Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Suffixes in English and Igbo

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Abstract

Contrastive analysis looks at the ways and means by which features in languages are compared and the challenges the language learner encounters in learning a target language. This study explores the similarities and differences in English and Igbo inflectional suffixes. It seeks to predict the interference problems a learner of either language as an alternate language will encounter while forming inflectional suffixes in the target language. Inflectional suffixes in English are the plural markers /-s/, its phonological variants- {-s,-z,-iz}, the past tense marker /-ed/ and its phonological variants-{-d,-t,-id}, the comparative {-er} and superlative {-est}forms while the Igbo inflectional suffixes{=e/=a, =o/=ọ} are the harmonizing open vowel suffix. Employing a corpus-based research method of data collection involving description, comparison and prediction of existing corpora of the inflectional features in both languages, this paper maintains that applying the CA measures, these transferred native speaker's formation of inflectional suffixes become serious interference phenomena to learning the target language. The theoretical framework, the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) approach by Van Vallin and La Polla (1997), which propagates the effect of the learner's inherent temporal properties in a target language is employed. The findings is expected to help language teachers and curriculum planners to aid language learning.

Keywords: morphology, contrastive analysis, transfer, interference phenomena, target language

Introduction

Globalisation has necessitated the need for interaction whereby new words are formed and internalized. Contrastive analysis (CA) looks at the impediments the native speaker experiences during language acquisition as he transfers the rudiments of his language word-formation process to the target language during learning. Most countries as Nigeria, are today, mandatorily bilinguals and multilinguals. This makes it imperative that indigenes who have their Mother Tongue (MT) or First Language (L1), may need to learn another language, the 2nd language (L2) or Target language (TL) for the purpose of interaction and integration. This is because of the presence of the mandatory national or formal language of expression, education/instruction, and governance in Nigeria, the English language, known as the 'lingua franca'. There are three major indigenous languages in Nigeria; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and other multifarious language groups e.g. Edo, Efik, Fulani, Ibibio, Igala, Ijaw, Kanuri, Pidgin Tiv.

The Igbo language is the mother-tongue to the people of the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Mother-tongue designate the indigenous language while first language isthe language of the environment of a learner. The English language is the official language, second language (L2) or the target language (TL). A learner is expected to be competent in one and learn the other. The English language is a Germanic language introduced in Nigeria by the British colonial masters as a means of communication, evangelisation and education and as a tool for imposing the English

culture, knowledge and philosophy to the colonised countries. English was adopted in Nigeria as the lingua franca following a resolution passed in the 1999 constitution, sections 55 and 97, by the National and State Assemblies that, governance should be carried out in English (and any other language of the ethnic group).

Language is all encompassing in the art of communication, dynamics, integration and education. As one embraces a new culture, meets people or assimilates new words or technology, the vocabulary of the language keeps enlarging. This invariably affects the learner as he thinks, perceives, reasons and articulates words and events in the mother tongue (MT) or first language (L1) and is expected to interact in more than one language. Obviously, during interaction, bilinguals vacillate from one language to the other. Olagoke (1979:15) summarises the effect the confusion of speaking in his MT and learning in a foreign language thus:

> As language is the most powerful tool for learning, a child will
> learn very little until he has mastered the language of instruction,
> and there is always a considerable linguistic confusion on the part
> of the child, as he thinks in his mother-tongue but, tries to learn
> and express himself in a foreign language.

Interaction could be seen as the ability of an individual to communicate effortlessly in the language and be understood (Ofor, 2012: 1). Where there are similar features in both languages, communication becomes easier, but, where similar features are lacking, learning difficulties or impediments occur. Inflectional suffixes in both languages have their similarities and differences due to the languages morphological relatedness. However, while inflectional suffixes in Igbo function with "verbal vowel prefix, auxiliaries and syntactic tone patterns to mark the different aspects and verb forms" (Emenanjo, 1978:91), the English inflectional suffixes are more inclined to syntactic categories (Carnie, 2007:44). The morphological differences in both languages will ultimately, constitute impediments to learning a new language.

Van Vallin (2005) believes that, despite the universal properties that all languages have in common over properties of individual languages, the systematicity of individual human languages still persist. The language learner, therefore, in other to grasp the new language, inadvertently, transfers into the new language, the habits of the mother-tongue. The error the learner will produce might seem insignificant to him but, is of some importance to the native speaker since, the errors signify contrasts which distinguish words in the morphological process. The morphological constituents of the two languages, English and Igbo, are known to constitute serious impediments to a learner whose, first language (either Igbo or English), inadvertently is trying to cause serious learning disability in the target language (TL).

The objective of this study is to critically explain the interference phenomenon, the errors, a native speaker of either of the languages, Igbo or English, will anticipate while learning and transferring the rudiments of his language to the second language. This will help the researcher to provide the language analyst and teachers of the expectations of the language learner as he learns the new language with a different linguistic background as he hopes to actualise a competent bilingual. The research method employed in the study is the corpus-based methodology.

Literature Review
(Conceptual Clarifications)

Contrastive analysis (henceforth CA) is based on the analysis that languages are more or less different and that the most important implication of these differences lie in the degree of difficulties the language learner will experience in learning the target language. According to Bright (1992:288), it is "the identification of points of structural similarities and differences between two languages to identify areas of potential difficulty, i.e., the interference or negative transfer in the learning of one or other of the languages".

CA is built on a tripartite arrangement involving the language learner – the learner's first language, the learner's target language and the difficulties to be experienced in learning the TL. In this arrangement, the learner already has a language of contact, the mother tongue or first language and wishes to learn a TL. It is then extrapolated that the learner's L1 will unfailingly interfere with the new language. Nickel (1975: 33) notes that the major aim of the CA is to expose the two languages, analyse them and subject them to a thorough linguistic analysis. James (1980: iv, 8), see CA as an inter-language study that aides a monolingual becoming a bilingual.

CA does not analyse or contrast languages in their totality; it looks for certain elements or features in the language to discuss, thus the inflectional suffix. Fisiak (1981:71) notes that the linguistic nature of elements selected for comparison is strictly dependent upon a particular linguistic theory employed in the description of the compared languages. For a positive result to be achieved, Headbloom (1979:27) identifies the basic practice of CA as the description of a particular subset of each language to be compared, comparing the two subsets noting the similarities and differences and to make a prediction from the comparison on the learner's difficult experiences during transfer.

In practice, James (1981:144) avers that for a better result, the two languages must be placed on 'parallel slab' or 'model of description'; this is because if different models or data for LI and L2 are applied, the descriptions are likely to highlight different facets of the data. With the right analysis, a better predictions of the learner's problems are identified.

It is apparent that most of the contrasts between languages are features of transfer. Transfer is conceptualized on the hypothesis that prior knowledge affects subsequent learning. According to O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Katamba (1996:504), transfer is the process whereby a feature or rule from a learner's L1 is carried over to the TL grammar. Malmakjaer and Anderson (1991: 522) see the possibility of the learner as having an already unconscious mastery of the mechanics of L1 as possible. The assumption is that the learning of a new task is either facilitated in the learning of the new codes (positive transfer) or impeded (negative transfer), depending on the similarities or differences obtainable between the two tasks. Ellis (1965) practicalised the directionality of transfer theory by submitting that hypothetically, the learning of Task 'A' will affect the subsequent learning of Task 'B' while Weinrich graphically describes it thus:

$$\textbf{NL} \quad \rightarrow \quad \textbf{FL}$$
Task A   Task B

For instance, an Igbo speaker trying to learn English will produce errors in the formation of verbs e.g. 'He *speak* Italian' instead of 'He *speaks* Italian'. Obviously, the Igbo learner of English is confused that there are three distinct {-s} morphemes [-s, -'s, -s] in English. He lacks the 3rd person singular/possessive form {-'s} and the plural morpheme {-s} and confuses the 3rd person singular with the plural morpheme. It is then not unusual that the L2 learner produces the form 'speaks' not after a singular subject,but after a plural subject, presumably because of the strength of the association between the singular morpheme '-s' (*they speaks', instead of the 'they speak') and the plural morpheme '-s' (friend-friends). This problem constitutes learning difficulty in properly forming meaningful words as verbs in English. Oluikpe (1978:vi), identifies two types of interference: negative and positive interferences. Negative interference primarily occurs when a structure in the L1 is lacking in the L2 while positive interference exists when the transfer of the structures in the L1 closely approximates the structures of the TL.

Arguments abound in the ability of CA to predict probable errors an L1 learner encounters in learning a TL. Prediction is a potent force CA uses to enable accurate result of the learner's problems identified. James (1980:182) identifies three objects of the CA prediction thus; transfer (could be negative or positive), errors (this signals inadequate learning) and difficulty (interference to be encountered by the learner). CA is then endowed with some potent values – predict, explain and remedy errors of the learner trying to learn a foreign language. While it can be argued that CA is not restricted to the classroom and the learner, it could however be beneficial to the educational policy makers to set a realistic goal of programmes for both the LI and the L2 learners. This is because, every experienced foreign language teacher who subjects his pedagogic activity to a thorough CA exposure, will realize that a substantial amount of persistent errors made by pupils can be traced to what Sridhar (1981) calls "the pull of the mother tongue".

In summary, the pedagogical significance of CA cannot be overemphasized. This is so, because, if a contrastive study of the MT and the TL is carried out, the differences between the two languages can be discovered and it becomes possible to predict the difficulties the learner will have.

Review of the Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework that propels this research is the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) approach developed by Van Vallin and La Polla (1997). The role and reference grammar approach is an exposition that favours the adaptation of all languages to a level representation of their specific attributes. It combines the attributes of syntax, semantics, pragmatics and the culture of a language to assess the inherent lexical properties in comparing languages. It enables the learner to access other languages, the foreign language, through the knowledge of the learner's mother tongue. RRG (henceforth), looks at the means by which all languages can achieve the same basic communicative ends using different linguistic means to achieve them.

RRG believes there are basic differences between one language and the other. From the RRG perspective, languages differ in terms of the manner in which discourse-pragmatics interact with the linking algorithm between syntax and semantics. It posits that its major role in language interaction is that no language rule system should be used to analyse another or impose the system of one language over another. Rather, that each language provide the prerequisite to

analyse its language. It projects the universality of language with a peculiarity of the internal structure of the language system under discourse. Its strength lies in the proposition that language is 'a system of communicative social action' in which the utterance relates to the meaning the speakers of the language attribute to it for understanding. Such meaning embodies the inherent temporal property of the language.

RRG adapts itself to the concept of the clause structure in which there exists an interplay of syntax, semantics and pragmatics in grammatical systems. That means, there is a representation of clauses which must allow for the representation of the three factors. Its design of the clause structure, the non-relational clause structure known as the Layered Structure of the Clause (LSC) aligns with this study. The LSC is based on two fundamental contrasts – between the predicate and non-predicating elements (the nucleus) and among non-predicating elements (arguments and non-arguments).

In the diagram below, RRG, employing the LSC, utilises the clause structure which are found in all human languages, free-word order to advance its argument of the contrastive analysis.

Table 1.1: Semantic units underlying the syntactic units of the layered structure of the clause

Semantic Elements	Syntactic Unit
Predicate	Nucleus
Arg. in semantic representation of predicate	Core argument
Non – Arguments	Periphery
Predicate + Arguments	Core
Predicate + Arguments + Non-Arguments	Clause (= Core + Periphery)

In fig. 1.1, the predicate, usually a verb is insulated in the Nucleus, the core contains the nucleus and the argument. The non-arguments are found in the periphery.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Affix is a word processing factory with the basic function in the word formation process to create, extend, modify or change the meaning and functions of words by adding morphemes: before (prefix), after (suffix), within (interfix), inside (infix), surrounding (circumfix), or marked over a syllable that forms part of the root (suprafix). suffixes are found at the end of another morpheme as in 'ize'. For instance, 'mordern-ise', 'capital-ize' 'equal-ize'. Interfix are morphemes represented by 'm', and 'r' which are not very productive in the English language but, abound in the Igbo language, e.g. 'ata<u>m</u>ata', 'egwù<u>r</u>egwu', 'esi<u>m</u>esi', añu<u>m</u>añu. In the examples above, an English learner of Igbo who has a knowledge of affixes and the morphological systems, is bound to have difficulties in identifying interfix in Igbo.

Inflection Suffix

Inflection marks contrasts in word formation especially through affixes. It refers to syntactic distinction such as gender, number, case, mood, tense etc., (Robertson, 1954). Inflectional affixes, according to McGregor (2009:62) are bound morphemes that give grammatical information relevant to the interpretation of a sentence. Inflectional affixes in English, (Ndimele, 2008: 38) can be illustrated in the table below:

Table 1.2: The 8 classes of English Inflectional Affixes

Inflectional Affix	Function/Meaning	Examples	
-s (N)	Plural	Gir<u>ls</u>	/-z/
-s	Possessive	John<u>'s</u>	/-z/
-s (V)	3rd Person singular, simple present	Ea<u>ts</u>	/-tʃ/
-ing	Progressive	Walk<u>ing</u>	/-iŋ/
-ed	Past tense	Dat<u>ed</u>	/-id/
-en	Past Participle	Se<u>en</u>	/-n/
-er	Comparative	Fast<u>er</u>	/-n/
-est	Superlative	Fast<u>est</u>	/-ist/

It is interesting to note that, the English inflectional morphology is sometimes phonologically conditioned. For instance, the '-s' ending marker is used to identify three different phonological forms of the element as [-s, -z, -iz]; while the past tense marker '-ed' can be phonologically derived as [-d, -t, ɪd]. These English inflectional affixes can be used to change meanings of words or extend words. For example:

The -S Morphemes:
1.a The plural marker: -s
     /-s/   girls
     /-z/   dogz
     /-ɪz/   boxɪz

b. Third Person singular: -s
     She take<u>s</u> it all.
     He find<u>s</u> love again

c. Possessive marker: -'s
     The boy<u>'s</u> parents have arrived.
     Ifeoma<u>'s</u> gown is beautiful

Past Tense Morphemes
/-d/   dabbed
/-t/   walked
/-ɪd/   landed

Igbo Inflectional Morphology
The Igbo inflectional morphology, unlike the English, is functional only by the use of verbs – the rV past tense marker. Green and Igwe (1963: 64) maintains that the Igbo verb is distinguished as the only inflectional affix marker through adding an affix to a verbroot or stem. However, Ndimele (1999:39) believes that Igbo supplements the shortage with what he terms stem-extenders, known as the Open Vowel Suffix (OVS) elements - [-o,-ọ,-a or -e]. These, he

contends, may be found between the stem of a verb and the perfective inflectional affix '-la'. The Igbo inflectional affix can be illustrated as:

Table 1.3: Open Vowel Suffixes in Igbo (Ndimele, 2008: 3)

Verbroot	Stem Extenders	Perfective Suffix	Output
-ri 'eat'	OVS (=e)		-rie 'eat'
-mị 'siphon'	OVS(=a)	La	mịala 'has siphoned'
-gbu 'kill'	OVS (=o)	La	Gbuola 'has killed'
-mụ 'gives birth'	OVS (=ọ)	La	mụọla 'has given birth'

Summary

This study gives an abridged documentation of the inflectional suffixes of the English and the Igbo languages using contrastive analysis as fodder. It simplifies the expectations of a foreign language learner, the peculiarities and the problems associated with L2 learning. It also provides the impediments or difficulties the language learner will encounter as he already speaks in one language and wishes to learn another. It posits that the language learner will find those structures similar to his language easy, while those that are different will be difficult to learn.

The research work gives an amplified background to the study of the two languages, providing sufficient reasons for similar structures in both and some areas expected for divergent structures. The Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) approach by Van Vallin and LaPolla (1997) was used as the theoretical framework while the conceptual studies expressed many author's view on contrastive analysis. The corpus-based methodology is employed. Modalities for data collection involved description, comparison and the prediction of the morphological features of both languages.

Findings
Inflectional Affixes
Analysis in English reveals that inflectional suffix is primarily expressed by the affixation of inflectional suffixes [-s] which indicates plural and possessive forms and the third person singular [-s, -'s, -s]; the [-ed] marker which also expresses the past tense marker [-d, -t, ɪd]. These morphological formations are absent in the Igbo language structures. The Igbo language learner therefore transfers into the target language thus:

Plural formation [-s]: a. *They have forty seat. b. *Three woman is here.
Possessive Marker[-'s]: a. *the girl father is huge. b. *the school anthem was lacking.
Third Person Singular [-s]: a. *He take it all. b. *She bring the book while coming

Past Tense Markers**:** [-ed]: **a.** They *come here yesterday. b. I *look for you last week. **c.** He land on the ground.
Verbal Progressive '-ing': a. *she is walk. b. *They are go to school late.
Comparative Marker '-er': *Ego is tall than Juliana. b. **Go high than others.
Past Participle Marker '-en': *I have see it all.

The English learner of Igbo who does not have stem extenders – the OVS elements [-a, -e, -o, -ọ] in his language transfers these:

*Ọ kụla ya ihe (he has hit him) instead of "Ọ kụọla ya ihe "– He has beaten him

*O rila ihe (he has climbed something) instead of   "O riela ihe" He has eaten

Conclusions and Recommendations
In this study, the posers identified as the vital elements guiding this research work were clearly stated and analysed. They include using the contrastive analysis to identify the similarities and differences between the two languages, noting the probable areas of identification, predicting the areas of learning difficulty the learner might have impediment in, in the learning process and how to address the errors that are expected.

The study is recommended for curriculum planners and textbook writers who will find it expedient to utilize the information deposited in the knowledge library. It is also recommended that foreign language teachers will use it to update their knowledge and equip themselves with the prerequisite preparations for a learner transiting from his mother tongue to a second language requires.

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