

A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF THE STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NOMINAL GROUPS IN ENGLISH AND YORUBA FOR EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

¹Toyese Najeem **DAHUNSI**, *Ph.D.*
Department of English and Literary Studies
College of Humanities & Culture
Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria
(Corresponding Author)

²Muhammad Aliyu **SAJO**, *Ph.D.*
Department of English and Literary Studies
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria

³Leo Aondonguter **DYAKO**
Department of International Relations and Diplomacy
University of Abuja, Federal Capital Territory
Nigeria

Abstract

English L1 speakers learning Yoruba L2 and *vice-versa* keep increasing globally. Language learning involves difficulties that arise from transfer of L1 features to L2, hence the need for a contrastive understanding of both languages. This work is a contrastive approach to the understanding of the structure of both English and Yoruba nominal groups (NGs) aimed at identifying structural and functional similarities and peculiarities. Eight hundred NGs (400 from each language) were randomly sampled from selected English and Yoruba newspapers. The analysis was based on the ideational metafunction of the systemic functional grammar, broken into the experiential and logical sub-types. This involved, first, a multivariate categorisation of the constituents of each NG into Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier, Thing, and Qualifier; and second, a univariate categorisation that accounted for instances of constituents that have iterations of the same functional relationships. The results of analyses led to some findings. One, both languages have similar functional elements, and each functional element has similar constituents in both languages. Two, while English has more functional elements in the premodification block but less in the postmodification block, Yoruba has less in the premodification block but more in the postmodification block. Three, the deictic and epithet are functionally and positionally fixed in English NGs whereas they are functionally split and positionally flexible in Yoruba NGs. Lastly, the variation in element ordering results in more structural peculiarities than similarities in both languages. Teachers' adequate familiarisation with the characterising similarities and peculiarities of the structure of NGs in both languages will facilitate an effective teaching of both languages.

Keywords: Contrastive studies, English, Yoruba, nominal groups, systemic functional grammar.

1.0 Introduction

For economic and related reasons, an increasing number of speakers of English as a native language are learning Yoruba in some parts of the world as a second language, while a

good number of speakers of Yoruba as a native language have kept learning English for various purposes also as a second or foreign language. According to Yusuf (2018), English is spoken as native and foreign language by approximately by

1.35 billion people across the globe, while Yoruba is spoken either as native or second language by roughly over 45 million people across the globe. While English belongs to the Indo-European family of languages, Yoruba is one of the 1,500 living languages in the Niger-Congo language family (ECOWAS-SWAC, 2006). The kinds of potential difficulty a learner of English as a second language may encounter may not be entirely similar to the kinds a learner of Yoruba may have, even though there may be some shared experiences by both learners in the course of learning either language. This aptly justifies the increasing quantities of research in language teaching, particularly from the contrastive analytical perspective.

One of the thrusts of contrastive analysis is to identify the areas of difficulty a particular foreign language will present for native speakers of another language, and this is done by systematically comparing the two languages involved. Studies have thus confirmed that where two languages have some features in common, there may not be learning difficulty, but where such languages have differences, learning difficulty may arise. Lennon (2008, p.1) specifically notes that “the greater the difference, the greater the degree of expected difficulty”. A lot of grammar books and related literature have provided extensive accounts of nominal groups, from their basic types to their functions (e.g. Huddleston, 1984; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002; Payne, 2011). What studies have not comprehensively explored is whether (or not) nominal groups have similar structural patterns across languages; and whether they perform similar functions across languages too. What was done in the study reported here was a contrastive study of the syntax of nominal groups in English and Yoruba, with a view to determining structural similarities and peculiarities in the nominal groups of both languages to enhance language teaching both ways.

1.1 Language Teaching and Contrastive Studies

The relationship between language teaching and contrastive studies is age-long. The

field of practice now referred to as contrastive studies started as early as 998 AD with the production of Aelfric of Eynsham’s *Grammatica*, a book written in Old English on some grammatical features of Latin, with the assumption that an understanding of the grammar of one language will help in the understanding of another language (Krzyszowski, 1990). This broad assumption was further explicated by John Hewes in his publication of *A perfect survey of the English tongue taken according to the use and analogie of Latine* in 1624. One of the features of Hewes’ book was his identification of instances of negative transfer of the features of English to Latin by speakers of English learning Latin. Second language learners’ tendency to transfer features of their first language either positively or negatively to the target language has thus been the rallying point of contrastive studies as this has long been explored and documented in literature by notable early grammarians (e.g. Lewis, 1670; Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957).

Contrastive studies came to the fore after the World War II partly with advances in structural linguistics and largely with the Bloomfieldian behaviourist approach to learning (Lennon, 2008). Structuralism as an approach to the study of language is associated with the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and it is an approach that is characterised by the central assumptions that language is rule-governed, comprises hierarchical sub-systems, and each sub-system has internal structure and patterns. Behaviourists viewed learning as habit formation that is a product of repeated patterns of stimulus, response and reinforcement (Lennon, 2008). The application of this to language teaching requires that language learners should be provided with some stimulus (which could be a linguistic task to perform as response), the response provided should be confirmed as correct (positive reinforcement) or incorrect (negative reinforcement). The idea of incorrect responses from language learners gave rise to increased focus on learners’ errors in the course of language learning, and this has continued to constitute a point of thematic concern and language teaching pedagogy guide not only to language teachers but also to language teaching curriculum developers

and applied linguists in general.

Most early contrastive studies have established the truism that language learning involves “committing errors” (Touchie, 1986, p.75). While earliest studies view language learners’ errors as undesirable language practices that should be prevented, more recent studies have argued that language learners’ errors should be viewed as evidence for a creative process in language learning and an indicator of the progress made in the course of learning. Selinker (1969), cited in Ho (2003) and Rustipa (2011) specifically argued that errors are important to the language teachers because they indicate the learners’ progress, they provide insight into how language is learnt, and they show how learners get involved in hypothesis testing in the process of language learning. Scholars have identified two major sources of errors in language learning. These include errors that are indicators of interference from learners’ native languages, referred to as interlingual errors (Fries, 1945, Lado, 1957; Touchie, 1986; Nayernia, 2011), and errors that are as a result of intralingual or developmental factors (Touchie, 1986; Derrick, Paquot & Plonsky, 2018).

Many contrastive studies in language teaching have concurrently submitted that a large number of errors in the second language are as a result of language habits in the first or native language transferred to the second language. This is why a good number of studies have suggested that language teachers should do a contrastive study of both the first and second languages in order to be able to predict the kinds of difficulty learners would be having in the target language (Rustipa, 2011). The transfer tendency of language features and habits from the first to the second language has been documented in a plethora of studies that include Tum (2012), who reported interference of Russian L1 on Turkish L2 among Russian learners of Turkish on the assumption that both languages have similar features and patterns. Other studies that have corroborated this finding using different combinations of other languages include Carrio-Pastor (2012) on Spanish and English, Moursi (2013) and Othman (2017) on Arabic and English, Lixin (2015) on Chinese and English,

Sebüktekin (2017) on Turkish and English, and a host of other related studies. Studies have also adopted a corpus-based approach to the contrastive study of languages. For example, while Steiner (2015) explored cohesion contrastively in English and German using corpus, Curry (2022) examined direct and indirect questions contrastively in English and French.

What runs through all these and other numerous contrastive studies are the underlining goals and guiding principles of contrastive studies, summed up by Rustipa (2011, p.17) as:

..... to make foreign language teaching more effective, to find out the differences between the first language and the target language based on the assumptions that: i) foreign language learning is based on the Mother-Tongue; ii) similarities facilitate learning (positive transfer); iii) differences cause problems (negative transfer/interference); iv) via contrastive analysis problems can be predicted and considered in the curriculum.

Contrastive analysis is not without its criticisms like any other framework and theory of knowledge. It has been argued in some studies that contrastive analysis cannot predict all difficulties learners may have, and that it is not every predicted learning difficulty that turns out to be actual difficulty for learners in the course of language learning. A new school of thought thus emerged in the 1960s and started to view errors in foreign language learning not as habit formation or transfer from first language, but as products of learners’ faulty inferences about the rules of the foreign language. The approach adopted by this school of thought is error analysis (spearheaded by Corder, 1971, 1975), with analytical focus on three major identified categories of errors that include overgeneralisation, incomplete rule application, and hypothesizing of false concepts (Rustipa, 2011; Hinkel, 2018). Advances in language learning have also shown that error analysis is not without its weaknesses, hence the interlanguage approach to the study of language learning.

1.2 Nominal Groups

The term “Nominal Group” has been described as “complexes of nominals” (Halliday

& Matthiessen, 2014, p.361). It is also referred to as “noun phrase” (Huddleston, 1984; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). It is a term that refers to one of the elements for sentence and clause formation, although it is quite often an optional element unlike the verbal group. An understanding of the structure, formation patterns and functions of nominal groups is very important in language learning for two reasons. One, nominal groups serve as information tanks or blocks for information packaging in sentences and clauses. They are, consequently, expansible (for example, from *boy* to *the boy*, *the wicked boy*, *the wicked white boy*, *the wicked white boy who died last year*, *the wicked white boy who died last year and was buried in New York*, etc.). Thus, they are the elements that allow tighter integration of meaning in the configuration of clauses (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The complexity or otherwise of the information load in nominal groups has led to group simplexes with just one semantic component (e.g. *the boy*) and group complexes containing a group simplex and a number of down-ranked groups and or clauses (e.g. *the boy with red shirt*, *the boy whose parents traveled last year*) (Thompson, 2013; Eggins, 2014).

Two, nominal groups are positionally mobile in clauses and sentences. They feature and function in all elements of the clause and sentence excluding the verb or the predicator block. For example, Payne (2011, p.169) uses the nominal expression *a little lamb* to show that nominal groups function as Subject (e.g. *A little lamb* followed Mary), Direct Object (e.g. Mary saw *a little lamb*), Indirect Object (e.g. Mary showed her pictures to *a little lamb*), Oblique (e.g. The children laughed at *a little lamb*), Subject Complement (e.g. It was *a little lamb*), and Object Complement (e.g. They consider it *a little lamb*). For the systemic functional grammarians (such as Thompson, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Bloor & Bloor, 2014), nominal groups function as participant elements (both as the “doer” and the “done to”) and as part of the circumstance elements in the experiential and transitivity configuration of the clause, leaving only the process element that construes the action in the clause where nominal groups

neither feature nor function.

The information packaging and positional mobility characteristics of nominal groups give them the property of flexibility in some sense. The information packaging characteristic provides various options from which a speaker can make paradigmatic choices (for example, choices can be made from such co-referential options as *John*, *the headboy*, *the boy whose phone was stolen*, etc.), which, in turn, determine the syntagmatic choices made in the linear progression of the clause. Halliday (1985) posits that language is “a network of interlocking options ... whatever is chosen in one system becomes the way into a set of choices in another” (p. xiv). Choice making from the pool of lexicogrammatical resources along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes offered by language (central to which are nominal groups) is a function of speakers’ proficiency levels. This makes nominal groups a source of potential difficulty and errors for language learners, since both have to do with patterned and systematic combination and linear ordering of lexical and phrasal categories to convey meanings in sentences.

Aziz (2021) describes structure as an abstract pattern that is recognisable because it is often repeated. He further notes that in the study of language, each structure has a number of places or slots, usually filled by elements. Every unit of language has a structure, and this has to do with the horizontal relations that hold between the components of a unit. The group is one of the five grammatical units of language (others including morpheme, word, clause and sentence). Every group has its structure across human languages, and nominal groups are not excluded in this unique characteristic. A study on the structure of nominal groups is therefore an examination of the patterns of relations that hold among the elements of nominal groups, and this becomes contrastive when such is extended to more than one language as is the case in this study.

Studies have explored languages contrastively from the level of grammar and have contributed in no little way to knowledge in terms of running grammatical features as well as language-specific grammatical features in pairs of languages (Fallahi, 1991; Shekhzadeh & Geichi,

2011; Li & Luc, 2018). These studies have, largely, examined grammar contrastively among languages from the perspective of word formation (morphology) and word arrangement (syntax). For example, in a collection of related studies, while Cetnarowska (2020), Fajardo (2020), Koliopoulou (2020) and Nose (2020) are all focused on morphology; Donati (2020), Molnar (2020), Georgiamentis and Tsokoglou (2020) examined syntax in selected languages contrastively. Hill, Mayberry and Baranowski (2014) examined the syntax of English and Spanish and noted, among other findings, that while English organises the elements of its sentence structure usually with the Subject coming first, Spanish routinely “positions the Subject after the verb” (p.2). They further observe that “English speakers are often baffled by the word order V+S of Spanish since it occurs so rarely in English” (p.3). Li and Luc (2018) provide an introductory account of potential learning difficulties Chinese learners of English in the areas of pronunciation and lexicogrammatical structures, a problem that results from “cross-linguistic influence” (p.3) or interlanguage transfer of features from the Chinese language (L1) to English (L2). They note that the Chinese language has witnessed some structural changes arising from Europeanisation and Anglicisation processes, and suggest that one way to overcome the negative effect of the cross-linguistic influence by learners is to raise their consciousness of such structural problems by going through self-correction procedures step-by-step.

Najim (2020) and Aziz (2021) contrastively explore phrase structures in English and Arabic, using English as metalanguage. Najim (2020) observes that English has three genders: feminine, masculine and neuter, while Arabic has only feminine and masculine, with the implication that learners may transfer the features of English to Arabic and vice versa. The focus of Connolly (2020) is the order of adjective and nouns in English and Spanish, both of which feature as part of nominal groups. It was observed in the study that Columbian learners of English do encounter some difficulty in word ordering with specific reference to adjectives and nouns. The

existence of this problem in learner output could be explained by a major difference in the grammatical rules for adjective-noun order between English and Spanish. Connolly came up with the finding that in both English and Spanish, adjectives can be in the prenominal, predicative, or postpositive positions. They further observe that while the classes of elements that serve in the prenominal position are largely similar, those that function in the postnominal for both languages are significantly dissimilar.

2.0 Research Methods

2.1 Research data

The data for the study comprised randomly sampled nominal groups from naturally occurring instances of language use. For this study, written language data was adopted for a number of reasons. One, written language is easy for pedagogical purposes and it reduces the risk of multiple variants (dialects) associated with spoken language. We have also used media discourse as data because the media has been regarded as a source of formal and near-ideal form of language, which scholars have suggested should be used in language teaching. For English, a total of two hundred (200) nominal groups were sampled from two Nigerian newspapers: *The Punch* and *The Nation* newspapers, making a total of four hundred (400). For Yoruba too, a similar number of nominal groups, two hundred, were extracted from two Nigerian languages with Yoruba as language of communication (that is, *Alaroye* and *BBC New Yoruba*), also making a total of four hundred (400). So, a total of eight hundred (800) nominal groups comprising four hundred for English and four hundred for Yoruba constituted the data for the study.

2.1 Analytical Framework

There is no doubt that different grammatical models have explored the syntax of nominal groups or noun phrases (e.g. Huddleston, 1984; Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech & Svartvik, 1985; Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002; Payne, 2011). The model adopted for analysis in this study is the Systemic Functional Grammar, a theoretical postulation of Michael Alexandra Kirkland Halliday and his associates, one model that provides a comprehensive multi-stratal account of language. The Systemic Functional account of

language sees the clause as the basic unit of analysis, with further explications that the clause is multi-functional: serving ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Eggins, 2004; Fontaine, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This novel model of grammar provides a comprehensive description and metafunctional analysis of the clause and all elements coming together to function within the clause (including the nominal group) and above the clause (including clause-complexes).

Our analysis of nominal groups in this study followed the Hallidayan approach, which views nominal groups from the ideational, interpersonal and textual lens. However, the analyses were limited to only ideational metafunction, which was split into experiential and logical sub-functions (Bloor and Bloor, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). As further noted by Bloor and Bloor (2013, p. 13) while the experiential sub-function is concerned with content or ideas, the logical sub-function is concerned with the relationship between ideas in units (Dahunsi, in-press). Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) have advised that the three metafunctions may not all be explored in the analysis of the group, especially where not all the three are needed for one’s analytical purposes. They maintain “in analysing group structure it is

not necessary to set up three distinct ‘lines’ corresponding to the experiential, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. A single structural representation will suffice.” (p.387).

The experiential analysis of each NG involved a multivariate categorisation of the constituent elements into the functional elements of Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier, Thing, and Qualifier (Bloor & Bloor, 2013; Thompson, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014;), with example analyses as shown in Table 1 for both English and Yoruba languages. The logical analysis, however, consisted of a univariate categorisation that accounted for instances of constituents that have “iterations of the same functional relationships” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 409). This type of analysis brings out “the hypotactic basis of premodification in the nominal group” (p.409) and the logical-semantic relations that hold among different constituents of the same functional element. This is especially in premodification cases that contain noun clusters (and sometimes adjectives) as Classifier element (e.g. *the APC female Governorship aspirant*), where there is a cluster of three nouns serving as the Classifier element, termed as “internal bracketing” (p.389).

Table 1: Analysis of NGs into Functional Elements and Identification of Element Constituents in Sampled English and Yoruba Data

Functional Elements	Nominal Groups					
	Deictic	Numerative	Epithet	Classifier	Thing	Qualifier
In-Data Samples Analysed (English)	<i>the</i>	-	<i>difficult</i>	<i>last</i>	<i>lap</i>	<i>in the life of the administration</i>
	<i>a</i>	-	<i>blood-thirsty</i>	<i>Jungle justice</i>	<i>mob</i>	-
	<i>the</i>	<i>Only</i>	-	<i>Female governorship</i>	<i>aspirant</i>	-
	<i>a</i>	-	-	<i>valedictory</i>	<i>session</i>	<i>for ministers contesting the 2023 elections</i>
In-Data Samples Analysed (Yoruba)*	<i>gbogbo</i>	-	<i>alabata</i>	-	<i>aye</i>	<i>ti won n je yii</i>
	<i>awon</i>	<i>Mejeeji</i>	-	<i>abalaye</i>	<i>elesin</i>	-
	<i>awon</i>	<i>Gbogbo</i>	-	-	<i>iriri</i>	<i>ti mo ni yii</i>
	<i>gbogbo</i>	-	-	<i>Yoruba</i>	<i>omo</i>	-
	-	-	-	-	<i>eranko</i>	<i>to ma n sare gan</i>

(* Word order in Yoruba just for identification purpose, not the correct order in actual use).

Table 2: Internal Bracketing in the Logical Structure of Sampled Nominal Groups from the English and Yoruba Data

English				
<i>the</i>	<i>Kidnapped</i>	<i>Kaduna</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>priest</i>
Modifier				Head
H	Δ	Γ	β	α
Yoruba				
<i>awon</i>	<i>Agbaagba</i>	<i>egbe</i>	<i>oselu</i>	<i>alaburanda</i>
Pre-Modifier	Head	Post-Modifier		
H	α	β	γ	Γ

The separate experiential and logical analyses done for every NG per language were followed by the determination of the comparative frequencies of each functional element per language data. This was done to be able to identify patterned similarities and variations of functional elements across text-types.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Functional elements found in both languages with their constituents

Both English and Yoruba were found to have similar functional elements of Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier, Thing and Qualifier. The constituents of each functional element were also found to be similar. Comparative examples are shown in Table 3. This analysis clearly showed that every word or constituent found in all nominal groups analysed for both English and Yoruba were categorisable into the six (6) functional elements, and such functional elements perform the same functions in the experiential and logical configuration of the nominal groups.

Table 3: Examples of categorised constituents into functional elements for both languages

Functional Elements	Deictic	Numerative	Epithet	Classifier	Thing	Qualifier
Constituents	determiners (specific and non-specific)	quantitative and ordinative Numerals (definite and indefinite)	adjectives (experiential and interpersonal)	nouns or adjectives	Nouns	phrases or clauses
English	<i>the, this, an, our, their, etc.</i>	<i>all, some, three, few, ten, etc.</i>	<i>notorious, splendid, peaceful, etc.</i>	<i>Government, national, economic, safety, etc.</i>	<i>party, politicians, priest, gunmen, etc.</i>	<i>...(candidate) of our party, ...(consultations) with critical stakeholders across the country</i>
Yoruba	<i>awon, won, wa, etc.</i>	<i>gbogbo, iwonba, perete, meta, etc</i>	<i>alaibikita, odaju, nla, kekere, daadaa</i>	<i>oloro, olorelu, odaran, ayarabiasa, etc.</i>	<i>egbe, iroyin, ijoba, egboogi, eru, eniyan, etc</i>	<i>... ti won n pe ni'gbo. ... to n bo lona yii</i>

Even though both functional elements and their constituents are largely similar, the functional potentials of each functional element are not entirely similar. For example, the “Thing” element in English is characterised by the three vectors of “countability, animacy and generality”, the countability vector is not applicable to similar element in Yoruba Nominal Groups. In English, a noun functioning as the “Thing” element can be indicated as countable (e.g. boys) or uncountable (e.g. water), this is not the case in Yoruba, where an indication of number is only indicated by the deictic or numerative element (e.g. English *boys*, Yoruba *awon omokunrin*)

3.2 Comparative Ordering and Interpretation of Functional Elements in the Experiential Structure of Nominal Groups

Though the analysis showed that the six functional elements are similar in terms of the constituents that realised them in both languages, the ordering of the elements differs substantially in both languages. In the experiential structure of the English nominal groups, the Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier elements (which are all optional functional elements) precede the obligatory “Thing” element to form the premodification block. In the structure too, it is only the Qualifier element (also optional) that comes after the “Thing” as postmodifier. This is exemplified in Table 4.

Table 4: Locations of functional elements in relation to the “Thing” element in English

Examples	Functional Elements						Group Structure
Nominal Group 1	<i>the</i>	<i>two</i>	<i>highly revered</i>	<i>Islamic</i>	<i>clerics</i>	<i>from the North</i>	D+N+E+C+T+Q
	Deictic	Numerative	Epithet	Classifier	“Thing”	Qualifier	
	Premodification				Head	Postmodification	
Nominal Group 2	<i>the</i>	-	-	<i>exclusive</i>	<i>jurisdiction</i>	<i>of the High Court</i>	D+C+T+Q
	Deictic	-	-	Classifier	“Thing”	Qualifier	
	Premodification				Head	Postmodification	
Nominal Group 3	-	-	-	-	anyone	who participates in a race	T+Q
	-				“Thing”	Qualifier	
	-				Head	Postmodification	

What the analyses in Table 4 show is that the “Thing” element can only come first in the structure if there are no premodifiers (as in Nominal Group 3). But where there are premodifiers (as in Nominal Groups 1 and 2), the “Thing” element is positionally fixed, coming after all premodifiers but preceding the postmodifying elements. The opposite of this is the case in the experiential structure of Yoruba Nominal Groups, where all functional elements except the Deictic element come in postmodification block. This means the “Thing” element precedes the Numerative, Epithet, and Classifier as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Locations of functional elements in relation to the “Thing” element in Yoruba

Examples	Functional Elements				Group Structure
Nominal Group 4	<i>omo</i>	<i>Hausa</i>	<i>kan</i>	-	T+C+N
	“Thing”	Classifier	Numerative	-	
	Head	Postmodifier		-	
Nominal Group 5	<i>awon</i>	<i>paali</i>	<i>eru</i>	<i>kan</i>	D+T+C+N
	Deictic	“Thing”	Classifier	Numerative	
	Premodifier	Head	Postmodifier		
Nominal	<i>gbogbo</i>	<i>Aye</i>	<i>alabata</i>	<i>ti won n je</i>	

Group 6	Deictic	“Thing”	Classifier	Qualifier	D+T+C+Q
	Premodifier	Head	Postmodifier		
Nominal Group 7	<i>awon</i>	<i>obayeje</i>	<i>eniyan</i>	<i>t'o n gbe laarin wa</i>	D+E+T+Q
	Deictic	Epithet	“Thing”	Qualifier	
	Premodifier		Head	Postmodifier	
Nominal Group 8	<i>eniyan</i>	<i>Pupa</i>	<i>meje</i>	-	T+E+N
	“Thing”	Epithet	Numerative	-	
	Head	Postmodifier		-	
Nominal Group 9	<i>Awon</i>	<i>olosele</i>	<i>yii</i>	-	D+T+D
	Deictic	“Thing”	Deictic	-	
	Premodifier	Head	Postmodifier	-	

In Table 5, the “Thing” element precedes the Classifier and Numerative elements in Nominal Groups 4 and 5; while it precedes the Qualifier and Epithet in Nominal Groups 6 and 8. The implication of this type of ordering is that while English has more functional elements in the premodification block, Yoruba has less functional elements in the premodification block but more of the elements in the postmodification block. Another implication of the ordering pattern is the tendency for Yoruba L1 learners of English as L2 to transfer structural arrangement patterns of functional elements in Yoruba to English, and this will constitute an error in the target language. For example, whereas *omo Hausa kan* (Thing+Classifier+Numerative) is correct and meaningful in Yoruba, the direct equivalent in English will be *child Hausa one*, which is incorrect and meaningless unless the ordering is reversed to Numerative+Classifier+Thing (*one Hausa child*).

Two other observed differences are in the ordering of the Epithet and Deictic elements. In terms of the Epithet elements, two types correlating to experiential and attitudinal epithets have been identified (Tucker, 1998; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Experiential epithets depict objective properties of things (such as *black pen*, *hot tea*, *cold weather*, etc.), while interpersonal epithets depict speakers’ subjective attitude towards things (such as *wicked husband*, *caring mother*, *nonchalant attitude*, etc.). In the experiential structure of Yoruba Nominal Groups,

the analysis show that the “Thing” element usually precedes experiential epithets (e.g. *omo pupa*, *omi tutu*, *oko ayokele*, etc.), whereas it can both precede interpersonal epithets (e.g. *odaju omo*, *onibaje eniyan*, etc.) and come after interpersonal epithets (*okunrin alainironu*, *omo oloriire*, etc.). This is unlike in English where the Epithet element usually precedes the “Thing” element (such as a *lovely encounter*, an *interesting movie*, etc.). Another difference in the ordering pattern is the characteristic “splitting” of the Deictic element in Yoruba Nominal Groups. Though this is not applicable to all nominal groups with the Deictic elements, it is peculiar to structures that have number indication combined with demonstrative pronominals. For example, the English nominal group *these boys* has an indication of plurality and demonstrative pronominal, the correct equivalent of this in Yoruba will be *awon omokunrin yii*, where the pre-“Thing” deictic constituent *awon* indicates plurality and the post-“Thing” deictic constituent *yii* stands for the demonstrative pronominal.

3.3 Emergent Structures across Data

In both languages, nominal groups have different realisations in terms of the sequencing of the functional elements constituting them. Among these structural patterns are some that are similar and a good number that are dissimilar. Both languages have nominal groups introduced by the Deictic, Numerative and the “Thing” elements. Within these sub-categories, there are similarities and differences as shown in Tables 6a and 6b.

Table 6a: Shared Structural Patterns across English and Yoruba Data

Category	Structure	English		Yoruba	
		Example	Frequency	Examples	Frequency
Deictic-Headed	D ^ˆ T	<i>the occasion</i>	8	<i>awon akorin</i>	8
	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ Q	<i>the time of the incident</i>	292	<i>awon oyinbo ti won fun wa l'ominira</i>	92
	D ^ˆ E ^ˆ T	<i>this momentous decision</i>	40	<i>awon onibaje eeyan</i>	4
“Thing”-Headed	“T”-Only	<i>Nigeria</i>	24	<i>Naijiria</i>	20
	T ^ˆ Q	<i>Okorochoa representing Imo West in the Senate</i>	28	<i>eranko t'o maa n sare gan</i>	108
Numerative-Headed	N ^ˆ T	<i>about five persons</i>	4	<i>egberun eeyan</i>	8
	N ^ˆ T ^ˆ Q	<i>over 20 others who had already procured the forms</i>	12	<i>aimoye igba ninu eerun</i>	4

Table 6b: Structural Peculiarities (Deictic-Headed)

Categories	English			Yoruba		
	Structure	Example	Frequency	Structure	Example	Frequency
Deictic-Headed	D ^ˆ C ^ˆ T	<i>An ex-parte application</i>	34	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ C	<i>Gbogbo omo Yoruba</i>	12
	D ^ˆ E ^ˆ C ^ˆ T	<i>A blood-thirsty jungle justice mob</i>	10	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ D	<i>Gbogbo emi mi</i>	8
	D ^ˆ C ^ˆ T ^ˆ Q	<i>A valedictory session for ministers contesting the 2023 elections</i>	52	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ C ^ˆ Q	<i>Gbogbo aye alabata ti won n je</i>	10
	D ^ˆ E ^ˆ T ^ˆ Q	<i>The worst places to give birth in the world</i>	26	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ C ^ˆ D	<i>Awon paali eru kan</i>	10
	D ^ˆ N ^ˆ C ^ˆ T	<i>The only female governorship aspirant</i>	4	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ C ^ˆ N	<i>Awon elesin abalaye mejeeji</i>	2
	D ^ˆ E ^ˆ C ^ˆ T ^ˆ Q	<i>The difficult last lap in the life of the administration</i>	4	D ^ˆ T ^ˆ N ^ˆ D	<i>Awon owe meteeta yii</i>	4
“Thing”-Headed	--	-	-	T ^ˆ C	<i>Alaafia Olorun</i>	24
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ D	<i>Asiko yii</i>	8
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ E	<i>Eeyan buruku</i>	8
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ N	<i>Iran meje</i>	4
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ C ^ˆ Q	<i>Tabili alawe meji t'owa niwaju won</i>	22
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ C ^ˆ C	<i>Asiwaju egbe APC</i>	20
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ C ^ˆ D	<i>Baluu Qatar Airways kan</i>	26
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ N ^ˆ D	<i>Anfaani eekan yii</i>	4
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ N ^ˆ Q	<i>Ojo keji t'o te lee</i>	4
	-	-	-	T ^ˆ C ^ˆ N	<i>Omo Hausa kan</i>	4
-	-	-	T ^ˆ C ^ˆ C ^ˆ D	<i>Ipo aare orile-edede yii</i>	8	

What the analyses in Tables 5a and 5b above show is that there are more structural differences than structural similarities. While the Deictic-headed structures were found to be more than all other structural types in the English data, it is the “Thing”-headed structures that were found to be more in use in the data for Yoruba language. As a result, the documented evidence that suggests that the Deictic-headed structural patterns of nominal groups were the most frequently used (e.g. Ruan & Jiaotong, 2016; Suryadewi, Netra & Rajeg, 2018; Author in press) can only be restricted to English, and not generalised across languages as the evident patterns of the Yoruba nominal groups have shown.

The comparative analyses carried out on both English and Yoruba have shown that in terms of nominal groups which are recurrent syntactic categories in sentence formation, both languages have some similarities, just as they do have some differences. The identified similarities are in the aspects of functional elements and the various constituents realising them, internal bracketing of logical semantic elements, and some number of recurrent similar structural patterns, while the areas of differences are in the functional potential of the “Thing” element in relation to the countability vector, element ordering in relation the obligatory element and high number of structural peculiarities than similarities. These findings have implication for not only for language teaching but also translation studies.

One, for the teaching of English as a second language to speakers of Yoruba, some familiarisation with the syntax of Yoruba, especially concerning nominal groups, is necessary. With this type of familiarisation, it would be easy for the teacher to start from what is common to both languages and then move to the peculiarities of the target language (Lennon, 2008). Such familiarisation will also make it easy for the teachers to predict learners’ potential areas of error, easily identify such errors where they are made, will be able to correct such errors drawing from structural analogies from the source language. It is thus agreed that similarities of language features will aid language learning through item transfer, while peculiarities will help

in the prediction of learning challenges (Ringbom, 2007). An understanding of the similarities and differences that exist between learners’ first and second language also needs to be considered in the development of teaching materials in the second language (Lennon, 2008). When it comes to word order problems in the nominal groups of one language because of interlinguistic interference, it is important for language teachers and learners to be aware of the issue and to provide exercises that address it. Such exercises should make use of the learners’ L1 in order to highlight the distinction between word orders in English and Yoruba and give the learners a more thorough understanding of the differences.

Two, English-Yoruba translators also need some familiarity with the syntax of nominal groups in both the source and target languages. The bottom-line is that the syntax of nominal groups as a syntactic category varies from language to language, and this variation must be taken into account in language teaching.

Conclusion

A contrastive study of two or more languages is aimed at the identification of similarities and dissimilarities between such languages with a view to predicting potential areas of difficulty for learners of either or both languages. This is what has been done in this study, using English and Yoruba as languages of analysis. The *tertium comparationis* comparatively explored in the study is the nominal group, which in each case, were sampled from naturally occurring instances of written English and Yoruba. Using aspects of the Hallidayan systemic functional grammar as analytical framework, the results of analyses show that nominal groups have structural and functional similarities in both languages, just as they also have substantial differences that distinguish one language from the other. In terms of similarities, it has been shown that both languages have similar functional elements (of Deictic, Numerative, Epithet, Classifier, Thing and Qualifier), and the kinds of sub-elements that serve as constituents of each functional element remain largely similar. One major area of difference is word ordering within nominal

groups. While English has more functional elements in the premodification block but less in the postmodification block, Yoruba has less elements in the premodification block but more in the postmodification block.

For example, all of Deictic, Numerative, Epithet and Classifier elements precede the mandatory “Thing” element in English (e.g. *the* [D] *two* [N] *troublesome* [E] *American* [C] *actors* [T]), whereas in Yoruba, only Deictic and the Epithet (if interpersonal) elements precede the mandatory Thing element, with Numerative, Epithet (if experiential) and Classifier coming after the “Thing” element (in this case *awon* [D] *onijongbo*[E_{int}] *osere* [T] *Amerika* [C] *meji* [N]). This inter-language word ordering variation corroborates Muhamed and Omar (1999) and Mohammed (2000), both of which confirmed word order variations between English and Arabic. The word ordering variation has also resulted in more structural peculiarities than similarities with the implication that there are tendencies for interlingual transference of the structural patterns of one language to the other

thus constituting a significant source of errors in the learning of both languages. The emanating findings from the study have implication for language teachers, language curriculum developers and applied linguists in general.

For language teachers, teaching the target language without a fair understanding of the features of learners’ first or native language can make teaching rather difficult, since such teachers would not be able to trace the source of potential learners’ errors or be able to predict such errors. For language curriculum developers, the need to incorporate specific shared interlanguage features into the curriculum is necessary since learners’ find it easy to start learning from the familiar to the unfamiliar. And for applied linguists, contrastive studies of languages provides opportunities for a better understanding of what languages have in common and what differentiate one from another. And, since there are thousands of languages in the world, more contrastive studies are needed to enable effective language teaching, translations and general linguistics scholarship

References

- Al-Khresheh, M. (2010). Interlingual interference in the English language word order structure of Jordanian EFL learners. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(1), 106-113.
- Aziz, Y. Y. (2021). *A comprehensive contrastive grammar of English and Arabic*. Hampshire: Amazon KDP.
- Bloor, T., & Bloor, M. (2013). *The functional analysis of English (Third Edition)*. London: Routledge.
- Carrio-Pastor, M. L. (2012). A contrastive analysis of epistemic modality in scientific English. *Revista da Linguas par fines especificos*, 19, 15-132.
- Cetnarowska, B. (2020). Gender marking in English and Polish job titles: Referring to female physicians. In M. Georgiafentis, Giannouloupoulou, G. & Tsokoglou, A. (Eds.) *Contrastive studies in morphology and syntax* (pp. 63-81). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Connolly, A. J. (2020). Adjective-Noun Order: An Error Analysis of Colombian Learners of English. *GIST Education and Learning Research Journal*, 20, 231-250.
- Corder, S. P. (1971). Idiosyncratic dialects and error analysis. *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 9(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1971.9.2.147>
- (1975). Error analysis, interlanguage and second language acquisition. *Language teaching*, 8(4), 201-218.
- Curry, N. (2022). On Corpus-Based Contrastive Linguistics and Language Pedagogy: Reimagining Applications for Contemporary English Language Teaching. In *English Language Teaching* (pp. 239-256). Springer, Singapore.
- Derrick, D. J., Paquot, M., & Plonsky, L. (2018). Interlingual versus intralingual errors. *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*, 1-6.
- Donati, C. (2020). A contrastive analysis of interrogative constructions in Romance: Microvariation and

- theory. In M. Georgiamentis, Giannouloupoulou, G. & Tsokoglou, A. (Eds.) *Contrastive studies in morphology and syntax* (pp. 155-174). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Economic Community of West Africa-SWAC/OECD (2006). *Atlas on Regional integration in West Africa*. Accessed online 10th November, 2022: <https://www.oecd.org/swac/publications/38409537.pdf>
- Eggs, S. (2004). *Introduction to systemic functional linguistics*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Fajardo, J. A. S. (2020). Congruence and equivalence in adjective-forming suffixation in Spanish and English. In M. Georgiamentis, Giannouloupoulou, G. & Tsokoglou, A. (Eds.) *Contrastive studies in morphology and syntax* (pp. 81-102). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Fallahi, M. (1991). *Contrastive linguistics and analysis of errors: The grammatical structure of English and Persian*. Tehran: Iran University Press.
- Fisiak, J. (1981). *Contrastive linguistics and the language teacher*. Oxford: Pergamon Institute of English.
- Fries, C. C. (1945). *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Georgiamentis, M., & Tsokoglou, A. (2020). Focus types: A crosslinguistic study of clause and information structure. In M. Georgiamentis, Giannouloupoulou, G. & Tsokoglou, A. (Eds.) *Contrastive studies in morphology and syntax* (pp. 191-210). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Greenbaum, S., & Nelson, G. (2002). *An introduction to the English grammar*. London: Pearson Education Limited.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. London: Arnold.
- Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). London: Arnold.
- Hewes, J. (1624). *A Perfect Survey of the English tongue taken according to the use and analogie of Latine*, London.
- Hill, S., Mayberry, M., & Baranowski, E. (2014). *Bilingual Grammar of English-Spanish Syntax: With Exercises and a Glossary of Grammatical Terms*. University Press of America.
- Hinkel, E. (2018). Error analysis. *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*, 1-5.
- Ho, C. M. L. (2003). Empowering English teachers to grapple with errors in grammar. *The internet TESL journal*, 9 (3). https://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=empowering+english+language+learners+to+grapple+with+the+grammar&btnG=
- Huddleston, R. (1984). *Introduction to the Grammar of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krzeszowski, T. P. (1990). *Contrasting languages: The scope of contrastive linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Lennon, P. (2008). Contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage. *Bielefeld Introduction to Applied Linguistics. A Course Book*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 51-60. <https://www.homes.uni-bielefeld.de/sgramley/CA-ErrorAnalysis-Interlang-Lennon.pdf>
- Li, D. C. S., & Luc, Z. P. (2018). *Chinese-English contrastive grammar: An introduction*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Lixin, X. (2015). An error analysis of the word class. A case study of Chinese College Students. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 10(3). 41-45.
- Molnar, V. (2020). Wh-questions at the syntax-discourse interface. In M. Georgiamentis, Giannouloupoulou, G. & Tsokoglou, A. (Eds.) *Contrastive studies in morphology and syntax* (pp. 174-191). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Moursi, A. (2013). The efficacy of error analysis on second language learners' written accuracy: An empirical study in the context of Arab learners of English. *International Research Journals*,

- 4(3), 249-256.
- Najim, H. (2020). *A contrastive functional grammar of English and Arabic*. Chisinau: Noor Publishing
- Nayernia, A. (2011). Writing errors, what they can tell a teacher. *The Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(2), 200-217.
- Nose, M. (2020). Past tense usages in tense-rich and tenseless languages. A contrastive study. In M. Georgiagentis, Giannouloupoulou, G. & Tsokoglou, A. (Eds.) *Contrastive studies in morphology and syntax* (pp. 137-155). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Othman, A. K. (2017). An investigation of interlingual and intralingual errors in written composition by Saudi EFL students at the University of Tabuk. *British Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 18(2), 1-9.
- Payne, J., Huddleston, R., & Pullum, G. K. (2007). Fusion of functions: The syntax of once, twice and thrice. *Journal of Linguistics*, 43(3), 565-603.
- Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. (1985). *A comprehensive grammar of the English language*. London: Longman.
- Ruan, Z., & Jiaotong, X. (2016). A corpus-based functional analysis of complex nominal groups in written business discourse: The case of "Business". *International Journal of Computer-Assisted Language Learning and Teaching*, 6(2), 74-90.
- Rustipa, K. (2011). Contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage and the implication to language teaching. *Ragam Jurnal Pengembangan Humaniora*, 11(1), 16-22.
- Sari, P. P. N., Budasi, I. G., Adnyani, N. L. P. S., & Suwastini, N. K. A. (2021). The error analysis of interlingual and intralingual interferences of the students: A case study of tourism study program. *Lenstra Pendidikan: Jurnal Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan*, 24(1), 69-81.
- Sebüktekin, H. I. (2017). Turkish-English contrastive analysis. In *Turkish-English contrastive analysis*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Selinker, L. (1969). Interlanguage. *IRAL*, 3, 114-132.
- Shekhzadeh, E. & Geichi, M. (2011). An account of sources of errors in language learners' interlanguage. In *2011 International Conference on Languages, Literature and Linguistics* (pp. 159-162), 26. Singapore: IACSIT Press.
- Steiner, E. (2015). Contrastive studies of cohesion and their impact on our knowledge of translation (English-German). *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*, 27(3), 351-369.
- Suryadewi, K. I., Netra, M., & Rajeg, M. (2018). The English nominal group structure with special reference to John Kerry and Ban Ki-moon's speech. *Jurnal Humanis, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Unud*, 22(2), 361-367.
- Thompson, G. (2013). *Introducing functional grammar*. London: Routledge.
- Touchie, H. Y. (1986). Second language learning errors: Their types, causes, and treatment. *JALT journal*, 8(1), 75-80.
- Tum, G. (2012). Reasons for errors done by Belarusian learners learning Turkish as a foreign language. *H. U. Journal of Education*, 42, 418-429.
- Yusuf, A. (2018). English loans in Yoruba language: Linguistic empowerment of disenfranchisement? *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria Supplement*, III, 232-247.

Websites Used for Data Collection

<https://www.bbc.com/yoruba>

<https://www.alaroye.org>

<https://www.punchng.com>

<https://www.thenationonline.net>