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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Religion and the Educational System in Nigeria:
A Cognitive Perspective
-Emeka Nwabueze - - - - - 1

Between Irresolution and Intervention: Mythic Investigation of
Elesin Oba, Olunde and Eman's Self Immolation in
Death and the King's Horseman and *The Strong Breed*
-Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu and *Cindy Anene Ezeugwu* 10

An Interpretation of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God Using
Relevance Theory of Pragmatics
-Adaoma E. Igwedibia, Christian Anieke and
Christiana Chikwadoeze - - - - 23

Ancestral Transgression and Lineal Calamity in Emeka Nwabueze's
Guardian of the Cosmos
-Ndubuisi Nnanna - - - - 32

Yoruba-English Bilingual Speech and Linguistic Theory:
Interference or Competence Manifestation?
-Olusanmi Babarinde and *Florence Chika Nwosu* - 44

On Gravitas: Soyinka's *Childe Internationale* and The Politics of
Graffiti
-Chinenye Amonyeze - - - - - 54

Life in America, an illusion of Luxury: Readings from Chimamanda
Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage'" and "The Thing Around
Your Neck" in *The Thing Around Your Neck* and *Americanah*
-Ogechukwu A. Ikediugwu - - - - 66

Gender Issues and Sustainable Development in Nigeria:
Biblical Perspective.
-Josephine Ngozi Akah - - - - - 83

Anecdotage: The Case of Uchendu in *Things Fall Apart*
-Abdullahi Ahmad - - - - - 96

Sexuality Issues and Adolescence in Nigerian Socio-Religious Society
-Chioma Patricia Onuorah - - - - 103

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Olusanmi Babarinde and Florence Chika Nwosu

Abstract

All thoughts and actions depend on ones understanding of language and the ability to use it.This paper examines the multilingual phenomena of code-mixing and invariant question tags of Yoruba-English bilingual speakers. It argues for the consideration of these phenomena as externalization of internalized bilingual's grammar which should be accounted for by any theory of language in general. The paper examines the syntactic construction of sentences in bilingual speech and the mental representation of the bilingual's grammar. Being a qualitative research, the descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. With the aid of tape recorders, casual conversations of students of the University of Ilorinwere recorded at different locations to elicit data that were analysed. The paper suggests that the inclusion of these language varieties in syntactic discourse will not only expand the data-base upon which insightful conclusions can be drawn about what constitutes language knowledge, but will also benefit linguistic theory.

Key words: Yoruba-English Bilinguals, Linguistic Theory, Code-Mixing, Invariant Question Tag, Competence

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Introduction

The Nigerian society is irretrievably heterogeneous, and the concept of multilingualism is derived from the very ethno-linguistic structure of the Nigerian society. Nigerian children, in most cases, are bilingual in two or more languages even before stepping into the English class for the first time. Language interference otherwise known as first language interference, and or crosslinguistic influence could result from such knowledge. Language transfer according to Ellis (1997) is the effect the learner's first language (L1) has on the acquisition of a L2. He notes that this interference can be viewed as an instance of interlingual errors in the learner's use of the target language that is traceable to the learner's first language or mother tongue.Weinreich (1953:1) throws more light on the term "language interference" to meanthe deviations from the convention of the target language as manifested in the speech of bilinguals as a result of language contact.According to him, interference connotes the restructuring of patterndue to the introduction of extraneous elements into the well-patterned domains of language structure.

Meanwhile, non-compliance with the rules of tag questions formation is a reflection of lexical interference especially when a lexical item oflanguage "A" (i.e., the first language/L1) is included in the structure of language "B" (i.e., target language/L2usually the English language). Spoken English with such mixed linguistic formsaccording to Banjo (2000) are often heard in informal settings in Nigeria.

However, grammar, in consonance with generative transformational theory according to Chomsky (1986: 24) is described as what one knows when one knows a language, that is, what has been learned, as supplemented by innate principles. The transformational generative grammar which is largely concerned with the formulation of theory is confronted with four questions:

i. What are the universal properties of human languages?
ii. What constitutes knowledge of human language?
iii. How is knowledge of language acquired?
iv. How is knowledge of language put to use?

The reactions to the first question above varied. While sociolinguistics reacted to it by viewing the data from the competence (i.e., the internalized language) and performance (i.e., the externalized language), phonologists and syntacticians based their explanation only on the competence which is an internalized knowledge of language which is inherently invariant. This latter view has preoccupied the formulation of phonological and syntactic theories. This approach however excludes data from multilingual and variant monolingual speech. This exclusion of multilingual data like code-mixing, which is often reflected in invariant question tag, as possible objects of language analysis cast doubt on the reliability of the (syntactic) theories in accounting for linguistic knowledge. Examples of code-mixed speech and invariant question tags from Yoruba-English bilingual speech below give a clue to questions (ii) and (iii) above.

Yoruba-English code-mixed speech

1. i. Mo travelniana.
   I travel foc. yesterday
   'Itravelled yesterday'
   ii. Ti o ba provoke mi ma a gbaeti rẹ
   If you (sub) provoke me I will kick ear you (obj.)
   'I will slap you if you provoke me.'

Invariant question tag with Yoruba interference

2. ia. You can do it, can't you? (Standard English)
   b. You can do it, ṣe? (Invariant question tag)

iia. A good time we're having here, aren't we?" (Standard English)
b.A good time we're having here, ṣebi? (Invariant English)

Sentences such as these which are representatives of speech habit of typical Yoruba-English bilingual are often heard in the southern, especially south western Nigeria where Yoruba is spoken. The systematic account regarding the formation of sentences above cannot be given within the context of the syntactic theories of generative grammar except some modifications that will take cognizance of the internalized knowledge of the bi/multilingual speaker is are done to the theories. These sentences in (1) and (2b) represent the externalization of the linguistic competence of the bi/multilingual speaker and this internalized/competence must be systematically explained by theory of language if truly generative theory a true model of the speaker's knowledge of language.Code-mixing, Di Sciullo, Muysken and Singh (1986) is the embedding of various linguistic units, i.e., morphemes, words, phrases, and clauses from two distinct grammatical systems or sub-systems within the same sentences and speech event. Essentially, code-mixing or intra-sentential switching noticeable in invariant question tag is seen as the alternating use of linguistic units from two or more distinct languages.

The main objective of the study is to argue for the second perception of a bilingual speech as a concrete externalization of part of the internalized knowledge of language that Yoruba-English bilingual speaker has and such internalized knowledge cannot be explained within the limit of the existing linguistic theories. The paper further argues that such demonstration of internalized knowledge should not be seen or considered as interference rather, it is a clear manifestation of ingenuity borne out of competence.

Basic tenets of question tags

A question tag or tag question (also known as tail question) Adekunle (2014) is a grammatical structure in which a declarative statement or an imperative is turned into a question.

3a. It is good. (a declarative statement)
b. Isn't it? (Turned into a question by a tag 'isn't it?' meaning 'Is it not good?)

The term 'question tag' is generally used by the British grammarians, while their American counterparts prefer 'tag question'. Question tags are universal in usage; they are virtually found in every language. However, in some languages like English and Yoruba, tag questions have the same form, structure and meaning since the two languages maintain subject-verb-object word order.Question tags are of different types, Atoyebi (2009) observes that

the most popular ones are the polarity types. In polarity types, positive statements take negative tags and negative statements go with the positive tags. For example,

4a. "He should eat, shouldn't he?"
b. "He didn't do the work, did he?"

Conventionally, the standard variety of English requires the question tag to correspond to the subject and verb of the preceding sentence.Downing & Locke (2006: 187)note that such tags consist of a single-word verb (be or have as main verbs, an auxiliary, or a modal) plus a subject pronoun. Besides, the tense of the tag corresponds to the tense of the statement as in,

5a. "It is a sober reflection, isn't it?"
b. You have a better opportunity, haven't you/don't you?"

However, when one speaksusing the rising tone of yes–no questions, one may actually be requesting for information or be expressing surprise or uncertainty:

6. You ate the food!?"
Question tags can also be used with imperatives
7. Keep quiet, will you?"

However, when one speaks on the falling tone, such may depict expectation of agreement with the preceding statement:

8. Pleasant day we're having, aren't we?"

The rationale behind tag question sometimes may not necessarily be to seek further information but just confirmation of what is already known.

9a. You like history, don't you? (Affirmative statement---negative tag).
b. You got 85% in Mathematics. So, you like mathematics, don't you? (positive statement…
negative tag).

A yes/no question, according toHintikka, (1982)is a typical example of tag question. It is an interrogative construction that expects an answer of 'yes' or 'no.' It is also known as a polar interrogative, a polar question, and a bipolar question. In yes-no questions, an auxiliary verb typically appears in front of the subject, a formation called subject-auxiliary inversion. Subject-auxiliary inversion is the movement of an auxiliary verb to a position in front of the subject of the main clause. It is otherwise known as subject-operator inversion. Subject-auxiliary inversion occurs commonly (but not exclusively) in the formation of yes-no questions. For example,

10. You are happy.
Are you happy?

It is generally believed that the tag question is a widely and frequently used English sentences pattern. Though it is usually a short question form, it may not make a complete thought without the tags. Tottie& Hoffmann (2006: 283) corroborate this position that a question tag is made up of a declarative statement with a tag attachment. They call the declarative statement, 'the anchor'where the subject (S) in the anchor must be a noun phrase (NP). A question tag always seeks positive and/or negative responses from the interlocutor(s). Essentially, Bear (2013) notes that, using question tags in especially in conversation promotes the understanding of the various auxiliary verbs and other parts of speech alike.An unambiguous way of indicating question in Yoruba is to have a question marker word-initially. For example, a Yes/No question is marked by *ṣé* as given below:

11a. *Ṣé* o maawa
Quest. you asp come
'Will you come?'

b. *Ṣé* o tigbọ́ ohuntímo sọ?
Quest you asp hear thing rel. I say
'Have you heard what I said?'

An overview of code-mixing and invariant question tag

Code-mixing and invariant question tags are seen as verbal behaviours that are symptomatic of language deficiency on the part of the speaker. The phenomena according to Kachru (1978) are therefore characterized as random and non-rule governed. However, it is evident that code-mixing and invariant question tag is rule-governed phenomenon that reflects the bilingual's linguistic creativity. They are governed socio-psychologically and structurally. Code-mixing and invariant question tags are socio-psychologically governed in the sense that the inclusion of switching and invariant forms as tags is typically triggered by the context of the situation for identifiable social and psychological functions. The phenomena are structurally governed in that the resulting utterances or questions are constructed according to the rules of the language pair concerned.

However, the invariant tag questions do not take into cognizance the normal rules for forming tag questions. In the canonical tag questions the verb and person (noun or pronoun numbers) in the main clause (either being positive or negative) are repeated in the tag and making the tag positive or negative where necessary.

In spite of the foregoing, the basic linguistic and psycholinguistic characteristics underlying these phenomena remain poorly understood probably because of paucity of cross-linguistic studies on code-mixing and invariant question tags especially in African languages, on the one hand, and to the

narrowness of the domain of linguistic investigation in generative grammar, on the other. The foregoing could be as a result of research output between languages within the Indo-European languages. Even if there were sufficient cross-linguistic research works on code-mixing and invariant question tags, the contributions and insights of such research would still be limited in as much as those linguistic inquiries are done within the context of current tenets that underlie generative theory.

Basic objectives of transformational grammar and portrayal of externalized language

The main objective of generative theory is to discover the universal features that underlie human language and to provide a characterization of what it is that a person knows when he knows a language, and how such knowledge is acquired (Chomsky 1981). Despite the claim by Chomsky (1986: 3) that performance or externalization or language use is one of the major issues to which current linguistic theory seeks answers, very little attention has been paid to it in the syntactic literature. Infact, performance is still treated as derivative, (see Chomsky 1986: 31). So, by maintaining the primacy of competence (internalized language) over performance (externalized language), current syntactic theory rejects the legitimacy of performance as object of linguistic inquiry. Indeed, if it is uncontroversial that stored knowledge structures underlie all form of verbal behaviour, then these different components of linguistic knowledge relate.

Bilingual speech and linguistic theory

Two main approachesexist in the study of the general phenomenon of bilingual speech act (see Pfaff, 1979; and Pandharipande, 1986). These are functional and descriptive approaches. The functional approach attempted to identify the various socio-psychological functions that bilingual speech act like code-mixing and invariant question tags serve and the contexts in which the phenomena occur. The descriptive or syntactic approach attempted to provide a general characterization of the structural properties exhibited in code-mixing and invariant question tags.

The dominant parameter in the syntactic approach is to explain the bilingual speech act, code-mixing and invariant question tags, based on syntactic constraints on what can be mixed and what can not be mixed, and what should constitute the tag in question tags. The principle that underlies this approach is that in order for these bilingual utterances to be grammatical, there must be surface syntactic equivalence at the juncture where the mixing and the tag question occur between the first language and second language. In view of this hypothesis, several constraints have been proposed in the literature to purportedly account for the grammaticality of, take for instance, various code-

mixed utterances in Yoruba-English. Sridhar and Sridhar (1980), note that the unstated objective of the constraint-oriented approach to code-mixing is to provide a definition of the notion 'possible grammatical utterance'. The most popular of these restrictions include the adjectival phrase constraint, the equivalence constraint, the free morpheme constraint, and the dual structure principle as given below:

i. The adjectival phrase constraint
Adjective/noun mixes must match the surface word order of both the language of the
adjective and the language of the head noun

ii. The equivalence constraint
Code-mixing will tend to occur at points in the discourse where juxtaposition of first
language and second language elements do not violate a syntactic rule of either language.

iii. The free morpheme constraint
Codes may be mixed after any constituent in discourse provided that that constituent is not a bound morpheme.

iv. The dual structure principle; The internal structure of the guest constituent need not conform to the constituent structure rules of the host language, so long as its placement in the host sentence obeys the rules of the host language.

For question tags,

i. The question tag to correspond to the subject and verb of the preceding sentence. Such tags consist of a single-word verb (be or have as main verbs, an auxiliary, or a modal) plus a subject pronoun

ii. A declarative statement or an imperative is turned into a question.

However, all these and other syntactic constraints proposed in the published literature have been invalidated by data from different languages (see El-Noory 1990, Pandharipanda1986, Hasselmo, 2011). Meanwhile, as a consequence of the invalidity of these constraints, the most fundamental question is that the characterization of the bilingual's competence has remained unanswered.

Explanation of the bilingual competence

Sentences (1i and ii) contain the English verb stems '*travel*' and '*provoke*'. Assuming that the lexicon and lexical rules are language specific, as noted earlier, what we can infer from the construction of the sentences such as (1) is this. The speaker determines, first, the appropriate syntactic structure in Yoruba; he then makes the relevant lexical insertion drawing the verbs '*travel*' and '*provoke*' from English and the rest of the lexicon from Yoruba, before

psycholinguistically in order for the bilingual speaker to be able to produce an understand effortlessly such utterances two necessary conditions must obtain; first, the bilingual speaker must have internalized the grammars of the languages concerned, and two, he must be able to access these languages simultaneously at the moment of speaking.

Conclusion

One of the most commonly held views about human language is that language is very creative. This creativity is reflected in the production and interpretation of novel sentences and second language learning. If the main objective of linguistic theory is to provide a characterization of competence and how it is used, then the knowledge of bilingual speaker noticeable in code-mixing and invariant question tags should be seen as a better indicator of creativity rather than error or interference because they exemplify one of the most creative aspects of language knowledge by integrating lexicons and grammatical rules from different languages in the construction of sentences. To process sentences from one language requires one type of skill or level of knowledge; but to process sentences from two or more languages simultaneously requires special knowledge because of the complexity involved.

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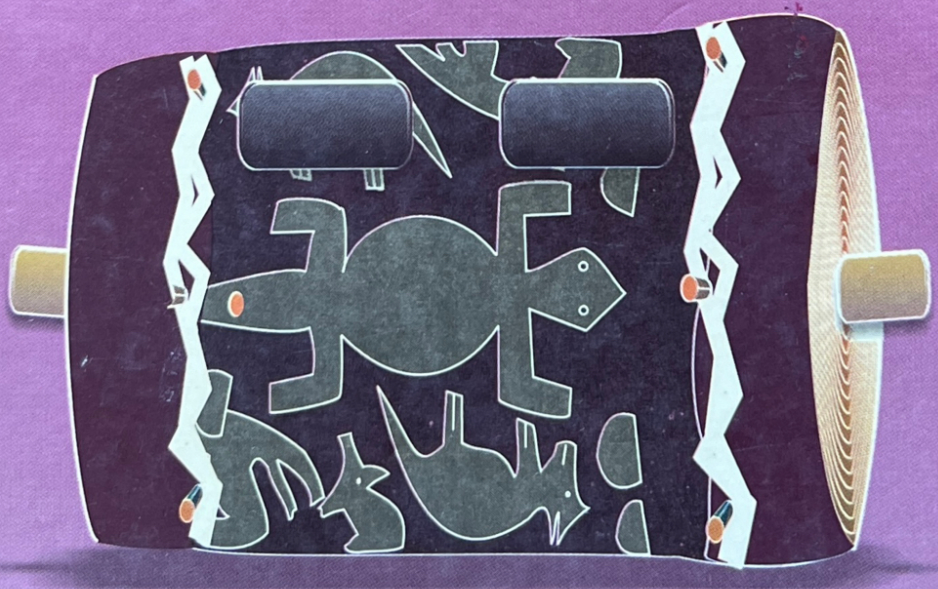
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