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Misspellings in Edo Names: A Case for a Standardized Orthographic Reform

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Abstract

This paper focuses on misspellings of Edo personal names from the phonetic point of view since the Edo orthography, like the orthographies of most Nigerian Languages, is generally believed to be phonetically based. It is observed in the present study that the principle of 'one letter/digraph to one sound' is not strictly adhered to in the Edo orthography as it currently is. The implication of this is that most Edo personal names, as they are currently written, are meaningless. In particular, as pointed out in Omọzuwa (2003), "The absence of separate orthographic symbols for the palatal and labial-velar nasal consonants [ɲ] and [ɲw], respectively, in the system, appears to violate the principle of a good orthography which requires that all significant sounds in a language are represented on a one sound, one letter/digraph basis. It is therefore recommended, following Melzian (1937), that the practice whereby the orthographic symbol for an oral vowel written after each of the nasal consonants 'm', 'mw', 'n', 'ny', and 'nw' without the redundant letter 'n' after the oral vowel be adopted in Edo orthography since it is a known phonetic fact that

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the nasal resonance of the vowel perceived in actual speech is the result of the progressive nasal spread of the preceding nasal consonant. The orthographic inconsistency inherent in the way Edo Language is currently written, therefore, calls for an urgent need for a standardized orthographic reform along the line suggested in this paper.

Introduction

The written forms of most African Languages were developed based on the spoken forms, during the colonial period. Choosing the appropriate written code for a language in a given geographical area was, therefore, the prerogative of the colonial administrators who also relied on the speech forms of their own mother tongues. Expectedly, this resulted in the inconsistencies observed in the ways the same phonetic sound is orthographically represented in different African Languages. Consider the following examples: the [u] sound of the name [aʔmadu] is rendered orthographically with the digraph 'ou' in the francophone areas whereas the same sound is written as 'u' in the Anglophone areas. Even within the same territory, similar orthographic inconsistencies exist. For instance, the sound [ɔ] in most Nigerian Languages is represented differently in the written form: 'o' (o with a sub-dot) as in [ókâ] (in Edo), [ókà] (in Igbo) "oka"(maize), [òwà] 'owa'(name of a village), and in the penultimate syllable of [èkjádòlò] 'Ekiadolor' (name of a village), 'or' in the final syllable of 'Ekiadolor', [àgbò] "Agbor" (name of the neighbouring Ika town). In this case, the phonetic [ɔ] is represented orthographically as 'or' which is homophonous with similar orthographic segments in English words such as

orthography, author, or, store, bore, etc., and even 'aw' as in [óká] "Awka", the 'aw' here being similar to the 'aw' in the English word "awful", "awkward", 'awe', etc. Thus, many Edo, Esan, Igbo, Ika and Ukwani names ending in the [ɔ] sound are written with the digraph 'or' in the final syllable of such names, the letter 'o' in the first syllable and elsewhere. Consider the following in Edo and Ika:

Edo	Ika
1. [òtábó] 'Otabor'	8. [àkũmǎbó] 'akumabor'
2. [òwábó] 'Owabor'	9. [òkũbó] 'Okubor'
3. [òkũ!bó] 'Okunbor'	10. [òsũhó] 'Osuhor'
4. [éxátó] 'Ekhator'	11. [ìdʒɛbó] 'Igiebor'
5. [èhìgǎtò] 'Ehigiator'	12. [èhìdʒátò] 'Ehigiator'
6. [ìsíbó] 'Isibor'	13. [ìràbó] 'Irabor'
7. [ìgǐèbó] 'Igiebor'	14. [òwábó] 'Owabor'

Orthographically, the 'o' with a sub-dot, 'o', is proposed in all instances of the phonetic [ɔ] in Edo Language. Thus, 1-7 above should be written 'Otabo', 'Owabo', 'Okunbo', 'Ekható', 'Ehigiato', 'Isibo', and 'Igiebo' respectively. For purposes of harmonization, therefore, adopting this in Esan, Ika, Igbo, Ukwani, etc., will not be out of place since it will further enhance easy written communication between literate speakers of these languages.

It is also observed that in most cases, nasal vowels have not been adequately represented orthographically in names as evidenced in the spellings of such Ika names in 8-10 above. As pointed out in Omozawa (2003), nasal vowels are represented orthographically as 'the corresponding letter for an oral vowel plus the letter 'n'. The two letters thus

constitute a *digraph* representing a single phonetic nasal sound. Thus, the five inherent nasal vowels [ĩ], [ẽ], [ã], [ũ], and [õ] are written as 'in', 'en', 'an', 'un', 'on' respectively.

An appropriate orthographic system for Edo names should therefore be understood within the context of what is phonetically and orthographically logical since the latter derives its essence from the former. This appears not to have been the case in some previous works on Edo (cf. Osemwegie 1965, 1974; Egharevba 1972, Emovon and Osemwegie 1982, Agheyisi 1986, Imasuen 1997, Obaze 1997, Erhahon 1998, Omoregie 2005, etc).

Misspelling in Edo often involves the following:

- (i) non inclusion of the negative marker 'i' [i] where necessary
- (ii) redundant orthographic 'n' after the vowel immediately following the digraph 'mw' representing the inherent nasal sound [m]
- (iii) absence of appropriate letters for the palatal and labial-velar nasals [ɲ] and [ŋw]
- (iv) absence of the letter 'n' after the digraphs 'in', 'en', 'an', 'un', 'on' representing the five inherent nasal vowels [ĩ], [ẽ], [ã], [ũ], and [õ] respectively, in some names
- (v) the use of a single letter 'r' instead of the digraphs 'rr' and 'rh', for the voiced and voiceless alveolar trills [r] and [r̥] respectively, or vice versa..

1.1 Non inclusion of the negative marker 'i' [i] where necessary in Edo personal names

In Edo, as in most African Languages, personal names are meaningful and reflect the circumstances of birth of the bearer. This could be environmental, social, or spiritual. The responsibility of choosing a meaningful name for a child is a solemn undertaking by the parents and relations. Such names could be phrases or even complete sentences that are most often abbreviated. Thus, most children born during war time bear the name [òkwóimôsé] literally translated as 'war is not beautiful' from [òkwó] 'war', [i] 'negative marker-not', and the adjective [môsé] 'beautiful'. This name summarizes the horrendous nature of war. In standard Edo orthography, which, to a large extent, is phonetically based, this name is written as 'okuoimose'. The inconsistencies in the orthographic rendering of this name by different bearers of the name, like many other names, should therefore be a matter of serious concern not only to Linguists but also to the generality of Edo speakers. For instance, the name above is variously spelt 'okuoimose', 'okuomose' by different Edo indigenes, the latter meaning the direct opposite of 'war is not beautiful', i.e., 'war is beautiful'. The implication of this is that in this computer age, the two written forms will be listed as if they were two different names. Other examples of personal names in which the negative marker is erroneously omitted are:

Correctly spelt version	Often misspelt as
15. Agbonimekuegbe [àgbõíměkwégbé] 'humans are not envious of each other'	Agbonmekuegbe [àgbõměkwégbé] 'Humans are envious of each other'
16. Aganimwọyi [àgǎímǔjǐ] 'barrenness is not glorified'	Aganmwonyi [àgǎmǔjǐ] 'barrenness is glorified'
17. Evbarunegbeifo [èḃàúnégbéífó] 'One good turn deserves another'	'Evbarunegbefo' [èḃàúnégbéífó] 'One good turn does not deserve another'
18. Èfẹimwẹkiekie [èfẹíměkǐkǐjẹ] 'It's never too late to acquire wealth'	Efemwekiekie [èfẹměkǐkǐjẹ] 'It's too late to acquire wealth'

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- | | |
|---|---|
| 19. Okhionkpaimwoyi [òxjòkpàimjòjì]
'A loner has no respect' | Okhionkpamwoyi [òxjòkpàimjòjì]
'A loner has respect' |
| 20. Uwuilekhue [ùwùfléxwê]
'Death spares no one' | Uwulekhue [ùwùléxwê]
'Death spares one' |

1.2 Redundant orthographic 'n' after the vowel immediately following the digraph 'mw' representing the inherent nasal sound [ŋ]

As pointed out in Omozuwa (2003), in Edo, "...provision is made only for the bilabial and the alveolar nasal consonants [m] and [n] in the orthographic system: 'm' and 'n' respectively. Even though the digraph 'mw' has been used to represent the labiodental nasal consonant [ŋ], the presence of the grapheme 'n' after the oral vowel that immediately follows the digraph makes it inconsistent with the way 'm' and 'n' are orthographically represented i.e., without an 'n' after the vowel immediately following these consonants." This follows from the phonetic fact that any oral vowel immediately following any of the five inherent nasal consonants, [m], [ŋ], [n], [ɲ], and [ɳw] is nasalized through the process of progressive nasal assimilation. (Omozuwa 1987, 1990, 2003). Thus, the Edo words for 'drum' and 'these', [èṁṁ] and [èṅṅ] are rendered orthographically 'ema' and 'ena' respectively, and not *'eman' and *'enan'. This is not the case with the other three nasal consonants [ŋ], [ɲ] and [ɳw]. [ɲ] and [ɳw] are not even orthographically represented (Omozuwa 2003). Edo personal names in which the grapheme 'n' is redundantly written after the oral vowel that immediately follows the digraph 'mw' include the following:

21. Adanihomwan / ádáníhóṁṁàn / => *[ádáníhó!ṁṁān] instead of
Adaanihomwa / ádǎníhóṁṁà / => [ádǎníhó!ṁṁǎ] 'mutual respect'
22. Agbonghamamwan / àgbòṅyámámǎn / => *[àgbòṅyámǎṁṁān] instead of
Agbonghamaamwa / àgbòṅyámǎṁ / => [àgbòṅyámǎṁǎ] 'life will be better'

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‘anya’ (eye), is inappropriately rendered orthographically, following the principle of ‘one letter/digraph to one sound’

26. /òṅèṁḗ/ => [òṅḗṁḗ] ‘Oṅyemwẹ’ (contentment/happiness) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘oyenmwen’ *[òṅḗṁḗn].

27. /ùṅí!ṁḗ/ => [ùṅí!ṁḗ] ‘Unyimwẹ’ (One’s character portrays who one is) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘Uyinmwen’ *[ùṅíṁḗn].

28. / ádàgbǔṅí / => [ádàgbǔṅí] ‘Adagbṅnyí’ (one’s investments in life determine how one lives) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘Adagbonyin’ *[ádàgbǔṅí].

29. / àgbǎgbǎṅá / => [àgbǎgbǎṅá] ‘Agbangbannya’ (one who over do things to suit himself) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘Agbangbanyan’ *[àgbǎgbǎṅá].

30. /ìṁúéṭíṅǎ/ => [ìṁwéṭíṅǎ] ‘Imuṭinnya’ (I faith in...) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘Imuentinyan’ *[ìṁwéṭíṅǎ].

1.3.1 The digraph ‘nw’ as the appropriate orthographic symbols for the Edo labial-velar nasal [ɲw]

The examples in 31-35 are instances where the Edo labial-velar nasal [ɲw], similar to the nasal consonant in the Igbo name [óṅwēmē], is inappropriately rendered orthographically, following the principle of ‘one letter/digraph to one sound’

31. /èṅwàèósíhà/ => [èṅwǎḗósíhâ] => [èṅwāsíhâ] ‘Èṅwaṅṣiha’ (common sense is superior to divination) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘Ewaen-Osiha’ *[èwǎḗósíhâ].

32. /èṅwàèósé!tí/ => [èṅwǎḗósé!tí] => [èṅwāsé!tí] ‘Èṅwaṅṣetin’ (common sense is superior to might) currently inappropriately rendered orthographically as ‘Ewaen-Osetin’ *[èwǎḗósé!tí].

33. /àṅwàbó/ => [àṅwābó] 'Anwabo' (Foresight comes with maturity) currently inappropriately written as 'Awanbor' *[awābó]
34. /àíṅwāfò/ => [àíṅwāfò] 'Ainwafo' (one cannot know all) written currently as Aiwanfo *[àíwāfò]
35. /úṅwàgùè/ => [úṅwāgwè] 'Unwague' (a palace title) currently written as 'Uwangu' *[uwāgwè].

Ọmọzuwa (1990) points out that the only Edo oral consonant nasalized regressively when followed by a nasal vowel is the alveolar lateral approximant [ɺ]. This explains why [ɺ] and [ɺw] are not perceived if the principle of "one letter/digraph to one sound" applies to words that ought to have these sounds, as they are currently written, as evidenced in the starred entries above

1.4 Absence of the letter 'n' after the digraphs 'in', 'en', 'an', 'un', 'on' representing the five inherent nasal vowels [ĩ], [ẽ], [ã], [ũ], and [õ] respectively, in some names

The letter 'n' after the digraphs 'in', 'en', 'an', 'un', 'on' representing the five inherent nasal vowels [ĩ], [ẽ], [ã], [ũ], and [õ] respectively, is absent in the written form of some Edo names. In such cases, the names become meaningless or acquire a meaning that was not intended as evidenced in the examples in 36-40 below:

36. /ìgbĩńóṃáhjá/ => [ìgbĩńõṃáhjá] 'Igbinnomwahia' (I seek the protection of everybody) currently written as 'Igbinomwanhia' [ìgbĩńóṃānhjá] (Everybody's seed yam(s)).
37. /ìgbĩńósà/ => [ìgbĩńõ!sà] 'Igbinnosa' (I am under the protection of God) currently written as 'Igbinosa' [ìgbĩńòsà] (God's seed yam(s))

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38. / ̀ìgbǐnńóbá/ => [ìgbǐnńóbá] 'Igbinnoba' (I am under the protection of the King) currently written as 'Igbinoba' [ìgbíńóbá] (the King's seed yam(s)).

39. / ̀ìgbǐnńòvìà/ = [ìgbǐnńò!vjà] 'Igbinnovia' (I am under the protection of the ovia deity) currently written as 'Igbinovia' [ìgbíńòvjà] (Ovia's seed yam(s)).

40. / ̀ìgbǐnńógú/ => [ìgbǐnńó!gú] 'Igbinnogun' (I am under the protection of the god of iron) currently written as 'Igbinogun' [ìgbíńògú] (the god of iron's seed yam(s)).

1.5 The use of a single 'r' instead of the double 'rr' or 'rh' (digraphs), for the voiced and voiceless alveolar trill [r] and [r̥] respectively

Edo language distinguishes between three r-sounds: the alveolar lateral approximant [ɹ], the alveolar voiced trill [r], and the alveolar voiceless trill [r̥]. The three sounds are also represented differently by three orthographic symbols: 'r', 'rr' and 'rh' respectively. In many cases, this distinction is not reflected in the written forms of many Edo personal names as seen in the following examples:

1.5.1 The letter 'r' instead of the digraph 'rr'

The examples in 41-45 below are some of the cases in which Edo names are wrongly written with the single letter 'r' instead of the digraph 'rr'. When phonetically transcribed, such names become meaningless.

41. 'Orobosa' *[òróbó!sà] instead of 'Orrobosa' [òróbó!sà] (He/it is in the hands of God)

42. 'Iriowengiasi' *[ɪjówẽgjasí] supposedly 'one can pull the rays of the sun' instead of 'Irrionweigiasi' [ɪrjó!ɪwẽígjasí] 'one cannot pull the rays of the sun'

43. 'Iyare' *[ijá!ɪè] instead of 'Iyarre' [ijá!rè] 'Safe journey'.

44. 'Uhunamure' *[ùhũámũ!ɪé] instead of 'Uhunnamurre' [ùhũnámũ!ré] 'One's destiny'

45. 'Uwarobosa' *[ùwà!óbó!sà] 'wealth is the hands of God' instead of 'Uwarrobosa' [ùwàróbó!sà] 'wealth is in the hands of God'

1.5.2 The letter 'r' instead of the digraph 'rh'

The examples in 46-50 below illustrate instances where Edo names are wrongly written with the single letter 'r' instead of the digraph 'rh'. Such names become meaningless when transcribed phonetically based on the 'one letter/digraph one sound' principle.

46. 'Airigbonaye' *[àíjâgbõàjé] instead of 'Airhiagbonnaye' [àírjâgbõnãjé] (you don't destroy the world you live in)

47. 'Agbonriare' *[àgbõjájâê] instead of 'Agbonrhiare' [àgbõrjájâê] (the world is spoilt).

48. 'Airiana' *[àíjánã] instead of Airhiana [àírjánã] (this is not to be spoilt/wasted)

49. 'Erokpadamwen' *[èròkpàdàmjẽn] instead of Erhokpaidamwe [èròkpàídâ!m jẽ] (no regrets)

50. 'Imaguomwanruo' *[ìmǎgwómjānwó] instead of 'Imaguomwaarhuo' [ìmǎgwómjār wó] (I did not boast to any one)

1.5.3 The digraph 'rh' instead of the single letter 'r'

Instances of the wrong use of the digraph 'rh' instead of the single letter 'r' in some Edo names are to be found in Omoregie (2005:91) as seen below:

51. 'Erhinmwinbo' *[èríṃĩnbó] instead of 'Erinmwibo' [èríṃĩ!bó] (the heavens do favour one)
52. 'Erhinmwinhe' *[èríṃĩnhé] instead of 'Erinmwihe' [èríṃĩ!hé] (the heavens have refused)
53. 'Erhinmwingbovo' *[èríṃĩgbòvó] instead of 'Erinmwiigbovo' [èríṃĩ!gbò!vó] (the heavens are not envious of anyone)
54. 'Erhinmwinorose' [èríṃĩnó!ósè] instead of 'Erinmwiorose' [èríṃĩ!nó!ósè] (the heavens are witnesses)
55. 'Erhinmwinoghae' *[èríṃĩnò!yàé] instead of Erinmwioghae [èríṃĩ!nò!yàé] (the heavens control the affairs of men)

1.6 Conclusion

This study focuses on misspellings of Edo personal names from the phonetic point of view since the Edo orthography, like the orthographies of most Nigerian languages, is generally believed to be phonetically based. It is observed in the present study that the principle of 'one letter/digraph to one sound' is not strictly adhered to in the Edo orthography as it currently is. The implication of this is that most Edo personal names, as they are currently written, are meaningless. In particular, as pointed out in Omọzuwa (2003), "the absence of separate orthographic symbols for the palatal and labial-velar nasal consonants [ɲ] and [ɲw] respectively in the system appears to violate the principle of a good orthography which requires that "... all and only the significant sounds in the

language" should be orthographically represented. (Bamgbose 1965:1).

The orthographic inconsistency inherent in the way Edo Language is currently written therefore calls for an urgent need of a standardized orthographic reform.

It is proposed that for the purpose of consistency and harmonization with the orthographic systems of some neighbouring languages regarding the way the palatal and labial-velar nasal consonants are orthographically represented, the digraphs 'ny' and 'nw' be reintroduced into the Edo orthographic system, and that the 'o' with the sub-dot 'o' be adopted in all instances of the half-open, back, rounded vowel [ɔ].

Finally, it is also recommended that the earlier practice whereby the orthographic symbol for an oral vowel is written after each of the nasal consonants 'm', 'mw', 'n', 'ny', and 'nw' without the redundant letter 'n' after the oral vowel be adopted in Edo orthography. This is because it is a known phonetic fact that the nasal resonance of the vowel perceived in actual speech is the result of the progressive nasal spread of the preceding nasal consonant.

The suggested orthographic reforms highlighted in this paper should, as a matter of urgency, be incorporated in the literacy skills component of the Edo language curriculum for schools with a view to correcting these anomalies.

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