

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR AND BETTE GRAMMAR

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Abstract

Bette native speakers who learn English as L₂ most of the time have difficulties in learning the morphological and syntactical structures of the second language. The difficulties arise from the evidence of differences between the structures of the acquired and learnt languages. The challenges the L₂ learner encounters are the focus of this research. That is to bring out the differences between the structures of the L₁ and those of L₂ as they pertain to Bette and English languages using the contrastive analysis theory. The study concentrated only on a few aspects of the morphology and syntax of the languages under study. The analysis reveals that the contrastive analysis leads to error analysis as the differences and difficulties lead to numerous errors in the process of learning L₂; that the knowledge of L₁ interferes with the study and mastery of L₂. It is therefore pertinent that curriculum planners take cognizance of those challenges so as to proffer solutions to how the difficulties should be tackled for effective teaching and learning.

Keywords: English, Bette, Structures, Contrastive Analysis

Introduction

English is an Indo-European language, and belongs to the West Germanic group of the Germanic Language. Bette is a southern Bantoid Language of the sub-Bendi family of Cross River languages of new Benue-Congo, and a member of the Niger-Congo (Ashipu, 2015; Ibli and Amechi, 2015). According to Emenanjo (1985, 1990 and 1999), Bette is a minority, underdeveloped language in terms of literary and linguistic scholarship. Nevertheless, the number of Bette speakers has continued to grow from a mere 36,800 speakers in Obudu and Obanlikwu in 1963 to 100,000 speakers (as at 2006), spanning across

Obudu, and parts of Obanlikwu and Boki LGAs of Cross River State, Nigeria (Ethnologue, 2018). Though the Bette language is understood and spoken generally in Obudu and parts of Obanlikwu and Boki local government areas, the language is mainly spoken in the five Bette speaking wards of Obudu urban 1, Obudu urban 2, Ipong, Begiading, and Angiaba/Begiaka. The five Bette non-speaking wards of Obudu are: Utugwang North, Utugwang Central, Utugwang South, Ukpe, and Alege/Ubang.

Bette Adieutum Unwandor originated from the Bantu in South Central Africa and settled at the foot of the Cameroun mountain, a part of which is today Obudu. The word Bette stands for both the name of the ethnic group and its language. Ottenberg (1968:59) notes that there are as many as thirty-eight languages spoken in the northern part of Cross River State. But since Obanlikwu, Boki, Igedde and Bekwara are descendants of Bette, it may therefore be posited that these languages are dialects of Bette, and their morphological process and structure follow the same pattern. In the course of migration, they moved with their language and settled in their present location. Watters (1999:78), a scholar in Bantoid languages, remarks that with the passage of time, Bette dissimilated the speech habits of their closest neighbours and has changed characteristically both in structures and intonation. These changes are reflected in the morphological and grammatical structures of the language. It is against this background that the paper sets out to bring some of the difficulties Bette native speakers encounter in the process of mastering the morphology and syntax of the English language.

Theoretical Framework

The field of Contrastive Analysis has grown and become a major pre-occupation of linguists and applied linguists. Large scale projects have been set up for the comparative study of languages with the justification that the results would prove significant and valuable for language teaching. According to Wardhaugh (1970), all natural languages have a great deal in common so that anyone who has learned

one language already knows a great deal about any language he must learn. Not only does he know a great deal about that other language even before he begins to learn it but the deep structures of both languages are very much alive so that the actual differences between the two languages are really quite superficial. However, to learn the second language relates the deep structures to its surface structure and their phonetic representation.

Gast (2016) states that contrastive studies mostly deal with the comparison of languages that are 'socio-culturally linked', that is, languages whose speech communities overlap in some way, typically through (natural or instructed) bilingualism. Narrowly defined, contrastive analysis investigates the differences between pairs (or small sets) of languages against the background of similarities and with the purpose of providing input to applied disciplines such as foreign language teaching and translation studies. With its largely descriptive focus, contrastive linguistics provides an interface between theory and application. It makes use of theoretical findings and models of language description but is driven by the objective of applicability (Gast, 2016). Some authorities are of the opinion that contrastive analysis hypothesis has both strong and weak versions. The importance of contrastive analysis, according to Lado (1957) in D.A Wilkins (1972:197), is that:

The errors and difficulties in our learning and use of a foreign language are caused by the interference of our mother tongue. Wherever the structure of the foreign language differs from that of the mother tongue, we can expect both difficulty in learning and error in performance. Learning a foreign language is essentially learning to overcome these difficulties. Where the structures of the two languages are the same, no difficulty is anticipated and teaching is not necessary. Simple exposure to the language will be enough.

On this note, where they are different, then, learning difficulties are to be expected, and the greater the difference, the greater the degree of expected difficulty. On the basis of such analysis, it is believed that teaching materials could be tailored to the needs of learners of a specific first language.

Writing on the strong version of contrastive analysis hypothesis, Banathy, Trager and Waddle (1966) assert that it is the change that has to take place in the language behaviour of a foreign language learner which can be equated with the differences between the structure of the learner's native language and culture, and that of the target language and culture. The task of the linguist, the cultural anthropologist, and the sociologist is to identify these differences. The task of the writer of a foreign language teaching programme is to develop materials which will be based on a statement of these differences. The task of the foreign language teacher is to be aware of these differences and to be prepared to teach them. The task of the learner/student is to learn them. Wardhaugh (1970) writes that one long-lived hypothesis which has attracted considerable attention from time to time (but more, it must be added, from psychologists and anthropologists than from linguists) is the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis with its claim that the structure of a language subtly influences the cognitive process of the speakers of that language.

Sapir maintains that language is a guide to social reality. Human beings do not live in the objective world alone, nor alone in the world of social activity as ordinarily understood but very much at the mercy of the particular language which has become the medium of expression for their society. This is to say that the 'real world' is, to a large extent, unconsciously built up on the language habits of the people.

A more recent hypothesis, and one more interesting to linguists today than the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, is the language acquisition device hypothesis proposed by the generative transformationalists. This hypothesis is that infants are innately endowed with the ability to acquire a natural language and all they need to set the process of language acquisition going are natural language data. It is by postulating such a language acquisition device can a generative-transformationalists account for certain linguistic universals including the ability to learn a first language with ease but also, the inability to learn a second language after childhood without difficulty.

According to Chomsky and Halle (1968), in their linguistic universal attempt to develop a system of hypothesis concerning the essential properties of any human language, these properties determine the class of possible natural languages and the class of potential grammars for some human language. Like the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the language acquisition device hypothesis is highly intriguing but it too presents seemingly insurmountable difficulties to anyone seeking to devise a critical test to prove its truth or falsity (Chomsky 1957).

The weak version requires of the linguist to use the best linguistic knowledge available to him in order to account for observed difficulties in second language learning. It does not require what the strong version requires, the prediction of those difficulties and conversely, of those learning points which do not create any difficulties at all. The weak version leads to an approach which makes fewer demands of the contrastive theory than does the strong version. It starts with the evidence provided by linguistic interference and uses such evidence to explain the similarities and differences between systems. However, the starting point in the contrast is provided by actual evidence from such phenomena as faulty translation, learning difficulties, residual foreign accents and so on and reference is made to the two systems only in order to explain actually observed interference phenomena (Wardhaugh, 1970).

The weak version of the hypothesis is adopted for this study because the best linguistic knowledge is required to account for the observed difficulties a Bette native speaker encounters in learning English Language as L2. In the learning of second language, there are some strategies that are involved for effective learning as captured by Krashen (1987). Krashen's (1987) theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses; the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis; the Monitor hypothesis; the natural Order hypothesis; the Input hypothesis; and the Affective Filter hypothesis.

There are several dissimilarities between the structures of the Bette Language and the English Language which pose a challenge to a Bette native speaker studying English as a second language. The

subsequent session dwells on the differences between the structures of the two languages.

Morphological differences between Bette Language and English Language

While it is easy to distinguish between lexical and functional morphemes in English, it is not so easy in Bette. This is because the division of lexical items into word classes in Bette does not follow the same pattern as in English. This situation is not only peculiar to Bette but all African languages and dialects (Ashipu 2015:2). For instance, the distinction between nouns and adjectives in Bette Language is not so clear as *kibuaibua* (red), *kifunifung* (white) and *kishishi* (black); which can be interpreted as both nouns and adjectives as *inkiwhoum-kishishi* (Black cloth), *kiwhoum-kibuaibua* (red cloth), *kiwhoum-kifunifung* (white cloth). It is noticeable from the above illustrations that both modifiers and qualifiers in Bette, unlike English, come after the head word (or nominal item).

It is difficult to get words in Bette which function originally as prepositions. As a result, speakers of the language resort to using nominal items, especially parts of the body as prepositions as in the following examples.

Word (Bette)	Gloss	Prepositional Item (English)
1. Lishi	Head	On
2. Lifung	Stomach	In, Inside
3. Item	Back	Behind
4. Kushu	Front	Before
5. Kubei	Leg	Under
6. Kubuo	Hand	Side

This difficulty gives rise to faulty structures in English by Bette speakers. For example, ‘She is at my back’ instead of English - “She is behind me”.

Conjunctions in Bette are fewer compared to English. Apart from “le” and “linkorye” which function inherently as conjunctions in Bette, there are hardly other noticeable ones. The word class of conjunction belongs to the closed system of functional morphemes which creates no room for addition of new words or morphemes.

Inflectional morphemes are used to form new words in Bette but only to show aspects of the grammatical functions of the word. Inflectional morphemes in Bette are limited in number and do not change the classes of the words. Unlike English, inflectional morphemes in Bette are used to change the base form of a word from singular to plural as in the following examples.

	Singular		Plural	
	Bette	English	Bette	English
7.	Kipam	Yam	Bipam	Yams
8.	Kidem	Chair	Bidem	Chairs
9.	Ukib	Bone	Bikib	Bones
10.	Kashua	Matchet	Lishua	Machetes
11.	Kishor	Toad	Bishor	Toads

It may be noticed from the above examples that while the process of converting words from singular to plural in English is by suffixation (as in chairs), it is remarkably different in Bette. To change a word from singular to plural in Bette requires a change in the initial consonant or vowel. However, this process is different from that of prefixation in English.

The Bette Language has *vcvc* word structure as against that of English which follows strictly the syllabic structure of the word. The structure pattern influences the learner’s spelling method of some English words.

	English word	English structure	Bette spelling	Bette structure
12	School	cccvc	Usukul	vcvcvc
13	Agnes	vccvc	Aginesi	vcvcvcv
14	Bread	ccvc	Ibiredi	vcvcvcv
15	Table	cvccv	Itebulu	vcvcvcv
16	Omnipotent	vccvcvcvc	Ominipotenti	vcvcvcvcvcvc

Some letters like ‘q’ and ‘x’ in the English alphabet are not in Bette, so the writing of words like queue, xenophobia, xylophone etc. is very difficult for a Bette learner of English Language.

Syntactic Differences between Bette Language and English Language

There are many differences between the structures of Bette and English syntax despite the fact that the two languages have the same subject-verb-object sentence order. Some of the differences are discussed below.

Function categories like definite and indefinite articles which are obvious in the English Language are not prominent in Bette Language, for example:

English

17. Alo is a girl

Subj. v art.obj.

18. She went to the market

Subj. v. prep.art.

Bette

Alo uyi ungia

Subj. v. obj.

Agie hé kaate

S/he v. part obj

In the first example, the indefinite article ‘a’ which is observed in the English Language is not seen in the Bette equivalent of the construction. This is why the Bette learner of English Language can make an expression like, ‘Alo is girl’. In the second example, there is no evidence of a preposition in the Bette equivalent of the sentence. The preposition is implied and subsumed in the verb. Also, the definite article which preceded the prepositional compliment is not present in the Bette translation of the sentence. This is why a Bette learner of English Language can say, ‘She went to market’.

Another difference between Bette and English syntax is that modifiers in the English Language precede the modified but it is the other way round in Bette Language. For example, in spatial deixis, ‘this’ and ‘that’ which are ‘awhun’ ‘awhuna’ in Bette Language.

	English		Bette	
19.	This man		Ungiekwe	awhun
	Demonstrative noun		noun	demonstrative
	Spec. noun		noun	Spec.
	Modifier modified		modified	modifier
20.	That book		Kushia	awhuna
	Demonstrative noun		noun	demonstrative
	Spec. noun		noun	Spec.
	modifier modified		modified	modifier

In numerals, the number which is the modifier comes before the noun which is the modified in English Language. But in Bette, numbers are preceded by the noun modified, for example:

	English		Bette	
21.	Two	legs	abe	afie
	Num.	noun	noun	num.
	Spec.	noun	noun	spec.
	Modifier	modified	modified	modifier
22.	Ten	Naira	Inaira	liwho
	Num.	noun	noun	num
	Spec.	noun	noun	spec.
	Modifier	modified	modified	modifier

In noun-noun constructions, the second noun is modified by the first in the English Language but in Bette Language, the reverse is the case; the second noun modifies the first, as in:

	English		Bette
23.	Boyfriend		Udim ungiekwe
	noun noun		noun noun
	Modifier		modified modifier
24.	Bette clan		Uclan bette
	noun noun		noun noun
	modifier modified		modified modifier

In placement of personal pronouns in Bette syntax, the movement is from the first person to the second person, then, to the third person. For example, 'Mi le wo le Alo li gia he utia' meaning 'I, you and Alo are going to the farm'. But in the English Language, the structure is the third person comes first, followed by the second person, then the first person, as in 'Alo, you and I are going to the farm'.

Findings and Conclusion

This study shows that to a large extent, the knowledge of the acquired language influences negatively the mastery of learnt language especially where the L_1 and L_2 are from different language groups. This is the situation when a Bette learner of the English language battles with the structure of the language which has different morphology and syntax from what is already existing in the speech behaviour of the learner. The contrastive analysis goes a long way in contrasting the system of the first language with the system of a second language in order to predict those difficulties which a speaker of L_1 will have in learning the L_2 and to construct teaching materials to help him learn that language effectively.

With the knowledge of contrastive analysis, Banathy, Trager and Waddle (1966) recommend that the task of the writer of a foreign language teaching programme is to develop materials which will be based on a statement of these differences; the task of the foreign language teacher is to be aware of these differences and to be prepared to teach them, the task of the student is to learn them (Thella and Chinyeaka, 2017). Therefore, all hands should be on deck to make the mastery of the English Language easier for non-native speakers of English Language like Bette learners. The above challenges as pointed out should be looked into by writers and curriculum planners while planning and writing the syllabus, and the learner on his part should dispose himself to overcome those challenges.

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