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ARTICLE

Ibeme as a dialect of Igbo: A lexicostatistic analysis

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Chimaobi Onwukwe, Roseline Ihuoma Ndimele and Onukawa Edith Ngozi

*Full Length Research Paper***Ibeme as a dialect of Igbo: A lexicostatistic analysis****Chimaobi Onwukwe*, Roseline Ihuoma Ndimele and Onukawa Edith Ngozi**

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Ibeme is a variety of Igbo spoken in Ibeme clan comprising four vast autonomous communities namely Ibeme, Abala, Oberete-Isiala and Abala-Nkamiri in Obi-Ngwa Local Government Area, Abia State. Previous studies have classified Ibeme as a patois of Ngwa dialect and it is often glossed over with Ngwa. This study attempts to show that Ibeme is a distinct dialect. Lexicostatistics method using Swadesh wordlist comprising 100 lexical items as guideline was adopted. Introspection was also involved in data gathering as a native speaker (that is, the lead author). From the lexicostatistics report, ethnographic description and some phonemic and morphological variations, it is identified that Ibeme is a separate dialectal area. It is concluded that Ibeme is not a patois of Ngwa as claimed by previous study (Oluikpe). The lexico-statistics report and ethnographic information show that Ibeme is separate dialect area.

Key words: Dialect, Patois, dialect differentiation, cognates and lexicostatistics.

INTRODUCTION

Igbo, like many other human languages exhibit variations which are consistent with the widely held view among linguists that language of a group of people may show regular variations within the group. English language, for example, spoken in different social groups shows systematic differences. Such variations are regarded as dialects of the same language. Hence, every language is made up of dialects. This is a function of the primacy of speech in human language. In principle, every language has two major forms – the 'standard' and the 'non-standard', otherwise called dialect.

In the southern part of Abia State exists Obi-Ngwa Local Government Area. However, in the eastern part of Obi-Ngwa exists Ibeme Clan, a clan of four vast

communities namely, Ibeme, Abala, Oberete-Isiala, and Abala-Nkamiri. Each of these communities has villages that make them up. Ibeme is made up of 4 villages, Abala Seven villages, Oberete-Isiala, eight villages and Abala-Nkamiri six villages in all make up Ibeme Clan. Before the recent creation of communities in the State, Abala, Oberete-Isiala and Abala-Nkamiri were villages in Ibeme autonomous community. Ibeme clan is in the sub-zone of Obi-Ngwa L.G.A. known as Agalaba zone. Ibeme covers an area of about 39sqm.km and is situated South of Ntighauzo-Amairi community in Obi-Ngwa L.G.A., North of Akirika-Obu in Ukwu East L.G.A. and Ika L.G.A. of Akwa-Ibom State; East of Akpaa-Mbato community all in Obi-Ngwa L.G.A. So, Ibeme is a border town.

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The status of Ibeme as a variant of Igbo language has attracted little or no attention of dialect-oriented scholars. The only notable study is Oluikpe (1979) which of course glossed Ibeme over with Ngwa; and designated Ibeme as a patois of Ngwa. This study quarrels with the notion of Ibeme as a patois as observed by Oluikpe (1979) given the origin of the word patois from Jamaican speech forms. Also, the limited corpus of a lexicostatistic method involving seven lexical items as used by Oluikpe (1979) is not large enough for making a categorical statement on the status of Ibeme. Hence this study expands the corpus to 100 basic items. Moreover, questions have been asked about the relationship between this dialect and Ngwa as well as neighboring Ndoki dialect which all together constitute part of the South Eastern group of dialects (SEGD).

This study is therefore aimed at re-examining the status of Ibeme particularly from a native speakers' perspective. The linguistic field method and lexicostatistics method were adopted for the study. The tone convention adopted is that of Green and Igwe (1963) where low and step tones are marked and high tones are unmarked.

Objectives of the study

This study tries to achieve the following objectives:

1. To establish that Ibeme is a dialect of Igbo.
2. To profile some morpho-syntactic and phonological variations, vocabulary (shared and divergent cognates) and the ethnographic description of Ibeme as dialect of Igbo.

Literature Review

Conceptual framework: Dialect and dialect differentiation

The definition of dialect and what criteria are used in determining it have been perennial issues of debate in virtually all persuasions of linguistic study. In terms of definition, Nwazuzu (2008) cites Hartman and Stork (1973, p. 65) as observing as follows: "dialect is a regional or social variety differing in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary from the standard language which is in itself a social favored dialect." She further observes that the authors state as follows: "If the variants differ only in pronunciation, it is often called accent. Sometimes, it is difficult to decide whether a variant constitutes a dialect sub-division or a different language since it may be blurred by political boundaries" (p. 1).

Similarly, Oluikpe (1979, p. 3) sees dialect as "any speech pattern of a given language that differs (in features of phonology, syntax, morphology and

vocabulary) from the literacy or official form of the language without being unintelligible to the members of the language community." For Pei (1970, p. 9), dialect is "a specific branch or form of a language spoken in a given geographical area differing sufficiently from the official standard or literary form of the language one or all levels of the language (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and idiomatic use of words) to be viewed as a distinct entity, yet not sufficiently different from other dialects of the language to be regarded as a separate language"

From the views of scholars some of which have been captured, the beacon for identifying a dialect is the official or literary form of a language. However, the case of Igbo becomes very difficult considering that the official or literary form of the language is yet to be resolved or emerge. Nwazuzu (2008, p. 2) sums up the this challenge as follows:

Because of complexities of topography, settlements, history, interregional communication and prestige of regional centers, dialect boundaries are often vague, complex and difficult to delineate. Dialects are seldom subject to neat classification which we might want to have. Sometimes classifications are imposed on dialects.

For this reason, we have adopted a working definition of a dialect that fits into our situation. Hence we define a dialect as a "collection of variations across functional areas of language such as phonology, vocabulary, syntax/morphology etc which *identify a speech form within a language community* [emphasis added] but not enough to make the speech form a language of its own"

In terms of criteria for determining dialects, dialectologists seem to agree that vocabulary; phonology; syntax and morphology are basis for distinguishing one from another (Nwazuzu, 2008). However, the approaches vary from arbitrariness which seems to have been highly favored among early dialectologists, to lexicostatistics which involves the identification of cognates and the counting of those cognates that are either shared or divergent. Another approach involves the determination of bundles of isoglosses in which coincidence of isoglosses establish dialect areas. We feel that lexicostatistics as alluded by some scholars is a more objective means of differentiating dialects (Pei, 1970, Oluikpe, 1979; Williamson, 1966) and also identification of variations in all or most important aspects of language such as phonology, morphology, syntax.

Another recurrent issue in dialect differentiation has been the question of semblances among speech forms within a specific language community. There has been the argument among some scholars that 'little' or 'minor' variations within a language community should not be considered basis for dialect demarcation; and that 'major' variations should be considered (Nwazuzu, 2008). It

becomes a different problem all together identifying what could be regarded as 'minor' and 'major' variations given the view of anthropologists that speech is subject to complex and interesting variations. The further argument is that semblances (of course in functional areas) among speech forms within a language community reduce the possibility of dialect demarcation (Bendor-Samuel, 1978). Other scholars have adduced that semblances in these functional areas among speech forms within a language community do not vitiate the probability of those speech forms being designated different dialects since dialect is often seen as "an aggregate of functional variants within a language community by which a section of the community can be identified" (Oluikpe, 1979; Darrey, 1986). The semblances to us, account for the fact that the different speech forms within a language group are of the same language and could be basis for grouping them into one group of dialects and not that the semblances can forestall a differentiation into dialects if they are by any objective means established.

Previous classification of Ibeme

Oluikpe (1979) in his survey of Ngwa dialect identifies that Ngwa Community is a homogenous dialect community and that there is small degree of divergence which reveals the existence of patois within the Ngwa dialect community. A patois is seen as a rural form of speech which together with other spoken varieties constitutes a dialect (Wardhaugh, 1998). Oluikpe (1979) identifies twenty one such patois comprising Ngwa dialect. However, Oluikpe (1979) observes that "Ibeme stands by itself with a 6% degree of divergence" (p.8). This is the highest degree of divergence recorded in his study which invariably makes Ibeme by Oluikpe's (1979) analysis, a single and separate patois of the Ngwa dialect. In his study, the pattern of relationship of patois of Ngwa dialect was grouped into five namely: Ngwaukwu Patois group comprising five patois, Amasa patois group comprising four, Ugwunagbo patois group comprising seven, Ahiaba patois group comprising four and Ibeme patois group which stands by itself. He further observes that Ngwaukwu, Umuoha and Nvosi are the patois with the least degree of divergence. Consequently, they are the most representative of Ngwa dialect. Oluikpe (1979) reports in part, the findings of his lexico-statistical approach to the study as follows;

Ibeme has four of the variants significantly divergent from the others. These are ge "what", togholi "nine", mgbo "door" and ukoro-beke "paw-paw". Although the corpus is not large enough to establish that Ibeme is a dialectal community distinct from Ngwa, one could reasonably postulate that Ibeme is a separate dialectal area [emphasis added]. This could be proved with enlarged corpus. (p.10)

Oluikpe (1979)'s postulation is apparently confirmed by the conspicuous absence of Ibeme in his categorizations showing identical speech forms in Ngwa. He termed these categorizations: "complexes". He identifies the following complexes: Nsulu complex made up of Ohuhu, Umuakwu, and Nsulu; Amasa complex made up of Ngwaobi, Amasa, Arongwa, Osokwa, Uratta-Amato, Amavo and Okpu-umobo. Ugwunabgo complex is made up of Ugwunagbo and Aba-Ohazu. Mgboko complex has Mgboko-amairi, Mgboko-Itungwa and Ohanze. Ahiaba-Abayi complex comprises Ahiaba and Abayi while Okporoahaba complex is made up of Ovungwu and Ovuokwu. This suggests that Ibeme has no other speech form in Ngwa with which it could be said to be identical with. Similarly, Oluikpe (1979)'s postulation about Ibeme could be taken more seriously in the light of his affirmation of the procedures of arriving at his result. He states,

The procedure is to record from the field work data the most representative variants as spoken in each of the twenty one speech forms...the idea is to account for all the variants perceptible in Ngwa with the hope that such a meticulous procedure will, in the long run, reveal the real nature of Ngwa speech forms (p.6).

Oluikpe (1979) adopts corpus involving seven lexical items out of which four are significantly divergent in Ibeme. Our inference, therefore, is that four is reasonably above half of his corpus and so we believe this could have led to Oluikpe (1979)'s postulation that Ibeme is a separate dialectal area. This observation also leaves us unsettled about Ibeme as a patois rather than a dialectal area. We therefore present an ethnographic description of Ibeme in a bid to further reveal the real nature or status of Ibeme.

Ethnographic description of Ibeme

On the ethnographic description of Ibeme, an account of Ichie Emeghiebo¹ acclaimed widely in Ibeme as the oldest man, has it that Ibeme has its origin from Ndoki of Ukwa axis. He further holds that settlers in the area called Ibeme were notable for their incessant land and other resources disputes with their Akirika, Ohambele, Ndoki brothers hence they moved towards the southern axis of Ndoki which shares borders with *Ndi ngwa ngwa* (ndi Ngwa) settlement. He recalled that this attribute of the settlers made the Ngwa neighbours to bravely refer to them as '*ndi Ibemegbulam*' Ibeme is therefore claimed to have derived from "Ibemegbulam" which translates "let my kinsman or neighbor not cheat me" (Informant, 2015). He holds that part of this settlers moved deep into the Ngwa settlement in areas like Mgboko, Umuoha and other parts of present day Ngwa. This account was corroborated by five other research informants. Ebere

(1995) while corroborating this account, holds that “it was around 1945/1946 that the colonial masters or administration carved Ibeme into Okpuala Ngwa judicial division in the present day Isiala-Ngwa North L.G.A. Hence, before this period, the Ibeme clan was under the Azumini judicial division in Ndoki in the present day Ukwa L.G.A” (P.3). Ebere (1995, p. 9) stresses his point by quoting Nwaduru (1984) as observing that “political calvings do not show or reflect origin as culture and indeed language do.”

An average Ibeme person does not see oneself as an Ngwa man and refers to people from the other parts of the present Ngwa as “*Ndi-Ngwa*.” This shows how an average Ibeme person instinctively though not directly sees oneself differently. Ezeala (1991, p. 1) while reacting to a publication on Ngwa history observes:

Contrary to John Nwachimereze Orijji’s article, in which he included Ibeme clan as among the various Ngwa origins that went further East of the present day Abia State to settle, it is important that this simple correction is made by informing him about the need to realize that Ibeme clan was not and has never been among the Ngwa clan. Ibeme is a clan of itself with a distinct dialect different from every other dialect in Igbo land. The history about the origin of Ibeme can be linked with the Ndokis of Akwette in the present day Ukwa East Local Government of Abia State. Prior to the 1940s, Ibeme was still under Ndoki Native Authority where its administrative headquarters was Azumini, but later on; political changes saw Ibeme being merged with Ntigha Uzo thereby given the name; Ntigha Uzo/Ibeme Autonomous Community which later separated due to their ethnic differences.

Some informants held that some cultural practices further point to the difference between Ibeme and Ngwa. They observe that Ibeme do not rear female dogs and abhor the cultivation and eating of white yam (ọnọ). These are common practices among the neighboring Ngwa communities. They recall that some Ibeme people were part of the Ndoki during the settlement of the dispute between the Ndoki and Asa in the 1940s where the *òkè-ikpe* (translated as ‘boundary as established by verdict’ (Informant, 2015), which needless to say has lost this meaning now) was adopted in the present day Ukwa LGA of Abia state. To further reveal the status of Ibeme and perhaps confirm the postulation of Oluikpe (1979), we present an enlarged corpus of lexico-statistics involving 100 basic wordlist.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve these objectives, the linguistic field method and lexico-statistics method were adopted. The method of data collection for this study involved structured interviews where informants were made to provide their dialectal variants of the

lexical items in the wordlist, and as a native speaker, introspection was used in gathering data. Data were purposively collected among informants of age bracket: 60-above in Ibeme and Ngwaukwu, and Umuoha (in Isiala Ngwa LGA, since according to Oluikpe (1979, p. 60), they are “most representative of Ngwa dialect”). The informants were chosen considering that they were born in, live as well as speak the unmixed or undiluted varieties. The interview was conducted using *Moris Swadesh (1971)* wordlist comprising 100 basic lexical items.

RESULTS

We identified the shared and divergent cognates between Ibeme and Ngwa using Swadesh (1971) wordlist, comprising 100 lexical items. The frequencies were also computed on the basis of which some findings were drawn. In the analysis, any variation in a vocabulary item (no matter how minute the variation might be) was regarded as divergent cognate. (Where D=DIVERGENT AND S-SHARED) (Table 1).

From the frequencies above, it could be seen that the percentage of divergent cognates is far higher than shared cognates between Ibeme and Ngwa (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

It is important at this point to re-analyze Oluikpe (1979)’s postulation in which he observes the following:

Although the corpus is not large enough to establish that Ibeme is a dialectal community distinct from Ngwa, one could reasonably postulate that Ibeme is a separate dialectal area [emphasis added]. This could be proved with enlarged corpus (p.10).

Using an enlarged corpus involving 100 basic wordlist, we observed that it has actually been proved that Ibeme is a separate dialectal area distinct from Ngwa. This proof is re-echoed by Blasse (1983, p. 18) as he observes as follows:

In adopting lexicostatistics approach in determining possible dialectal areas, in an event where divergence is recorded in up to 50% or half of the lexical items in the corpus; there is a very strong pointer that such constitutes a dialectal area of its own (emphasis added).

The percentage of divergence in the table is far or way above half or 50% of the lexical items in the corpus. Having established this using an approach widely believed to be very objective and reliable in dialect differentiation, another issue that pops up is as it concerns the argument on ‘daughter’ or ‘satellite’ dialect (Ikekeonwu, 1985; Nwaozuzu, 2008). Nwaozuzu (2008, p. 9) brings it into proper perspective as she states as follows:

Table 1. Shared and divergent cognates between Ibeme and Ngwa using Swadesh (1971) wordlist,

S/ No	English	Ibeme	Ngwa
1	I	mụ	(Ogwe) mụ (S)
2	you	ị	gị (D)
3	we	Yīī	anyi (D)
4	this	Ka	ke/ka (S)
5	that	ka nụ	ke na (D)
6	who	Onye	onye (S)
7	what	Ge	(n)giri (D)
8	how	àgìrì	(nda) ot ^h u (D)
9	now	Ugbe	gboo (D)
10	many	ọgbọgbọ	ọtụtụ (D)
11	one	Ole	nnaa (D)
12	two	abụọ	abụọ (S)
13	big	ukwu	ukwu (S)
14	fat	Ibù	ivù (D)
15	long	akaraka	ogologo(akalaka)(D)
16	small	Ururu	ntakala (D)
17	woman	Nwandèmè	nwanyi (D)
18	man	Nwandīkom	nwoke (D)
19	elder	oke mad ^h ù	oko mad ^h ù (D)
20	fish	azụ	azụ (S)
21	cook	k ^h e	te (D)
22	soup	kwụkwō	miiri (D)
23	Lice	ngwe	igwu (D)
24	seed	mkpuru oshishi	mkpuru osisi (D)
25	leaf	(kpara) kwụkwō	akwụkwō (D)
26	skin	Anu hụ	anu ahụ (D)
27	vagina	mgbù	ọtụ (D)
28	blood	ọbàrà	Ọbàrà (S)
29	they	we	(Ogwe) we (S)
30	door	mgbò	ib ^h o (D)
31	bone	ọkpụkpụ	ọkpụkpụ (S)
32	Paw paw	Ụkọrọ bèkeè	ọkwọrọ nkita/okparụ (D)
33	egg	àkwa	àkwa (S)
34	horn(of an animal)	mpi	mpi (S)
35	tail	òdùdù	òdù/òdùdù (S)
36	feather	àbùbù	àbùbà (D)
37	hair	ntuntụ ishi	ntụtụ isi (D)
38	head	ishi	isi (D)
39	plate	gbam gbam	agbụgba (D)
40	nine	togholī	iteghite (D)
41	premises	uhu	ezi (D)
42	claw	mb ^h ọ	mvọ (D)
43	foot	Okporo ukwu	ọkpa (D)
44	tongue	Ire	ire (S)
45	tooth	eze	eze (S)
46	knee	(Ọkpụ) ikpèrè	ikpèrè (S)
47	hand	aka	aka (S)
48	belly	afọ	afọ (S)
49	breast	aā	aā (S)

Table 1. Cont'd

50	cassava	jàap ^h u	igburu (D)
51	heart	mkpuru obi	mkpuru obi (S)
52	liver	umeju	umeji (D)
53	see	hu/lee	lee (S)
54	know	marì	marà (D)
55	lie(on a bed)	nyaruo	Jaaruo (D)
56	In/at	Lì	la (D)
57	grandfather	Teetekwu	nna nna (D)
58	dirty	Njuchu/ari	amuma (D)
59	say	t ^h u	si (D)
60	because	Kwuru	sita (D)
61	father	Teete	nna (D)
62	kinsman	nwatē	nwana (D)
63	grandchild	ok ^h ennē	nwanwa (D)
64	kill	Gbuo	gbuo (S)
65	everywhere	nkalile	ebelile (D)
66	talkative	et ^h uret ^h u	ekwurekwu (D)
67	fly	fe	fe (S)
68	sweep	za	hie (D)
69	stand	zolie	bilie (D)
70	give	nye	nye (S)
71	sun	anyanwu	anyanwu (S)
72	moon	onwa	onwa (S)
73	water	Miri	miri (S)
74	where	Leyi	ebe ole (D)
75	there	ngon/ngan	nnaa (D)
76	stone	Owute	nkume (D)
77	sand	aja	aja (S)
78	cloth	Ngwei	uwe (D)
79	heel	etèkèlè	ike ukwu (D)
80	fire	okù	okù (S)
81	smoke	nt ^h u	nt ^h u (S)
82	mountain	Ugwu	ugwu (D)
83	red	manu manu	mmanu mmanu (D)
84	green	kwukwō ndu	akwukwō ndu (D)
85	yellow	odo odo	odo odo (S)
86	white	h ^w emu	ocha (D)
87	black	oji	oji (S)
88	night	uchichi/anyasu	anyasu (S)
89	hot	okù	okù (S)
90	money	nwofuru	ego (D)
91	buttocks	otupuru	ike/onumgbu (D)
92	cold	oyi	oyi (S)
93	full	ojuju	ojuju (S)
94	new	ofuru	ofuru (D)
95	good	nma	nma (S)
96	round	gburu gburu	gburu gburu (S)
97	friend	Dà	enyi (D)
98	jaw	ab ^h a	agba (D)
99	dry	ko	ko (S)
100	name	aha	ahwa (D)

Table 2. Percentage of shared and divergent cognates.

Cognates	Frequency	Percentage
Shared	38	38
Divergent	62	62
Total	100	100

characteristics of the group is arbitrarily taken as the point of reference otherwise called the main dialect while others around it are seen as daughter dialects or what Ikekeonwu (1985) calls Satellite dialects.

From the observation above, one can deduce that the major yardstick for demarcating 'main' and 'daughter' or 'satellite' dialects is "exhibition of almost the same characteristics with minor differences". To us, a percentage as high as above 50% of lexico-statistics does not depict a 'minor' difference upon which one could say that Ibeme is a daughter/satellite dialect of Ngwa. Moreover, some phonemic and morpho-syntactic variations in Ibeme as discussed below are weighty differences which cannot be said to be 'minor' by any linguistic measure.

Some phonemic and morpho-syntactic variations in Ibeme

We focused on the phonemic and morpho-syntactic features of Ibeme to further reveal the true nature and status of Ibeme.

For the *-rV* suffix, we identify that it is the fact indicator in Ibeme or what we may call assertive suffix and we have the following examples:

- (1)(a) Ada chọ̀rì dì
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE husband) 'Ada sought for husband'
(b) Ada gwèrì h̄wee
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE something) 'Ada collected something'
(c) Ada m̀èrì h̄wee
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE something) 'Ada did something'
(d) Ada sùrù ọ̀hia
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE bush) 'Ada cleared/cut the bush'
(e) Ada gàrì ahịa
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE market) 'Ada went to market'

From the examples above, there are more of harmonizing variants than copy of the root vowel onto the suffix vowel in Ibeme. Examples a, b, c and e show harmonizing variants while (d) show copy of root's vowel onto the suffix. The rule for this in Ibeme is that when the root vowel is round back /u/or /ɔ/ vowels, the root vowel is copied but if other vowels, the harmonic variant is copied (Onwukwe, 2015) as in further examples in 2.

- 2 (a) Ada gwùrù ùrù
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE hole) 'Ada dug a hole'
(b) Ada chùrù anụ
(Ada-VR-ASSERTIVE animal) 'Ada pursued an animal'

Ngwa dialect examples in 3 show that there is essentially copy of the vowel of the root verb, no harmonic variant copy in the *rV* indicative formation.

- 3, (a) Ada nchọ̀rò dì
(Ada-H.PFX-VR-ASSERTIVE husband) 'Ada sought for husband'
(b) Ada ngwèrè h̄wee
(Ada-H.PFX-VR-ASSERTIVE something) 'Ada collected something'
(c) Ada nmèrè h̄wee
(Ada-H.PFX-VR-ASSERTIVE something) 'Ada did something'
(d)) Ada nsùrù ọ̀hia
(Ada-H.PFX-VR-ASSERTIVE bush) 'Ada cleared/cut the bush'
(e) Ada ngàrà ahịa
(Ada-H.PFX-VR-ASSERTIVE market) 'Ada went to market'

We also notice from the data in 3 above that the homorganic nasal prefix (H.PFX) is a major feature of Ngwa dialect. It is claimed that the homorganic nasal prefixation is a major feature that clearly distinguishes Ngwa from other dialects of Igbo. (Oluikpe, 1979) but is not obtainable in Ibeme. This further shows that Ibeme is a distinct dialect area.

In terms of phonemic inventory of Ibeme, some variations have been observed. The voiced labio-dental fricative and its nasalized counterpart: /v/ and /v̄/ are found to be non-existent in Ibeme. This has been adjudged to a case of diachronic change which results to dialectal differentiation (Onwukwe, 2015). According to Oluikpe (1979), these sounds are part of the Ngwa phonemic inventory. We observe that there is correspondence, which shows in the form of substitution in the absence of these sounds in Ibeme involving voiced bilabial plosive and its aspirated counterpart, /b/ and /b^h/. The following samples in 4, illustrate this, but this is clearer with some samples in Ngwa placed side by side (Table 3).

Furthermore, the voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ is found to replace the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ under certain condition and that is when the /s/ is followed by a high front vowel like /i/ or /i/ in Ibeme Igbo and more often in medial environment in a word. The following examples are instructive.

- 5 ishi /isi/ 'head'
shi 'feaces'
oshishi 'tree/stick'
ìshì 'blindness'

Table 3. Dialectal differentiation.

Ngwa	Ibeme	Gloss
Vu	bu	Carry
vɔ̀dà	budà	Carry down
ɔ̀vùrɔ̀	ubùrɔ̀	Brain
avɔ̀	abɔ̀	Basket
ivù	ibu	Load
v̄ɔ̀	b ^h ùò	harvest/uproot
v̄ù	b ^h u	Hatch
m̄vɔ̀	mb ^h ɔ̀	finger nails
āvɔ̀	ab ^h ù	Arm fit
v̄o	b ^h o	lend a hand to carry load

Shi /ʃi/ 'cook'

The voiceless post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ does not occur in Ngwa phonemic inventory (Oluikpe, 1979). Still in terms of phonemics, Ngwa has a total of 46 consonants and this applies to all the speech complexes identified in Oluikpe (1979) "except for Ibeme which shows relative differences..." (p. 8). We have elsewhere identified that Ibeme has 43 consonants and eight vowels which correspond to the eight synchronic vowels of SI.

Conclusion

As has been in the above discussion, one can observe that from the ethnographic description of Ibeme, Ibeme does not share the same origin with the Ngwa. Ibeme is by political demarcations, part of Ngwa but certain cultural and etymological issues relate Ibeme more to Ndoki than the Ngwa. Based on the limited corpus adopted by Oluikpe (1979) in his lexico-statistic analysis of Ngwa speech community, we observe that with an enlarged corpus of 100 basic wordlist, 65% divergence was recorded in Ibeme, which we identify as high and

significant enough to designate Ibeme as a separate dialect area. Some phonemic and morpho-syntactic variations in Ibeme have been identified, which by our analysis, are further proofs. Thus, Ibeme is not a patois of Ngwa as claimed by previous studies, that is, Oluikpe (1979), the lexico-statistics report and ethnographic information are too weighty variations which show that Ibeme is a separate dialect area.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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