

## THE RELEVANCE OF PARADIGMATIC AND SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS IN MORPHOLOGY TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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### **Abstract**

English Language has for well over a century now continued to enjoy the pride of place in the nation's educational system. English never has less than five periods, and may even be given as many as seven or eight periods particularly in schools that prepare students for the Oral English examination and serves all over the world as a medium of instruction in all subjects including itself. English Language has many unique properties among which are words; the most tangible elements of a language. Morphology has an impact on Language learners' ability to both listen and speak efficiently in English. Indeed, the most serious problems of teaching English has to do with the quality of the teachers available for teaching the language as nearly all such teachers are L2 speakers. The paper aims at broadening the scope and knowledge of students and their teachers on word use and word formation through paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. Accordingly, the possibility of effecting appreciable improvement in the quality of the English spoken in the country as a whole would appear very remote if the study of words and their relationships continue to be neglected in schools. The paper recommends the training of teachers in Contrastive Linguistics who are unable to understand and consequently devise effective pedagogical strategies for combating the mostly mother-tongue induced kinds of learners' errors that recur in students' written and oral performances in the language.

In the past decade, there has been a scope of research in morphological paradigm which enhances the individual's ability to decode the morphemic structure of words and further analyse them. The paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations provide some implications for English language learning in not only understanding the meaning of words but also recognising the different morphological forms/patterns of the same words. Meanwhile, learning is not an isolated individual cognitive process. It has been argued by Emenanjo, (1991) that the crisis in present day Nigerian education is that of verbal communication and that if the standards of education have fallen or are falling, the lack of effective manipulation of verbal communication in the popular, non-elitist public schools is at the core of it all. Language teachers can engage in teaching paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations as strategies for enabling comprehension and ensuring that students have a clearer understanding of vocabulary. Teachers and learners alike need to understanding the basic formation of words and relationship of words in meaningful statements.

Morphology, as a subfield of linguistics, studies the internal structure of words and the relationships among words; Akmajian et al (2001:12). It is the study of morphemes and their arrangements in forming words; Nida (1992:1) and according to Finegan (2004: 40), the most tangible elements of a language are its words'. Lyons (1979: 73) stated that a linguistic unit enters into relations of two different kinds: paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. These two terms paradigmatic and syntagmatic are from the Greek words 'paradigmatiko' meaning 'pattern' and

'syntagmatiko' which means 'arrange together'. These were contrasting terms in structural linguistics and were procedures introduced by the Swiss Linguist, Ferdinand De Saussure.

Given the fact that Nigeria is a plural society and English language has the status of L2 and increasing number of English language learners across the world, it is uncommon to notice that learners are not able to use the language effectively and efficiently as it is equally emerging that language teachers who are expected to help these learners to recognise and manipulate new words are not able to do so. The following analysis and discussion will broaden the scope of both the teacher and learner on paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of words.

### **Concept of Paradigm**

A paradigm is a set of word form that belongs to a lexeme in which a choice can be made in accordance with the grammatical rules of a language; Haspelmath (2002). Finegan (2004) stated that paradigm is a set of forms constituting the inflectional variants of a word; and Nelson Francis (1958) quoted in Tomori (1992), paradigm is the system of morphemic variations which is correlated with a parallel system of variation in environment. To Akmajian et al (2001), 'inflectional affixes are discussed in terms of words sets called paradigms', for instance, the various forms the verb 'dance' can take (dance, dances, danced, and dancing). Fundamentally, therefore, a paradigm is a pattern, but historically, has been represented as a series of morphologically related forms sharing a base.

### **Concept of Syntagm**

A syntagm, on the other hand, is a structural combination of two or more units in a language. The syntagm is understood as the linear sequence of oral and written language. Akmajian et al (2001), stated that 'for every word we learn, we learn how it fits into the overall structure of sentences in which it can be used'. Also, Saussure (1983) stated that syntagmatic relations can also be called 'associative relations'.

### **Paradigmatic Relations**

Paradigmatic relation is the choice or relations of similarity and differences between signs, meaning, internal and external structures. According to Haspelmath (2002:165), 'paradigmatic relations are between units that could (potentially) occur in the same slot, and co-exists only in the lexicon, as well as the substitution of those units'.

The concept of paradigm is generally restricted to representing patterns or relationship among inflected words, however, the role of paradigm in morphological operations is independent of whether the process involved is inflectional or derivational, but rather, a series of changes in the shape of linguistic forms which matches a series of changes in positions; Tomori (1999). Paradigmatic description is word-based, paying much attention to 'paralleled formal and semantic resemblances among words in the lexicon'; Haspelmath (2002). Paradigmatic relations are indicated in a vertical pattern and can be illustrated in the following examples.

#### **(a) Paradigms of verbal forms**

Dance	dances	danced	dancing	danced
Sing	sings	sang	singing	sang
Write	writes	wrote	writing	written

#### **(b) Paradigms of noun forms (also known as declensions)**

i) Boy                      boy's                      boys

	Man	man's	men
	Horse	horse's	horses
ii)	<b>Paradigms for two English Nouns</b>		
	<b>Singular</b>		
	Common	farmer	garden
	Possessive	Farmer's	garden's
	<b>Plural</b>		
	Possessive	farmers'	gardens'

From the knowledge of the above paradigms, L2 learners become consciously aware of the morphemic structure of words and their ability to reflect on and manipulate that structure” (Carlisle, 1995). Therefore, the explicit knowledge of the smallest meaningful units of language, including derivational (e.g., -er/-or, -tion, un-,ing, re-)

In the same vein, most English nouns have singular and plural forms which are related by the addition of ‘s’ to mark plurality while the singular is unmarked. Similarly, the contrast or relationship with adjectives is that of the use of ‘er’ ‘est or an adverb as is the case with the example below;

c)	<b>Paradigm of Adjectives</b>				
	young	younger	youngest	very young	too young
	new	newer	newest	very new	too new
	red	redder	reddest	very red	too red

In the above paradigms (a, b and c), the morphemic variations correspond with a parallel system of variation in a particular linguistic environment. For instance the verbs (sing, dance, write) can co-exist in identical linguistic environment and can be substituted in a frame. Look at the following examples derived from the verbs (sing, dance, write).

She can sing well.  
 She can dance all night.  
 She can write her name.

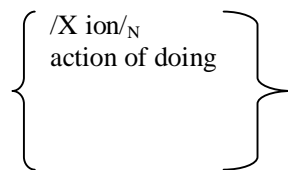
The verbs in the above example appear in identical linguistic environment as they occupy the third position of the grammatically substituted sentence, after which other words or verbal elements can follow. If other forms of the verbs (danced, dancing) are subjected to the above structure, the same patterning will be derived; for instance, the past participle (danced, sang, written) can be used in the same grammatical environment as in:

She has danced today  
 She has sang a new song  
 She has written the letter

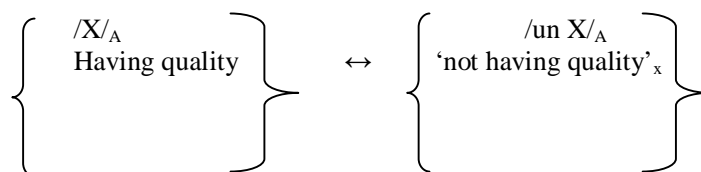
The same is applied to the nouns and adjective paradigms. Thus, members of all the verbs listed in the examples are closely related and are said to be in paradigmatic relationship with one another, and words that show parallel patterns of related forms belong to the same category either as nouns, verbs or as adjective, Finegan (2004).

### Paradigmatic Relations in Derivational Words

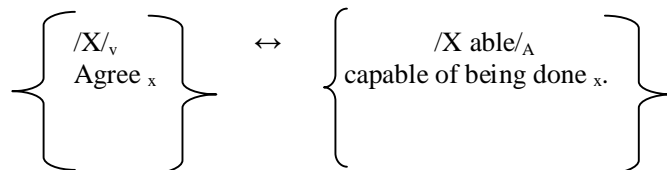
The word schema can be used to show paradigmatic relations in derivational words. The word ‘aggression’ for instance has paradigmatic relationship with such words as **attraction**, **suggestion**, **prohibition** and **discussion** and can be represented as follows;



Also, the word ‘unacceptable’ is paradigmatically related to words such as **uncommon**, **unhappy**, **unjust**, and **acceptable** and is described as thus;



Another contrast is noted in the word ‘agreeable’ which has paradigmatic relations with words like **eatable**, **receivable**, **deliverable** and can be represented as



However, a linguistic unit can be marked or unmarked depending on its usage. For instance, the word ‘dog’ and ‘bitch’ are paradigmatically related because they can be constituted in a particular context, but can be contrasted as marked or unmarked units. The word ‘dog’ is unmarked because it is general while ‘bitch’ is marked because it is specific, talking about a particular sex; a female dog.

However, morphemes (i.e., suffixes and prefixes) and inflectional (e.g., -ed, -s, -ing, -est) markers (i.e., suffixes) can better help learners understand the morphemic structure of words and thereafter reflect upon as well as manipulate these word structure in order to have a greater understanding of the overall meaning of the word. Unfortunately, learners’ of English in Nigeria are not able to use inflections and derivations efficiently to determine their meaning. There are still very many errors and confusions in relating their meaning and use.

### Syntagmatic Relations

The syntagmatic approach to morphology gained prominence among linguistics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is one of the dimensions by which the structural linguists treat words as interrelated system rather than ordinary aggregate of individual. According to Haspelmath (2002), ‘syntagmatic

relations are between units that (potentially) follow each other in speech', and also the segmentation of words into morphemes within the environment in which they occur'. This relation also relates to linguistic 'glue', combinatory relations, and creates larger signs from smaller signs. For example nouns and verbs are glued or joined together as subject and predicates of sentences. When this happens, the words are said to be syntagmatically related. Examples can be derived from the linguistic levels of phonology, morphology and syntax.

### **Phonological Level:**

At phonological levels, consonants and vowels are glued together as syllables, following the phonological rules, example, in the word 'come' /k ʌ m/ where /k/ and /m/ are consonants and / ʌ / is a vowel coming together in a structural bond to form the monosyllabic word /k ʌ m/. The three phonemes /k, ʌ and m/ are in syntagmatic relations because they are structurally joined together to give the phonetic shape of the word to give meaning. It should be noted that the phonological rule will ordinarily not allow the formation of a word with the sounds arrangement patterning like /ʌ k m/. It is a meaningless succession of sounds in an utterance, not joined in a recognised structural bond, therefore are not in syntagmatic relationship with each other.

At the morphological level, the following conditions are noted:

a) Lexical morphemes and affixes are bounded or glued together to derive new words.

Examples

- |      |                    |   |             |
|------|--------------------|---|-------------|
| i)   | un + desire + able | = | undesirable |
| ii)  | book + ish         | = | bookish     |
| iii) | nation + al        | = | nationals   |

b) stems are bonded together into compound stems; examples

bookstore, laptop, headset, typewriter, bedroom, classroom, phone call.

Though these are two words combined to form compound stems, they have one meaningful part each.

c) Stems and inflections are bonded together into words. Examples can be derived from the following words ending with 's' 'es' or 'ed' as in; teaches, plays, and danced. The morphemes – s, 'es' or 'ed' are joined together in a structural bond to derive the words.

### **Syntactic Level**

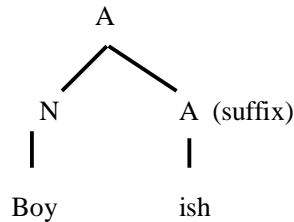
At this level, words or group of words are joined together following grammatical rules to derive meaning. These grammatical rules have constituted a lot of problems for L2 learners of English who often would over generalise as the case may be. According to Yule (2009), 'the English Language has strict rules for combining words into phrases'. For instance the following sentence can be said to be grammatically correct 'The girl is here' because it is 'syntactically well formed', Lyons (2009); ungrammatical and unaccepted when it is 'here is girl the'. Lyon also noted that any combination of elements or units of a given language which is not well formed in terms of the rules of the language is ill-formed. Lyons (1979) further described the English Language as a 'Language with what is commonly called fixed word order consisting of a subject, verb and object' that is also difficult for learners to comprehend and internalise; for example;

He hit (kick) - have to be followed by a noun object. We can the have

He hit (kick) the wall; and not 'He hit'

However, the verb sleep/ doze, do not normally follow the above syntactic pattern, thus we will have 'Peter slept' and not 'Peter slept the bed'

Syntagmatic description is morpheme based and can be used to show constituent relations (ie) the relationship between the base and the affixes. For instance, the suffix – ish is mostly attached to nouns changing their word class. Thus, boyish becomes an adjective as is seen in the following tree diagram.



Syntagmatic relations can be in syntactic sequence of class constructions as noted in Nida (1992). The sequences include;

- |    |                          |                                  |
|----|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. | Adjective plus noun, e.g | redlight, sunglass, blackboard   |
| 2. | Noun plus noun e.g       | classroom, boardroom. torchlight |
| 3. | verbal plus noun e.g     | Dinning-hall                     |

Syntagmatic relations can also be observed in words that collocate in the English language which are based mainly on idiomatic usage (ie) the way English is used whether or not it contradicts strict grammatical rules. These examples can be noted in the following prepositional idioms;

Absolve	from	(blame)
Accompanied	by	(a lady ( person)
Accompanied	with	(applause (a thing)
Annoyed	by	(the noise (a thing)
Annoyed	with	(the child (a person)

### Conclusion

This study of word patterns, giving their pragmatic and syntagmatic relations attempt to open a new knowledge and understanding for both the teacher and the learner. As we have already seen, paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations are relevant at every level of linguistic description, which depends on interpretation in deriving grammaticality and acceptability. This makes paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations interdependent at all levels of language structure. . Most people really begin to meaningfully speak, read, write language and appreciate literature in the various languages in the tertiary institutions. The trend must be reversed if the teaching of language is to occupy its "core" position in the 6-3-3-4 set-up. According to Lyons (1979), every linguistic unit is restricted with respect to the context in which it can occur. Paradigmatic relation is a condition where all the related units can occur in the same context while syntagmatic relation is between other units of the same level with which it occurs and which constitute its context.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made;

- 1) A Language Unit should be established in every Ministry of Education to handle all matters dealing with languages. This unit should be manned by specialists in language, linguistics or language education
- 2) All Nigerians have to be re-educated on the place of language in the teaching\learning process.
3. In-service training for serving teachers of languages at all level of education.

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