

A Study of Esan Dialects

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Abstract

This work is the second in a series of dialect studies on Esan. Its motivation is borne out of the need to further define the internal linguistic relations that may exist within the language commonly described as multidialectal. Esan is classified as North Central Edoid. A preliminary phonetic study classified the language into eight dialects.

This study is lexicon based. It adopted principles of lexicostatistical glottochronology, an approach to language study with the aim of determining levels of mutual intelligibility.

Data were collected from twelve adult Esan native speakers, each of whom spoke one of the twelve Esan speech varieties identified for this work. The Ibadan word list of 400 Basic items was the main instrument for data collection. The later were transcribed in phonetic format in International Phonetic Alphabet tradition. Available data were subjected to comparative analysis using some principles of lexicostatistical glottochronology. Segmental and tonal features were compared across Esan speech varieties for dialectal indices.

The twelve Esan speech varieties emerged as separate dialects when a combination of segmental and tonal patterning on lexical items were adopted as basis for comparison, whereas Esan emerged as two dialects when tonal patterning on lexical items was considered in isolation.

The study showed the existence of tonetic and segmental diversities within Esan. The statement that Esan comprises multiple dialects is further confirmed. It provides a framework for understanding the internal linguistic variation within Edoid and an avenue for the documentation of Esan speech varieties. This study would serve as a basis for further research on other aspects of Esan grammar for the identification of linguistic variation in the language and other related languages.

Key Words: Dialect, Edoid, Esan, Lexicon, comparative

1. Introduction

This work is a study of the dialect status of Esan. The impetus for this study is the dearth of dialect studies of Edoid languages despite the common claim that most of these languages comprise many dialects. Elugbe (1989) and Egbokhare (2003) are seminal works in this regard, as they

establish broad frameworks for understanding the relationships which may exist between members of this group of languages. This study is therefore conducted with a view to furthering existing comparative works on Edoid languages, even though the objectives of these studies may not be symmetrically coterminous. The present effort seeks to investigate the claim that Esan is multidialectal, a claim credited to Ejele (1982, 1991, 2003); Okojie and Ejele (1987:3) amongst others. Okojie and Ejele specifically claim that Esan consists of ‘varieties’ as well as ‘dialects’. The main goal of this study therefore is to make an empirical statement about the dialect status of Esan.

This study falls within the branch of linguistics known as dialectology. Francis (1983:1) defines it simply as the study of dialects, while Crystal (1987:26) states that it is a systematic study of regional dialects. A more rigorous definition of this branch of linguistics also referred to as ‘dialect geography’ or ‘linguistic geography’ is

...a branch of general linguistics concerned with the analysis and description of regional, social or temporal varieties of a language, showing how they differ in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary and how they are geographically distributed.

(Hartmann and Stork 1972:66).

Literature reveals that early comparative works on African languages have been geared towards the classification or grouping of these languages into language families according to their perceived relatedness. Bernd (1974:7) lends credence to this observation when he states that:

Most comparative work in the field of African languages have focused on the discovery of genetic relationships, as if there are no other equally interesting goals that language comparison can achieve.

1.1 Esan language and people

Esan is classified as a member of the North Central branch of Edoid (NCE). The Edoid group of languages belongs to the New Benue Congo of the Niger Congo Phylum (Elugbe 1989). It has as immediate neighbours on the classificatory chart, Edo to the left, and the dialect cluster of Ora-Emai-Iuleha to the right. Native speakers of the language concede to the occurrence of linguistic similarities between Esan and some of her close neighbouring languages. Esan has a proposed orthography (Okojie and Ejele, 1989).

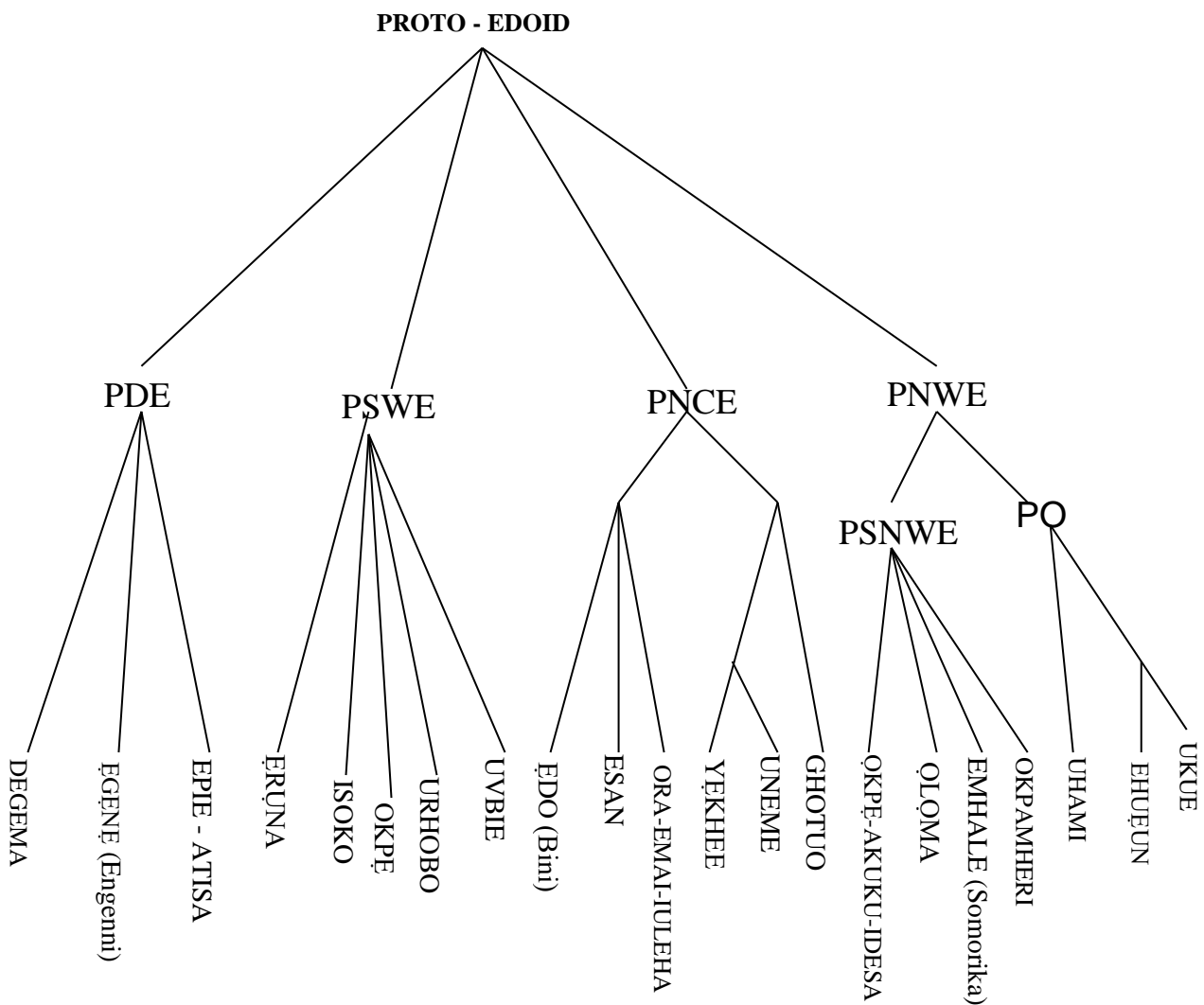
1.2 Previous studies

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A foremost classificatory work on Esan is Elugbe (1989) where the language is identified as a member of the “Edoid group” along with Ukue, Ehuen, Uhami, Okpamheri, Emhale, Oloma, the dialect cluster of Okpe – Akuku – Idosa, Ghotuo, Uneme, Yekhee, the dialect cluster of Ora – Emai, Iuleha, Edo, Uvbie, Urhobo, Okpe, Isoko, Eruwa, the dialect cluster of Epie – Atisa, Egene and Degema. Specifically, Esan is grouped with Edo, Ora – Emai – Iuleha, Yekhee, Uneme and Ghotuo as Proto North Central Edoid (PNCE). The Edoid family tree as presented in that work is replicated in figure 1.



Key

- PDE - Proto Delta Edoid
- PSWE - Proto South Western Edoid
- PNCE - Proto North Central Edoid
- PNWE - Proto North Western Edoid
- PSNWE - Proto Southern North Western Edoid

Figure 1: The Edoid family tree (Culled from Elugbe, 1989:26)

Although his comparative work of his Edoid languages includes Esan, Elugbe states categorically “I have, unfortunately, no data on Esan though I have read Akpamu’s (1971) phonology of one of the Esan dialects.” (cf. Elugbe, 1986). Thus, the absence of illustrations from Esan in that work is obviously a result of the dearth of data on Esan mentioned above.

According to Ejele (1994:69) Esan phonemic system consists of 25 consonant phonemes. She also identifies 7 oral and 5 nasal vowels. These are presented in tables IA and IB respectively.

Table IA: Phonemic consonant chart of Esan

| Place | bilabial | labio-dental | alveolar | alveopalatal | Palatal | velar | labio-velar | glottal |
|--------------|----------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------|-------|-------------|---------|
| plosive | p b | | t d | | | k g | kp gb | h |
| fricative | β | f v | s z | ʃ | | x y | | |
| affricate | | | | tʃ dʒ | | | | |
| nasal | m | | n | | | | | |
| lateral | | | l | | | | | |
| trill | | | r | | | | | |
| glide | | | | | j | | w | |

Table IB: Phonemic vowel chart of Esan

| Place | front/nasal | central/nasal | back/nasal |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Manner | | | |
| high | i ĩ | | u ũ |
| mid | e | | o |
| halfmid | ɛ ẽ | | ɔ ɔ̃ |
| low | | a ã | |

Osiruemu (2005), identifies the high (H), low (L), rising (LH) and falling (HL) tones for Esan, at the systematic phonemic level.

Table IIA: Tonal contrasts in Esan

- i. /éǝ/ ‘rat’
- ii. /èǝ/ ‘edge’
- iii. /ékpà/ ‘vomit’
- iv. /èkpà/ ‘punch’
- v. /ǝkpá/ ‘one’
- vi. /ǝkpà/ ‘cock’

(Osiruemu 2005:xxi)

The falling and rising glides are derivations from phonological processes such as vowel elision. These gliding tones occur following the disyllabification of the first of two adjacent vowels bearing non-identical tones. A falling glide is formed when the tones on the vowel sequence are HL, while a rising glide is formed when the sequence is LH. These gliding tones are exemplified below in Table IIB

Table IIB: Tonal Glides in Esan

- (vii). /èvá # èvá/ → /è v ê v á/
- (viii). ‘two two’ in twos’
- (ix). /údò # údò/ → /ú d ũ d ò/
- (x). ‘stone stone’ ‘all stones’

The H and L tones occur word initially, medially and finally on lexical items. There are no instances of the HL and LH tones in word initial position.

Ikoyo-Eweto and Jamgbadi (2012) is a pioneering effort in the study of Esan dialects. That study identified eight phonetic varieties of Esan. The goal of this study is to further clarify the dialect status of the language.

1.3 Data and methodology

This study is based on 12 speech varieties of Esan. These Esan speech varieties are presented below by their common nomenclature. Their individual identification for the present work is provided in brackets after the name for each speech form as follows: Ekpoma (EK); Ewatto (ET); Igueben (IB); Ilushi (IL); Irrua (IR); Ogwa (OG); Ohordua (OH); Ubiaza (UB); Udo (UD); Ugbegun (UG); Ugboha (UH); Uromi (UM). These speech varieties were identified from responses of subjects for this study to preliminary questions from the instrument for data collection. Table I contains information about towns and Local Government Areas where these Esan speech varieties are mostly spoken.

Table III: Main speech areas of identified Esan speech varieties

| S/N | Identified Esan speech form | Towns | | Local Government |
|-----|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| | | Esan name | Official name | |
| 1. | EK | Ekuma Irukekpen | Ekpoma Irukekpen | Esan West |
| 2. | ET | Ebhoato | Ewatto | Esan South East |
| 3. | IG | Igueben | Igueben | Igueben |
| 4. | IL | Ilushi | Ilushi | Esan South East |
| 5. | IR | Uruwa | Irrua | Esan North East |
| 6. | OG | Ogua Ugiogba | Ogwa Ujogba | Esan West |
| 7. | OH | Okhuedua | Ohordua | Esan South East |

| | | | | |
|-----|----|----------|---------|--------------------|
| 8. | UB | Ubiaza | Ubiaja | Esan South East |
| 9. | UD | Udo | Udo | Igueben |
| 10. | UG | Ugbegun | Ugbegun | Esan Central |
| 11. | UH | Owaha | Ugboha | Esan South East |
| 12. | UM | Urhomwun | Uromi | Esan North East |

This attempt at capturing these locations should be viewed against the background of the pervasiveness of heterogeneity within a given language. These speech areas actually flow into each other. This view of the physical bounding of dialect areas is buttressed by the opinion in contemporary dialectology that "... there are no clear cut dialect areas, only gradual transitions..." Thus language variation is usually not even across a whole area but intensifies at some points and rarefies in others.

Data collected for this study were transcribed phonetically, in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) format and subjected to principles of lexicostatistical glottochronology. This analytical method is an approach to language study devised in the late 1940s by the American linguists Morris Swadesh and Robert Lees (cf. Campbell, 1998). It is used to work out the length of time which has lapsed since two languages thought to be related began to diverge. The technique is used by counting the number of similar words between the languages in question, using the sample of vocabulary taken from them, with the relevant word list. The lower the number of vocabulary agreement between two samples, the longer the languages have been separated. Thus, two languages which have 60% vocabulary in common would be thought to have diverged longer ago than languages which have 80%.

This approach to language relatedness has met with criticisms because of its perceived shortcomings. Bennett and Sterk (1977) state that although this method of data analysis is useful for preliminary sub-grouping, it is not – if used alone – adequate for indication of fine degrees of relationship. They opine that the nature of this method of analysis is such that geographical and social proximity tend to increase cognateness scores significantly. Hymes (1964) drew attention to the semantic difficulties encountered in using the same test list across cultures. Modifications resulting in the need to surmount such difficulties impede standardization of studies in lexical relationships. Akinkugbe (1978:44-46) explains that lexicostatistics lacks uniform cut-off points and a means of quantifying degrees of similarities among cognates – a measure of reliability which is invaluable to

dialectology. Swadesh suggested that speech forms scoring below 86% cognateness relatedness be regarded as belonging to different languages and those scoring above 86% as belonging to the same languages. Williamson, 1973b (cf Akinkugbe, 1978) takes scores below 80% to mean that speech forms “clearly” belong to different languages and between 81% and 85% “arguably” belong to different languages. The consensus about the use of lexicostatistics is that since the method is not complete in itself, results have to be checked with other types of evidence. For the reasons explicated above, which among other things show that an adoption of lexicostatistical glottochronology, in its entirety, would not adequately address the aims and goals of the present study, a modification in methodology was adopted as follows:

- (a) The ‘Ibadan Word List of 400 Basic Items’, rather than Swadesh’s 100-word list was used as the main instrument for data elicitation.
- (b) The lexicostatistical method for the analysis of data was adopted as well as the cut off levels (86%) for determining relatedness between speech forms.
- (c) Lexical items on the word list would be compared on the basis of complete similarity and dis-similarity, rather than cognation, across the identified Esan speech varieties under focus.

1.4 Data analysis

Analysis of data available for this study was conducted as follows:

Lexical items were compared across the identified Esan speech varieties to determine their levels of relatedness. This comparison was conducted between a pair of speech varieties at a time, until all twelve speech varieties were compared with one another. The sum totals resulting from the comparisons were subsequently converted to percentile values. The statistical formulae by which the analysis of available data were conducted for this work were as follows. Three variables – y, x, z – were introduced to capture the lexical relationships between Esan speech forms under study. The values of these variables are:

- i. y → total number of items compared between two given speech forms at a given time.
- ii. x → total number of identical items between two given Speech forms at a given time.
- iii. z → total number of un identical items between two given speech forms at a given time.

To calculate the value of each given variable, the following formula was used.

iv. $X + Z = Y$

This formula taken for each variable would translate into the following two simple formulae.

$$\text{iv. } X = Y - Z$$

$$\text{v. } Z = Y - X$$

To calculate the percentile values of these variables, the following formula was applied.

$$\text{vi. } \frac{(X,Z) \times 100}{Y} = \frac{(X,Z)\%}{y}$$

Taken simply for each variable, this formula would read as follows

$$\text{(vii) } \frac{X \times 100}{Y} = \frac{X\%}{Y}$$

$$\text{(viii) } \frac{Z \times 100}{Y} = \frac{Z\%}{Y}$$

With these formulae, percentage scores of relatedness between the speech varieties under study were generated. Tonal permutations on lexical items across the Esan speech varieties formed the basis for tone statistical analysis in the work. Comparisons between the lexicons of the Esan speech varieties were conducted along the following three sub-parameters:

- (1). Relatedness between Esan speech varieties considering both segmental and tonal constitution of lexical items.
- (2). Relatedness between Esan speech varieties considering only segmental constitution of lexical items.
- (3). Relatedness between Esan speech varieties considering only tonal patterning on lexical items.

This exercise resulted in close to 70 comparisons, and about 410 calculations to arrive at the statistical evidence presented in this work. Each comparison yielded statistical values which formed the criteria for determining the linguistic relatedness between Esan varieties. Percentile relatedness of 86% and above was adopted as basis for considering Esan speech varieties as close enough to be regarded as belonging to the same dialect. Such linguistic relatedness was considered insufficient to mar mutual intelligibility. Relatedness values below 86% was adopted as basis for considering Esan speech varieties distant enough to be considered separate dialects.

2. Identification of Esan Dialects

The identification of Esan dialects presented in this section is a logical deduction from the results of analysis of available data. These findings are presented as follows.

2.1 Results of Data Analysis

The values and deductions accruing from the application of statistical formulae to available data are presented below.

2.1 .1 Relatedness of Esan speech varieties considering both segmental and tonal constitution of lexical items

At this level of comparison, dichotomy was between lexical items which bore identical segmental and tonal constitution and those which did not. Statistical values of these comparisons are as follows.

Table IVA: Statistical values of lexical items with identical segmental and tonal constitution across Esan speech forms

Key: ET= Ewatto, UG = Ugbegun, UM = Uromi
 UD= Udo, OG = Ogwa, UH = Ugboha,
 UB= Ubiaza, EK = Ekpoma, OH = Ohordua
 IB= Igueben, IR = Irrua, IL = Illushi

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| ET | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 32 | UG | | | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 50 | UM | | | | | | | | | |
| 45 | 41 | 50 | UD | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 36 | 38 | 46 | OG | | | | | | | |
| 36 | 35 | 47 | 42 | 31 | UH | | | | | | |
| 42 | 46 | 53 | 47 | 37 | 48 | UB | | | | | |
| 32 | 53 | 46 | 39 | 41 | 33 | 38 | EK | | | | |
| 61 | 36 | 44 | 51 | 38 | 41 | 46 | 33 | OH | | | |
| 20 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 27 | 15 | 18 | 20 | 21 | IG | | |
| 32 | 51 | 52 | 44 | 35 | 35 | 50 | 52 | 34 | 19 | IR | |
| 44 | 41 | 55 | 47 | 38 | 59 | 52 | 40 | 46 | 20 | 41 | IL |

Shared lexicostatistical values between paired Esan speech forms are highlighted in Table 4B.

Table IVB: Shared Statistical Values of Paired Esan Speech Forms with Identical and Tonal Constitution

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ET/UG 32 | UG/UM 50 | UM/OG 38 | UD/EM 39 | OG/IL 38 | UB/IL 52 |
| ET/UM 39 | UG/UD 41 | UM/UH 47 | UD/OH 51 | UH/UB 48 | EK/OH 33 |
| ET/UD 45 | UG/OG 36 | UM/UB 53 | UD/IB 20 | UH/EK 33 | EM/IB 20 |
| ET/OG 39 | UG/UH 35 | UM/EK 46 | UD/IR 44 | UH/OD 41 | EM/IR 52 |
| ET/UH 36 | UG/UB 46 | UM/OH 44 | UD/IL 47 | UH/IB 15 | EK/IL 40 |
| ET/UB 42 | UG/EK 53 | UM/IB 19 | OG/UH 31 | UH/IR 35 | OD/IB 21 |
| ET/EK 32 | UG/OH 36 | UM/IR 52 | OG/UB 37 | UH/IL 59 | OH/IR 34 |
| ET/OH 61 | UG/IB 18 | UM/IL 55 | OG/EK 41 | UB/EK 38 | OH/IL 46 |
| ET/IB 20 | UG/IR 51 | UD/OG 46 | OG/OH 38 | UB/OD 46 | IB/IR 19 |
| ET/IR 32 | UG/IL 41 | UD/UH 42 | OG/IB 27 | UB/IB 18 | IB/IL 20 |
| ET/IL 44 | UM/UD 50 | UD/UB 47 | OG/IR 35 | UB/IR 50 | IR/IL 41 |

Based on the statistical levels adopted for this work, which is 86% (see section 1.4), each of the twelve identified Esan speech varieties attained below the adopted value of relatedness when compared with one another. Thus all twelve Esan speech varieties are considered autonomous dialects of Esan.

Table 4C contains examples of data illustrating lexical items in this category of comparison across Esan speech varieties.

Table IVC: Lexical Items with Identical Segmental and Tonal Constitution Across Esan Speech Forms

| S/N | ET | UG | UM | UD | OG | UH | UZ | EM | OD | IG | IR | IS | GLOSS |
|-----|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1. | àkɔ | àkɔ | àkɔ | àkɔ | àkɔ | Akɔ | àkɔ | Àkɔ | akɔ | àkɔ | àkɔ | àkɔ | tooth |
| 2. | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | àmè | water |
| 3. | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | ɔkà | maize |
| 4. | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | ìyòyò | smoke |
| 5. | òtɔ | òtɔ | òtɔ | òtɔ | òtɔ | otɔ | òtɔ | Òtɔ | òtɔ | òtɔ | òtɔ | òtɔ | ground |
| 6. | ùkì | ùkì | ukì | ùkì | ùkì | ukì | ùkì | Ukì | ukì | ùkì | ùkì | ùkì | moon |
| 7. | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | ɔkpà | cock |
| 8. | èvá | èvá | evá | èvá | èvá | èvá | èvá | Evá | evá | èvá | èvá | èvá | two |
| 9. | gwà | gwà | gwà | gwà | gwà | gwà | gwà | Gwà | gwà | gwà | gwà | gwà | to hoe |
| 10. | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | Xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | xwǎ | heavy |

2.1.2 Relatedness of Esan Speech Forms Considering Only Segmental Constitution of Lexical Items

At this level of comparison, dichotomy was between lexical items which bore identical segmental constitution and those which did not. Tonal constitutions of lexical items were ignored. Statistical values of lexical items which bore identical segmental constitution only across Esan speech varieties are as follows:

Table VA – Statistical values of lexical items with identical segmental constitution only across Esan speech forms

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| ET | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 36 | UG | | | | | | | | | | |
| 42 | 54 | UM | | | | | | | | | |
| 48 | 45 | 53 | UD | | | | | | | | |
| 42 | 40 | 40 | 50 | OG | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 38 | 49 | 44 | 34 | UH | | | | | | |
| 44 | 48 | 55 | 50 | 39 | 51 | UB | | | | | |
| 39 | 58 | 51 | 45 | 46 | 37 | 42 | EK | | | | |
| 64 | 40 | 48 | 55 | 42 | 43 | 48 | 38 | OH | | | |
| 38 | 32 | 34 | 36 | 47 | 29 | 33 | 35 | 38 | IB | | |
| 35 | 55 | 55 | 48 | 37 | 28 | 52 | 56 | 39 | 30 | IR | |
| 46 | 42 | 57 | 50 | 40 | 60 | 53 | 41 | 49 | 36 | 44 | IL |

Table VB: Shared statistical values of paired esan speech forms with identical segmental constitution only

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ET/UG | UG/UM | UM/OG | UD/EK | OG/IL | UB/IL |
| 36 | 54 | 40 | 45 | 40 | 53 |
| ET/UM | UG/UD | UR/UH | UD/OH | UH/UB | EK/OH |
| 42 | 45 | 49 | 55 | 51 | 38 |
| ET/UD | UG/OG | UM/UB | UD/IB | UH/EM | EK/IB |
| 48 | 40 | 55 | 36 | 37 | 35 |
| ET/OG | UG/UH | UM/EK | UD/IR | UH/OD | EK/IR |
| 42 | 38 | 51 | 48 | 43 | 56 |
| ET/UH | UG/UB | UM/OH | UD/IL | UH/IB | EK/IL |
| 39 | 48 | 48 | 50 | 29 | 41 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| ET/UZ 44 | UG/EK 58 | UM/IB 34 | OG/UH 34 | UH/IR 38 | OH/IB 38 |
| ET/EK 39 | UG/OD 40 | UM/IR 35 | OG/UB 39 | UH/IL 60 | OD/IR 39 |
| ET/OD64 | UG/IB 32 | UM/IL 57 | OG/EM 46 | UB/EK 42 | OH/IL 49 |
| ET/IB 38 | UG/IR 55 | UD/OG 50 | OG/OH 42 | UB/OH 48 | IB/IR 30 |
| ET/IR 35 | UG/IL 42 | UD/UH 44 | OG/IB 47 | UB/IB 33 | IB/IL 36 |
| ET/IL 46 | UM/UD 53 | UD/UB 50 | OG/IR 37 | UB/IR 52 | IR/IL 44 |

From the analysis presented above, all twelve Esan speech varieties exhibited below the 86% lexicostatistical value adopted for this work. This analysis confirmed the verdict from the preceding one that the identified Esan speech varieties under focus are autonomous Esan dialects. A notable increase in statistical values from comparison between Esan speech varieties emerged at this level of analysis. This occurrence could be a result of the lowering of the number of linguistic features used as parameters of comparison. The highest value of 61% rose to 64%. Table 5C features lexical items in this category of comparison across the twelve Esan speech varieties.

TABLE VC: Lexical items with identical segmental constitution only across esan speech forms

| S/N | ET | UG | UM | UD | OG | UH | UB | EK | OH | IG | IR | IL | Gloss |
|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|----------|
| 1. | etò | etò | étò | étò | etò | étò | etò | étò | étò | etò | étò | étò | hair |
| 2. | óbᵛ | obᵛ | óbᵛ | óbᵛ | óbᵛ | óbᵛ | obᵛ | óbᵛ | óbᵛ | obᵛ | óbᵛ | óbᵛ | hand |
| 3. | unù | unù | únù | únù | unù | únù | unù | únù | únù | unù | únù | únù | mouth |
| 4. | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | ᵛpjà | matchet |
| 5. | ewà | ewà | èwà | èwà | ewà | èwà | ewà | èwà | èwà | èwà | èwà | èwà | mat |
| 6. | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | úkpᵛ | cloth |
| 7. | íyô | íyô | iyô | iyô | íyô | íyô | íyô | íyô | íyô | íyô | íyô | íyô | money |
| 8. | enì | enì | énì | énì | enì | énì | enì | énì | énì | énì | énì | énì | elephant |
| 9. | igbé | igbé | ìgbé | ìgbé | igbé | ìgbé | ìgbé | ìgbé | ìgbé | igbé | ìgbé | ìgbé | ten |
| 10. | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | kpâ | to vomit |

2.1.3 Relatedness of Esan Speech Forms Considering Only Tonal Constitution On Lexical Items

At this level of comparison, dichotomy was between lexical items which bore only identical tonal patterning, and those which did not. Statistical values of lexical items in this category across Esan speech varieties are:

Table VIA: Statistical values of lexical items with identical tonal patterning only across Esan speech varieties

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| ET | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 96 | UG | | | | | | | | | | |
| 97 | 96 | UM | | | | | | | | | |
| 97 | 96 | 97 | UD | | | | | | | | |
| 97 | 96 | 98 | 96 | OG | | | | | | | |
| 97 | 97 | 98 | 98 | 97 | UH | | | | | | |
| 98 | 98 | 98 | 97 | 98 | 97 | UB | | | | | |
| 93 | 95 | 95 | 94 | 95 | 96 | 96 | EK | | | | |
| 97 | 96 | 96 | 96 | 96 | 98 | 98 | 95 | OH | | | |
| 82 | 86 | 85 | 84 | 80 | 86 | 85 | 85 | 83 | IG | | |
| 97 | 96 | 97 | 96 | 98 | 97 | 98 | 96 | 95 | 89 | IR | |
| 98 | 99 | 98 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 99 | 99 | 97 | 84 | 97 | IL |

Table VIB: Shared tonostatistical values of paired Esan speech varieties

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| ET/UG | UG/UM | UM/OG | UD/EK | OG/IL | UB/IL |
| 96 | 96 | 98 | 94 | 98 | 99 |
| ET/UM | UG/UD | UM/UH | UD/OH | UH/UB | EK/OH |
| 97 | 96 | 98 | 96 | 97 | 95 |
| ET/UD | UG/OG | UM/UB | UD/IB | UH/EK | EK/IB |
| 97 | 96 | 98 | 84 | 96 | 85 |
| ET/OG | UG/UH | UM/EK | UD/IR | UH/OD | EK/IR |
| 97 | 97 | 95 | 96 | 98 | 96 |
| ET/UH | UG/UB | UM/OH | UD/IL | UH/IB | EK/IL |
| 97 | 98 | 96 | 97 | 86 | 99 |
| ET/UB | UG/EK | UM/IB | OG/UH | UH/IR | OH/IB |
| 98 | 95 | 85 | 97 | 97 | 83 |
| ET/EK | UG/OH | UM/IR | OG/UB | UH/IL | OD/IR |
| 93 | 96 | 97 | 98 | 99 | 95 |
| ET/OH | UG/IB | UM/IL | OG/EK | UB/EK | OH/IL |

| | | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 97 | 86 | 98 | 95 | 96 | 97 |
| ET/IB | UG/IR | UD/OG | OG/OH | UB/OH | IB/IR |
| 82 | 96 | 96 | 96 | 98 | 89 |
| ET/IR | UG/IL | UD/UH | OG/IB | UB/IB | IB/IL |
| 97 | 99 | 98 | 80 | 85 | 84 |
| ET/IL | UM/UD | UD/UB | OG/IR | UB/IR | IR/IL |
| 98 | 97 | 97 | 98 | 98 | 97 |

At this level of analysis, all twelve Esan speech varieties exhibited high relatedness values (80% -99%), when only tonal patterning on identical lexical items was used as parameter for comparison. The twelve Esan speech varieties under focus fell into two dialect groups, by the levels adopted for this study as follows.

1. Igueben – Irrua – Ugbegun – Ugboha
2. Ewatto – Uromi – Udo – Ogwa – Ubiaza – Ekpoma – Ohordua – Irrua - Ilushi – Ugboha – Ugbegun.

By this grouping, Igueben shared above the cut off value of relatedness (86% and above) with Irrua Ugbegun and Ugboha, while with all others, relatedness was below the adopted statistical level for determining dialectal status in this work. Irrua, Ugbegun and Ugboha however, shared above 90% relatedness value with all the other Esan speech forms, an evidence suggestive of a closer linguistic relatedness with them, than with Igueben. On the basis of the argument stated above, a finer verdict would be that which classified Igueben as a separate dialect from the other eleven Esan speech forms, on the basis of tonostatistical evidence. The emergence of the three speech forms of Irrua, Ugbegun and Ugboha as members of the two identified dialects in 1`and 2 confirm the opinion in contemporary dialect study that dialect areas are usually gradual transitions, rather than clear cut boundaries – (see section 1.3). These three speech varieties have exhibited what may be called a transition between two dialects. That occurrence may be explained in either of two ways as follows:

- (i). Irrua, Ugbegun and Ugboha are in a process of becoming more like Igueben with which they share a lower percentage of resemblance by a process of gradual evolution through socio-linguistic processes like language contact.
- (ii). Irrua, Ugbegun and Ugboha have, over the years gradually evolved to become more like the other members of the second dialect group with which they share above 90% level of resemblance. The probability of their total disappearance as members of the first dialect group in future is high. Igueben had, thus far, maintained its linguistic distance between it and the other Esan speech forms.

- (iii) Tonostatistical values between Esan speech forms, as revealed at this level of comparison, suggests that the larger majority of Esans speak the same form of the language.

Table VIC illustrates lexical items at this level of analysis, across Esan speech forms.

Table VIC: Lexical items with identical tonal patterning only across Esan speech forms

| S/N | ET | UG | UM | UD | OG | UH | UB | EK | OH | IB | IR | IL | Gloss |
|-----|--------|----------|--------|---------|--------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| 1. | ìtábà | ìtábà | ìtábà | tábà | itábà | ìtábà | ìtábà | ìtábà | itábà | ìtábà | tábà | tábà | tobacco |
| 2. | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | íxjàḃḃ | okro |
| 3. | émátḃ | úkpelḃḃḃ | émátḃ | elḃḃḃ | emátḃ | émátḃ | émátḃ | émátḃ | elḃḃḃ | émátḃ | elḃḃḃ | elḃḃḃ | iron |
| 4. | òlû | òlú | òlúlù | kpelébe | íkpirjàgbèdê | òwû | òwû | olú | olû | òlú | úkpòlú | òwû | thread |
| 5. | eere | èlele | èlele | èlele | elee | èlee | èlele | elee | erere | èelee | èlele | èlele | eight |
| 6. | isírì | ìsílì | ìsílì | ìsílì | isílì | ìsì | ìhílì | isílì | isílì | ìhílì | isílì | ìsílì | nine |
| 7. | sâ | sâ | sâ | sâóxù | sâγóxù | sâ | sâ | sâ | sâ | sâ | sâóxù | sâ | jump |
| 8. | γàḃ | gbèyáé | γà | γà | γàlè | γàè | γàlá | γàè | γǎ | γǎ | γàléá | γà | divide |
| 9. | häsá | häsà | Häsà | häsà | häsà | hàè | häsà | häsà | häsà | häsà | häsà | hà | to pay |

Conclusion

Statistical analysis of available data confirmed the claim that Esan is multidialectal. The statistical values, which emerged from analysis of data, within the stated parameters, provided evidence to substantiate this claim as follows.

1. When both segmental and tonal constitution on the one hand, and only segmental constitution of lexical items, on the other, were used as parameters for determining linguistic relatedness, each Esan speech variety emerged as an autonomous Esan dialect.
2. When only tonal constitution on identical lexical items formed the parameter of comparison, Esan speech varieties fell into 2 dialect groups.

Summary

This research effort is a study in dialectology. Its main aim was to empirically evaluate the common claim that Esan is multidialectal. Sub-goals of this effort included identifying Esan dialects by determining the levels of relatedness between twelve Esan speech varieties and their levels of mutual intelligibility. This dialect study was based on the lexicon of Esan. The Esan varieties identified were Ekpoma, Ewatto, Igueben, Ilushi, Irrua, Ogwa, Ohordua, Ubiaza, Udo, Ugbegun, Ugboha, Uromi. Data were elicited from twelve adult Esan native speakers with the Ibadan word list of 400 basic items as the main instrument. Analysis of available data was conducted using some principles of lexicostatistical glottochronology, an approach to the historical study of languages, used to determine linguistic relatedness and distances between languages thought to be related.

Results which emerged from the adopted levels of analysis provided empirical evidence in favour of the claim that Esan comprises more than one dialect. Specifically, lexicostatistical analysis of Esan speech varieties revealed them as autonomous Esan dialects when segmental and tonal constitution on lexical items, on the one hand, and only segmental constitution of lexical items on the other hand, formed the basis for analysis. Two Esan dialects were identified when only tonal constitution on lexical items was used as parameter for comparison. The levels of mutual intelligibility which Esan speech varieties exhibited correlated directly with their dialectal status, as speech forms belonging to the same dialect group featured a higher level of mutual intelligibility when compared with those which fell into different dialect groups. This study therefore gave insights into the dialect status of Esan. Esan speech varieties shared higher levels of relatedness when linguistic principles of comparison were lowered than when they were raised. Findings showed that although identical tonal configurations on lexical forms suggested a high level of mutual intelligibility

between Esan varieties, when both tonal and segmental constitution of lexical forms were used as parameters of comparison, the language presented as a cluster of dialects.

The pioneering status of this work leaves unattended, many researchable areas in determining more comprehensively, the linguistic status of Esan. Further comparative research on other areas of grammar such as sentence structure, tense and aspect, may yet provide further evidence for making more far reaching statements about the dialectal status of Esan.

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