

A CONTRASTIVE MORPHO-SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND ANGHAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This study presents a contrastive morpho-syntactic analysis of English and Anghan, a Plateau language spoken in southern Kaduna State, Nigeria, for which, to the best of the knowledge of this research, no documented grammatical description currently exists. Guided by Distributed Morphology theory (Halle & Marantz, 1993), the research employs a qualitative descriptive design with data drawn from audio-recorded conversations, songs, folk stories, and unpublished written materials, yielding one hundred and fifty sentences for analysis. The Item-and-Arrangement approach and Markedness Theory were applied to examine morphological elements, combinatorial rules, syntactic structures, and the interface between morphology and syntax in both languages. The findings show that Anghan is a highly agglutinating, noun-centric language with a systematic noun class system comprising at least ten classes, each triggering obligatory agreement on verbs, adjectives and pronouns, a feature entirely absent in English. Anghan exhibits productive prefixation, infixation, and reduplication, with seven distinct tenses marked through affixation, enabling mono-lexical expression of complex sentences. While both languages share SVO basic word order, Anghan consistently places modifiers after heads (N-Adj, N-Poss), contrasting with English pre-nominal modification. The study contributes to language documentation, provides empirical support for theoretical claims about morphosyntactic variation, and establishes a foundation for pedagogical material development and language preservation efforts.

Key Words: Morphosyntax, Contrastive Analysis, English, Anghan

Introduction

Morphosyntax represents a fundamental domain of linguistic inquiry that examines the intricate relationship between word formation and sentence structure, encompassing grammatical categories such as tense, number, person, and case that simultaneously affect individual words and their syntactic environments. Crystal (1980) observes that typological linguistic research frequently consolidates morphological and syntactic investigations under the unified rubric of "morphosyntax," acknowledging the inherent interconnectedness of these linguistic components. This interdisciplinary approach is particularly significant for understanding how different languages organize their grammatical systems, as it reveals the diverse strategies languages employ to represent syntactic features through morphological marking. Morphology, as Haspelmath (2002) elucidates, investigates the internal structure of words and the ways in which their structure reflects relations to other words, while syntax involves inquiry into the rules governing the ordering and connection of words to form phrases and sentences. The integration of these domains becomes essential when inflectional categories such as tense, voice, and number play crucial roles in syntax, affecting both the words around them and the words within which they occur, thereby demonstrating the interdependence of grammatical levels.

The imperative for comprehensive documentation and description of African languages has been long recognised within linguistic scholarship, with Pierre (1967) articulating a two-tiered approach to such endeavours. The first level involves the systematic description of individual languages to establish their structural properties, providing the scientific foundation for grammar writing and lexicographic work. The second level entails comparative analysis across languages to identify typological groupings and structural patterns. This study addresses both dimensions by undertaking a contrastive morphosyntactic analysis of English and Anghan, a language spoken in

southern Kaduna State, Nigeria, for which to the best of the knowledge of this research, based on verifiable evidence, no documented grammatical description currently exists. The research is motivated by the understanding that structural description not only empowers a language for public use and educational applications but also serves to preserve linguistic heritage for future generations. Gleason (1961) upholds that every language has a stock of meaning-bearing elements and different ways of combining them to convey meaning, implying that while word structures differ across languages, systematic similarities and contrasts warrant investigation.

Anghan, also known as Kamanton, belongs to the Plateau language family of Nigeria, with its speakers tracing their origins to the Jarawa hills region spanning parts of present-day Bauchi and Plateau States. Historical accounts by Bonnet (2010) document the migrations and settlement patterns of the Anghan people across various hill formations including Faagod, Faanghan, and the Kamanton hills, with subsequent dispersion to communities such as Kabam, Yangel, Shakwan, and Lena. Meek (1930) provides additional anthropological notes suggesting that Nadun, the ancestral father of the Kamanton people, first came from Kagoro, establishing settlements east of what is now Kamuru station. The language has faced pressures that threatened its vitality, including disease outbreaks and increasing dominance of Hausa, yet it persists as a living language awaiting systematic linguistic description. In contrast, English represents a West Germanic language that evolved from Anglo-Frisian dialects brought to Britain during the fifth to seventh centuries, subsequently developing into a global *lingua franca* spoken across approximately sixty sovereign states. The historical trajectory of English in West Africa, particularly through missionary activities and colonial administration as documented by Ajayi and Michael (1974) and Adetugbo (1979), has established it as the official language in Nigeria, creating a linguistic landscape where indigenous languages like Anghan exist alongside this global language.

The theoretical framework guiding this investigation is Distributed Morphology, introduced by Halle and Marantz (1993),

which posits that abstract morphemes comprising words are completely empty of phonological information until after syntactic operations have manipulated them. This theory demonstrates the interconnectedness of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic components of grammar, challenging traditional notions of the lexicon as the unit where derived words are formed and idiosyncratic word-meaning correspondences are stored. Distributed Morphology adopts a separationist approach where complex expressions are separated from phonological expressions, with syntactic hierarchical structure operating throughout all levels. The theory's core principles—late insertion, under specification of vocabulary items, and syntactic hierarchical structure all the way down—provide an appropriate framework for analysing how morphological operations in Anghan and English determine and constrain syntactic structures across both languages. This framework enables the researcher to examine how abstract grammatical features are realised through phonological forms after syntactic derivation, and how vocabulary items are inserted in contexts where they satisfy morphosyntactic feature requirements.

This study, therefore, seeks to address the significant research gap concerning the grammatical structure of Anghan by providing a systematic description of its morphosyntactic features in contrast with English. The objectives are to identify morphological elements in both languages, examine the rules governing the combination of these units, describe the basic syntactic structures of Anghan in contrast to English, and establish the interrelationships between morphology and syntax in Anghan. The investigation aims to answer critical questions regarding how morphological elements are realized in both languages, the patterns of their combinations, the basic syntactic structures of Anghan, and the extent to which the two languages share relationships or exhibit contrasts. By achieving these objectives, the research contributes to the documentation and preservation of Nigeria's linguistic diversity while providing empirical evidence for theoretical claims about morphosyntactic variation and the interface between morphological and syntactic components of human language.

Review of Related Studies

The foundational concepts of morphology and syntax have been extensively explored in linguistic literature, providing the theoretical bedrock for contrastive analysis. Haspelmath (2002) describes morphology as both the oldest and one of the youngest sub-disciplines of grammar—oldest because the earliest known linguists were primarily morphologists, as evidenced by structured lists of Sumerian words illustrating morphological distinctions; youngest because the term "morphology" itself was not coined until the second half of the nineteenth century. The discipline investigates the internal structure of words, with the morpheme serving as the smallest meaningful grammatical unit that cannot be further divided without destroying meaning (Lloyne & Usuf, 2007). Importantly, Haspelmath (2002) observes that morphological prominence varies across languages, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Cross-linguistic Variation in Morphological Expression

Language	Category	Expression	Example
English	Plural	Morphological suffix	<i>nut/nuts</i>
Yoruba	Plural	Separate word	<i>okunrin/awon okunrin</i>
Sumerian	Subject agreement	Morphological prefix	<i>budu/baduun</i>

Aronoff and Fudeman (2008) further elaborate that inflectional morphology involves concepts relevant to how words relate to other words in construction, with inflectional categories being obligatory, productive, and regular. Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams (2005) provide a comprehensive inventory of English's eight inflectional affixes, as shown in Table 2, demonstrating how these grammatical markers never change syntactic category but rather adapt words for effective sentence functioning.

Table 2: English Inflectional Affixes

Affix	Function	Example
-s	Third person singular present	She waits
-ed	Past tense	She waited
-ing	Progressive	She is eating
-en	Past participle	She has eaten
-s	Plural	Donuts
's	Possessive	Disa's hair
-er	Comparative	Shorter
-est	Superlative	Shortest

The relationship between morphology and syntax has attracted considerable scholarly attention, with Allerton (1979) conceptualising grammar as fundamentally divided into these two components. Anderson (1986) articulates the interface through identification of major interaction areas: agreement properties, inherent properties, configurational properties, and phrasal properties. Vanvalin (2001) consolidates these perspectives by asserting that syntax and morphology collectively constitute what is traditionally termed "grammar," with the alternative designation "morphosyntax" explicitly recognizing their fundamental interconnectedness. Baba (1998) demonstrates through Hausa examples that syntactic concepts play a role in morphology, showing how verbs are morpho-syntactically derived.

Several significant studies have examined morphosyntactic phenomena in indigenous Nigerian languages. Isunuoya (1998) investigated pluralisation in Emai language, revealing patterns summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Pluralisation Patterns in Emai Language

Vowel Class	Singular	Plural	Pattern
/o/ initial	obo (finger)	abo (fingers)	Vowel suppletion
/e/ initial	eto (hair)	eto (hair)	No change
/i/ initial	ime (farm)	ime (farms)	No change

Nwachukwu (2008) conducted a morphosyntactic analysis of Hausa and Jar languages, employing Transformational Generative

Grammar and Markedness Theory to identify areas of similarity and difference. The study revealed that while both languages exhibit morphosyntactic features, Jar displays unique characteristics in certain words and constructions without counterparts in Hausa, underscoring the importance of documenting minority languages.

Lilian A. (2008) provided an extensive description of Olusuba (Suba language) morphosyntax, discovering that Olusuba nouns lack free root morphemes—unlike English where words like *girl* and *chair* stand independently, Olusuba equivalents require appropriate noun class prefixes as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Bound Roots in Olusuba vs. Free Roots in English

English	Olusuba	Morphological Structure
Girl	<i>o-mwala</i>	prefix + root
Tree	<i>e-miti</i>	prefix + root
water	<i>a-magi</i>	prefix + root

Michael A. (2016) contributed a critical perspective through morphosyntactic analysis of adverbs in Standard Yoruba, questioning whether adverb constitutes a legitimate lexical class in the language. Employing the minimalist framework of Radford (1999), the researcher examined items traditionally classified as pre-verbal, post-verbal, and sentence-final adverbs, revealing fundamental inconsistencies in classification criteria. The study concluded that adverbs lack the derivational processes characteristic of established lexical classes like nouns and verbs.

Contemporary research in morphosyntax has increasingly emphasised the role of agreement systems and noun classification in African languages. Kibort (2007) defines morphosyntactic features as those whose values involve either agreement or government, proposing a framework summarised in Figure 1 (adapted from Kibort, 2007). Deen (2009) investigated the acquisition of inflectional prefixes in Bantu languages, demonstrating that children acquire noun class agreement systems gradually. Embick and Noyer (2001) advanced

Distributed Morphology by proposing that morphology refers to a sequence of operations applying to the output of syntactic derivation. Harley and Noyer (1999) further developed the distinction between i-morphemes (roots with phonological content) and f-morphemes (abstract grammatical features), a distinction crucial for analysing Anghan's agglutinating structure.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to conduct a contrastive morphosyntactic analysis of English and Anghan languages, following Chambers' (1985) assertion that qualitative methodology is optimal for obtaining comprehensive information about phenomena, particularly for a language like Anghan that lacks extensive documentation. The research relied primarily on primary sources derived from audio-recorded conversations, songs, published and unpublished written materials including Anghan brief histories, dialectology documents, and Kamanton folklore, supplemented by the researcher's introspective competence as a native speaker of Anghan with native-like proficiency and proficient second-language competence in English. Data collection employed field notes, pen, and audio-tape recording devices to capture raw linguistic data from natural language use contexts, with the data corpus comprising one hundred and fifty (150) linguistic items randomly selected from both primary and secondary sources to ensure representativeness across various grammatical contexts. The analytical framework integrated two complementary approaches: the Item-and-Arrangement model of morphological analysis (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2008), which conceptualises each language as comprising sets of morphemes and the patterns governing their combination, and the Markedness Theory of the Prague School (Trubetzkoy & Jakobson, 1930), following Tomori's (1982) observation that each language possesses unique morphological and syntactic rules. This distinction is illustrated in Table 5, which applies Markedness Theory to the Anghan numeral system.

Table 5: Marked and Unmarked Forms in Anghan Numerals

Anghan	Gloss	Remark
<i>Jin</i>	One	Unmarked
<i>Btikian</i>	Five	Unmarked
<i>Kob</i>	Ten	Unmarked
<i>Shofual</i>	Twenty	Unmarked
<i>Shofual a bzhin</i>	Twenty one	Marked
<i>Shofual a btikian</i>	Twenty five	Marked
<i>Dari ashofual abtikian</i>	One hundred and twenty five	Marked

Data were first presented in Anghan, then compared and contrasted with equivalent English forms and structures, establishing a clear dichotomy between the two languages under investigation and providing appropriate answers to the research questions concerning their morphosyntactic similarities and differences.

Analysis

The morphological analysis reveals that Anghan possesses a systematic noun class system comprising at least ten distinct classes, each with unique singular and plural affixation patterns. Unlike English where nouns like *man* and *home* exist as free morphemes, Anghan equivalents *na-jin* and *ka-shik* require appropriate prefixes for meaningful use, demonstrating that most Anghan noun roots are bound morphemes. Table 6 presents the noun class categorisation based on shared singular and plural prefixes.

Table 6: Anghan Noun Classes and Pluralisation Patterns

Class	Singular Example	Gloss	Plural Form	Gloss	Plural Marker
1	<i>nwaing</i>	child	<i>nwaing-zhiadi</i>	children	-zhiadi suffix
1a	<i>nwe-jon</i>	kitten	<i>nwe-jon</i>	kittens	tone distinction
2	<i>bwak</i>	hand	<i>m-bwak</i>	hands	m- prefix
3	<i>nyon</i>	Hen	<i>Nyoon</i>	hens	vowel lengthening
4	<i>chwak</i>	wound	<i>m-pwak</i>	wounds	m- prefix

The noun class system triggers agreement across verbs, adjectives, and pronouns, with genuine ambiguity rare because even when noun prefixes coincide, verb agreement markers differ, as exemplified in Table 7.

Table 7: Noun Class Agreement on Verbs

Noun	Gloss	Class	Verb Agreement	Example
Nazhir	person	Class 1	<i>wa-</i>	<i>nazhir nga wa azhi</i>
Nazhir	seat	Class 2	<i>kwa-</i>	<i>nazhir nga kwa azhi</i>
Nwegbia	dog (sg)	Class 1	<i>wu-</i>	<i>nwegbia wu zha</i>
Nwegbia	dogs (pl)	Class 1	<i>ba-</i>	<i>nwegbia ba zha</i>

Anghan exhibits two states analogous to case: the topic state (marked by initial vowel) for subjects and objects of affirmative verbs, and the base state (unmarked) for objects of negative verbs, prepositions, and noun predicates, as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: State Distinctions in Anghan

Construction Type	Example	Gloss	State
Subject	<i>jin a ba wa bak nga</i>	The men are drinking	Topic state
Object of affirmative verb	A shisher ame mbani	She sat among them	Topic state
Object of negative verb	<i>uwong na wa a zhi</i>	<i>Uwong is not here</i>	Base state

Pronominal systems in both languages exhibit declension for person, number, and case, though with different patterns as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Pronominal Systems Compared

Person	English Subj	English Obj	Anghan Subj	Anghan Obj
1st sg	I	Me	Mi	mi
2nd sg	you	You	Nyuni	nyuni
3rd sg	he/she/it	him/her/it	nyua/kani	nyuani/kani
1st pl	we	Us	Yir	yir

Possessive constructions further demonstrate agreement patterns, with the first-person possessive 'my' declining to suit the noun class and number of the possessed noun, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Possessive Agreement Patterns

Example	Gloss	Noun Class	Number
<i>awi shu nan ami</i>	This is my husband	Class I	Singular
<i>ambi ba shu tilikial amini ya</i>	These are my girls	Class I	Plural

The verbal morphology of Anghan exhibits rich agglutinating structure capable of representing complex sentences mono-lexically, following the template: Subject Marker – Tense Marker – (Limitative Marker) – (Object Marker) – Root – (Extension) – Final Vowel. Table 11 illustrates the subject agreement paradigm.

Table 11: Subject Agreement Prefixes on Verbs

Person	Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
1 st	mi-	I	yi-	we
2 nd	nyu-	you (sg)	nyin-	you (pl)
3 rd	wu-/a-	he/she/it	ba-	they

Table 12: Verb Conjugation Examples

Verb Form	Gloss
m-gwaing	I want
yi-gwaing	we want
nyu-gwaing	you (sg) want
ba-gwaing	they want

Tense marking employs seven distinct patterns, as summarized in Table 13.

Table 13: Tense Formation in Anghan

Tense	Marker	Example (1sg 'go')	Gloss
Present	-	mi-za	I go
Past	-ng	mi-za-ng	I went
Future	-ka	mi-za-ka	I will go

Table 14: Adjective Agreement

Phrase	Gloss	Agreement Pattern
shishe-tili	beautiful girl	agrees with singular noun
shishe-tili-kial	beautiful girls	agrees with plural noun

Word formation processes in Anghan exhibit greater diversity than English, with productive prefixation, infixation, and reduplication. Table 23 illustrates prefixation patterns.

Table 15: Prefixation Examples

Prefix	Base Form	Gloss	Derived Form	Gloss	Function
ba-	Nyi	Person	Banyi	People	pluralisation
ka-	fyit	Tree	Kafyit	small tree	diminutive

Findings and Discussion

The analysis yields five major findings regarding the morphosyntactic contrast between English and Anghan. First, Anghan is a predominantly agglutinating language with extensive prefixation, productive infixation, and systematic reduplication, while English

exhibits fusional characteristics with increasing analytic tendencies. Anghan words are composed of i-morphemes (roots lacking inherent phonological content) and f-morphemes (abstract grammatical features), which combine through syntactic operations to produce surface forms—a finding that aligns with the Late Insertion Model central to Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz, 1993). The systematic noun class system, comprising at least ten classes each triggering agreement on verbs, adjectives, and pronouns, represents a feature entirely absent in English grammar. This noun-centric organisation means that most Anghan noun roots are bound morphemes requiring appropriate prefixes for meaningful use, contrasting sharply with English where numerous free root morphemes can stand independently, as summarised in Table 16.

Table 16: Contrastive Morphological Properties

Property	Anghan	English
Morphological Type	Agglutinating	Fusional/Analytic
Noun Classes	10+ classes	None
Agreement	Full paradigm	Minimal

Second, the verbal morphology of Anghan demonstrates remarkable complexity with seven distinct tenses marked through prefixes and suffixes, and unique aspectual distinctions such as the progressive action marker *aka-* and the "so far" perfective that have no direct equivalents in English grammatical structure. The verbal template Subject Marker + Tense Marker + (Limitative Marker) + (Object Marker) + Root + (Extension) + Final Vowel allows for monolexical expression of what would require multi-word constructions in English, exemplifying the agglutinating principle where each morpheme carries a single grammatical meaning with clearly segmentable boundaries. This contrasts with English fusional morphology where multiple grammatical categories may be fused into a single morpheme, as in *-s* marking third person, singular, and present simultaneously. Table 17 illustrates the contrast in verbal complexity.

Table 17: Verbal Complexity Compared

Anghan	Gloss	English Equivalent
Mi-hwanmadi-do-gi-nyuni	I am happy to see you	5 English words
Mi-za-ng	I went	I went

Third, word formation processes in Anghan exhibit greater diversity than English, with productive infixation and reduplication representing strategies entirely absent from English grammar. The presence of infixation insertion of morphemes within roots for pluralisation and nominalisation demonstrates a typologically rare feature that challenges universalist assumptions about morphological structure. Reduplication serving multiple grammatical functions provides evidence for the systematic nature of Anghan's morphological processes, contrasting with English where reduplication remains marginal and non-grammatical. Table 18 summarises the word formation contrasts.

Table 18: Word Formation Strategies Compared

Strategy	Anghan	English	Example (Anghan)
Prefixation	Dominant	Common	ba-nyi
Infixation	Productive	Rare	g-y-an

Fourth, despite sharing SVO basic word order with English, Anghan exhibits consistently head-initial phrase structure with modifiers following heads (Noun-Adjective, Noun-Possessor, Noun-Relative Clause), while English displays mixed headedness with pre-nominal adjectives but post-nominal relative clauses. Table 19 illustrates these structural differences.

Table 19: Phrase Structure Contrasts

Construction	Anghan Order	Example	English Order	Example
Noun + Adjective	N-Adj	<i>kpang kpong</i>	Adj-N	big house
Noun + Possessor	N-Poss	<i>kpang mi</i>	Poss-N	my house

Fifth, the study confirms that Distributed Morphology provides an appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing contrastive morphosyntactic phenomena. The theory's principles of late insertion and under-specification explain how Anghan roots lacking inherent phonological content combine with abstract morphemes through syntactic operations to produce appropriate word forms. Table 20 illustrates the Distributed Morphology analysis applied to Anghan.

Table 20: Distributed Morphology Analysis of Anghan

Surface Form	Root	Abstract Morphemes	Syntactic Operation
Awɪ	<i>-geawɪ</i>	[demonstrative][Class I]	Vocabulary insertion
za-ng	<i>-za</i>	[past]	Suffixation

Table 21: Summary of Morphosyntactic Contrasts between English and Anghan

Feature	Anghan	English
Morphological Type	Agglutinating	Fusional/Analytic
Noun Classes	Present	Absent
Infixation	Productive	Absent
Word Order	SVO	SVO

Conclusion

This contrastive morphosyntactic analysis of English and Anghan languages has provided the systematic description of Anghan grammatical structures while establishing points of convergence and divergence between the two languages. The study demonstrates that

Anghan is a highly agglutinating, noun-centric language with a systematic noun class system comprising at least ten classes, each triggering obligatory agreement on verbs, adjectives, and pronouns a feature entirely absent in English grammar. The verbal morphology exhibits remarkable complexity with seven distinct tenses, productive infixation, and systematic reduplication, enabling mono-lexical expression of what would require multi-word constructions in English. While both languages share SVO basic word order, Anghan consistently places modifiers after heads (Noun-Adjective, Noun-Possessor, Noun-Relative Clause), contrasting with English pre-nominal modification for adjectives and determiners. The agreement system requires full person-number agreement on all finite verbs, enabling pro-drop constructions impossible in English, which maintains only third person singular -s marking. Table 31 provides a comprehensive summary of the contrastive features identified in this study.

The findings align with Distributed Morphology's claims about the interdependence of morphological and syntactic components, demonstrating that word formation is not a separate lexical process but an integral part of syntactic derivation. This research contributes significantly to the documentation and preservation of Anghan linguistic heritage, provides empirical evidence for theoretical claims about morphosyntactic variation, and establishes a foundation for pedagogical material development and further research. The study underscores the urgency of documenting Nigeria's minority languages, which face increasing pressure from dominant languages such as Hausa and English, and demonstrates the theoretical and practical value of contrastive analysis in understanding linguistic diversity and universality.

Recommendations

- a. Computer programmes should be developed to automate the analysis of Anghan's complex inflectional morphology for efficient and accurate documentation, enabling researchers to

- process large corpora with minimal manual input while maximizing accuracy in identifying syncretic inflectional forms and disambiguating complex morphological patterns.
- b. Unexplored aspects of Anghan should urgently be documented, including its phonetics, phonology, tonal system, and syntax, to preserve the language from the threat of dominant languages such as Hausa and English, with particular attention to the tonal system which preliminary evidence suggests carries significant grammatical and lexical distinctions.
 - c. A standardized orthography, user-friendly practical grammar, and a comprehensive reference dictionary documenting lexical items with their grammatical properties, noun class affiliations, and usage examples should be created to support literacy, education, and further research.
 - d. Contrastive learning materials highlighting structural differences and similarities between English and Anghan, should be developed and community-based training initiatives to support mother-tongue education, ensuring the language's continued relevance in modern contexts through terminology development for contemporary domains should be implemented.

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