



## Personal Pronouns in Ogba and English Languages

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**Abstract.** This paper contrasted the personal pronouns in Ogba and English languages with the aim of identifying the areas of similarities and differences between the personal pronouns in both languages. It adopted the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA). The study employed the descriptive survey design. The data were gathered through the use of the unstructured elicitation oral interview method and the intuitive knowledge of the researchers as L1 and L2 speakers of Ogba and English respectively. The methods of data analysis employed were the descriptive technique of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing and the contrastive method of data analysis. The study found out that whereas there are only seven personal pronouns in Ogba, there are twelve personal pronouns in the English language. It was observed that with the exception of the 2nd person pronouns in the English language, all the personal pronouns in both languages mark number distinction. It was also affirmed that unlike the 2nd person pronouns in Ogba, 2nd person pronoun in English does not mark number and case in the language. This study noticed that whereas the 3rd person pronouns mark gender distinction in English, they do not mark gender distinction in Ogba. It is noticed that unlike in Ogba, it is only the singular form of neuter gender of the 3rd personal pronouns that occurs in SPEC C<sup>1</sup> in cleft-construction in the English. This study recommends that English language teachers within Ogba speech communities should focus on the gender and case distinctions when teaching personal pronouns in the English language.

**Keywords:** Elicitation, Employ, Cleft-Construction, Morpheme, Intuitive, Contrastive, Data etc.

### 1. Introduction

All natural languages are made of different components, such as phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax. This indicates that every natural language has its syntactic structures, just as it has its semantic and phonological structures; and every competent speaker of the language must master the structures of his language and at the same time, intuitively understands individual lexical items (words) and sentences in the language as well as interpret and categorize the meanings of the words and

sentences. Also, every proficient user of a natural language has the mental list of the lexical items (words) in his language. This mental list of the lexical items is commonly referred to in linguistic as lexicon or vocabulary. It is also imperative to note that even though all natural languages have certain features (principles) which are said to be language universal, their application is said to be language specific. Consequently, this paper hypothesizes that the personal pronouns in the Ogba and English languages must have their areas of similarities and differences; whereas the areas of similarities may aid or enhance the teaching and learning of the target (English) language; the areas of differences may impede or hinder it in Ogba speech communities. Hence, a contrastive study of the personal pronouns in both languages can assist L2 (English language) teachers in Ogba speech communities to identify the possible areas of learning difficulty for their learners. This can help them to identify the best way to assist the learner to eliminate such blunders or errors. Accordingly, this paper contrastively examines the personal pronouns in Ogba and English languages.

### 1.1 The Ogba Language

Ogba is an Igbooid (Igbo related) language which belongs to the Benue-Congo family of the Niger-Congo phylum. It is spoken in over forty-one communities in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The nomenclature “Ogba” is generally used to designate both the native speakers and the language. The proficient users of the language in most cases usually prefix the morpheme “nde” ‘people’ to Ogba (nde-Ogba which denotes ‘Ogba people’) when referring to the native speakers and avoid the prefix when referring to the language. The language is closely related to Ekpeye, Igbo, Ikwere and Echie which are spoken in different local government areas of Rivers State, Nigeria (Eze & Isaac, 2020, 2023).

### 1.2 Tonal convention

Ogba is a tone language. In other words, tones are extremely significant in the grammar of the language. Tones are as significant as the phonemes in the

language because like the segmental phonemes (consonants and vowels). This entails that tones are phonemic in the Ọgba language. No wonder Emenanjo (2015, p 113) insists that any linguistic analysis of the Igboid languages which ignores tone is said to be incomplete because it has ignored an essential code which not only identifies the language but also makes it unique. Ahiamadu (2000) and Isaac (2018) say that Ọgba has high tone ( ´ ), low tone ( ` ), high-low ( ^ ), and mid-tone ( ˘ ). They unanimously recommend that as a convention, all the mid tones ( ˘ ) should be left unmarked in Ọgba. In view of that, any data presented in the Ọgba language with an unmarked tone in this paper should be read as mid.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA). Adesanya (2002), Melefa (2015) and Nwala (2015) assert that the CA theory was propounded by Robert Lado in 1957. They note that theory is very appropriate in the examination of the areas of resemblances and differences between two or more languages. According to Richard (1992) and Yang (1992), the CA theory can be applied in the different levels of grammatical study such as phonetics and phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax. Also, they admit that the CA is relevant because it enhances language teaching and translation. Richard (1992) and Yang (1992) further note that the CA identifies the areas of difficulties for language learners that could be handled with correct exercise. Thus, this paper posits that the CA theory can aid the researchers in the identification of the resemblances and differences between the personal pronouns in the Ọgba and the English languages.

## 3. Review of Related Literature

Ken-Maduako (2004) asserts that the term “pronoun” is derived from the Latin word “pro-noun”. In her opinion, the term “pro” means ‘for’ while “noun” means ‘name’. Accordingly, she described a pronoun as a word for a name in this case, the noun. She summarily accepted that a pronoun in the English language have these three features: unlike the nouns, pronouns in the English language do not take determiner, pronouns in the language have definite forms to specify the various types of cases, and pronouns in the English language indicate distinctions of person (1<sup>st</sup> person, 2<sup>nd</sup> person and 3<sup>rd</sup> person). Ken-Maduako also admitted that pronouns are used to avoid the unnecessary repetition of nouns, noun phrases and noun clauses. Also, Lamidi (2008) and Ahaotu (2011) corroborate the opinion that the term “pronoun” refers to a word used to substitute or replace a noun in a construction. In the words of Andrew (2016, p. 14), “pronouns are words used in lieu or instead of nouns.” This definition supports the claim that pronouns are nominal substitutes in natural languages. Isaac (2018) asserts that the wrong use of a

pronoun can distort the message from a sender to the receiver (the audience). Isaac and Ugorji (2022) agree that the term pronoun refers to a word that takes the place of a nominal (nouns, noun phrases and noun clauses) in a construction. They note that pronouns in Ọgba are said to be similar to nouns in the language because they can carry out almost all the syntactic functions of nouns. However, unlike the nouns, pronouns in Ọgba do not generally co-occur with modifiers in the language. They also observe that the available data in the Ọgba language reveal that even though pronouns in the language can occur in all the syntactic positions designated for the nouns, they (pronouns) vary from the noun. It is construed from the findings of Ken-Maduako (2004), Lamidi (2008), Ahaotu (2011), Isaac (2018), and Isaac and Ugorji (2022) that pronouns exists in Ọgba and English languages. However, to the best of the researchers’ knowledge, no study has so far contrasted the personal pronouns in Ọgba and English language. For that reason, this paper contrasts the personal pronouns in both languages with the aim of identifying their similarities and differences.

## 4. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey design, which involves taking a sample from a population in order to classify their basic features which can be used to reach or draw a general conclusion about the whole population. The data were gathered through the use of the unstructured elicitation oral interview method and the intuitive knowledge of the researchers as L1 and L2 speakers of Ọgba and English languages respectively. This suggests that the researchers did not provide any formal questionnaire for the respondents to answer. In other words, the data were collected from the respondents in informal settings or situations. The methods of data analysis employed in this paper are mainly the descriptive technique of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing and the contrastive method of data analysis. The data collected in Ọgba were first glossed in English language before been contrasted with their equivalence in English language.

### 4.1 Personal Pronouns in Ọgba

The personal pronouns generally indicate the relationship between speech participates and the speech. It usually identifies the speaker’s position in a Speech Act. They specify whether the speaker or audience is part of the speech or not. Simply put, they reveal who does what in a discourse. The examples in table 4.1 represent all the personal pronouns in the Ọgba language:

S/N	Person	Nominative		Accusative	
		Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1a.	1st person	m(mú)	Yé	m(mú)	Yé
		'I'	'we'	'I'	'we'
b.	2nd person	í(yú)	ònú	í(yú)	ònú
		'you'	'you'	'you'	'you'
c.	3rd person	ọ	wọ	á(yá)	wọ
		's/he/it'	'they'	'him/her/it'	'they'

Table 4.1: *Personal Pronouns in Ogbá*

The examples 1a-c in table 4.1 demonstrate that there are seven personal pronouns in the Ogbá language. It is noticed that the grammatical features of person, case and number apply to all the personal pronouns in the language. The examples also show that personal pronouns make distinction between three persons, namely: 1st person personal pronoun, 2nd person personal pronoun and 3rd person personal pronoun. The 1st person is usually used when the speaker is involved in the speech; the 2nd person is generally employed when the audience or addressee (the listener) is part of the speech while the 3rd person is the form that is employed when neither the addresser nor the addressee is part of the discourse. It is further observed from the data in table 4.1 that it is only the singular form of the 3rd person pronoun that makes case distinction in Ogbá. On the other hand, all the personal pronouns in the language make gender distinction. Once more, it is also noticed that singular form of the 1st person pronoun – m(mú), the singular form of the 2nd person – í(yú) and the 3rd person singular form of the accusative case – á(yá) have two forms in the Ogbá language. Additionally, this study observes that the contracted form and the full form of the 1st person pronoun have some differences:

- 2a. M gbá-m ọsọ yá tnà.  
1SG run+PST-1SGSCL race SPEC today  
'I ran race today.'
- b. \*M gbá ọsọ yá tnà.  
1SG run+PST race SPEC today  
'I ran race today.'
- c. ?Mmú gbá-m ọsọ yá tnà.  
1SG run+PST-1SGSCL race SPEC today  
'I ran today.'
- d. Mmú; yà t; gbá ọsọ yá tnà.  
1SG RC run+PST race SPEC today  
'It was me that ran today.'
- e. Ọ kpọ mmú.  
3SG call-PST 1SG  
'S/he called me.'

The examples in 2a-e indicate that contracted form and the full form of the personal pronouns in Ogbá have different grammatical features. For instance, in 2a construction, the 1st person singular subject clitic (1SGSCL) which has the same form with the pronoun is obligatorily suffixed to the lexical verb (the head of the VP). Its omission results in ungrammatical construction as in 2b. It is also observed that 2c is unacceptable for two reasons: firstly, the full form of the personal pronoun does not accept the attachment of 1SGSCL to the verb when it occurs in nominative (subjective) case. Secondly, the relative clause marker (yà) is needed before the verb as in 2d. The examples in 2d and 2e demonstrate that the full form of the 1st person pronoun occurs in cleft construction and in accusative case in the language. Figures 4.1a and 4.1b can be used to clarify that the occurrence of the full form of the 1st person pronoun in sentence initial position is a case of movement.

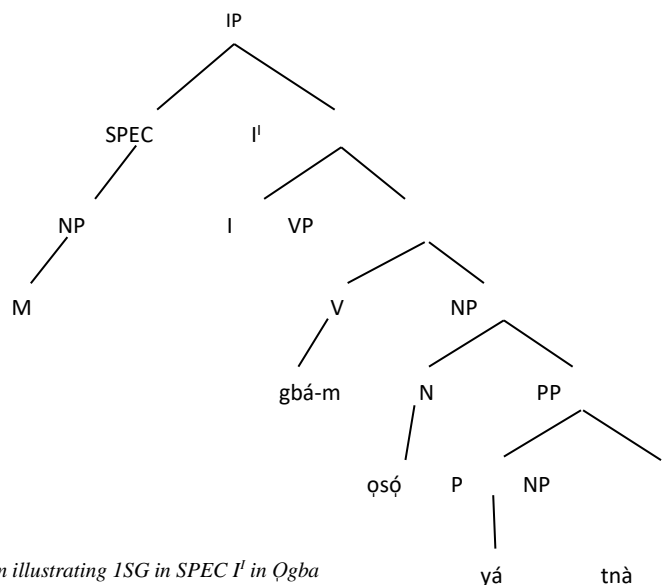


Fig. 4.1a: A tree diagram illustrating 1SG in SPEC I' in Ogbá

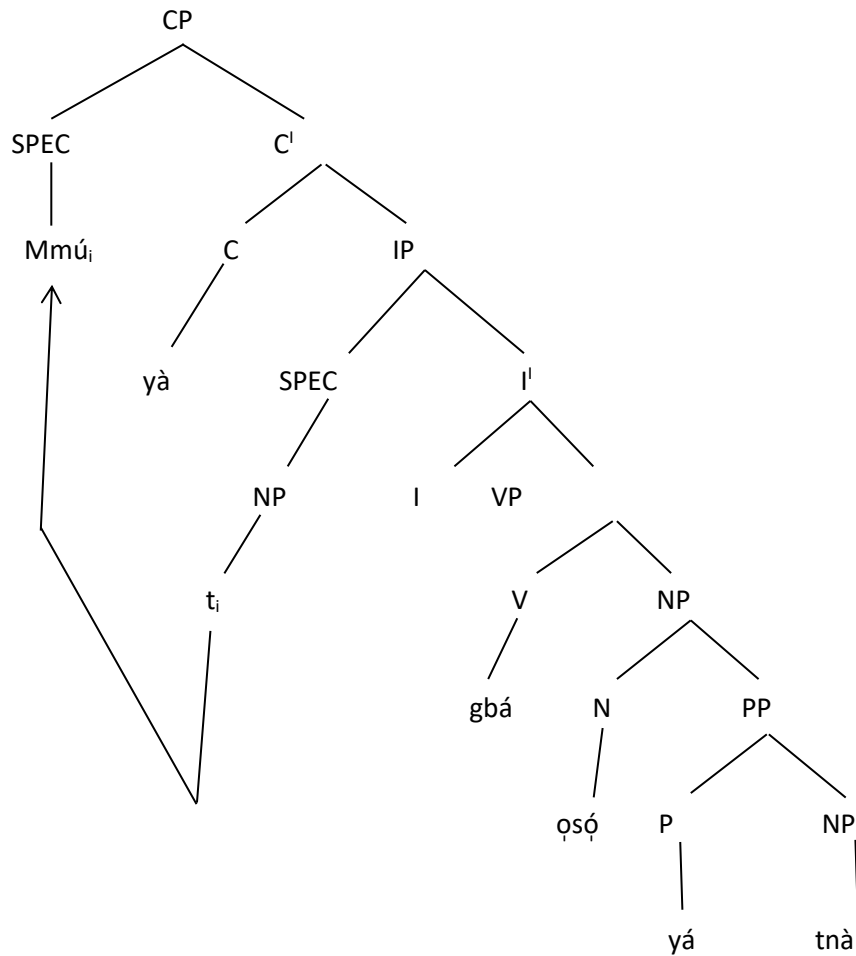


Fig. 4.1b: A tree diagram illustrating the Movement of 1SG from SPEC I' into SPEC C' in Ọgba

Figures 4.1a and 4.1b substantiate the view that the contracted forms of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns occur in the nominative case, that is, the SPEC I' of an IP (the main clause) in Ọgba as in figure 4.1a. But, when they move from the SPEC I' to SPEC C', they obligatorily change to their full forms. This accounts for the ungrammaticality of the construction in example 3a:

- 3a. \*M yà t<sub>i</sub> gbá ọ̀sọ́ yá t̀nà.  
1SG RC run+PST race SPEC today  
'It was me that ran today.'
- b. ?Ọ kpó m.  
3SG call-PST 1SG  
'S/he called me.'
- c. Ọ kpó m òkwú.  
3SG call-PST 1SG call  
'S/he called me.'

The example in 3a-c confirm that the contracted form of the 1st person pronoun do not occur in SPEC C' in a cleft construction in the Ọgba language. It also noticed that the contracted form of the 1st person pronoun may occur in accusative case; however, it customarily co-occurs with an indirect object. Thus, example 3b is either incomplete or unacceptable in the language. Furthermore, the examples 4a-d prove that the 1st and 2nd person pronouns share the same syntactic features.

- 4a. Í gbá ọ̀sọ́ yá t̀nà.  
2SG run+PST race SPEC today  
'You ran race today.'
- b. Íyúì yà t<sub>i</sub> gbá ọ̀sọ́ yá t̀nà.  
2SG RC run-PST race SPEC today  
'It was you that ran today.'
- c. ?Íì yà t<sub>i</sub> gbá ọ̀sọ́ yá t̀nà.  
1SG RC run+PST race SPEC today  
'I ran race today.'

- d. Íyú gbá ọsọ yá tnà?  
 2SG run-PST race SPEC today  
 'I ran race today.'

The examples in 4a-d corroborate that like the contracted form of the 1SG, the contracted form of the 2SG does not occur in SPEC C<sup>I</sup> in a cleft construction in the Ọgba language. It is observed that whereas the contracted form occurs in the nominative case of a declarative sentence as in 4a, the full form occurs in the nominative case of an interrogative sentence as in 4d. This is only syntactic difference between it and the 1SG in the language. The examples in 5a-d illustrate the syntactic features of the 3SGACCU in the Ọgba language:

- 5a. Ọ kpọ á òkwú.  
 3SG call-PST 3SG call (n)  
 'S/he called her(him).'
- b. Áyá, yà t<sub>i</sub> kpọ á òkwú.  
 3SG RC run-PST 3SG call (n)  
 'It was him/her that called.'
- c. \*Á yà kpọ áyá òkwú.  
 3SG RC run-PST 3SG call (n)  
 'It was him/her that called.'
- d. \*Áyá yà kpọ áyá òkwú.  
 3SG RC run-PST 3SG call (n)  
 'It was him/her that called.'

The examples 5a-d indicate that whereas the contracted form occurs in accusative case in a construction, the full form occurs in the SPEC C<sup>I</sup> in cleft-construction in the language. This accounts for the ungrammaticality of 5c and 5d. Figures 4.2a and 4.2b can be used to illustrate the syntactic movement of the 3SG from the SPEC II to SPEC CI in the Ọgba language:

Fig. 4.2a: A tree diagram illustrating 3SG in SPEC I<sup>I</sup> in Ọgba

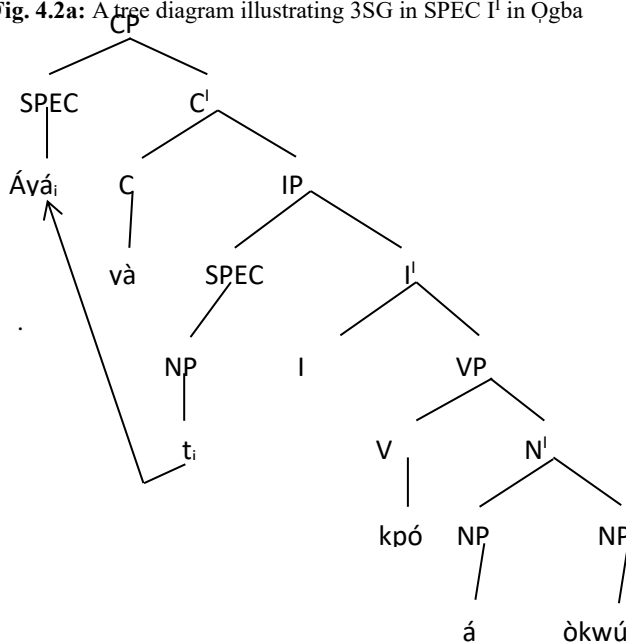


Fig. 4.2b: A tree diagram illustrating the Movement of 3SG from SPEC I<sup>I</sup> into SPEC C<sup>I</sup> in Ọgba

Figures 4.2a and 4.2b clearly reveal that the only form of the 3SG which occurs in the SPEC I<sup>I</sup> is the nominative case – Ọ, the contracted form of the accusative case – á occurs in the direct object position while the form – áyá occurs in the SPEC C<sup>I</sup> of a cleft-construction. This suggests that figure 4.2b results from its movement of the 3SG from SPEC I<sup>I</sup> to SPEC C<sup>I</sup>.

#### 4.2 Personal Pronouns in English

This study identified twelve personal pronouns in the English language. The data in table 4.2 illustrate the person pronouns in the language:

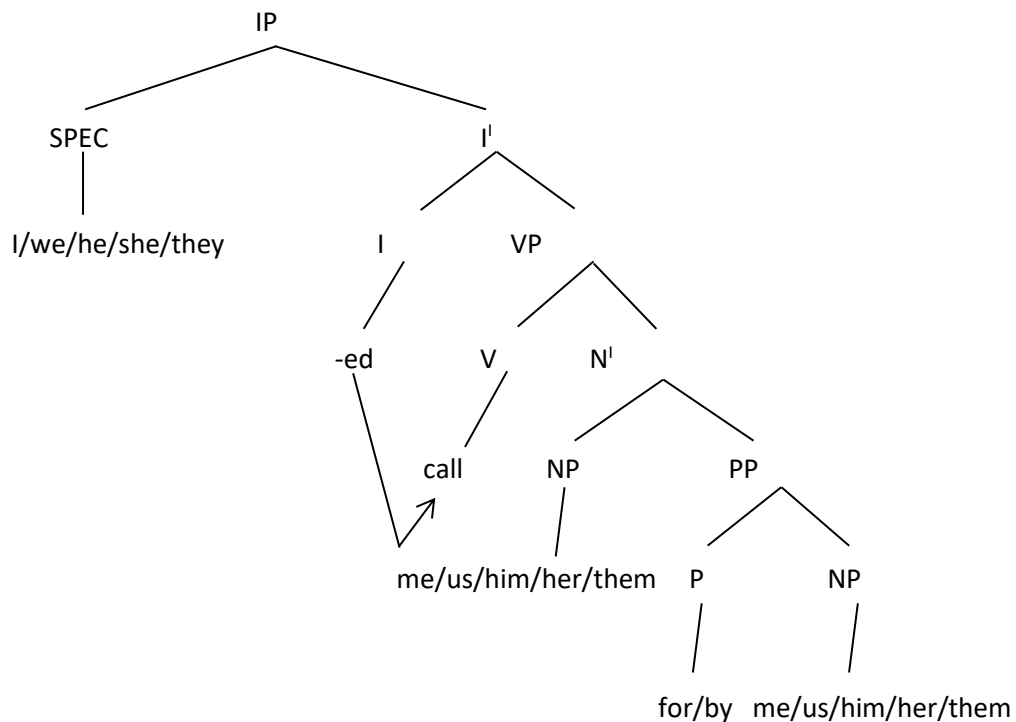
S/N	Person	Nominative		Accusative	
		Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
6a.	1st person	I	We	Me	Us
b.	2nd person	You	You	You	You
c.	3rd person	He	They	Him	Them
	Masculine				
	Feminine	She	They	Her	Them
	Neuter	It	They	It	Them

**Table 4.2:** Personal Pronouns in English

The data in table 4.2 prove that with the exception of the 2nd person pronouns, the grammatical feature of number and case apply to all the personal pronouns in the English language. That is, it is only the 2nd person pronoun that does not mark number and case in the language. It is also observed that whereas the 3rd person pronouns mark gender, the 1st and 2nd person pronouns do not mark gender distinction. It is further noticed from the examples in 6c in table 4.2 that the 3rd person pronouns in the language recognize three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter. The data further show that the gender distinction of the 3rd person pronoun is only marked by the singular forms while the plural forms do not mark gender distinction. More so, the singular form of the neuter gender is the same with both the nominative and accusative cases.

- 7a. I/we/he/she/they bought the pen.
- b. \*Me/us/him/her/them bought the pen.
- 8a. John called me/us/him/her/them.
- b. \* John called I/we/he/she/they.
- 9a. The pen was bought by me/us/him/her/them.
- b. \*The pen was bought by I/we/he/she/they.

The examples in 7a-b affirm that the personal pronouns: I, we, he, she and they are nominative pronouns. In other words, they do not occur in objective case. This accounts for the ungrammaticality of 7b. On the other hand, the examples in 8a-b reveal that the personal pronouns: me, us, him, her and them are accusative. That is, they do not occur in subjective case. This explains why the construction in 8b is ungrammatical. This study observed that whereas the accusative pronouns in the English language can come follow a preposition in a construction, the nominative pronouns do not follow a preposition in a construction in the language. Thus, whereas the example 9a is grammatical, the example 9b is ungrammatical in the language.



**Fig. 4.3:** A tree diagram illustrating the Syntactic Positions of Personal Pronouns in English Language

Figure 4.3 prove that it is only the personal pronouns: I/we/he/she/they that can occur in the SPEC I<sup>1</sup> while the personal pronouns: me/us/him/her/them occur in the objective NP which is dominated by the VP node. The tree also shows that the personal pronouns: me/us/him/her/them can occur in the NP that is C-commanded by the P and dominated by the PP node.

#### 4.3 The Similarities and Differences between Personal Pronouns in Oqba and English

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that the personal pronouns in Oqba and English have some similarities and differences. In terms of similarities, it is observed that with the exception of the 2nd person pronoun (which does not mark number distinction in English), all the pronouns in both languages mark number distinction. It is also observed that the 3SG in Oqba and English mark case distinction. This study further noticed that the accusative cases form of the 3SG in both languages occur in SPEC C<sup>1</sup> in cleft-constructions in both languages.

In terms of differences, it is observed that unlike the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns in Oqba, 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun in English does not mark number and case in the language. This study noticed that whereas the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronouns mark gender distinction in English, they do not mark gender distinction in the Oqba language. It is noticed that unlike in Oqba, it is only the singular form of neuter gender of the 3<sup>rd</sup> personal pronouns that occurs in SPEC C<sup>1</sup> in cleft-construction in the English. That is, it is only the pronoun – it that occurs in the SPEC C<sup>1</sup> in cleft-construction in the English language while all the accusative pronouns can occur in the SPEC C<sup>1</sup> in cleft-construction in the Oqba language. Once more, it is noticed that unlike English, the singular form of the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun – m(mú), the singular form of the 2<sup>nd</sup> person – ì(yú) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form of the accusative case – á(yá) have two forms in the Oqba language. Additionally, this study observed that unlike the singular form of the 1<sup>st</sup> personal pronoun in English, whenever the contracted form of the singular form of the 1<sup>st</sup> personal pronoun in Oqba occurs in the SPEC I<sup>1</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular subject clitic (ISGSCL) which has the same form with it is obligatorily suffixed to the lexical verb (the head of the VP).

#### 5. Conclusion

The application of the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) in the analysis of the personal pronouns in the Oqba and English languages has shown that the personal pronouns in both languages have their areas of similarities and differences. The study has proven

that whereas there are only seven personal pronouns in the Oqba language, there are twelve personal pronouns in the English language. This suggests that there are more personal pronouns in the English language than in Oqba language. With the exception of the 2nd person pronouns in the English language, all the personal pronouns in both languages mark number distinction.

#### 6. Recommendations

Following postulations of the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) that the areas of differences between two or more languages can pose learning difficulty for the L2 learner, this study recommends that English language teachers within Oqba speech communities should focus on the gender and case distinctions when teaching personal pronouns in the English language.

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