

A Comparative Study of the Jukun Language

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Article DOI:

10.48028/iiprds/ijdshms.v14.i1.26

Keywords:

Language, Language
variation, Phonology
and Morphology

Abstract

The study compares Wapan and other dialects of the Jukun language. This research was aimed at identifying the similarities and the differences between the dialects of the Jukun language. The objective of this research is to bring to light the relationship that exists between the Wapan dialect and other dialects of the Jukun language in term of articulation of sounds. The methodology adopted for this study is the descriptive method. Data for the research was gathered by the researcher through observation, note taking and the intuitive knowledge of one of the researchers as a native speaker. In the process of gathering and analyzing the data used, native speakers of Jukun language who are well-informed and familiar with the fundamentals of the language were visited, consulted and observed as they interact in social gatherings in Wukari, Takum, Donga and Ibi. Secondary data were elicited from the already existing literature in relation to the subject under investigation. Data presented was glossed for the understanding of the readers. From the findings, the study holds that although similarities exist among the different dialect of the Jukun language, some vary in terms of sounds and meanings. The study also revealed that, some words in the selected dialects have different pronunciation and spellings; others have almost the same pronunciation with almost the same spellings while others have the same pronunciation with the same spellings. The study concludes that similarities do exist between the dialects of the Jukun.

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Background to the Study

Language changes overtime in the aspect of pronunciation as well as word formation. As human beings come in contact with one another, in different geo-political settings, their differences affect the way they communicate. As such, when different individuals with different language come in contact, the articulation of their words affects one another thereby affecting their language overtime. Jukun language is one of such language that came in contact with different languages. As such there have been a lot of influences on the language from other languages varying from borrowing, coinage and tonal change thereby occasioning the raise of different dialects. For example, the Wapan dialect of the Jukun people refer to géa as cut and so also the Yoruba people refer to géa as cut. From this example it can be deduced therefore that there is an act of borrowing that has affected the morphology as well as the phonology of the Wapan dialect and the Yoruba languages.

These are two components of language system that interact and affect each other in some ways (Morphology and Phonology). Due to interaction, pronunciation of a morpheme may get modified or changed. The change may be regular or irregular depending on the context of usage. The work examines the Wapan, Njikun (Jukun Takum), Kuteb, Etulo, Chamba, Ichen, Wanu, Kpanzun, Kona, Gwana, Jibu and Wase-Tofa dialects of Jukun language as such, this study is significant in that it shall help to provide linguistic information on dialectal variation in Jukun language as the study shall contribute to the linguistic development of the language.

Linguistic Profile of the Jukun People

The Jukun language according to Joseph Greenberg (1963) is classified among the Niger-Congo family of African Language Family classification. The language is widely spoken by the Jukun people. There are different varieties of the Jukun language scattered all over Nigeria and beyond. These among others includes Wapan widely spoken in Wukari, Ekpan spoken in Takum and Donga, Wanu spoken in Ibi and Abinse, Kona spoken in Jalingo and Bali, Dampar, Wurbo and Bakundi spoken in (Wukari), Pindiga, Kisha, Agatu spoken in Nasarawa, Gwana spoken in Gombe, Wase and others spoken in Plateau. Most of these varieties are what are now considered as dialects of Jukun language.

Jukun are an ethno-Linguistic nation in West Africa who traced their origin to Kwararafa Kingdom. According to oral tradition the Jukun people came from Yamen into Nigeria through the Mamdara hills and Lake Chad. They first settled in Ngazargamu, there they established a stronghold by fortifying their settlement which later became the capital of kanem Borno Empire, the present-day Maiduguri, Borno State. From Borno they moved to Upper Gongola Valley where they established a base for a very long period of time (known as Kwararafa Empire. The Kwararafa Empire extended its territory from far North to Cross-river around Calabar in the 17th century (1618AD). However, the kingdom collapsed in the 19th century due to internal forces.

Dialectal Profile of Jukun language

According to Greenberg (1963:3), African languages are classified based on genetic origin. In view of this, the Wapan, Njikun (Jukun Takum), Wanu, Kuteb, Kpanzon, Ichen, Ekpan Nyonyon, Kisha, Wase, Agatu, Dampar, Din, Wurbo, Jibu, Pindiga, Gwana, Bakundi, Kona, Etulo, and some parts of Chamba are parts of the Jukunoid based on their origin (root) which is connected to the culture and tradition that is associated with Jukun people.

Conceptual Review

Language

Language is an organized or structured system of transference of ideas, thoughts or emotions to an individual or group of individuals. Language is aimed at convincing the hearer to accept whatever ideas, thoughts or emotions passed across to them. Dangana and Ogechi (2018:16) avers that "Language is an attribute of human existence, a core value in terms of human interaction". Suffice it to say here that language is a part of human existence which encompasses culture, tradition and beliefs. These aspects of human existence can only be passed to the next generation or the wider society through an instrument called language. It is difficult to conceive a human society without a language. This points us to the fact that language is an inevitable ingredient in the human society without which no society can survive. To this end, it is needful for us to understand how it works in terms of our behavior and contact to one another. Thomas and McDonagh (2013:48) observe that the expression of complete communication needs of a people is enhanced by the use of language. This is because, language enhance understanding among the people who share the same linguistic identity without which human society will be chaotic and unimaginable. Holmes (2013:20) opines that people often use language to signal their membership in a particular group and to consent to different aspects of their social identities, social status, gender, age, ethnicity, and the kind of social networks that they belong to; turn out to be important dimension of identity in many communities. Suffice it to say here that, every human society has its own unique way of communication.

Language Variation

Language variation is a way of saying the same thing in a different way. Speakers of any language have variation in the way that they use language. This variation is demonstrated by linguistic differences in terms of sound (phonetics) and structure (grammar). There might be only a slight variation between forms of a language such as minor pronunciation of words or a slight change of grammatical structure that do not inhibit inter-group communication.

As pointed out in Richard (2019) that language can also be refers to as lect, to mean a distinctive form of a language. In the same vein, Magaji, (2017) observed that language variation is the range of difference between varieties of language. This variation can be sociolinguistic in nature. That is, as a result of how people distinguish themselves from each other, such as by accent and vocabulary. All varieties of language differ from one

another in terms of their morphology, articulation of speech sounds and sentence structures. This variation may follow predictable patterns, or it may be as a result of group of people distinguishing themselves from other groups. It is customary for a language to have varieties distinguished in terms of users and uses. When group of speakers differ in their language, they are said to speak different dialects of the language.

Phonology

Phonology is the study of the sound system of a particular language and their meaning. Phonology describes the way in which sounds function within a given language and operate at the level of sound system. Lyons (1981) attests that the primary medium of human language is sounds; sounds have a role to play in human language because they are combined to produce meaningful ideas. For example, /p/, /i/ and /t/ are standing as individual sounds but when these sounds are brought together or combined, it forms a meaningful idea called "pit" to a native speaker of English. Meaning; Ditch or hole.

Phonology is concerned with how sound in a particular language behaves or changes as a result of modification or alteration of the sound. From our example of pit, if the sound /y/ is added to pit + y = pity, it automatically changes the meaning from Ditch to the feeling of compassion. In this regard, phonology seeks to consider the contrastive relationship among speech and sounds that constitute the fundamental components of a particular language. Ken (2009) observes that phonology is concerned with the difference of meaning that is signaled by a sound. That is to say, how sounds are organized in a particular language explaining the place of sound occurrences.

Morphology: Morphology is the study of word formation. It is concerned with how word is formed and structured. The formation of word changes the grammatical class from noun to verb, noun to adjective, verb to adverb, etc. At times depending on the process of word formation applied. At other times, the grammatical class of the word formed does not change but the surface structure of the word is being affected. The procedure employed in this aspect of word formation process helps to serve as a marker to the newly formed word, marker in terms of plural, tense, number, or gender. Matthew (1999:58) also defines morphology as the study of the internal structure of words and the roots by which words are formed. The key words in this definition are 'internal structure of words and the roots' by which words are formed. Internal structure entails the units of words that have their own meanings as ingredients in the formation of new words. When these units are brought together, by the help of affix process, new words are formed. For example: A unit of word: fool. Fool is a unit of word and at the same time a root word. That is, it can stand on its own and be meaningful or sensible. If another unit, for example, 'ish', a unit that cannot stand on its own and be sensible is added to it, the word becomes foolish. This word 'fool' has undergone the process of word formation through the process called an affix process of suffixation. The discussion on the term unit, leads to the phenomenon called Morpheme. Morphemes are components of words in their smallest forms.

Tomori (2004:47) defines morpheme as a minimal linguistic unit that carries grammatical or semantic meaning. From these definitions, it is clear that morphemes are minimal or smallest units, these units are meaningful, and they carry grammatical or semantic meanings. These components can be independent or dependent (free or bound). They are the smallest meaningful grammatical units of a language that are indivisible. Morpheme is categorized based on three criteria viz:

- i. It is a word or part of a word that has meaning.
- ii. It cannot be divided into smaller meaningful segments without changing its meaning or leaving a meaningless remainder.
- iii. It has relatively the same stable meaning in different verbal environments.

There are types of morphemes viz: free and bound morphemes

Free morphemes are morphemes that can stand on their own and be meaningful. For example, boy, man, cut, is, end, come, etc.

Bound morphemes are morphemes or units of words that cannot stand on their own and make meaning. For example: un, il, tion, ing, ment, en, etc.

Morpheme comprises two separate classes called 'base', 'root', or 'stem' and affixes.

Base is a morpheme that gives the word its principle meaning. An example of a free base, morpheme is boy in the word boys, 's' is a bound base morpheme which is an affix (suffixation).

Abubakar (2001:12) defined the term morphology as the study of the word formation inflection. In this definition, it can be deduced that morphology is the study of how new words are formed by the changes that occur especially at the end of the word. For example the plural 's', the third person singular 's', the past tense '-d', '-ed', the negative particle 'nt' and the comparative '-er' and so on.

Methodology

In this paper, the research design adopted for this study is a descriptive survey. As such, Data for the research were gathered by the researcher through observation and note taking for subsequent analysis as the researcher visited selected individuals like scholars who are highly conversant with the dialects in Wukari, Takum, Donga and Ibi. Native speakers of Wapan and other dialects of Jukun, especially the elders, the academics, the clergy, the farmers and businessmen/women, who are versed and are acquainted with the basics of the dialects were equally visited. The aged were considered as well as the youths as they interact in social gatherings.

The researchers observed the people as they communicate or interact with one another. Observation was used so as to understand the structure of the dialects even without the knowledge of the speakers. In the course of their communication, the utterances of the speakers were critically observed to identify the similarities and the differences that exist between the Wapan and other dialects of the Jukun language. It is also important to state here that one of the researchers is a native speaker, therefore, part of the data was elicited

by the researcher's knowledge of the language attribute. In collecting data for the research work, the researcher also relied on library sources. Hence, the method of data collection comprises primary and secondary sources.

Data Presentation Analysis and Discussion

Variation of words in Jukun language convey different shades when there is a difference in the pronunciation as a result of dialectal variant of such words as can be seen in the data presented below:

Comparative Analysis

Table 1: Comparison of some words in Jukun Dialects

Gloss	Wapan	Ichen	Wanu	Kpanzun
Water	Jàpè	Mbur	Làpè	Nbèn
Urine	Shinzhàn	Sinbur	Shingya	Fúnúbèn
Oil	Abyiu	Byi	Abyiu	Úbú
Blood	Ásà	Nghn	Ásà	Ikyèn
Rain	Achú	Chú	Afyú	Uski
Man	Wúnú	Ndèhdon	Wònù	Bidùn
Woman	Wùwà	Ndèhgwà	Wòwà	Bindo
Father	Atà	Attàh	Adà	Atà
Girl	Nwù wà wuwa	Nwèhndehgwa	Angowowa	Mbàbindo
Brother	Nwùzà	Nwèhjùà	Angòyi	Mbàyùnàidùn

Source: Field Work (2024) and Magaji (2017:136)

The analysis reveals that liquid nouns are the same in comparison, especially between Wapan and Wanu in the case of 'water', 'urine', 'oil' and rain with a slight difference in their pronunciation. The study observed that, similarities also occur between the Wapan, Ichen, and Wanu in the words for oil and rain while the Kpanzun have different words for all the liquid nouns. Also, 'man' and 'woman' are similar between Wapan and Wanu. The word for 'father' is similar in the four dialects as seen in the examples above with a slight difference in the consonant sound that appears in Wanu dialect.

Meek (1930:121) observes that there is a remarkable differentiating feature between the dialect spoken in Wukari and the dialects of the other groups. The Wapan dialect is characterized by the use of a pronominal prefix 'a' in naming items. The other dialects use suffixes instead. For example: 'na', 'ni' and 'ri', 'ru'. These are suffixes among the Ichen/Chamba, Kona, Gwana and Pindiga. The Jibu vacillates between the two systems (Prefix and Suffix). In consonant with the orientation of Classical phonology theory, no two sounds are considered physically and objectively exactly alike even those that occur in corresponding positions in utterances. The theory is concerned with the representation of pronunciation of dialect. That is, some alterations of what makes a particular dialect differ from other dialect of the same language as seen below:

Table 2.

Gloss	Wapan	Jukun Takum	Kona	Gwana	Jibu	Wase-Tofa
Head	áchì	shí-nā	Kí-nì	Kí-nì	Shîn	Shîn
Hair	á-jì	hwē	Háwî	Ji-nì	á-jìn	Mwán-jìn
Tooth	á-nyì	já-nà	Já-rì	Jí-rì	íj-èn	íj-ìn
Leg	á-bè	bá-rà	Sáí	Tsáí	í-bàr	Bàr
Man	á-pà	pē	Mpèr	Mpérd	Père	ápèr
Chief	á-kù	Kúrù	Kú-rù	á-kú-rù	Kùr	Nkìr
Moon	á-sò	Só-nà	Sá-nù	Sá-nò	Só-àn	á-sò
Water	á-jápè	Zápè	Zápèr	Zápère	Zá	Jápèr
Salt	á-mà	Má-nà	Má-nà	Má-àn	í-mán	á-mùn
Room	á-tàn	Tá-nà	Táé-nù	Tá-nùj	Tá-nà	á-tùj
Pot	á-pè	Pàrà	Pá-rì	Pá-rà	á-pàr	á-pùè
Knife	á-kwìn	Kú-nà	Kwí-nì	Kwí-rì	Kú-nà	á-kùn

Source: Field Work (2024) and Meek (1930:121)

The study revealed that, similarities occur between the Kona and Gwana, Jibu and Wase-Tofa dialects in the words for head and while the Wapan and Jukun Takum dialects have different words for the head. Likenesses also occur between Wapan, Jukun Takum and Kona dialects for chief and salt. However, Wapan and Jibu dialects have almost the same articulation for salt with slight difference while Wase-Tofa has a different articulation for salt and chief. For room, similarities occur in Jukun Takum and Jibu dialects. In Jukun Takum and Gwana dialects, similarities exist for pot similarly, for Jukun Takum and Jibu, resemblances occur for Knife. In all, some words in the dialects presented have different articulation and spellings; others have almost the same articulation with almost the same spellings while others have the same articulation and spellings. For example, chief in Jukun Takum, Kona and Gwana dialects, head in Jibu, Wase-Tofa dialects, and Kona, Gwana dialects, Moon in Wapan and Wase-Tofa dialects and so on.

Table 3.

Gloss	Wapan	Kutéb	Etulo	Chamba
Eat	Jí	Chī	Gyè	Liij
Dance	Gbèjò	Isē	Shífyè	Nààán
Fall	Kókwī	Káensī	Gbésē	Yià
Boil	Nē	Zwāg	Kídólá	Dòn
Measure	Mbā	Myāe	Mbárū	Déun
Swear	Dánkí	Bìn	Kírábó	Nwòóm
Drink	Wá	Ngwá	Kíwá	Nyèun
Grind	Zā	Pwā	Kíyàrú	Nàám
Think	Gā	Káb	Tséwèl	Sèèl
Speak	Zèn	Rī	Gbózè	Gàm

Source: Field Work (2024)

The study discloses that, in comparing Wapan and Kuteb dialects, there exist similarities in the pronunciation of fall “*Kókwī High-Mid tone in Wapan and Káensī High-Mid tone in Kuteb*”, boil “*Nē Mid tone in Wapan and Zwāg Mid tone in Tuteb*”, measure “*Mbā Mid tone in Wapan and Myāe Mid tone in Tuteb*”, drink “*Wá High tone in Wapan and Ngwá High tone in Kuteb*”, grind “*Zā Mid tone in Wapan and Pwā Mid tone in Tuteb*” and speak “*Zēn Mid tone in Wapan and Rī Mid tone in Tuteb*” as all the tonal marks are the same in the process of the articulation of these words; but different in spellings (written orthography). The research also reveals that similarities exist between Wapan and Etulo dialects in the aspect of pitch in voicing as seen in measure “*mbā*” and fall “*kókwī*” in Wapan and Etulo measure “*mbárū*” and fall “*gbésē*” both having mid-tones at the final position of the word while drink in Wapan “*wá*” is similar to drink in Etulo “*kíwá*” also at the final position of the word but with high tonal marks.

The investigation further reveals that differences exist in some words in Wapan and Etulo; but for Chamba, all the words presented in this data are different in the aspect of sound articulation and word spellings to Wapan. For example, eat “*jí*” in Wapan and “*gyè*” in Etulo, dance “*gbèjò*” in Wapan and “*shífyè*” in Etulo, boil “*nē*” in Wapan and “*kídòlá*” in Etulo, swear “*dánkí*” in Wapan and “*kíràbó*” in Etulo, grind “*zā*” in Wapan and “*kíyàrú*” in Etulo, think “*gā*” in Wapan and “*tséwèl*” in Etulo, speak “*zēn*” in Wapan and “*gbózè*” in Etulo,

In all, some words in the dialects presented have different articulation and spellings; others have almost the same articulation with almost the same spellings while others have the same articulation and spellings. Greenberg (1963:1) asserts that languages with the same origin have resemblance in sound and meaning in specific form. This is the true picture of the Jukun language in relation to its individual dialects. As seen in the examples of individual dialects presented. This shows that, all these dialects are parts of the Jukunoid based on their origin.

Conclusion

Effort has been made in the course of this research to establish that among the dialects compared, there exist some similarities and differences in the dialects of the Jukun language as some words have different articulation and spellings while others have almost the same articulation with almost the same spellings. The similarities signal the fact that these dialects belong to the same genetic origin. In harmony with Greenberg assertion, languages with the same origin have similarity in sound and meaning in specific form. This is the true of the Jukun language in relation to its individual dialects. While their differences signal their uniqueness in distinguishing their selves from each other because of their topographical origin, shift in cultural values that resulted into social grouping thereby influenced their speech which subsequently gave rise to dialectal differences of the same language.

Recommendations and Suggestions.

The Jukun Language Development Committee (JLDC) should expand their scope to accommodate research work especially, academic research work on Jukun language. Researchers should be encouraged to focus their research on dialectal studies ranging from exploratory, classification, to causal research so as to work towards building the dialects of the Jukun language. To this effect, it is important that conferences and workshops be organized with the aim of promoting the Jukun language dialects. Discussions and reviews on research findings on Jukun language dialects should be done. On this note, the Wukari Traditional council and Wukari Local Government Chairman should endeavor to give financial support to the Jukun Language Development Committee as they work towards the development of Jukun language and the dialects of the Jukun language.

More so, the Taraba State Government should train teachers to master and teach indigenous languages thereby promoting our indigenous languages. Television programs that promote local dialects and languages within the state should be encouraged with awards and handsome gifts not only to the best performer but to all participants so as to encourage more people to participate in programs that promote local dialects and languages thereby preserving our local dialects and languages.

Contribution to Knowledge

The work is anticipated to project the Jukun language to an enviable position as it is expected to serve as a guide towards the development of models for the linguistic development of the dialects of the Jukun language where other dialects not captured in this study can draw inspirations in respect to the development of their individual dialects.

More so, the study will serve as a reference material for schools and other organizations like language developers who are willing to promote local languages, give awareness to see some features that are identical in other languages thus tracing their genetic origin to the same language family. In learning indigenous African language, a research work as this is of a great benefit to interested linguists who have a drive for developing minority languages, especially those that are on the verge of going into extinction.

The government also stands to benefit from this work as it serves as a reading material which will enhance literacy among the Jukun speakers and therefore reduce the level of illiteracy in the society.

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