

A Contrastive Analysis of some Structures of English and Edo Languages

Adebola O. Sarah Michael

Department of General Studies, The Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria

Abstract: This paper examines the Noun Phrases (NP's), Verb Phrases (VP's) and some simple sentences within Edo constructions in comparison to their structures in English language through a syntactic contrastive analysis of the two languages. This study aimed at helping the Edo second language (L₂) speaker overcome the problems of transfer from his (first language or mother tongue) L₁ and to become more competent in the use of English structures. Chomsky's ST (Standard Theory) model was used as it accounts for phrase structure rules and transformational subcomponents. It has helped the researcher to highlight the major differences between the two languages within the phrase structure. It was discovered that the Edo structures are not as elaborate as that of English and that the Edo speaker of L₂ is likely to omit the determiner and mix up his tenses because of their verb usage. The work concluded that there is a need for language teachers to draw the attention of the students to the areas of differences and spend more time to teach the students the correct usage so that the students can become more skilful in the use of the two languages.

I. Introduction

Language and communication are inseparable since language is the mechanism employed for communicative functions. This function has been effectively carried out in Nigeria through the use of English Language because it serves as the official language of the nation. However, the adoption of English language since independence because of the multilingual nature of the nation has given rise to bilingualism and multilingualism. A major challenge from this is that when two languages come in contact the system of the two languages is widely divergent. This of course is as a result of the transfer of the features from one language to another. This usually brings about certain issues and errors known as interference and so on. Therefore, challenges usually arise for most learners of English as the second language. In an attempt to resolve these issues, the emergence of contrastive linguistics could be said to have brought a sort of proactive development to language learning, language teaching and translation among others. Contrastive analysis can be said to be the systematic comparison of the mother tongue and the foreign language or target language with the aim of describing their similarities and differences in order to identify the areas of difficulty that might bring about interference. Therefore, CA is believed to be interested in how the learning of L₁ (where 'L' stands for 'language' and '1' for first language or mother tongue) could affect the learning of L₂ (where 'L' stands for 'language' and '2' for second language). Contrastive analysis (CA) is an inter-linguistic enterprise. It considers both form and function of languages in context and some psychological processes the learner undergoes. A basic assumption of Contrastive Analysis is that languages can be compared. Though it compares and contrasts languages, it focuses more on the differences than similarities. The languages for comparison in this paper are English and Edo languages. Our emphasis will be on interference otherwise known as transfer in the language to be compared with English which is Edo language. The paper seeks to find out what are some of the differences that makes Edo L₁ speakers mix up their tenses, lexical items etc. Edo language is spoken by Edo people whose territory is also known as the Benin kingdom. Edo language is usually regarded as one of the Edoid family Yusuf (1992)

The Edo speaking people are in the center of a large language group in Edo state such as the Igbirra, Esako, Igala, Ijaw, Itsekiri and so on with a population of approximately 5 million people. The Edoid languages comprise over two dozen so-called "minority" languages. The term Edoid stems from E`d`o, the most broadly spoken member language and the language of the famed Kingdom of Benin (David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, 2019). Edo state was created in August 27th, 1991 by the administration of President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. The state was carved out of the former Bendel state to satisfy the agitation of a state under the leadership of the Oba of Benin- Omo N'oba Nedo Ukuakpolopolu Oba Ereduwawa. Edo state is bounded to the north by Kogi state, in the South by Delta state and in

the West by Ondo state; while in the east by Kogi and Anambra state. Edo state is a multi- ethnic community. These communities trace their descendants to the ancient Benin Kingdom. The language spoken by the Edos is called Edo. We have other ethnic groups like the Esans who speak the Esan dialect and the Isakos.

II. Literature Review

After the initial work by Charles Fries, Lado (1957) in his book, *Linguistics across Cultures*, identifies contrastive analysis as a significant concept in second language acquisition process. Here he tries to give a full description of language, which includes not only the linguistic feature but also accommodates a wide selection of the social-cultural features in which the language functions. After the works of Weinreich (1958) and Lado (1957) many scholars have tried to seek explanations to the problems of L₂ learners through Contrastive Analysis. Weinreich attempts an explanation of the different settings of language contact and the effect of each of this on the language, the mechanisms and structural causes of interference. He opines that Contrastive Analysis helps to predict, identify and describe likely areas where learners are likely to encounter difficulty and areas where learning processes will be enhanced particularly where language share similar features such that the features of L1 and the learning of L2. Scholars have contrasted various languages but English is often the reference point, perhaps because of the wide spread usage of English. In some of these scholarly endeavours problem areas for L₂ learners have been identified and solutions have also been proffered to some of these problems.

In Nigeria, English is also the reference point often perhaps because English is the official language and it serves many purposes in the nation. Some contrastive studies on English and some Nigerian languages include the works of scholars like Banjo (1969), Lamidi (1996), Ojo (1996), Yusuf (1998), Igboanusi (2000), Asowata (2001), Ibitoye (2004). In these works Contrastive Analysis of some Nigerian languages were examined. For instance, Banjo (1969) and Lamidi (1996) looked into the syntactic lexical structures of English and Yoruba while Yusuf reviews and analyses the syntax of English in comparison with the syntax of some indigenous languages in Nigeria. For instance, the theoretical framework (SVO Structures) adopted in English grammar is vividly compared with that of Yoruba grammar and areas of similarities and differences in the two grammatical structures are made known. Igboanusi (2000) discussed the semantic, phonological and syntactic contrastive analysis in English and Igbo. He submits that the systems are more elaborate than the Igbo's systems. Again, his findings reveal that while English is a language capable of passive sentence construction, Igbo is not. This of course means these differences must be taken into consideration in the teaching of the languages. Asowata's (2001) work was on basic clauses in Igala- English and Oza- English. Lamidi (2004) studies agreement relations in English and Yoruba with a view to bring to the fore the salient features of agreement relatives – identifying the problems associated with the mastery of English agreement features and providing the reasons for and possible solutions to the problems. Ayeleru (2000) acknowledges that interference also occur at the semantic level but he deals with speech and writing because they are the most problematic. Ikhimwin (2012) attempts a contrastive analysis of some semantic fields in English and Edo while Filani (2013) looks at three semantic fields of English and Ugboko. According to Ibitoye (2004) contrastive analysis exists on the assumption of the influence of L1 on L2 in language learning processes. Hence, this motivates the idea of studying the various systems of two languages in order to identify areas of possible conflict and areas where learning will be facilitated. Thus, the researcher in this paper seeks to consider some structures in English and Edo language respectively since very few works exist in this area. The paper will explore areas of similarities and differences in the languages and to proffer suggestions that could help an Edo bilingual in the use of good English structures if challenged.

III. Bilingualism, Multilingualism and Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

Nigeria being a multilingual society adopted English Language as its official language. This has helped to aid communication between the various ethnic groups but with the resultant effect of bilingualism and multilingualism that has produced various types of bilinguals with various levels of competence. One major linguistic instrument that language learners often use to assess and improve the performance of learners is the Contractive Analysis (Lamidi (2004). For contractive analysis to do this, the two languages to be contrasted must have a common ground on which the contrast will be based. This is known as tertium compatriotism. Without any common ground, we cannot examine any area of difference (Sajavara, 2000). According to James (1980) review on the role that contrastive analysis plays in understanding and solving problems in second or foreign language learning and teaching, contrastive analysis is concerned with the study of bilingual competence, with the performance of any individual in a second language or foreign language.

A Contrastive Analysis of some Structures of English and Edo Languages

The basic assumption of CA is that the second language learner (L2) will tend to transfer the features of his mother tongue (MT) to that of the target language (TL) utterances. The belief of 'transfer' here means carrying over the habits of the MT into the L2. The main assumptions of CA according to König & Gast (2009: 1), are summarized as follows:

- First language acquisition and foreign language learning differ fundamentally, especially in those cases where the foreign language is learnt later than a mother tongue and on the basis of the full mastery of that mother tongue.
- Every language has its own specific structure. Similarities between the two languages will cause no difficulties ('positive transfer'), but differences will, due to 'negative transfer' (or 'interference'). The student's learning task can therefore roughly be defined as the sum of the differences between the two languages.
- A systematic comparison between mother tongue and foreign language to be learnt will reveal both similarities and contrasts.
- On the basis of such a comparison it will be possible to predict or even rank learning difficulties and to develop strategies (teaching materials, teaching techniques, etc.) for making foreign language teaching more efficient.

Thus, contrastive analysis is an instrument for comparing languages and improving the methods and results of language teaching. Contrastive analysis hypothesis therefore, believes that the utilization of similarities and differences between two systems: S_1 and S_2 (S_1 being the first system acquired and S_2 , the second) could make learning effective. Also, Larsen- Freeman and Long (1991) in Lamidi (2004) explains the core of this hypothesis that:

where two languages were similar, positive transfer could occur; where they were different, negative transfer or interference would result.

The implication of this is that whenever there are similarities learning will be facilitated while learning will be impaired or retarded whenever there are differences. Facilitation and interferences represent therefore, positive and negative transfer respectively. The emphasis on this paper as highlighted earlier will be on (interference also called transfer and this is usually as a result of MT interference which are problems that can be traced to inhibition that arises when a fellow who has learnt an S_1 attempts to learn another language. This according to Weinreich (1968:1) is described as

those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language.

In this research work, some structures in English and Edo shall be considered. Therefore we shall apply some of James (1980) approaches to the study of Contrastive Analysis as illustrated in Lamidi (2004: 39) which are:

- (a) Structural and taxonomic model, which uses immediate constituents analysis in the comparison of structures or patterns of linguistic expressions without any reference to meaning,
- (b) Transformational generative grammar approach, which posits that deep structure and transformations are universal and CA brings out points of departure in structures,
- (c) Contrastive generative grammar, where L_1 and L_2 structures are generated from a common base and are contrasted during this process of generation, and
- (d) Case grammar, which is based on a set of (largely semantic) linguistic universals.

For this paper, items (b) and (c) shall be our main references point.

IV. Methodology

The model used in this work is Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar. (TGG). The phrases, clauses and sentences to be analysed, were constructed in English language and the language helper tried to give the equivalent in Edo language. The language helper, an adult native speaker of Edo language is about fifty five years old is a bilingual from that community. Julianah Ajoke is educated with a good control of Edo and the English language. She was born and brought up in Benin City but currently resides in Ikire.

V. Data Analysis

The Phrase Structure

A phrase is 'a group of words forming an equivalent and not having a subject and predicate of its own' - Yusuf (1992:2). Therefore the phrase structure rule would mean the aspect that is concerned with grouping of words together to function as a unit by following specific rule or order that is allowed by the language. Such rules vary from language to language. According to Yusuf (1998) phrase structure rule can be said to be "re-write, expansion rules, very much like the expansion of an icon in the computer, which displays the content of a phrase or sentence. It is like opening a box to disclose its contents". Take a noun phrase for instance which may have a determiner, a compulsory noun phrase and some optional satellites like the prepositional phrase and possibly a clause, you have a formula that can be represented thus:

NP → (D) N (PP) (S)

okpia keke okhuo

'man and woman'

The Edo speaker is likely to omit the determiner and say 'man and women' instead of saying 'the man and the woman'

- (4) Ovialeke nomose nekhui nii
 Girl that beautiful black that / the
 "the beautiful dark complexioned girl"

In Edo the determiner comes last instead of before the head word. Therefore an Edo speaker of L₂ may say 'girl beautiful dark complexioned' bringing the head word first and may even omit the determiner completely.

- (5) Omookpia nebolozo
 Childman handsome
 " the handsome young man"

There is no lexical item for 'young' in Edo so 'child' is added to 'the word 'man'. Thus, there is a sort of compounding to get the equivalent of the word young. Two nouns have to be put together to get the adjective young in English. "Child" is placed before man. The determiner is also eliminated so it is possible for Edo L₂ speaker to say "young handsome man because the definite article is not represented.

- (6) Omookhuo no re suku
 Child woman that is in school
 The young girl in school'
 'child and woman ' is also substituted for the word 'young' just as in the example above.

- (7) Egedege nii
 Storey building the
 "the storey building"
 As noted earlier the determiner is placed last in Edo.

- (8) Ebe noma nii
 Book good that
 'that interesting book'

There is no lexical item as 'interesting' in Edo language. Thus, it is possible for Edo L₂ speaker to say 'that good book' instead of 'that interesting book' since there is no lexical item as 'interesting'. Because the determiner comes last he is also likely to omit it.

The Verb Phrase in Edo

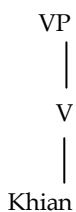
Traditionally, the verb is called the predicate because it has the sentence predicator, namely the verb. It is this lexical category that tells us what the subject NP and other participants in the sentences do. As the head of the verb phrase it is obligatorily present with or without satellites. Phrase structure rule for verb phrase in Edo language can be represented thus:

VP → V (AV) (NP) (Pp) (CP)

- (i) Verb phrase can be represented by a head word only

VP → V

e.g Khian walk'



- (h) it could be verb plus adverb

VP → V (ADV)

Khian zai zai

Walk quick quick

" walk quickly"

Note that for the Edo speaker there is a reduplication of the base adverb.

A Contrastive Analysis of some Structures of English and Edo Languages

Tense

There seems to be no difference between present and past tense in Edo. Often, active verbs indicate pastness while stative verbs indicate presentness e.g.

- (i) Lilian tie ebe vobo
read book at hand
'Lilian is reading'
- (ii) Oghogo tie ebe
'read book'
'Oghogo read'
- (iii) Mary rie evbae
'Mary eat food'
'Mary ate'
- (iv) Mary rie evbae vobo
"Mary eat food at hand"
'Mary' is eating'

For this reason an Edo L₂ speaker may find it difficult to differentiate between the present and past tense.

The Word Order and Some Simple Sentences in Edo

The basic word order of Edo language as mentioned earlier is SVO

- (i) I rie owa
I go house
S V O
'I am going home'
- (ii) I mianmian ebe vben
I forget book my
S V O
I forgot my book
- (iii) Oseni guoguo etombili
Oseni brake tumbler'
S V O
Oseni broke the tumbler'
- (iv) Omomo gbe ebo
Baby wear shoe
S V O
The baby wore shoes.

VI. Conclusion

In an attempt to carry out a syntactic and contrastive analysis of English and Edo in this study, the researcher examined NPs, VPs, and some simple sentences within Edo constructions. Through the research, it has been discovered that the Edo structures are not as elaborate as that of English in this comparative study. From the simple sentence analysis, it was discovered that the determiner comes last or after the head word in Edo and that Edo speaker of L₂ are likely to omit the determiner completely. In the area of tense, an Edo L₂ speaker of English is likely to mix up his tenses because of their verb usage. In the area of arrangement of words Edo speakers tend to make use of compounding, inference etc. because of the omission (or addition) of some lexical items. Also determiners and adjectives precede noun in English unlike in Edo.

Recommendations and Implication for Language Teaching

Looking at the background of CA, as applied to language teaching is the assumption that the Mother tongue plays a role in learning a second language; therefore language teachers should emphasize the teaching of grammar in the secondary schools.

They should draw the attention of the students to these areas of differences and spend more time to teach the students on the correct usage so that the students can become more proficient in the language and excel in the school certificate examinations.

Also, the Edo L₂ learners must be conscious of the deviations from their MT while learning English so as to avoid negative “transfers from their MT to the target language by exercising certain language behaviour changes. Despite some criticisms of CA, its usefulness cannot be overlooked because it still has a lot to offer in the area of second language teaching but further research is encouraged to discover more effective ways of application.

References

- [1.] Ayeleru, B. (2000). “Problems of Transfer and Interference in the Learning of French
- [2.] Language by Anglophone and Yorubaphone Students”. *Studies in English Language*.
- [3.] A.O.Babajide.Ed. Ibadan: Enicrownfit. 198-203.
- [4.] Asowata, L. (2001). *A Contrastive Study of the Syntactic Structures of English and Oza*. Unpublished BA essay University of Ibadan.
- [5.] Bamgbose, A. (1995). ‘New English in the Nigerian Environment’ in Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas (eds). *New Englishes: A West African perspective*. Ibadan. Musuro.
- [6.] Banjo, L.. (1969). *A Contrastive Study of Aspects of the Syntactic and Lexical Rules of English and Yoruba..* Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Ibadan
- [7.] Eberhard, D., Simons, G., and Fennig, C. (eds.). (2019) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. URL <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- [8.] Filani, I. (2013). A contrastive analysis of three semantic fields of English and Ugboko” in W. Adegbite, A. Ogunsiji and O. Taiwo (Eds.), *Linguistics and the Globalisation of African languages for sustainable development* (pp529-541). Ibadan: Universal Akada Books Nigeria Limited.
- [9.] Ibitoye, C. (2004). ‘Fundamentals of applied linguistics’ in Bamisaye, T ed. *An integrated*
- [10.] *study in language and society*. Lagos: Majab Publishers.
- [11.] Igboanusi, H.(2000) ‘Contrastive Analysis: Some problem Areas for the Igbo Learner of English’ in Babajide A.O. (ed) *Studies in English language*. Ibadan; Enicrownfit (pp 188-197).
- [12.] Ikhimwin, G. (2012). “A Contrastive Analysis of some Semantic Fields of Study in English and Edo.”. *Knowledge Review* Volume 23 No. 3 , December, 2011 Collapse
- [13.] James, C. (1980) *Contrastive Analyses*. London: Longman
- [14.] König, Ekkehard and Volker Gast (2009). *Understanding English-German Contrasts*. 2nd edition (revised). Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.
- [15.] Lado, R. 1957. *Linguistics across cultures*. United State of America: The University of Michigan Press.pp 140.
- [16.] Lamidi, M. (1996). *Potholes in Grammar*. A Contrastive Study of, Aspects of Empty categories in English and Yoruba. Unpublished MA thesis. University of Ibadan.
- [17.] Lamidi M. (2000) *Aspects of Chomskyan Grammar*, Ibadan. Emman publications.
- [18.] Lamidi M.T (2004). “Agreement Relations in English and Yoruba” in Raji, R.D. (ed) *Journal of English Studies*. Vol 1 Department of English. Ibadan. University Press.

A Contrastive Analysis of some Structures of English and Edo Languages

- [19.] Larsen-Freeman, D. and Long M. H (1991). *An Introduction of Second Language Acquisition Research*. London and New York: Longman.
- [20.] Mair, C. (2020). "Contrastive Analysis in Linguistics." Oxford Bibliographies. Oxford University Press
- [21.] Ojo, J. (1996). *A Contrastive lexicology of six semantic fields of English and Yoruba* Unpublished MA thesis, University of Ibadan.
- [22.] Oseni, J. (1999). *The Morpho syntax of Edo language* Unpublished B.A. Essay University of Ilorin.
- [23.] Sajavara, K. (2000) "Contrastive Linguistics" in Byram M. (ed) *Routhledge Encyclopaedia of language Teaching and learning*, London and New York: Routledge. pp 140-1440
- [24.] Weinreich, U. (1968) *Languages in Contact*, The Hague: Mouton.
- [25.] Yusuf, O (1992) *An Introduction to Linguistics*. Ibadan: University Press.
- [26.] Yusuf, O. (1997). *Transformational Generative Grammar. An Introduction* Ijebu-Ode. Shebotimo Publications.
- [27.] Yusuf . O (1998) *Fundamental of Syntax and the Study of Nigerian Languages*. Ilorin: Unilorin Press.