

## A Lexicostatistical Survey of Afikpo-Igbo Varieties

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**Abstract:** This paper is a lexicostatistical survey of speech varieties of Afikpo-Igbo. The study explores some instances of how the sounds of the four linguistic varieties which are operational in Afikpo society are patterned, with the aim to determine their similarities and differences. Again the researchers tend to stimulate further research on Afikpo varieties for documentary purposes and to reveal the multilingual nature or the language situation in Nigeria and its Diaspora. The researchers randomly selected a total number of 20 participants of the study from the four linguistic groups represented in the study while qualitative and quantitative methods were used to analyze the data. The result of the study show that variations in the dialects are more of accent rather than dialectal. Again Afikpo is a dialect rather than a language as speculated by non linguists. Additionally study of this sort is essential to prevent the extinction of the local dialects of Igbo language and to make it available for the younger generations. Consequently, language activists and linguists especially those from Afikpo Diaspora should come together and provide a workable orthography of the dialect so that it could be used alongside the standard Igbo as a mode of instruction in the primary school level especially in the environments where these dialects are spoken. This will in no small measure enhance learning as the role of mother tongue (L1) in second language classroom cannot be overemphasized.

**Key words:** Lexicostatistical • Speech • Varieties • Linguists and orthography

### INTRODUCTION

According to [1] the Igbo language is spoken by over twenty million (20 million) people. They live in states like: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo, Delta and River States respectively. It is believed that particularly, every village in Igbo land has its own distinctive dialect and according to [2], Igbo dialects are classified into five different clusters and they are: inland west Igbo, inland east Igbo, Niger Igbo and northern Igbo. In spite of these, there has been a lot of controversies among scholars as regards the number of dialects that are spoken in Igbo land.

Another nagging problem that begs for urgent clarification is the issue of language and dialect. That is the issue of trying to distinguish between language and dialect which according to [3] has been a problem which has attracted the attention of linguists over the years, with each scholar using his own parameter to draw the distinction. However, the most acceptable criteria for this distinction has been the concept of mutual intelligibility. Even though, among these dialects they still exist some

variances in form. As a result of this, the researchers have developed interest in the study of the dialect under study to determine, their level of mutual intelligibility or otherwise.

Previously, documentation of this sort has not been done in Afikpo dialects. Hence, the researchers embark on this painstaking study to document these varieties to avoid endangerment. The study will consider such concepts as mutual intelligibility of the dialects and what constitutes the variances. Furthermore, the study will highlight to some extent instances of how the sounds of these four varieties are patterned to determine the similarities and differences that exist in the word list provided below. Finally, the researchers tend to stimulate further research on Afikpo varieties for documentary purposes and to reveal the multilingual nature or the language situation in Nigeria and its Diaspora.

Interestingly, a study of the relationship between the four varieties of Afikpo dialect is of immense significance because it will serve as a reference material for any researcher who wants to embark on a similar research in another dialect. It will also help to enrich the Afikpo

dialect in particular and the development of the Igbo language in general. The material will also sustain the existence of the dialects and preserve them to help the younger generation to know and use them to avoid engenderment.

**Research Area, Design and Population:** Afikpo North Local Government Area of Ebonyi state of Nigeria is made up of four different towns, they are Ehugbo (the headquarters of the LGA), Amasiri, Unwana and Akpoha. The people were originally called Ehugbo likewise their dialect but was later called Afikpo during colonial administration probably for linguistics convenience. In the present study, Afikpo will be used to refer to all the towns discussed in this work while Ehugbo will be used to refer specifically to specific communities which include; ohaisu, Itim, Nkpogoro, ugwuegu, Ibii in Afikpo north local government areas of Ebonyi State. Each community comprises of about four villages respectively. The researchers employed a survey research design to carry out the study with the aim to show the similarities and differences inherent in the varieties of Afikpo dialect. The researchers randomly selected five (5) elders each from the four different towns that make up Afikpo. Making a total of twenty (20) subjects.

**Literature Review:** This chapter, contains review of some current views and related literatures on the concepts of Dialect, Accent and Mutual intelligibility as these are central to identifying the relationship and differences that exist among varieties of a language or dialect.

**Dialect vs Language:** The issue of trying to draw a borderline between language and dialect has been a problem which has attracted the attention of linguists over the years, with each scholar using his own parameter to draw the distinction. Drawing a distinction between these terms is rather a complex and difficult task that has even attracted the attention of non linguists who resorted to using even unscientific methods to classify language and dialect [4].

[5] avers that sometimes, divisions are made between language and dialect by separating people and what they speak. According to her language to such people is a dialect promoted by elites. Language can be used to refer to either a single linguistic norm or a group of related norms of that dialect. Linguistically, there is no clear cut distinction between language and dialect. According to [6], this issue is more political than linguistic. Without bias [7] note that the demarcation of languages or its

varieties is shrouded in political manipulations other than objective linguistic investigations.

This situation is typical of the Afikpo dialect where some see it as a language and then see Amasiri, Akpoha and Unwana as dialects of Afikpo. From the foregoing, it may be tempting to say that there are no empirical linguistic criteria to draw a dichotomy between language and dialect.

**Accent vs Dialect:** In order to understand better the word accent, it is necessary to draw a distinction between dialect and accent in order to know where the meaning of one ends and where the other begins. The concept dialect refers to a variety of a given language which exhibit variations in pronunciation at times grammar and vocabulary [8].

In Nigeria for example, almost all Nigerian languages have their distinctive dialects. For instance, Afikpo, Owerri, Nsukka, Izzi, Ohofia, Ngwa, Onitsha etc. are all dialects of Igbo language. When we talk of accent, we refer to a type of variation which is particular to the pronunciation or phonological features of a dialect used by its members in their day to day conversation. [4] avers that "accent is used to identify class differentiation in a given language or dialect which can also be narrowly termed sociolect". The term accent is usually misconceived with the term dialect. Though as we have earlier said, accent is restricted to the phonological difference displayed by some speakers of a given speech form which is at variance with the standard or expected form or the variety.

The fact which emerges from the foregoing could be said to be the reason while Afikpo dialect is realized differently by the four varieties that make up the dialect, as the examples below show.

Ehugbo	Akpoha	Amasiri	Unwana	Gloss
N'ibom	L'ibom	Nibomu	N'ibohu	"that place"

From the example above, we can deduce that the speakers accent is displayed as they use the standard variety of the dialect whose variance is conditioned by some phonological features. These features often times may bring misconception of the terms meant, or worse still affect intelligibility.

**Dialect vs Mutual Intelligibility:** The concept of mutual intelligibility is coined by linguist to describe the level of understanding between two or more varieties of a language or dialect [3]. According to [7], intelligibility may

be seen as the ability to make out meaning from an utterance, understand it and what the expression represents according to the social and cultural background where the expression is used. Furthermore, [2] sees intelligibility as the process by which a listener can understand a speaker at particular and situation. In this case [8] avers that “if you understand language A, without being taught that language, it is a dialect (or another variety) of your own language, if you understand language B, or your own language B is a dialect of the one you can understand, A or the both you speak (A and B) are dialects of some third entity (which is then called a language). But if you do not understand A, it is a different language”

Notably, the criteria of mutual intelligibility according to [7] is also ambiguous. The big question is how well do people need to understand themselves for what they

speak to be called dialects or how wide apart should the level of intelligibility be for the norm to be classified as a different form of that dialect. Most times people who speak the same dialect but from different communities claim not to understand each other.

**Methodology:** The researchers employed the descriptive method in the analysis and also included some statistics to determine the percentage of similarities and differences.

**Data Presentation and Analysis:** The primary aim of this work is to provide the word lists already given in English in the different forms which make up Afikpo dialect such as Ehugbo, Amasiri, Akpoha and Unwana and then investigate their relatedness, variation and also determine their percentage of mutual intelligibility.

**Data Presentation:**

S/N	Ehugbo	Amasiri	Akpoha	Unwana	Gloss
1.	Íwà	Egburu	Íwà	Íwà	Cassava
2.	Ézizá	Ézizá	Ézizá	Ézizá	Broom
3.	Méé	Méé	Méé	Mò	Blood
4.	Uwèyè	Uwèyè	Ukárà	Uwèyè	Cloth
5.	Nrí	Nrí	Nrí	Ndí	Food
6.	N'ibom	L'ibom	N'ibom	N'ibom	That place
7.	Nkata	Nkata	Nkata	Nkata	Basket
8.	Ńkórò	Ńgàdà	Mkpúrù	Ńgàdà	Chair
9.	Mkpúmé	Mkpúmé	Mkpúmé	Nkúmà	Stone
10.	ìkpanyi	Ńgájí	Ńtútú	Ńtútú	Spoon
11.	Áhikéré	Áhíré	Áhikéré	Áhikéré	Groundnut
12.	Ògé	Ògé	Mmá	Ògé	Cutlass
13.	Úgbó	Úgbó	Úgbó	Úgbó	Bed
14.	Nainàí	Nainàí	Nainàí	Nainàí	Tray-pan
15.	obúú	obúú	obúú	obúú	Crayfish
16.	Akiékéé	okpùríkpo	ookpo	Akiékéé	Coconut
17.	Úkpúkání	Úkpúkání	Úkpúkání	Úkpúkání	Door
18.	ukom	opunike	ukom	Akoí	Plantain
19.	Òsé	Òsé	Òsé	Òsé	Pepper
20.	Òkpùkpò	Òkpùkpò	Ngélé	Ngélé	Stream
21.	Akpùkpá	Akpùkpá	Àkpá	Akpùkpá	Maize
22.	Ògòngò	Ògòngò	Ògòngò	Ògòngò	Potatoes
23.	Ayim	Ayim	Ayim	Ayim	Onions
24.	Ńkopáékwó	Ńká-ékwó	Éékwó	ékwùkwo	Leaf
25.	Mgbimgbí	Mgbimgbí	Mgbimgbí	Mgbimgbí	Paw-paw
26.	Áhù	Áhù	Áhù	Áhù	Mellon
27.	Ũné	Òkùmké	Akponye-mkuru	Ákói	Banana
28.	ogbogoro	ogbogoro	Ígòdò	Òkpògòrò	Key
29.	Uba	Azi	Uba	Uba	Fish
30.	Éhò	Éhò	Éhò	Éhò	Stomach

**Similarities:** Based on the data collected from the four speech communities that make up the varieties spoken in Afikpo North Local Government, the following information was deduced as regards the similarities noticed in the four linguistic varieties considered:

S/N	Ehugbo	Amasiri	Akpoha	Unwana	Gloss
1.	Nkata	Nkata	Nkata	Nkata	Basket
2.	Mkpúmé	Mkpúmé	Mkpúmé	Nkúmà	Stone
3.	Àhíkéré	Àhíréré	Àhíkéré	Àhíkéré	Groundnut
4.	Úgbó	Úgbó	Úgbó	Úgbó	Bed
5.	Nainàí	Nainàí	Nainàí	Nainàí	Tray-pan
6.	obúú	obúú	obúú	obúú	Crayfish
7.	Úkpúkání	Úkpúkání	Úkpúkání	Úkpúkání	Door
8.	Ézízà	Ézízà	Ézízà	Ézízà	Broom
9.	Òsé	Òsé	Òsé	Òsé	Pepper
10.	Akpùkpá	Akpùkpá	Àkpá	Akpùkpá	Maize
11.	Ògòngò	Ògòngò	Ògòngò	Ògòngò	Potatoes
12.	Ayim	Ayim	Ayim	Ayim	Onions
13.	Nkópáékwó	Nká-ékwó	Éékwó	ékwùkwó	Leaf
14.	Áhù	Áhù	Áhù	Áhù	Mellon
15.	Mgbimgbí	Mgbimgbí	Mgbimgbí	Mgbimgbí	Paw-paw
16.	Éhò	Éhò	Éhò	Éhò	Stomach

**Differences:** The following differences abound in the four varieties of the dialect under study.

S/N	Ehugbo	Amasiri	Akpoha	Unwana	Gloss
1.	Nkórò	Ngádá	Mkpúrù	Ngádá	Chair
2.	Ikpanyi	Ngájí	Ntútú	Ntútú	Spoon
3.	Ógé	Ógé	Mmá	Ógé	Cutlass
4.	ukom	opunike	ukom	Akoí	Plantain
5.	Òkpùkpò	Òkpùkpò	Ngélé	Ngélé	Stream
6.	Ùné	Ókùmké	Akponye-mkuru	Ákói	Banana
7.	Akíékée	okpùrikpo	ookpo	Akíékée	Coconut
8.	ogbogoro	ogbogoro	Ígòdò	Òkpògòrò	Key
9.	Uba	Azi	Uba	Uba	Fish
10.	Íwà	Egboru	Íwà	Íwà	Cassava
11.	Mée	Mée	Mée	Mò	Blood
12.	Nrí	Nrí	Nrí	Ndí	Food
13.	Uwèyè	Uwèyè	Ukára	Uwèyè	Cloth
14.	Akpùkpá	Akpùkpá	Àkpá	Akpùkpá	Maize

**Note:** Some of these lexical items in the above table do not really constitute differences rather they are in free variation and this makes the dialects highly intelligible by all the speakers of the four variances.

**Lexicostatistical Survey:** A lexicostatistical study of the four varieties of the dialect is conducted here so as to determine their percentage of similarities or differences of the 25 lexical items.

Total number of lexical items = 25  
 Total number of lexical similarities = 16  
 Total number of lexical difference = 9

∴ Percentage similarities

$$\frac{16}{25} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

= 64%

Percentage difference

$$\frac{9}{25} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

= 36%

## CONCLUSION

This work has thrown light on the linguistic situation in Afikpo and also proffer the following recommendations; Afikpo North Local Government Area is made up of four varieties of the dialect which are mutually intelligible to all native speakers of the dialect. They are Ehugbo, Akpoha, Amasiri and Unwana. The differences in the dialects are more of accent rather

than dialectal. The variances in the accent is used to identify where a particular speaker hails from among the speakers of Afikpo dialect. Afikpo is a dialect spoken by the indigenous people of Afikpo North, it is a dialect rather than a language as speculated by non linguists.

Furthermore, the linguists especially the dialectologists should undertake studies of this sort to make them accessible to non-linguistics and non-native speakers. Again, such study is essential to prevent the extinction of the local dialects of Igbo language and to make it available for the younger generations to identity.

More so, language activists and linguists especially those from Afikpo Diaspora should come together and provide a workable orthography of the dialect so that it could be used alongside the standard Igbo as a mode of instruction in the primary school level especially in the environment where these dialects are spoken. This will in no small measure enhance learning as the role of mother tongue (L1) in second language classroom cannot be overemphasized.

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