A Contrastive Study on French and Urhobo Phonological Systems—A Case Study of Articles and Demonstrative Structures

Carole E. Okenrentie, Ph.D.
Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria

It is a general knowledge that French as a language is widely spoken internationally whereas Urhobo is mainly spoken in the geographical location where it belongs. It is also spoken, and this, sparingly so, by Urhobo persons in the Diaspora. Presently, Urhobo has become a language of study at the Delta State University, Abraka. It has also been included in the educational curriculum for study at the lower cadre of secondary school education in the Delta State. This situation has triggered the author’s interest in doing a contrastive phonological study. The significance of this study is that it will highlight the salient differences in some of the grammatical aspects in the languages under consideration and also identify the difficulties that learners experience as a result of these difficulties. The author will also, as much as it is possible, proffer solutions to these learning difficulties.

Keywords: contrastive, study, French, Urhobo, phonology, articles

Introduction

There may have been contrastive studies done on the phonological systems of French and other Nigerian languages or dialects before now but that of French and Urhobo phonology is comparatively new. Akpofure (2015) provides us with a thesis titled Une étude comparée des systèmes phonologiques du français et de l’urhobo. This book, which may not be the first to study this aspect of French and Urhobo phonology, although to the best of our knowledge, seems to be the only available work on the French/Urhobo theme just now treats the subject on hand. It will largely serve as our reference as this work progresses.

The Urhobo language is spoken in the Delta State of Nigeria as well as in the Diaspora. Odiemo (2014, p. 1) puts the number of Urhobo language speakers at about one million according to the 2006 census, a number which could possibly be contested due to possible lapses in the census exercise.

Objective

This study is aimed at exposing language students to the differences and similarities which exist in the phonological systems of French and Urhobo languages. It is expected that an understanding of these differences will facilitate learning either of the French or Urhobo language as the case may be. (Let it be noted in passing that Urhobo, like lots of African languages, is fast becoming a second or even third language to the owners.)
Theoretical Framework

We will base this study on the Optimality Theory. Zuraw (2014, p. 3) cites Prince and Smolensky (1993, p. 1) as saying that this theory “…was developed as a response to a conceptual crisis at the center of phonological thought”. He also goes on to say that “in a 1970 Linguistic Inquiry article, Charles Kisseberth identified a ‘conspiracy’ in Yawelmani: rules of vowel insertion and deletion conspire to place every consonant adjacent to a vowel”.

Methodology

To fully treat this subject, the eclectic approach will be adopted since it is required that various technics be used to gather data for it. For example, there will be recordings that would help to determine the different sounds in both languages under consideration, verbal interviews, etc. This study will begin with the discussion of definite and indefinite articles. This will be followed by demonstrative structures. Under the demonstrative structures, we will treat adjectives and pronouns. Pluralization will invariably be treated in connection with all the areas under consideration since it is interwoven with articles, demonstrative adjectives, as well as demonstrative pronouns. The structure of this work is therefore as follows:

1. The Article;
2. The Demonstrative Adjectives (Determiners);
3. The Demonstrative Pronouns;
4. Phonological Processes;
5. Conclusion.

As it is, the French aspect will be discussed in this work, not because we do not know what the elements to be treated in French are, but because it is what we know of these reference points in French that will enable us to highlight the differences between its phonological system and that of the Urhobo language.

The Article

For Trueman (2015, p. 1), “An article (…) is a word (or prefix or suffix) that is used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. Articles specify grammatical definiteness of the noun, in some languages extending to volume or numerical scope”. Ade Ojo (2002) agrees with this definition when he states that:

Articles are the words used for presenting or identifying (the gender and number of) nouns, all the possessive pronouns and a few indefinite pronouns (like même, autre). Each noun is preceded immediately by the article, except when there is an intervening adjective before the noun. In which case the article is placed before such an adjective. (p. 58)

Mazet (2015, p. 1) affirms that “…French has definite articles, indefinite articles and partitive articles. The French definite article is the equivalent of the English the. But French has four forms of article défini…”.

Mazet goes on to name them as /le/, /la/, /l'/, and /les/. By this it is clearly affirmed that the French article has three different parts, i.e., the definite, the indefinite, and the partitive articles. This is different from the Urhobo situation where the article “na” has no parts other than one. Clearly the Urhobo article “na” is used to represent both the definite and the indefinite articles. As for the partitive article, this is not yet clearly represented in Urhobo phonology, although it will be more fully examined later on in this work.

The Definite Article

Ade Ojo (2002, p. 58) and Alden (1965, p. 197) also affirm that in French the definite article comprises of
/le/, /la/, /l’, and /les/. /Le/ indicates the masculine noun as in (1) le père; (2) le gillet; and (3) le bidon. /La/ indicates feminine nouns as in: (1) la mère; (2) la famille; and (3) la maison. The /l’/ is used when the noun in question begins with a vowel and it does not distinguish between the masculine and the feminine. The elision of the vowel brings about a contraction. This contraction makes room for a free flow of the sequence between article and noun, creating in the process, a more fluid and pleasant form of articulation. For example, instead of (1) /Le enfant/ [lǝfǝn], one says [lǝfǝn]; instead of (2) /la église/ [laegliz], one says /l’église/ [legliz].

The rule of vowel elision clearly applies here. Quite different from the case of the French article, this rule does not apply as touching the Urhobo article /na/. The Urhobo article “na” is the direct equivalent of the French definite articles /le/, /la/, and /l’/. Another difference between the French and the Urhobo article is that the Urhobo article ‘na’ does not come before the noun; it comes after it, as in:

Example: /Ômô nà/ l’enfant. Ex : (Ômô/enfant, nà/l’)

/Ômôshàrè nà – Le garçon
/Ômûtè nà/ - la fille
/Ôshàrè nà/ - l’homme

/Aye nà/ - la femme.

(The examples above as well as some others that will follow are extracted from Akpofure (2015, p. 200), not for want of other examples to give, but to clearly indicate how the Urhobo article /nà/ is appropriately used for the masculine as well as the feminine gender. The reason is that apart from persons most of the other nouns are without gender distinction.) The examples noted above also show that whereas in the French language, the article comes before the noun (or before the adjective, as the case may be), clearly indicating the gender of the noun in question; the Urhobo article does not precede the noun, or the adjective (as the case may be) neither does it distinguish between masculine and feminine nouns. In most cases, it also comes after the adjective. The French “l’” has no equivalent in Urhobo. The article /nà/ describes the masculine as well as feminine noun:

Example: /Ômôshàrè nà = le garçon

/Ômûtè nà = la fille.
/Ôbè nà = le livre.
/išikùrù nà = l’école etc.

When the sentence features an adjective, the article still comes after the adjective:


Pluralization of the Definite Article

The plural form of the French definite article /Les/ is used to represent both masculine and feminine genders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’homme</td>
<td>Les hommes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La femme</td>
<td>Les femmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le garçon</td>
<td>Les garçons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La fille</td>
<td>Les filles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This implies that the plural article /les/ does not distinguish between the masculine and feminine nouns. The determination of the gender therefore depends on the nature of the noun. The Urhobo plural form does not distinguish between the masculine and the feminine gender either. This therefore is a similarity in the plural articles of both languages. What happens in the case of the Urhobo article “nà” is that while “nà” remains, the initial vowel for the noun in its singular form modulates into a plural vowel as in the case of /o/ (singular form) changing to /e/ (plural form). This implies that it is the initial vowels of the nouns that show the effect of pluralization. This is what Oyiborhoro (2005, p. 77) implies when he says that: “Pluralization in Urhobo is essentially achieved by replacing the vowel at the beginning of the word with another vowel and change from a singular prefix to a plural prefix”. The singular prefixes are usually a, e, and i, depending on the nature of the word in question. The plural prefixes are generally e, i, and a. The following examples were extracted from Akpofure (op. cit., p. 200).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/əmə nà/ [əmə na]</td>
<td>l’enfant.</td>
<td>/əmə nà/ [əmə nà] les enfants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/əməʃərə nà [əməʃəre na]</td>
<td>Le garçon/éméshərə nà [əməʃəre na] – Les garçons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/əmətə nà / [əmətə nà] - la fille</td>
<td>/əmətə nà / [əmətə nà] - les filles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/əʃərə nà / [əʃəre na] - l’homme</td>
<td>/əʃərə nà / [əʃəre na] - les hommes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/əwən nà / [əwən na] – La robe</td>
<td>/əwən nà / [əwən na] – les robes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indefinite Articles**

Ade Ojo (op. cit., p. 58) and Alden (op. cit., p. 197) affirm also that the indefinite articles in French grammar are: /un/, /une/, and /des/. /Un/ is the masculine singular article and /une/ the feminine singular article while /des/ indicates the plural nouns. The Urhobo equivalent of /un/ and /une/ is /əvə/ [əvə].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Urhobo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Un</td>
<td>garçon</td>
<td>ôməʃərə əvə [əməʃəre əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Une</td>
<td>fille</td>
<td>ômətə əvə [əmətə əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Un</td>
<td>homme</td>
<td>ôʃərə əvə [əʃəre əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Une</td>
<td>femme</td>
<td>âyə əvə [əyə əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Une</td>
<td>personne</td>
<td>ôhwə əvə [õhwo əvə]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Akpofure (op. cit., p. 201)

This means that while in French the indefinite article serves as a prefix, in Urhobo it serves as a suffix.

**Pluralization of the Indefinite Article**

The plural form of the Urhobo indefinite article is /əvə/ as opposed to /əvə/ as used above. Note that there is a replacement of the singular vowel /ə/ [ə] with a plural vowel /e/ [ɛ]. Like the French singular indefinite article, the plural French indefinite article also precedes the noun but it does not distinguish between genders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Urhobo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Des</td>
<td>garçons</td>
<td>êməʃərə əvə [əməʃəre əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des</td>
<td>filles</td>
<td>êmətə əvə [əmətə əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des</td>
<td>hommes</td>
<td>êʃərə əvə [əʃəre əvə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Des</td>
<td>femmes</td>
<td>êyə əvə [əyə əvə]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Des gens [ihwo evo]. Akpofure (2015, p. 201)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urhobo:</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>òmòshàré évó [òmɔre òvo]</td>
<td>émèsìshrè évó [emɛre evo]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>òmòtè évó [òmɔte òvo]</td>
<td>èmètè évó [emɛtɛ evo]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>òshàré évó [òṣare òvo]</td>
<td>èshrè évó [eʃare evo]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>òyè évó [øyɛ òvo]</td>
<td>èyä évó [eyə evo]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>òhwoð évó [òhwo òvo]</td>
<td>ihwó évó [ihwo evo]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Partitive Article

French grammar features partitive articles. Concerning this, Ade Ojo (op. cit., p. 79) says: “The partitive, compressed form of de + definite article (du, de l’, de la. Des) meaning some, part of and from is used before concrete nouns that are uncountable or of undetermined quantity to express a certain quantity of something”. Alden (1965, p. 200), means the same thing when he says: “The partitive article consists of “de + the definite article agreeing with the noun modified… the partitive article is the plural of the indefinite article (which is omitted in English or expressed by the word some).” This notion of some has an equivalent in Urhobo - /évó/.

But it is not necessarily used with uncountable nouns. The Urhobo (article) /évó/ [evo] meaning /des/ in French is used with countable nouns as in /èmètè évó/ [emeɛre evo], etc., the singular form being /ỳɔ̀vɔ/ meaning un/une.

Example:

- òmòtè évó [òmɔte òvo] Un homme / èshàré évó èvó [eʃare evo] des hommes

/Du/ is more closely expressed by the Urhobo article /éme/ [eme], this being the prefix for /émerhà/ meaning /un peu/. “émè” is taken from the Urhobo word “émèrhà”. It is used for uncountable nouns such as /ámè - eau/, /émù - repas/, /èrhàré - feu/, /ùdí - boisson/, and /òkè - temps/.

Example: Bikò, kɛ vwe àmè [biko kɛu om ome] S’il te plait, donnez-moi un peu de l’eau.

Kɛwe éme èmù [kɛu em emu]- Donnez-moi un peu de repas / Donnez-moi du repas.

Kɛwe èmè èrhàré [kɛu em erhore] Donnez-moi du feu

Úmùdí je èrò? [umudí ʒ er] Il reste toujours du boisson?

Mè guòŋe ómò òkè [me gwɔn ɔm ɔke] Il me faut un peu du temps / Il me faut du temps

With the intransitive verb /aller/, the article + prepositions /a + le/ or /a + les/ result in /au/ or /aux/ as the case may be.

Example: /Je vais à + le marché/ Je vais au marché = Mí kpóò èkí.

This translation does not indicate a contraction of article + preposition. (No article is seen to have been used in the Urhobo sentence here.) This sentence indicates vowel elongation. In the Urhobo sentence, /Kpó/ is the verb /to go/ = aller. /ékí/ is the noun. This noun does not have an article. The partitive as well as the tense (present) is expressed in the lengthening of the vowel /o/.

Example: Mí kpóò… Je vais au…

- èkí Marché

Mí kpóò èkí / Je vais au marché

Demonstrative Adjective (Determiners)

Ade Ojo (op. cit., p. 217) also affirms that the demonstrative adjective helps to show or indicate other words; it points to the noun and agrees with it in number and gender. The demonstrative adjective precedes a
noun. He notes the simple form of the French demonstrative adjectives or determiners as: Ce, Cet, (masculine), Cette, (feminine) Ces, (plural). Their Urhobo equivalents are as follows: Ce, Cet = Náná; Cette = Náná; Ces = Náná. These are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples:</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Ce garçon</td>
<td>Cette fille</td>
<td>Ces garçons / ces filles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urhobo</td>
<td>/òmòshàrè nànà</td>
<td>òmòtè nànà</td>
<td>èméshàrè nànà / èmètè nànà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Cet homme</td>
<td>Cette femme</td>
<td>Ces hommes / ces femmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urhobo</td>
<td>òshàrè nànà</td>
<td>ìyè nànà</td>
<td>èshàrè nànà / èyà nànà</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following examples show their usage in sentence structures. These sentences are taken from Martinet and Evans et al. (1971, p. 139).

1. Ce disque, Paul me le donne / òsètè r ùnè nànà, ìpòlù òvwèrò ìkêvwè.  
   [òsetè r ùnè nànà ipòlu òvwèrò kèvwè]

2. Cette serviette est à vous ? / òríàbò nànà, òwèwè yì òvwòrò? òwèwè yì òvw (e) òríàbò nànà ?  
   [òríàbò nànà òwèwè yì òvwòrò]  [òwèwè yì òvwò òrìa òwò]

The compound form of the demonstrative adjectives is created by adding the suffix /ci/ to the simple forms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples:</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Ce garçon-ci</td>
<td>Cette fille-ci</td>
<td>Ces garçons-ci / ces filles-ci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urhobo</td>
<td>òmòshàrè nànà</td>
<td>òmòtè nànà</td>
<td>èméshàrè nànà / èmètè nànà</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>Cet homme-ci</td>
<td>Cette femme-ci</td>
<td>Ces hommes-ci / ces femmes-ci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urhobo</td>
<td>òshàrè nànà</td>
<td>ìyè nànà</td>
<td>èshàrè nànà / èyà nànà</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Urhobo demonstrative article “nàná” does not really translate the French “ci”. For example, in “òmòshàrè nànà” the “ci” is simply implied. On the other hand, if one says òshàrè ètíñè nà, while it expresses “ci”, the demonstrative adjective nànà is thrown off. To retain it one would have to say òshàrè nànà.

**Demonstrative Pronouns**

Ade Ojo (2002, p. 217) as well as Lawless (2015, p. 1) affirm that the demonstrative pronoun refers to a noun that has just been mentioned and which we do not want to repeat, so the pronoun is used instead of the noun. Also, according to Lawless (op. cit.), “They must agree with the gender and number of the noun they replace”. Lawless explains further and says that “Each of the four demonstrative pronouns can refer to something nearby or far away” but that if one wants to stress one or the other a suffix can be used. Ade Ojo also indicates clearly the French demonstrative pronouns by splitting them into various groups: the neuter, simple and compound forms as follows:

**Neuter Forms:** (Masc sing) Ceci (Fem sing) Cela (Masc plu) Ceux-ci /ceux-là

**Simple Forms:** (Masc sing) Celui (Fem sing) Celle

(Masc plu) Ceux (Fem plu) Celles

**Compound Forms:** (Masc sing) Celui-ci, celui-là (Fem sing) Celle-ci, celle-là

(Masc plu) Ceux-ci, ceux-là (Fem plu) Celles-ci, celle-là

In the following table we have paired them with their Urhobo equivalents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
<th>Plural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fr.</td>
<td>Ceci</td>
<td>Cela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ceux-ci</td>
<td>/ceux-là</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Urh.  óná
Fr.  Celui
Urh.  ó ré
Fr.  Celui-ci
Urh.  óná ró étiné ná
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fr.</th>
<th>Celle</th>
<th>Celles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urh.</td>
<td>ó ré</td>
<td>É ré</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As touching the group of pronouns under study, it is noted that whereas French distinguishes between the masculine and feminine genders Urhobo does not. In Urhobo language grammar, the demonstrative pronouns refer to all nouns whether masculine or feminine. Here are some examples.

French Urhobo
(1) Ceci est le jour de joie. óná édé ré āghohò [́ọná ẹdɛ r aγγɔ]
(2) Cela est grande óyẹná rhórö [ọyẹná rhoro], óyẹná órode [ọyẹná ọrode]
(3) Ceux-ci sont rouges ënàná èvwàvwàrẹ [ẹnà ewaware]
(4) Ceux-là sont blancs ëyẹná éfuáfó [ẹyẹná elfwafo]
(5) Celui-ci est mon sac óná ró étiné ná ékpó mè [ọná ọ etine na ekpo me]
(6) Celle-là est sa serviette óyẹ ró óbóyì ná ékpó rí isikírù rí yè [ọye ọ oboyi na ekpo r isikuru rı yeye]
(7) Celles-là sont mes robes ëyẹná iwùn mè [ẹyẹn iwù me]

It had been noted earlier that Urhobo pronoun has no gender distinction but it does distinguish between singular and plural by way of vowel modulation as can also be seen from the above five examples. To serve as examples the following sentences are drawn from Martinet and Evans (1971):

(1) Je ne veux pas celui-ci. Je voudrais celui-là.
   Mé guòne óná ró étiné ná.
   Mé guòne óyẹ re óbóyì ná.
   [me ṣow ọna ró etine ná’] [me ṣow ọye ró oboyi ná]
(2) Je ne veux pas celle-ci. Je voudrais celle-là.
   Mé guòne óná ró étiné ná.
   Mé guòne óyẹ re óbóyì ná.
   [me ṣow ọna ró etine ná’] [me ṣow ọye ró oboyi ná]
(3) Je ne veux pas ceux-ci. Je voudrais ceux-là.
   Mé guòne éná re étiné ná.
   Mé guòne é re óbóyì ná.
   [me ṣow ena re etine ná’] [me ṣow e re oboyi ná]
(4) Je ne veux pas celles-ci. Je voudrais celles-là.
   Mé guòne éná re étiné ná.
   Mé guòne éyẹ re óbóyì ná.
   [me ṣow ena re etine ná’] [me ṣow eyɛ rɛ oboyi ná]

(Celui qui / ó ré), (celui que / ó ré), (celui de / ó ré).

Ade Ojo (op. cit.) further explains that: “In principle, the simple forms of the demonstrative pronoun are always followed by the preposition /de/ or any of the relative pronouns: qui, que, à qui, auquel, à laquelle (and their plurals). In Urhobo, this preposition is /re/, /r/ being the demonstrative pronoun. It responds to the question /Ọgọ?/ [ɔɔɔγɔ] - /Quel?/, /laquelle?/, /lequel?/.

A CONTRASTIVE STUDY ON FRENCH AND URHOBO PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

For all the prepositions which follow the French demonstrative pronouns, Urhobo has only one form. That is /ô ré/. It does not distinguish between masculine and feminine. It could be qui, que, à qui, auquel, à laquelle. The following examples are taken from Capelle et Capelle (1970, p. 70).

A. Celui qui / ô ré :

i. Il a lu la lettre qui annonce ton arrivée / qui est arrivée hier soir / Celle que tu as reçue.

Ô se ôbê rë ô vuê òvuê rë ëchâ wê ná rê / rë ô rhêrê vvê óvwôvvô ôdëÿê / ô ré ôtëwe ôbô.

ii. J'ai vu le film qui passe au Logos, qui a gagné le Grand Prix à Cannes. Celui que Pierre n'a pas aimé.

B. Celui que / ô ré

i. Ceux qui sont venus me voir habitent à côté d'ici

Ítû rë é rhê mrê vvê diâ këre étûnê  [itu re rhe mrê ve djakere tine]

ii. Celles que mon père a vues sont trop chères.

Írî i te ôsêmô ôbô ghàrè nô  [ir i to sem obo garere no]

C. Celui de / ô ré

i. J'ai pris mon parapluiie  Moi, j'ai pris celui de ton oncle

[se pri ma parapluii]  [mwa se pri solvi do ton skl(o)]

Mê rëye ëhârâhâ më rê  Òmévvê, më rëye Ô rë ônîôvô rë ôsêwê

ii. J'ai pris mes livres  Moi, j'ai pris ceux de ma sœur

Mê rëye ëbë më rê.  Òmévvê, më rëye Ô rë ônîôvô më

J'ai pris mes photos  Moi, j'ai pris celles de mes parents.

Mê rëye ëhôhô më rê.  Òmévvê, më rëye Ô re ôsêmô ve ônîmê

[me re yoho me re]  [omeve me re e re seme v onime]
Phonological Processes

Urhobo phonological processes which feature in this work include: (1) assimilation and (2) elision. One of the rules in Urhobo grammar stresses that though all letters in the word are written but not all of them should be pronounced. This means that like the French language, Urhobo words are not pronounced as written.

Assimilation

Akpofure (2015) also discussed assimilation. She quoted Aziza (2007) as saying that: “Assimilation is a process whereby a segment takes on some or all of the features of a neighbouring segment... In Urhobo, where there are contiguous vowels, and one does not delete, assimilation occurs...” (p. 288). The following sentences indicate the points at which assimilation occurs in Urhobo articulation of these words. The sentences in French used in the following examples are taken from Martinet and Evans (1971, p. 139):

Example (1) Ce disque, Paul me le donne /ọsêté ọ̀nà nànà, Ìpòlù vwèγ kèγwè. 
[ọsẹtẹ runà ìpòlu veγ kẹkẹ]
In this sentence the vowel [u] assimilates the vowel /e/. This compresses the two words /re/ (de) and /une/ (song) into one word /runè/, modulating the sound yet retaining the meaning.

Example (2) Ces disques, Paul me les donne /ísẹtẹ re inè nànà, Ìpòlù vwáyé kèγwè.
[iṣẹtẹ rine nana, ìpòlu uaye kẹkẹ]
In this sequence what happens to /re une/ above also happens to /re inè/. Actually, this assimilation occurs at the point of speech articulation, which is why /re inè/ is transcribed as [rine]. This calls to mind the fact that the last letters of French words are not usually pronounced. While this can be said to be a similarity, it should be noted that the unpronounced letters in French are not necessarily assimilated. They are just not pronounced in speech articulation.

Example (3) Cette serviette est à vous? órìabọ̀ nànà, ówèγ? [òrìàbọ̀ nana ówẹ]
órìabọ̀ nànà, ówèγ wè yì vwò́rò? Ówèγ wè yì vw(e) órìabọ̀ nànà?
[òrìàbọ̀ nana ówèγ yì vòrò] [òwèγ yì vòrò òrìàbọ̀ nana]
In this sentence, /vwè órìabọ̀ / also indicates assimilation when it is transcribed as [vw òrìabọ̀]

Example (4) Je ne veux pas celui-ci.         Je voudrais celui-là.
Mè guò́ñ ọ́nà ré étìnè nàá.      Òyè ré óbóyì nà mé rhá guò́ñ
[me guò́ñ ọ́nà ré etìnè na´]      [òyè ré óboýì nó me rhá guò́ñ]
Mè guò́ñ ọ́nàá [me guò́ñ ọ́nàá] óyèná mè guò́ñ ré [òyèná me guò́ñ ré]
/guò́ñ ọ́nàá/ [guò́ñ ọ́nàá] as well as /guò́ñ óyèná/ [guò́ñ óyèná] are also points of assimilation.

Elision

It had been noted earlier in this work, that at the level of the definite article, vowel elision is observed when two vowels come together as in /la église - l’église/, /la école - l’école/, or when a vowel comes in contact with the aspirate /h/, as in /le hôpital - l’hôpital/. It is not so in Urhobo. Both vowels are left in place in written form but elision takes place during speech articulation.

Conclusion

So far this work has treated various forms of articles as well as demonstrative structures. To conclude, we present a summary of the findings of this study.

(1) Unlike the French article, the Urhobo article has no parts other than one—“Nà”. It is used to express
the definite as well as the indefinite article. The Urhobo article “na” does not come before the noun. It comes after it;

(2) In Urhobo neither the article /nà/ nor the noun takes an /s/ to form the plural as with the French plural form. The initial vowel of the Urhobo noun modulates to another vowel according to the nature of the vowel in question. Ex: ëmò (sing) = Ëmè (plural);

(3) Quite like the French plural form, the Urhobo plural form does not distinguish between the masculine and the feminine gender;

(4) The Urhobo indefinite article /óvó/ does not indicate the gender of the noun whereas the French indefinite article /un/ and /une/ do so. Like the definite article, the indefinite article /óvó/ does not precede the noun. It comes after it;

(5) The partitive article /du/ does not exist in Urhobo. It has an equivalent which is the prefix of an Urhobo adjective /émèrhà/ meaning /un peu/, émé being the prefix. Thus we have /kèvwe éme ëmù/ - Donnes moi du repas. Literally, it translates as /Donnes-moi un peu de repas/;

(6) While in French the partitive article /au/ is got from article + preposition, in Urhobo, it is a process of vowel elongation that creates the equivalent of this process, hence the partitive article /au/ and /aux/ would seem not to exist in Urhobo;

(7) In French the demonstrative adjective comes before the noun. In Urhobo it comes after the noun. French demonstrative adjectives indicate genders; Urhobo demonstrative adjectives do not indicate genders;

(8) French demonstrative pronouns indicate genders. Urhobo demonstrative pronouns do not indicate genders.

**General Differences as Observed in This Study**

**The Use of the Plural “Vous”**

The French pronoun /vous/ calls into play the Urhobo pronoun /óvwá/. Apart from the generic plural form of /vous/, Coffey (2014, pp. 2-3) explains that “vous” is commonly used in formal or polite speech, generally, when speaking to older persons, or superiors as in a hierarchy for instance, or to unfamiliar persons. “Vous” can also be used to express displeasure or contempt. This implies that the French pronoun /vous/ is used in various contexts. The Urhobo plural pronoun /óvwá/ simply refers to the generic plural form as in “/óvwá ìhwó mè…”/vous mes gens”, “óvwá ëmònhà”/Vous les enfants/; “óvwá ìhwó re ìnàjìírìà…Ôghènè cha ëvwà ìkò!/Vous les nigérians!…Que Dieu vous aide!”

**Negation**

It was also noted that whereas in French negation was expressed with two words “ne…pas” with the verb in between; Urhobo simply adds another vowel to the end vowel as in /Mè guònhò réè/ [me gwɔnɔ re ` ] Je ne veux pas. Note that the additional vowel /e/ is transcribed with an extra tone mark. /Ô diè ómèvwèëè/ [ɔ diε œmèvөε ` ] Ce n’est pas moi; /Mè chá réè/ [me ʃɔ re ` ] Je ne vais pas manger.

**Voudrais**

Je voudrais celui-là. From the verb “vouloir”—to want. Urhobo does not provide a direct word to word equivalence of the conditional tense used in this sentence. For example:

Ôyènà mé rhà guònhò/J’aurais voulu celui-là. In this example, “j’aurais voulu” translates “mé rhà guònhò”. Meanwhile, “aurais” is the past conditional mood of the verb “avoir”. But “avoir” does not feature in the
French sentence “Je voudrais celui-là”. Urhobo amplifies the sentence in order to provide an acceptable translation, hence /je voudrais/ translates into “me rha guono”. Why not “Mé rhá guño òyènà” “Je voudrais celui-là”.

iLogosi

The vowel /i/ comes in here because, according to Aziza, cited in Akpofure (2015, p. 208), “That is a syllable structure constraint in Urhobo”. It is common therefore to hear Urhobo people say: /ígógônô/ instead of /gógônô/ - seau. /Mîshêlû/ - Michel, /Pîer/ - Pierre. As touching a noun that already begins with a vowel as in /âmô/ - /eau/, /ôdjà/ - /savon/, /ôphiâ/ - /couteau/, Urhobo has no problem. It was also noted that these initial vowels are most commonly used with borrowed words such as: /égânasè or égâlásè - glass/, /ôfôtô - photo/, /ôtása - tasse/.

References


