# MORPHO-PHONEMIC HINDRANCES TO STANDARD IDOMA ORTHOGRAPHY

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**ABSTRACT**

The Idoma language has received serious setbacks on account of either wrong transcription or outright rejection of patronage as a result of a number of issues notable among which is orthography problems. This paper is set to give a vivid analysis of both morphological as well as phonological features of Idoma language and spot out reasons for error in giving wrong orthographies. It is set to advance reasons for advocating the disjunctive method of orthography as against the proponents of conjunctive approach. The role of elision in the negative influence of conjunctive writing was given to enable clarity. A practical transformational analysis of Idoma structural elements was also given to prove the effectiveness of the matter in question. At the end of the paper, some useful suggestions were given to help the proper orthography of the Idoma language.

## INTRODUCTION

The Idoma language was first mentioned by Samuel Ajayi Crowther  in his book, Narratives of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue cited in Erim(1981). In it, he described the Idoma as" Akpoto", a derogatory name used to express serfdom  and referred to them as a tribe. The first written and published work on the Idoma language was reported in John Clark's Specimen of Dialects in which he mistook it for a Gold Coast ( Modern Ghana) language (Armstrong, 1985) cited in Amali (2002).

Idoma language is spoken by the Idoma people in present day Benue state who migrated to the place from Apa in Kwararafa kingdom under their Eastern war hero, Idu the son of Oma ( Erim, 1981) also called Iduma ( Okwori, 1992) around the 15th century AD. They officially took the name, Idoma in 1928 ( Magid,1976) with their first central leader, Ogiri Oko from Adoka district as the first Ochidoma. The Otukpo dialect is the one described as standard (Abraham,1967; Idoma Language and Literacy Committee, 2000) with slight modifications accepting the  allied Enochi proto types.

Languages of the world have varying stages of metamorphosis. Idoma is currently undergoing one in its history and cultural orientation. English, for example has transformed from the Old English period known and called Anglo-Saxon from 449 to 1100 AD made up of four major dialects, Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish and West Saxon with Northumbrian as the central language(New Lexicon Webster's Dictionary, 1988). Words like "fæder ure" as "your father"  were freely used with four cases of noun as nominative, dative, genitive and accusative respectively in grammar and vocabulary.  Middle English started from 1100 through1500 AD experiencing greater reduction in inflectional endings especially in syllables as in "learnung" for "learning", "tyme" for "time", "trouthe" for "truth" and "fredom" for "freedom" respectively in sound system and grammar. Borrowings from French like "cattle", "guardian" etc came into the language.  These progressed into our present-day modern English starting from1500 to date.

If the English language "metamorphosized" from these stages, it is then not unusual to discuss on issues of correct orthography neither is it a contention to feel that  stability in linguistic analysis has been met in the Idoma orthography. Basically, two groups of thought co-exist sometimes inadvertently on the Idoma orthography: the conjunctive and disjunctive advocates. The conjunctives render the language as a sort of agglutinative language with a core root or stem and other affixes which may not be independent in semantic application but used as if they qualify as one portraying a sort of agglutination. For instance, one of such advocates rendered the expression, "Ayipe jongbaogbihi e jongbaogbelan" – " Children know rope to tie yam they know rope to tie matter not" as a structural formative (Amali, 2002).  This sentence has four words but a structural explication can further be rendered to reflect it as " Ayipe – Children + je – know + ongba - rope + oo – that is (used for) + gbo – tie + ihi –yam + e – they + je – know + ongba – rope + oo – that is (used for ) + gbo – tie + ela – matter + n – not." The seemingly thirteen word agglutinative sentence was sort of reduced to four. The expression renders Idoma as a sort of conjunctive language which arose as a result of lack of proper and in-depth knowledge of Idoma morphemic components as well as syntactic elements.  The transition between the elided words, 'Ayipe' ending with a vowel and 'je' plus 'ongba', ending with a vowel and 'oo le' as well as 'gbo' and ihi' in production appear to be stringed hence the error of combining them as a single lexical item or even as a word for that matter. The written word is different from the spoken eg. "I have" is written while "I've" is spoken yet it does not make English inferior.

This error appears so prominently as a result of a wrong grammatical analysis due to elision in Idoma words. It is as a result of this that the morphological as well as phonemic  analysis of Idoma structural elements were

critically analyzed to give a clear cut terminal points in Idoma lexical items so as to help proper clarification of structural labels to aid correct orthography.

The disjunctive, on the other hand renders the language with much more inflections in mind. Affixes are given due morphological as well as syntactic placements in Idoma structural linguistics. For example, "Ọlẹ ku alọ" – " House that is (for) us" or simply "Ọlẹ alọ" – " Our house" is a nominal phrase but still reflects two or three lexical items even though it appears in speech as a single item. It is in the light of this that it becomes expedient to embark on a research of this kind.

Language is an essential vehicle for the propagation, transmission and integration of  socio-cultural values, norms and attitudes. Therefore, teaching language has become a central issue in the minds of governments as attempts have been severally made to train language teachers or encourage its learning even informally. This is not always easy as good language teaching is conceived according to cultural adaptations and perceptions (Tsui , 2009). The ability to form close interpersonal relations with learners is highly valued.

The language teaching literature is often divided into disciplinary knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge (Ortega ,2009; Lightbown, Spada ,2006) Halliday's  An Introduction to Functional Grammar (2004) deals with the domain of disciplinary knowledge while Parrot's Grammar for English Language (2000) belongs to pedagogical content knowledge. Modern descriptive Linguistics is usually studied from three angles, Phonetics and Phonology, Grammar, including Morphology and Syntax and Semantics (Olu Tomori , 1977).

 In 1974, the Gowon administration declared Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as major languages in Nigeria and as early as the 1930s, the International African Institute (IAI) based in London recognized the need for the African child to receive education and training in his vernacular (Ahmed,1982; Fafunwa,1995). This has prompted a linguistic inquest into African languages when writers delved into Nigerian languages which the Idoma language benefitted from as well. This was spearheaded by foreigners who were mainly missionaries who used informants who were not necessarily linguists. This has resulted in several wrong presentations and misconceptions which made Abraham (1967) to submit thus :

> ... It therefore follows that works on African languages published
> by persons who do not speak them fluently, presents a distorted
> and incomplete picture.

For  a major authority in African languages to make such an assertion leaves much to be done in our various indigenous languages.

## LANGUAGE AND MORPHOLOGY

The origin of language is quite a subject of controversy as scholars have attempted to peg their submissions on various convictions including divine source, natural sound source, oral gesture source, glossogenetics (biological basis on the formation and development of human language), physiological adaptation and interactions and transactions (Yule,1996). The issue of language is more concerned with communication which made traditional linguists to view language as a self-contained calculus, a mechanism, for the production of sentences (James, 1996 , 98).

The basis of language studies is on phones and allophones realized through phonology and morphology. This singular reason is further buttressed in the strong submission that language is primarily speech and secondarily writing. Phonetic symbols form the basis of speech while morphological elements determine writing. This therefore gives much impetus to morphology having a dominant position in language. The formation and use of words is primarily for linguistic relevance which language is set to achieve.

There is therefore a strong relationship between morphology and language. Morphology is a component of grammar which is a good aspect of linguistics, the scientific study of language (Yule , 1996).

## MORPHOLOGY

Morphology looks at the various structural elements that give form and meaning to lexical formatives. Yule (1996,75) defines morphology as the study of forms. In its original form, it talks of that aspect of Biology where various parts of the organisms are studied. In Linguistics, it is generally referred to as lexical morphology which has inflectional and derivational morphology as aspects (Matthews , 1991). Morphology considers the study of formatives which are arranged in different ways. This forms what is called concatenative morphology. Concatenative morphology is a morphological study that looks at the formation of words by the use of strings or elements referred to as morphemes(McCarthy, 1978). Such languages as English, Idoma, Hausa exhibit this phenomenon as against the non-concatenatives where words are formed by interlacing or interleaving (McCarthy, 1978, 1981). Such languages as Hebrew, Arabic are examples that fall within this category.

## IDOMA MORPHOLOGY AND ELISION

Idoma morphology covers such areas as morphemes which covers both free and bound morphemes.

## IDOMA FREE MORPHEMES.

These are morphemes that can stand alone without appendage and realize effective meaning. They include:

1. Nyọ     -  go

2. Bọbi      -  ugly
3. Hila       -  old
4. Ẹla        -  word
5. Ewo      -  dog

All the lexical items above are not only independent but cannot be altered to realize any new semantic structure e.g. the word, 'nyọ' – 'go' has two alphabets 'ny' and 'ọ' which has no other way of rendering. Since it can function independently, it then means that any compounding outside mere compound word with any word violates its grammatical feature of indivisibility e.g. nyọ - go + ọlẹ – house are two independent free morphemes and any combination that renders it a word due to its elision is not only distorting but ungrammatical. The expression,  'Ng nyọ ọlẹ ẹnẹ' – 'I went home yesterday' cannot be written as 'Ng nyolẹ ẹnẹ' where 'nyọ' and 'ọlẹ' assume a single word  nor can it be written as, 'Ng nyọlẹẹnẹ' reducing it to two words or  worse still as, 'Ngnyọlẹẹnẹ' as just a word. It is not only incorrect but ungrammatical and unacceptable.  This is because the various morphemes can still appear in other linguistic environments and maintain independent semantic value e.g. 'Ọlẹ nya lọhi' – 'This house is good' where 'Ọlẹ' does not need to elide with any linguistic string for effective meaning.

## IDOMA BOUND MORPHEMES

An Idoma bound morpheme according to Apeh (2012,5) is "...  one that has no independent morpho-semantic value". They apply only to word classes and not forms. They include 'ba', as in 'bẹba' – 'beg' ('ba' + elision + 'ẹba' = 'bẹba'. 'ẹba' – 'beg as an art' ( noun) is the root word which changes to a verb,( a change in class) to 'bẹba' – 'beg'. The prefix , 'ba' which is a pre noun modifier signifying asking changing the class of the noun to verb has a stable linguistic function and identity. It can occur in words like 'b ọkọ'- 'prompt or induce to speak' where 'ba' – 'ask for' + elision + ọkọ' – 'voice' combine to become 'bọkọ' – prompt a speech or incite a talk. Others include 'da' - find as in 'dọka' – find information, 'gbo' – 'tie' as in 'gbela' – 'tie a matter' ( make a decision). The table below gives further clarifications.

| S/N | Idoma | English | Bound Morpheme | Root | English |
|-----|-------|---------|----------------|------|---------|
| 1.  | bẹba  | Beg     | ba             | ẹba  | beg(as an art) |
| 2.  | ticho | Climb   | tu             | Icho | Up |
| 3.  | hẹhọ  | Farm    | hi             | ẹhọ  | Farm |
| 4.  | pẹla  | Hear    | po             | ẹla  | Word |
| 5.  | akalọ | Ours    | aku            | alọ  | We |

Table of Idoma bound morphemes.

Taking a close look at the table shows that several Idoma words are in elision. This is the source of the contradiction in conjoining words which qualify as free items as mere appendages. A careful look at Idoma words suggest that they are independent grammatical semantic isolations which elision has wrongly incited an improper nomenclature on. It is wise there to take a critical look at structures before conclusions.

Bound morphemes appear as either prefixes as in above, suffixes as in words like 'adam' – 'my father', 'ẹnẹnu' – 'his/her/its mother', 'ọluwa' – 'their house' or infixes like 'ọnchẹnya'- 'lady' from 'ọchẹnya'- 'girl', 'ẹhọoohi' – 'farming' from 'hẹhọ' –'farm', where 'oo' – 'process of' is infused into both 'ẹhọ' –'farm' + 'hi'- 'cultivate'. Noting that speech is different from writing, one should render the written Idoma word as distinct as possible to maintain the grammatical rules governing morpheme formation. Yoruba, Igala and a host of others share similar linguistic traits as Niger Kodofaniyan language phylum yet their  languages are not transcribed conjunctively and agglutinatively.

## REPLACIVE  AND DERIVATIVE MORPHEMES

A  replacive morpheme describes the eliding processes in words where there is a clash between a terminal vowel sound in a word and an initial sound in a another e.g. 'wa' – 'come' + 'ọlẹ' – 'home' are phonetically realized as /wọlɛ/ but as 'wa ọlẹ' in alphabetical transcription. The replacement in speech of /a/ is not strange and solely applicable to Idoma. English /a:v/ as phonetic while 'I have' as written orthographies respectively point to the fact that there exists a strong difference between alphabetic and phonetic transcriptions. This is one very sensitive error that several Idoma linguists share which has been a catastrophic hindrance to issues in Idoma orthography. Where there is a replacement morpheme, there is always then an error that co-joining is the solution.

Derivations also play same negative impact in Idoma linguistic orthography. This is a situation where words are formed out of others e.g.'le ọba' in isolation is marry (a) husband but 'lọba' in conjunction is marry as a verb as

in (1). Ada lọba.  (2). Ada le ọba. Sentence 1 means Ada got married while 2 means Ada sponsored a marriage. This does not mean that there is any notable difference in the phonetic realizations as context plays much role in the speech of almost all languages while writing helps to clarify issues and Idoma cannot be spared such natural linguistic phenomena. Cases of derivations like 'jọnya' – 'beautiful' from 'ọnya' - 'woman',  'gbọko' -'pray' ( verb) from 'ọkọ' – 'prayer',( noun) should not serve as an unnecessary avenue to conjoin Idoma words. This is rather uncalled for.

## IDOMA PHONOLOGY AND ELISION

Matthews (1991,2) defines phonology as concerned with functioning of sound units within the system of individual languages. Yule(1996) looks at phonology as the descriptions of the systems and patterns of speech sounds in a language. Malmakjeer( 1991) looks at it from the point of interrelationship with by defining morphology as the study of phonological structures of morphemes. Palmer (1989) also looks at it as the combination of phonemes in morphemes in any given language.

From all these linguistic analyses, one can see that there exists a strong tie between morphology and phonology. There is little wonder then that there is confusion in transcription of lexical items in linguistic explications as the case of Idoma.

At the word level, there are little or no contradictions in Idoma structural expositions since pluralization in the language does not occur through prefixation, infixation or suffixation but simply through vowel replacements like "ọyi" – "child" and "ayi" – "children", "enefu" – "white man" and "anefu" – "white men", "oligbọ" – "Igbo man/woman" and "aligbọ" – "Igbo men/women", respectively. Other areas include the use of number like "aglagba  ẹpa" – "two (pairs of ) trousers",  "ọbatu ẹnẹ" – "four jars",  or the use of "a" like ọkpa" – "book" and "aọkpa" – "books", "ifu" – "mouse" and "aifu" – "mice" respectively.

However, due to the influence of elision in syntactic structures, the need to pay much attention to morphological components of linguistic structures becomes paramount. The nominal phrase, "adam" '"my father" has two lexical morphemes, "ada", a free morpheme and "m",  a contraction of "akum" – "mine" a bound morpheme as suffix which poses no meaningful problem but the verbal phrase, "le odre" – "eat food" is transcribed as /lodre/ where the pre- modal auxiliary, "le" serving as a pre-qualifier to the nominal element,  "odre" becomes problematic. In Transformational grammar, the phrase structure places "le odre" as verb phrase which in turn is broken into verb + noun phrase which in turn is broken into noun. If the linguistic item, the verb phrase is permitted to be used as a single lexical item, what happens to the transformation of verb phrase to verb+ noun phrase and noun? This will then create an assumption that the Idoma language has either no verbs or at most verbal particles which are conjoined with noun particles and or elements. This appears ungrammatical since "Ng gee le" – "I will eat" has "le" as a single lexical item. "Odre yọ ama" – "Food is here" also has "odre" – "food" as a seperate linguistic item. If this is so , then structurally speaking, the fusion of "le" and "odre" is not only ungrammatical but morphologically incoherent.

Abraham(1967) renders the nominal phrase, " eñɛtɛɛpa" – "two pots of water"as a word. Structurally speaking, it is not absurd to have "enyi-ẹtẹ as a compound word or even the use of "enyi ẹtẹ" without a hyphen as a compound word like "headmaster" but the question is , why the inclusion of "ẹpa"- "two" which is, in its own semantic right and structural  standing as a free morpheme qualified to be independent since it has independent semantic and morphological  relevance and is therefore entitled to be rendered seperate. In transcription it is /eñɛtɛ ɛnɛ/ which amounts even to two lexical items in speech since there would be an unnecessary dragging in an attempt to include the nominal," ɛta". Other expressions like ,"O gaolɛ" – "He has come home", " O likpo boci" – "He stepped on a tree" respectively are more or less con joinings ( Abraham, 1967). "gaolɛ" – " come home can be "ga ọlẹ" while "likpo" – " has leg" used mainly as perfective case of the noun should be "lẹ ikpo" and "boci" – "stepped on a tree" can be "ba ọchi".

## CONCLUSION
The understanding that writing is different from speech in orthography will help a lot as we have other languages like English exhibiting such differences as well. It is safe to conclude that speech and writing are two different linguistic issues which demand different approaches in orthography as well. The disjunctive approach of Idoma orthography appears more grammatical and is highly projected for use in the Idoma language.

## SUGGESTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS
- The Idoma Language should as a matter of urgency be restored to primary schools in Idoma land.

- The Curriculum of Idoma language Teaching should be over hauled.
- Teachers and Trainers alike in the language should be made to acclimatize with current trends in Idoma language studies.
- More learning materials and fresh hands should be recruited to assist the learning process of the language.
- The Idoma nation should wake up to the language restoration move to avoid extinction.

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Geoffrey Apeh has a Masters Degree in English from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria in 2009 after he got a B Ed English Language Degree from the same institution in 1999. He has presented many papers on Idoma Language and written books on the language as well. He is a strong advocate of reviving the Idoma language from extinction and has been working to ensure the language is back in school. He is working seriously on his PhD at the same University.

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