

NATIVE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN ENGLISH ADJECTIVE ORDERING: A STUDY OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Many studies revealed that non-native speakers of English language face difficulties in understanding the correct order of adjectives, especially when there is more than one adjective qualifying a noun. This is a case of interference which, although criticized by several authors, referring to the influence of one language on another. This study aims to examine native language interference in English adjective position and order among English non-native speakers. The study employed a qualitative approach, in which test and error analysis were used to collect and analyze data respectively. The participants comprised final year students of Government Secondary School Dala, Kano-Nigeria. A sample of 20 students who are Hausa native speakers was purposively selected using typical sampling strategy. The findings revealed that the students' native language influences their English adjective position and order. Altogether, the students made 66 errors out of 200 responses they provided across English adjective position and order. These errors might reflect poor academic performance amongst the students. Therefore, the students should develop both English speaking, and reading culture and their teachers should encourage them, since language learning requires constant practice.

Keywords: Native language, interference, English adjective ordering, Nigeria

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multilingual country, comprising different ethnic groups that occupy a complicated landscape from its historical, cultural, political, economic and educational developments. The major languages in Nigeria according to the British colonial point of view are Hausa in the northern region, Yoruba in the western region, and Igbo in the Eastern region within the country. This has already craved an age for the English language as the only unifying solution to such a multilingual country. Language policy becomes the extraordinary measures to determine values, norms, basis of conduct, and loyalties in the country. Nigeria is a lingua Franca in view of its geographical spread, coupled with its over 450 languages and the number of their speakers (Danladi, 2013). Therefore, English has become one of the prerequisite subjects for anyone applying to study in the Nigerian higher institutions. It is therefore expected that anyone who scored a credit at 'O' level exams will be able to satisfactorily show an element of proficiency in English (Danyaro, 2007).

Learning of native language takes place in a very natural way and through proper imitation and exposition. The language listening and speaking skills are learnt at home while reading

and writing skills are learned at schools. Children have more exposure to the use of their native language and possibility of getting corrected is higher. Native language is learnt by birth, but the process of second language learning is quite different. The language listening and speaking skills precede reading and writing at school. Learning of second language is an artificial process, and mistakes are not corrected on the spot (Radhika & Kala, 2013).

The interference of Native language in learning English as a second language is generally a lifelong experience. Learners never manage to shake off the lexical stress pattern of their native language in their English oral production. Children learn their mother tongue by imitation, but when learning a second language, they face difficulties of accepting the rules different from that of their mother tongue. Therefore, the interference of native language is felt in their language learning and communication. Interference can be described as deviations in a learners' use of a foreign language which can be traced back to the learners' first language that has been acquired before. However, interference included those errors that occur in the learning of a second language (Sinha et al., 2009; Radhika & Kala, 2013).

Several studies revealed that non-native speakers of English language face problems in knowing the correct order of adjectives, especially when there is more than one adjective qualifying a noun. For example, Zawahreh (2013) asserted that the process of finding the correct equivalents of Arabic adjectives in English language by TEFL students when they translate from Arabic to English is considered a highly challenged issue. This indicates that the process of choosing the correct equivalents of adjectives in English might be difficult and misleading for EFL learners in most cases.

During the process of English learning, students mostly face difficulties in using adjectives especially when they write descriptions. Non-native speakers of English mostly think in and use the pattern of their first language (L1) rather than the second language (L2) (Omar, 2012). According to Kamal (2010), final year secondary school students in Nigeria mostly fail to make the grade in English Language paper and effective use of English adjectives becomes a difficult task for them. Mass failure remains consistent in the students' final year English examinations (Kamal, 2010).

Kraft and Kirk-Greene (1973) stated that English adjectives cannot stand alone with an article as sentence subjects or objects. For example, 'the big went home' is incorrect in English, but in Hausa it is correct to say '*babba ya tafi gida*', meaning, the big (one) went home. Another difference as identified by Muhammed (1978) is that adjective in Hausa can come before or after the noun. For instance, it is incorrect in English to say 'car white' instead of 'white car', but in Hausa it is correct to say '*mootaa faraa*' meaning 'white car' or '*farar mootaa*' meaning the same as "white car" in English. It is tacitly assumed in Hausa linguistic literature that an adjective in pre-position means the same as those in post-position.

Other problems faced by students in learning English sentence structure include the use of pronominal, the order of adjectives, the use of the determiners, possessives, and predicatives (Adeyanju, 1972). This study aims to identify the errors made by final year secondary school students in English adjective position and ascertain whether the students' native language interferes in their English adjective position and order. The study focused on Hausa native speakers who are students of Government Secondary School Dala, Kano-Nigeria.

2.0 ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Many studies in the area of native language interference in the target language reported that the second language learning environment encompasses everything the language learner hears and sees in the new language. It may include a wide variety of situations such as conversations with friends, reading billboards and newspapers, as well as classroom activities. Bhela, (1999) found that the way learners use their L1 structures to form the L2 texts indicates a direct interference of L1 in L2. The finding reported by Prins (2006) also indicated that students fall back on the rules of their first language due to insufficient knowledge about the rules of the second language. This affects students' academic performance in ESL classroom.

Kannan (2009) stated that twelve years of study might not make students master English language. Also, students are being taught in schools that mastery of English requires constant practice and patience. This kind of feeling that prevails among students makes them think that achieving fluency in English language is impossible. The author suggested that to address these problems, English teachers have to encourage the students to talk in English and make them feel confident. By taking extra care, English teachers can create student-friendly or learner-centric environment, as students will actively participate in the English classes. Amer (2013) also posited that one of the major causes of committing errors is assumed to be the linguistic differences between L1 and L2.

Khansir (2012) found that ESL learners are unaware of the existence of particular English language rules. Second and foreign language researchers have long been interested in Learners' errors. The basic task of error analysis is to describe how learning occurs by examining the learners' output, and this includes correct and incorrect usage of language. Lack of English language proficiency among students remains of great concern to educators, policy makers, and the general public (Normazidah et al., 2012).

Amer (2013) used descriptive analytical method to describe the differences between English and Arabic position and order of adjectives, and analysed the pedagogical implication for teaching adjectives in both languages. The study found that the position and order of English adjectives are problematic for students, due to the differences in structure of both languages. The author suggested that English should be taught inductively and not deductively, so that learners can use adjectives easily and appropriately. Similarly, Firas (2013) found that the process of finding and choosing the correct equivalents of Arabic adjectives in English language is difficult and misleading among students because of the problematic differences between Arabic adjectives and their possible equivalents in English.

Muhammed (1978) explained that the choice between pre-position and post-position seems to be contextually conditioned. Their usage depends entirely on the distinction that the writer or speaker wishes to make, regarding the aspects or qualities of the referent of noun emphasised in a given context. Smirnova (1982) stated that Hausa language has both proper and mixed adjectival nominal. Proper nominal can only appear as attributes or predicate in a sentence. Similarly, Newman (2000) noted that; Adjective in Hausa can function predicatively or attributively. According to Crysmann (2012), Hausa adjectives are clearly

modifiers, predicating a property of an individual. Similar to other modifiers in the language, all adjectives may appear in post-head position.

On measuring the interference of native language in second language acquisition, previous literature revealed that little attention has been given to Nigerian Languages, particularly Hausa Language. Therefore, this study investigates the errors committed by Hausa native speakers in English adjective position and order, and ascertains whether the students' native language influences their English adjective position and order. For the purpose of this study, the researchers chose final year students of Government Secondary School Dala, Kano-Nigeria.

2.1 Theoretical Approach

This study adopted error analysis to guide the research work. There are two major approaches to the study of learners' errors, namely: error analysis and contrastive analysis. Error Analysis is one of the major topics in the field of second language acquisition. ESL learners are unaware of the existence of particular rules in the English language. Second and foreign language researchers have long been interested in learners' errors (Khansir, 2012). The physical object that has been considered in this study is a product of students' writing errors in using English adjectives. James (1998) explained the differences between Errors and mistakes. An error refers to an instance where language is unintentionally deviant and is not self-correctible by the author. Meanwhile, a mistake is intentionally or unintentionally deviant and self-correctible.

Contrastive analysis is an approach to study of second language acquisition, though Khansir (2012) claimed that error analysis cannot be properly performed without touching upon the notion of contrastive analysis. It involves predicting and explaining learners' problems based on a comparison of L1 and L2 to determine similarities and differences. The goal of contrastive analysis is primarily pedagogical in nature. It is intended to increase efficiency in second language teaching and learning (Saville-Troike, M., & Barto, K, 2016).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design. It is a useful approach whenever researchers are concerned with discovering or describing second language acquisition in its natural state. Qualitative research design aims to study a phenomenon in its natural and social context. It aims to collect data or describe things in a non-numerical way. Non-numerical data of qualitative research can be changed into numerical ones by way of classification and categorization (Ali, 2012). The population of this study comprises final year Secondary School students of Government Secondary School Dala, Kano-Nigeria. The students consist of Hausa native speakers during 2014/2015 academic session.

The entire population in this study cannot be examined due to time and resource constraints. This occurs in many situations as pointed out by Wimmer and Dominick (2013). Therefore, 20 students were chosen to participate in the study. Since the study is purely qualitative in nature, 20 participants might be enough (Brian & Anne, 1996). The researchers

employed purposive sampling method in which typical sampling strategy was used to consciously select the students to participate in the study. Purposive non-probability sampling method is useful in studying a small subset of a larger population. It is used in a situation where members of the subset are easily identified, but the enumeration for all is nearby impossible (Lathan, 2007).

According to Donyie (2011), well conducted qualitative research is very labour intensive, and therefore qualitative studies typically use, of necessity much smaller samples of participants than quantitative ones. Accordingly, qualitative research is not concerned with how representative the respondent sample is or how the experience is distributed in the population. Instead, the main goal is to find individuals who can provide rich and varied information about the phenomenon under investigation.

The written test scripts were collected from 20 selected students who are in their final year at the selected secondary school. The students have been taking English language as a compulsory subject right from primary schools, where they spent 6 years, to the secondary schools in which they spent another 6 years. Altogether, the students have been learning English for 12 years. However, they speak Hausa language at homes with their parents, friends and relatives. The students were provided with written test with a view to testing their ability in using English adjective position and order. The test scripts were used as data to analyse errors in their English adjective positioning and ordering. It served as an instrument used to measure the students' ability in using English Adjectives where the scores were used in identifying their strengths and weaknesses (Akuezuilo, 1993). The responses were analysed based on the following steps provided by Corder (1974): Collection of sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data were collected from a sample of 20 participants using written test. The participants comprise final year secondary school students who are native speakers of Hausa language. All the participants fall within the age range of 17-22 years. The participants' information regarding class, native language and sex is the same. However, the age distribution of the participants is presented in table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Age Distribution of the participants

| No. of Participants | Age |
|---------------------|-----|
| 1 | 17 |
| 7 | 18 |
| 5 | 19 |
| 6 | 20 |
| 1 | 22 |

As depicted in Table 4.1, one out of the 20 students is 17 years old, seven of them are 18, five of them are 19, and six of them are 20 while one of them is 22. The general objective of this study was to examine native language interference in English adjective positioning and ordering.

4.1 Errors in Using English Adjectives

One of the objectives of this study was to identify the errors made by Senior Secondary School students in using English adjectives. The test form distributed to the respondents contains ten different groups of adjective, which were wrongly positioned to ascertain if the students have the ability to correctly rearrange them. The students provided the following responses.

1. The *shark great white* is at the top of the marine chain.

Altogether, 16 of the respondents correctly rearranged the above adjectives as “great white shark” in the sentence. Three of the participants repositioned the adjectives as “white great shark”, which is absolutely incorrect based on the rules of English adjective ordering. A group of adjectives should begin with ‘size’ followed by ‘quality’, ‘shape’, ‘colour’, ‘origin’, ‘material’, and finally ‘noun’ (Rosato, 2013). One of the respondents responded as “shark great white”, which is also incorrect based on the aforementioned rule.

2. Most sharks use all their senses...*including vision excellent*.

Eighteen of the respondents reorganized the words as “including excellent vision”, which is correct. Two of them repositioned the words as “...excellent vision including”, which is incorrect.

3. Sharks also have six senses which enable them to detect the *fields weak electrical*.

Sixteen of the respondents correctly reordered the adjectives as “weak electrical fields”. One of them incorrectly reordered the adjectives as “...weak fields electrical”. Two of them responded as “...electrical fields weak”, which is also incorrect. Only one of them incorrectly responded as “...fields weak electrical”.

4. The *most white shark's fearsome assets* are its huge head.

Four of the participants correctly reordered the adjectives as “the white shark’s most fearsome assets”. Three of them responded incorrectly as “fearsome assets most white shark’s”. Eleven of them responded as “the most white shark’s fearsome assets” which is also incorrect. Two of them responded as “the white shark’s fearsome assets most” which is considered incorrect.

5. Its *temperature blood* is about three to five degrees Celsius above water temperature”

Nineteen of the respondents correctly repositioned the adjective as “blood temperature”. Only one of them repositioned the adjective as “temperature blood”, which is absolutely incorrect.

6. Why does it use this *strategy bite-and-spite*?

Fifteen of the respondents correctly repositioned the adjective as “bite-and-spite strategy”. Five of them incorrectly repositioned the adjective as “strategy bite-and-spite”, which is also incorrect.

7. Therefore, for the white shark, a *strike mortal quick* and release are a common behaviour.

Fourteen of the respondents correctly responded as “quick mortal strike”. Two of them reordered the adjectives as “mortal quick strike”, which is incorrect. Three of them incorrectly responded as “quick strike mortal”. Only one of the respondents reordered the adjectives as “mortal strike quick” which is also wrong.

8. The *image sharks’ public* has been greatly coloured by the novel jaws.

Three of the respondents used the adjective correctly. They responded as “sharks’ public image”. Eleven of them repositioned the adjective as “public sharks’ image”, which is incorrect. Five of them incorrectly responded as “public image sharks”. Only one of the respondents used the adjective as “image sharks’ public”, which is also incorrect.

9. ...which was turned into a *movie popular*.

Nineteen of the respondents correctly repositioned the adjective as “popular movie”. Only one of them repositioned the adjective as “movie popular”, which is incorrect.

10. The smell of blood does not drive it into a feeding frenzy as *other sharks certain* do.

Ten of the respondents correctly reordered the adjectives as “certain other sharks”. Four of them repositioned the adjectives as “other certain sharks”, which is incorrect. Three of them incorrectly responded as “sharks certain other”. Three of them responded as “sharks other certain” which is also incorrect.

The findings revealed that the students made 66 errors out of 200 responses they provided across English adjective position and order.

4.2 Native Language Interference in Using English Adjectives

This study also aimed to ascertain whether the students' native language interferes in their English adjective position and order. This interference has been analysed using the items 1-10 from section 4.1, based on the Hausa and English adjective rules provided by Kraft and Kirk-Greene (1973), Muhammed (1978), Newman (2000) and Rosato (2013). English adjectives are positioned before noun while Hausa adjectives are positioned either before or after the head noun (Kraft & Kirk-Greene, 1973). The following are some of the instances of interference found in the students' adjective positioning and ordering.

1. ...*shark great white*

The students were asked to reorder the above English adjectives. In Hausa language, it is grammatically correct to use more than one adjective to describe a noun, regardless of

position and order of the adjectives used (Muhammed, 1978). The adjectives can be placed either before or after the noun. Below are some basic examples.

- a) *Kifi fari babba*
- b) *Farin kifi babba*
- c) *Kifi babba fari*
- d) *Babban kifi fari*
- e) *Farin babban kifi*

Despite positioning the adjectives *fari* (white) and *babba* (great) in different positions, all the aforementioned phrases in Hausa language have exactly the same meaning as ‘great white shark’. Because the students first acquired the rules of adjectives sequences acceptable in their native language when they are used in modification of a single head noun, they find it difficult to use the correct order of English adjectives. For example, instead of reordering the adjectives as “great white shark”, three of the students responded as “white great shark”, which is direct translation of *farin babban kifi* into English language. This contradicts the adjective ordering rule in English grammar.

Newman (2000) noted that in Hausa language, there are ‘alternative word orders’; simple single-word adjectives occurring both before and after the head noun. Prenominal adjectives obligatorily connect to the head by means of a genitive linker (-n or -r, depending on number and gender). Meanwhile, post-nominal adjectives are immediately juxtaposed to the head noun. This is particularly the case in pre-position. For examples, *farin babban kifi* = great white shark. One of the respondents positioned the adjectives as “shark great white”, which is incorrect in English language, but in Hausa language it is correct to say *Kifi babba fari* = shark great white.

2. ...including vision excellent

The above adjective position can be correctly translated into Hausa language as follows.

- a) *Tare da nagartaccen gani*
- b) *Tare da gani nagartacce*

Both phrases are correct translation of “including excellent vision” into Hausa language. In this case, only two of the participants repositioned the words as “excellent vision including”.

3. ...fields weak electrical

- a) *Raunanan sassa na lantarki*
- b) *Sassa raunana na lantarki*

All the above Hausa phrases mean ‘weak electrical fields’. During the rearrangement of the adjectives in English language, one of the students responded as “weak fields electrical”, which exactly followed the Hausa language positioning structure as in the first example from the above phrases. Similarly, one of the students responded as “fields weak electrical”, which also followed the Hausa language positioning structure as in the second example, perhaps due

to the interference of Hausa adjective rules in the student's English adjective positioning and ordering.

4.most white sharks fearsome assets

Babbar kadarar farin kifin mai tsoratarwa

To translate the above phrase into Hausa language, there are 'alternative word orders', simple single-word adjectives occurring both before and after the head noun. Prenominal adjectives obligatorily connect to the head by means of a genitive linker (-n or -r, depending on number and gender) while post-nominal adjectives are immediately juxtaposed to the head noun. This is particularly the case in pre-position (Newman, 2000). Three of the respondents repositioned the adjectives as "the most white shark's fearsome assets", which is nearly the same as in the above Hausa adjective order, perhaps due to the interference of Hausa adjective rules in their English adjective positioning and ordering.

5. ...temperature blood

Yanayin dumin jiki

These two English words seem to be very simple, straight forward, and very familiar to most of the respondents. However, one of the students responded as "temperature blood" which is grammatically incorrect in English adjective position. This might be due to the interference of Hausa adjective rules in the student's English adjective positioning and ordering, since the student's response exactly followed the Hausa rules as in the above example.

6. ...strategy bite-and-spite

Dabarar sari-ka-noke

Some English words have no direct word-to-word translations in Hausa because they do not have literal or exact replacement in Hausa language. Therefore, the phrase can only be contextually translated. The above Hausa translation represents the contextual meaning of the phrase 'bite-and-spite strategy'. Five of the respondents repositioned the adjective as "strategy bite-and-spite".

7 ...strike mortal quick

Bugun mutuwa mai sauri

Two of the respondents reordered the adjectives as "mortal quick strike". Three of them responded as "quick strike mortal" while only one responded as "mortal strike quick". These errors might occur because the students first acquired the rules of Hausa adjective sequences used in modification of a single head noun.

8. ...image shark's public

Kimar kifin ga jama'a

In the process of repositioning the above adjective, eleven respondents repositioned the adjective as “public shark’s image” which is incorrect in English. Also five of the respondents repositioned the adjective as “public image shark’s” while one of them followed the Hausa adjective rules by responding as s “image sharks’ public”.

9. ...movie popular

Shahararren fim

The above adjective position seems to be very simple, straight forward, and very familiar to most of the respondents. However, one of the students responded as “movie popular” which is grammatically incorrect in English adjective position, perhaps the student got confused or did not know the English adjective rules.

10. ...other sharks certain

Wasu nau'in kifayen

Four of the respondents incorrectly reordered the above adjectives as “other certain sharks”. These respondents directly followed the structure of Hausa adjectives as translated above. Three of the respondents reordered the adjectives as “sharks certain other”, which is incorrect. Also, three of them responded as “sharks other certain” which is also incorrect. Perhaps the respondents were influenced by Hausa adjective rules as translated above.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

The findings reported in this study revealed that the students made 66 errors out of 200 responses they provided across English adjective position and order. It was also found that the students' native language have interfered in their use of English adjectives. This may be due to the fact that the students first acquired the rules of adjective sequences which are acceptable in their native language when they are used in modification of a single head noun. Despite learning English as a second language for twelve years, the students still have deficiency in using English adjectives. In the process of repositioning or reordering the adjectives, the students face difficulties in knowing the correct order of English adjectives, especially when there are more than one adjective qualifying a noun. Some of the respondents do not apply English adjective rules in repositioning or reordering the adjectives.

These findings are in line with Bhela's (1999), who found that the way learners used their L1 structures to help them form their L2 texts indicates a direct interference of L1 in L2. Similarly, Amer (2013) found that one of the most prominent causes of committing errors found in this area is assumed to be the linguistic differences between the adjective position and order. The findings reported by Normazidah (2012) also showed that there is a strong influence of native language on English language learning. Students fall back on the rules of their first language when they do not know the rules of the second language (Prins, 2006). These errors might reflect poor academic performance amongst the students. Therefore, the students should develop both English speaking and reading culture, and their teachers should encourage them, since language learning requires constant practice.

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