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A Contrastive Analysis of Pluralisation of Nouns in English and Ikwerre (Omuanwa): Implications for the Second Language Learner

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Abstract:
Human language is rule-governed. These rules are innate in the native speakers and vary from one language to another. The variations in the morphological and syntactic structures in languages pose difficulties to the second language learner in the target language. This paper therefore, examines and contrasts the plural formation of nouns in English and Ikwerre (Omuanwa) with a view to identifying the morphological and syntactic structural differences associated with pluralisation which may pose difficulty to the second language learner. The theoretical framework adopted is Contrastive Analysis (CA). This paper revealed that there is an overwhelming difference between plural formation of nouns in English and Ikwerre (Omuanwa) as English plural markers are suffixes while Ikwerre plural markers are prefixes. While English is full of irregularities and a lot of exceptions to given rules of pluralisation, most nouns in Ikwerre form their plurals by using plural markers which are free morphemes before the host. This paper therefore, recommends that second language learners of English whose first language is Ikwerre should make conscious effort to learn the plurals of words in English the way they are, so as to use the correct plural forms of words in English sentences.

Keywords: Pluralisation, nouns, first language, second language, second language learner

1. Introduction

Every language has a grammar which comprises a finite set of rules that account for all the grammatical sentences in the language. According to Ndimele (1999, p.18), 'Every normal speaker of a language has developed a mental grammar of that language'. The author further explains that 'The mental grammar is a form of internalised linguistic knowledge of a language which enables the native speaker to produce as well as recognise appropriately structured expressions in that language' (p.78). These rules that govern human language are innate in the native speakers and vary from one language to another. They are not prescribed by few individuals in the speech community but on the general rules that apply in the grammar of that language. Hence, for sentences in any given language to be grammatical, the rules of the grammar of that language must be followed. The overgeneralization and transfer of rules from the first language to the second language are some of the problems of the second language learner in constructing grammatically correct sentences in the target language. One of such rules is the rule of plural formation of nouns.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Contrastive Analysis (CA)

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is a crucial field of Applied Linguistics. It was used extensively in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in the 1950s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. It is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. According to Bussman (1996, p.102), 'Contrastive Analysis is a linguistic sub-discipline that is concerned with synchronic comparative study of two or more language varieties'. The languages compared can be genetically similar or dissimilar. The theoretical foundation of what became known as the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis, were formulated in Robert Lado's *Linguistics Across Cultures (1957)*. Lado in his book claimed that those elements which are similar to the learner's native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult. The aim of Contrastive analysis is to provide separate detailed phonological and syntactical analysis of different languages and to show up the differences and similarities by comparing them in language teaching. The idea behind CA is to find a way of predicting these mistakes in pronunciation and sentence construction which foreign learners of a language are likely to make and device drills to prevent those mistakes from occurring. Crystal (1997) states

that CA 'is a systematic comparison of L_1 and L_2 in order to predict areas of learning difficulties'. It is claimed that the acquisition of learning an L_2 is largely determined by the structure of an earlier acquired language, hence these structures of the L_2 that coincide with the corresponding structures of L_1 are assimilated with ease as a result of positive transfer. Whereas, contrasting structures prevent considerable difficulties and give rise to errors as a result of transfer. Lado (1957) affirms that 'these elements which are similar to the learners' native language will be simple and those that are different will be difficult (p.2). It implies that if a CA of two languages is carried out, the difference between the two languages as well as the similarities can be discovered and it becomes possible to predict and describe the difficulties that the learners will have in learning the target language. Lado was the first in providing a comprehensive way of treating these difficulties. He suggested procedures for the contrastive study of the languages which involved the description of the language, comparing them and predicting learning difficulties. The main objective of CA therefore is to help in second language and foreign language learning by establishing the similarities and differences that exist between two or more languages thereby predicting all potentially possible learning difficulties.

2.2. Geography of Ikwerre Ethnic Group

Ikwerre is an ethnic group and a major tribe in Rivers State situated in the southern part of Nigeria. Nigeria is made up of so many ethnic groups whose origins could be traced to specific areas of the country. The Ikwerres are a group of people who inhabit the upland part of Rivers state in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. According to Nduka (2001) 'Ikwerre is an ethnic group which encompasses four local government areas in rivers state namely Ikwerre, Emohua, Obio-Akpor and Port Harcourt.'
Ikunga (2018) affirms that:

The Ikwerre cultural area maintain similar borders with the
Ohaji/Egbema of Imo state to the northeast, the Ogba to
the northwest, the Ekpeye and Abua to the west, the Ijoid
groups of Degema, the   Kalabari and Okrika to the south,
the Eleme and Oyibo to the southeast and Etche to the east.

The Ikwerres speak Ikwerre language hence the name 'Ikwerre' refers to both the people and their language. The Ikwerre language consists of several dialects which include Omuanwa, Igwuruta, Elele, Akpor, Emohua etc. These dialects vary considerably but there is mutual intelligibility among speakers from the different parts of Ikwerre land.

3. Conceptual Review

3.1. Pluralisation

Pluralisation is the process of changing nouns from singular to plural. Plural is one of the grammatical categorical of numbers used to denote two or more of something. It is represented in various languages as a separate word, an affix or by either morphological indications such as stress or implicit markers/contexts. Not all languages treat the numbers of nouns the same way. Some languages have dual or other systems of number categories. For example, Chinese and Japanese have a single form for plural nouns. Languages like Arabic and Welsh have six forms. However, English and many other languages like German and Spanish involve a simple two-way number contrast between singular and plurals. Whereas, plural nouns are used to indicate that there is more than one person, animal, place or thing, singular nouns are used to indicate one of something.

3.2. Pluralisation of Nouns in English Language

Most nouns in English form their plurals by adding the plural marker 's' to the singular nouns. For example, table/tables. Some nouns take different forms depending on the letter that ends the word. For instance, words ending in 'ch' take 'es' to form their plurals (church-churches), words ending in '-y' change the 'y' to 'ies' if the 'y' comes after a consonant (industry-industries) but retain the 'y' and add 's' if the 'y' comes after a vowel (day-days). Nouns that end in 'f' or 'fe' form their plurals by changing the 'f' or 'fe' into 'ves' (knife-knifes). However, there are few exceptions to the rule above as some nouns that end in 'f' or 'fe' add only 's' to the singular to form their plurals (chief-chiefs) while some have both 'fs' and 'ves' plural forms (dwarf-dwarfs/dwarves). Nouns that end in 'o' form their plurals by adding 'es' to the singular nouns (potato-potatoes). There are exceptions to the rule as some nouns that end in 'o' form their plurals by adding 's' (piano- pianos) while some have both the 's' and 'es' plural forms (buffalo-buffalos/buffaloes). Some nouns form their plurals by vowel change (mouse-mice) while some have the same form for singular and plural (sheep-sheep). Some nouns are always used in plurals (goods, spectacles) while some are always used in singular (furniture, equipment), others are plural in appearance but singular in use (news, politics, ethics etc).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that pluralisation of nouns in English is full of rules and a lot of exceptions to given rules.

3.3. Pluralisation in Ikwerre Language

Plural forms of noun in Ikwerre are different from the ways it is done in English language.
The different ways of forming plurals in Ikwerre include:
1) Through the use of some independent words used as plural markers. Examples of such markers in Ikwerre that denote more than one includes:
   I.   'ele' and 'nde' which are plural markers used to substitute the singular 'nye'

Examples include:
i.   teacher ----------------nyezhihne
      teachers---------------eleznihne
                          nde znihne

ii.   doctor----------------nyedibia
      doctors---------------eledibia
                          ndedibia

iii. man/boy--------------nyenwirnikne
      men/boys------------elenwirnikne
                      ndenwirnikne

iv.   woman/girl----------nyenwere
      women/girls---------elenwere
                      ndenwere

v.   leader----------------nyeisi
      leaders---------------ele isi
                      nde isi

vi.   enemy----------------nye ogwu
      enemies--------------ele ogwu
                      nde ogwu
vii. mother---------------nne
      mothers---------------nde nne

viii. person-----------------madnu
      persons--------------ele madnu
                      nde madnu

ix.   husband--------------ndi
      husbands------------nde ndi
                      ele ndi

x.   mad person----------nye ara
      mad persons---------nde ara

xi.   good persons--------nye oma
      good persons--------ele oma
                      ede oma

xii. thief------------------nye oshi
      thieves----------------nde oshi

xiii. guest------------------nyijne
      guests-----------------eleijne

xiv. a king------------------nye eze
      kings-------------------ele eze

II. 'omu' which is the plural of 'nnwo' used as a plural marker
   Examples include:
i.   child (of someone) --------nnwo
      children-------------------omu

ii.   child (not adult) ----------<u>wa</u>tatakiri
      children-------------------<u>omu</u>takiri
iii. sibling----------------------<u>n</u>wirnita
      siblings---------------------<u>omu</u>nwirnita
iv.   sister-----------------------<u>n</u>wirnita ke nwerhe
      sisters----------------------<u>omu</u>nwirnita ke nwerhe
v.   Student---------------------nnwo sukulu

vi.   Students--------------------omu sukulu

2) Through the use of some words that are quantifiers. Examples of such words include:

Ikwerre	English

1. nkpu   many/plenty
   nkpu mahdu   many persons/people
   nkpu nkita   many dogs
   nkpu ewu   many goats
   nkpu uwo di n'akpam   many clothes are in my bag

II. ibidha   many/plenty
     Examples;
     ibidha mahdu   many people
     ibidha agwo   many snakes
     ibidha usisi di n'ohia   many trees are in the bush

iii ágnwa   some
     agnwa mahdu   some persons
     agnwa okukwú   some fowls
     agnwa ngaji   some spoons
     agnwa aknwa   some eggs

IV gburugburu   all
    gburugburu mahdu   all the people
    gburugburu ite   all the pots
    gburugwuru oro   all the houses

3) Through the use of cardinal numbers

otu akpa	one bag
akpa aboo	two bags
otu ngadha	one chair
ngada isne	five chairs
otu ite	one pot
ite aboo	two pots
otu nti	one ear
nti aboo	two ears

4) Through the use of some verbs like 'juru' which means 'filled'

madhu juru n'oro	the house is filled with people.
igodo juru nime akpam	my bag is filled with padlocks.
ite juru n'oro nri	the kitchen is filled with pots.

3.4. Contrastive Analysis of English and Ikwerre

1) Ikwerre plural markers on nouns are prefixes while the plural markers in English are suffixes.
Example:

Ikwerre	English
nne	mother
nde nne	mothers
nyedibia	doctors
eledebia	doctors
watakiri	child
omutakiri	children
nyeoshni	thief
eleoshni	thieves

2) Plural markers in Ikwerre are free morphemes while plural markers in English are bound morphemes.
Examples include:

Ikwerre		English	
omu	'children'	books	
nkpu	'many/plenty'	tables	
igbhida	'many/plenty'	babies	

juru   'filled'   child<u>ren</u>
agnwa   'some'   tomato<u>es</u>
gburugburu   'all'   kniv<u>es</u>

3) As in English language, some plural nouns in isolation in Ikwerre language do not show any overt difference with their singular forms in the spelling. The plurality is understood in the context.
Examples include:
English
Singular   plural
Sheep   sheep
Furniture   furniture
Equipment   equipment
The <u>sheep</u> is ill   The <u>sheep</u> are ill
Ikwerre
Singular   plural
ewu (goat)   ewu
ite (pot)   ite
ngagi (spoon)   ngagi
le otu ite (look at a pot)   le nkpu ite (look at the pots)

4)   The replacive morpheme is present in both languages. 'A morpheme is said to be replacive when it is used to displace or substitute one or more items of the root' (Ndimele,1999)
Examples in English and Ikwerre include:
English   Ikwerre
M<u>a</u>n----m<u>e</u>n   ny<u>e</u>wirikne----<u>ele</u>nwirikne
Wom<u>a</u>n---wom<u>e</u>n   ny<u>e</u>nwerne----<u>ele</u>nwerne

4. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that plural formation of nouns in English is different from the way nouns form their plurals in Ikwerre language. While the plural markers in English are suffixes, the plural markers in Ikwerre are prefixes. This study also revealed that the plural markers in Ikwerre are free morphemes while the plural marker 's' in English is a bound morpheme. However, the study also noted that there exist some similarities in formation of plurals in the two languages. Some plural nouns in both languages do not show any overt difference with their singular forms in spelling. The plurality is implied in the context

The fact that there is an overwhelming difference between plural formation of nouns in both languages poses difficulty to the second language learner of English whose L_1 is Ikwerre. This is because while plural formation of nouns in English is full of irregularities and a lot of exceptions to given rules, most nouns in Ikwerre form their plurals, using plural markers which are free morphemes before the host.

It is therefore recommended that L_2 learners of English whose L_1 is Ikwerre should make conscious effort to learn the plural forms of nouns in English the way they are.

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