

## LINGUISTIC VARIATION: A PROBLEM FOR STANDARDISATION. A CASE STUDY OF THE JUKUNS OF TARABA STATE

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### Abstract

This study examined the varieties of the Jukun language with the aim of determining whether a Standard variety actually exists as claimed. The paper carried out a comparative analysis of four varieties spoken in and around Wukari local Government area, drawing data from the Ibadan Four Hundred (400) Word list of Basic Items. The data was collected from native speakers of the language. The essence of the comparative work was to discover the similarities and differences that exist among the dialects. At the end of the study, it was discovered that although mutual intelligibility exists among the dialects, most of them varied in terms of word use and their meanings. The conclusion drawn was that there was no standard variety. This study recommends that for a standard dialect to be chosen, measures should be taken to design orthographies for the dialect most widely spoken and speakers of that variety encourage others to accept it.

**Key Words:** Linguistic variation, Dialect, Standard Language.

### Introduction

This study examines four varieties of the Jukun language- Wapan, Ichen, Wanu and Kpanzo which form part of the Kwararafa Kingdom. The Jukuns are traditionally located in Taraba, Benue, Plateau, Adamawa and Gombe States in Nigeria and parts of northwestern Cameroon. They are descendants of the people of the Kwararafa kingdom. Most of the tribes in north central Nigeria trace their origin to the Jukun people and in one way or the other relate to the Jukun. In Taraba, the Jukuns are located in the south and variations of it can be found in almost every Local Government area of the state. Of the different varieties, some are quite similar to each other and some so different they are almost different languages.

The Jukun Language is classified among the Nigritic languages (Shimuzu 1980, Ajiduku 2013). It is a “tone” language which uses pitch to indicate difference in the meaning of words. Most of the words in the Jukun language which are similar

but have different tones will therefore, have different meanings (Ajiduku 13; 17)

### **GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION**

The Jukuns are an ethno-linguistic nation in West Africa and are traditionally found in Taraba, Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Adamawa states in Nigeria and parts of Northwestern Cameroon. They are descendants of the Kwararafa kingdom. In Taraba, they are found in the southern part of the state and are a tribe of warriors, hunters, farmers and fishermen.

The various dialects of the Jukun according to Akoga N.B (2012) are:

1. Wapan: Spoken mainly in Wukari, Dampar, Wase and Ibi
2. Wanu: Mainly in Abise, Ibi, Makurdi, Tella, Gindin Dorowa, Mayorenewo, Gbajimba, along the River Benue to Cameroon, Lake Chad and Niger.
3. Jukun Kwona: Mainly in Jalingo and Ardo Kola Local Government areas of Taraba State.
4. Wurbo: Spoken in areas around the River Taraba, Ibi, Tella and Bakundi.
5. Jibu: Mainly in Bali and part of Kurmi Local Government areas of Taraba State.
6. Jukun Pindiga and Gwana: Spoken in Pindiga and Gwana in Gombe State.
7. Ichen: Spoken in Donga, Kurmi, Bali and sparsely in parts of Wukari, Taraba State.
8. Kpanzo: Mainly in Donga and Takum Local Government areas in Taraba State.
9. Itulu and Ekpa Nyonyo: in Katsina Ala and Adi in Benue State.
10. Nike/Kuteb: Spoken in Takum, Ussa and Yangtu Development areas of Taraba State.

### **Theoretical Scope**

Variation theory in Linguistics, as pioneered by William Labov in the late 1960s, is concerned with the fact that languages can possess a whole range of resources for producing a linguistic expression. The spectrum of variation exists at every level of the Linguistic system, from the way we pronounce certain words to the syntactic forms we choose. Geographical variation is apparent even in monolingual countries, from the various dialects which characterize particular regions. Linguistic variation between groups of people is compounded by the variation which exists within the speech of each individual.

### **Linguistic Variation**

Linguistic variation refers to the range of difference between varieties of language. This variation can be sociolinguistic in nature. i.e it occurs as a consequence of the way people distinguish themselves from

each other, such as by accent and vocabulary.

All varieties of all languages vary from each other in terms of words used and their meanings, pronunciation and syntax. This variation may follow predictable patterns over time, or it may be the result of groups of people distinguishing themselves from others. Language is a system of terms used by a people sharing a history and culture. No human language is fixed, uniform or unvarying; all languages show internal variation. In the same vein, actual usage varies from group to group and from speaker to speaker in terms of the pronunciation of a language, the choice of words and the meaning of those words and even the use of syntactic constructions. This variation in speech is a very important and well-recognized aspect of our daily lives as language users in different regional and social communities.

It is customary for a language to have varieties distinguished in terms of users or uses. When groups of speakers differ noticeably in their language, they are often said to speak different 'dialects' of the language. It is rather difficult however, to define precisely what a dialect is and in fact, the term has come to be used in various ways.

Hudson R.A (2003) explains that “if one thinks of ‘language’ as a phenomenon including all the languages of the world, the term VARIETY OF LANGUAGE ( or just variety for short) can be used to refer to different manifestations of it, in just the same way as one might take ‘music’ as a general phenomenon and then distinguish

‘varieties of music’ and what makes one variety of language different from another is the linguistic items that it includes, so we may define a variety of language as a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution”. Dialects can be described according to various criteria of the speech community viz; geographical, social and socio-linguistic criteria. The dialects of a language are mutually intelligible to all speakers of the language. Lack of intelligibility of a variety to speakers will thus identify such as a new language. The boundaries of dialects are difficult to delineate because they merge into one another. But a distinction is usually made between a standard' dialect and other 'local' dialects of a language. Mutual intelligibility according to Hudson is not really a relationship but a matter of degree, ranging from total intelligibility down to total unintelligibility.

Users of a language all belong to the same language community but invariably use dialects of the language community because of geographical provenance (i.e the reality of place-to-place situation) or because of culturally shared attitudes to certain biological and social dichotomies that characterize sociological groupings and hence influence linguistic usage. Standard language (also standard dialect or standardized dialect) is a variety used by a group of people in their public discourse. Alternatively, varieties become standardized by undergoing a process of standardization, during which it is organized for description in grammars and dictionaries and encoded in such reference works. Typically, varieties that become

standardized are the local varieties spoken in the centers of commerce and government where a need arises for a variety that will serve more than local needs. A standard language can be either pluricentric or monocentric. The only requirement for a variety to be standard is that it can frequently be used in public places or for public discourse. The creation of a prescriptive standard language derives from the cohesion with this considered as requiring an agreed-upon, standardized language variety. Standard languages commonly feature:

- \* A standardized dictionary,
- \* A recognized grammar.
- \* A Linguistic institution defining usage norms
- \* A constitution (legal)
- \* Status (frequently as an official language)
- \* Effective public use (court, legislature, schools)
- \* A literary canon
- \* Convenience speaking
- \* Popularity and acceptance in the community and finally
- \* Population The standard dialect enjoys more social prestige than other dialects. It is a neutral dialect, which draws an unbiased social attitude from all speakers of a language. It is associated with educated usage and is the model for writing a language. It provides the basis for codifying and teaching the language and it usually assigned with formal and more sophisticated roles than other dialects.

Yule, G (2003) believes that whether or not you speak a standard variety of a language, you will certainly speak with an accent. It is a myth that some speakers

have accents while others do not some speakers may have distinct or easily recognized types of accents while others do not but every language user speaks with an accent. The term 'accent' when used technically is restricted to the description of aspects of pronunciation, which identify where an individual speaker is from, regionally or socially. It is to be distinguished from the term 'dialect' which describes features of grammar and vocabulary, as well as aspects of pronunciation.

The classic example of a dialect is the 'regional' dialect' which is the distinct form of a language spoken in a certain geographical area. We can also speak of a 'social' dialect, which is the distinct form of a language spoken by members of a socio-economic class, such as the working-class dialects in England or the ghetto languages in the United States. Wapan variety which is spoken in Wukari is considered to be the standard variety on the basis that the city is the commercial area of the Jukuns even though it does not have all the requirements to be a recognized standard. It is important to note that dialects are never purely regional, social or ethnic. Sometimes, regional, social and ethnic factors combine and intersect in various ways in the identification of dialects.

The existence of different regional dialects clearly is widely recognized and often the source of some humor for those living in different regions. Most regional dialects clearly have stereotyped pronunciations

associated with them. The Wapan would for instance say 'kyabera' which means good morning and 'kunyaununi' - good evening- while the others ( Ichen, Kpanzo and Wanu would say 'kyabeya' and kanyura' respectively. In like manner, the Wapan says 'Buju' (food) and the others say 'Bijii'. In popular usage the term 'dialect' refers to a form of a language that is regarded as 'substandard', 'incorrect' or corrupt' as opposed to the standard 'correct' or 'pure' form of the language. In this instance, the Wapan have derogatory terms with which they refer to some of the varieties: the Itchens are called 'Kyanton' the Wannu, 'Banu'. In linguistics though, the term 'dialect' carries no such value judgment and simply refers to a distinct form of a language. Thus, for example, linguists would refer to so-called 'standard Jukun' as a dialect of Jukun, which from a linguistic point of view is no more 'correct' than any other form of the language. Although dialects are often said to be regional, social or ethnic, linguists also use the term 'dialect' to refer to language variations that cannot be tied to any geographical area, social class or ethnic group. Rather, this use of dialect indicates that speakers show some variation in the way they use elements of the language.

Language variation does not end with dialect. Each recognizable dialect of a language is itself subject to considerable internal variation; no two speakers, of a language, even if they are speakers of the same dialect produce and use their language in exactly the same way. We are

able to recognize different individuals by their distinct-speech and language patterns.

### Comparative Analysis

#### LIQUID NOUNS

S. No.	Gloss	Wapan	Ichen	Wanu	Kpanzo
1.	Water	Jàpé	Mbùr	Làpé	Nubén
2.	Urine	Shínzhán	Sínbùr	Shíngyà	Fùnùbén
3.	Oil	Abyú	Byí	Abyíu	ùbù
4.	Blood	Àsà	Nghn	Āsà	Ikyèn
5.	Rain	Áchù	Chù	Āfyù	Ùski

None of the liquid nouns in all the four varieties are exactly the same. The most similar appear between Wapan, and Wanu in the case of 'water', 'urine', 'oil' and 'rain', with only a slight difference in pronunciation, similarities also occur between the Wapan, Ichen and Wanu in the words for 'Oil' and 'rain' while the Kpanzo have different words for all the liquid nouns chosen. The words which sound similar in the three varieties obviously have the same root verb e.g. In the case of 'urine', 'oil' and 'rain' even though they are they are all different. The word for 'blood' in Ichen is made up completely of consonants and no verb.

## HUMAN NOUNS

Serial number	Gloss	Wapan	Ichen	Wanu	Kpanzo
1.	Man	Wúnù	Ndèhdōn	Wònù	Bìdùn
2.	Woman	Wúwà	Ndèhg wà	Wòwà	Bìndó
3.	Father	Átā	Áttāh	Ádā	Atá
4.	Girl	nwù wà wú wù	Nwéhn dèhgwā	Āngó wòwà	Mbàbì ndó
5.	Brother	Nwùzà	Nwéhj úā	Angò yí	Mbày únáidùn

In this category, as in the previous, the similarity between the Wapan and Wanu occur, in words for ‘man’ and ‘woman’, the words for ‘father’ is similar in all the varieties, with a slight variation in the consonant, in Wanu, although obviously, the words have the same root. The Ichen and Kpanzo varieties have completely different words from the other varieties, in four of the words chosen.

## BODY PARTS

Seri	Glo	Wap	Iche	Wa	Kpan
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al no.	ss	an	n	nu	zo
1.	Leg	Ābè	Kpúā fu	Ábá	Āfkán
2.	Hand	Āvò	Kpāb ù	Ávó	Āfgú
3.	Teeth	Ānyì	Sān	Ānyí	Ābōn
4.	Bone	Āgán	Chás hì	Níkí	Nyūfún
5.	Bone	Āké	Fumu	Púkē	Āfú

Almost all the words in this group are different. The few that are the same as in the case of ‘hand’ in Wapan and Wanu, appear to be the same but differ in pronunciation. For ‘leg’ in the two languages, the words are slightly similar except for a vowel change in the end position which also creates a change in the pronunciation of the word. In the case of ‘hand’ and ‘teeth’ for the two, the words are slightly the same in terms of spelling but a variation also occurs in pronunciation. For ‘bone’ in the four varieties, there are some interesting changes- between the Wapan and Wanu, there is a deletion of initial /a/ in ‘ake’ and an addition of consonant ‘p’ and /u/ in ‘puke’, while in the Ichen, the word for ‘bone’ has an addition of the consonant ‘m’ and /u/ in the end position and the same (mu) deleted in Kpanzo, and /a/ added in the initial position. All the other words for the other four words chosen are different. This difference is bound to create problems of understanding.

## ANIMALS

Serial no.	Gloss	Wapan	Ichen	Wanu	Kpanzo
1.	Goat	Ābyín	Bwí	Ábyí	Ìbwé n
2.	Cow	Āná	Ndùā	Áné	Ìndō
3.	Hen	Ákwín wà wúwà	Kēn-ndèh gwā	Ákú wà wúw à	Ìfūn-ìndó
4.	Cat	Ābíky ànkù	Kúlè	Biky àkú	Kúlè
5.	Horse	Āvín	Ènyé	Áví	Ùny ó

Among the animal nouns chosen, there are more cases of the root word being similar with slight variations as in the case of ‘goat’, and ‘cow’ in the Wapan and Wanu varieties. In the case of ‘cat’, only two dialects have any similarity with an initial vowel difference. The Wanu and Kpanzo have a totally different name for the animal, which is the same for both of them. “Hen” is called something different in all the four varieties. Two varieties- Wapan and Wanu- have some similarity for the words for ‘horse’, with an initial vowel difference in the Wapan variety while Ichen and Kpanzo have some similarity, most likely, one created by sharing a root word.

## VERBS

Serial no.	Gloss	Wapan	Ichen	Wanu	Kpanzo
1.	Swallow	Má	Mgb éh	Wú	Mē
2.	Drink	Wá	Nyèn	Wā	Vō
3.	Bite	Dzw án	Kpēh -sàn	Jōn	Dzón
4.	Sleep	Nànà	Dùād àn	Nán á	Dó
5.	Fall	Kò	Kpò	Kw èrí	Kpù

Looking at these examples, it is clear that almost all the words are different. Except in the case of ‘drink’ where two varieties maintain the same root word with the difference occurring in their pronunciation and in ‘sleep’ where there are variations in the sound of the same word for the Wapan and Wanu. In ‘bite’ and ‘fall’, the pronunciations seem to be the determinant of the difference in the Wapan, Ichen and Kpanzo varieties.

**Conclusion**

The four varieties of Jukun compared have different names for most of the words chosen. This answers the question of whether there are dialectal variations between the varieties.

Even though there is mutual intelligibility, each of the different varieties uses its own words to name things rather than adopt one

from their neighbors for ease of communication. The Wapan enjoys the prestige of being the language spoken in the city center and has the largest number of speakers but it is not accepted by all the other dialects as the standard variety to be spoken by everyone and this could be attributed to the fact that the Wapan speakers look down on the other dialects as being inferior, the speakers of the other dialects insist on learning and using their own dialects rather than accepting the Wapan.

A person's language is one of the most fundamental features of self-identification. The form of a language spoken by a single individual is referred to as an 'idiolect' and every speaker of a language has a distinct idiolect. Given the existence of dialectal and idiolectal variations, what allows us to refer to something as 'Jukun' as if it were a single, monolithic language? A standard answer rests on the notion of 'mutual intelligibility'. That is, even though, native speakers of Jukun vary in their use of language, their various dialects permit mutual intelligibility. This means that a Chamba, an Itchen, Kpanzo or a Wanu may recognize each other as speaking the same language. Speaking the 'same language' therefore, does not depend on the speakers speaking an identical language but rather, very similar languages. Mutual intelligibility also covers similarities in speech and pronunciation. In many instances, all the different varieties of Jukun have the same word for some things, such as 'Bikhen' which is dress, 'Butso' is work and 'Nyakyon' is door in all the dialects. This means that although the Wapan man says 'Ando' (house) and 'Akyon wayaya'

(travel) and calls maize 'Zankpa', he still understands the Chamba man who says 'Tana' (House) Gba (travel) and 'Rakpa (Maize).

These variations in the different dialects of Jukun is cause for a division in that the Wanu, Ichen and Kpanzo all feel that they can stand on their own as a strong group and do not need to accept a 'standard' in the Wapan variety.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Wapan which already has the status of being the dialect with the largest number of speakers should be open and friendly to speakers of the other dialects so as to gain their acceptance to be recognized as the standard variety.
2. Wapan should be codified and represented in a dictionary which would provide an accepted grammar for general usage.
3. It should be taught in schools and colleges so that speakers of all the other varieties will learn and use it as the standard.
4. Material development to accommodate exploits from all the other groups, however reiterating the choice of Wapan as Standard variety.
5. Socio-logical approaches such as plays and storytelling to strengthen ties between the groups should be taken.



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