

## **A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF ENGLISH AND IGBO STRUCTURES: A CHALLENGE TO AN IGBO ESL**

**Thecla Udemmadu (PhD)**

Department of Igbo, African and Asian Studies,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria  
theclaudemmadu@yahoo.com

**Chinyeaka Lauretta**

Department of English Language and Literature,  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka  
chinyeakalaura@yahoo.com

### **ABSTRACT**

Igbo native speakers who learn English as L<sub>2</sub> most of the time have difficulties in learning the morphological and syntactical structures of the second language. The difficulties emanate from the evidence of differences between the structures of the acquired and learnt languages. The challenges the L<sub>2</sub> learner faces prompted the researchers into investigating the differences between the structures of the L<sub>1</sub> and that of L<sub>2</sub> as they pertain to the Igbo and English languages using the theory of contrastive analysis. The study concentrated only on few aspects of 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 L<sub>2</sub>; that the knowledge of L<sub>1</sub> interferes in the study and mastery of L<sub>2</sub>. It is therefore, recommended that the curriculum planners take cognizance of those challenges so as to proffer solution on how the difficulties should be tackled for effective teaching and learning atmosphere.

**Keywords:** English, Igbo, Structures, Contrastive Study

### **INTRODUCTION**

English is an Indo-European language, and belongs to the West Germanic group of the Germanic language. Igbo language on the other hand is classified under Western Benue-Congo, Igboid. The language belongs to the Kwa subgroup of languages spoken in sub-Saharan Africa. The Igbo language is one of the three national languages of Nigeria together with Yoruba and Hausa. The Igbo people live in the southeastern part of the country and are one of its largest ethnic groups. Their first contact with Europeans was in the mid-fifteenth century with the arrival of the Portuguese and the British. The latter (British) colonized the country and Nigeria got her independence in 1960. During the colonialization, the colonial masters (British) imposed their language (English) as a medium of administration and education. Igbo language which is one of the indigenous languages in Nigeria is a tonal language and has vowel harmony as well as consonants with double articulation. Word order of the Igbo language is, like in most Benue-Congo languages; subject-verb-object. The language has about 24 million native speakers close to one-sixth of the population of Nigeria. Igbo is one of the national languages of Nigeria. The name 'Igbo' is both used to refer to the people, the geographical area and the language of the people. Igbo people are usually bilingual, speaking English as well because during the colonial era, English language was imposed on the country and become a lingua franca of Nigeria and it's the second language (L<sub>2</sub>) to most of the indigenous language speakers (Gutman & Avanzati 2013). Hence, this study attempts to point out some of the difficulties Igbo native speakers encounter in the process of mastering the structures of morphology and syntax of the L<sub>2</sub> (English language). The work is discussed under the following sub-heading: the general introduction, theoretical framework, differences between the structures of Igbo morphology and that of English, differences between the structures of Igbo syntax and that of English, then, the findings and conclusion.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This section discusses different perceptive of contrastive analysis by different writers noting the strong and weak versions. It also looks into the implications of the analysis as presented by linguists. 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 other 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 alike so that the actual differences between the two languages are really quite superficial. However, to learn the second language, one must learn the precise way in which that second language relates the deep structures to its surface structure and their phonetic representation.

Discussing the concept, 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 writers are of the opinion that contrastive analysis hypothesis has both strong and weak versions. The main idea of contrastive analysis, as propounded by Lado in his book *Linguistics Across Culture* (1957) was that it is possible to identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will present for native speakers of another language by systematically comparing the two languages and cultures. Where the two languages and cultures are similar, learning difficulties will not be expected, where they are different, then, learning difficulties are to be expected, and greater the difference, the greater degree of expected difficulty. On the basis of such analysis, it was 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 behavior of a foreign language student which can be equated with the differences between the structure of the student'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 program 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. 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 processes of the speakers of that language.

A much more recent hypothesis, and one much more intriguing to linguists today than the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, is the language acquisition device hypothesis proposed by the generative-transformationalist. This hypothesis is that infants are innately endowed with the ability to acquire a natural language and all they need to set process of language acquisition going are natural language data. Only by postulating such a language-acquisition device can a generative-transformationalist 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. Like the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the language-acquisition device hypothesis is extremely intriguing, but it too presents seemingly insurmountable difficulties to anyone seeking to devise a critical test to prove its truth or falsity.

The weak version requires of the linguist only that he uses 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 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 analysis of data in this study will be based on the weak version of the hypothesis because the researchers used the best linguistic knowledge within their disposal to account for the observed difficulties an Igbo native speaker encounters in learning English language as L<sub>2</sub>. In the learning of second language, there are some strategies that are involved for an 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 Igbo and the English languages which pose a challenge to an Igbo 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 IGBO AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

There are so many differences between the morphological components of Igbo and English. The Igbo language has CVCV word structure as against that of English. This structure pattern influences the learner's spelling method of some English words like;

S/N	English word	English structure	Igbo spelling	Igbo structure
1.	Omnipotent	V <u>c</u> vcvcvcv	Ominipotenti	Vcvcvcvcvcv
2.	Thecla	C <u>c</u> vc <u>c</u> v	Tecula	Cvcvcv
3.	Bread	C <u>c</u> vc	Buredi	Cvcvcv
4.	Agnes	V <u>c</u> vc	Aginesi	Vcvcvcvc
5.	Table	Cv <u>c</u> v	Tebulu	Cvcvcv
6.	School	C <u>c</u> vc	Sukulu	Cvcvcv

**Table 1**

Igbo word structure does not accommodate consonant cluster but English does. For instance, in English there are consonant cluster in words like: rhythm, crystal, school, often, answer, etc. Some Igbo proper nouns like people's name, name of towns which were wrongly spelt by the colonial masters need to be corrected such as,

S/N	Anglicanised spelling	Correct Igbo spelling
7.	Nsukka	Nsuka
8.	Awka	Oka
9.	Onitsha	Oñicha
10.	Obollo	Obolo
11.	Anambra	Anambara
12.	Orji	Oji
13.	Abba	Aba
14.	Owerri	Owere
15.	Awlaw	Olo

**Table 2**

In Igbo morphology, the letters of a word have one to one correspondent with their pronunciation but some English words have pronunciations far away different from their letters, for example, 'ewe' is pronounced /ju:/, 'one' is pronounced /wʌn/, 'eye' is pronounced /ai/, 'cat' is /kæt/ in English.

Igbo morphology does not have silent letter as English, for instance in the words below certain visible letters, are invisible during pronunciation as in: sword, often, answer, honour, psychology, pneumonia, etc. The italicized letters are not pronounced, in other words they are silent sounds.

Consonants do not end Igbo words unlike in English. This is why some Igbo spellings by the British are wrong such as:

S/N	Anglicanised spelling	Correct Igbo spelling
16.	Obiorah	Obiora

17.	Ezeh	Eze
18.	Okafor	Okafo

**Table 3**

Some letters like ‘q’ and ‘x’ in English alphabet are not in Igbo, so the writing of words like queen, queue, quos, xenophobia, xylophone etc. are very difficult for an Igbo learner of English language.

Igbo language is a rule-governed language especially as it concerns affixes. In English, there are so many irregular verbs. The general convention is that ‘-ed’ is the past tense marker in the language. But an Igbo native speaker has much difficulty in supplying the past tense of some irregular verbs like: ring, light, lay, go, stick, sting, put, stink, buy, rewind, lie, etc. It is not strange to find out that an Igbo native speaker can give the past tense of stick as ‘sticked’, sting as ‘stinged’, stink as ‘stinked’, light as ‘lighted’, even the past participle of words like ‘ring’ can be given as ‘rang’. But in Igbo, the formula for past tense is –rv<sub>2</sub> meaning, suffixing the letter /r/ and vowel of the verb root to the verb root, like: ga + r + a = gara ‘meaning went’, ri + r + i = riri ‘meaning ate’, zu + r + u = zuru ‘meaning stole’.

For English irregular verbs, it is very difficult for an Igbo learner of English language to identify number of morphemes in such verbs when they are inflected, example, the morphs: ‘went, was, lit, bought, came’, have two morphemes each but it is difficult for an Igbo learner of English to believe because Igbo language is an agglutinating language where all the morphemes can be separated. However, English words are inflecting as physical separation of some morphs are impossible. This is also the case with irregular nouns. The conventional plural marker is suffixing of ‘-s’ to the noun but some English words form plurals through the mutation of the vowels as in: man – men, foot – feet, goose – geese, tooth – teeth, etc. Also, some English lexemes may have two grammatical meanings as they have different grammatical functions; the noun and the plural which is zero marker, for example: sheep, cattle, furniture, information, etc. It is common to observe that some Igbo native speakers learning English would supply the plural of foot as foots, goose as geoses, sheep as sheeps, cattle as cattles, furniture as furnitures, information as informations etc. This is generalizing the fact that ‘-s’ is the plural marker in the English language.

### SYNTACTIC DIFFERENCES BETWEEN IGBO AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES

There are a lot of differences between the structure of Igbo and English syntax despite the fact that the two languages have subject-verb-object sentence order. Some of the differences are discussed below. Functional categories like definite and indefinite articles which are obvious in the English language are not prominent in the Igbo language, for example:

S/N	English	Igbo
19	Obi is not a girl	Obi abughị nwanyị
	Subj V neg article compl	Subj pref-V-neg compl
20	She went to the market	O gara ahịa
	Subj V prep article Prepcompl	S/he V-pst prepcompl

**Table 4**

In the first example, the indefinite article ‘a’ which is observed in the English language is not seen in the Igbo equivalent of the construction. This is why an Igbo learner of English language can make an expression like: Obi is not girl. In the second example, there is no evidence of preposition in the Igbo equivalent of the sentence, the preposition is implied and is subsumed inside the complement. Also in same the sentence, the definite article which preceded the prepositional complement is nowhere to be found in the Igbo translation of the sentence. This is why an Igbo learner of English can comfortably say: She went to market. Consequently, it is always difficult to convince an Igbo learner of English that in “O gara ahịa” that ahịa is a prepositional complement based on the fact that there is no physical presence of preposition in the construction.

Another difference between the Igbo and English syntax is that modifiers precede modified in the English language but it is the other way round in the Igbo language. For example, in spatial deixis, ‘this’ and ‘that’ which are, ‘a’ and ‘ahụ’ in the Igbo language.

S/N	English	Igbo
21	This man	Nwoke a
	Demonstrative noun	Noun demonstrative
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier
22	That book	akwụkwọ ahụ
	Demonstrative noun	Noun demonstrative
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier

**Table 5**

In numeral, the number which is the modifier comes before the noun which is the modified in the English language but in Igbo language, apart from the numeral 'one' which precedes the noun, other numbers are preceded by the noun in the Igbo language, for example:

S/N	English	Igbo
23	Two hands	Aka abụọ
	Num noun	Noun num
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier
24	Five-thousand naira	naira puku ise
	Num noun	Noun num
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier

**Table 6**

In adjectival phrase, the adjective which modifies the noun precedes the noun it is modifying in the English language but it is the other way round in the Igbo language. For example:

S/N	English	Igbo
26	Beautiful lady	nwaanyị oma
	Adj noun	Noun adj
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier
27	Black goat	Ewu ojii
	Adj noun	Noun adj
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier

**Table 7**

In noun-noun constructions, the second noun is modified by the first in the English language, but in the Igbo language the reverse is the case; the second noun modifies the first, like,

S/N	English	Igbo
28	Boy friend	Enyi nwoke
	noun noun	Noun noun
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier
29	Anambra State	Steeti Anambara
	Noun noun	Noun noun
	Spec noun	Noun spec
	Modifier modified	Modified modifier

**Table 8**

In syntactic structure, Igbo language is head initial; the noun/nominal is the head of the NP, a verb is the head of VP, preposition is the head of PP, an adjective is the head of AdjP, while an adverb is the head of AdvP.. For instance, *nwaanyị ọma* (woman beautiful is an NP in Igbo syntax; beautiful woman which means ‘*ọma nwaanyị*’ is an AdjP). In placement of personal pronouns in Igbo syntax, the movement is from the first person to the second person, then to the third person. For instance, ‘*mu na gị na Nkechi nwe nri a*’ (I(first person) conj you(second person) conj Nkechi (third person) have food this; meaning: ‘I , you and Nkechi are the owners of this food’. But in the English language, the structure is the third person comes first, followed by the second person, then the first person, as in, ‘Nkechi, you and I are the owners of the food’. That is ‘third-person, second-person and first-person are the owners of the food’. In the English syntax, there must be concord agreement between the verb and the subject, but the Igbo language has nothing to do with the agreement of verb and the subject. For instance:

S/N	English	Igbo
30	Ekene eats rice	Ekene na-eri osikapa
	Subj-sg v-sg obj	Subj-sg aux-pref-vr obj
31	They eat rice	Ha na-eri osikapa
	Pro-pl v-pl obj	Pro-pl aux-pref obj

**Table 9**

Igbo has no singular and plural verbs but English has.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The research work shows that to a great 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 group. This is the case with an Igbo learner battling with English language which has different morphological and syntactic structures with what is already existing in the speech behavior of the learner. The contrastive analysis goes a long way in contrasting the system of one 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, Bonathy, Trager and Waddle (1966) recommend that the task of the writer of a foreign language teaching program 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. Therefore, all hands should be on deck; to make the mastery of the English language easier for non-native speakers of English language like Igbo learners. The above pointed out challenges should be looked into by writers and curriculum planners while planning and writing the syllabus, and the learner on his own part should dispose himself to overcome those challenges.

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