

THE SYNTACTIC INTERFERENCE OF IKA LANGUAGE ON ENGLISH PERFORMANCE OF IKA NATIVE SPEAKERS: A STUDY OF THE NOUN PHRASE STRUCTURE.

Rosemary E. Chiedu

Abstract

This study examines the syntactic interference of Ika language on English performance of Ika native speakers using a noun phrase structure of both languages as the focus of analysis. Contrastive analysis of Ika and English noun phrase structures revealed that the syntactic structure of Ika and English Language at the simple noun phrase level cause interference LI (first language) on L2 (second language) and if not properly addressed, native speakers of Ika are likely to encounter problems whenever they want to use the noun phrase to make sentences in English Language.

Ika language is a variety of the Igbo language spoken by people in Ika South, Ika North-East Local government area of Delta State and some few villages in Edo State. On the other hand, the English language is a prestigious language used in almost all parts of the world. As a result of the global spread, many varieties have evolved. The British Standard English (BrE) has international intelligibility and acceptability. Since the introduction of English by the British during the colonial period in Nigeria, it has performed numerous functions like the official language, language of integration, technology and most importantly, the language of education.

The Concept of Interference

The linguistics term 'interference' as it affects language learning and performance has been variously defined by linguists for a long time. Although the emphasis of their definitions are on the phonological level of language, today, the idea of linguistic interference goes beyond phonology to include a situation where the totality of the features of one language are carried, wholly or partially, over into another language thereby causing some kind of interference in reproducing or speaking that language (Conor, 1996). When this occurs, there is the likelihood that a second language learner will make some error in using the language in actual performance.

Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities. Essentially, contrastive analysis relies heavily on the assumption that there is the tendency among second language learners to transfer regularly, the features of their mother tongues to the second language.

However, differences in the linguistic structure of two languages do not necessarily lead to problems. Ellis (1994) in discussing the issue of transfer stated that it is the hypothesis that learning of task A will affect the subsequent learning of task B. It, therefore, follows that transfer can either hinder or enhance the learning of a second language because of the learner's mastery of a first language.

The Constituents of English Noun Phrase

In English language, the sentence is made up of two constituents, the noun phrase and the verb phrase. This is written as;

$S \longrightarrow NP + VP$

(S = sentence; NP = Noun phrase; VP = Verb phrase)

For example;

The man/slapped the girl

NP → VP

The basic noun phrase is defined by Quirk et al (1972) as that element in the sentence which typically functions as subject, object and complement.

The noun phrase can be made up of a single constituent (the head). For example;

NP → N (Men/ are difficult)

or basically made up of two constituents; the determiner and noun;

NP → Det.+N(Det-determiner)

For example; The tree...

Out of these two constituents, the noun is the basic or most obligatory element in most noun phrases.

Generally, there are two basic types of the noun phrase namely the simple noun and the complex noun phrase.

The simplest structure of the noun phrase is that which consists of only the headword (noun head) which is usually a proper noun and plural forms of common nouns.

For example:

Aba (N proper)/ is a busy town.

Other examples are;

Peter (N proper)/ is a boy.

Dogs (N+PI)/bark.

Boys (N +PI) are timid

Also, a simple noun phrase may consist of only the definite and indefinite article or demonstrative article and the head as exemplified below;

A boy came here . (indefinite article + noun)

The man smiled . (definite article + noun)

Those trees are dry. (demonstrative adj.+ noun)

The complex noun phrase, on the other hand, is made up of three component parts namely; the head, the premodification and the postmodification.

The head of the complex noun phrase is the basic element in the noun phrase and is usually a noun around which other components cluster.

The premodification comprises all the items placed before the head notably adjectives and nouns. Most often, determiners are added to these pre-head items. For example;

The fat boy ...

Some fat school boys ...

The determiner system in English is complex, but native speakers of the language grasp it early. There are three sub-classes of the determiners and they are;

1. The regular determiners.
2. The optional determiners.
3. The post determiners

However, the most commonly used are the regular determiners, which are of three kinds namely;

- a. Articles : a (an), the zero (which represents the absence of an article).
- b. Demonstratives: this (singular), these (plural), that (singular), those (plural).
- c. Possessives: my, our, your, his, her, its, their etc.

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The noun phrase usually contains only one determiner and the use of the zero article makes it possible to say that every noun phrase contains one regular determiner.

The postmodification comprises all the items placed after the head notably prepositional phrases, non-finite clauses and relative clauses. Examples;

The boy in the class... (prepositional phrase)

The boy sleeping in the class... (non-finite clause)

The boy who slept in the class... (relative clause)

It has been previously stated that the head of the noun phrase in English Language is the most obligatory element in most noun phrases. It dictates concord or agreement between the subject and the verb and other components which cluster around it. The head can be premodified (when other elements come before it) and postmodified (when other elements occur after it). The order of occurrence of items in the English noun phrase is fixed. It is this theory of the relative ordering of modifiers in a group that explains why it is normal to say "a good man" and quite ungrammatical to say "a man good" unless for a special semantic effect.

There are various ways of deriving the plural form of noun heads. The most usual way of deriving the plural forms of nouns is the use of the -s suffix which means 'more than one'. This is usually added to the end of the noun head;

la. The pencil is mine.

Ib. The pencils are mine.

In no. Ib, more than one pencil is referred to. Sometimes -es is added to the noun head as in the word 'mango' which becomes 'mangoes'. A morphological change in the form of the words can also reflect pluralization like in 'foot' which becomes 'feet'. In 'sheep', there is no overt inflection or morphological change to derive the plural form which still remains 'sheep'

The Constituents of Ika Noun Phrase

In Ika dialect, the sentence seems to have an equivalence in terms of the basic syntactic structure. That is, the Ika sentence has subject, verb and complement (object) as its basic syntactic structure as the English sentence. Let us consider some examples;

1. a. Nne m ngho nkite.
b. mother + poss+ buy +(past) + dog.
c. My mother bought (a) dog.

2. a. Nkechi wuu okpoho.
b. Nkechi + v(intensive) + girl.
c. Nkechi is (a) girl.

3. a. Efa m wuu Ebere.
b. name + poss +V (intensive) + Ebere.
c. My name is Ebere.

The above sentences show that the Ika sentence is predominantly made up of a subject and a predicate . The Ika sentence can be analysed thus:

S → NP +VP

Like the English determiners, Ika has its distinct determiners each having a special way of use with the noun head. Articles are absent in the Ika noun phrase structure. This is because in Ika dialect, the zero article precedes the head of the noun phrase. This is shown in the following examples containing noun phrases in Ika and their English equivalents;

1. Ika: okenyen, okenyen, okenyen.
English: boy, a boy, the boy.

2. Ika: ekwan, ekwan, ekwan.
English: egg, —→ an egg, —→ the egg.

In the above examples, the indefinite articles 'a', 'an', and the definite article 'the' do not have equivalent structures in Ika.

Demonstrative are used with noun heads but they occur after the noun heads unlike in English where they occur before noun heads.

For example;

1. Ika: Ulo ni wuu nkem.
English: This house is mine.

2. Ika: ulo hu wuu nkem.
English: that house is mine.

3. Ika: ulo we ete ni
English: their house is not far

4. Ika: ulo enyi hi ogbe.
English: our house is big.

5. Ika: ulo a hi ogbe
English: His/her/its house is big

English : His/her/its house is big.

In Ika, the noun head is the basic element in the noun phrase. Other elements cluster around it but it is usually the first item in the noun phrase while the premodifiers and post modifiers which occur before and after it respectively in English occur after the noun head in Ika dialect.

Examples;

1. Ika: Okpoho ri nma bia ebe ni.
English: The beautiful girl came here.

2. Ika: Oshishi hu akpo ele nku.
English: That tree is dried up.

In example 1, the adjective (beautiful) which premodifies the noun head (girl) in English occurs after the noun head in Ika while the article (the) is absent in Ika. In 2, the demonstrative (that) which premodifies the noun (tree) occurs after the noun 'oshishi' in Ika.

Finally, in Ika, the noun head does not usually have an overt inflection for the plural as English does. What happens when a word is inflected for the plural is that a vowel sound in the noun which is usually the first letter in the word undergoes a morphological change. The qualifiers 'ie' (all) 'ndi hu' or 'ndi ni' (those or these respectively) are also used with the noun heads to indicate plurality.

Examples;

<u>English</u>	<u>Ika</u>
Boy	okenyen
boys	ikenyen
girl	okpoho

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girls	ikpoho
tree	oshishi
trees	oshishi <u>ndi hu</u>
bag	ekpa
bags	ekpa <u>ndi ni</u>

In the first two examples, the plural morphemes *-s' in English is realized in Ika by a morphological change of the first vowel sound of the noun 'o' to T. The qualifiers 'ndi hu' and 'ndi ni' are used in the last two examples to indicate the plural form of nouns 'tree' and 'bag'.

These examples are not exhaustive as several other examples abound in the language.

Differences between Ika and English Noun Phrase Structures.

The most noticeable difference between Ika and English noun phrase is that while English noun phrase has the article occurring before it, in the Ika noun phrase, the article especially the indefinite articles are usually omitted in a sentence. For example, in the sentence;

Ika: Ewu rii gi.

English: (The) goat ate (the) yam.

The sentence structures are analyzed thus:

<u>Ika</u>		<u>English</u>	
Sentence	→ NP+VP	Sentence	→ NP + VP
NP	→ N	NP	→ Det. + N
VP	→ V	VP	→ Verb + NP
Det	→ ...	Det	→ Article
noun	→ ewu, gi	noun	→ goat, yam
verb	→ rii	verb	→ ate

From the above analysis, it is obvious that the articles (definite) in both sentences have been omitted in the Ika noun phrase structure because it does not have an equivalent structure in Ika dialect. This can also be seen in the other examples;

1. Ika: Agwo ta eletu
English: (A) snake bit(a) rabbit.
2. Ika: ekwan rii ime mkpu.
English: (An)egg is inside (the) cup
3. Ika: Okpoho hu bia nyanhun.
English: (The) girl cane yesterday.
4. Ika: Okenyen zuu ekpa.
English: (A) boy stole (A) bag.
5. Ika: ekpeti onvinyo aghanran.
English: (A) television set is expensive.

The articles in the above sentences V, 'an' and 'the' which specify the nouns they precede 'snake', 'rabbit' 'egg' 'cup', 'girl', 'bag' and 'television set' are not represented in Ika dialect. Thus, it is very common for the students to say and write.

1. My mother bought dress for me.
Instead of: My mother bought a dress for me.
2. I saw goat in the room.
Instead of: I saw a goat in the room.

This is as a result of the fact that the English definite and indefinite articles do not have equivalent structures in Ika. Students who are using or learning English as a second language will, most of the time, commit the error of omitting the article when they are using the language (English) in actual performance because they do not exist in their local language (Ika).

Another major difference between Ika and English is the word order of the elements that make up the noun phrase in the Ika dialect and the English Language. In English, the order is fixed. The head of the noun phrase can be premodified and postmodified as earlier mentioned but the premodifying and post modifying items have fixed position in the noun phrase. For example, in the phrase;

The first red car.....

The determiner (the) which is a definite article comes before the ordinal (first), and adjective (red) before the noun head (car) which is the only basic element in the noun phrase. Here, the order of the items is fixed and any alteration makes the noun phrase a wrong phrase. Thus, it is wrong for a native speaker of Ika to say:

The red first car...

When he is speaking or writing in the English Language. But this is what happens most of the time because the Ika noun phrase has no definite structure in the occurrence of elements that make it up. The dialect is such a flexible one that any of the items in the noun phrase could come first before the others, although the noun head usually comes first before the premodifiers and postmodifiers. In the English noun phrase;

The dark- complexioned tall man...

the Ika native speaker could simply say;

1. Ika : Qkenyen egi-ngi su usue...
English: The dark- complexioned tall man...
- or
- Ika: Qkenyen su usue egi-ngi...
English: The tall dark -complexioned man...

Finally, the noun head is usually the first element or item in Ika noun phrase and other items which premodify and postmodify the noun head in the English noun phrase occur after it in Ika as exemplified below;

1. Ika: Egho hu ruu uyin wu nke e.
English : That dirty currency note is hers,
2. Ika: Qshishi hu kpo nkun ri ebe hu.
English: That dry tee is over there.

3. Ika: Efere hu shani tikpo.
English: That wide plate got smashed .

Deductions Drawn from the Contrastive Analysis

The following statements can be made from the contrastive analysis of Ika and English noun phrase structures carried out.

First, in the English noun phrase, possessive pronouns 'my', 'your', 'his', 'our' and 'their' usually precede noun heads. In Ika, these possessive pronouns occur after the noun heads they are attached to. For example;

- Ika : Efa m/efa i wuu Amaka .
English: My name/your name is Amaka .

This could cause problem of word order for the Ika native speaker when he/she wants to use a noun having a possessive pronoun in making sentences.

Secondly, the articles 'a' , 'an' and 'the' which usually precede the noun head in English do not occur or feature in Ika noun phrase structure. Thus, the Ika native speaker when using English could easily omit articles whenever they occur before the noun head in sentences they are making. For example;

- Ika: Ifeoma/ngho/ni m/ekpa.
English: Ifeoma/bought/me/bag.
Instead of: Ifeoma bought me a.bag.

Third, the English noun phrase structure has a fixed order of occurrence of the items. The determiners, premodifiers and postmodifiers are usually positioned in a fixed order unlike what obtains in Ika noun phrase structure. Thus, when using English, Ika native speakers could use any of the items in the noun phrase after the noun head which usually begins the noun phrase. For example, in the phrase;

The beautiful black car

Ika native speakers could say ;

- Ika : Ugbo ali ri nma egi ngi..
English: A beautiful black car...
or
Ika: Ugbo ali egi ngi ri nma..
English: A black beautiful car...

Finally, the plural form of most nouns in English are irregular in form. On the other hand, in Ika language, the form of the noun does not change with the addition of a suffix when there is need to indicate or mark plurality or the notion of 'more than one'. Rather, quantifiers are used or a morphological change of the first vowel sound of the noun occurs. For example;

1. Ika : Okenven bia ebene.
English: A boy came here.
2. Ika: Ikenyen bia ebene,
English: Boys came here.

As such, Ika students learning English could easily and wrongly use plural forms with wrong premodifiers before the noun heads in English sentences. In the following sentence;

Ika: Ikenyen ewe ke iwe.
English: Men are always angry,
an Ika native speaker could say in English;
A lot of men are always angry.

or

Plenty men are always angry.
to emphasize the plurality of the noun head 'men'

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the syntactic interference of Ika language on English performance of Ika students using the noun phrase structures of both languages.

From the contrastive analysis of Ika and English, deductions were drawn and it can safely be concluded that differences in the syntactic structures of Ika dialect and English Language at the simple noun phrase level cause interference of L1 (first language) on L₂ (second language). Thus, for the Ika learner (speaker) of English, there is a great deal of interference of his mother tongue (Ika) on his mastery of English Language.

Recommendations

Considering the findings of this research and the conclusion, the following recommendations are tendered.

1. The teacher who is teaching English Language to Ika students should first of all, study the differences and similarities between the English and Ika noun phrase structures. This will equip him with the problems the students are likely to face in learning and mastering the second language (English).
2. Ika students who are studying English should be made to produce as many sentences as possible with English noun phrase structure so that they will have appreciable knowledge of how it works. The students' responses should be monitored and evaluated by the English teacher and corrections should be made when wrong sentences are made by Ika learners of English.

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