WORLDVIEWS, THOUGHT AND WORD ORDER TEACHING AND LEARNING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Though language is not the sole determinant of the way people think, it reflects their pattern of thought. Language therefore plays a critical role in reflecting the worldviews across cultures. The role of English as an exoglossic official language in Nigeria disposes it to reflect the sentiments of English in writing and impose the same on the Nigerian languages, which are taught using English as a medium of instruction. By using English as a medium of teaching the Nigerian languages, many teachers of Nigerian languages, by their English training, get influenced to adapt the orthography of Nigerian languages to that of English. However, this position is resisted by views, which hold that the linguistic features of English, which may reflect the worldview of the English, do not account for those of Nigerians. This paper takes Igbo, one of the official languages of Nigeria as a case study of this interplay of the language system and thought in Igbo pedagogy.

It attempts to find out the implications of this difference between worldview and language on the one hand and the imposition of the morpho-syntax of English on Igbo. It investigates the implications of this influence on the Igbo learner. Using a descriptive method of analysis, the paper finds out that though English is used to teach Igbo, its structures neither reflect the worldviews of the Igbo nor its linguistic patterns. Thus, the learner of Igbo is torn between thinking in English and reflecting the Igbo worldview in writing or vice versa. This dilemma retroactively affects the Igbo learner of English or Igbo. The paper formulates a guiding orthographical principle which helps the learner of Igbo to achieve linguistic orthographic accuracy.

KEY WORDS: Worldview, Thought, Tone, Morphology, Syntax, Teaching, Learning

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that there is a relationship between language and culture. However, the exact nature of the relationship is not yet settled; there are versions of this relationship. What appears to be agreed upon is that language is a conveyor of the people’s culture and worldviews. The inspiration for this study arises from the ontological uncertainty about the relationship between culture and language on the one hand and the relationship between language structure and teaching-learning on the hand. The paper seeks to find out whether if it is given that two societies have different worldviews epitomised in the structure of their languages whether such reflections do not have any effect, whether retro-active or pro-active on the cross-linguistic transfers of either language to the other in a teaching learning situation.

The objects of the study are English, the official language of Nigeria and Igbo one of the official languages of Nigeria. The two languages belong to two different genealogical phyla and have peculiar structural patterns, which presumably tease students of Igbo learning English. The paper examines the Igbo and English noun phrase, which have opposed structural patterns. The paper is organised into five sections. The first section is the general introduction, which highlights the background to the paper and the organisation. The second section provides the theoretical background. It
gives the support for the assumptions of the paper, which subsequently investigates. The third section provides information on what makes the simultaneous teaching and learning of English and Igbo compelling. The fourth section presents the method of data collection, samples of data collected and analysis. The final section is the summary of the findings of the paper.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Goodenough (1957) defines a society’s culture as whatever that one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner consistent with and acceptable to its members and to do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves. This definition implies that knowledge is acquired by socially interacting with the other members of the society; it does not emanate from any kind of generic endowment; culture is the know-how that a person must have in order to get through the task of daily living (see also Wardhaugh (1996:221)). The contention of Goodenough is on all fours opposed to the theory of mentalism which proposes that knowledge, especially linguistic knowledge is based on some acquired natural endowment. Chomsky (1988:3) postulates as follows:

Universal grammar is a deductive science concerned with the immutable and general principles of language... principle that form part of common human nature and that are the same as those that direct human reason in its intellectual operations. Chomsky proposes that knowledge whether that of culture or otherwise is acquired because man is endowed with the device to so acquire the knowledge in question. In other words, the know-how has some foundation that supports it. The above contention appears to leverage the theory of cultural relativity, originally enunciated by Humboldt and popularised by Sapir and Whorf in the 1940s, and its subsequent objections.

The theory of cultural relativity contends that the structure of language determines the way in which the speakers of a language look at life. This theory, as shown by Wardhaugh (1996:222), has been robustly criticised and it appears that the result is a resolution that the culture of a people finds reflection in the language that its members employ; they value certain things and do them in certain ways that reflect what they value and what they do; cultural requirements do not determine the structure of language. In other words, the structure of language embodies the way the view things. In language contact situations, there is a flux of the world views of the cultures in contact. This is the case with the English and Igbo languages found in Nigeria. Nigeria is an exoglossic country. This means that it uses a foreign language as an official language. Furthermore, Nigeria also recognises Igbo and two other local languages as national cum official languages. There then exists a situation where it is statutory requirement that Igbo is studied from the primary to the junior secondary level of education while English should be learnt from the senior

Status of English and Igbo in the Nigerian Education System

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culled from Emenanjo (1990)

From the above table, the English language is the official language of Nigeria. In other words, it is the language of conducting official businesses in Nigeria. These businesses could be legislative or judicial. In addition, it is compulsory
from the Senior Secondary School Education in the country. This is irrespective of the fact that English is the L1. In other words, it falls outside the mother tongue, language of the immediate community and the major Nigerian languages. It is the language perceived to be understood by the majority of the Nigerian elite.

**ENGLISH IGBO CONTACT**

The statutory provision makes the teaching and learning of English and Igbo mandatory in the school curriculum. There is no one document that contains the rule on the Nigerian language policy. The following includes the provisions, which mandate the study of English and Igbo in the Nigerian schools:

**Sources of the Nigerian Language Policy**

The principles of the NLP can be got from the following sources (cf Emenanjo (1990, 2003), Mbah (2012)), viz:

   1. The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, Hausa, Ibo (sic), and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefor
4. Section 55 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN). This section is in tandem with Section 51 of the 1979 constitution enunciated in (a) above
6. The Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation of Nigeria Amendment Act (1961) Section 18(1)

There is therefore no option for the Igbo child to learn Igbo without English or vice versa.

As shown in the introduction above, the world views of English and Igbo are understandably different. The difference is reflected in the structure of the languages. The Igbo students learning English find problems learning aspects of the English language. This is irrespective of the position held by syntacticians that all grammars are equal. Kimball (1973), cited in Mbah (1999:27), posits that whether a language is right or left branching, they are the same:

For every right branching grammar ($G_R$), there is a left branching grammar, ($G_L$), such that $L(G_R) = L(G_L)$

Given this theorem, it is expected that students learning language should not have problem acquiring rules of cross-linguistic generalities. But this assumption does not appear to be so. Perhaps the explanation could be found in the universal grammar theory of principles and parameters, which claims that all languages of the world are subject to the same rule but individual language vary in the way they obey the rules. Word order is one of the principles of grammar. The general rule is that every language must have a way that it arranges its word order; each language may in the way that it arranges its words in a syntactic construction.

The English noun phrase is head final while that of Igbo is head initial. In other words, whereas in the English noun phrase, the head word comes last, in the Igbo language, the head word comes first. The head of a phrase is better described than defined; it is the word in the phrase, which has the following characteristics: it
1. is obligatory in all occurrences of the phrase (Robinson, 1970), subject to discourse ellipsis (Matthews, 1981 and Emonds, 1972)

2. characterises the whole construct (Bloomfield, 1933; Hockett, 1958; Radford, 2006; Zicky, 1985)

3. can substitute the phrase in a grammatical construction (Mbah, 1999)

4. approximately means the same thing as the entire phrase (Mbah, 1999)

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A translation exercise was given to twenty students selected through purposive sampling technique. A validated test instrument, which was a questionnaire, comprising thirty noun phrases and twenty sentences, containing noun phrases, was administered to them. Some published grammar books, written by some Igbo teachers were selected and their literal and dynamic translations of noun phrases examined. With knowledge of the grammars of the two languages a translatological analysis of the renditions was done paying particular attention to word order and their perceived realisations in the questionnaire and grammar books.

Let us examine the following constructions:

1. (a) tall young man
   (b) white lean egret
   (c) red round hat

   The above syntactic structures are generally regarded as noun phrase (cf Abney, 1987). The elements, which are obligatory and upon which the other ones hang are the final words: man, egret and hat respectively. Structurally, following the X-bar convention, they may be represented as:

2. ... X

   The ellipses stand for the position of the qualifiers, which are optional elements while X stands for the heads. The Igbo equivalents of the above structures in 1 are:

3. (a) nwa okorobị ogologo
   (b) ụgbala lìga lìga ọcha
   (c) okpu okirikiri mmee

   The Igbo phrases have the structural pattern:

4. X ...

   While the Igbo noun phrase is left branching, that of English is right branching. Rather than follow the individual language patterns, eight out of the Igbo learners of English translated the tokens in 1 as 5:

5. (a) ogologo nwa okorobị
   (b) ọcha lìga lìga ụgbala
   (c) mmee okirikiri okpu

   The meanings of 5a-c are as follows:
6. (a) height of the young man

(b) leanness of the white egret

(c) *round blood hat

While 6a-b has a different meaning from those expressed in 1, 6c does not appear to make any sense in English. The question is whether the Igbo rendition results from the differences in the language structures of English and Igbo or from elsewhere. From previous studies (such as Chomsky, 1965, Greene, 1972, Wardhaugh, 1986, Emenanjo, 1996 and Mbah, 2004), it does not appear to lie in the language structure. The source of the problem, from the interaction with the learners, lies in the differences in their perception of how the two cultures organise things in their worlds. They tended to believe that English was head initial and would not recognise the role of partitives in breaking dependency relation in the syntax of English.

In 1, while young relates more to man in English such that the structure translates to young man that is tall, the reverse is the case in Igbo. In the language, young relates more to the word tall than to man in the sense that both of them are qualifiers. The Igbo perception of the structure would be man that is tall and young. These versions do not arise from the structure of the languages but from their difference in viewing the world. The way the English arrange the head and its complements in noun phrases poses a problem to the Igbo learner of English. To get it right, the order of the English and Igbo noun phrases are to be reversed ad seriatim. Hence, the realisation of of 1 as 7 by twelve of the learners is wrong but understandable.

7. (a) *okoroha nwoke ogologo - young man tall

(b) * ụgbala ịgịa ọchị a - egret lean white

(c) *okpu okirikiri mme - hat round red

The rendition of 1 as 7 results from differences in the organisation of the Igbo world view, which they import into Igbo.

The learners got most of the sentence structures containing the noun phrases right because they used fascinating ways to express the meaning of the structures without retaining the rigid structural meaning demanded by the phrase structures. For instance, four main syntactic patterns pervaded their following renditions of The tall young man bought a car:

8. (a) Nwa okoroha ahụ toro ogo ụzụara moto – The young man who is tall bought a motor (car)

(b) Nwa okoroha ahụ ụzụara ụgbọala (sic) toro ogologo – the young man who bought a car is tall

(c) Nwa ahụ ụzụara ụgbọala (sic) bụ toro ogologo bụụṛụ nwa okoroha – The child who bought a car is tall and young

(d) Nwa ahụ ụzụara ụgbọala (sic) bụ nwa okoroha toro ogologo – The child who bought a car is a young man who is tall

Prose enabled them to perceptively break the rigid syntactic pattern of the noun phrase. They tended to perceive the sentences in the same but using different image schemata (for the impact of imaging on semantic interpretation, see Mbah and Edeoga (2012), Ortony (1979), Fauconnier, Saeed (2003)). The renditions are a pointer to the way they perceive
and imbibe syntactic patterns. Nonetheless, many of them neglected to apply the diacritic marks (mainly the sub-dots), which are important in the orthography of the language.

One recurrent pattern, which was common to most of their work, was foreign language learner reticence. The word ụgbọala dynamically translates car in the language but does not reflect the way that the Igbo worldview perceives it. Literally, the word means vehicle land that is land vehicle. The concept is a phrase in Igbo but a word in English. Though, their rendition is right, they are influenced by the fact that it is a concept in the English; as such, they erroneously conceive it as a word. However, when they agree that ụgbọ a free morpheme in Igbo and that it takes complements such as:

9. (a) ụgbọ elu – vehicle height - aeroplane
   (b) ụgbọ mmiri – vehicle water – ship
   (c) ụgbọ oloko – vehicle rail - train
   (d) ụgbọ amara – vehicle dance - canoe
   (e) ụgbọ ikwe – vehicle mortar – palm mortar

The paradigm shown in 9 displaces their perception that vehicle and ala form one canonical unit. They realised that ụgbọ is a head word while ala is its nominal qualifier. They further tended to see that the Igbo and English may have a concept in mind but realise the same concept from different image schemata. It is these schemata that mirror the world views of the cultures and reflected in the structure of their languages.

Another observation in the translation exercise is that the learners had difficulty with words in English realised as phrasal expressions in the Igbo language. Let us examine their renditions of the following words:

10. (a) Teacher
    (b) Student
    (c) Car

All the learners translated the words correctly but wrote them as one word respectively, thus:

11. (a) onyenkụzi

    person teaching person who teaches (teacher)

    (b) nwaakwụkwọ


    (c) ụgbọala

    vehicle land – vehicle that runs on land (car)

The learners tried to mimic the English orthography. This problem does not appear to arise out of perception. When some of the learners were interacted with after the administration of the questionnaire, some of them laid the blame on the teacher while the others claimed that that was how the words were written in English. The study went further to ascertain how these words were written in the orthography of the language. It showed that some teachers in deed wrote them as single words in their publications (see Uba-Mgbemena, (2011), Ikeokwu & Onyejekwe (2008), Oluikpe and Nwoazuzu, (1995)). on the other hand, some authors wrote them as phrasal expression such as Emenanjo (1996), Mbah
(1999, 2011), Okeke (2012) among others. These methods represent the views of two major schools of thought on Igbo orthography in current Igbo discourse. The view represented by the former says that if a set of words in Igbo translates into a single word in English, then the Igbo words should be written together.

They base their argument on targeted concept with the English word as a measure. The other view argues that whether they translate into a word or otherwise in English should not be used to determine the Igbo orthography. Each language, it argues has its world views reflected in the syntax of the language (for avoidance of repetition, reference is made to Mbah, 2004 where the tone of the arguments are exhaustively discussed). In other words, though the learner may perceive the concepts rightly, distinguishing their elements, the confusion arising from the beliefs of the language teachers may lead them astray.

Mbah (2004) makes a recommendation, which the learners under study found appealing. Mbah (2004) notes that every languages has morpho-syntactic paradigms, which are fairly consistent and should be consistently reflected in the orthography of the language. Williamson (1979) notes that of all the considerations of orthography design, consistency is one of the most crucial. The questionnaire included items, which led the students to realise the mistake in following the English orthography in writing Igbo, e.g.

12. (a) evening school
   (b) thatched house

Their renditions of 11 were 12

13. (a) akwụkwọ mgbede
   evening school
   (b) ụlọ ọkịrịka

The essence of including 11 was to elicit the response, which showed and did elicit the desired response that akwụkwọ and ụlọ were canonically independent of nwa such that nwa akwụkwọ and ụlọ ọkịrịka should be written differently. The logic of the test was to show that if onyenụzi, nwaakwụkwọ and ụgbọla, which are single words in English were to be written as phrases, then akwụkwọ mgbede and ụlọ ọkịrịka which have the same syntactic paradigm in Igbo should not be logically written as separate words. This method lacks consistency and does not augur well for teaching, learning or language planning.

SUMMARY

The paper has demonstrated that culture is the totality of the ways of life of a people. The way of life is transmitted via language. Each language reflects the culture of each society. As culture differs from society to society, the structure of language reflecting these culture invariably differs from language to language. the differences interact when the languages come in contact as is the case with English and Igbo. The study of Igbo and English is empowered by the legal regime of Nigeria. It also shows that Igbo learners of English are influenced by two major factors, namely their Igbo worldview and their instructors. They try to implant their world view on their learning of English. they therefore interpret English from what they know of their mother tongue. However, because they are lack knowledge of what they know when translated to English, they tend to rely on their instructors. Unfortunately, most of their instructors have background in written English but not in Igbo. They therefore transplant their language into the Igbo orthography through equating a concept in Igbo with that in English. They therefore write and teach wrong Igbo. The paper devises a simple way of testing
whether a two or more words should be written together or not, namely, by forming a paradigm of similar syntactic structures.

REFERENCES


