

A PRELIMINARY TENTATIVE COMPARISON OF THE STRUCTURES OF SOME CHADIAN LANGUAGES WITH ENGLISH

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Abstract

This paper examines the structural similarities between English and Chadian languages. Chad is a country in Sub Sahara Africa that exhibits a linguistic heterogeneous situation. The estimate of the number of indigenous languages and dialects spoken in Chad is 180. Thus, the languages chosen for the purpose of this study are Ngambay, Mundand, Musey, Tupuri, and Chadian Arabic. It should be noted that all these languages are not only spoken, but they are also written and used for literary education. In addition, English is a foreign language. It is taught as a subject in secondary schools and as a course at universities. French and Arabic are official languages. So, Chadian students studying English therefore have a complex linguistic background. A case in point concerns students of the Higher Teachers' Training School in N'Djamena. This paper therefore is an attempt to compare the structure of English with the students' mother tongues in written production. The Chadian National Alphabet has been used for the transcription of the students' indigenous languages. The Contrastive Analysis theory has also been adopted to compare the structures of these languages. In a linguistically multi-setting like Chad, it is important to attempt to bring languages closer in order to identify the differences and similarities between them from the point of view of their structures, and problematic linguistic areas that prevent students from learning English successfully. But it is found that students' mother tongues do not pose any problem, in contrast to French language that has been used in education.

Keywords: language, structure, sentence, contrastive analysis

Rezumat

În articol, sunt examinate asemănările structurale dintre limbile engleză și ciadiane. Ciad este o țară din Africa subsahariană, în care se înregistrează o situație glotică eterogenă, în sensul că se vorbesc peste 180 de limbi și dialecte. În această lucrare, supunem cercetării limbile ngambay, mundand, musey, tupuri și araba ciadiană care au atât latură orală, cât și scrisă, ultima fiind chiar folosită în educația literară. Engleza, în această țară, este o limbă străină, care se predă ca materie în ciclurile gimnazial, liceal și universitar. Franceza și araba sunt limbi oficiale. Studenții din Ciad care studiază limba engleză au, prin urmare, un fundament glotic complex, format din limbile locale enumerate. Printre ei se numără și studenții Școlii superioare de formare a profesorilor din N'Djamena. În articol, ne propunem să comparăm structura limbii engleze cu cea din limbile materne ale studenților cu pricina, o atenție deosebită fiind acordată aspectului scris. Acesta se bazează, în limbile indigene ale studenților menționați, pe alfabetul național din Ciad. Teoria analizei contrastive a fost, de asemenea, întrebuințată pentru a compara structurile acestor limbi. Într-un cadru glotic divers cum este cel din Ciad, este important să încercăm să comparăm limbile pentru a identifica atât diferențele și asemănările dintre ele din punctul de vedere al structurilor lor, cât și fe-

nomenele glotice problematice, care îi împiedică pe studenți să învețe cu succes limba engleză. După cum o arată investigațiile făcute de noi în acest articol, limba maternă a studenților nu crează probleme în învățarea englezei. Cauza dificultăților, în acest caz, este franceza folosită în educație.

Cuvinte-cheie: *limbă, structură, propoziție, analiză contrastivă*

1. Introduction

French and Arabic are both official languages of Chad. English is taught as a foreign language in this country. In addition to these languages, it is interesting to note that in Chad more than 180 ethnic languages and dialects are used in communication. This highlights the multiethnic and multicultural characteristics of this country. Therefore, obstacles abound the language learning context since Chadian learners of English are from various linguistic backgrounds, having different native languages as their first languages.

2. Literature Review

I. Yankitor studied the problems of interferences between Ngambaye and English languages among EFL learners of Lycée de Bebaem in Chad (see Yankitor, 2017). These learners already had knowledge of their first language, Ngambaye, and this affected their performance in English. Observation, interview, oral and written tests were used by us as instruments for data collection. Apart from pronunciation problems, we found that learners had problems in writing: the place of object personal pronoun was the same in Ngambaye and English as in the following examples:

Ngambaye: *Yein unda rim lekolgə.*

English: *She enrolls **me** to school.*

Students' sentence form: *She **me** writes to school.*

If the position of object personal pronoun was the same in Ngambaye and English, then the interpretation of errors in the students' form as shown in the example was wrong, because the interference might occur not from Ngambaye, but French as can be seen in the following sentence:

*Elle **m'**inscrit à l'école.*

B. Tshotsho, M. Sekiso and L. Mumbembe investigated the English language grammar challenges faced by Congolese students who pursued their degree programme in South Africa (see Tshotsho et al., 2015). The research instruments that the researchers used were students' assignments and notes written in English language. To analyse their data, document analysis was used. The results of this research showed that the Congolese French-speaking students faced challenges related to various aspects of grammar: tenses (present, past, present continuous, past continuous, future), infinitive forms of the verb and perfect tenses, concord, conjunctions, prepositions,

articles, pronouns and punctuation. The causes of these errors were attributed to the French background of the Congolese students that interferes with English, forgetfulness, lack of exposure to reading, and weak level of grammatical competence in English.

3. Theoretical Framework

According to transfer theory, there are two types of transfer: *positive transfer* occurs when previous language makes easier the learning or acquisition of a second language and *negative transfer* occurs when previous linguistic knowledge disrupts the process of learning another language. G. Yule believes that negative transfer leads to interference (Yule, 2010). U. Weinreich defines the concept of interference as “[...] those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i. e. as a result of languages in contact” (Weinreich, 1953, p. 1).

This can also be understood from the view that the learners’ linguistic background plays a negative role in the acquisition of a second or foreign language, leading to linguistic interference. So, contrastive analysis theory can also be adopted in order to investigate the differences and similarities between two or more languages.

Contrastive analysis (CA) is a theory which is used for the systematic analysis of the structures of two different languages with a view to looking for differences and similarities between them. CA is based on the assumption that "those elements which are similar to the learner’s native language will be simple for him/her, and those areas that are different will be difficult" (Lado, 1957, p. 2), underlying the interference or the influence of the first language on the second/foreign language.

CA sets out to achieve the following objectives as generally pointed out in literature:

- Looking for differences and similarities between the first language (L1) and the second/foreign language (L2);
- Identifying errors made by L2 learners;
- Helping learners deal with their errors through effective teaching of second/foreign language.

S. P. Corder proposes that by reference to the native language of the learner (Corner, 1981), we can arrive at a plausible interpretation. If the native language is not known, then the analysis of that sentence may have to remain in abeyance until we have learned more of the idiosyncratic dialect of the learner. If, however, this language is known, we may be able, by a process of literal translation, to arrive at a means of interpreting the sentence plausibly. He further suggests the possibility of asking the learner in his mother tongue to provide an authoritative interpretation. The recourse to the mother tongue of the learner (in his absence) is in fact also a highly intui-

tive process and, of course, depends on the degree of knowledge of that dialect possessed by the investigator.

4. Basic English Sentence Patterns

Mastering English sentence patterns means understanding parts of speech, which are, articles, nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions. English has grammar rules which apply to these parts of speech. The number of English patterns varies according to authors. For instance, Martha Kolln classifies seven common sentence patterns in her book entitled *Rhetorical Grammar: Grammatical Choices, Rhetorical Effects* (see Kolln, 2006).

Sentence patterns are not strictly limited to seven as pointed out by Kolln. Most sentences in the English language are constructed on the basis of the following basic structures or patterns:

1. *Subject + Verb* (S + V)
2. *Subject + Verb + Object* (S + V + O)
3. *Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object* (S + V + IO + DO)
4. *Subject + Verb + Complement* (S + V + C)
5. *Subject + Verb + Object + Complement* (S + V + O + C)
6. *Subject + Verb + Adjective* (S + V + Adj)
7. *Subject + Verb + Adverb* (S + V + Adv)
8. *Subject + Verb + Object + Adverb* (S + V + O + Adv)

5. Methodology

This study is descriptive. We were not good in the students' mother-tongues in order to compare them with English. In fact, we could not be knowledgeable in all languages spoken in Chad. This step was problematic and seemed very difficult in the thesis from which this article is derived as it requires a lot of time. Nevertheless, the teacher got his students involved in translating their sentences into English. This was the evidence that data were collected from the target students based on their mother tongue to put alongside their written English. This really takes time. These data were then analysed from a grammatical point of view. To write down the students' mother tongue, the transcription system with Latin alphabet that accords with the Chadian National Alphabet has been adopted.

6. Comparing the Structures of English with Some Chadian Languages

By comparing the structures of English with some indigenous languages, many language systems will definitely come into contact and will therefore get to be influenced by the L1. The indigenous languages involved in the comparison with English are Ngambaye, Mundang, Tupuri, Musey and Chadian Arabic. According to A. Akmajian (Akmajian et al., 2007, p. 153), "in all languages, sentences are structured in certain ways".

It is interesting to note that Chad has more than 180 languages and dialects. Therefore, obstacles abound the learning context since the learners

have different mother tongues. In the selected students' mother tongues, the structures of the sentences are different from the structures of English sentences. The elements of the mother tongue sentences are represented linearly by the following symbols that correspond to the parts of speech:

- V = *Verb*
- N = *Noun*
- Adj = *Adjective*
- Adv = *Adverb*
- Conj = *Conjunction*
- Prep = *Preposition*
- Pro = *Pronoun*

From our observations, the structural differences between English and the students' mother tongues are noticeable as can be seen in the following examples:

(a) *ellipsis*:

- in English: *Cigarette that most people smoke in Chad is fine.*

- in Ngambay: *Sa gə dəwje bula day Chad gə ne le to Fine*

Smoke that people many drink Chad here is fine
 N Pro N Adj V N Adv V N

In the example about ellipsis, the linear order of the Ngambay sentence made by the student does not correspond to the structures of the English sentence. For instance, the quantifying adjective *bula* (many) comes after the noun *dəwje* (people). The second noticeable observation is that *Chad* in the Ngambay sentence is preceded by a preposition. In English, nouns often come after prepositions as complements of the prepositions, for instance *in Chad*. Finally, the noun *sa* (smoke) is not preceded by a definite article meaning that in Ngambay, there is no definite article, *the*. So, the reason why the student did not put the definite article *the* before *cigarette* may be interpreted as the influence of the structure of Ngambay on his English writing. Normally, the student would have written: *the cigarette that most people smoke in Chad is fine*, because in English, *the* gives specific information about the noun, that is to say, there are many types of cigarette, but the definite article tells us that the cigarette mentioned here refers to *fine* which is well known to Chadian smokers. The definite article, *the* is then wrongly omitted in the English sentence.

(b) *interrogative form*:

- in English: *Why you should give too much attention to mothers?*

- in Mundang: *Mor fēē we bə yik wəŋ pəlii nay ne?*
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
For why you catch importance women much like this?
 Prep Adv Pro V N N Adv Prep

In Mundang, it can be observed that the subject pronoun *we* (you) is placed before the verb *bə* (catch) in the interrogative form while in English, it would be correct to observe the following structure: V+S+O. We can assume that there is no inversion in Mundang. The student's sentence: *why you should give too much attention to mothers?* in which the subject pronoun *you* is placed before the auxiliary verb *should* is in accord with the structure of the student's mother tongue. In formal written English, the auxiliary verb *should* has to be placed before the subject. So, the correct form would be: *why should you give too much attention to mothers?*

- in Tupuri: *We mayga ndo husugy debaŋ ti mare wo?*
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
Because reason you respect too much yours mothers why?
 Conj N Pro V Adv Pro N Adv

The same observation made on the Mundang interrogative form can be made for the Tupuri structure. That is to say, the subject pronoun *ndo* (you) is used before the verb *husugy* (respect), and this structure has affected the student's sentence in English: *why you should give too much attention to mothers?*

(c) *pleonasm:*

- in English: *Smoking cigarette it is dangerous for your health*

- in Chadian Arabic:

Ta'chreb tuumbakh da ma adiil
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
You drink cigarette this not good
 Pro V N Adj Adv Adj

The Chadian Arabic is a dialect of standard Arabic. We stated that the Chadian Arabic arose as a result of contact between the standard Arabic, the Sudanese Arabic, the Libyan Arabic, and the indigenous languages of Chad. It is used among Chadians of different ethno-linguistic background for wider communication (see Ngarsou, 2014). In the Chadian Arabic sentence, we can notice the presence of the proximal demonstrative adjective *da* meaning "this".

The position of the adjective in the Chadian Arabic sentence rather lays emphasis on *tuumbakh* (cigarette) than locates the proximity of the object referred to. The difference between the Chadian Arabic and English is that there is no impersonal verb that can be preceded by the subject pronoun *it* in Chadian Arabic. *Da* (It) is just used to emphasise on cigarette, but in English, the student has reflected the same pronoun which is wrong. Unlike English, *da* (it) in Chadian Arabic is placed after the noun *tuumbakh* (cigarette). Normally, the sentence: *smoking cigarette it is dangerous for your health* would have two possible constructions which would be optional for the student: 1) *smoking cigarettes is dangerous for your health*; 2) *it is dangerous to smoke cigarettes*.

In the following examples in Musey, Ngambay and Mundang, a similar observation is easy to be made, because of the presence of *this* in the sentences. In fact, *ndara* in Musey, *le* in Ngambay, and *wo* in Mundang, are all placed after *tabara*, *sa*, and *təpə* meaning cigarette:

- in Musey: *Ce tabara ndara ka jividi*
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
 Drink cigarette this not bad
 V N Pro Adv Adj
- in Ngambay: *Kay sa le majel*
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
 Drink smoke this not good
 V N Pro
- in Mundang: *Zoo təpə wo pə bii mor jamsu*
 ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
 Smoke cigarette this bad for health
 V N Pro Adj Prep N

In summary, the wrong interrogative sentence like *why should you give too much attention to mothers?* was made by Moundang and Toupouri students while the sentence, *smoking cigarette it is dangerous for your health* was written by Mousey, Ngambay, and Moundang speakers. Given that the Chadian Arabic is widely spoken by Chadians from all ethnic groups, the latter sentence could be made by any Chadian speaking Chadian Arabic regardless of his/her ethnic background.

7. Conclusion

In this study, students have some problems which include punctuation, ellipsis, interrogative forms, and pleonasm. The features of the students'

mother tongues are not found in their sentences. The approach used to compare the structures of the students' mother tongues with English would be beneficial for both students and teachers as it provides evidence that English and African languages do not have the same structures. As such, students' difficulties in making correct sentences could be attributed to the influence of the French language.

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