

# A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE NOMINAL GROUP STRUCTURES OF ENGLISH AND URHOBO

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## **Abstract**

The paper undertook a contrastive analysis of the nominal group structures of English and Urhobo. Data for the study were randomly selected from books and articles published by native and non native speakers of English. For Urhobo, data were obtained from books and articles published by native speakers. The descriptive method was used for the analysis of data. The procedure for data analysis followed that specified by Lado (1964) which states that we begin with an analysis of foreign language and compare its structure by structure with native language. The nominal group structures of English and Urhobo were compared and contrasted using Halliday's scale and category grammatical model. The paper notes that the observed differences between the nominal group of both languages can create learning problems to the Urhobo learners of English. It is suggested that intensive exposure be given to the Urhobo learners in English nominal group structure.

**Key Words:** Contrastive, nominal, scale and category, analysis.

## **Introduction**

The nominal group (NG) which is discussed in this essay is one of the three major groups recognized by Systemic Grammar (Halliday, 1994). The other groups are the adverbial group (ADG) and verbal group (VG). A good knowledge of the structure and form of the nominal group in any language is relevant as the form of the NG affects to a large extent the form of other groups especially the verbal group. Systemic Grammar which is being adopted in this work, allows for a single word to function as a group in so far such a word belongs to the structural class of the group which it represents. As a result, a noun can be regarded as a nominal group as in:

1. David danced this morning

NG. VG. ADG

Again, when a single-word nominal element functions as a group in a sentence, we have a simple nominal group, but if it consists of more than one element, we have a complex nominal group as in:

2a. David came yesterday (simple NG)

2b. The tall man came yesterday (complex NG)

2c. The beautiful tall Nigerian girl was here (complex NG)

While the NG in 2a is a simple one, the NG in 2b and 2c are complex in that each of them has more than one nominal element. However, the degrees of this complexity vary as the NG in 2c is more complex than the NG in 2b. Other words forming the NG can be dropped, but the element that forms the head word cannot be dropped. For examples in "Chief Omoni", "Omoni the tailor". "Chief Omoni the village headmaster", the mandatory element is "Omoni". The other elements can be dropped depending on the choice of the language user.

A nominal group may consist of a noun and other words such as determiners and adjectives. The head or the main word in a nominal group is the noun. A nominal group in English has a minimum of one and maximum of three elements: modifier, head and qualifier (Eka, 2004). These are usually represented by the letters m, h, q. The head of a nominal group is the noun in the group; the modifier is the item before the noun (head); the qualifier is the item after the noun.

In English and Urhobo, a nominal group can take the following forms:

The head is the obligatory member of the construction.

I.

It can consist of a single noun. This is mostly when the noun is a proper noun.

ii. It can consist of a determiner and a common noun. The determiner is obligatory if the noun (head), is a singular count noun.

iii. It can consist of a determiner, one or more adjectives and a noun.

iv. It can be made up of a determiner and a noun followed by a prepositional group.

Greenbaum and Nelson (1999) posit that modifiers that come before the noun (head) are pre-modifiers, and those that come after the noun (head) are post modifiers. In the nominal group, we can have many modifiers and many qualifiers with the modifiers usually outnumbering the qualifiers, but there is usually only one head which may be single or compound.

It has been established by scholars that most Nigerian learners of English do have problems with the use of the English nominal group especially in the area of subject and verb concord. Some nominal groups in English such as indefinite pronouns: nobody, everybody, everyone; and construction like: "One of the boys" when used as subjects, often pose problems. This paper is therefore meant minimizing these problems by contrasting the nominal group structures of English and Urhobo, one of the major indigenous languages in the Niger Delta

### Simple Nominal Group in English and Urhobo

As we pointed out above, the simple nominal group has one element:

1a. Joseph		Came
1b. Omonigho		rhe re (Urhobo)
2a. He/She/It	Came	2b. O/Q/Q/rhe re

3. Everybody is expected  
h

Urhobo has series of pronouns which can function in place of the nominal group. The following examples occur in Akpojesheri (2013, p. 190):  $\text{\textcircled{O}}$  -he/she/it, yena that, Onana-these, Eyena-those, we-you (singular and complement) Ovwa- subject you (Plural, subject and complement), wo-you (singular and subject). ae they, Avware-we, ae-them, etc.

Examples:

4. Wo cha mrę oyono na

You will see teacher the (order of items)

You will see the teacher

$\text{\textcircled{O}}$  cha vw  $\text{\textcircled{O}}$  ke we

He/she will give it you (Order of items)

He/she will give it to you

### Complex Nominal Group

The complex NG has two or more elements in its structure:

5a. my | cup  
m | h

5b. Uko | me.  
h | m

6a. The | old | man  
M | m | h

6b.  $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ mare | oshare | na  
m | h | m

7a.	The	man	in glasses
	m	h	q
7b.	Qshare	ro	kue ughanna yo na
	h		q m
8a.	John	the barber	
	h	q	
8b.	John	ro bre. e.to	

John that cut hair (order of items) the above analysis gives us h, mh, hq and mhq in English. In Urhobo, we have h, mhm, hq and mhq.

### Elements of the Nominal Group Structures in English and Urhobo.

#### The M Element

We can have a zero modifier element in a construction that begins with a head as in:

9a. Girls in the house (English)

9b. Emete vwē evu r̄ē uwevwi na (Urhobo) Eka (2004) notes that where modifier element is present, we can have a range of one to eleven modifier elements. According to Eka, this is at least for the purpose of illustration in that in real life situations, we hardly ever need to use more than three or four. Examples are:

10a. A tall dark fat woman (English)

m m m m h

10b. Aye ovu grongro biebi rhuarho (Urhobo)

h m m m m

woman one tall dark big (order of items)

11b. A tall dark woman (English)

m m m h

11a. A tall dark woman (English)

12a. A tall woman (English)  
m m h

12b. Aye ovu grongron (Urhobo)  
h m m  
Woman one tall (order of items)

13a. One woman (English)  
m h

13b. Aye ovu (Urhobo)  
h m  
Woman one (order of items)

One can observe that we are able to reduce the modifier elements from four to one in the above examples without creating semantic or structural problems. The reason is that each pre-head item modifies the head "woman".

### **The nature of patterning within the M element**

We have seen that it is possible to have quite a long number of items within the m element. This is because, the m element is capable of drawing membership

### **The Deitic**

The deitic element is made up of proper determiners, pre-determiners and post-determiners. At the deitic position we have items like the, a/an some, nearly etc in English. In Urhobo they are na, ovo Examples are:

14a. The man (English)

14b. Oshare na (Urhobo)  
Man the (order of items) (English)

15a. An orange (English)

15b. Utie ovo (Urhobo)  
Orange one (order of items)

16a. A boy (English)

16b. Ọmohare ovo (Urhobo)

Small man one (order of items)

Other modifier elements are the ordinal, the epithet and the nominal. The elements are usually abbreviated as DOEN. Many items can occur within the m

Slot as in:

17a. My first beautiful iron Chair (English)

Dietic ordinal epithet nominal noun

17b. Agbara ọ́ ogba yoyovwi re esosuo mę (Urhobo)

Noun nominal epithet ordinal dietic

Chair of iron beautiful of first my (order of item)

According to Eka (2004), in a more elaborate m system, we can have up to two determiners within the deitic elements, and as many as five adjectives and two nominals, plus the other usual possibilities within the m element as shown below:

18a. All the first three humble tall rich experienced dark Nigerian Chemistry  
 m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m | m  
 teachers

h

18b. Iyono ọ́ ikemistri ọ́ Nigeria biebi ve eriarie fefe grangran ve

h m m m m m m

ogho eje ọ́ erha re esosuo na

m m m m m

Teachers of chemistry of Nigeria dark experience rich tall humble all three first the (order of items).

The sentence above has eleven m elements. In English, the sentence begins with the predeterminer - all. When we have an extensive list of m elements as shown in example 18, the construction normally starts with one of such determiners. The second position is occupied by the determiner-modifier "the". Other determiners that can enter this position are: my, our, your, his, her, their, these, those. This means that all the predeterminers listed here can pattern with these determiners in the first instance. In Urhobo, the head comes first followed by the predeterminers which may of course come last as shown in the sentence 10b.

Onose (2007) notes that the order of occurrence of adjectives does not appear to affect the grammaticality or otherwise of appropriate sentences in Urhobo. The following examples occur in Onose (2007; p 4).

- |     |              |      |                |      |                |      |                  |
|-----|--------------|------|----------------|------|----------------|------|------------------|
| 19. | Aye<br>Woman | <br> | biebi<br>dark  | <br> | rhuarho<br>fat | <br> | grongron<br>tall |
| 20. | Aye<br>Woman | <br> | rhuarho<br>fat | <br> | biebi<br>dark  | <br> | grongron<br>tall |

i.e. A tall dark fat woman

According to Onose, both expressions are acceptable, unlike in English where we talk of adjectives of age, colour and size, which are used in a definite order in the nominal group structure. In Urhobo, this order does not seem to be strictly important.

In English, the m elements are arranged logically. For instance, we can say "first-three", "first-six", "first-seven" but not the other way round. Determiners are in a closed system in that they are not many.

### The ordinals and cardinals

The other m elements are the ordinals and the cardinals. The ordinal is normally known to come before the cardinals in English as shown in example 10a earlier Adejare and Adejare (2006) state that ordinals are focused on numerals and therefore, function as enumerators. The following are members of the ordinal numerals: first, second, third, sixth, etc. ordinal numerals perform enumerative

function as in:

21a. David's first birth day was celebrated in the church and his second was at the amusement park.

21b. Ese vwię omo re esosuo vwę Evwro, ori ive kerha vwe Avwra.

Ese had her first child at Effurun, the second was at Abraka.

Ordinals can function in some contexts as headwords in the NG as in.

- 22a. Akpo is the first (English)
- |      |     |        |  |    |  |          |
|------|-----|--------|--|----|--|----------|
|      | m   | h      |  |    |  |          |
| Akpo | ore | esosuo |  | na |  | (Urhobo) |
|      |     | h      |  | m  |  |          |

Sentence 22 is possible where there is the need not to repeat a headword already mentioned in the text. For instance the first student, the first governor, the first chairman.

Cardinal numerals are one, two, three, four, five, six etc. they may function with or without a premodifier or a modifier e.g.

23. m h  
 One boy (no modifier)  
 His three cars (one modifier)  
 All the ten boys (two modifier)

With the exception of non-count nouns like Naira (Nigeria's currency) Cardinal numerals require number concord with the headword (Adejare and Adejare, 2006). E.g.

24. One boy (singular)  
 Omoshare ov̄o (Urhobo)  
 Two boys (plural)  
 Emeshare iv̄e (Urhobo)

In some cases, ordinal and cardinal numerals may co-occur and generate two ordinator, with the ordinal numerals preceding the cardinal numerals as in:

25. D | O<sub>1</sub> | O<sub>2</sub> | N  
 The | first | two | boys  
 | | | |  
 26b. N | O<sub>2</sub> | O<sub>1</sub> | D  
 Emeshare | Iv̄e | re sosuo | na (Urhobo)  
 | | | |

Other examples are: "your last three cars", "their next three performances. I.E should be mentioned that in Urhobo, the modifier a/am is treated as cardinal numerals. Consider:

- 27a. An | orange  
 Utię | Ovo (Urhobo)  
 Orange one |  
 28b. A | Man  
 Oshare Ov̄o (Urhobo)  
 Man | One



This is also possible in English as shown in the sentences below: Although Urhobo does not have the option of using the equivalents of a/an except "ovo" (one)

28a. A man came

28b. One man came

**The Epithet (E)**

The epithet is the third element in the structure of the modifier system. The word class "adjective" functions in this position. Example:

29a. Aghogho is a good boy

29b. Aghogho emamo re\_omoshare

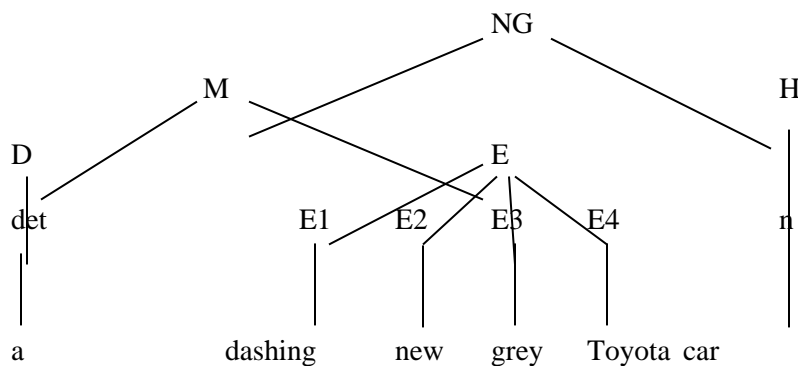
The above NG has the mh structure. The modifier consists of two items, the (deitic), article "a" and the adjective "good" which is an epithet. In the Urhobo equivalent, the article ("a") is fused with the adjective "emamo".

The English epithet according to Adejare and Adejare (2006), is another unit where multiple items may occur. For example:

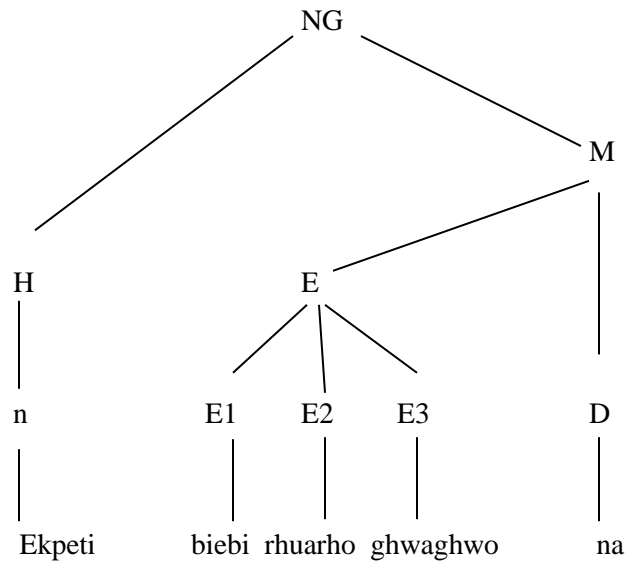
30. The old big black box, we have three epithets analysed as:

a.	D	E <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>2</sub>	E <sub>3</sub>	H
	The	old	big	black	box
b.	H	E <sub>1</sub>	E <sub>2</sub>	E <sub>3</sub>	D
	Ekpeti biebi	rhuarho ghwagwo	na	(Urhobo)	
	Box	black big	old	the (order of items)	

Other examples are: "a beautiful young black Nigerian", "a dashing new grey Toyota car". A tree diagram showing the last example is given below.



And for Urhobo example 30 is given below:



Multiplicity of epithets in sentences often causes descriptive problems. It is wise them to classify them. All elements in the NG have a sequence of arrangement. The dietic comes first followed by ordinal, the epithet and finally the nominal at which operates noun joining in the premodification of the headword (Osisanwo, 1999 p.40). Multiple epithets represent the different attributes of the headword to which a language user wishes to focus attention. Adjectives that convey these attributes occur in order of quality, size (also age and shape), colour and provenance. Examples

31i. **quality**-lovely, good

ii. **size**, size - long, small, short

age-old, young, new

Shape - round, flat, square

iii. **colour** - red, white, grey

iv. Provenance race-negroid

Geographical origin - African, Indian,

Derived-golden, wooden

If the epithet's order of occurrence is known, errors involving their usage will be avoided.

### The Nominals (N)

In this position, we have items at which operate nouns joining in the pre- modification of the headword. Such nouns occur immediately before the headword. Example:

D	D	E	N	H
The	two	beautiful	Japanese	cars
The	four	creative	Nollywood	actors

Urhobo does not have equivalent of the nominals above. The morpheme "re" showing nationality is introduced before the word as in:

lyono "re Nigeria" (Nigerian teachers).

### The h Element

The h element is usually a noun. It is the principal element in the NG structure. It is the only mandatory element. It is the component of the NG that determines the nature of the qualifier element with regards to concord and meaning. For examples we can have: "the man has", "The lecturers have". But we cannot say "The weather smiled" except it is used figuratively.

We have single h element and compound h elements. Examples; "Peter",

"Ufuoma" and "City of Lagos", "Orere re Avwraka" (city of Abraka) Here "City of Lagos" and "orere re Avwraka" form a compound h element.

Other compound h elements include "bread and butter", "tea and sugar" the compound h elements like singular ones always select singular verbs as in :

32. Bread and butter was served for dinner

### The q Elements

The q elements occur after the h element. The term qualifier itself is a Hallidayan one: it emanates from, and features often in Holliday's systemic grammar, also known as Scale and Category Grammar (Eka, 2004).

Adejare and Adejare (2006) note that the qualifier, unlike the modifier, has no concise structure of its own. Rather, different types of grammatical structures: the word, the group and the clause, etc. function as rank shifted elements of structure.

For instance, a clause may be found in a place where one would normally have expected to find a group or word.

### Word as NG Qualifier

Some word classes function as the qualifier in the nominal group structure.

They are adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns etc.

Examples:

33a. Nothing | useful (q = adjective)

h	q	
33b. Emuovuovo		royovwiri-ii
h		q

34. The		man		himself (q-emphasizing pronoun)
m		h		q

35. The		first		house		built (q=verb)
m		m		h		q

Sentence 33a can be contextualized as: "nothing useful happened during the meeting".

**Group as NG qualifier.**

36. The		carpenter		next door (q=NG)
m		h		q

37. The		boy		being examined (q = VG)
m		h		q

Omoshare      na                      ra norhie

**Clause as NG qualifier**

38. The		house		which	he	built (q = nonfinite clause)
m		h		q		

Owevwi      na      re                      o tore

**Determiners as qualifiers**

Determiners that function as NG qualifiers are mostly cardinal numerals such as one, three, six, nine as in:

39. The		Ogoni		nine (q=determiner)
---------	--	-------	--	---------------------

m h q  
 Ihwo re ogoni re irhiri na

40. The Appo six  
 m h q

**Adverbs and prepositions as qualifiers**

41. A woman nearby (q = adverbs)  
 m h q

Aye re obi kere

42. The enemy within (q = preposition)  
 m h q

Qvwre ghe re uwevwi na

**Other functions of the nominal group**

**NG as a subject**

Examples are:

43a. The old man has kicked the bucket.

The tall man slapped Onome

43b. Oshare grongro na ghwie Onome (Urhobo)

Man tall the slapped Onome

**NG as a Complement**

Examples are:

44a. David slapped the fat girl

NG

44b. David ghwie omote rhuarho na (urhobo)

David slapped girl fat the (order of items)

## NG Functions in Apposition

### Examples:

45a. Umukoro **the tailor** was here

(NG in apposition to Umukoro)

45b. Umukoro obreto na rhie etinę (Urhobo)

Umukoro cutter of hair the came here (order of items)

## NG as Adverbial Group

The NG can occupy the final position in the adverbial group structure. This final element of structure is termed completive in analysis. This can occur when we have a preposition headed adverbial group.

Examples:

46a. The night guard is /in/ **the house**

46b. Orheraso na evu re **uwevwi na** (Urhobo)

Watcher of night the inside of house the (order of items)

## Contrastive Features of the Nominal Group Structures of English and Urhobo

The analysis reveals that English and Urhobo have simple and complex nominal group. In both languages, the NG functions at the subject and complement positions. Pronouns can also function as nominal group in both languages. In the Element two languages the head is the mandatory element in the NG while the modifiers and qualifiers are optional members. At the subject and complement positions in both languages, nouns and pronouns do not co-occur (no double subjects and complements).

English and Urhobo show a lot of differences at the NG Structure. The structure of the NG in English is h, mh, hm q hq and mmh while that of Urhobo is h, hm, mhm, hm q. In English nominal sequence, the noun joining in the pre-modification of the head word has “-an” morpheme for indicating nationality (e.g. Nigerian) The equivalent of this morpheme is absent in Urhobo. It is replaced with the morpheme “re” (of) which occurs as prefix to the noun, unlike the one in English which occurs as a suffix to the noun.

At the deitic position within the modifiers, English has a/an/the. Equivalents of this pair of modifiers are not in Urhobo rather “Ovo” (one) which is supposed to be a cardinal numeral is used.

The result is that the learner may have problem with the use of “a or an”.

The third person singular pronoun in English donates gender but in Urhobo, this is not possible. For instance, the third person singular pronoun which can occur at the subject position in English is he/she/it, but in Urhobo one word “O” is used for these pronouns.

The second person singular and plural pronouns that can function at both subject and complement positions in English, have the same form “you”. In Urhobo, separate forms are used. In the analysis, “wo”

(singular 2nd person) is used for Subject . Again, "wa" (2nd person plural) is used as subject while "ovwa" (2nd person plural) is used as complement. These differences may lead to a situation where "you" and "people" are brought together in the subject position to indicate plurality: You people should come for prayer meeting on Friday " .

In the PCS (predictor, complement, and subject) structure in Urhobo, the complement is fused with the predicator if it is a pronoun, but in English it is not. Example: Mre David (see him her David). Here, the equivalent of him/her which is "e" is fused with the predicator to generate "mre". Hence, we have two items in the Urhobo sentence, unlike English which are three.

## **Conclusion**

This work was intended to do a contrastive analysis of English and Urhobo. The aim was to discover areas of similarity and difference between the two languages. From our juxtaposition of the nominal group structures of both language, we were able to discover the similarities and to a large extent differences in their structures and patterning. The areas of difference will most likely pose difficulties and learning problems to the Urhobo school child learning English nominal group structure. It is suggested here that the learner be exposed to many relevant materials dealing with English nominal group, and how the items forming the NG in English are patterned.

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