

# A Comparative Phonology of the Olùkùmi, Igala, Owe and Yoruba Languages

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## Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of the phonological systems of the Yorùbá, Owé, Igala and Olùkùmi languages with the objective of comparing and finding a reason for their similarities and differences and also proffering a proto form for the languages. These languages belong to the Defoid language family and by default a constituent of Niger Congo language family. Owé along with the other Okun dialects is traditionally regarded as a dialect of Yorùbá. The paper examines what constitutes their similarities and differences that make them to be regarded as different languages. A descriptive approach is adopted for the study. Data were collected from native speakers of the languages using the *Ibadan Four Hundred Word List of Basic Items*. Using discovered common lexemes in the languages, the classification of the languages sound systems and syllable systems are carried out in order to determine the major patterns of differences and similarities. Some major sound changes were discovered in the lexical items of the languages. The systematic substitutions of sounds also constitute another major finding observed in the languages. We have been able to establish in this study that there exists a very strong relationship among these languages, with the discovery of some common lexemes. We, however, discovered that the languages are mutually unintelligible except for Owé that has a degree of mutual intelligibility with Yoruba. The major reason for divergence is language contact as each group has experiences, relationships and contacts with different peoples and languages.

## Sample Data

Olukumi Igala Owe Yoruba Gloss

ọwó ọwó ọwó ọwó hand

usu uchu usu/ isu isu 'yam'

ara ọla ọra ara 'body'

ọma ọma ọmọ ọmọ 'child'

oluku ónùkú olúku ọrẹ 'friend'

obìnrin ọbùlẹ obùnrin obìnrin 'woman'

ba àtá baba bàbá 'father'

ẹnẹ ọnẹ ọni ẹni 'person'

una úná uná iná 'fire'

ọfọ ọlà ọrọ ọrọ 'word'

ẹdọ ẹdọ ẹkẹdọ ọkàn 'heart'

usa ùchà usà isà 'pot'

ẹla ẹla ẹlá malu 'cow'

arigbo ọ̀gìjọ arígbó arúgbo 'old person'

eku íkélékwu eku eku 'rat'

gbe né gbe gbé 'carry'

zẹ jẹ jẹ 'eat'

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