

*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*

## Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and Nouns Used in English and Ika Languages among Learners in Delta State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The aim of the study is to investigate through comparative analysis, areas of difficulties which Ika native speakers who learn English as a second language would face in learning the English nouns and verbs. It is discovered that Ika learners of English language as a second language face challenges because of difficulties from the evidence of differences between the structures of the English and Ika nouns and verbs. These challenges have prompted the researcher into investigating the differences between the structures using the theory of comparative analysis. This paper adopted methodological content analysis using secondary sources. Comparative analysis has led to the discovery of areas of difficulties such as differences in the position of nouns and modifiers, formation of plurals, various ways of representing gender in English and changing active to passive sentences for nouns. For verbs, there are problems in the presentation of the perfective marker in both languages, tenses and also passivation. It is, therefore, recommended that the curriculum planners take cognizance of these challenges so as to proffer solution on how the difficulties can be tackled for effective teaching and learning. Ika language should be studied independently of English looking at the vast differences between the two. The teacher should concentrate on these difficulties, while students become serious with learning ability.*

**Keywords:** English, Ika, Nouns, Verbs, Comparative Analysis

### Introduction

In the structure of language, syntax means the way words and phrases are put together to form sentences in a language. It involves the organization of words into phrases and sentences. It studies the level of language that lies between words and the meaning of utterances. The theoretical framework for this study is based on comparative analysis theory propounded by Robert Lado in 1957. In his *Linguistics Across Culture*, which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them (Fisiak, 2019). It is based on the idea that no two languages are the same. Comparing the learners' first language with the English language requires the isolation of features of English language which cause problems for the learners. Studies within one language could involve contrasting phonemes, morphemes; and those involving across two languages could involve a comparative analysis of lexical, grammatical, discourse systems including interference and translation equivalent (Opara, 2016). This is done by comparing native languages with the foreign language being learnt. Linguists believe that pointing out the similarities and differences of the languages will make the learning of the foreign language easier for the learner. Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and to suggest a systematic set of technical procedures for the comparative study of languages. This procedure includes: describing the languages (using structural linguistics), comparing them, and predicting learning difficulties. It was expected that once the areas of potential difficulties had been mapped out through comparative analysis, it would be possible to design language courses more efficiently.

The basic assumption for CA hypothesis is the interference of the first language system with the second language system and the second language learning basically involved the overcoming of the differences between the two linguistic systems, that is, the native and the target languages (Brown, 2019). Fries in support of Brown states, 'the most effective teaching materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with parallel description of the native language of the learner' (Powell, 2018). This paper looks at the syntactic features of nouns and verbs. The writer selected literatures on the syntactic features of nouns and verbs. From the relationships and variables observed, differences and similarities of the syntactic features of English and Ika nouns and verbs will be established. The idea is to trace the relationship between the two languages in the two areas: nouns and verbs. From the relationships, it will be pertinent to conclude whether the knowledge of English language can be enhanced by the knowledge of Ika language and whether the study of Ika language

*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*  
will be based on the established norms of the English language.

### Description of the Syntactic Features of English and Ika Languages

Based on Lado's procedure for comparative analysis, which include description of languages, comparing them, and prescribing learning difficulties, our main preoccupation in this section is with presenting the syntactic features of English, presenting and analyzing the syntactic features of English and Ika languages using comparative perspectives. This approach involves the description of English nouns and verbs and Ika nouns and verbs, the comparison of the items of the two and then making some pedagogic projections about them.

#### Syntactic Features of the Structures of English Nouns

The syntactic features of nouns can be described in terms of the typical positions they occupy and the grammatical functions they perform in larger units like phrases and clauses (Yadugiri, 2020). Thus, Yadugiri lists some of these features as below:

- 1) A noun occurs following words like determiners such as a, the, an, there, that, these e.g. that house, an orange, these books.
- 2) A noun functions as the most important item or the head in a noun phrase as in these difficult questions, an honest worker, some fresh oranges from the garden.
- 3) A noun occurs after a preposition e.g. I gave the book to Emeka. He gave the book to the man.
- 4) Nouns function as subject, object, and complement e.g. subject: English is an international language, object: we sell cars, complement: Ada is a girl. Nouns form their plurals by adding -s, -es, -en or irregularly by changing the inner vowels. For instance: tap- taps, pass—passes, tooth- teeth, foot- feet, knife- knives, ox- oxen

Yadugiri (2020) also points out some of the syntactic features of verbs:

- 5) The verbal function in a clause is performed by either a single verb as in:

They went to school.

Or, by two or more verbs occurring together as in:

They have been going to school.

- 6) A verb can be described in terms of two important grammatical features: Finiteness and tense.

A) Finiteness: verbs are of two types: finite and non-finite. A finite verb is one that is limited in terms of number, person, and tense while non-finite verb is not limited in terms of number, person, and tense. Of the three types of verbs that constitute verb phrase: lexical verbs, primary auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries; lexical verbs and primary auxiliaries have finite and non- finite forms, whereas modals are always finite. Examples:

The children ate their dinner.

He died *bitten* by a poisonous snake.

She spent her vacation *writing* a book.

The underlined verbs are finite verbs while the italicized ones are non-finite verbs.

B) Tense: Tense is a grammatical feature that characterises finite verbs. Non-finite verbs do not have tense. English has two tenses – present and past. The present tense is marked by the suffix “- s/-es” only in the case of third person singular, whereas in all other cases, the base form of the verb is used. Examples:

He lives in America.

They live at Nsukka.

In the above examples, the past tense is marked by the suffix “-ed” in most cases and by a different form of the verb in the case of irregular verbs, for instance:

(a) He lived in America

(b) I lived in America.

He bought a new car. I bought a new car.

They bought a new car.



*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*

7) Movement transformation: Transformation takes place because speakers of language are familiar with their languages and therefore may presume many things and delete any lexical items from their speech (Anagbogu, Mbah, & Eme, 2020). Transformational Generative Grammar answered several questions that the structural grammarians had left unanswered. To TGG, a sentence has been structured and a surface structure. It is as a result of several transformations that have applied to deep structure (a kernel sentence) that one arrives at the surface structure of a sentence. Movement transformation is part of such transformation in the English language. Two types of movement transformation very important in this analysis are passivisation and dative movement deletion. Passivation involves the movement of the direct object to the grammatical subject position and the movement of the subject to the grammatical object position. In the process of interchange between the subject and the object, some grammatical elements are added to the elements of the deep structure (Anagbogu, Mbah, & Eme, 2020). Consider, for instance, 'Obi killed a snake.' and 'a snake was killed by Obi.' As a condition for passivation, there is an insertion of the verb 'be', '-en', and 'by'. Dative movement is the interchange of position between the direct and indirect object. It entails the movement of an indirect object to the direct object position and the direct object to the indirect object position (Anagbogu, Mbah, & Eme, 2020), examples:

- a)
  - i. Give the book to me.
  - ii. Give me the book.
- b)
  - i. She gave the book to John.
  - ii. She gave John the book.

Dative movement can only apply to ditransitive verbs (Yadugiri, 2020).

### **Comparing Syntactic Features of English and Ika Nouns and Verbs**

#### **Differences:**

1) Nouns, Pronouns, and Nounphrases

In English language, a noun occurs following determiners (words like a, the, these) while determiners follow nouns in Ika constructs. Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2020) in support of this assert that "The phrase structure of languages differs from one another. For instance, the English NP is headfinal while Ika is head initial." Let us observe the following:

English	Ika
That house	Ụlo Һu
Those cars	Orente ndi Һu
Some students	Umunaehuo ndi Һu

In the above expressions, the English determiners (that, these, and some) come before the nouns (house, fruits, and students) while the Ika determiners (Һu, Һu, and ndi Һu) come after the nouns.

2) In English, the noun phrase appears at the end of a group or in the middle but in Ika language the head of the NP is seen at the beginning of such NP as in:

English	Ika
These difficult questions	Ajuju ndi ni ezeke
Some fresh oranges from the garden	Nkpuru osisi ndi Һu gha ime ugbo
New office	Ofisi nke ohun

What these translations show is that no matter the length of noun phrase in English, the Ika counterpart must start with the head word.

3) In English language, nouns form their plurals by adding "-s", "-en", "-es" or in the case of irregular by changing the inner vowels. The plural marker is affixed to the nouns. In Ika, the NP is unique in the sense that it does not express its morphological



*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*

agreement features overtly. In other words, it does not show its inflectional forms at the surface structure (Mbah, 2010). In Ika, an independent morpheme is used to express meaning of more than one. This means that an Ika noun takes complement as in:

English	Ika
Houses	Ulo by o <sub>da</sub>
Persons	Ihia bu o <sub>da</sub>
Books	Ehuhuo bu o <sub>da</sub>

4) English distinguishes male and female sexes in the use of pronouns (Yudugiri, 2020) but this is not applicable to Ika language. A particular pronoun is used to represent both sexes. Examples:

English	Ika
She gave me a car	O yem oriente
He gave me a book	O yem ehuhuo
It ran to the bush	O gba ban ime ofia

5) In English language, nouns form their plurals both regularly by adding “-s”, “-es”, “-en”, or irregularly by changing the inner vowels. Ika language does not change its plurals irregularly. For instance: the two nouns – knives and teeth – remain ebeke bu o<sub>da</sub> and eze bu o<sub>da</sub> in Ika language.

6) Movement of nouns (subject and object). In English language, the two movement transformations discussed earlier – passivation and dative movement apply in English. Passivation involves the movement of both the subject and the object but such operations are not possible in Ika language thus:

Passivation:

English	Ika
They bought food stuffs.	We no ihien we gi eshi ihien oriri
Food stuffs were bought by them	We no ihien we gi eshi ihien oriri

The expression, “Obi gbu eworo” cannot be changed to passive voice and therefore an active sentence in Ika cannot be changed to passive unlike in English where passivation occurs. The same thing applies to dative movement for instance:

English	Ika
She gave the book to John	O ye ehuhuo hu Joni
She gave John the book	O ye Joni ehuhuo hu

The Ika expression, “O ye ehuhuo hu” does not make sense. In Ika language, ditransitive verbs exist even though dative movement cannot apply.

### Similarities



*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*

- 1) Both English and Ika nouns function as the most important items or the head in a noun phrase
- 2) Both English and Ika nouns occur after prepositions e.g. in the morning

– ‘ama’ututu. There are two ways of writing prepositions in Ika language as shown above. The two ways are as a result of the letter that follows the preposition. If the letter is a vowel, the preposition is contrasted but if consonant, the preposition is written in full. This is not so in the English language. Sometimes, a preposition is used as a case maker. This is when a preposition is translated into a casemaker or a verb in another language. Examples:

O gbaso *me* - He ran *after* her

O re ye azu - He sold fish *to* her. Mbah (2020) terms this kind of preposition ‘bound prepositions.’

- 3) Both English and nouns function as subject, object, and complement in clauses. Examples:

Subject: **Ben** is my brother

**Ben** wu nwene m

Object: We sold **cars**

enyi re **orente**

Complement: Ada is a **girl**

Ada wu nwa ta igbagba

#### **Verbs and Verb Phrases**

- 1) In English, the perfective marker is a full word while it is an affix in the Ika language, for instance:

English	Ika
Mary went to the market	Meri j'en afia
Mary has been going to the market	Meri e'j'en afia.

In the above examples, ‘has’ is a perfective marker and a full word but in Ika ‘e’ shows a perfective marker but embedded in the verb, although both of them belong to the same node- inflection.

- 2) Another area where the two languages have remarkable difference in verb is in the use of tenses. In English language, the present tense is marked by the suffix “-s/-es” only in the case of the third person. In Ika language, the third personal pronoun does not show any singular marker in verbs, for example:

English	Ika
He lives in America	Obi ime America
They live in America	We bi ime America

- 3) There is problem of passivation as we have explained earlier. Passivation is a verbal product in English language. It cannot occur in Ika language.

#### **Similarities**

- 4) Both languages can be described in terms of finiteness and tense. Ika language has finite and non-finite verbs just like English language, example:

English	Ika
She ate rice	Ori osikapa



*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*

Eating rice is good	Iri osikapa ri nma
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5) Both languages have present and past tenses

Present tense	Past tense
She is eating rice	She ate rice
O ri eri osikapa	O ri osikapa

### Discussion of Findings

This study has shown that, to a great extent, the knowledge of the acquired language influences negatively the mastery of the target language especially where the L1 and L2 are from different language groups. This is the case with an Ika learner battling with English language which has different syntactic structures with what is already existing in the speech behaviour of the learner. The comparative analysis goes a long way in comparing the system of one language with the system of a second language in order to predict those difficulties which a speaker of L1 will have in learning the L2 and to construct teaching materials to help him learn that language effectively. From my own analysis:

1. An Ika learner of English may have problems with the position of modifiers and nouns in phrases.
2. Learners would find it difficult in identifying modifiers and nouns because of the differences in their positions in the two languages.
3. Learners will also have problems of the formation of plurals. In the English language, there are so many ways of forming plurals and past tense.

It becomes difficult for an Ika learner of the English language to face problem of how to form plurals of words in the English language. For instance, because there are variations in the way plurals and tenses are formed, there is a problem of what form to use for a particular word. Is it 'persons or persones, is it boys or boyes, is it found or finded, is it bought or buyed, is it went or goed'. Learners are bound to make these kinds of problems because there are no specified methods to know their plurals and past tense and also because the acquired language has a different way of realising these. Ika language for example has just a word to represent plurality – 'bu oḍa'. In the same vein there are problems in the use of pronouns in sexes, formation of passives in English, etc. These problems abound because the realisation of the items are not identical with the acquired language – Ika. With the knowledge of comparative analysis, Bonathy, Trager and Waddle (2016) recommend that the task of the curriculum planners of a foreign language teaching program is to develop materials which will be based on these differences. The foreign language teacher is to be aware of these differences and to be prepared to teach them and the task of the student is to learn them. Therefore, all hands should be on the deck to make the mastery of the English language easier for non-native speakers of the language like Ika learners. These challenges should be considered by the curriculum planners while planning and writing the syllabus, and the learner on his own part should dispose himself to overcoming those challenges.

### Conclusion

The researcher has outlined and analysed some of the differences and similarities observed in the syntactic features of English and Ika nouns and verbs. These variables observed have proved that language is a system of systems i.e. every language has a structure of its own. In other words, no language should be modelled with reference to another language. If Ika language is described using English, no accurate data would be gathered. The two languages should be studied independent of the other by close observation and interrelation. The approach of the study of any language with respect to the structure would make the study of any language to be precise, empirical, logical, and scientific. This is good of the structuralism as against the unscientific, illogical, and prescriptive approach of the traditional grammarians who in their analysis of the study of the English language have used other Indo-European languages to describe English. Such has resulted in so many irregularities in their description of the language. One can conclude also that the knowledge of Ika language for instance may not enhance the learning of English language.

*Qualitative Study on Comparative Analysis of Syntactic Features of Verbs and ... Eboh, S. C. (2026)*

### Recommendations

Based on the analysis of this paper, it is recommended that:

1. the curriculum planners take cognizance of these challenges so as to proffer solution on how the difficulties can be tackled for effective teaching and learning.
2. Ika language should be studied independently of English looking at the vast differences between the two.
3. The teacher should concentrate on these difficulties, while students become serious with learning ability.

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