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## A Comparative Study of Counting System in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba

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### ABSTRACT

*The significance of counting system and its effects in developing different aspect of the lives of people cannot be overlooked. The concept of counting as viewed in this paper is also expressed. What counting system entails is also discussed. The importance of counting system in the society is also earmarked. The various means of counting used by the three major indigenous languages i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba is also highlighted. In conclusion, recommendations on what can be done to improve and sustain the counting among the three major indigenous languages in Nigeria is given*

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### INTRODUCTION

Counting is very important in our daily life activities. Every human being engages in the counting system in all aspects of life. Even children through their play make use of pebbles, fruits seed, stones, bottle tops, sticks etc. to solve their simple arithmetic both at home and in the school. Adults too are not left out as they count their wealth, which may be in terms of material things or money. In the past, fore fathers in the three major tribes use similar method of marks in form of stroke written with charcoal on the wall of their houses to indicate date or time of events and sometimes to know how far they've gone in their daily and weekly contributions (thrift) called (ajo) in Yoruba, (adashi) in Hausa and (isusu) in Igbo. Transaction are incomplete without the knowledge of counting, buying, selling, time telling, business transactions at home and in the offices, markets, shops all involve in counting. Through counting traders are able to realize their losses or gains. Grownups are able to know their achievements in life by counting their blessings and mishaps through flash backs. The country is agitating to embark on a programme called population census through which the total number of the populace of Nigeria can be known. Counting system is also made use of during the election period to know the winning candidate among the contestants.

The importance of counting can be enumerated as follows:

- It increases qualitative reasoning ability.
- It serves as an instructional material.
- It gives room for easier understanding.
- Further, it enhances reliability and accuracy

This paper examines the methods used in counting by the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo indigenous tribe in Nigeria and it is divided into three parts as follows:

- 1) Data
- 2) Analysis of Data
- 3) Findings



**Table A: Cardinal Numbers**

English	Hausa	Igbo	Yorùbá
Zero	Sifiri	Efu	Òfo tabi Òdo
One	Daya	Otu	Oókan Ení
Five	Biyar	ìse	Arún
Ten	Goma	ìri	Èwá
Eleven	Goma sha ðaya	ìri na otu	Oókànlá
Fifteen	Goma sha biyar	ìri na ìse	Ààruńdíńlógún
Eighteen	Goma sha takwas	lri na àsatô	Èjìdíńlógún
Twenty	Ashirin	lri àbuô	Ogún
Twenty-three	Ashirin da uku	lri abuo na atô	Ètálélógún
Thirty	Talatin	lri ato	Ogún
Thirty-Five	Talatin da biyar	lri ato na ìse	Ààruńdíńlógójí
Forty	Arba'in	lri anô	Ogójì
One hundred	Dari/ðari ðaya	Nàri	Qgḡḡrún

**Cardinal Numbers**

English	Hausa	Igbo	Yorùbá
One hundred and one	Dari da ðaya	Nari na otu	Òkanlé lḡgḡḡfún-ún
Two hundred	Dari biyu/metan ñ	Nari abuo	Igba
Five hundred	Dari biyar/hamsaminya	Nari ise	Èédégbḡta
One thousand	Dubu ðaya/zambar	Puku	Ègbḡrún kan
One million	Miliyan ðaya	Nde	Ègbḡgbḡrún kan
One Billion	Biliyan ðaya	ljeri	Ègbḡgbḡrún lḡnà egbḡrún

English	Hausa	Igbo	Yorùbá
A unit (1)	Guda	Nge	Èyḡ
Bundle (10 units)	Bandir	Ukwu	ìdì
A bag (100)	Jaka ðaya	Out akpa	àpò
A big bag (1,000)	Dubu ðaya	ego Akpa ego ize	òké



**Table B: Ordinal Numbers**

English	Hausa	Igbo	Yorùbá
First	Na ɗaya	Nke mbu	Èkíníí/Ikíníí
Second	Na biyu	Nke abno	Èkeji/Ikeji
Third	Na uku	Nke ato	Èketa/Iketa
Fourth	Na huɗu	Nke ano	Èkerin/Ikerin
Fifth	Na biyar	Nke ise	Èkarùn-ún/Ikarùn-ún
Sixth	Na shida	Nke isù	Èkefà/Ikefà
Seventh	Na bakwai	Nke Āsà	Èkeje/Ikeje
Eighth	Na takwas	Nke àsatō	Èkejo/Ikejo
Nineth	Na tara	Nke itōlū	Èkēsàn-án/Ikēsàn-án
Tenth	Na goma	Nke iri	Èkewà/Ikewàá

A close study of table A shows that what matter is eleven to nineteen is less difficult because what it needs is just “sha” in Hausa and “na” in Igbo. “Sha” and “na” literally means and which then reads ten and one (11), ten and nine (19) etc. The counting system in Yoruba is equally simple, though a little but more difficult than that of “din” and “le” involves addition.

In Hausa language the “goma” can be removed, that is:

11 – Goma sha ɗaya Or Sha ɗaya

Which still refer to the same number eleven; this cannot be done in Igbo counting system. Whereas in Yoruba, counting from one to fourteen is done by additive process “le” which is progressive but as soon as counting starts from 15-19 It’s done by reverse method. Because what it needs is a mere addition of “din” which literally means less “15” then becomes 5 less than 20 or “arùn” less ogún or árùndínlógún. 16 becomes four less twenty or erin less ogún (èridínlógún). We start subtracting from 20 which is ogún in Yoruba to give what is needed. Hausa language does have back formation at 18, 19, 28, 29 etc. for instance instead of goma sha takwas for 18 we can say “Ashirin ba biyu”. All we need to do is to subtract two from multiple of ten numbers i.e 20-2 which is 18. Another observation noted is that in Hausa number 15 can also be referred to as goma sha biyar, counting in always progressive just like Igbo “iri na ise” but we can’t remove “iri” in Igbo unlike in Hausa where “goma” can be removed. All numbers above (20) twenty employ “da” which is constant rather than “sha” in Hausa language and all numbers above (10) ten employ “na” in Igbo language. It is observed that in Hausa “ɗari” is a common feature attached to the unit numbers 1-9 signifying hundred as shown above. The same procedure applies to thousands (dubu ɗaya, dubu biyu, dubu uku etc.) and millions (miliyan ɗaya, miliyan biyu, miliyan uku etc.). In Hausa numbers are not multiplied in their counting system. Whereas Yorubas and Igbos employ multiplication in their counting system though the methods used varies. In Yoruba when they want to refer to (40) forty which means 20x2 i.e. ogún meji it is therefore referred to as ogoji etc. But in Igbo it is analysed as 10x4 i.e. ten multiply in four places which is then referred to as iri ano. Percentages are also expressed as follows;

*English: 10%*

*Igbo: Pacenti iri*



*Yoruba: Idasimewaa Ogorun-un*

*Hausa: Murabbai goma*

It is also observed here that we used a borrowed word from English language which is *pacenti* in Igbo to express percentage. This word *pacenti* comes before the numeral. Time telling can be expressed in the following ways in the three languages as follows:

English: 10mins. to 11:00 a.m.

*Yoruba: O ku iseju mewaa ki agogo mokanla aaro lu*

*Igbo: O foro nkeji iri k aka o kuo elekere iri na otu nke ututu*

*Hausa: Karfe sha daya saura minti Goma Na Safe.*

The syntactic and the semantic of those sentence is the same even the order of words. It can be expressed in three languages in another way like this:

English: 10:50a.m.

*Igbo: Etekere mbu akuola*

*Yoruba: Aago mokanla aaro ku iseju mewaa*

*Hausa: Karfe Goma da minti hamsin Na Safe*

*English: 10 past 11 a.m.*

*Hausa: Sha d'aya da minti goma na safe.*

*Igbo: O jirila nkeji iri gafee elekere iri na out nke utu*

*Yoruba: Aago mokanla aaro koja iseju mewaa.*

Counting can be expressed in buying and selling in the following way.

English: One Naira

Igbo: Otu Naira

Yoruba: Naira kan

Hausa: Naira daya

English: Two naira

Igbo: Naira Abuo

Yoruba: Naira meji

It is observed that we don't say naira Otu in Igbo because it doesn't sound well. So what they say is Otu Naira. In the position of the major elements it may never be the same in the first count, the position is Otu Naira but in the next count the position will change. This circumstance is not applicable in Yoruba counting system while bargaining, there is never a time that the position will change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

If Nigerian languages would be counted as one of the major languages of the world, its complex numerical system would have to be simplified. Science and Technology, the engines that drive the modern world depend largely on number manipulations. This means that the system of performing rigorous mathematical mechanics before arriving at a given quantity has to give way. The duo-decimal numerical system, with which our forebears counted their cattle, chickens in the barn and cocoa bags would have to be replaced with a decimal system. It is the decimal numeric system that we can use to count the number of people that occupy Nigeria's geo-political regions, the distance of the earth to the moon, the number of molecules in a substance etc. The duo-decimal counting system would just



not move the Nigerian languages into the modern era. Another reason to change to the use of the decimal system of counting is that it stops making counting itself the objective. Furthermore, this change is necessary because it immediately includes more people in the national debate. Because how many Nigerian besides the educated ones, actually understands the implications of national budget? How then can one explain to an uneducated person that the government will spend more than one trillion naira in a year? In the decimal system, the numbers are called as they are written. In the three languages under the review, the written number does not always have a corresponding voice pattern. For example, a simple number like 36 is called in the various languages as follows:

Yoruba: Eerindinlogoji

Igbo: Iri ato na isii

Hausa: Talatin da shida

That is (36) thirty-six is four less than two times twenty. None of the numbers used in the pronunciation can be deciphered from the written symbol. The Nigerian language system already starts on a good foot. All that needs to be done is a little fine tuning to the destination.

## CONCLUSION

It is observed that the three languages have counting system. In essence counting system is a universal phenomenon in languages. Like Chomsky proposition that there are parametric variations. It exist in all languages, it's the way they operate that only differ. The similarities noticeable in counting among the three languages could be linked to the origin of the three tribes which could be traceable to New Benue Congo

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