Benchmark Journals

A Contrastive Analysis of Affixation Patterns in English and Igbo Languages

Unigwe, Chinyere Mercy
Department of Primary Education (PED)
Federal College of Education, Zaria

Abstract

This study examines the basic differences and similarities in the affixation patterns of the English and Igbo languages. CA (Contrastive Analysis) is an area of linguistic studies, which has to do with a scientific study of two or more languages, so as to make critical, howbeit, pedagogical comments on their areas of divergence or convergence. The research data is archival, therefore, the method of data collection is documentation. Lexical items were selected from the text Igbo Adi, an Igbo-English dictionary of linguistics by Mbah etal. The central Igbo, that is, the approved variety popularly known as Igbo Izugbe has been considered for analysis. The research data is presented and analysed using Nida 1949 and Carl James 1996. Morphology, which is essentially the study of the grammatical rules of word formation in any language, was discovered to operate in both English and Igbo with significant areas of differences and similarities. It is the finding of this research that while infix is absent in English, Igbo Language uses circumfixation to expand the meanings of words. The findings also indicate that while interfixation as one of the affixation patterns, does not exist in English, it is however, a productive affixation pattern in Igbo. It is recommended that since different languages have different structures, learners and teachers should master the conventions in these languages.

Keywords: Contrastive analysis, morphology, affixation, morpheme, root, stem.

Introduction

Every language has different ways of forming new words that make it unique. At the same time, language involves, grows, develops, degenerates and even dies based on the changing characteristics of word which is the basic tool of language. Word can change its form or meaning to meet up new concepts and ideas. These change patterns and variation could be attributed to factors like language contact, neologism due to advancement in science, communication and technology, or coinages to address nouveaux information and emerging ideas. One of these processes of word formation is called affixation. Affixation is under the concept of morphology, and morpheme. Morphology is a branch of linguistics that deal with the internal structure and formation of words. Yule (2007) defines morphology as, "the study of forms". These forms are what we have as morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest units of grammar.

There are two kinds of morphemes: free morphemes and bound morphemes. A free morpheme can stand alone and is understandable in isolation. Example, boy. A bound morpheme cannot occur alone example –ish in girlish. Affixation is thus, the process of addition of affixes (bound morphemes) to the existing stem, root, or base morphemes in order to form new words or change the meaning of the existing one. It is one of the productive ways of word building in both the English and Igbo languages. Babarinde (2009) states that,

"affixation comprises of prefixation, suffixation, interfixation, infixation". Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2001) include "circumfixation." All these are morphological processes. A morphological process is thus, a means of changing a stem to adjust its meaning to fit its syntactic and communicational context.

Different languages are used in different communities, therefore obvious structural differences abound. The study of the differences and similarities between two languages begin with contrasting their structures and the language families. Contrastive linguists make efforts towards contrasting their genetic nearness by analyzing the similarities existing between the two languages. However, comparative studies have shown that languages may be similar but different genetically. Contrastive linguists analyze languages phonologically, morphologically, syntactically and semantically (James, 1996). English Language originated in England and is now widely spoken in many countries of the world including Nigeria, India, Ghana, Australia, Canada etc. It is a language in the Indo-European sub-division, and it has a large number of single morphemes (Yule, 2007:214). For this study the words that are used are taken from the Igbo Adi, an Igbo-English dictionary of linguistic by Mbah Mbah, Ikeokwu, Okeke, Nweze, Ugwuona, Akaeze, Onu, Eze, Prezi, and Odii (2013). The English words are taken from *A University Grammar of English* by Randolph Quirk and Greenbaum (2012).

Statement of the Problem

Contrastive study looks at the similarities and differences between two languages. English and Igbo languages share a lot in their morphologies. For instance, both languages demonstrate tremendous dependency on affixation to mark grammatical relationship. Igbo learners of English as a second language (L2) tend to impose inflectional structures as well as affixation patterns from Igbo language into English which affect negatively the learning of the target language that is, English. Differences in affixation processes in Igbo and English create problem in second language learning and this is because Igbo and English languages are of different linguistic backgrounds and because of these differences that exist, the affixation processes also differ. It becomes the intention of the study to find out the similarities and differences between Igbo and English affixation and the implication this may have in the study of the target language (English language). Therefore, it is against this background that the researcher deemed it necessary in carrying out a study like this which examines the differences and similarities between the languages (English and Igbo).

Purpose of the Study

This research aims at contrasting the affixation patterns of English and Igbo languages and identifying areas of linguistic similarities (if any) between the two languages. Thus, the specific objective is to:

Investigate the affixation patterns that exist in English and Igbo in terms of position and functions

Benchmark Journals

Significance of the Research

The research is considered relevant because it will act as a readily available materials for indigenous language documentation and preservation. It will also be a source and reference work for students who are interested in the study of linguistics, especially in the area of morphology. In addition, we believe that an investigation into the word structure of Igbo language in contrast to English will reveal the rich affixation patterns embedded in English and Igbo language. The research will also help the teachers of second language to predict the difficult situations in language learning and thus encouraging the learners to overcome those difficulties.

Literature Review

Morphology is the study of forms of words or word structure (from Greek morphe-'form' and logy means 'study'). Matthew (2007) sees "morphology as the study of grammatical structure of words and the categories realized by them". Thus, a morphological analysis will divide "girls" into "girl" and –s" which realizes "plural", singer into "sing" and "-er", which marks it as a noun denoting an agent. A category is morphological if it is realized within words.Similarly, Fromkin et.al (2011) sees morphology "as the study of the internal structure of words, and of the rules by which words are formed".

Morphemes

The English and Igbo affixation patterns cannot be discussed in isolation without talking about morphemes which deals with the smallest meaningful unit of a language. Morphemes can be free or bound. A free morpheme is a meaningful unit of a word; it can stand alone as an independent word in a phrase. Examples include; drunk, cat, butter, tea, etc. Bound morphemes are morphemes that cannot stand alone and must be attached to another morpheme or word. They may or may not have meaning independently; for example "un"-has a negative meaning in the words "unhealthy, 'unable, "undo" and others, but it will be meaningless independently. O'Grady, Achibald and Katamba (2011:17) see morphemes as "…the smallest unit of language that carries information about meaning and formation." Anagbogu, et al. (1990) refers to morpheme as, "the smallest indivisible form which has a specific grammatical function." Example, the English word **UNBREAKABLE** has three morphemes: **un** -, **break**, and – **able**.

Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis is the comparison and contrast of the linguistic systems of two or more languages in order to bring out prevailing convergence and divergence between them. It is a systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying the structural differences and similarities. Jurgen as early as 1980 makes an interesting contribution when he states that Modern Contrastive Analysis is concerned primarily with the synchronic study of two languages, L1 and L2. Within the synchronic study Jurgen (Ibid) points out that an analyst engages in what he calls "CONFRONTIVE" linguistic analysis and "Contrastive" analysis derives from the distinction between confrontive grammars which shows the

correspondence and similarities between two languages and contrastive grammar which is only concerned with the differences between two languages.

Affixation

Words from different languages are made up of base words known as roots which contain the core of the meaning of the word. In English, affixation is a collective term for the types of formatives that can be used when added to another morpheme (the root or stem). Crystal (2008) sees affixation as "…the morphological process whereby 'grammatical' or 'lexical' information is added to a stem." He further states that affixes are limited in number in languages and are generally classified into three types, depending on their positions with reference to the root or stem of the word. In addition, Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) posits "that affixation is the morphological process by which bound morphemes are attached to a root or stem to mark changes in meaning, parts of speech, or grammatical relationship".

In the words of Ballard (2001), "Affixation is the process by which bound morphemes (other than roots) are added to bases, either word-initially or word finally to form new words." Umera-Okeke and Nwankwo (2009) support this argument as they say that affixation means "the addition of prefixes and suffixes to the root word or base with or without a change of the word class. These prefixes and suffixes are called affixes and they are bound morphemes that are added to the base morphemes to form words".

Empirical Review

Uruakpa (2004) researched on "A Comparative Analysis of the English and Igbo Morphological processes". The work explores the different morphological processes including affixation in the languages. Among other things, she finds that both languages demonstrate tremendous dependence on affixation to mark grammatical relationship. However, even though not detailed, Uruakpa discusses affixation as a productive morphological process, with a few examples to buttress her claims. Her comparative study is lopsided for the tremendous transfer of some local dialects instead of the standard Igbo which will breed readability and comprehensibility. This invariably affects her findings for the affixation patterns found in the two languages are much more than what has been presented and therefore not exhausted. This is the gap this work hopes to fill. Again, her take on infixation in English is doubtful for other researchers have shown with examples the existence of infixes in English. Despite these, her research is beneficial to this present study. This work explores both extensively and intensively the affixation patterns in the two languages. In addition, this study will provide the meanings of affixes that will be presented for clarity, an area Uruakpa did not cover. Okonkwo (2010) carried out study on "A contrastive analysis of word-formation of English and Igbo verbs" and found that Igbo verbs are formed by interfixes and other affixation process technically known as derivational and inflectional processes.

Journal of Educational Realities-JERA
pISSN 2536-6661, eISSN 2536-6653 Vol.10, No.1, Jan/March, 2020
A Publication of University of Uyo, Nigeria

Benchmark Journals

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Nida's (1949) model and James' (1996) model. This is because it is a descriptive study and Nida's descriptive method is useful and effective for the study. The theoretical framework is eclectic since a combination of the two approaches is adopted.

2.24.1 Nida (1949) Model

Nida outlines a set of descriptive statements for Morphological studies. It is paraphrased below:

(a)   The formal description of Morphology should reflect as accurately as possible the structure of the language under consideration. In other words, the morphemes and combinations of words, the morphemes and combinations of morphemes should be described according to their pertinent environment.

(b)   The system of outlining must be clean and formal.

(c)   The use of linguistic terminology should reflect the intended reader although it must conform to terms used by the other linguistics. New terms are to be clearly defined and consistently used.

James's Model

There are two stages in which linguistic analysis can be carried out. First, is the stage of description where each of the two languages is described on the appropriate level. The second stage, is the stage of juxtaposition for comparison (James, 1996 cited in Rubba, 2004). Being descriptive and comparative in nature, James model is also adopted for this study. James in his model reviews the role that Contrastive Analysis, can play in understanding and solving problems in second or foreign language teaching and learning, using both psycholinguistic and linguistic analysis of which this study is purely linguistic in nature.

Methodology
Sources of Data

The sources of data for this study includes: written materials (textbooks, journals and articles in English and Igbo languages), the researcher equally interacted with Igbo experts and through introspection.

Written Materials

English has rich and extensive published materials in libraries and the internet. The same is the case with the Igbo language. It is one of the major Nigerian languages with a distinct orthography and system. In general, both book and non-book materials are also sources. They supplied data for this research. For instance, *A University Grammar of English* by Randolph Quirk and Greenbaum (2012) and *Igbo Adi, an Igbo-English Dictionary of Linguistics* (2013).

Journal of Educational Realities-JERA
pISSN 2536-6661, eISSN 2536-6653 Vol.10, No.1, Jan/March, 2020
A Publication of University of Uyo, Nigeria

Benchmark Journals

The researcher as a native and proficient speaker of Igbo language is also a resource person (through introspection), so her knowledge of the Igbo language also added to the data. The data and translation are validated by language (Igbo) experts in the field of linguistics.

Method of Data Collection

The method of data collection for this research is documentation. Data for this research are archival; therefore, lexical items analyzed were selected from the languages under study. The researcher got most of the data for Igbo language from textbooks, journals and articles written in Igbo language, the researcher equally interacted with teachers of Igbo language and Igbo translators. Lexical items were also taken from the text 'Igbo Adi', *An Igbo English Dictionary of Linguistics* by Mbah, et al. (2013).

Discussion of Findings

The research reveals that:

a) Both English and Igbo languages have some affixation patterns common in them while some are peculiar to one another. Affixation processes such as infixation, interfixation and circumfixation are peculiar to Igbo Language, while suffixation, prefixation and suprafixation are common in both languages.

b) The study investigates morphological processes in English and Igbo through a contrastive analysis approach. Peculiarities in the morphological processes of the two languages as well as their areas of differences and similarities, believed to be pedagogical relevance, have been discussed. Analyses were made and the findings of the research include infixation, interfixation, circumfixation are peculiar to Igbo language while prefixation, suffixation and suprafixation are common to both languages. English has mutation plurals e.g. man-men, in forming plurals but this is absent in Igbo language rather it uses a prefix like structure such as Ndi-Umu. For instance onye nkuzi (teacher) – Ndi nkuzi (teachers), nwata akwukwo (student) – umu akwukwo (students).

c) Interfixation does not exist in English. But it is present in Igbo. It has three forms r, m, ta. cc) For instance Egwure gwu (playing), edemede (essay writing) and nha ta nha (equal).English has no negative suffix rather it uses prefixes to form negatives e.g. legal – illegal, possible – impossible. This shows that to a great extent the knowledge of acquired language influences negatively, the mastery of the target language especially where L_1 and L_2 are from different language groups. This is the case with Igbo learner battling with English languages which have different affixation patterns with what is already existing in the speech behavior of the learner. Prefixes in Igbo are limited to a few vowels that are conditioned by the vowel harmony rule and in some cases the syllabic nasal Iga- to go, egbu – to kill. English has many types of prefixes. The Igbo learner of English as a 2nd language faces problems of how to learn the distinct prefixes in English.

Conclusion

Affixation patterns in Igbo are more than what is obtainable in English language. However, in general, affixes especially in English are too numerous and inexhaustible. Again, specific word classes allow affixes while some others do not. This boils down to the fact that mastering a large number of distinctive affixes and the word classes that admit them become a great challenge to Igbo learners of English. This contrastive study shows that word formation is one of the problem areas in the study of language. Although very many languages use affixation as a method of forming new words, the structures, patterns and realizations become the major issues. Since the formation of new words is done in different languages differently, learners of a particular language find the specifications and rules of the language difficult. The inconsistencies and exceptions in the rules pose problems to the learners. Because of the existing differences in the use and application of certain affixes in Igbo and English, the Igbo learners of English find it difficult to use some words correctly. The result may either be over-generalization or errors.

Recommendations

1. Further researches should be carried out in morphology especially in the area of affixation in other languages where none has been done, irrespective of the status, or population of its users.
2. Different languages have different structures so learners and teachers should master the rudiments in these languages.

References

Anagbogu, P., Mbah, M.B., & Eme, C.A. (2001). *Introduction to Linguistics.* Awka: J.F.C. Limited.

Aronoff, M. & Fudeman, K (2011). *What is Morphology?* West Susses: Blackwell Publication Ltd.

Babarinde, S. (2009). *Morphology: Its Basics and Application.* Nsukka: Paschal Communication Print.

Ballard, K. (2001). *The Framework of English: Introducing Language Structure.* Beijing: Palgrave Publishing Ltd.

Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Fromkin, V. Rodman, R. & Hyams, N. (2011). *An Introduction to Language.* Canada: Lachina PublishingService.

James, C. (1996). *Contrastive Analysis.* London: Longman Group Ltd.

Jurgen, E. (1980). Contrastive Linguistics at the Cross road of Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching' in *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. Vol 18, No 3, pp 181-190.

Matthew, P. H (2007). Morphology: An Introduction to the Theory of Word Structure. Cambridge: C.U.P

Mbah, B.M., Mbah, E.E., Ikekonwu, E.S., Okeke, C.O, Nweze, I.M., Ugwuona, C.N., Akaeze, C.M., Onu, J.O., Eze, E.A., Prezi, G.O., & Odii, B.C. (2013). Igbo Adi: Igbo- English, English-Igbo Dictionary of linguistics and literary terms. Nsukka: University of NigeriaPress.

Nida, E. (1949). *Morphology: The Descriptive Analysis of Words*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.

Okonkwo, T.I. (2010). ‒A Contrastive analysis of word formation processes of the English and Igbo Verbs‖. An Unpublished MA Thesis, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka. Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Ltd.

Randolph, Q. & Sidney, G. (2012). A university grammar of English. South Asia: Pearson Pub.

Rubba, J. (2004) *An Overview of the English Morphological \System.* In English Department (Linguistics) Sun Luis Obiquo Carlifonia Polytechnic State University.

Umera-Okeke, N.& Nwankwo, U.C. (2009). *Studies in Morphology and Syntax of English*. Awka: Mount Carmel Printing and Publishing Limited.

Uruakpa,G.A.(2004).Comparative Study of English and Igbo Morphological Processes. AnUnpublished M.A thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Yule, G. (2007). *The Study of Language* (2nd Ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.