Aspects of Urhobo Grammar Taught Through Poetry:
The Verb “Edia” to Be

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Unquestionably, anyone born to Urhobo parents, being biologically Urhobo, should speak the Urhobo language. But does everybody born by an Urhobo parent speak Urhobo? From our observation, the answer to this question is clearly “no”. Many of the Urhobo people in the Diaspora as well as those at home have chosen to shift from their own language to other languages. Hence Urhobo language has gradually acquired the status of a second language. Therefore, its teaching would also veer away from language teaching methods that are used for first languages. Based on Noam Chomsky’s theory of Generative Grammar, aspects of the Urhobo grammar will be treated as we present specifically the verb “edia”/“to be”. As it is, it is being presented as a second language bearing in mind the great population of Urhobo people in the Diaspora as well as Mowarin’s “migua generation” of Urhobo children back home in Urhobo land. This being so, the methods applied in this study are the Grammar Translation Method Approach as well as the Direct Method Approach. To facilitate its learning especially for the new generation of Urhobo persons, the poetic approach would also be applied.

Keywords: Urhobo, grammar, verb, “edia”/“to be”, poetry

Introduction

Ojaruega (2014, p. 88) states clearly that “Anybody born by an Urhobo parent is an Urhobo”. Yes. However, it is a crying fact that not all biologically Urhobo people speak Urhobo. Many have forgotten the smooth and soft flip of the tongue that produces the Urhobo [r], or the curve of the lips when it articulates the phoneme [u]. The general reason given for this predicament is that Urhobo is surrounded by other tribes and languages. To support this here is what Darah (2014, p. 54) says. “The immediate neighbours of the Urhobo are the Isoko to the east, Ukuani to the northeast and Edo (Bini) to the north, the Ijaw to the south and the Itsekiri to the southwest”. As a result of this proximity, many Urhobo parents and children opt to speak izaw, itsekiri, kuani, etc., all languages of neighbouring tribes including the oyibo man’s pidgin, hence the second language status of Urhobo. According to the Chapparal Poets (2007, p. 2), “Repetition…is the purposeful re-use of words and phrases for an effect”. Also, Moritz-Saladino (2015, p. 2) says that “New research conducted at Cambridge University has demonstrated that all you need to do is see a word 160 times in 14 minutes to truly know it. …Learning is simple when you repeat”. This is basically the reason why, apart from other approaches, the poetic approach is being used. At this point, it should be noted that to learn Urhobo now, it would not only be seeing the word but also saying it that would help to fully use this repetitive aspect of poetry in teaching the Urhobo language. This is more so when the lesson content has to do with grammar. For this reason, I take my

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bearing from methods of conjugating verbs in the French language grammar. The first, second and third persons singular and plural of the pronoun would be established through poetry. Conjugation of the verb “edia”/“to be” will then be effected also in poetic form, first in the singular, then in the plural form.

**Objective**

The aim of this work is to create avenues for the great population of Urhobo persons who thus far have neglected the language to be drawn back to it, learn it, and speak it. It is also hoped that those of us who have stayed with the language and who speak it would improve on our knowledge of it, speak it more and possibly speak it better.

**Preamble to the Verb “Edia”**

The verb “edia” cannot be conjugated or used in isolation. Therefore, the pronoun and its use have to be established before progressing to the verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ediode</th>
<th>The pronoun</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eruo</td>
<td>Poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibaba ju vwe rhe</td>
<td>Papa sent me here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ni mi rhi n akpọ so</td>
<td>To verify life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi gbe iku roye vwo kẹwẹ</td>
<td>To tell you its story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oma obọ roye, jẹ ọ kerhọ</td>
<td>While himself is listening</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi dje ona roye vwo kẹwẹ</td>
<td>To show you its technics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oma obọ roye, jẹ ọkerhọ</td>
<td>While herself is listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Ihwo erha na ke na**

- **Ihwo erha na ke na** – These now are the three persons

- **Mẹ** – Ohwo re ọṣosuọ re ọvo
- **Wẹ** – Ohwo re ọvẹ ọ re ọvo
- **Ọye** – Ohwo re erha re ọvo

**Sentences (Questions)**

- Who sent you here?
- Papa sent me here

- That I should do what?
Nu wo rhi n akpọ so
Rere mị ru idie
Wo gbe iku ọrọye vwo kevwe
Oma obo ọrọye je o ru idie?
Oma obo ọrọye je ọ kerho
Omẹvwe – ohwo re idie?
- Ohwo re ọsusu
Owẹwẹ – ohwo re idie?
- Ohwo re iве
Oma obo ọrọye – ohwo re idie?
- Ohworọ erha

Illustrations for the singular form

Omẹvwe. = Ohwo re ọsusu re ovo
I/Me = First person singular

Owẹwẹ. = Ohwo re i ve re ovo
You = Second person singular

Oye = Ohwo re erha re ovo
Him/her = Third person singular

Ilhwo erha re ovo na gba re.
A gba reye aye vwo rue irhie re eta.

Iku egbe
Omẹvwe na
Ode me Ọvọke
Omẹvwe ohwo re Urhobo
Avwraka na, ọye me dia

Conversation
Here I am
My name is Ọvọke
I am Urhobo
I live here in Abraka
Omwegi Oyono
Mi yono ihuwo Urhobo
Karo phiyo ne omwegi ohwo rẹ ọsọọọ rẹ ọvo
Owegi, idie ye odede wẹ?
Ode me Ruona. Ogheneruona
Omwegi ye ohwo rẹ Urhobo
Obe Eko oye me vẹ Osem vẹ Onime dia
Me rihe Avwraka rhi yono obe
Me karọ phiyo ne “owegi” ohwo rẹ ivẹ
Oniowo me na. Ode roye Kesiena
Kesiena, ohwo rẹ erha.
O ji rhi yono obe vẹ Avwraka na.
Wo riẹnre nẹ ohwo rẹ erha, ọ tẹ otaa?
Ọ da tẹ ota tiọye na,
O roye edia rẹ ohwo rẹ ọsọọọ, jẹ ọ roye ọ rẹ ivẹ.

Enaọ/Questions
(1) Evu re eruo nana, ẹdia vọ oye Ibaba epa? …………………………………
    In this poem, what is Papa’s person? …………………………………………..
(2) Edia vọ oye Inene epa? ………………………………………………………
    What is Mama’s person? ……………………………………………………………
(3) Omegwei ọ ọ te otaa na, ọdia vọ oye me epa? ……………………………
    I, who am speaking now, what person am I? ………………………………..
(4) Owẹ wọ? Edia vọ oye wọ epa? …………………………………………………
    What of you? What person are you? …………………………………………. 
(5) Edia vọ oye Kesiena epa? ………………………………………………………
    What person is Kesiena? …………………………………………………………

E wọ kuo owo nana phiyo otọ, a gba
rhueroma se eruo na.
Poem
Ibaba ju vwe rhe
Ni mi rhi na akpo so
Mi gbeiku roye wọ kẹwẹ
Oma obọ roye, jẹ ọ kerho
Inene ju vwe rhe
Ni mi rhi notọ so
Mi dje ona roye wọ kẹwẹ
Oma obọ roye, jẹ ọ kerho.
Vwe ekuoma re eko re eruo na re e seri na,
a mrẹ re nẹ ẹko rẹ ọvo rẹ «ediode»
re eyono ri, ihwo erha eye ẹgba rẹ ihwo re
To conclude this section, let us read the
papa sent me here
To verify life
To tell you its story
While himself is listening
Mama sent me here
To verify life
To show you its technics
While herself is listening
From the piece of poem we read we see that the
singular of the pronoun that we have
just learnt is made up of three persons, first
ereye ota rẹ iruo na vwo phia. Ohwo rẹ èsosọọ rẹ ovo, ohwo rẹ ivè rẹ ovo kugbe ohwo rẹ erha rẹ ovo.

**Owọrẹ ivè**
Owọ rẹ e teri na, etinẹ e de ke yono kpahe “Ibuebu”.

**Ibuebu**
- **Avwanre** = ohwo rẹ èsosọọ rẹ ibuebu
- **Ovwavwa** = ohwo rẹ ivè rẹ ibuebu
- **Aye** = Ohwo rẹ erha rẹ ibuebu

**Illustrations for the plural form**

**Poem**
Ibaba vẹ Inene je avwanre rhe
N avwanre rhi n akpo so
Me gbe iku rọye vwo ke ovwavwa
Oma obọ r aye, je aye kerhọ

**Questions**
(1) **Avwanre**, otu rẹ ọdịa vô?
(2) **Ovwavwa**, otu rẹ ọdịa vô?
(3) **Aye**, otu rẹ ọdịa vô?

**Sentences**
(1) Omęvwę Oyono

**Step two**
Next we will learn the “Plural”.

**Plural**
- **We** = First person plural
- **You** = Second person plural
- **They** = Third person plural

**Irhie re eta**
(1) Omęvwę Oyono

**Eruo**
Ibaba vẹ Inene je avwanre rhe
N avwanre rhi n akpo so
Me gbe iku rọye vwo ke ovwavwa
Oma obọ r aye, je aye kerhọ

**Poem**
Father and Mother sent us here
That we should come and verify life
And tell you its story
While they themselves are listening.

**Questions**
What person is “we”?
What person is “you”?
What person is “they”?

**Sentences**
I am a teacher
(2) Owewe Orhere You are a nurse
(3) Oye Oneri He/she is a trader
(4) Avwanre emo re Akpofure We are Akpofure’s children
(5) Ovwavwa emo re Oshevire You are Oshevire’s children
(6) Aye, emo re Orhere na They are the Nurse’s children.
(7) Ose me Ohonvwo O My father is a chief
(8) Ese ose me Ese is my friend
(9) Ese evu re ukoni Ese is in the kitchen.
(10) Ese se vwe Ese is calling me.

Enan/Question Affirmative Ekpari/Response
(1) Owewe Oyono? E. Omevwe Oyono
(2) Owewe Orhere? E. Mewwe Orhere
(3) Oni we Oneri? E. Oni me Oneri
(4) Ovwavwa emo re isada esa? E. Avwanre emo re isada esa

Negative
(1) Owewe Orhere? Ejo. Me die Orheree
(2) Owewe Oyono? Ejo. Me die Oyonoo
(3) Ese osi we? Ejo. Ese die osemee
(4) Owewe Oghwere? Ejo. Me die Oghweree
(5) Ose we Onokpa? Ejo. Oseme die Onokpa.

Iku egbe/Conversation
– Omeg Mewwe je ohwo re urhobo. Mewwe o re Uhwokori. Wewe o re Urhobo re itivo?
– Mewwe o re Okpara.
– Ewe? Eloho, we o re Okpara? Ke oye avwanre ihwiv na ihwo re Agbon! Avwanre ke imoni!
– Etiyoe o epaa.

Si ekparo phiyi enan ona./Write the answers to these questions in Urhobo.
(1) Ovoke ohwo re igbo?
(2) Ovoke ohwo re itivo?
(3) Eloho ohwo re itivo vwo Urhobo?
(4) Ekuoto re Urhobo vwo eye Uhwokori vee Okpara epaa?
(5) Tivo oye Ovoke vee Eloho da die imoni?

Ivokabulari: (1) Ovoke – (Noun) Someone’s name; (2) Ohwo – somebody/person; (3) Igbo – (Noun) Name of a tribe and the language; (4) Urhobo – (Noun) Name of a tribe and language; (5) Uhwokori – (Noun) Name of a town in Urhoboland; (6) Itivo – where; (7) Okpara – (Noun) Name of a town in Urhobo land; (8) Agbon – (Noun) Name of a clan; (9) Imoni – siblings; and (10) Etiyoe o epaa. – That’s how it is/That is how it is.

E yono kpahe ihwo esa re a vw o reye eta re Iruo vw o wian nu re
A gba reye aye vwo yono ota re iruo “edia”. We have now learnt of the six persons that are used in the conjugation of verbs.

Let us now use them to learn the verb “edia”.

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ASPECTS OF URHOBO GRAMMAR TAUGHT THROUGH POETRY

Ota rɛ iruo “Ędia”
Ovo
Omɛvwę erọ,  
Owɛvwę erọ,  
Oye erọ -
Ibuebu
Avwanre erọ,  
Ovwavwa erọ,  
Aye erọ

A gba reye ota re iruo na vwo si eruo ovo
re e se ne “Ono yi jire edia?” tavwe.
Omɛvwę erọ, Owɛvwę erọ, Ọye erọ.
Me da erọ, wọ da erọ, oye da erọ,
Ono kọye jiro edia?
Ihwe eje ero.
Ovwę ohwo ro jiro ędia
Avwanre ihwo eje erọ
Ovwavwa ihwo eje erọ
Aye ihwo eje erọ
Avwanre da erọ
Ovwavwa da erọ
Aye da erọ
Ono kọye jiro ędia?
Ihwe eje ero.
Ovwe ohwo rɛ o jiro ędiaa.

E vwo kuo phiyo oto, a gba rhuɛroma se Eruo na,
Eruo
Ibabaju vве rhe
Ni mi rhi n akpọ so
Mi gbe iku royɛ vwo kɛwɛ
Oma obọ royɛ, je ọ kerhọ
Inene ju vве rhe
Ni mi rhi notọ so
Mi dje ona royɛ vwo kɛwɛ
Oma obọ royɛ, je ọ kerhọ
Mɛvwę ohwo rɛ ɛsosọ
Owɛvwę ohwo ɛvɛ
Oma obọ royɛ, Ohwo re erha

The verb “To be”
Singular
I am  
You are  
He/she is
Plural
We are  
you are  
They are

With this verb, let us now write a poem titled
“If who is not?”
I am, You are, He/she is.
If I am, and you are, and he is,
Who then is not?
Everyone is.
There is no one who is not
We all are
You all are
They all are
If we are
And you are
And they are
Who then is not?
Everyone is.
There is no one who is not.

To conclude let us read the poem again.

Poem
Papa sent me here
To verify life
To tell you its story
While himself is listening
Mama sent me here
To verify life
To show you its technics
While herself is listening
I am first person
You are second person
He himself is third person
Conclusion

This work is about the teaching and learning of the Urhobo verb “edia”. However, before attempting this task, we had to first learn the usage of the pronoun Omęvwę, Owewę, Øye, etc.

It was stated at the beginning that the writer had in mind the Urhobo persons in the Diaspora as well as the new generation of Urhobo, for whom English had become first language and Urhobo, second language. For these groups of persons the English version had to be provided. This version should not be seen as a work of translation because it is not. It is somehow an equivalent of the Urhobo content which came spontaneously as the work progressed. This is evident in sequences like “Oma obo royehimself, herself”. This could also have been “she herself”. But poetry is also involved here, and as such there is economy of words. What is important however, is for Urhobo to be led back to her language and it is expected that this will be accomplished as time goes on.

The claim to have fully exhausted all that there is to know about this particular verb “edia” is not made here. There is a lot more to teach and to learn, but time and space constraints have forced this work to stop at this point. As time permits it will still be revisited in the very near future. This work is open to criticism, correction, addition, subtraction if need be, because no one person knows everything, especially when it has to do with language because it evolves. And the Urhobo language has come to a time when it must perforce grow and evolve.

References


