



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Linguistics variation: A case study of Oka - Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 23(03), 2731–2738

Publication history: Received on 08 August 2024; revised on 22 September 2024; accepted on 25 September 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.23.3.2865>

Abstract

The analysis reveals distinct phonological features, such as unique vowel harmony patterns and consonant clusters, that differentiate Ọ̀kà dialects from each other. Syntactic analysis uncovers differences in sentence structure, particularly in verb placement and the use of tense and aspect markers. Lexical comparisons highlight numerous unique terms and expressions in Ọ̀kà, reflecting cultural and environmental influences. This research contributes to the documentation and preservation of the Ọ̀kà dialect, providing insights into the dynamic nature of language and its role in cultural identity. The findings underscore the importance of linguistic diversity and support efforts to promote and sustain minority dialects within larger linguistic communities. It is based on an analysis of phonological and morphophonological features as vowel harmonies and consonant clusters found specifically in both Ọ̀kà dialects and standard Yorùba. Lexical comparisons reveal many hapaxes in Ọ̀kà that illustrate cultural and environmental associations. The study also unpacks sociolinguistic dimensions that shape these variations. This research contributes to the documentation and preservation of the Ọ̀kà dialect, providing insights into the dynamic nature of language and its role in cultural identity. The findings underscore the importance of linguistic diversity and support efforts to promote and sustain minority dialects within larger linguistic communities.

Keywords: Linguistics; Variation; Ọ̀kà

1. Introduction

Linguistic variation refers to the variable use of certain linguistic items as observed in the speech pattern of language users (Wolfram 2005). It also refers to the regional, social or contextual differences in the ways that a particular language or dialect is used. It is central to the study of language use and it is very inherent: a single speaker will use different linguistic forms on different occasions, and different speakers of a language will express the same meanings using different forms. Linguistic variation is a prevalent situation in African contexts where different dialects and lects are spoken in a single community.

This research work aims to examine the linguistic variation in Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Ọ̀kadò and Ìbàkà lects spoken in Ọ̀kà-Àkókó, Àkókó-Southwest Local Government Area of Ondo State. The major focus is to identify and compare the linguistic variation among the lects. Furthermore, this work will discuss the markers of the variations as well as the similarities among the lects. The sound system, lexical and syntactic variations among the lects will be discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the variationist theory of sociolinguistics as proposed by William Labov in the 1960s. The Variationist Theory is subsumed under the Descriptive Approach. A preliminary consideration with regard to variationist approach to sociolinguistics is that variation analysis require a large number of tokens to the variable being studied for providing sufficient data for further analysis Mehrdad (2013). The task of identifying and analyzing variable forms is greatly aided

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by full transcription of the interview data. Except for the case of the study on balance between level of detail and accessibility is the norm in variationist data collection Liamas (2007).

As far as syntactic variations are concerned, all pertinent grammatical variations preserved, whether they conform to standard rules or not. Frequency of occurrence is the criterion for determining the status of a form. However, morpho-syntactic variables tend to be much less recurrent than phonetic variables, which can be a problem for quantitative analysis Labov (1966).

An example of Labovian sociolinguistic analysis is that Labov (1966) found the frequency at which the variable feature is used depends on the circumstances of speaking. /r/ deletion in New York City is a clear example of the case where New Yorkers can delete it after a vowel. Labov found out that this deletion correlated not only with the linguistic environment and the speaker's social class but also with the speaking task. According to Labov, speakers tended to delete /r/ more often when they are telling stories than when they are providing demographic information. Labov suggested that the speakers tended to delete /r/ more in casual style because they paid less attention to how they sounded. Concentrating instead on telling the story. However, in formal style the speakers monitored their speech, trying to avoid stigmatized forms like deleted /r/.

According to Liamas (2007), the first stage in the phase of statistical analysis is to count the number of tokens and the proportion of different variants within different instances of use. At this point, decisions and judgements are made on how many occurrences of the use of the variable under study are in the data and also on the different numbers of variants that make up these occurrences. This stage in the statistical analysis which was discussed by Liamas (2007) can be related to the relationship that exists within the lexical items which were identified during the data collection and analysis of Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Òkadò and Ìbàkà lects. In the subsequent discussions in this research work, some linguistic features and items within different instances of use will be examined and the different variants among these lects will be identified.

3. Variation in the Consonant System of Òkà Dialects

Consonants are produced by constricting the vocal tract at some point, thereby diverting or obstructing the air in the oral cavity. Yul- Ifode (2008:47). Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Òkadò and Ìbàkà lects have similar sound systems, most especially the consonant sounds. It should be noted that there are consonants which are not attested in some of the structurally diverse dialects of Yoruba which do not appear in the standard form. (Oshodi 2011:3). Some of the consonant sounds which are in the lects but not attested in Standard Yoruba will be identified in this study.

Meanwhile, Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Òkadò and Ìbàkà lects have some consonant sounds which are similar to the ones used in standard Yoruba. Although, the lects have similar consonant sounds, they also have some consonant sounds that differ.

3.1.1. ÀGBÁ ÒKÀ

Àgbá Òkà has 19 consonant sounds, they are: [b d f g gb h k l m n kp r s t w j d͡ʒ t͡ʃ]. The sounds are illustrated below in a chart stating their state of the glottis, place of articulation and manner of articulation. Àgbá consonants shown in table below:

Table 1 Consonant Chart of Àgbá Òkà

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Alveolar	Palato- alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio- velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m		n					
Trill			r					
Fricative		f	s	ʃ				h
Affricate				t͡ʃ d͡ʒ				
Approximant					j		w	
Lateral			l					

3.1.2. ÌKÀNMÙ

Ìkànmù lect attests different number of consonant sounds found in Àgbà lect. [b d f g gb h k l m n kp r s t w j dʒ tʃ]. They are illustrated in table below:

Table 2 Consonant Chart of Ìkànmù

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Alveolar	Palato- alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio- velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m		n					
Trill			r					
Fricative		f	s					h
Affricate				tʃ dʒ				
Approximant					j		w	
Lateral			l					

3.1.3. ÒKADÒ

Òkadò lect has 19 consonant sounds, they are: [b d f g gb h k l m n kp r s t w j dʒ f ɸ]. The sounds are illustrated below in a chart stating their state of the glottis, place of articulation and manner of articulation. Consonants in Òkadò are shown below:

Table 3 Consonant Chart of Òkadò

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato- alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio- velar	Glottal
Plosive	b			t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m			n					
Trill				r					
Fricative		f	ɸ	s	ʃ				h
Affricate					dʒ				
Approximant						j		w	
Lateral				l					

3.1.4. ÌBÀKÀ

Table 4 Consonant Chart of Ìbàkà

	Bilabial	Labio dental	Alveolar	Palato- alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Labio- velar	Glottal
Plosive	b		t d			k g	kp gb	
Nasal	m		n					
Trill			r					
Fricative		f	s	ʃ				h
Affricate			ts dz					
Approximant					j		w	
Lateral			l					

Ìbàkà lect has 19 consonants, they are: [b d f g gb h k l m n kp r s t w j f dz ts]. The sounds are illustrated below in a chart stating their state of the glottis, place of articulation and manner of articulation. These are shown below.

The consonant charts of the lects clearly show that the lects have similar consonant sounds and a few variants. Àgbà and Ìkànmù have almost the same number of consonant sounds but they are not used similarly at all times with difference in one sound. For example, the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate [tʃ] is majorly used by Àgbà lect and sometimes used in Ìkànmù. Òkadò and Ìbàkà lects do not attest this sound. This sound is realized in some of the words below in table below:

Table 5 The occurrence of [tʃ] in the Lects

S/N	Àgbà	Ìkànmù	Òkadò	Ìbàkà	Gloss
1.	[ùtʃà]	[ùtʃà]	[ùtà]	[ùtà]	'cooking pot'
2.	[atʃɔ]	[atʃɔ]	[aəɔ]	[aɔ]	'cloth'
3.	[utʃé]	[utʃé]	[uté]	[uté]	'work'
4.	[tʃòkó]	[tʃòkó]	[dòkó]	[dzòkó]	'sit'

3.2. Variation in Tone System

Ladefoged (1975:227) defines tone as the pitch variations that affect the meaning of a word. Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Òkadò, and Ìbàkà are tonal lects. They attest the three tones: low, mid, and high represented as [ˉ], [ˊ] and [ˋ] respectively. These same tones are attested in Standard Yoruba. The tones occur on vowel sounds and syllabic nasals [m and n] as seen in the word 'orange- [òróm bók]' which is translated in the lects as:

Àgbà - 'ùròhnbók',
 Ìkànmù- 'ùròhnbók',
 Òkadò- 'ùrèhnbók',
 Ìbàkà- 'ùròhnbók'.

There are no variations in the use of tones in the lects. Examples of words with the high, mid and low tones in the lects are seen in the translation of 'what' below:

À gbà- Irú,
 Ìkànmù- Kòóri,
 Òkadò- Kàáíṣi,
 Ìbàkà- Kííru.

3.3. Lexical Variation

Languages change overtime and vary according to place and social setting. When differences occur in words and phrases but not in meaning in dialects of the same language, this is known as LEXICAL VARIATION. It also refers to the type of variation that is related to things concerning the words or the lexicon of a language. It is the prominent type of variation in the dialects of a language.

Lexis can be made to form difference (that is, lexical items that are similar phonetically but have different meanings in related lects) and forms can be made to lexis difference (that is, lexical items that are different phonetically but have the same meaning in related lects). Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Òkadò and Ìbàkà lects do not attest the lexis to form difference but they attest the form to lexis difference. The lects vary in several words and also have mutually identifiable lexis, that is, the similar ones. Some of the common words in Standard Yoruba are translated into Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Òkadò and Ìbàkà lects. These translations show some areas of similarities and differences.

3.3.1. Form to Lexis Difference

Table 6 Lexis Difference in Ọkà

	Àgbá	Ìkànmù	Ọkadò	Ìbàkà	Gloss
5	Iwọ̀n	Uwẹ̀n	Iwẹ̀n	Iwọ̀n	'tongue'
6.	Àgbà̀n	Àgbà̀n	Irinkin	Irinkin	'jaw'
7	Ipótan	Pótan	Pótẹ̀n	pótan	'thigh'
8	Ujẹ̀	Ùjẹ̀ré	idẹ̀	Idzẹ̀	'food'
9	Ìíjẹ̀	Jíjẹ̀	Ìídẹ̀	Ìdzídzẹ̀	'Yam'
10.	Igi-uná	Igi-gbíggbẹ̀	Igi-inẹ̀	Igi-iná	'firewood'
11	Ọ̀rin	Urẹ̀n	Ọ̀rin	Àdá	'matchet'
12	Ìkọ̀nga	Kọ̀oga	Kọ̀nga	Ìkọ̀nga	'well'
13	Ulẹ̀-amà	Ilẹ̀-amọ̀n	Amẹ̀mẹ̀	Amẹ̀	'mud'
14	Cheré	Teré	Şiré	Şeré	'play'

This is the type of lexical variation in which different forms are used to represent the same word in different lects. This type of lexical variation is peculiar to the lects of Ọkà. A lexical item in standard Yoruba can be translated differently in Àgbá, Ìkànmù, Ọkadò and Ìbàkà, that is, a particular expressed differently in the dialects to mean the same thing. It is observed the lexical items of Àgbà and Ìkànmù are closely related, as they sometimes use the same form and meaning of words. Examples of lexical items with form to lexis difference are shown in the table below:

3.3.2. Showing Lexical Items with the Same Form and Meaning

Table 7 Lexical Items with the Same Form and Meaning in Ọkà dialect

S/N	Àgbá	Ìkànmù	Ọkadò	Ìbàkà	Gloss
15	Aká	Aká	Aká	Aká	'arm'
16	Inọ̀	Inọ̀	Inọ̀	Inọ̀	'belly'
17.	Omi	Omi	Omi	Omi	'water'
18.	Ọ̀sẹ̀	Ọ̀sẹ̀	Ọ̀sẹ̀	Ọ̀sẹ̀	'leg'
19.	Ehó	Ehó	Ehó	Ehó	'money'
20.	Óro	Óro	Óro	Óro	'seed'
21.	Usin	Usin	Usin	Usin	'knife'
22.	Àtú	Àtú	Àtú	Àtú	'cap'
23.	Ugbá	Ugbá	Ugbá	Ugbá	'calabash'
24.	Ugbó	Ugbó	Ugbó	Ugbó	'bush'

These and many more examples have similar forms, pronunciations and meanings in the four lects. Majority of these lexical items are similar to what we have in standard Yoruba, the slight variations discovered are phonological.

3.4. The Comparison of Lexical Items Using Lexicostatistics Method

In order to trace the language relationship of various languages, the language family tree must be reconstructed on the basis of well-articulated rules and principles. One of these principles is the principle of LEXICOSTATISTICS.

This simply means the statistical analysis or comparison of vocabulary items. Certain vocabulary items are taken from each of the lects and are compared with the corresponding vocabulary items. Then the percentage of intelligibility is calculated. It is necessary in comparison to use basic vocabularies such as nouns, verbs, pronouns, qualifiers and prepositions. This is analyzed in the tables below:

Table 8 Analysis

S/N	Àgbá	Ìkànmù	Ọ̀kadò	Ìbàkà	Gloss
25.	Orí	Orí	Orí	Orí	'head'
26.	Ìrọ̀n	Ìrọ̀n	Ìrọ̀n	Ìrọ̀n	'hair'
27.	Ojú	Ojú	Odú	Odzú	'eye'
28.	Umọ̀	Imọ̀	Imọ̀	Imọ̀	'nose'
29.	Iwọ̀n	Uwẹ̀n	Iwẹ̀n	Iwọ̀n	'tongue'
30.	Àgbòn	Àgbòn	Àgbìn	Àgbòn	'chin'
31.	Inọ̀	Inọ̀	Inọ̀	Inọ̀	'belly'
32.	Àyìn	Àyìn	Àyìn	Àyìn	'back'
33.	Aká	Aká	Aká	Aká	'arm'
34.	Pótan	Pótan	Pótẹ̀n	Pótan	'thigh'
35.	Ọ̀sẹ̀	Ọ̀sẹ̀	Ọ̀sẹ̀	Ọ̀sẹ̀	'leg'

Morris Swadesh (father of lexicostatistics) proposed that any pair of lects that share a cognate (lexical words that are related) correspondence of 86% and above must be of the same language and conversely, any pair of lects that share less than 86% must be classified as separate languages. The lexicostatistics of the lects above could show that Àgbá, Ìkànmù, Ọ̀kadò and Ìbàkà are purely lects of Standard Yorùbá as their cognates share correspondences shows about 86% and above.

3.5. Variation in Simple Sentence Structure

In English language, the sentence structure is represented as SVO- Subject Verb Object. This is also used in Standard Yoruba.

Simple sentences in Àgbà, Ìkànmù, Ọ̀kadò and Ìbàkà lects have the same sentence structure, which is the SVO used in Standard Yoruba thereby showing that there is no variation in their sentence structure. However, in line with sentence expansion rule of the phrase structure grammar Yusuf (1992) puts the rule as: $S \rightarrow NP (AUX) VP$. This

means a sentence must contain a noun phrase, an optional auxiliary and a verb phrase where the verb phrase may contain a verb and in most cases a verb and a noun phrase.

The simple sentences of these lects were observed to attest the HTS in their deep structures. According to Awobuluyi (1992), a V- syllable having a high tone and known in Yoruba linguistic literature as the high tone syllable or HTS for short, regularly occurs directly after the subject in Yoruba declarative sentences. It has an underlying form, ó, which always assimilates (sometimes vacuously) to the final vowel of the subject NP (Yoruba words are all vowel-final). This is exemplified showing the deep and surface structures of the sentences below:

Àgbá

Dàda ó rú ehó → Dàda á rú ehó

Dada HTS steal money Dada HTS steal money

“Dada stole money” “Dada stole money”

Dàdà rú ehó S= NP (Tádé), VP (ru), NP (ehó)

Dàdà stealPAST money

‘Dada stole money’

Ìkànmù

Dàda ó jí ehó → Dàda á jí ehó

Dada HTS steal money Dada HTS steal money

“Dada stole money” “Dada stole money”

Dàdà jí ehó S= NP (Tádé), VP (ru), NP (ehó)

Dàdà stealPAST money

‘Dada stole money’

Òkadò

Dàda ó fé ehó → Dàdà á fé ehó

Dada HTS steal money Dada HTS steal money

“Dada stole money” “Dada stole money”

Dàdà fé ehó S= NP (Tádé), VP (ru), NP (ehó)

Dàda stealPAST money ‘

‘Dada stole money’

Ìbàkà

Dàda ó mé ehó → Dàda á mé ehó

Dada HTS steal money Dada HTS steal ‘money

Dada stole money Dada stole money

Dàdà mé ehó S= NP (Tádé), VP (ru), NP (ehó)

Dàdà stealPAST money

‘Dada stole money’

It is observed from the examples above that the lects also attest the High Tone Syllable underlyingly as attested also in simple sentences in Standard Yoruba. This HTS however, becomes non-overt in the surface representation but the high tone has been transferred to the vowel that ends the subject NP. The simple sentence structure however, remains the same in the four lects.

4. Conclusion

The sound system variation of the lects are observed to occur majorly in the consonant sound system. No variations were identified in the vowel and tone systems. Furthermore, the lexical variations of the lects were observed to be derived as form to lexis difference (lexical items that are phonetically different but have the same meaning). The lexical variations occur majorly as a result of phonetic differences (the sound system). The principle of lexicostatistics which was proposed by Morris Swadesh was adopted in deriving the percentage of intelligibility that exists between the lexical items in the lects. The lexicostatistics method confirmed that the lects belong to the same standard language- Yoruba and that they are mutually intelligible. The lects have similar simple sentence structures and are similar to the ones attested in Standard Yoruba- SVO. The focus constructions are also similar to that of standard Yoruba. Focusing in À gbà, Ìkànmù, Ọ̀ kado and Ìbàkà involves bringing the focused item to the initial part of the sentence before the focus marker. The subject, object and verbs can be focused in these lects. The areas of variations observed are in the focus markers and the occurrence of the HTS used by the dialects. It is also observed that the lects have different markers of negation which was clearly shown from the angle of tense and aspect marking.

The question markers vary in the lects. It is observed À gbà and Ìkànmù seem to be more related in their forms of questioning. The lexical items of the interrogative sentences also vary. Most of the markers of questions in the lects, especially the WH- question markers are formed by combining the question elements with the adverbs- place, time, reason etc. For the polar questions, the do, have, be, and modal verbs are used as question markers in these lects. However, they have different forms and realizations.

The linguistic levels at which the variations in À gbà, Ìkànmù, Ọ̀ kado and Ìbàkà lects occur have been discussed in this research work. The relatedness and distinctness of these lects have also been shown and the markers of the variations were identified.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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