

A Contrastive Study of Noun Phrases in English and Ngwa Dialect of Igbo: Implications for Second Language Learners

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Abstract

Noun phrases constitute an essential component of sentence structure and play a significant role in meaning construction across languages. This study presents a descriptive contrastive analysis of noun phrase structures in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo, and English with the aim of identifying their structural similarities and differences and examining their implications for second language learning. Data for the study were drawn from naturally occurring linguistic expressions, the researchers' native-speaker competence in the Ngwa dialect, published descriptions of Standard Igbo, and established English grammar texts. The analysis was carried out within the framework of Contrastive Analysis. The findings reveal that Ngwa and Standard Igbo share many noun phrase features, including the occurrence of noun-headed constructions and the post-head positioning of demonstratives, numerals and most modifiers. However, the Ngwa dialect also exhibits dialect-specific lexical and structural features that distinguish it from Standard Igbo. In contrast, English noun phrases are predominantly characterized by pre-head modification, overt articles, inflectional plural marking, and the placement of determiners and numerals before the noun. These structural differences account for predictable transfer errors among Ngwa speakers learning English. The study concludes that a systematic comparison of Ngwa, Standard Igbo and English provides valuable insights for linguistic description, dialect documentation and second language pedagogy. It recommends greater documentation of Igbo dialects and the incorporation of dialect-sensitive approaches into English language teaching in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: *Contrastive analysis, English, Ngwa dialect, noun phrase, Standard Igbo, second language learning.*

1. Introduction

Previous studies on Igbo grammar have focused predominantly on Standard Igbo, with comparatively fewer studies examining the syntactic characteristics of individual dialects, particularly the Ngwa dialect. The noun phrase (NP) is one of the fundamental constituents of sentence structure and occupies a central position in syntactic analysis. It functions as the subject, object, complement, or object of a preposition, thereby

contributing significantly to the interpretation and grammatical organization of sentences. The internal structure of noun phrases differs across languages in terms of constituent ordering, modification, definiteness, plurality, and agreement. These structural variations have attracted considerable attention in descriptive and contrastive linguistics because they provide insights into language-specific grammatical systems and help explain the challenges encountered in second-language acquisition.

English noun phrase structure has been extensively documented and is characterized by the pre-head placement of determiners, adjectives, numerals and most modifiers before the noun head. In contrast, Igbo, like many Niger-Congo languages, generally exhibits a head-initial noun phrase structure in which demonstratives, numerals and several modifiers occur after the noun. Although both languages perform similar grammatical functions through noun phrases, they differ considerably in constituent order and the realization of grammatical categories such as plurality, definiteness and modification. These structural differences often result in negative language transfer among learners whose first language differs typologically from English.

The Igbo language comprises several mutually intelligible dialects, each exhibiting unique phonological, lexical and syntactic characteristics. Standard Igbo serves as the official written variety and has received extensive scholarly attention in grammatical descriptions. However, many dialects continue to display distinctive structural features that are not adequately represented in Standard Igbo. One such variety is the Ngwa dialect, spoken predominantly in the Ngwa region of Abia State, Nigeria. Although Ngwa shares the core grammatical properties of the Igbo language, it possesses dialect-specific realizations of several linguistic structures, including noun phrase constructions. These features deserve systematic documentation both for descriptive linguistic purposes and for preserving the linguistic diversity within the Igbo language.

Existing studies on Igbo noun phrases have concentrated largely on Standard Igbo, with comparatively little attention devoted to dialect-specific descriptions of Ngwa. Among the most comprehensive grammatical descriptions of Standard Igbo is Emenanjo (2015), whose analysis of Igbo constituents and grammatical processes provides an important foundation for subsequent study of Igbo syntax. However, comparable descriptions of individual dialects, particularly the Ngwa dialect, remain relatively limited. Consequently, many of the syntactic features that distinguish Ngwa from Standard Igbo remain insufficiently documented. Furthermore, few studies have examined the noun phrase structure of the Ngwa dialect alongside Standard Igbo and

English within a single contrastive framework. Such a three-way comparison is important because it distinguishes features that are common to Igbo generally from those that are peculiar to the Ngwa dialect while simultaneously identifying structural differences that may present challenges to Ngwa speakers learning English.

Against this background, the present study undertakes a descriptive contrastive analysis of noun phrase structures in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English. The study identifies their structural similarities and differences, highlights dialect-specific characteristics of Ngwa, and discusses the implications of these findings for second-language learning and the documentation of Nigerian indigenous languages. By providing a systematic description of Ngwa noun phrase syntax in relation to Standard Igbo and English, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Igbo dialectology, descriptive syntax and contrastive linguistics.

2. Statement of the problem

The noun phrase has been extensively studied in English and several Nigerian languages because of its central role in sentence structure and meaning. Within Igbo linguistics, considerable attention has been devoted to the description of noun phrase structure in Standard Igbo, particularly with respect to constituent order, determination, modification, plurality and numeral placement. These studies have provided valuable insights into the syntax of Standard Igbo and have contributed significantly to the grammatical description of the language.

Despite these contributions, comparatively little attention has been paid to the noun phrase structure of individual Igbo dialects. The Ngwa dialect, although one of the major dialects of Igbo, remains insufficiently described in the literature, especially from a contrastive syntactic perspective. Consequently, it is not yet clear which noun phrase features are shared with Standard Igbo and which represent dialect-specific characteristics. This lack of detailed documentation limits our understanding of the internal syntactic variation within the Igbo language.

Furthermore, existing contrastive studies have focused predominantly on comparisons between English and Standard Igbo, with few attempts to incorporate the Ngwa dialect into such analyses. As a result, the structural similarities and differences among Ngwa, Standard Igbo and English noun phrases have not been comprehensively documented. This gap also limits the availability of linguistic evidence that could explain the transfer-related difficulties experienced by Ngwa speakers in learning English as a second language. Previous studies on Igbo grammar have focused

predominantly on Standard Igbo, with comparatively fewer studies examining the syntactic characteristics of individual dialects, particularly the Ngwa dialect.

It is against this background that the present study undertakes a descriptive contrastive analysis of noun phrase structures in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English. The study seeks to provide a systematic description of the syntactic properties of Ngwa noun phrases, establish areas of convergence and divergence with Standard Igbo and English, and demonstrate the relevance of these findings to descriptive linguistics, dialect documentation and second-language learning.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to undertake a descriptive contrastive analysis of the noun phrase structures of the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English in order to identify their structural similarities and differences and examine their implications for second-language learning. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. describe the noun phrase structure of the Ngwa dialect of Igbo and Standard Igbo;
- ii. identify the structural similarities and differences between the noun phrase systems of the Ngwa dialect and Standard Igbo;
- iii. compare the noun phrase structures of the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English;
- iv. examine the syntactic features that distinguish the noun phrase structure of English from those of the Ngwa dialect and Standard Igbo; and
- v. analyse the likely areas of language transfer and learner errors arising from the structural differences between English and the Ngwa dialect of Igbo.

4. Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- i. What are the structural characteristics of noun phrases in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo and Standard Igbo?
- ii. What are the structural similarities and differences between noun phrases in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo and Standard Igbo?
- iii. How do the noun phrase structures of the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English compare?
- iv. What syntactic features distinguish English noun phrases from those of the Ngwa dialect of Igbo and Standard Igbo?
- v. What learner errors are likely to result from the structural differences between English and the Ngwa dialect of Igbo?

5. The Ngwa Dialect

Ngwa is one of the major dialects of the Igbo language spoken predominantly in Abia State, southeastern Nigeria. It is used across the seven Local Government Areas that constitute the Ngwa cultural region, namely Isiala Ngwa North, Isiala Ngwa South, Obingwa, Osisioma Ngwa, Aba North, Aba South and Ugwunagbo. (Ogbonna, 2024). As a member of the Igbo dialect continuum, Ngwa shares many phonological, morphological and syntactic features with Standard Igbo while retaining distinctive lexical and grammatical characteristics that reflect its dialectal identity.

Like other Igbo dialects, Ngwa belongs to the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Although Standard Igbo serves as the official written variety and the medium of formal education and literature, the Ngwa dialect remains the principal language of everyday communication among its native speakers. The dialect therefore constitutes an important component of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Igbo people. Previous descriptions of Igbo grammar have focused predominantly on Standard Igbo, leaving many dialects, including Ngwa, comparatively under-described. Nevertheless, available studies indicate that the Ngwa dialect preserves the characteristic head-initial noun phrase structure of Igbo while exhibiting dialect-specific realizations in lexical choice, demonstratives, plural marking and modifier placement. These features make the dialect an appropriate subject for descriptive and contrastive syntactic investigation. The present study focuses specifically on the noun phrase system of the Ngwa dialect and compares it first with Standard Igbo and subsequently with English. This approach makes it possible to distinguish features that are common to the Igbo language from those that are unique to the Ngwa dialect and to identify areas of structural divergence that may influence second-language learning.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), originally developed by Robert Lado (1957). The theory posits that the systematic comparison of two or more languages makes it possible to identify their structural similarities and differences and to predict areas of learning difficulty for second-language learners. According to Lado (1957), elements that are similar across languages are generally easier to acquire, whereas areas of structural divergence are more likely to result in language transfer and learner errors. Contrastive Analysis emerged within the field of applied linguistics as an important

framework for comparing the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic systems of languages. The theory assumes that language learning is influenced by the learner's first language (L1), and that differences between the first language and the target language (L2) constitute potential sources of interference. James (1980) explains that contrastive analysis is fundamentally an interlingual and bidirectional enterprise that seeks to establish correspondences and divergences between linguistic systems for both theoretical description and practical language teaching.

Contemporary contrastive studies continue to demonstrate the usefulness of structural comparison in explaining learner difficulties. Udeh (2022), for example, identifies constituent ordering as one of the principal areas of divergence between English and Igbo noun phrases. Similarly, recent studies on Igbo dialect syntax indicate that while dialects exhibit lexical differences, their underlying grammatical organisation remains largely consistent, thereby supporting the need to distinguish dialectal variation from cross-linguistic variation. Although the strong version of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which claimed that all learner errors could be predicted through language comparison, has been criticised, its descriptive value remains widely acknowledged. Wardhaugh (1970) distinguishes between the strong and weak versions of the hypothesis, arguing that while not all learner errors arise from first-language interference, systematic comparison of languages remains indispensable for explaining many recurrent transfer-related errors. Lennon (2008) similarly observes that contrastive analysis continues to provide a valuable descriptive framework for identifying cross-linguistic similarities and differences, especially when combined with evidence from learner performance.

The choice of Contrastive Analysis is particularly appropriate for the present study because the research is essentially descriptive and comparative. Rather than proposing abstract syntactic rules, the study examines the structural organisation of noun phrases in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English with the aim of identifying points of convergence and divergence. The framework facilitates the systematic comparison of constituent order, determiner placement, numeral position, plural marking and noun modification across the three language varieties. It also provides a useful basis for explaining the transfer-related errors that may arise when native speakers of the Ngwa dialect learn English as a second language.

Accordingly, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis offers the most suitable theoretical foundation for this study because it aligns with its descriptive orientation, comparative objectives and pedagogical concern for second-language learning.

7. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design employing the contrastive method of syntactic analysis. The design is appropriate because the study is concerned with describing and comparing the structural properties of noun phrases in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English rather than measuring respondents' opinions or testing statistical hypotheses.

The data for the study consist of naturally occurring noun phrase constructions drawn from the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English. Ngwa data were obtained through the researchers' native-speaker intuition, consultation with competent native speakers for verification where necessary, and existing grammatical descriptions of the dialect. Data on Standard Igbo were drawn from published grammatical works and reference materials, while English data were obtained from standard descriptive grammar texts.

The data were purposively selected to illustrate major noun phrase constructions involving simple nouns, proper nouns, demonstratives, determiners, numerals, quantifiers, plural markers and noun modifiers. These constructions constitute the basis for examining the syntactic organisation of noun phrases across the three language varieties.

The analysis follows the principles of Contrastive Analysis by first describing the noun phrase structure of the Ngwa dialect in relation to Standard Igbo and subsequently comparing both with English. Each construction is analysed using the standard Leipzig Glossing Rules for the presentation of the Ngwa and Standard Igbo data. The comparison focuses on constituent order, determiner placement, numeral position, plural marking and modifier distribution in order to identify areas of structural convergence and divergence as well as their implications for second-language learning.

8. Data Analysis

This section presents a descriptive contrastive analysis of select noun phrase constructions in the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, Standard Igbo and English. In line with the objectives of the study, representative examples are analysed to illustrate the major structural characteristics of noun phrases in the three language varieties. To ensure clarity and avoid unnecessary repetition, only constructions that adequately exemplify each syntactic pattern are discussed. The Ngwa and Standard Igbo data are presented using the Leipzig Glossing Rules, while the analysis proceeds by first describing the noun phrase structure of the Ngwa dialect in relation to Standard Igbo before contrasting both with English. The discussion focuses on constituent order, determiner

placement, numeral position, adjectival modification, possessive constructions, quantifier placement and plural marking, with particular attention to their implications for second-language learning.

8.1. Description of Noun Phrase Structures in Standard Igbo and Ngwa Dialect

This section describes selected noun phrase constructions in Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect of Igbo. Nwachukwu (1987) provides one of the earliest comprehensive grammatical descriptions of Standard Igbo, noting that the noun functions as the central element of the noun phrase and that modifiers such as demonstratives, numerals and adjectives generally occur after the noun. This description established the foundation for subsequent studies of Igbo nominal syntax. Building on this work, Emenanjo (2015) offers a more detailed account of the subsequent structure and grammatical processes of Standard Igbo, further confirming the predominance of post-nominal modification in the language. Representative examples are used to illustrate the structural organisation of noun phrases in both language varieties. The analysis focuses on major noun phrase constructions involving demonstratives, numerals, adjectives, possessives and plural or quantified expressions. The examples are presented using the Leipzig (2015) Glossing Rules to facilitate linguistic description and comparison.

8.1.1 Noun + Demonstrative Constructions

The noun phrase in both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect exhibits a head-initial structure in which the noun functions as the head of the phrase while the demonstrative follows it.

Example 1

Standard Igbo:

ùlọ̀ nà a
house DEM
'this house'

Ngwa:

ùlọ̀ nà nà
house DEM
'this house'

The examples show that both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect position the demonstrative after the noun, indicating a shared post-nominal demonstrative pattern. The difference lies primarily in the lexical form of the demonstrative rather than in

constituent order. Whereas Standard Igbo employs *a*, the Ngwa dialect uses *nà* to express the same grammatical function.

The post-nominal placement of modifiers observed in these examples agrees with Emenanjo's (2015) description of the constituent structure of Standard Igbo noun phrases. This finding supports earlier descriptions of Igbo nominal syntax, which identify post-head modification as a defining feature of the language.

8.1.2. Noun + Numeral Constructions

Another important characteristic of noun phrase structure in both varieties is the placement of numerals after the noun head.

Example 2

Standard Igbo:

Mmádù àtọ

person three

'three persons'

Ngwa:

Mádù àtọ

person three

'three persons'

The examples indicate that numerals occur in post-nominal position in both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect. Although minor lexical differences may occur in pronunciation or orthographic representation, the constituent order remains identical. The similarity suggests that numeral placement constitutes a stable syntactic feature across the two varieties.

8.1.3 Noun + Adjective Constructions

Adjectival modification in both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect also follows the head noun.

Example 3

Standard Igbo:

Nwa ọma

child good

'good child'

Ngwa:

'good child'

The examples illustrate that adjectives occur after the noun in both varieties. This post-nominal ordering differs from languages in which adjectives precede the noun. The identical constituent order observed in Standard Igbo and Ngwa further demonstrates their close grammatical relationship.

8.1.4. Possessive Noun Phrase Constructions

Possessive relationships are similarly expressed through noun phrase constructions that exhibit comparable constituent ordering in both language varieties.

Example 4

Standard Igbo:

ùlọ̀ nà m

house 1SG.POSS

'my house'

Ngwa:

ùlọ̀ nà m

house 1SG.POSS

'my house'

The examples reveal that possessive markers occur after the noun in both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect. The structural similarity indicates that possessive noun phrase formation follows the same grammatical principle in the two varieties, notwithstanding occasional dialectal lexical variation.

8.1.5 Plural and Quantified Noun Phrase Constructions

Plurality in Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect is commonly expressed through numerals, quantifiers or lexical devices rather than obligatory inflectional suffixes.

Example 5

Standard Igbo:

Ụmụákā niile

children all

'all the children'

Ngwa:

Ụmụtakiri lílè

children all

'all the children'

The examples demonstrate that quantifiers occur after the noun in both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect. Plural interpretation is derived from the lexical meaning of the

noun, the accompanying quantifier or the broader discourse context rather than from obligatory plural suffixes. Whereas Standard Igbo employs ‘ákā niile’, the Ngwa dialect uses ‘akiri lílě’ to express the same grammatical function. This feature constitutes another important point of similarity between the two varieties (Ogbonna 2024).

Overall, the analysis shows that Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect exhibit essentially the same noun phrase organisation. In both varieties, the noun functions as the obligatory head of the phrase, while demonstratives, numerals, adjectives, possessives and quantifiers generally occur in post-head position. The differences observed are predominantly lexical rather than syntactic, reflecting dialectal variation within a shared grammatical system. These findings establish the close structural relationship between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect and provide the basis for the broader contrastive analysis with English presented in the next section.

8.2. Contrastive Analysis of Noun Phrase Structures in Standard Igbo and Ngwa Dialect

The descriptive analysis presented in the preceding section demonstrates that Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect exhibit a high degree of structural similarity in the organisation of noun phrases. This section compares the two varieties in order to identify their major points of convergence and divergence.

A striking similarity between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect is the head-initial structure of the noun phrase. In both varieties, the noun functions as the obligatory head around which other constituents are organised. Demonstratives, numerals, adjectives, possessive markers and quantifiers generally occur after the noun, thereby producing a predominantly post-head modification pattern. This constituent order distinguishes both varieties from languages such as English, where most modifiers precede the noun.

The analysis further reveals that plurality in both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect is expressed primarily through lexical means, numerals, quantifiers or contextual interpretation rather than through obligatory inflectional suffixes. This shared strategy reflects a common grammatical heritage and reinforces the close linguistic relationship between the two varieties.

Although the overall syntactic organisation of noun phrases is largely the same, certain dialectal differences are evident. These differences occur mainly at the lexical level. For example, some demonstratives, lexical modifiers and other nominal elements are realised differently in the Ngwa dialect from their Standard Igbo counterparts.

However, these lexical differences do not alter the underlying constituent order or grammatical functions of the noun phrase elements. Consequently, the observed variation is better described as dialectal rather than structural. This finding is consistent with Asuoha's (2022) observation that the distinctive characteristics of the Ngwa dialect are reflected more in dialect-specific lexical and structural realizations than in radical departures from the grammatical architecture of Standard Igbo.

The findings, therefore, suggest that the Ngwa dialect preserves the core noun phrase syntax of Standard Igbo while maintaining distinctive lexical features that reflect its regional identity. This observation supports the view that dialects of the same language may display considerable lexical variation without substantial differences in their underlying grammatical organisation.

The close correspondence between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect has important implications for the present study. It indicates that the most significant structural contrasts are likely to emerge when both varieties are compared with English. Consequently, the next section extends the analysis by examining the similarities and differences among Standard Igbo, the Ngwa dialect and English noun phrase structures.

8.3. Contrastive Analysis of Noun Phrase Structures in Standard Igbo, Ngwa Dialect, and English

This section extends the contrastive analysis by comparing the noun phrase structures of Standard Igbo, the Ngwa dialect and English. The comparison highlights the principal structural similarities and differences among the three language varieties and examines their implications for second-language learning. The discussion is organised around the major features of noun phrase structure identified in the preceding sections.

Table 1: Contrastive Features of Noun Phrase Structures in Standard Igbo, Ngwa Dialect and English

Feature	Standard Igbo	Ngwa Dialect	English	Observation
Noun phrase head	Noun	Noun	Noun	The noun functions as the head in all three languages.
Demonstrative position	Post-nominal	Post-nominal	Pre-nominal	Standard Igbo and Ngwa dialect share the same

				pattern, while English differs.
Numeral position	Post-nominal	Post-nominal	Pre-nominal	English contrasts with both Igbo varieties
Adjective position	Post-nominal	Post-nominal	Pre-nominal	English places adjectives before nouns
Possessive construction	Post-nominal	Post-nominal	Pre-nominal	Structural difference between English and the Igbo varieties
Plural marking	Lexical/contextual	Lexical/contextual	Inflectional suffixes	English relies mainly on grammatical inflection
Constituent order	Head-initial	Head-initial	Modifier-initial	Standard Igbo and Ngwa exhibit similar syntactic organisation

The comparison shows that Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect share the same fundamental noun phrase structure. In both varieties, the noun functions as the obligatory head, while demonstratives, numerals, adjectives and most modifiers occur after the noun. This head-initial organisation is one of the defining characteristics of Igbo nominal syntax and remains stable across the representative constructions analysed in this study.

English differs considerably from both Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect in constituent ordering. Unlike the Igbo varieties, English typically places determiners, demonstratives, numerals and adjectives before the noun. Furthermore, English employs overt articles (a, an and the), which have no direct grammatical equivalents in Standard Igbo or the Ngwa dialect. Another important distinction concerns plural marking. Whereas Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect largely express plurality through lexical items, numerals, quantifiers or contextual interpretation, English primarily relies on inflectional morphology, especially the suffixes -s and -es, together with a number of irregular plural forms.

Despite these differences, the three language varieties also share important similarities. In all three, the noun functions as the head of the noun phrase, and noun phrases perform comparable grammatical functions within sentence structure, including serving as subjects, objects and complements. Thus, the major contrasts lie not in grammatical function but in the internal organisation of noun phrase constituents.

The structural differences identified in this comparison provide a linguistic explanation for many of the transfer-related errors commonly observed among Ngwa speakers learning English. Learners whose first language is the Ngwa dialect are likely to transfer the post-nominal ordering of demonstratives, numerals and adjectives into English, thereby producing constructions that reflect the constituent order of their first language rather than that of the target language. These observations provide the basis for the error analysis presented in the following section.

8.4. Error Analysis and Implications for Second-Language Learning

The contrastive analysis presented in the preceding sections reveals several structural differences between English noun phrase constructions and those of Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect. From the perspective of Contrastive Analysis, these differences constitute potential sources of language transfer and learner errors among native speakers of the Ngwa dialect learning English as a second language. This section analyses the likely errors that may arise from these structural differences and discusses their pedagogical implications.

Table 2: Predicted Transfer-Related Errors in English Noun Phrase Constructions

Structural Feature	Ngwa/Standard Igbo Pattern	Possible Learner Error	Correct English Form	Source of Error
Demonstrative position	Noun + Demonstrative	House this	This house	Transfer of post-nominal demonstrative pattern
Numeral position	Noun + Numeral	Persons three	Three persons	Transfer of post-nominal numeral placement
Adjective position	Noun + Adjective	Child good	Good child	Transfer of post-nominal

				adjective position
Possessive construction	Noun + Possessive	House my	My house	Transfer of constituent order
Plural marking	Lexical/contextual plurality	Omission of incorrect use of plural suffixes	Books, houses, children	Differences in plural marking systems
Plural marking	Lexical/contextual	Lexical/contextual	Inflectional suffixes	English relies mainly on grammatical inflection

The table shows that most of the predicted learner errors arise from differences in constituent order between English and the Igbo varieties. Since Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect generally place demonstratives, numerals, adjectives and possessive markers after the noun, learners may initially transfer this familiar ordering into English, resulting in grammatically unacceptable constructions such as *House this*, *Persons three* and *Child good*. Such errors reflect first-language influence rather than a lack of understanding of the intended meaning. Another important area of difficulty concerns plural marking. Unlike English, which predominantly expresses plurality through inflectional suffixes and a limited number of irregular forms, Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect frequently rely on lexical items, numerals, quantifiers or contextual interpretation to indicate plurality. Consequently, learners may omit obligatory English plural markers or overgeneralise plural forms in contexts where Standard Igbo and Ngwa do not require overt morphological marking. The findings also suggest that not all aspects of noun phrase structure present learning challenges. The three language varieties share the noun as the head of the noun phrase and employ noun phrases to perform similar grammatical functions within sentence structure. These similarities may facilitate positive transfer and support learners' understanding of the basic syntactic role of noun phrases.

From a pedagogical perspective, the analysis underscores the importance of contrastive grammar in English language teaching within Ngwa-speaking communities. Teachers should explicitly draw learners' attention to differences in constituent order, determiner usage and plural marking between English and the learners' first language. Such an approach is likely to reduce persistent transfer-related errors and promote greater grammatical accuracy in English language use.

9. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect share a common noun phrase structure characterised by a head-initial constituent order in which the noun functions as the obligatory head of the phrase. In both varieties, demonstratives, numerals, adjectives, possessive markers and most quantifiers occur predominantly after the noun. This observation confirms earlier grammatical descriptions of Igbo nominal syntax, which identify post-nominal modification as a defining characteristic of the language. The findings therefore reinforce previous descriptions of Standard Igbo while demonstrating that the Ngwa dialect largely preserves the same underlying syntactic organisation.

The present findings corroborate Nwachukwu (1987) and Emenanjo's (2015), both of whom identify the noun as the head of the noun phrase while modifiers typically occur in post-head position. The present study extends this description by demonstrating that the same structural organisation characteristics of Ngwa dialect.

The analysis further shows that the differences between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect are predominantly lexical rather than syntactic. Although some demonstratives and nominal modifiers differ in their surface forms, the constituent order and grammatical relationships remain essentially the same. This finding supports the view that dialectal variation within the Igbo language is manifested more in pronunciation and lexical choice than in fundamental syntactic organisation. Consequently, the Ngwa dialect should be regarded as a structurally related variety of Igbo that retains its own distinctive linguistic identity.

When Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect are compared with English, more substantial structural differences become evident. English noun phrases are characterised by pre-nominal placement of demonstratives, numerals, adjectives and possessive determiners, whereas the Igbo varieties consistently favour post-nominal modification. English also differs in its use of articles and obligatory inflectional plural marking, grammatical features that are either absent or realised differently in Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect. These typological differences account for many of the transfer-related errors predicted in the error analysis and demonstrate the usefulness of Contrastive Analysis in explaining the influence of learners' first language on second-language acquisition. The present finding corroborates Udeh (2022), who similarly observes that post-nominal modification is a defining characteristic of Igbo noun phrase syntax. It also aligns with Georgi and Amaechi (2023), whose analysis of Igbo morphosyntax demonstrates the structural stability of constituent ordering across grammatical constructions.

The findings equally underscore the importance of distinguishing between dialectal variation and cross-linguistic variation. While the structural differences between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect are relatively limited, the contrasts between the Igbo varieties and English are much more pronounced. This distinction is significant because it prevents dialectal variation from being mistaken for grammatical deficiency and provides a more accurate description of the relationship among the three language varieties.

The present study contributes to scholarship in three important ways. First, it expands the documentation of the Ngwa dialect by providing a systematic description of its noun phrase structure. Second, it demonstrates that meaningful contrastive analysis of English should first establish the relationship between the dialect under investigation and Standard Igbo before drawing cross-linguistic comparisons. Third, by applying the Leipzig Glossing Rules in the presentation of linguistic data, the study adopts internationally recognised standards for descriptive linguistic analysis, thereby enhancing the clarity, consistency and replicability of its findings. The conclusion that the differences between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect are largely lexical rather than syntactic is also supported by Asuoha (2022) whose study of Ngwa syntax highlights the importance of describing dialect-specific grammatical patterns within the broader framework of Igbo grammar rather than treating them as independent syntactic systems.

Overall, the findings confirm that the noun phrase systems of Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect are structurally similar, while both differ considerably from English in constituent order and the expression of grammatical categories. These observations not only advance the descriptive study of Igbo dialect syntax but also provide useful insights for contrastive linguistics, dialect documentation and English language teaching in multilingual Nigerian contexts.

10. Conclusion

This study has undertaken a descriptive contrastive analysis of the noun phrase structures of Standard Igbo, the Ngwa dialect of Igbo and English. By first establishing the structural relationship between Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect before extending the comparison to English, the study provides a more comprehensive account of the syntactic characteristics of Ngwa noun phrases and their relationship to both the standard variety of Igbo and English. The analysis demonstrates that Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect share the same fundamental noun phrase organisation. In both varieties, the noun functions as the

obligatory head of the phrase, while demonstratives, numerals, adjectives, possessive markers and quantifiers generally occur in post-nominal position. The differences observed between the two varieties are predominantly lexical rather than syntactic, indicating that the Ngwa dialect preserves the core grammatical structure of Igbo while maintaining its own dialectal identity. The comparison with English reveals significant differences in constituent order, determiner usage and plural marking. These structural contrasts account for many of the transfer-related errors that Ngwa speakers may encounter when learning English as a second language. The findings therefore confirm the usefulness of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as a descriptive framework for explaining cross-linguistic similarities and differences and their implications for language learning.

Beyond its pedagogical relevance, the study contributes to the documentation of the Ngwa dialect by providing a systematic description of its noun phrase structure using internationally recognised Leipzig Glossing Rules. It also demonstrates the importance of incorporating Standard Igbo into contrastive studies involving Igbo dialects and English, thereby providing a more accurate understanding of dialectal and cross-linguistic relationships. It is hoped that the findings of this study will stimulate further descriptive and comparative research on the syntax of other Igbo dialects and contribute to the broader documentation and preservation of Nigeria's indigenous languages.

11. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. English language teachers working in Ngwa-speaking communities should adopt contrastive teaching strategies that explicitly highlight the structural differences between English noun phrases and those of Standard Igbo and the Ngwa dialect.
- ii. Curriculum developers should incorporate insights from indigenous language syntax into the teaching of English grammar in multilingual contexts to minimise transfer-related learner errors.
- iii. Linguists should undertake further descriptive studies on other Igbo dialects using internationally accepted linguistic conventions, such as the Leipzig Glossing Rules, in order to enrich the documentation of Igbo dialect syntax and facilitate comparative research.
- iv. Future research should extend contrastive analyses beyond noun phrases to other grammatical domains, including verb phrases, clause structure and information structure, across Igbo dialects and other Nigerian languages.

v. As regards the difficulties posed by the different noun phrases of English and the Ngwa dialect of Igbo, it is recommended in this study that Ngwa dialect of Igbo L2 learners must master the placement of nouns after determiners and note that the contexts where applicable so as to overcome of non-specificity as noted in the study. This recommendation agrees with Nweze and Eze (2018) which revealed that determiners in Igbo have a two-way ordering and should be studied or mastered.

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