A Contrastive Analysis of the Syntactic Features of English and Igbo Nouns and Verbs

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Abstract
The aim of the study is to discover through contrastive analysis, areas of difficulties which Igbo native speakers who learn English as a second language would face in learning the English nouns and verbs. It is discovered that Igbo learners of English language as a second language face a lot of challenges because of difficulties from the evidence of differences between the structures of the English and Igbo nouns and verbs. These challenges have prompted the researcher into investigating the differences between the structures using the theory of contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis has led to the discovery of areas of difficulties such as differences in the position of nouns and modifiers, formation of plurals, various ways of representing gender in English, changing active to passive sentences etc. for nouns. For verbs, there are problems in the presentation of the perfective marker in both languages, tenses and also passivization. It is, therefore, recommended that the curriculum planners take cognizance of these challenges so as to proffer solution on how the difficulties can be tackled for effective teaching and learning. The teacher should concentrate on these difficulties, while students become serious with learning ability.

Keywords: English, Igbo, Nouns, Verbs, Contrastive Analysis
Introduction
Syntax means the way words and phrases are put together to form sentences in a language. It involves the organisation of words into phrases and sentences. It studies the level of language that lies between words and the meaning of utterances (Andrew Carnie, 2007). This paper tends to look at the syntactic features of nouns and verbs. The writer tries to review some literature on the syntactic features of nouns and verbs. From the relationships and variables observed, differences and similarities of the syntactic features of English and Igbo nouns and verbs will be established. The idea is to trace the relationship between the two languages in the two areas: nouns and verbs. From the relationships, it will be pertinent to conclude whether the knowledge of English language can be enhanced by the knowledge of Igbo language and whether the study of Igbo language will be based on the established norms of the English language.

Theoretical Framework
The theoretical framework for this study is contrastive analysis. It is a discipline in Applied Linguistics formulated by Robert Lado in 1957 in his *Linguistics Across Culture*, which is concerned with the comparison of two or more languages in order to determine both the differences and similarities between them (Fisiak et al, cited in Fisiak, 1990). It is based on the idea that no two languages are the same. Comparing the learners’ first language with the English language, requires the isolation of features of English language which cause problems for the learners. Studies within one language could involve contrasting phonemes, morphemes; and those involving across two languages could involve a comparative analysis of lexical, grammatical, discourse systems including interference and translation equivalent (Ademola, 2005 cited in Opara, 2016). This is done by comparing native languages with the foreign language being learnt. Linguists believe that pointing out the similarities and differences of the languages will make the learning of the foreign language easier for the learner. Lado was the first to provide a comprehensive theoretical treatment and to suggest a systematic set of technical procedures for the contrastive study of languages. This procedure includes: describing the languages (using structural linguistics), comparing them, and predicting learning difficulties. It was expected that once the areas of potential difficulties had been mapped out through contrastive analysis, it would be possible to design language courses more efficiently. Contrastive analysis, along with Behaviorism and Structuralism exerted a profound effect on SLA curriculum design and language teacher education, and provided the theoretical pillars of Audio Lingual Method.

The basic assumption for CA hypothesis is the interference of the first language system with the second language system and the second language learning basically involved the overcoming of the differences between the two linguistic systems, that is, the native and the target languages (Brown 1990: 48). Fries in support of Brown states, ‘the most effective teaching materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with parallel description of the native language of the learner’ (Fries, 1945 cited in Powell, 1998).

Description of the Syntactic Features of English and Igbo Languages
Based on Lado’s procedure for contrastive analysis, which include description of languages, comparing them, and prescribing learning difficulties, our main preoccupation in this section is with
presenting the syntactic features of English, presenting and analyzing the syntactic features of English and Igbo languages using contrastive perspectives. This approach involves the description of English nouns and verbs and Igbo nouns and verbs, the comparison of the items of the two and then making some pedagogic projections about them.

**Syntactic Features of the Structures English Nouns**
The syntactic features of nouns can be described in terms of the typical positions they occupy and the grammatical functions they perform in larger units like phrases and clauses (Yadugiri, 2011). Thus, Yadugiri lists some of these features as below:

1) A noun occurs following words like determiners such as a, the, an, there e.g. that university, an apple, these fruits

2) A noun functions as the most important item or the head in a noun phrase as in these: difficult questions, an honest worker, some fresh fruits from the garden

3) A noun occurs after a preposition e.g. I gave the book to Emeka. He gave the book to the man at the counter

4) Nouns function as subject, object, and complement e.g. subject: **English** is an international language, object: we sell **cars**, complement: Ada is a **girl**. Nouns form their plurals by adding –s, -es, -en or irregularly by changing the inner vowels. For instance: tap—taps, pass—passes, tooth- teeth, foot- feet, knife- knives, ox- oxen

5) Gender is a grammatical feature in terms of which nouns are divided into two or three categories depending on the endings they have and the ways in which they are used with articles, adjectives, and adverbs. English does not make use of gender as a grammatical feature. It only distinguishes between (i) animate beings and inanimate things (ii) human and non-human beings and (iii) male and female sexes in the use of pronouns (Yadugiri 2011). For example, I gave her a book. It was the book which (which) had won an award this year. It was the book (book) I had borrowed in the library. She spoke to a Suleman. He was the one who (subject) could speak English. He was the one whom (object) we had talked to yesterday.

**Syntactic Features of English Verbs**
Yadugiri (2011) also points out some of the syntactic features of verbs:

6) The verbal function in a clause is performed by either a single verb as in:
   They went to school.
   Or, by two or more verbs occurring together as in:
   They have been going to school.

7) A verb can be described in terms of two important grammatical features: Finiteness and tense.

   A) **finiteness**: verbs are of two types: finite and non-finite. A finite verb is one that is limited in terms of number, person, and tense while non-finite verb is not limited in terms of number, person, and tense. Of the three types of verbs that constitute verb phrase: lexical verbs, primary auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries; lexical verbs and primary auxiliaries have finite and non-finite forms, whereas modals are always finite. Examples:
   The children ate their dinner.
He died bitten by a poisonous snake.
She spent her vacation writing a book.
The underlined verbs are finite verbs while the italicized ones are non-finite verbs.

B) Tense: Tense is a grammatical feature that characterises finite verbs. Non-finite verbs do not have tense. English has two tenses – present and past. The present tense is marked by the suffix -s/–es only in the case of third person singular, whereas in all other cases, the base form of the verb is used. Examples:
He lives in America.
They live at Nsukka.

In the above examples, the past tense is marked by the suffix -ed in most cases and by a different form of the verb in the case of irregular verbs, for instance:
He lived in America.
I lived in America.
He bought a new car.
I bought a new car.
They bought a new car.

8) Movement transformation
Transformation takes place because speakers of language are familiar with their languages and therefore may presume many things and delete any lexical items from their speech (Anagbogu, P. N., Mbah, B. M. & Eme, C. A., 2010). Transformational Generative Grammar answered several questions that the structural grammarians had left unanswered. To TGG, a sentence has deep structure and a surface structure. It is as a result of several transformations that have applied to deep structure (a kernel sentence) that one arrives at the surface structure of a sentence (Pushpinder & Jindal, 2010).

Movement transformation is part of such transformation in the English language. Two types of movement transformation very important in this analysis are passivisation and dative movement deletion. Passivization involves the movement of the direct object to the grammatical subject position and the movement of the subject to the grammatical object position. In the process of interchange between the subject and the object, some grammatical elements are added to the elements of the deep structure (Anagbogu et al, 2010). Consider, for instance, ‘Obi killed a snake,’ and ‘a snake was killed by Obi.’ As a condition for passivization, there is an insertion of the verb ‘be’, ‘-en’, and ‘by’. Dative movement is the interchange of position between the direct and indirect object. It entails the movement of an indirect object to the direct object position and the direct object to the indirect object position (Anagbogu et al, 2010), examples:
a) i. Give the book to me.   ii. Give me the book.
b) i. She gave the book to John.  ii. She gave John the book.

Dative movement can only apply to ditransitive verbs (Yadugiri, 2011).
Comparing Syntactic Features of English and Igbo Nouns and Verbs

Differences:
1) Nouns, Pronouns, and Noun phrases
In English language, a noun occurs following determiners (words like a, the, these) while determiners follow nouns in Igbo constructs. Anagbogu et al (2010) in support of this assert that “The phrase structure of languages differ from one another. For instance, the English NP is head final while Igbo is head initial.” Let us observe the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That university</td>
<td>Mahadum ahu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These fruits</td>
<td>Mkpuruosisi ndi a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some students</td>
<td>Umuakwukwo ufodu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above expressions, the English determiners (that, these, and some) come before the nouns (university, fruits, and students) while the Igbo determiners (ahu, ndi a, and ufodu) come after the nouns.

2) In English, the noun phrase appears at the end of a group or in the middle but in Igbo language the head of the NP is seen at the beginning of such NP as in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These difficult questions</td>
<td>Ajuju ndi a siri ike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some fresh fruits from the garden</td>
<td>Nkpuru osisi di ohuru si n’ubi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New office</td>
<td>Ofisi ohuru</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What these translations show is that no matter the length of noun phrase in English, the Igbo counterpart must start with the head word.

3) In English language, nouns form their plurals by adding -s, -en, -es or in the case of irregular by changing the inner vowels. The plural marker is affixed to the nouns. In Igbo, the NP is unique in the sense that it does not express its morphological agreement features overtly. In other words, it does not show its inflectional forms at the surface structure (Mbah, 2010). In Igbo, an independent morpheme is used to express meaning of more than one. This means that an Igbo noun takes complement as in:
4) English distinguishes male and female sexes in the use of pronouns (Yudugiri, 2011) but this is not applicable to Igbo language. A particular pronoun is used to represent both sexes. Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She gave me a book</td>
<td>O nyere m akwukwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He gave me a book</td>
<td>O nyere m akwukwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It ran to the bush</td>
<td>O banyere n’ime ohia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) In English language, nouns form their plurals both regularly by adding -s, -es, -en, or irregularly by changing the inner vowels. Igbo language does not change its plurals irregularly. For instance: the two nouns – knives and teeth – remain otutu mma and otutu eze in Igbo language.

6) Movement of nouns (subject and object). In English language, the two movement transformations discussed earlier - passivization and dative movement apply in English. Passivization involves the movement of both the subject and the object but such operations are not possible in Igbo language thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passivization:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obi killed a snake</td>
<td>Obi gburu agwo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A snake was killed by Obi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The expression, “Obi gburu agu” cannot be changed to passive voice and therefore an active sentence in Igbo cannot be changed to passive unlike in English where passivization occurs. The same thing applies to dative movement for instance:
English | Igbo
---|---
She gave the book to John | O nyere akwukwo ahu John
She gave John the book | O nyere John akwukwo ahu

The Igbo expression, “O nyere akwukwo ahu John” does not make sense. In Igbo language, ditransitive verbs exist even though dative movement cannot apply.

**Similarities**

1) Both English and Igbo nouns function as the most important items or the head in a noun phrase.

2) Both English and Igbo nouns occur after prepositions e.g. in the morning – n’ututu, without success – na nkiti. There are two ways of writing prepositions in Igbo language as shown above. The two ways are as a result of the letter that follows the preposition. If the letter is a vowel, the preposition is contrasted but if consonant, the preposition is written in full. This is not so in the English language. Sometimes, a preposition is used as a case maker. This is when a preposition is translated into a case maker or a verb in another language. Examples:

- English: She has gone to market
- Igbo: O gaalari ahia

3) Both English and nouns function as subject, object, and complement in clauses. Examples:

- Subject: Ben is my brother
- Object: We sold cars
- Complement: Ada is a girl

**Verbs and Verb Phrases**

1) In English, the perfective marker is a full word while it is an affix in the Igbo language, for instance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She has gone to market</td>
<td>O gaalari ahia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has been going to the market</td>
<td>O naburi aga ahia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above examples, ‘has’ is a perfective marker and a full word but in Igbo ‘ri’ shows a perfective marker but embedded in the verb, although both of them belong to the same node- inflection.

2) Another area where the two languages have remarkable difference in verb is in the use of tenses. In English language, the present tense is marked by the suffix -s/-es only in
the case of the third person. In Igbo language, the third personal pronoun does not show any singular marker in verbs, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He lives in America</td>
<td>Obi n’America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They live in America</td>
<td>Ha bi n’America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3) There is problem of passivization as we have explained earlier. Passivization is a verbal product. This is a verbal product in English language. It cannot occur in Igbo language.

**Similarities**

4) Both languages can be described in terms of finiteness and tense. Igbo language has finite and non-finite verbs just like English language, example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Igbo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She ate rice</td>
<td>Oriri raisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating rice is good</td>
<td>Iri raisi di mma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5) Both languages have present and past tenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present tense</th>
<th>Past tense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>She is eating rice</td>
<td>She ate rice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O na-eri raisi</td>
<td>O riri raisi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion of Findings
This study has shown that to a great extent the knowledge of the acquired language influences negatively the mastery of the target language especially where the L1 and L2 are from different language groups. This is the case with an Igbo learner battling with English language which has different syntactic structures with what is already existing in the speech behaviour of the learner. The contrastive analysis goes a long way in contrasting the system of one language with the system of a second language in order to predict those difficulties which a speaker of L1 will have in learning the L2 and to construct teaching materials to help him learn that language effectively. From our own analysis, an Igbo learner of English may have problems with the position of modifiers and nouns in phrases. Learners would find it difficult in identifying modifiers and nouns because of the differences in their positions in the two languages. Learners will also have problems of the formation of plurals. In the English language, there are so many ways of forming plurals and past tense. It becomes difficult for an Igbo learner of the English language to face problem of how to form plurals of words in the English language. For instance, because there are variations in the way plurals and tenses are formed, there is a problem of what form to use for a particular word. Is it ‘persons or persones, is it boys or boyes, is it found or finded, is it bought or buyed, is it went or goed’. Learners are bound to make these kinds of problems because there are no specified methods to know their plurals and past tense and also because the acquired language has a different way of realising these. Igbo language for example has just a word to represent plurality – ‘otutu’. In the same vein there are problems in the use of pronouns in sexes, formation of passives in English, etc. These problems abound because the realisation of the items are not identical with the acquired language – Igbo. With the knowledge of contrastive analysis, Bonathy, Trager and Waddle (1966) recommend that the task of the curriculum planners of a foreign language teaching program is to develop materials which will be based on these differences. The foreign language teacher is to be aware of these differences and to be prepared to teach them and the task of the student is to learn them. Therefore, all hands should be on the desk to make the mastery of the English language easier for non-native speakers of the language like Igbo learners. These challenges should be considered by the curriculum planners while planning and writing the syllabus, and the learner on his own part should dispose himself to overcoming those challenges.

Conclusion
The writer has outlined and analysed some of the differences and similarities observed in the syntactic features of English and Igbo nouns and verbs. These variables observed have proved that language is a system of systems i.e. every language has a structure of its own. In other words, no language should be modelled with reference to another language. If Igbo language is described using English, no accurate data would be gathered. The two languages should be studied independent of the other by close
observation and interrelation. The approach of the study of any language with respect to the structure would make the study of any language to be precise, empirical, logical, and scientific. This is good of the structuralism as against the unscientific, illogical, and prescriptive approach of the traditional grammarians who in their analysis of the study of the English language have used other Indo-European languages to describe English. Such has resulted in so many irregularities in their description of the language. Therefore, it is an established fact that Igbo language should be studied independently of English looking at the vast differences between the two. One can conclude also that the knowledge of Igbo language for instance may not enhance the learning of English language.

References


