

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 “miguo 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 [v]. 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 Chapparral 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

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.

Ediode

Eruo

Ibaba ju **vwe** rhe

Ni **mi** rhi n akpọ so

Mi gbe iku rọye vwọ kẹwẹ

Oma obọ **rọye**, je ọ kerhọ

Inene ju **vwe** rhe

Ni **mi** rhi n otọ so

Mi dje ona rọye vwọ kẹwẹ

Oma obọ **rọye**, je ọkerhọ

Omẹvwẹ – ohwo rẹ ẹsosuọ rẹ ọvo

“Me” – Omẹvwẹ

Owẹwẹ – ohwo rẹ ivẹ rẹ ọvo

wẹ – Owẹwẹ

Oma obọ **rọye**

Oma obọ **rọye**

Oma obọ **rọye** Je ọ kerhọ

Qye – Ohwo rẹ erha rẹ ọvo

Ihwo erha na ke na

Me – Ohwo rẹ ẹsosuọ rẹ ọvo

We – Ohwo rẹ ivẹ rẹ ọvo

Qye – Ohwo rẹ erha rẹ ọvo

Irhiẹ rẹ eta (enanọ)

Ono yi ju **we** rhe?

Ibaba yi ju **vwe** rhe

Ni **mi** rhi ru idie?

The pronoun

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 singular

Me

You are second person singular

You

He himself

She herself

He himself/she herself is listening

He/She – is third person singular

These now are the three persons

I – First person singular

You – Second person singular

He/She – Third person singular

Sentences (Questions)

Who sent **you** here?

Papa sent **me** here

That **I** should do what?

Nu **wo** rhi n akpo so
 Rere **mi** ru idie
Wo gbe iku roye vwo keṣwe
 Oma obọ **roye** je o ru idie?
 Oma obọ **roye** je o kerho
Omeṣwe – ohwo re idie?
 – Ohwo re esoso
Oweṣwe – ohwo re idie?
 – Ohwo re ive
Oma obọ roye – ohwo re idie?
 – Ohwo re erha

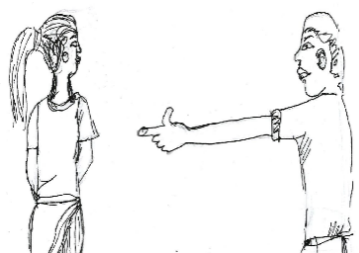
That **you** should verify life.
 For **me** to do what?
 To tell its story to me
 While **he** does what?
 While **he himself** listens
Me – What person am I?
 – First person
You – what person are you?
 – Second person
He himself, She herself is what person?
 – Third person

Illustrations for the singular form



Omevwe. = Ohwo re esoso re ovo

I/Me = First person singular



Oweve. = Ohwo re ive re ovo

You = Second person singular



Oye = Ohwo re erha re ovo

Him/her = Third person singular

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

Iku egbe

Omeṣwe na
 Ode me Oṣoke
 Omeṣwe ohwo re Urhobo
 Avwra na, oye me dia

The three persons of the singular form is now complete.
 Let us make sentences with them now.

Conversation

Here I am
 My name is Oṣoke
 I am Urhobo
 I live here in Abraka

Omeṣvwe Oyono
 Mi yono ihwo Urhobo
 Karo phiyo ne **omeṣvwe** ohwo re ẹsosuo re **ovo**
Oweṣwe, idie ye ode we?
 Ode **me** Ruona. Ogheneruona
Omeṣvwe je ohwo re Urhobo
 Obẹ Eko oye me ve Osemẹ ve Onime dia
 Me rhiẹ Avwaka rhi yono obe
 Me karo phiyo ne “**oweṣwe**” ohwo re ive
 Oniovo me na. Ode roye Kesiena
 Kesiena, ohwo re erha.
 O ji rhi yono obe vwe Avwaka na.
 Wo riñre ne ohwo re erha, o te otaa?
 O da te ota tiye na,
 O reye edia re ohwo re ẹsosuo,
 je o reye o re ive.

Enano/Questions

- (1) Evu re eruo nana, edia vo oye Ibaba epha?
- In this poem, what is Papa's person?
- (2) Edia vo oye Inene epha?
- What is Mama's person?
- (3) Omeṣvwe re o te ota na, edia vo oye me epha?
- I, who am speaking now, what person am I?
- (4) Owe vwo? Edia vo oye wo epha?
- What of you? What person are you?
- (5) Edia vo oye Kesiena epha?
- What person is Kesiena?

E vwo kuo owọ nana phiyo otọ, a gba
 rhueroma se eruo na.

Eruo

Ibaba ju vwe rhe
 Ni mi rhi n akpo so
 Mi gbe iku roye vwọ kewe
 Oma obọ roye, je o kerho
 Inene ju vwe rhe
 Ni mi rhi notọ so
 Mi dje ona roye vwọ kewe
 Oma obọ roye, je o kerho.
 Vwe ekuoma re eko re eruo na re e seri na,
 a mre re ne eko re ovo re «ediode»
 re eyono ri, ihwo erha eye egba re ihwo re

I am a teacher
 I teach Urhobo language
 Remember that **me**, **I am** first person singular
You, what is your name?
My name is Ruona. Ogheneruona
I too, **I am** urhobo
 I live at Lagos with my father and mother
 I came to Abraka for studies
 I remember that “**you**” is second person
 Here is my sister. Her name is Kesiena
 Kesiena, “she” is third person
 She also came to study in Abraka
 Do you know that the third person does not speak?
 If he speaks now
 If he does not take the place of first person
 He takes that of the second person.

To conclude this section, 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
 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 vwọ phia. Ohwo rẹ
 ẹsosuọ rẹ ọvo, ohwo rẹ ive rẹ ọvo kugbe
 ohwo rẹ erha rẹ ọvo.

Owọrẹ ivẹ

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

Ibuebu

Avwanre = ohwo rẹ ẹsosuọ rẹ ibuebu

Ovwavwa = ohwo rẹ ivẹ rẹ ibuebu

Aye = Ohwo rẹ erha rẹ ibuebu

Illustrations for the plural form



Avwanre = Ohwo re esosuo re ibuebu

We = First person plural



Ovwavwa = Ohwo re ive re ibuebu **You** = second person plural.



Aye = Ohwo re erha re ibuebu

They = Third person plural.

Eruo

Ibaba vẹ Inene je avwanre rhe
 N avwanre rhi n akpọ so
 Me gbe iku rọye vwọ ke ovwavwa
 Oma obọ r aye, je aye kerhọ

Enanọ

- (1) **Avwanre**, otu rẹ ẹdia vọ?
- (2) **Ovwavwa**, otu rẹ ẹdia vọ?
- (3) **Aye**, otu rẹ ẹdia vọ?

Irhie re eta

- (1) Omẹvwẹ Oyono

person, second person and third person singular.

Step two

Next we will learn the “Plural”.

Plural

We = First person plural

You = Second person plural

They = Third person plural

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 Oneki	He/she is a trader
(4) Avwanre emọ rẹ Akpofure	We are Akpofure's children
(5) Ovwavwa emọ rẹ Oshevire	You are Oshevire's children
(6) Aye, emo re Orhere na	They are the Nurse's children.
(7) Oşę mę Ohonvwonre	My father is a chief
(8) Eşę ose mę	Ese is my friend
(9) Eşę evu re ukoni	Ese is in the kitchen.
(10) Eşę se vwe.	Ese is calling me.

Enano/Question**Affirmative****Ekparọ/Response**

(1) Owęwę Oyono?	E. Omęvwę Oyono
(2) Owęwę Orhere?	E. Męvwę Orhere
(3) Oni we Oneki?	E. Oni me Oneki
(4) Ovwavwa emọ rẹ isada esa?	E. Avwanre emọ rẹ isada esa
(5) Aye emọ rẹ Orhere na?	E. Aye emọ rẹ Orhere na.

Negative

(1) Owęwę Orhere?	Ejo. Me dię Orheree
(2) Owęwę Oyono?	Ejo. Me dię Oyonoo
(3) Eşę oşę we?	Ejo. Eşę dię oşemę
(4) Owęwę Oghwẹre	Ejo. Me die Oghwẹree
(5) Oşę wę Onokpa?	Ejo. Oşemę dię Onokpaa.

Iku egbe/Conversation

- Ovọke. **Węwę** ohwo rẹ igbo? Ejo. **Mę** dię ohwo rẹ igboo. **Męvwę** ọ rẹ urhobo. **Kę owę** vwo?
- Omę? **Męvwę** ję ohwo rẹ urhobo. **Męvwę** ọ rẹ Uhwokori. **Węwę** ọ rẹ Urhobo rẹ itivo?
- **Męvwę** ọ rẹ Okpara.
- Eye? Elohọ, wę ọ rẹ Okpara? Kę oye avwanre ihwivę na ihwo rẹ Agbon! Avwanre kę imoni!
- Etiọye ọ epha.

Si ekparọ phiye enano nana./Write the answers to these questions in Urhobo.

- (1) Ovọke ohwo rẹ igbo?
- (2) Ovọke ohwo rẹ itivo?
- (3) Elohọ ohwo rẹ itivo vwę Urhobo?
- (4) Ekuoto rẹ Urhobo vọ eye Uhwokori vę Okpara epha?
- (5) Tivo oye Ovọke vę Elohọ da dię imoni?

Ivokabulari: (1) Ovọke – (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) Etiọye ọ epha. – That's how it is/That is how it is.

E yono kpahe ihwo esa rẹ a vwọ reye eta rẹ

Iruo vwọ wian nu re

A gba reye aye vwo yono ota rẹ 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".

Ota re iruo “Edia”**Qvo**

Omẹvwe ero,

Owẹwe ero,

Oye ero -

Ibuebu

Avwanre ero,

Ovwavwa ero,

Aye ero

A gba reye ota re iruo na vwo si eruo ovo

re e se ne “Ono yi jire edia?” tavwe.

Omẹvwe ero, Owẹwe ero, Oye ero.

Me da ero, wọ da ero, oye da ero,

Ono koye jiro edia?

Ihwe eje ero.

Ovwe ohwo ro jiro ediaa

Avwanre ihwo eje ero

Ovwavwa ihwo eje ero

Aye ihwo eje ero

Avwanre da ero

Ovwavwa da ero

Aye da ero

Ono koye jiro edia?

Ihwe eje ero.

Ovwe ohwo re o jiro ediaa.

E vwo kuo phiyo oto, a gba rhuroma se**Eruo na,****Eruo**

Ibaba ju vwe rhe

Ni mi rhi n akpo so

Mi gbe iku roye vwo kewe

Oma obọ roye, je o kerho

Inene ju vwe rhe

Ni mi rhi notọ so

Mi dje ona roye vwo kewe

Oma obọ roye, je o kerho

Mẹvwe ohwo re esosuo

Owẹwe ohwo re ivẹ

Oma obọ roye, 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

“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 Omẹvwẹ, Owẹwẹ, Oye, 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 obọ roye/himself, 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.

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