
Structural Analysis of Mandarin Chinese (MC) and Yoruba Simple Sentences

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Abstract

This study is necessitated because of the teaming number of Yoruba learners of Chinese as a second language (L2). MC (Putonghua) is the official dialect of the Chinese language taught in Confucius Institutes around the world. This is equally the variety that Yoruba learners are exposed to here in Nigeria. The framework of contrastive analysis is used for the study. Data were sourced from native speakers and relevant literature. Findings show that to large extent, both languages exhibit an SVO pattern in affirmative sentences and their imperative sentences also show similar pattern, hence minimal structural variations. However, Negation processes in both languages differ, Yoruba negative particles occur at sentence initial positions where as in Chinese they precede the Verb. Interrogation in MC is marked with in-situ question markers or others question particles that can occur at sentence final position whereas Yoruba question particles occur at the sentence initial position. Conclusively understanding these structural patterns of MC becomes pertinent in order to help Yoruba L2 learners understand areas of similarity and differences so as to boost their

learning speed and enhance their use of both languages especially for teachers, curriculum planners, translators and other learners in general.

Keywords: Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative, Negation, Mandarin, Yoruba

Introduction

Language as an instrument of communication is an inherent aspect of human existence. Humans convey their thoughts, emotions, ideas, feelings, and share the entirety of their social interactions via language. Languages are composed of symbols that are systematic and the creative ability of humans in the use of language set humans far above other animals. Bloch and Trager (1942) identify that symbols define human language, according to them; language is “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates”. This underscores the invaluable role of human language in fostering cooperation and unity within a community of speakers.

Yoruba is one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, with concentrated population in Southwestern states. The Yoruba language is in the Yoruboid cluster which belongs to the Defoid group within the Benue-Congo subgroup of languages under the Niger-Congo family and spoken by about 20 million population who are indigenous to West African countries such as Nigeria, Republic of Benin, Togo, Sierra Leone, and Ghana (Bendor-Samuel, 2025). Yoruba exhibits a dialect continuum which is visible in several distinct dialects with variations in pronunciation, grammatical structure, and vocabulary. Bamgbose (1966) affirms that the total number of Yoruba dialects vary from twelve to twenty-six. Chinese (MC), a member of the Sino-Tibetan language family is predominantly spoken by the Han population. Chinese is broadly

categorized into seven groups with various dialects due to the presence of 56 different national minorities. Orthographically it employs distinctive characters to represent words with a majority of characters deriving from spoken sounds that carry meaning. Chinese character has evolved over time, influenced by revolutions and political changes. To facilitate the smooth learning of Chinese language by foreigners, the pinyin system which uses the western alphabet and spelling to pronounce Chinese words was developed in 1892 (Roberts, 1999).

In order to ensure that the learning of Chinese is enhanced it becomes pertinent that comparative studies of this nature be carried out in order to establish possible areas of similarities and differences between Chinese and other languages which invariably stands to facilitate the learning process. This study which is targeted towards Yoruba speakers learning Chinese is quite timely as the findings would aid them understand the structural patterns of both languages hence be able to navigate through impending difficulties thereby enriching the body of knowledge on the structural description of both languages.

Framework and Methodology

Comparison of linguistic system of languages has always been of interest to many scholars. Contrastive analysis is one of the approaches for comparison of linguistic system which involves systematically comparing language systems of two or more languages, with focus to reveal similarities or differences between languages for theoretical purposes (Ringborn, 1994). The application of contrastive analysis in language learning according to (Mishra 2005) involves the following procedures:

- i) formal description of two languages
- ii) selection of sets for comparison

- iii) comparison of identified areas of differences and similarities as well as
- iv) prediction from the identified areas likely causes of errors due to language differences and learning difficulty

However, Al-khresheh (2016) having admitted to the four steps above as crucial to contrastive analysis also added a fifth crucial step which is the verification. According to the study, there is need to verify the predictions to ascertain if there are challenges on the basis of the contrastive analysis of both languages.

The data as used in the study were obtained through primary and secondary sources which comprise native speaker intuition and grammar texts on both languages. All data are properly marked for tones.

Simple Sentence

Andersen (2014) defines the simple sentence as one that contains one independent clause and is used when presenting a limited amount of information. They may be used to declare a direct statement, display a simple list, give concise directions or ask a question. Jian (2011) describes a simple sentence as one that comprises a single independent clause. He gives an instance of a simple sentence as follow: 我们上个星期六游览了香山 ‘Wǒmen shàng ge xīngqīliù yóulǎn le Xiāng Shān’. (Last Saturday we visited Fragrant Hill.). He explains this as a simple declarative sentence because it consists of subject, verb, object and adverbial of time. According to Okpanachi (2002) simple sentence expresses one idea as shown by the verb in the sentence. It is that which contains a single clause and expresses a single idea which can be divided into two major parts: the subject and the predicate. The subject of the sentence is the word or the groups of words being addressed by the

speaker or writer. This may be long or complex and consists of words that include articles, adjectives or other nouns followed by prepositional phrase or relative clause that performs the action of the verb. The predicate accounts for the action, condition or state of being of the subject. Structurally, every language is composed of words, phrases, and sentences which though universal also has some parametric variation as in the case of MC and Yoruba. 李德金 & 程美珍 (2008) states that a simple sentence expresses different meanings and tones such as declaration, an interrogation and others. It is worthy of note that MC and Yoruba are both tonal languages.

Structural Pattern of MC and Yoruba Simple Sentences

Structure according to Burton-Roberts (1980) is fundamental to the study of syntax as it considers each linguistic item in relation to the whole system of other items of the sentence. Considering the MC word order, the position of lexical items interacts with other features of the language such as the notion of topic, the expression of definiteness and direction in order to be established. Morbiato (2018) notes that MC has the SVO as well as the shift to SOV word order.

Huang and Li (2009), state that Chinese has SVO, and also allows variations of SOV and OSV. Jian (2011:18) stating that simple sentence has an independent clause identifies that Chinese has the following as basic clause patterns: SV, SVO, SAV, SVOO, and SV(O)C. Meanwhile the word order of Yoruba is strictly SVO, all Noun Phrases (NP) in Yoruba are head initial and most Verb Phrases (VP) would not include a definite or indefinite article. The Yoruba language has a fixed word ordering that is not altered for questions or negatives or other expressive, elements, rather are marked with a variety of particles Hewson (2021:2).

Empirical Studies

Olalere (2012) in the syntactic contrastive analysis of English and Yoruba: A Re-examination', employed the CA to identify similarities and differences between both languages to elucidate their implications for language teaching and learning. It focuses on potential challenges Yoruba speakers may encounter while learning English. His findings among others include pluralization strategy of English and Yoruba. While English engages the use of suffixes - 's', '-es' and '-en' for plural marking as can be seen in bag + s → bags, tomatoe + s → tomatoes and ox + en → oxen, while Yoruba engages the use of plural words such as "*awon*", which is usually positioned before the nouns such as Awon + omo → Awonomo - 'children' and Awon + iwe → Awon iwe - 'books'.

Adjectives in English precede the nouns they modify in attributive position while in Yoruba, this is not the case as the adjective follows the noun. There is no distinction before the third person gender in Yoruba as the same pronoun 'O' is used for both 'he' and 'she' moreover in English, there are four plural pronouns namely you (subject) you (object); they (subject) and them (object), while for Yoruba six of such plural pronouns exist; eyin (subject), yin (object), awon (they), won (them) and the honorific plural pronoun eyin (you, singular object pronoun).

Odudigbo (2014) presents a contrastive analysis of Yoruba vowels and consonants in comparison to those of the French language. The findings indicate that Yoruba speech sounds are inherently tonal, often accompanied by a melodic quality that enhances oral expression through a harmonious and vocalic system. This tonal and melodic nature of Yoruba sounds contributes significantly to effective communication and highlights their unique usefulness when compared to the phonetic characteristics of the French language.

Anajemba and Mbagwu (2015), on the contrastive study of the DP in Igbo and Chinese employ the contrastive analysis hypothesis to analyse the Determiner Phrase in both languages. DP in the study refers to all phrasal structures in which a D (determiner) occurs with a nominal.

The goal is to resolve the contradiction in a D being a constituent of an NP (noun phrase) or a Pro (pronoun) serving as the head of an NP. Igbo and Chinese were studied based on the premise that they belong to different language phyla which could account for specific parameters between the systems of the languages. The differences, by the tenets of CA (Contrastive Analysis) would constitute areas of difficulty for the speakers of one of the languages learning the other language. Determining these differences is therefore crucial towards contributing to a positive achievement in the teaching and learning of any of the languages as the target language. The study reveals that while Ds in Igbo are positioned to the right of their noun complements, Ds in Chinese are positioned to the left of their noun complements. This accounts for differences between the surface realization of determiners in Igbo and Chinese.

Anajemba (2016) studies the interrogative sentence patterns of Igbo and Chinese. The study highlights the similarities and differences in the interrogative patterns of both languages. Observations from the study reveal notable differences in constituent structures of the interrogatives in both languages from the position of the negation markers within the Verb Phrase (VP). Igbo language uses the suffix *-ghi/-la* as negative markers that are affixed to verbs whereas Chinese uses the particles 不 *bù* and 没 *měi* which are positioned before the verbs they negate in simple sentences. It anticipates potential challenges faced by Igbo L1

learners of Chinese in the identified areas and proffered suggestions which could help learners to navigate such problems in future.

Udemmadu and Chinyeaka (2017) investigates the challenges Igbo native speakers face when learning English as a second language (L2), focusing on morphological and syntactic differences between the two languages. Using contrastive analysis theory, the research highlights how structural differences between Igbo (L1) and English (L2) contribute to learning difficulties and frequent errors. It concludes that L1 interference significantly affects L2 acquisition and recommends that curriculum planners address these challenges to improve English language teaching and learning for Igbo speakers.

Adaji (2018) in the contrastive syntactic study of sentence structures of English and Igala used the structural theory proposed by Quirk (1985). The research shows distinctive features of Igala sentence structures as the placement of nouns before articles and adjectives, lack of morphological inflections for verbs in Igala and the formation of past simple or habitual tense by deletions of 'a' instead of adding the suffix -ed as in English. It also notes that while English has the SVO pattern, Igala exhibits both SVO and SOV patterns. In Chinese and Yoruba there are various forms of simple sentences which comprise declaratives, imperatives, interrogatives, exclamations and others that we examine below:

Declarative Sentences

Declarative sentence is used "to declare, make known, or explain" facts. A declarative is in the form of a simple statement. A simple declarative sentence is in the form of a simple sentence and has just a subject and predicate; it mostly follows sentence patterns like SV, SVO, SVC, SVA, and others.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Affirmative

	Chinese	Yoruba
1.	她 做饭。 Tā zuò fàn 3sg.(f) do food 'She cooks food'	Ó se òunjẹ. 3(s)(f) do food 'She cooks food'
2.	我 爱 你。 Wǒ ài nǐ 1sg. love 2sg. 'I love you'	Mo nife e. 1sg. have love 2sg. 'I love you'
3.	她 吃饭 Tā chī fàn 3(sg.)(f) eat food 'She eats food'	Ó jẹ ounjẹ. 3(sg.)(f) eat food 'She eats food'
4.	他 去 学校。 3(s)(f) qù xuéxiào He go school 'He goes to school'	Ó lo sì ilé ìwé. (3)(s)(m) go to house book 'He goes to school'
5.	你 洗 衣服。 Nǐ xǐ yīfu 2sg, wash cloth 'You wash cloth'	Ó fo aso. 2sg. wash cloth 'You wash cloth'
6.	这件衣服是白色的。 Zhè jiàn yīfu shì bái sè de Det. Mw. cloth is white Poss. 'The cloth is white'	Aso yii fun fun. Cloth Det. white white 'This cloth is white'

- | | |
|---|---|
| 7. 我是孩子。
Ade shì wǒ de háizi
Ade be 1sg. Poss. child
‘Ade is my child’ | Omo mi ni Adé.
Child 1sg. be Ade
‘Ade is my child’ |
| 8. 马克看书。
Mǎike kàn shū
Mike look book
‘Mike reads book’ | Mike kà ìwé.
Mike count book
‘Mike reads book’ |
| 9. 爷爷在家。
Yéye zài jiā
Grandpa Loc. home
Grandpa is at home | Bàbá àgbà wà nílé.
Father old Loc. home
‘Grandpa is at home’ |
| 10. 他是我爸爸。
Tā shì wǒ bàba
3sg. be 1sg. father
‘He is my father’ | Bàbá mi ni.
Father 1sg. be
‘He is my father’ |

Negation Forms

Here we examine some of the contradictory form of declarative sentences in both languages to understand the negation strategies obtainable in both languages, taking cognisance of the positions of the negation particles as used in the sentences.

- | | Chinese | Yoruba |
|-----|---|---|
| 11. | 他 没有 做饭。
Tā měi you zuò fàn
3(s)(f) Neg have cook food
‘She did not cook food’ | kò se òunje
Neg(3sg.) cook food
‘She did not cook food’ |

- | | | |
|-----|---|---|
| 12. | 我 不 爱 你。
Wǒ bú ài nǐ
1sg. Neg love 2sg.
‘I don't love you’ | Mi ò nife e
1sg. Neg love you
‘I don't love you’ |
| 13. | Ade 不 是 我 的
孩子。
Ade bú shì wǒ de hái zi
Ade Neg be 1sg. Poss. child
‘Ade is not my son’ | Adé ò kì n se Omo mi
Ade Neg my child
‘Adé is not my child’ |
| 14. | 爷 爷 不 在 家。
Yèye bú zài jiā
Grandpa Neg Loc home
‘Grandpa is not at home’ | Bàbá àgbà ò sí nílé
Grandpa Neg Loc home
‘Grandpa is not at home’ |

From the data (1- 9), both languages exhibit an SVO pattern in affirmative sentences, suggesting minimal structural differences for a Yoruba learner of Chinese. However, in (11), Yoruba's negative sentence pattern alters the Subject position by replacing "O" with "ko," while Chinese places negation marker before the Verb. From the data (12-14), both Yoruba and Chinese negations precede the Verb, with Yoruba using "o" and Chinese employing 不 "bù" and 没 "měi".

Imperative Sentence

An imperative sentence is a sentence that expresses a direct command, request, invitations, warning, or instruction. Imperative sentences do not have a subject; instead, a directive is given to an implied second person. There are two types of Imperative Sentences

in English grammar, namely: positive imperatives and negative imperative sentences.

- i. Positive imperative sentences: These sentences use affirmative verbs to address the subject. For example, "Pick up some bread from the store."
- ii. Negative imperative sentences: These sentences tell the subject to not do something. They usually begin with the verb "don't" or the negative form of a verb.

Order or Ban Imperative sentences in Chinese and Yoruba

	Chinese	Yoruba
15.	这里 不要 吸烟! Zhèlǐ bú yào xī yān! Det Neg need smoke 'Don't smoke here!'	Máse mu sìgá níbìyí Neg drink cigarette Det. 'Don't smoke here!'
16.	在 图书馆 不许 拍照. Loc túshūguǎn bù xǔ pāi zhào In library Neg take picture 'Do take picture in the Library'	Máse yà àwòrán ni ilé- ìkàwé Neg draw picture Loc house read 'Don't take picture in the Library'
17.	快 去 睡觉。 kuài qù shuì jiào Fast go sleep 'Go to sleep!'	tètè lo sùn. Fast go to sleep Go to sleep!

Request or Dissuade Imperative Sentence

	Chinese	Yoruba
18.	(您) 请坐 (Nín), qǐng zuò You(pl), please sit Take a sit, please.	Èjọ e joko Please, 2sg. sit Take a sit please
19.	请 等 一下 qǐng děng yī xià 'Please wait a moment.'	Jọ dúró die Please stand small 'Please wait'
20.	我们 开始 吧 wǒmen kāi shǐ ba 1Pl start Part 'Let's begin.'	E jé a bèrè Let 1Pl start 'Let's begin'

From the data above (15-17), the Chinese structure places the locative before the imperative word, whereas in Yoruba, the imperative is at the sentence initial position, and the locative follows. Yoruba learners of Chinese should carefully note these distinct patterns and recognize the variation in the placement of imperatives and locations. Mastering these structures is essential to prevent negative transfer of the L1 knowledge when expressing oneself in spoken or written Chinese.

Exclamatory Sentence

An exclamatory sentence is one that expresses sudden or strong emotions and feelings. It ends with an exclamation mark. Languages of the world have ways of depicting emotions and feelings and this is applicable to Yoruba and Chinese. Below are instances of exclamations in both languages.

- | | Chinese | Yoruba |
|-----|--|---|
| 22. | 呀, 你 来 了 !
Yā, nǐ lái le
Excl, you come Part
'You have come!' | Èhèén, O ti de!
Excl, you have
come
'You have come!' |
| 23. | 真 可 惜 了 !
Zhēn kěxī le
Excl, pity Part
'Really pitiful!' | Eèya, o se ni láanu
Excl, it do person
mercy
'Really pitiful!' |

The data presented in (22-23) show that exclamatives are positioned at the sentence initials in both languages. Therefore it is posited that exclamatory sentences in Chinese and Yoruba follows a similar pattern, and would not pose a challenge for Yoruba learners of Chinese. Exclamatory sentences are commonly used in spoken Chinese, particularly in movies, even though they may not always be written in text.

Tense Expression in Chinese and Yoruba

Tense form of verbs allows one to express time. The tense of the verb indicates when an event or something existed or when a person did something. Past, present, and future are the three main types of tenses to be considered with example sentences in both Chinese and Yoruba so as to understand the ways and patterns to depict tenses in each language.

Past Tense Expressions

Affirmative

- | | Chinese | Yoruba |
|-----|---|--|
| 24. | 他 吃了 饭。
Tā chī le fàn
3sg(m) eat Part food
'He ate food' | Ó je óunje.
3sg Past food
'He ate food' |
| 25. | 我 去 过 北京。
Wǒ qù guó Běijīng
1sg go Part Beijing
'I've been to Beijing' | Mo ti lo sí Beijin rí.
I have go Part beijing
before
'I've been to Beijing' |

Negative

- | | Chinese | Yoruba |
|-----|---|--|
| 26. | 我 没 吃 饭。
Wǒ měi chī fàn
1sg Neg eat food
'I did not eat' | Emi ko jeun.
1sg Neg food
'I did not eat' |
| 27. | 我 没 去 过 北京。
Wǒ měi qù guó Běijīng
1sg Neg go Part Beijing
I have never gone to Běijīng | Emi ko lo si Beijin.
1sg Neg go to Beijing
'I have never to gone
Beijing' |

The data as present in (24 -27), highlight that the basic ways to construct past tense in Chinese are Verb + 了, and Verb + 过. When it comes to tenses in Chinese, many Chinese learners feel puzzled about the difference between “verb + 了 (le)” and “verb + 过 (guò)” as they are both related to the past tense. The main difference between these two structures lies in the fact that “verb + 了 (le)”

puts an emphasis on “facts”, whereas “verb + 过 (guò)” lays stress on “past experience”. Whereas simple past tense structure in Yoruba, has the verb positioned directly after the pronoun as in NP + V + O.

Present Tense

To examine some sentences where the actions are ongoing that is in their present state in both languages we have the following examples:

Chinese	Yoruba
28. 我在洗碗。 Wǒ zài xǐ wǎn 1sg Pres wash dish 'I am washing the dishes'	Mo n fo abó. 1sg Pres wash plate 'I am washing the dishes'
29. 我正在吃饭。 Wǒ zhèngzài chī fàn 1sg Pres eat food 'I am eating food'	Mo n jeun 1sg Pres eat food 'I am eating food'
30. 他在说中文。 3sg(m) zài shuō zhōngwén. 3(s)(m) speak Chinese 'He is speaking Chinese'	O n so Shinis. 3sg(m) Pres speak Chinese 'He is speaking Chinese'

The data in (28-30) show that in Chinese 正 *Zhèng*, 在 *zài* and 正在 *zhèng zài* all indicate that an action is ongoing marking a present time. They are only used when there is an action involved, and cannot be used with modal or stative Verbs. While in Yoruba, “n” is use before Verb to indicate present tense.

The Future Tense

To construct a sentence expressed in the future, the sentence structure has the adverb marking the temporal state at the beginning of the sentence in Chinese as follows: Adverb/particle + subject + verb + complement/object.

Chinese

31. 我要去法国。
Wǒ yào qù fàguó
1sg Fut go france
'I'm going to France'

Yoruba

Mo fe lo si ilè Farasé.
1sg Fut go to land
France
'I'm going to France'

32. 以后我要去中国。
Yǐhòu wǒ yào qù zhōngguó
After 1 Fut go middle country
'One day I will go to China'

Lojo kan maa lo si
Shina.
One day Fut go to
China
'One day I will go to
China'

Negative

Chinese

33. 我不要 去 法国。
Wǒ bú yào qù fàguó
1sg Neg go france
'I'm not going to France'
34. 以后我 不要 去 中国。
Yǐhòu wǒ búyào qù
zhōngguó
After 1sg Neg go middle
country
'One day I will not go to China'

Yoruba

Mio fe lo si ilè farasé.
1sgNeg go to land France
'I'm not going to France'

Ojo kan mio ni lo si shina
One day Neg go to China
'One day I will not go to
China'

From the data in (31-34), we observe that in Chinese, the future marker is consistently positioned immediately after the subject. Similarly, in Yoruba, the future particle also follows the subject, which poses no difficulty for Yoruba learners of Chinese. In the negative aspect, the negation precedes the future tense in Chinese, unlike Yoruba where the structure differs. According to example (32), "i" appears between the subject and negation particle in Yoruba, potentially causing confusion for Yoruba learners of Chinese and leading to inaccuracies in translating future tense negatives.

Proposed Strategy for a Yoruba learner of Chinese

- As a Yoruba speaker delving into the realm of Chinese sentence structure, it is essential to comprehend the rigid word order in Chinese, characterized by a Subject-Verb-Object pattern. This includes familiarizing oneself with the constituents of the sentence patterns across various types of sentences.
- A Yoruba learner of Chinese needs to reinforce his/her skills by focusing on familiarizing him/herself with common sentence patterns in Chinese. Regular practice in constructing sentences using these patterns will help internalize the syntax.
- Finally, adopting a comprehensive approach that includes structured learning, regular practice, and immersion will empower Yoruba learners to navigate and master the intricacies of Chinese sentence structures effectively.

In conclusion, this study has provided valuable insights into the linguistic structure of simple sentences in both Chinese and Yoruba. Through the contrastive analysis, it is recorded that both languages

have similarities in the basic pattern of simple sentences however, the constituent arrangement of the sentences differ which highlights the syntactic parameters of each language.

Recommendation

This study addressed the structural constituents of the simple sentences of both languages. It is only a syntactic attempting in describing what patterns are obtainable in the affirmative and negative patterns of declaratives, imperatives, exclamatory and interrogative sentences. We hereby recommend that further studies be carried out on complex patterns as well as other areas of both languages such as phonology, semantics, and morphology.

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