (word) that occurs in the VP. For example:

36. Boma óɓórí wá dérè-ǹ pǐrí
    PN goat PRT man-DEF give
    Boma gave the man a goat.
37. Aniparaworima ǹdʒǐ wá Idango pǐrí.
    PN fish PRT PN give
    Aniparaworima gave Idango a fish.
38. Ngerebo kíŋgí wá námá-ń pɛ̀lɛ́.
    PN knife PRT meat-DEF cut
    Ngerebo cut the meat with a knife.

Note that in examples 36, 37 and 38 above, the last elements (words) "pǐrí", "pǐrí"and "pɛ̀lɛ́" function as Vs in the VPs.

Also, in English, the Oi occurs immediately after the verb. For example:

39. They bought David a car.
    V Oi
40. We wrote Mark a letter.
    V Oi
41. John gave me the cloth.
    V Oi

See that in examples 39, 40 and 41 above, the words "David", "Mark" and "me" function as the Oi in the S and come immediately after the Vs "bought", "wrote" and "gave".

Contrarily, in Nkoro, the Oi appears before the V. For example:

42. Boma óɓórí wá dérè-ǹ pǐrí
    PN goat PRT man-DEF give
    Boma gave the man a goat.
43. Aniparaworima ǹdʒǐ wá Idango pǐrí.

PN fish PRT PN give

Aniparaworima gave Idango fish.

44. Ngerebo kíŋgí wá námá-mí pɛ̀lɛ́.

PN knife PRT meat-DEF cut

Ngerebo cut the meat with a knife.

Observe that in examples 42, 43 and 44 above, the words "dérè-mì", "Idango" and "námá-mí" function as the Oi in the S and occur before the Vs "pĭrí", "pĭrí", and "pɛ̀lɛ́". Moreso, in English, the Od occupies the final position in the S. For example:

45. They bought David a car.

S V Oi Od

46. We wrote Mark a letter.

S V Oi Od

47. John gave me the cloth.

S V Oi Od

Note that in examples 45, 46 and 47 above, the words "car", "letter" and "cloth" serve as the Ods in the S and occur at the final position.

But, in Nkoro, the Od occurs immediately after the S of the sentence. For example:

48. Boma óßórí wá dérè-mì pĭrí.

PN goat PRT man-DEF give

Boma gave the man a goat.

49. Aniparaworima ǹdʒì wá Idango pĭrí.

PN fish PRT PN give

Aniparaworima gave Idango fish.

50. Ngerebo kíŋgí wá námá-mí pɛ̀lɛ́.

PN knife PRT meat-DEF cut

Ngerebo cut the meat with a knife.

Observe that in examples 48, 49 and 50 above, the words "óßórí", "ǹdʒì" and "kíŋgí", function as the Od in the sentences and occur immediately after the S "Boma", "Aniparaworima" and "Ngerebo".

Furthermore, in English, both the Oi and the Od NPs basically occur to the right hand side of the V (see examples 45, 46 and 47 above). While in Nkoro, both the Od and the Oi NPs usually occur to the left hand side of the V (see examples 48, 49 and 50 where the words

"óßórî", "ùdʒì" and "kîŋgî" function as the Od NPs and "dérè-mì", "Idango" and "námá-mí" serve as the Oi NPs above).

**Discussion of Findings**

The learner of a second language experiences errors and difficulties that occur as a result of mother-tongue interference. Wherever the structures of the foreign language differ from those of the mother-tongue, we can expect both difficulties in learning and error in performance. Therefore, learning a second language is essentially, learning to overcome these difficulties. Ibe (2007) cited in Peter (2019, p. 71) notes that a major area of defect in the performance of the second language learner, is the grammatical structure and as such, the learners transfer literally and without meaning, the structures of the first language into the second language.

In this paper, the pedagogical di-transitive verbs in Nkoro and English languages were identified and each has different di-transitive verb forms and structures which are not found in the other language.

English language is a verb-first (i.e, verb-initial) language; a syntactic concatenation where the di-transitive verb occupies the first (initial) position in the predicate slot of the sentence (see examples 45, 46 and 47 above).

On the other hand, the Nkoro language is a verb-last (i.e, verb-final) language; a syntactic configuration where the di-transitive verb appears at the very last (final) position in the predicate slot of the construction (see examples 48, 49 and 50 above).

Again, in English, the Oi comes immediately after the V (see examples 45, 46 and 47 above). But, in Nkoro, the Oi occurs before the V (see examples 48, 49 and 50 above).

Moreso, in English, the Od occupies the sentence final position (see examples 45, 46 and 47 above).

Contrarily, in Nkoro, the Od occurs immediately after the S (see examples 48, 49 and 50 above).

Further, in English, both the Od and the Oi basically occur to the right hand side of the di-transitive V in the construction (see examples 45, 46 and 47 above).

But, in Nkoro, the Od and the Oi all occur to the left hand side of the di-transitive V in the construction (see examples 48, 49 and 50 above).

Furthermore, in English, articles (determiners) can occur before the Od. Note that in examples 45, 46 and 47 above, "a" and "the" which occur before the words "car", letter" and "cloth" are all articles (determiners).

But in Nkoro, determiners occur after nouns. Observe that in examples 48 and 50 above, "m ◎" and –m ◎which are suffixed to de ◎re◎ and na◎ma ◎are articles (determiners) in the sentences.

**Conclusion**

This paper is a contrastive morpho-syntactic analysis of Nkoro and English ditransitive verbs. First of all, the morpho-syntactic di-transitive verb configurations in both languages were discussed. After analyzing the data collected, the following findings among others were brought to fore. The major difference in morpho-syntactic di-transitive verb construction in Nkoro and English lies in the area of verb placement in relation to its arguments. For instance, while English language is an SVO language, Nkoro is an SOV language. Nkoro is a verb-last (i.e, verb-final) language; a syntactic configuration where the verb appears at the very last (final) position in a sentence (see examples 36, 37 and 38 above). It was also discovered that English has no future tense, but Nkoro does. We noticed that the future tense marker in Nkoro is the [-mu◎] suffix (see table under data analysis above).

**Recommendation**

In line with the findings of this paper, we make the following recommendations:

1. The grammar of Nkoro should be studied widely while di-transitive verb in Nkoro specifically should be given the most needed attention.
2. Other grammatical categories which are also associated with morpho-syntax such as noun, adjective, etc., should be studied.
3. Word formation process in Nkoro should also be studied.

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