MORPHO-SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH AND IGEDE NOUN AND VERB PHRASES

Babalola Sehinde Michael

Department of English, University of Ibadan
babalolamichael777@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Universal Grammar proposes that all languages share certain universal characteristics while also exhibiting unique features. Despite the abundance of research on the contrastive analysis of English and Nigerian languages, no attention is known to have been given to morphosyntatic features in Igede. Therefore, this study examines the morpho-syntactic features in English and Igede noun and verb phrases in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence, and predict possible areas of difficulty for Igede learners of English. This study adopts the X-bar theory, a sub-theory of the Principle and Parameters Theory (PPT) by Noam Chomsky (1981). The data collection methods employed were structured interviews and narrative. It is found that the position of modifiers and nouns in both languages differs; the noun phrases exhibit a head-initial structure, unlike English, which follows a head-final structure. The findings also reveal that there are differences in the plural formation; representation of gender in both languages. The study also reveal that while the English language marks the progressive verb form with the "-ing" suffix, the Igede language marks the progressive verb with the mopheme, "juwa." It also shows that Igede does not have an indefinite article. The study also reveal that there are differences in the formation of perfective markers. To address these challenges, it is recommended that curriculum planners should consider the linguistic differences between both languages when designing language curricula, ensuring that the curriculum includes explicit instruction on the areas of difference.

Keywords: Universal Grammar , morpho-syntactix, Igede, noun, language

Introduction

Language, as a fundamental facet of human communication, exhibits remarkable diversity in its structural configurations across linguistic families (Greenberg 1963;Comrie, 1981). One of the primary functions of language is to facilitate interaction and communication among individuals and groups (Halliday, 1970). Similarly, Godwin (2014:10) avers that the most basic importance of language is communication, and communication can be transactional or interactional. Scholars have explored the similarities and differences between English and several major Nigerian languages. This investigation is rooted in the understanding that similarities between two languages can facilitate learning, while differences can impede it. Selinker (1972) emphasizes that learners often draw on their native language during the acquisition of a second language, stating, "Learners rely on their mother tongue, benefiting from similarities but facing challenges due to differences. Moreover, Odlin (1989) supports this notion by affirming that "positive transfer occurs when languages share features, while negative transfer arises from significant differences." This suggests that when learners encounter similarities, they may find it easier to grasp new concepts and structures in the target language. Conversely, when faced with pronounced differences, learners may struggle, leading to confusion and misunderstanding. Numerous scholars have conducted research on the contrastive analysis of English and various Nigerian languages. For instance, Abiodun (1989) examined vowel harmony in Igede, while Jeanne (2012) examined the syntactic structures of English and Yoruba. Godwin (2014) focused on the sentence structures of English and Igala. Similarly, Adejo (2016) studied the basic clause structure of Idoma and English, and Aloysius & Anyugo (2018) conducted a morphological analysis of clipping in Igede. Samuel (2019) explored focus constructions in Igede and selected dialects of Yoruba, specifically Ondó and Kále. Olawe (2022) analyzed the inflection systems of English and Ekpari, and Babalola (2024) examined basic clauses in English and Igede. Despite this body of research, a significant gap remains in the analysis of the morpho-syntactic features of English and Igede noun and verb phrases. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the morpho-syntactic features of English and Igede noun and verb phrases. The primary objective is to identify the similarities and differences in these features and predict the potential challenges that Igede learners of English may encounter in acquiring English as a second language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Survey of Igede language in Nigeria
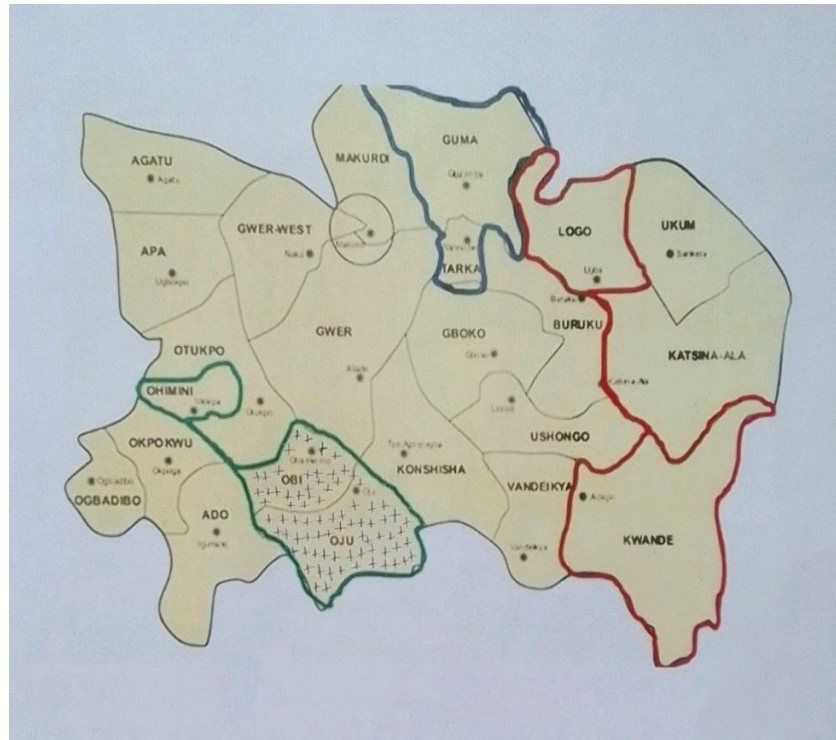
Sources: Babalola (2024:9)

The areas marked with '+,' are the areas where the Igede language is spoken, and the speakers are dominant there. The Igede people reside in Benue State, Nigeria. The people traced their ancestry to Sabon Gida Ora in Edo State, and they are the third-largest ethnic group in Benue. They are located in two local government areas: Oju and Obi. They are made up of six clans in Benue State: Ohia, Ovbiokhvarin, Evbiobe, Uhomora, Oke, and Emera. Igede is a member of the Benue-Congo language family, a branch of the Niger-Congo language family (Anyugo, 2018). Igede is the language spoken by 461,000 people in the Lower Benue and Cross River States of Nigeria (Odey, 2020).

An Overview of English language in Nigeria

The English language plays a vital role in Nigeria, serving as a unifying force amidst the country's linguistic diversity. As noted by Ogunsiji (2001:154), the exact date when the English language was introduced to Nigeria remains uncertain. The use of English as a national language also helps to reduce ethnic tensions and promote national unity. As Oyeleye and Ogunsiji (2012) noted, the promotion of indigenous languages is hindered by mutual suspicion and ethnic consciousness among Nigerians. Therefore, English continues to perform both transactional and interactional functions in Nigeria, serving as a common language for national integration and cohesion. In conclusion, the English language plays a vital role in Nigeria's development, serving as a unifying force, facilitating communication, and promoting national unity.

Morpho-syntax as a branch of linguistic

Morphosyntax is a branch of linguistics that studies the internal structure of words (morphology) and how words are combined to form sentences (syntax). According to Chomsky (1981), it refers to "the study of the rules and principles that govern the internal structure of words and the way words are combined to form sentences. Similarly, Baker (2003) views morphosyntax as "the interface between morphology and syntax, where the internal structure of words meets the rules of sentence formation." Carnie (2007) avers that it is the study of the relationship between the internal structure of words and the way they are combined to form phrases and sentences. However, the above scholars' views converge on the idea that morphosyntax is fundamentally concerned with the interface between word structure and sentence formation.

The noun phrase

A noun phrase (NP) is a phrase that centers around a noun or pronoun, functioning grammatically like a single noun. It can be modified by determiners, nominals, numerals, and adjectives, providing additional information about the noun (Lamidi, 2000: 152). Furthermore, noun phrases can be post-modified by prepositional phrases, serving as complements or adjuncts, adding details about the noun's relationships or characteristics. According to Radford (2004: 112), a noun phrase consists of a head noun and dependents, such as determiners, modifiers, and complements, with the head noun determining the phrase's grammatical category.

The English noun phrase

An English noun phrase (NP) is a phrase that functions as a single noun, typically consisting of a noun or pronoun as its head, accompanied by various modifiers such as adjectives, determiners, and prepositional phrases. In English, nouns can be pre-modified by specifiers, which provide additional information about the noun's characteristics, or post-modified by complements, which provide more details about the noun's relationships (Raheem,

2015). As Biber et al. (1999) note, the noun phrase is a fundamental unit of English grammar, allowing speakers to convey complex ideas and relationships through a combination of lexical and grammatical elements.

The Igede noun phrase

In Igede, the noun phrase exhibits a unique structural pattern. Unlike in English, Igede noun phrases can be modified by specifiers or complements that follow the head noun, rather than preceding it. The head noun in Igede typically occupies a central position within the noun phrase.

The verb phrase

The verb phrase (VP) is a crucial component of a sentence, traditionally referred to as the predicate. It is centered around the verb, which serves as the head of the phrase and reveals the roles played by other nouns in the sentence (Yusuf, 1997:20). According to Radford (2004: 71), the verb phrase is a fundamental unit of sentence structure, and the verb is the central element that determines the phrase's grammatical properties. The verb can be followed by complements or adjuncts, which provide additional information about the action or state described by the verb. As Biber et al. (1999: 703) note, complements are obligatory elements that complete the meaning of the verb, while adjuncts are optional elements that provide additional information about the verb's action or state. Furthermore, the verb phrase can also be modified by various types of phrases, such as adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, and clauses, which can provide additional information about the verb's action or state (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002:137).

The English verb phrase

The English verb phrase is a fundamental unit of sentence structure, consisting of a main verb and any accompanying auxiliary verbs, modals, or other elements (Radford, 2004:71). According to Biber et al. (1999:703), the verb phrase typically follows a subject noun phrase in English sentence structure. Huddleston and Pullum (2002:137) note that the verb phrase can be modified by various types of phrases, such as adverbial phrases, prepositional phrases, and clauses.

The Igede verb phrase

In Igede, a verb phrase (VP) is formed by a required verb, which is accompanied by optional elements such as complements and adjuncts (Babalola, 2024:64).

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this analysis is grounded in X-theory, a sub-theory within the broader Principles and Parameters framework of generative grammar. It was developed by Chomsky in 1981, and it was further refined by various linguists. X-theory offers a systematic approach to analyzing the syntactic features of languages. Its application to the contrastive study of English and Igede nouns and verb phrases is particularly beneficial for several reasons. Firstly, X-theory emphasizes the hierarchical organization of phrases, which is essential for understanding the syntactic behavior of nouns and verbs. According to Chomsky (1986), this structure provides a clearer representation of how heads (nouns and verbs) project into larger phrases. Analyzing these structures allows for a comparison of how English and Igede organize their syntactic elements, revealing both similarities and differences. Furthermore, the principles and parameters framework enables the exploration of universal syntactic features while highlighting language-specific variations. Baker (2003) notes that X-theory helps identify common principles governing noun and verb usage across languages, as well as the parameters that differentiate their syntactic structures. This dual focus enriches the contrastive analysis and deepens our understanding of both languages. Moreover, X-theory is adaptable, allowing for the analysis of various syntactic phenomena, including modifiers, adjuncts, and specifiers. This flexibility is vital when comparing how English and Igede handle noun and verb phrases. As Carnie (2007) points out, employing X-theory enables researchers to incorporate a wide range of syntactic elements into their analysis, providing a comprehensive view of the languages' structures. In summary, X-theory is particularly well-suited for analyzing the contrastive syntactic features of English and Igede nouns and verbs due to its focus on hierarchical structure, its ability to balance universal principles with language-specific variations, and its flexibility in accommodating diverse syntactic phenomena. This theoretical approach enhances our understanding of both languages and their syntactic intricacies.

2.3 Methodology

Data were collected from two purposively selected indigenous Igede speakers aged between 50 and 60 years, residing in Ohia, Benue State. One participant is an Igede writer, ensuring authenticity in the data. The speakers were interviewed to elicit expressions in Igede, which were subsequently translated into English by an Igede language expert. Relevant structures were extracted from these translations, supplemented by literature and grammar textbooks to provide a comprehensive analysis. The analysis focuses on identifying and comparing the morpho-syntactic features of nouns and verb phrases in both languages using X-theory as the theoretical framework. The researcher categorizes the extracted sentences according to their morpho-syntactic features, paying particular attention to the roles of nouns and verbs within phrases, including heads, plurality formation, progressive and perfective marking, complements, and modifiers. A detailed contrastive analysis highlights the similarities and differences in syntactic features, examining aspects such as word order, agreement, and the use of articles and determiners in English compared to corresponding structures in Igede.

1.4 Comparing the syntactic features of the English and Igede noun and verb phrase

Differences

1. In English, the noun maybe pre-modified by specifiers or post-modified by complements. While noun phrase may be post-modified by specifiers or complements. Below are the English and Igede noun phrases:
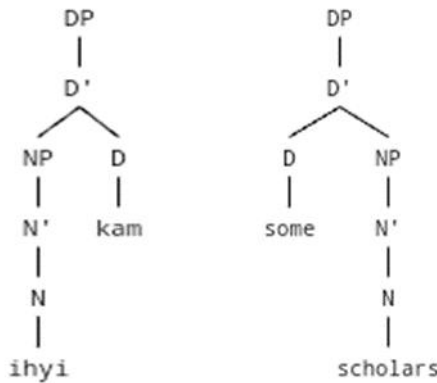
Table 1:

| ENGLISH NOUN PHRASE	IGEDE NOUN PHRASE
The boy	Ọleng owe man the 'the man'
Some men	Ìhyi Kam market that 'that market'
The politicians	Ịbịrịchakụ ookpokp cat one ' a cat'
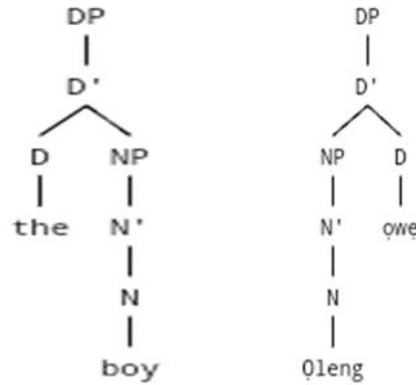
1a.   1b.

1c.   1d.

Contrastive statement

In the above expressions, the English determiners(the, that some) pre-modified the nouns "boy", "men", "politicians" while the Igede determiners (owe, Kam and okpokpo) post-modified the nouns(Ọleng , Ịbịrịchakụ and ihyi). Crystal (2003) avers that some languages do not have an article system. It appears that Igede falls within this group because, while the definite article ọwẹ, 'the in Igede is clearly stated, the indefinite (a/an) is not. Rather, they are replaced with numbers such as ookpokpo, *one,* immiye, *two* etc.

2. In English, noun phrase appears at the end of a group in the middle while in Igede ,the head of NP is seen at the beginning of the NP. Examples:

Table2:

ENGLISH	IGEDE
Beautiful soul	Ọlẹng ọlụhyị man handsome 'handsome man'
The Nigerian politicians	Ịbịrịchakụ ookpokp ọtụka cat one big 'one big cat'

2a.   2b.

2c.   (2d)
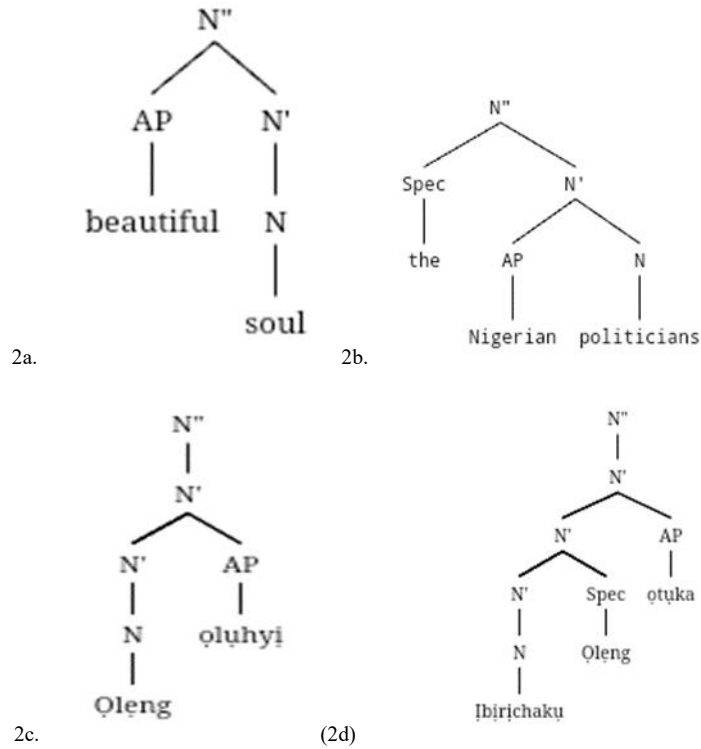
Contrastive statement

(2a) above is headed by the N *soul*, while the AP beautiful is the attribute. In (2b), the head of the noun phrase is N politicians. The specifier precedes the adjective, while the adjective Nigerian modifies the noun. In (2c) Above, the head of the noun phrase (NP) is Ọlẹng. The noun is only post-modified by the adjective. The noun comes before the adjective, and it appears at the beginning of the NP. In this example, the adjectives ọlụhyị post-modified the noun. The word Ọlẹng, which is the head, appears first in the phrase. It could be concluded that the NP is head-initialized in Igede. In (2d) above, the N ibirichaku is the head of the phrase, while the specifier owe post-modifies the head. The A otuka is the attribute. It is an adjunct because it does not complete the meaning of the phrase; rather, it adds additional information that the phrase can do without.

3   English and Igede form their plurals through different processes. In English, plural formation involves various patterns. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). Regular plurals are formed by adding -s, -es, or -en to the singular form (Quirk et al., 1985). Irregular plurals involve vowel changes from oo to ee and a to e (Bauer & Huddleston, 2002). English plural formation employs morphological processes like suffixation, vowel alternation, and suppletion (Matthews, 1991). Unlike English, which morphologically marks plurality with suffixes, Igede typically forms its plurals through prefixation and numericals. The adding of suffixes to the root words, such as -s, -es, and -ves, to show number in English nouns is not found in Igede. Plural marking in Igede is generally achieved through the addition of prefixes and numerical indicators.

Table 3:

ENGLISH Singular	IGEDE Singular	ENGLISH Plural form	IGEDE Plural form	ENGLISH Process of plural formation	IGEDE Process of plural formation
Car	Omoto	Cars	Imoto	Inflected with -s	Vowel prefix
Person	Ọnginyị	People	Anginyị	Vowel altenation	Vowel prefix
Lion	Ugebe	Lions	Ugebe imiye lion two 'two lion'	Inflected with -s	Numerals
Man	Ọlẹng	Men	Alẹng	Vowel altenation	Vowel prefix

Contrastive statement

In table 3 above , the process of inflection for plurality in both English and Ekpari differs. Though both Languages do not follow a regular pattern of inflection of plural number, yet, the inflection processes do not relate. In English the suffix -s is used to inflect the root words "car" and "lion" for

number as "cars" and " lions" respectively while the pluralization in Igede is by vowel prefix and numerical indicator. English inflects "man" and "person by a vowel alternation plurality as "men" and "people" while Igede inflects " Anginyi" and "aleng" to show plurality by vowels prefix.

3. The Igede language exhibits unique characteristics in its pronoun usage, differing significantly from English. Unlike English, which employs gender-specific pronouns (he, she, it), Igede uses a single pronoun "o" to represent all genders. This is exemplified in the table below:

Table 4:

ENGLISH	IGEDE
He ate my rice	Ọ ya Igede he/he speak Igede 'she/she speaks Igede'
She ate my rice	Ọ ka ihyi he/she go market 'he/she went to the market'

The Syntactic fracture of verb phrase in English and igede

4. In English, the perfective maker is a full word and it appears before the main verb in the subjective position. While in Igede,,the perfective aspectual marker is a morpheme that has structural position after the verb; it is a postverbal morpheme "le." Example:

Table 5:

ENGLISH PERFECTIVE	IGEDE PERFECTIVE
Jane has collected the pen	iJohn rí iju lè iJohn eat yam PERF 'John has eaten yam'
I have eaten rice	Imosisi wòn òjígà lè Moses. kills rat PERF 'Moses has killed a rat'
I had eaten before he came	Imosisi wòn òjígà lè Moses kills rat PERF 'Moses has killed a rat'

5a.   5b.
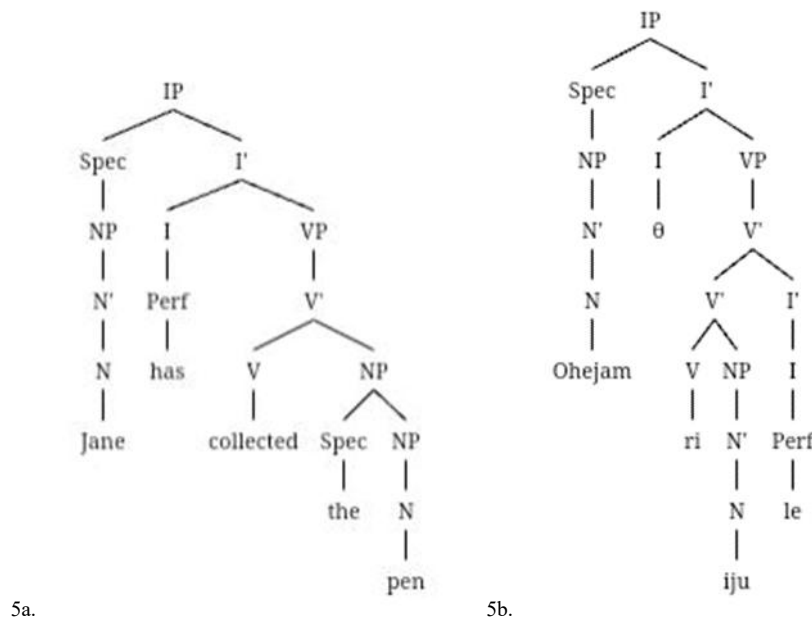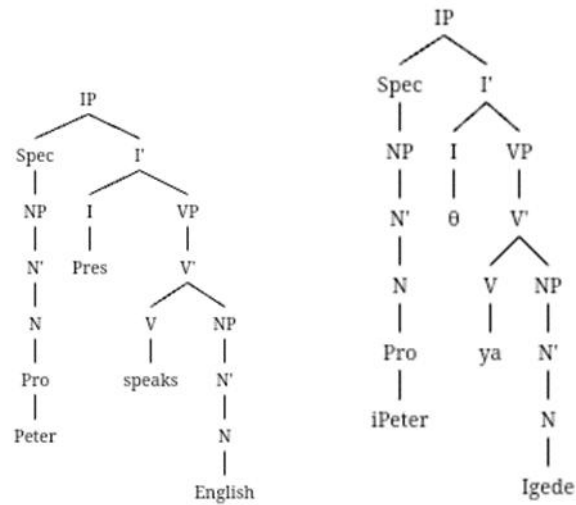
Contrastive statement

In the above English data, the English perfective marker appears in the sentences before the main verbs (eaten, collected). The above data also shows that English has different morphemes for their perfective marker (have, has, had,,etc.) while Igede data shows that Igede has just one perfective marker which is proverbial(appears after the main verb).

5. Another notable difference between the English and Igede languages lies in their verb conjugation systems, particularly with regards to tense and person. Unlike English, where the third-person singular form of verbs is typically marked with an "-s" or "-es" suffix , Igede verbs do not exhibit any singular marker for the third person. This means that the same verb form is used for both singular and plural subjects in the third person. For example:

Table 6:

ENGLISH	IGEDE

Peter speaks	iPeta ri Peter eat 'Peter eats'
She speaks English	Ọ ya Igede She/he speak Igede 'he speaks Igede'

6a   6b

Contrastive statement

In the above,(6a) is inflected with s while the (b) above is not inflected.

6. In English, the progressive marker (-ing) is an inflectional affix attached to the end of action verbs to express progressive/continuous actions (Agwu, 2024:27). In contrast, Igede employs a different structure, where the morpheme "juwa" appears before the action verb rather than inflecting the verb itself. For example:

Table 7

ENGLISH PROGRESSIVE	IGEDE PROGRESSIVE
She **is crying**	ọlẹng ọwẹ **juwa nune** man the PROG sleep 'the man is sleeping '
I **am looking** at him	iJohn **juwa** **se** eyin John PROG fetch water 'John is fetching water'

Discussion of findings

This study reveals that a learner's first language (L1) significantly influences their ability to master a second language (L2), particularly when the two languages belong to distinct language groups, as seen in the challenges faced by Igede learners of English.

The study's findings support the idea that larger linguistic differences between the native language and the target language lead to greater learning difficulties. Specifically, the study found significant differences in the morphosyntactic features of noun and verb phrases in English and Igede.

Regarding noun phrase structure, the study found that Igede noun phrases exhibit different structures compared to English. The position of modifiers and nouns in both languages differs, which may pose challenges for Igede learners of English.

The study also revealed differences in plural formation strategies between English and Igede. English uses suffixes (-s, -en, or -ies) and vowel alternation, whereas Igede employs vowel prefixes and numerical indicators. This difference in plural formation strategies may lead to errors in English language production among Igede learners.

Furthermore, the study found that while Igede has a definite article, it lacks indefinite articles, instead using numerical indicators to convey indefiniteness. Additionally, the study found that Igede marks progressive aspects using a preverbal morpheme "juwa," unlike English, which inflects the verb with the suffix "-ing." The study also found differences in perfective marker formation, with Igede using a post-verbal morpheme that appears in sentence-final position.

The investigation also revealed that Igede uses a single pronoun, "o," to represent all genders, unlike English, which employs gender-specific pronouns. This difference in pronoun usage may cause difficulties for Igede learners of English in using the correct pronouns.

These findings have implications for language teaching and learning, particularly for Igede learners of English. To address the challenges faced by Igede learners, it is recommended that language learning materials be developed to cater to their specific needs, taking into account the differences

between English and Igede noun and verb phrases. Curriculum planners should also consider these linguistic differences when designing language curriculum.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of understanding the differences between the Igede and English languages, particularly in areas such as noun phrase structure, plural formation, pronoun usage, aspect marking, and verb conjugation. These findings have implications for language teaching and learning and suggest that Igede learners of English may require targeted instruction to address these differences.

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