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# A Study Of Inflectional Markers In English And Izoṅ

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## ABSTRACT

This study sets out to identify inflectional markers in English and Izoṅ based on word categories. The aim is to identify the inflection markers and state the differences between English and Izoṅ. Data was collected using the fieldwork method complemented by language textbooks. The theory adopted is contrastive analysis and the simple descriptive approach is used in analyzing the data. After the data analyses, the following findings are identified. Inflectional markers are present in both languages. English has more ways of forming plurals than Izoṅ. Negation suffix can be attached to Izoṅ main verbs and adjectives unlike English language that only auxiliary verbs accommodate negations. It is observed that there is a slight difference in the tense formations between the two languages. In all, a knowledge of these differences thus enhances the learners' ability to learn the second language easily.

**Keywords:** Inflection, word categories, number, person, case and tense

## INTRODUCTION

Every language is made up of words, and expressions are made through the medium of words. Language is dynamic owing to the fact that people come in contact with other cultures and languages and they imbibe the positive aspects of the culture and possibly borrow words from the language. According to Kaliai et al (2017) man, in attempt not to limit himself to his immediate environment, has been propelled by quest for knowledge to know places, things and activities in other regions. New places, things and activities require new names. Besides, as society develops, new names are given to objects and places, and other coinages are made. The entrance of new words enriches the vocabulary of the target language thereby making the language to grow.

Morphology being an aspect of linguistics deals with the study of formation of words. Words are formed using meaningful units called morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest linguistic unit within a word that carries meaning such as 's' in bags. The addition of 's' in bags indicates plurality whereas the word 'bag' without the 's' is referring to one item. To illustrate further the word 'unbreakable' has three morphemes. They are: 'un', 'break' and 'able'. Consequently, these linguistic items are also called affixes. Affixes are elements attached to root words and they are of two main types called prefixes and suffixes. Prefixes are elements that precede root words and suffixes are items that come after root words.

In the same vein, there are two major types of morphemes and they are free and bound morphemes. Free morphemes can stand on their own, for example, 'able' in the word 'breakable' while the bound morphemes cannot stand in isolation; they need root word for support. Example, 'un' cannot stand independently; rather, it needs 'breakable' in order to be meaningful. Other examples are: 'il', 'dis', 'pro', etc that come before root word are prefixes while items such as 's', 'es', 'tion', 'ism', 'ise', 'ist', etc are called suffixes. Meanwhile, affixes can perform two main functions when they are attached to root words.

These functions are:

i inflectional function

ii derivational function

The main thrust of this article is to identify and analyze the inflectional markers in English and Izoṅ. According to Yule George (1996) a large number of language items or elements are not given separate listings in English dictionaries. These small bits of language are called affixes and some of them are inflectional in nature. Nordquist (2019) asserts that inflection refers to a process of word formation in which items are added to the base form of a word to express grammatical meanings. He continued by saying that the word “inflection” comes from the Latin *inflectere*, meaning “to blend”. Inflectional markers in English include the following:

The genitive/possessive ‘s’

The plural ‘s’

The third person singular ‘s’

The past tense -d, ed or t

The ‘ing’ forms of verbs

The negative particle ‘nt’

The comparative ‘er’ and the superlative ‘est’.

Inflectional makers in English take different forms but they are in most cases prefixes and suffixes. Note, inflectional affixes show grammatical categories in terms of indicating plurality of nouns such as mat - mats. Similarly, the same inflection -s at the end of laughs indicates that the subject is in the third person singular (she/he laughs). Also, it is used to show the past tense, changing ‘listen’ to ‘listened’ and ‘laugh’ to ‘laughed’ etc by so doing inflectional affixes are used to show grammatical categories such as tense, person, number and case.

However, it is pertinent to state that not all English words follow the rules as stated above. Some words are inflected using sound changes known as vowel alternations. Examples, sing - sang - sung for verbs and teeth - tooth or ox - oxen for nouns indicating plurality. According to language scholars, inflectional morphemes do not change the grammatical category of a word. That is, adjectives are still adjectives irrespective of the change of forms such as tall - taller - tallest; nouns remain nouns such as rat - rats and verbs stay verbs. For example, if you add ‘ed’ to the verb climb to show the past tense, climbed is still a verb.

Nevertheless, the rules that govern word formation processes differ from one language to another. Thus, before analysing the inflectional markers of Izoṅ it would be pertinent to briefly state the location of this ethnic group. The Izoṅ ethnic group is situated in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. They spread across six states in Nigeria as stated in Perefagha (2010) and Evilewuru (2013). The states are: Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Rivers. The Izoṅ language forms a distinct group within the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family of African languages. Williamson (1990) as was cited by Kwokwo (2012) confirms that the Izoṅs are of the Ijoid sub-group of the Niger-Congo family. The Izoṅs are of different sub-groups called “Ibe” and each “Ibe” has its own dialect. Derefaka (2003) as was cited by Kwokwo (2012) mentioned twenty-eight dialects of Izoṅ. According to Alagoa (1972) the degree of mutual intelligibility between dialects varies widely.

The Kolokuma dialect is used in this study and it is spoken in Kolokuma-Opokuma local government area of Baylesia state. It is the dialect of education among the Izoṅs in Bayelsa state owing to the fact that it was enacted by the Bayelsa state House of Assembly and signed into law by the former governor. Besides, Prezi (2014) asserts that Kolokuma dialect is of the central Ijoid classification and it has been extensively used in previous studies, especially by Kay Williamson and Egberipou including the Izoṅ translators of the Bible. This dialect is also used by the mass media (electronic) because it is intelligible to other Izoṅ speakers especially within Bayelsa state.

The affix common to Izo language is suffixes. Eneware (2015), Ekiugbo and Ayunku (2018) opined that there are no prefixes in Izo and the language operates exclusively on suffixes. The suffixes of Izo which includes the tense system of verbs are stated below:

ama, mo and otu are plural markers eg; kimimo, kimiama, akpo-otu, etc

nimi is the simple present tense marker

yemi is the present progressive marker

mi is the past tense marker

dou is the present perfect tense

nghimi is the future tense marker

nghidou is the immediate future tense marker

dėin/dėnghi/dėngi is comparative form of gradable adjective

fa is the superlative form of gradable adjective

Other forms of gradable adjectives in Izo. E.g, kami, bowemi.

### **A Brief Review of Related Literature**

Several scholars have examined the meaning and existence of inflections in their languages. Note, inflection is a major category of morphology and its presence or the degree to which it is exhibited in languages varies. In line with this, Haspelmath and Sims (2002) asserted that English makes more use of morphology than Yoruba one of the major languages of Nigeria. So also, there are several languages that make use of morphology than English. Thus, Booij (2005) claimed that English has a relatively poor inflectional system when compared to other languages such as French, Italian and Spanish.

Similarly, National Teachers' Institute (2000) declared that Igbo and Hausa are inflected languages unlike Yoruba that does not show inflectional affixes. Accordingly, Nweya (2013), Ezenwa (2018) affirmed that verbs are inflected for tense/aspect, mood and polarity in 'imilike' and 'ezeagu' dialects of Igbo language. Both scholars are of the notion that the strategies employed to achieve inflection in the two dialects differ from those of standard Igbo. Nweya (2013) gave an example of the Igbo verb 'je' which can be inflected to represent a number of syntactic functions within the same word class. 'je'(imperative) meaning 'go', eje (participle) meaning 'going', jere (past) meaning 'went', jehi (negative) meaning 'not go', jeela (perfective) meaning 'have gone'. He asserted that inflectional values also fall on pronouns, but mostly on verbs. Other scholars in support of the view that Igbo verb is the only grammatical category that accept affixes both for inflectional and derivational are: ( Okonkwo 1974, Emenajo 1978, Nwachukwu 1984 and Mbah 1999, 2011 among others).

In the same vein, Crysmann (2004) submits that verbal inflectional categories like tense and aspect are indicated by means of discrete markers that often fused with exponents of subject verb agreement in Hausa another major Nigerian language. He explained that tense, aspect and mood are reflected in a verb in its base form with the exception of continuous markers (absolute/relative/negative), where a gerund form of the verb is chosen, which is referred to as verbal noun in the literature. These verbal nouns are in two forms, that is, regular/weak verbal form and a strong form that morphologically behaves like a noun in a sentence. Example; *ainka*: 'sow'—*ainki*: 'sowing'.

Altogether, a look at the above brief review of literature in terms of the amount of inflectional complexity the major Nigerian languages manifest arouse the scholarly instincts of the researcher to undertake this

study. Thus, it would not be out of place to investigate if the Izoṅ language also portray inflections in its word formation processes like some major Nigerian languages.

### **Aim and Objectives**

Izoṅ Language scholars like Eneware (2017) and Egbuson (2022) have declared that Izoṅ has a fairly rich tense feature and this article aims at identifying the inflectional markers of Izoṅ based on word categories. This is done in relation to English inflections using the parts of speech.

Thus, the objectives of this article are:

1. to identify the inflectional markers of English and Izoṅ by word classes
2. to state the differences between the inflectional markers of English and Izoṅ.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **The Theory of Contrastive Analysis**

Language teaching and learning falls within the purview of applied linguistics. Most people are interested in learning other languages especially foreign languages for economic reasons. So many theories and methods have been developed to make language teaching and learning easier. Thus, contrastive analysis theory was developed to address the difficulties language learners face in the process of learning the second language or any foreign language. This theory is strongly connected to behaviourism and structuralism.

The proponents of this theory are: Fries (1945), Weinreich (1953) and Lado (1957) as was cited in Mbah (2016). Basically, contrastive analysis has to do with the similarities and differences observed in the two languages compared with a view of predicting the difficulties learners' will face due to the differences identified. Note, positive transfer occurs where the two languages compared are similar but negative transfer or interference occurs where the two languages are different. As stated in Lado (1957) and as was cited by Obadan (2016) in Mbah (2016) language teachers that are aware of the differences between the second language and the native language of the students will know better what the real problems are and proffer solutions.

#### **Procedure of contrastive analysis**

The method contrastive analysis is carried out is explained below. Whiteman (1970:191) as was cited by Obadan (2016) breaks contrastive analysis into four steps. The four steps are:

- (a) write a formal description of the two languages, that is, the L1 and the L2
- (b) secondly, pick forms or aspects from the description of the contrast
- (c) thirdly, make a contrast of the forms chosen
- (d) and lastly, make prediction of difficulty through the contrast observed in the two languages. The four stages of contrastive analysis could simply be seen thus; description or explanation, selection, contrast and prediction.

At the description phase, the structures of the two languages are compared comprehensively, second stage, a choice is made about the aspect of the two languages to be compared since it is impossible to contrast everything in the two languages. While the third stage is the contrastive analysis of the two languages and the last stage is where the errors or difficulties are analyzed including predictions.

Similarly, Ellis (1985) as was cited by Obadan (2016) summarised the above four stages in achieving the goals of comparison between two languages as follows:

- (1) description (ie, a formal description of the two languages is made
- (2) selection (ie, certain items, which may be entire subsystems, such as the auxiliary system, are selected for comparison
- (3) comparison (ie the identification of areas of differences and similarities
- (4) prediction (ie, identifying which areas are likely to cause errors, usually areas of differences.

From the foregoing, this article is anchored on this theory because it gives the researcher the leverage to compare the inflections of the two languages thereby bringing their similarities and differences to the fore. Thus, inflection is an aspect of morphology and morphology is an arm of linguistics.

## METHODOLOGY

The method used in this paper is descriptive. Language in general has to do with description because it involves observation and making conceptual categories without necessarily establishing rules. This design is used when the researcher's aim is to get information on the present status of a person, an object or event as they are without any form of influence.

### Method of Data Collection

The data for this academic paper was collected based on fieldwork. This is because the researcher is a native speaker of Izon and as a second language user of English it was easy for him to extract the required data for his analysis from written textbooks in English.

### Method of Data Analysis

The data was analysed using the simple descriptive approach. In order to identify the inflectional markers easily in both languages various tables are drawn based on word classes. From these tables, it becomes easy to point out the similarities and differences of the inflectional markers of English and Izon.

## PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

Generally, words make up language and words are easily understood better if they are analysed based on word classes. English language has eight parts of speech and out of these there are some word categories that attract inflectional markers. The parts of speech that accommodate inflectional markers are: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs. Thus, words that portray inflection in each word category are listed below in the table for easy identification. The table drawn below shows the parts of speech, grammatical meanings, inflection markers with words exemplifying them.

Table 1: Inflections of Noun/Pronoun/Verb/Adjective and Adverb in English

Parts of speech	Grammatical meanings	Inflection markers	Examples
Noun	Number	- s, es, ies, ives, etc	Bag - bags/ fox - foxes Lady- ladies/ wife - wives Ox - oxen/ sheep - sheep.
		's or s'	Mary's / Princess' bag.
		Case (genitive)	
Pronoun	Case (genitive)	My - our	My car - our car
		Your - your	Your bag
		His/her/it's - their	His/her/it's cloth
	Subjective	I - we	I eat - we eat
		You - you	You eat
		He/she/it	He/she/it eats
		Objective	
Objective	Me - us	He gave me/us food	
	You - you	I gave you food	
	Him/her/it - them	She gave him/her/it food	
Reflexive	Self/selves	Herself/themselves	
Verb	Tense (present)	- s	Cry - cries

	Tense (past)	-ed	Cry - cried
	Aspect progressive	- ing	Climb - climbing
	Aspect perfect	- en, ed	Rise - risen/treat - treated
Adjective	Degree of comparison	-er	New - newer
	(comparative/superlative)	-est	New - newest.
	Irregular forms	Less/least	Little - less - least
	Free lexical item	More/most	More useful/most useful
Adverb	Comparative degree	-er	Soon - sooner
	Superlative degree	-est	Soon - soonest
	Irregular forms	Better/best	Well - better - best
	Free lexical item	More/most	More quickly/most quickly

In the same vein, words could be inflected in the Izon language using the parts of speech mentioned above with the exception of adverbs. The table below shows inflectional markers of nouns in Izon.

Table 2. Inflectional Markers of Izon Noun/Pronoun/Adjective

Parts of speech	Grammatical meaning	Inflection	Example
Izon Noun	Number	Definite - 'mo'	Owou (child) - owou <b>mo</b> (the children)
		Indefinite - 'ama'	Akpa (bag) - akpa- <b>ama</b> (bags)
		Plural marker 'otu'	e.g ama (town) ama-otu (town people)
		Definite plural marker -	kimimo(the men) - Kimi <b>owei</b> (Mr)
		Plural definite 'amini'	owei (man) - owe <b>iamini</b> (the men)
		Female gender = Ere (woman/girl)	
		'abàu'	Ere (girl) - ere <b>abàu</b> (girl/miss)
		'arau'	Ere <b>arau</b> (Mrs/madam)
		Plural definite - 'mini'/'minimọ'	Ere <b>amini</b> /ere <b>aminimọ</b> (the women)
		Izon Pronoun	Person/Number
Subjective case			
Àri (I)	Woni (we)		
Ári (you)	Ọ̀mìṅì (you)		
		Eri (he)/arau (she)	Ọ̀mìṅì (they)

Objective case	Singular	Plural
	Ì (me)	wó (us)
	Í (you)	ó (you)
	Wò/ù (him)/àrà or á (her)	Ò (them)
Genitive case	Singular	Plural
	Ìnè (my)	Wó (our)
	Ínè (your)	ínè (your)
	Wò/ù (his)/àrà or á (her)	oro (their)
Predicative adjectives	Singular	Plural
	Ìnei (mine)	Woi (ours)
	Ìnei (yours)	oréi (yours)
	Wòì (his)/àrà (hers)	orèi (theirs)
Reflexive	inèngò (myself)/àràngò (herself)/wòngò (himself)	

Izon Adjective Positive Comparative Superlative other gradable forms Negation

Ayá (new) ayá-**dẹ̀jìn** (newer) ayá-**fa** (newest) ayákami (very new) /ayábọ̀wẹ̀mi (very very new) ayá**gha** (not new)

Dùba (big) dùba-**dẹ̀jìn** (bigger) dùba-**fa** (biggest) dùbakami (very big) dùbabọ̀wẹ̀mi (very very big) dùba**gha** (not big) Kuro (strong) kuro-**dẹ̀jìn** (stronger) kuro-**fa** (strongest) kurokami (very strong) / kurobọ̀wẹ̀mi (very very strong) kuro**agha** (not strong)

Table 3: Inflections of Izon Verb

Izon verbs	Tẹ̀kirimẹ̀- ifí. -nimi	Bọ̀korodọ̀ -mi	Biemi -yemi	Bọ̀dọ̀ -dọ̀ Present perfect	Bọ̀lọ̀ nghimi	-	Bọ̀korodọ̀ biemi	-agha / kumọ̀ Negation
English verbs	Present tense	Past tense	Present progressive		Future tense		Past prog tens	
Akì (take)	akì <b>nimi</b> (take)	akì <b>mi</b> (took)	akì <b>yemi</b> (taking)	akì <b>dọ̀</b> (taken)	akì <b>ng̃himi</b> (will take)		akì <b>timimi</b> (had taken)	akì <b>agha</b> (not take)
Bo (come)	bo <b>nimi</b> (come)	bo <b>mi</b> (came)	bo <b>yemi</b> (coming)	bo <b>dọ̀</b> (come)	bo <b>ng̃himi</b> (will come)		bo <b>timimi</b> (was coming)	bo <b>agha</b> (not come)
Dẹ̀rì (laugh)	dẹ̀rì <b>nimi</b> (laugh)	dẹ̀rì <b>mi</b> (laughed)	dẹ̀rì <b>yemi</b> (laughing)	dẹ̀rì <b>dọ̀</b> (laughed)	dẹ̀rì <b>ng̃himi</b> (will laugh)		dẹ̀rì <b>timimi</b> (was laughing)	dẹ̀rì <b>agha</b> (not laugh)

Other Izon verbal inflections not captured in the above table are; remote past, transitive marker and the immediate future tense marker. They are analysed below with their inflectional markers.

1. Remote past verbal inflectional marker is the auxiliary verb “wẹri” + past tense marker “mi”. Example, **akiwẹri mi** - had taken
2. Transitive marker: the inflectional form of the verb indicating the transitive verb is “nimi”. Example, **akinimi** – taken
3. While the immediate future marker verb form in Izon is “nghidọu”. Example, **akinghidọu**” - about to take.

## DISCUSSION

A close look at the above tables reveals that both English and Izon languages are inflectional in nature based on their word categories. An outstanding similarity is that the different parts of speech that show inflectional markers are almost the same in the two languages. The word classes are noun, pronoun, verb, adjective and adverb for English language only.

### Similarities

Thus, nouns are inflected for number such as singular and plural for the two languages. Here are the suffixes indicating plurality in English: ‘s’, ‘es’, ‘ies’, ‘ves’, ‘en’, etc. Note that some nouns in English experience vowel change to show if they are more than one. Examples, foot - feet, man - men, etc. Besides, some nouns do not change their forms, yet they are plurals in English. Examples, news - news, cattle - cattle, etc.

On the other hand, plurals in Izon language using the Kolokuma dialect which is the language of education in Bayelsa State are formed by the various inflectional markers such as: **ama**, **mo**, **otu**, **amimi**, **aminimo**. They are the indefinite plural marker “ama” and the definite plural marker “mo”. For example, ogidi (cutlass) - **ogidiana** (cutlasses), buu (pond) - **buuama** (ponds), ẹbọlo (bead) - ẹbọlo**ama** (beads) and kimi (person/man) - **kimimo** (the persons/the people/the men), agbaka (shoe) - **agbakamo** (the shoes), etc. Apart from these major plural formations in Izon, examples of other plural markers as stated above are the indefinite plural suffix **amini** and **otu** that can be used for both genders which includes: ere (woman) - **ereamini** (the women), owei (man/boy) - **oweiamini** (the men/the boys), ere - **ere-otu** (group of women), owei - **owei-otu** (group of men) or akpo (world) - **akpo-otu** (people of the world). Besides, ‘aminimo’ is also another plural suffix that can be used with both genders like, ere (woman) - **ereaminimo** (these women) or owei (man/boy) - **oweiaminimo** (these men/boys).

Pronoun: It is obvious from the above data on pronouns that there is no unevenness between the inflectional markers in both languages. To explain further, there is no denial of the similarity between the inflectional markers of pronouns in terms of person, case, gender and reflexives in the two languages. Even though the Izon lacks morphemic representation of it/its that is, for the neuter unlike English, it is implied in course of communication. Besides, tonal marks are used to differentiate between ‘mine’, ‘yours’, ‘his’, and ‘ours’ in Izon.

For adjectives, both languages can be inflected for comparative and superlative degrees respectively from the above tables. For English, morphemes such as ‘er’ and ‘est’ is added to root words that are adjectives and some adjectives change their forms or take the free lexical items more/most to indicate the comparative and superlative degrees. Whereas, in Izon a separate word ‘dein’ which means more or surpass is used in all words to form the comparative and ‘fa’ which means very to form the superlative degrees.

By and large, adjectives specify the qualities of the nominals they modify and the tendency for an entity to possess more of a particular attribute than other members of its class cannot be ruled out. Thus, a typical adjective is gradable and can take degree expressions like ‘very’, ‘too’, ‘quite’, ‘much’, ‘rather’, ‘pretty’, etc in English to describe an object or person. For instance; ‘he is too stubborn’. Or ‘Her



performance is quite impressive'. Similarly, in Izoŋ the other gradable adjectives identified in this article such as “.....kami” and “.....bowemi” can be seen as degree expressions. These adjectival inflectional markers can serve as degree expressions and can be affixed to root adjectives to form other forms of gradable adjectives. Note, as degree expressions they can indicate if an entity has more of a particular attribute than any other member of its class. Examples; “ebi” (good) - “ebikami” (very good) or “uwa” (old) - “uwabowemi” (too old/very very old), etc.

From the morphological point of view, verbs change their forms to indicate tense, aspect, voice, mood, person or number. For the two languages used in this article verbs can be inflected for tense, aspect and mood. Language scholars claimed that tense and aspect have to do with time but in different ways. The two languages portray suffixes indicating various tense forms, that is, present, past and future as stated in the tables above.

Aspect is another verbal category that both languages show inflections. Some language scholars have argued that English should not be used to illustrate the difference between tense and aspect because they are not completely distinct. What holds them together is morphosyntax. Inflections are morphosyntactic items that are used to form sentences especially with tenses/aspect as the following:

1. Simple present tense - Abel sings everyday.
2. Present progressive - The athletes are running.
3. Present perfect tense - She has won the race.
4. Past/simple past tense - He got the job.
5. Past progressive - she was reading when her mother arrived.
6. Past perfect - The supervisor had left before the principal arrived.
7. Future tense - Pere will travel next week.
8. Future progressive - Ebi will be singing by this time tomorrow.
9. Future perfect - He will have seen the Provost by this time next week.

In the same vein, the Izoŋ language also uses suffixes to show how tense and aspect are marked together in the sentences below:

- 1) Simple present - Àri fiyai **finimi** = I eat the food.
- 2) Present progressive - Árau fiyai **fiyemi**. = she is eating the food.
- 3) Present perfect - Ebi **mudɔu**. = Ebi has gone.
- 4) Past tense - Eri fiyai **fimi**. He ate the food.
- 5) Past progressive - Àri fun **gotimimi**. = I was reading the book.
- 6) Future tense - Eri mị̄ng**himi**. = He will do it.
- 7) Immediate future tense marker - Eri bong**hidɔu**. = He is about to come.

Mood is another verbal category that can be inflected in the two languages. For English, the subjunctive mood can be used to express wish or possibility. It is usually formed by the subjunctive verb, that is, the third person present singular without the - s (or es) ing whether it is present or past. Examples:

- I. If I were in the church, I would teach the Sunday school lesson.

II. I strongly suggest that Mr Ala should write the business proposal.

Other modal auxiliary verbs used to express mood are: may, must, ought to, would/should. Example, she would like to dance during the traditional marriage.

Similarly, the Izon language also depict mood. Though this verbal category is not too conspicuous in Izon. Just the same, the inflectional suffix that signals mood is - mi. Below are some examples:

- a) Ought to - “Arau zimi egbenimi”. = she ought to give birth.
- b) Possibility - “Ú furu kpo puaghi”. = It is possible for him to steal.
- c) Uncertainty - “Kaghan timi ya tisabi bonghimi. = The teacher may come.

### Differences

Notwithstanding the fact that the two languages exhibit plural formations with the help of inflectional markers there are some differences. As languages differ so do morphological systems vary. The first noticeable difference is the vowel changing suffixes indicating plurality in English unlike the Izon language plural suffixes that are affixed to nouns. For instance, goose - geese, ox - oxen, etc. English has over five ways of pluralizing different words from table 1 above. Izon has five ways of forming plurals and they are the indefinite “ama”, “amini” and the definite “mo”, “aminimo” plus otu. According to Egbuson (2022) perhaps this glaring difference may likely be one of the causes of students finding it difficult to grasp the English language easily.

Another observed difference in the plural formation of the two languages is the absence of words that do not change their forms indicating plurality in Izon. In reality, Izon does not have such plural formations unlike English that has such words like cattle - cattle, sheep - sheep, furniture - furniture, equipment - equipment, etc to the best of my knowledge.

Secondly, “ma” is a definite singular inflectional marker for the female gender. Example, toḃou (child) - toḃou ma (the girl), ere (woman) ere ma (the woman). Other inflectional marker that can be attached to ere are: “abàù” and “aràù”. Example, ere (girl) - ereabàù meaning a young girl that is uncircumcised and it serves as the English equivalent of ‘Miss’. While erearàù means a full grown woman that is married or circumcised and it is the equivalent of the English word for ‘Mrs’ or ‘Madam’. Nonetheless, from table 1 and to the best of my knowledge as a second language user of English there are no singular inflectional markers whether definite or indefinite in English.

Furthermore, Izon has singular definite marker called ‘bi’ for the male gender and neuter nouns. It can be used for both animate and inanimate objects. Examples, toḃou (child) - toḃou bi (the boy/male child), kimi (the person/man) - kimi bi (the person /man), obiri (dog) - obiri bi (the dog), edule (lion) - edule bi (the lion). Examples of inanimate objects in Izon using the neuter marker ‘bi’ are: buru - buru bi, buu (pond) - buu bi (the pond), etc

Note, it is pertinent to state that foremost Izon language scholars like late Prof Kay Williamson, A.O. Egberipou, C.B. Agbegha, C. Akpoatimifa Oruekpedi, etc normally attach these gender/neuter markers such as ‘bi’/‘ma’ to the root words they occur with. Examples, toḃoubi (the boy/male child), toḃouma (the girl/female child), burubi (the yam), oboribi (the goat),etc. This school of thought of attaching the definite singular markers as can be seen from the foregoing examples is promulgated by some modern Izon language scholars like E.C. Eneware (2015, 2017), E. Egbuson (2022). However, some scholars argue that affixing the definite singular markers to root words is no longer in vogue in Izon. This argument is championed by scholars who are native speakers of the Kolokuma dialect like O.M. Kwokwo, Peter E.J. Nwankwe, etc. They are of the opinion that the definite singular markers be written separately as it is in this article.

Besides, in Izon, the plural marker ‘otu’ and the definite plural marker ‘amini’ can be used for both genders. For example, in some dialects like Kabou, words like owei (boy/man) - owei-otu (men folk) = male gender and ere (woman/girl) - ere-otu (women folk) = female gender. Also, there words like akpo

(world) - akpo-otu (world people), ama (town) - ama-otu (town people). Similarly, the definite plural marker “amini” is also used by both genders. Examples, owei (boy/man) - oweiamini (the boys/men), ere (woman/girl) - ereamini (the women).

In the same vein, for adjectival inflections there are noticeable differences between the two languages. Just like English, Izon has positive, comparative and superlative suffixes as can be seen in table 2. In addition to these, Izon has other gradable forms such as “bōwēmi” and “kami” in terms of describing words. Examples; ‘gani’ (expensive) = ‘ganiƙami’ (too expensive) / ‘ganiḃōwēmi’ (very very expensive) or ‘seḃi’ (bad) = ‘seikami’ (too bad) / ‘seibōwēmi’ (very very bad). As can be seen, these adjectival inflections are used to form other gradable forms describing the level or quality of the object or beauty of something. The Izon language is highly descriptive. Also, in Izon the negation suffix ‘gha’ can be attached to root adjectives. Examples, ‘záu’ - small/ ‘záughā’ - not small, ‘gani’ - expensive ‘ganighā’ - not expensive, etc.

In English, the past tense for regular verbs is inflected by -ed and the irregular verbs change their forms. For the future tense, a separate lexical item including the base form of the verb is used to form it. Whereas, the Izon language exhibits suffixes attached to the root verbs to form future tense. This can be seen in the following words:”subonghimi (will carry), tiṭenghimi (will sit), kpálinghimi (will spy), etc.

Note, Izon does not portray past perfect tense, instead it has what is called the remote past as stated in Eneware (2015). Example, Ári funbi tebulu gho koromọ wērimḃi. = I dropped the book on the table. Also, there is the past habitual tense marker in Izon. Example, Árau furu timimi. = she use to steal. Another point of difference is the absence of future progressive and future perfect tense in Izon language.

Here are the differences between the verbal inflections of the two languages. English has three main types of tenses: past, present and future. The future tense is formed periphrastically. Example: present - smile, past - smiled, future - will smile.

However, Izon has three different types of past tenses and two types of future tenses. Thus, past tense “mi”, remote past auxiliary “weri + mi” past habitual auxiliary “timi + mi”. For the future tenses: “nghi + mi” and immediate future tense: “nghi + ọu”.

In English, negation suffix such as not is affixed to auxiliary verbs only. While in Izon, negation suffixes are attached to main verbs such as mięgha = don’t do; akigha= not take, etc. Note, “kumo” is a free lexical negation word that can follow main verbs in Izon. Example, “mukumo don’t go, “akikumo” = don’t take, etc.

Adverbs in English can be inflected. The inflectional morphemes ‘er’ for comparative and ‘ést’ for superlative degrees are also used for adverbs. Example, soon - sooner - soonest, etc. In addition, irregular adverbs change their forms in different unpredictable ways to show the comparative and superlative degrees respectively. Example, well - better - best, etc. Periphrastic adverbial formations take the free lexical items ‘more’ and ‘most’ to show both the comparative and superlative degrees. Example, aloud - more aloud - most aloud, etc.

Comparatively, adverbs in Izon do not seem to portray inflection like English. It appears this is the only exception among the various parts of speech that can be inflected in both languages. This assertion is done to the best of my knowledge.

In summary, the malleability of words based on the parts of speech is largely dependent on the context or environment in which the word occurs in both languages. Thus, inflection is essential to syntax because word forms changes due to the syntactic position it occupies. Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) claimed that any change in form that is conditioned by syntactic factors so to say counts as inflection whether it involves affixation or not. In more clear terms, inflectional changes of the structure of words obey syntactic rules. Syntax, being one of the components of the grammar of a language determines the structure of words in different syntactic operations with the help of morphosyntactic items. In other words, there is an interplay between syntax and morphology.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the presence of inflectional markers in English and Izon. From the angle of historical comparative linguistics, the tendency to compare languages resides in the mind of language scholars especially from heterogeneous background all over the world.

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