

Aspect in Ogba and English Languages

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Abstract

This paper examined aspects in Ogba and English languages with the aim of identifying the areas of similarities and differences between the aspectual systems in both languages. The Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) was adopted for the study. The study employed the descriptive survey design. The data were gathered through the use of the unstructured elicitation oral interview method and the intuitive knowledge of the researchers as L1 and L2 speakers of Ogba and English respectively. The methods of data analysis employed were the descriptive technique of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing and the contrastive method of data analysis. The study found out that whereas there are three types of perfective aspects (present, past and future) in the English language, there is only one type which is the past perfect in the Ogba language. It was observed that both languages have two types of imperfective aspects (durative/progressive and habitual). It was also affirmed that both languages marked duration through the combination of the auxiliary verb and affixation. However, whereas the Ogba language uses prefixation, the English language uses suffixation. This study recommends that English language teachers within Ogba speech communities should focus on the present and future perfect tenses when teaching tense and aspect in the English language.

1. Introduction

Every natural language has unlimited words which are usually classified into different classes. The classes to which these words can be grouped are finite. The number of these classes or parts of speech differs from one language to another. In traditional grammar, words in a natural language are grouped into eight parts of speech. But, modern linguistic researches have proven that words in a language can be classified into a minimum of two groups and a maximum of twelve groups based on what is

obtainable in the language under investigation. Where a language has only two classes of words, they must be the nouns and the verbs. This is because the nouns and the verbs are language universal. This suggests that the nouns and verbs exist in all the natural languages. Even though the verbs exist in all the natural languages, their grammatical features vary from one language to another. This is in agreement with the Principle and Parameter theory which states that even though all natural languages have certain features (principles) that are

believed to be language universal, the application (parameter) of the principle is typically language specific (Ndimele, 1992). As a result, this paper posits that the aspectual marking patterns in the Ogba and English languages must have some resemblances and discrepancies; whereas the areas of resemblances may support or enhance the teaching and learning of the target (English) language; the areas of discrepancies may hinder or obstruct it in the Ogba speech communities. Hence, a contrastive study of the aspect in both languages can assist L2 (English language) teachers in Ogba speech communities to identify the possible areas of learning difficulty for their learners. Accordingly, this paper contrasts aspect in Ogba and English languages.

1.1 The Ogba Language

The language “Ogba” is named after its native speakers. This implies that both the native speakers and their language are referred to as “Ogba”. It is an Igbo language or an Igbo related language which is spoken in about forty-one (41) communities in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria (Isaac, 2018). Like other natural languages, Ogba has dialectal variations. Whereas Ojum (2016) identifies five dialectal variations: Egini, Usomini, Igburu, Idu and Omoku; Isaac (2018) identifies only two dialects (Egini and Igburu). However, it is observed that both linguists are unanimous that Ogba dialects are mutually intelligible. Ojum (2016) adds that the five dialects she identified have wide variations in terms of tone and intonation, and in terms of lexical items.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) and descriptive approach to the study of grammar. The CA is a second language learning theory. It can be applied in the analysis or study of two or more languages. According to Nickel (1971), the major advocate of the CA is Robert Lado in 1952. Nickel (1971) and Ndimele (1992) affirm that the CA theory is sometimes referred to as comparative syntax or contrastive syntax. Ndimele (1992) says that the comparative syntax or CA compares the syntactic behaviours of two or more languages. On the other hand, Anyanwa and Ndimele (2001) see the descriptive approach as the modern approach in language analysis. They examine the modern approach from the

historical perspective and observed that the famous scholar (linguist) who initiated this approach in the 19th Century is Ferdinand de Saussure who is commonly referred to as “the father of modern linguistics” (p.13). According to them, there was a new focus of interest to analyze language without reference to history in the 19th Century. Thus, the emphasis shifted from how language changes to language description. This implies that language scholars are not expected to stress how linguistic items have changed in a number of related languages, but they (language scholars) are to pay attention to the description of single languages at one point in time. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the goal of CA theory in language study or analysis is the teaching and learning of L2. Accordingly, this paper endorsed the CA theory because it is expected that the theory is enormously applicable in the analysis of the aspect in Ogba and English languages. Also, the descriptive approach was adopted because it has proven to be beneficial in the analysis of core linguistic data, since it makes provision for the analysis of linguistic data without reference to a particular language.

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Finch (2000) defined aspect as a category used in the description of verbs which refer to the duration of the activity indicated by the verb. He differentiated aspect from tense. He declared that whereas tense is primarily concerned with location of time; aspect is concerned with how long it occurred for. He also divides aspect into two categories, that is, the progressive and the perfective aspect. Jenewari (2011) acknowledges that aspect is the diverse ways of presenting the internal temporal structure of a situation. He also notes that “events take place through time; their duration may be thought of as having beginning, middle and an end” (p. 78). The affirmation of Jenewari (2011) implies that there are three types of aspects which include the inceptive, perfective or completive and progressive. Kari (2015) identified two types of aspect that is: complete and incomplete. The terms “perfective” and “imperfective” are synonyms of complete and incomplete verbal actions or events respectively.

Ogbuleka (2014) contrasted the negation in English and Ogba with the aim of contrasting the negative marking system in English and Ogba. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The data for the study were drawn the

researcher's intuition as an L1 speaker of Ogba and L2 speaker of English. The data were analyzed using the contrastive method of data analysis. The study found out that there are more negative operators in English than Ogba. According to the study, English language has about 14 negative operators, while Ogba has only four. The study also observed that the negative particle is typically attached to auxiliary verbs in English, but in Ogba, it is said to be typically attracted to both main and auxiliary verbs. The study further revealed that the scope of negation in Ogba differed from English in the sense that verbs that follow the negative item copy the tone of the negative, whereas English does not exhibit such phonological process. Weke-Ikpo (2020) carried out a contrastive study of the verbs in Ogba and English languages with the aim of contrasting the grammatical features of the verbs in both languages. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study and the competent speakers of Egni dialect of Ogba and English languages constitute the population of the study. The study employed the random sampling technique. The researcher collected the data for the study through the use of the unstructured elicitation oral interview method. The data collected were analyzed using the contrastive and descriptive method of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing. It was found out that verbs in both languages can be classified or grouped into three types using three criteria: the syntactic, morphological and semantic behaviours. It was also noticed that syntactically, there are lexical and auxiliary verbs in both languages. Morphologically, the study identified simple and complex verbs and semantically, there are dynamic and stative verbs in both languages. The study further observed that the syllabic structures of the verbs in Ogba language differ from those of English language. For instance, it was affirmed that simple verbs in Ogba usually begin with a consonant and end with a vowel while simple verbs in English may begin with either a consonant or vowel and end with either a consonant or a vowel. That is, in Ogba the syllabic structure of a simple verb is CV whereas that of English is CVC. Additionally, it is observed that unlike English, Ogba verbs generally do not agree in number with their subjects. In other words, verbs in the language do not inflect as a result of change in the number

of the subject. This means that a singular subject in the language takes the same form of verb with its plural counterpart. Ogba language deviates from the subject-verb concord that exists in English language. It is deduced from the findings of Ogbuleka (2014) and Weke-Ikpo (2020) that verbs exist in Ogba and English languages. Unlike, Ogbuleka (2014) and Weke-Ikpo (2020) who focused on negation marking and grammatical features of verbs in Ogba and English languages respective, this paper contrasts the aspect in Ogba and English language.

3. Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The data were gathered through the use of the unstructured elicitation oral interview method and the intuitive knowledge of the researchers as L1 and L2 speakers of Ogba and English languages respectively. This suggests that the researchers did not provide any formal questionnaire for the respondents to answer. That is, the data were collected from the respondents in informal settings or situations. The methods of data analysis employed in this paper are mainly the descriptive technique of morpheme-to-morpheme glossing and the contrastive method of data analysis. The data collected in Ogba were first glossed in English language before been contrasted with their correspondence in English language.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The data gathered for this study are presented in this section. The data are presented in two sets: Ogba and English languages separately. For that reason, the data collected in Ogba are presented first followed their English language equivalence. This suggests that there are two tables for every data presented in this paper.

4.1 Data on Aspect in Ogba and English Languages

Aspect has been described as the manner in which the verbal action is expressed. Verbal action may be seen as complete or incomplete. Sometimes, the terms "perfective" is been used in place of complete verbal action while the term "imperfective" is been used as correlates of incomplete verbal actions.

4.1.1 Data on Perfective in Ogba and English Language

The term "perfective aspect" indicates some degree of completion. In other words, perfective aspect denotes action, event or situation that has

been accomplished. The action, event or situation originated before the moment of speaking and has already been completed. Ogba and English languages mark perfectiveness in different way. For example:

1) Data Illustrating Perfective Aspect in Ogba

- a. Uche znú-mè nnúnũ.
PN steal-PERF. fowl.
'Chikwe had stolen fowl.'
- b. Ada kwnà-mè ēkwná.
PN cry-PERF. cry(n).
'Ada had cried.'
- c. Yé biá-mè áhiá.
1PL come-PERF. market.
'We had come to the market.'
- d. O gbú-mè nkítá.
3SG Kill-PERF. dog.
'S/he had killed a dog.'
- e. Wó, kpó-mè yé ókwú.
3PL call-PERF 1PL talk.
'They had called us.'

2) Data Illustrating Perfective Aspect in Ogba

- a. He has eaten the food.
- b. They have eaten the food.
- c. John and Mary have been friends.
- d. Mary had killed the snake.
- e. Daniel and Mathew had gone to school.
- f. I would have finished teaching before the man arrives.

The sentences in 1a-e and 2a-f illustrate perfective aspect in Ogba and English languages respectively. The sentences in 1a-e indicate that the perfective in Ogba is realized through the suffixation of the morpheme “-mè” to the verb root in a construction. It is observed that the attachment of this suffix (-mè) to the lexical verb changes a simple past sentence into a perfective aspect in Ogba. The examples in sentences 2a-f show that perfectiveness is realized in the

English language through the use of the primary auxiliary verb “have” and the past particle form of the lexical verb. It is noticed that the perfective aspects in the English language can be did into three types: present perfect as in 2a-c, past perfect as in 2d-e and the future perfect as in 2f.

4.1.2 Data on Imperfective Aspects in Ogba and English Languages

The “imperfective aspect” refers to action, event and situation that is ongoing (progressive) and habitual. The data on imperfective aspects in Ogba and English languages are presented under two headings: Durative/progressive and habitual.

4.1.2.1 Data on Durative/Progressive Aspect in Ogba and English Languages

A durative/progressive aspect expresses an action or event that is perceived to have started in the past and is still on at the moment of speech and may continue after the moment of speech. It is not conclusive but on-going at a particular point in time. This means that the action or event is endless at the time of speaking. It is also described as an on-going process at the moment of speech. For example:

3) Data Illustrating Durative/Progressive Aspect in Ogba

- a. Onyebuchi dí í- rí írní nyē.
PN be Pref.- eat food Det.
'Onyebuchi is eating the food.'
- b. Yé dí í- gbú ágwô.
1PL be Pref.- kill snake.
'We are killing snake.'
- c. Nná gē dí í- jé úzò.
mother our be pref.- go bush/farm.
'Our mother is going to the farm.'
- d. Wó, dí í- kwná ēkwná.
3PL be pref.- cry cry.
'They are crying.'
- e. O dí í- gwú álí.
3SG be pref.- dig ground.
'He is digging the ground.'

4) Data Illustrating Durative/Progressive Aspect in English Language

- a. Joshua is writing a book.
- b. They are waiting at the room.
- c. He is coming to your house.
- d. We are drinking tea.
- e. I am running.

The examples in 3a-e and 4a-e demonstrate that durative/progressive aspect in Ogbia and English languages respectively. Sentences 3a-e showed that the durative aspect in Ogbia is usually marked by the combination of the auxiliary verb *dí* 'be' and the prefixation of the infinitive morpheme "í-" to the root of an active verb in the language. It is observed that the deletion of the auxiliary verb *dí* 'be' and the infinitive morpheme "í-" will change sentences 3a-e from durative or progressive constructions to simple past constructions. The sentences in 4a-e demonstrate that durative or progressive aspect in the English language can be marked through the use of an appropriate form of the primary auxiliary verb "be" and the attachment of the suffix "-ing" to the main verb. The actions or events in examples 3a-e and 4a-e are ongoing.

4.1.2.2 Habitual Aspect in Ogbia and English Languages

Habitual aspect refers to actions or events that continually occur without restriction on their extension into the past and the future. The habitual aspect is distinctly marked from the progressive aspect in Ogbia and English languages. The examples 5a-e and 6a-e exemplify habitual constructions in Ogbia and English languages respectively.

5) Data Illustrating Habitual Aspect in Ogbia

- a. Onyebuchi *rí* *gà* *íní* *nyē*.
PN eat HAB food Det.
'Onyebuchi eats the food.'
- b. Yé *gbú* *gà* *ágwô*.
1PL kill HAB. snake.
'We usually kill snake.'
- c. Nná *gē* *jé* *gà* *úzò*.
mother our go HAB bush/farm.
'Our mother goes the farm.'
- d. Wó *kwná* *gà* *ēkwná* *ósá* *ùtútù*.

3PL cry HAB cry every morning.
'They cry every morning.'

- e. O *gwú* *gà* *álí*.
3SG dig HAB ground.
'He digs the ground.'
- f. Onyebuchi *rnú* *gà* *dí* *órú* *nyē*.
PN eat HAB be work Det.
'Onyebuchi used to do the work.'
- g. Yé *gbú* *gà* *dí* *ágwô*.
1PL kill HAB. be snake.
'We usually kill snake.'

6) Data Illustrating Habitual Aspect in English Language

- a. Precious drinks tea every day.
- b. She eats foods before going to the church.
- c. They dance in the church.
- d. James and John always celebrate birthday on Fridays.
- e. Precious used to drink tea every day.
- f. The Director used to teach Economics.
- g. I used to visit my children.

The examples in sentences 5a-g and 6a-g illustrate habitual constructions in the Ogbia and English languages. Sentences 5a-g indicate that habitual is usually marked by the auxiliary *gà* which comes immediately after the lexical verb. In other words, the introduction of the auxiliary "gà" immediately after the lexical or main verb changes a simple past construction to a habitual construction in the Ogbia language. The examples show that there two types of habitual construction in the Ogbia language: the present habit as in 5a-e and past habit as in 5f-g. The past habit is realized through the combination of the habitual marker "gà" and the auxiliary verb "dí" 'be' which occurs immediately after the habitual marker. The sentences in 6a-g show that the English language marks habitual in two ways. That is, through the use of the simple form of the lexical verb as in 6a-d, and the modal auxiliary used to as in 6e-g. It is also noticed that whereas the simple form of marks

present habit in the language, the modal auxiliary “used to” marks past habit.

5. Discussion of Findings

The data presented and analyzed in the study revealed that unlike the English language, the Ogbia language marks only the past perfect. This implies that whereas the English language expresses present perfect, past perfect and future; the Ogbia language expresses only past perfect. In other words, Ogbia does not express present and future perfect aspects. This may be because of the tense system in the language. An action or event in the Ogbia language is either on-going (progressive) or completed. That is, there is no present tense in the language. It was observed that the perfectiveness in the Ogbia language is marked through the suffixation of the “-mè” to the lexical verb of a simple past construction. On the other hand, English marks perfectiveness through the combination of an appropriate form of the primary auxiliary verb “have” and the participle form of the main or lexical verb. This study further noticed that unlike in the Ogbia language, there are three types of perfective aspects in the English language that is, present, past and future perfect. It is observed that present perfect is expressed in the English language through the combination of the present form of the primary auxiliary verb “have” and the past participle form of the lexical verb. It expresses past actions or events that have present consequences. On the other hand, examples 2d-e prove that the past perfect is marked through the combination of the past form of the primary auxiliary verb “have” and the past participle form of the lexical or main verb while example 2f show that the future perfect can be marked through the combination of the past form of the modal auxiliary verb “will”, the primary auxiliary verb “have” and the past participle form of the main verb. A contrastive evaluation of examples 1a-e and 2a-f showed that the Ogbia and English languages mark perfective through the use of auxiliary verbs.

This study found out that durative/progressive through the combination of the auxiliary verb “dĩ” ‘be’ which is usually introduced immediately after the subject and the attachment of the infinitive prefix “ĩ-” to the verb root. It was observed that the difference between simple past construction and durative/progressive structures is the presence of these two grammatical elements. This suggests that the

deletion of the auxiliary “dĩ” ‘be’ and the infinitive prefix “ĩ-” can all the constructions in 3a-e from durative/progressive aspectual construction to simple past constructions in the Ogbia language. Similarly, the constructions in 4a-e revealed that durative/progressive aspect is commonly marked in the English language through the combination of the primary auxiliary verb “be” and the suffixation of the “-ing” morpheme to the root of the main verb. This indicates that the Ogbia and English languages inflect to mark durative/progressive aspects. That is, both languages mark durative aspect through affixation. However, the difference is in the parameter, whereas the Ogbia language employs prefixation as illustrated in examples 3a-e, the English language selects suffixation as in 4a-e.

Once more, this study affirmed that habitual is distinctly marked from the progressive in the Ogbia and English languages. It was ascertained that the auxiliary verb “gà” is commonly used to mark habituality in the Ogbia language. It is deduced from the constructions in examples 5a-e that the introduction of the auxiliary verb immediately after the lexical verb changes a simple past construction to a present habitual construction. This means that the distinction between a present habitual construction and the simple past construction in the Ogbia language is the presence of the habitual marker “gà” in former (habitual construction). The present study also revealed that the past habitual construction is realized in the Ogbia language through the introduction of the primary auxiliary verb “dĩ” ‘be’ immediately after the habitual marker “gà”. A holistic examination of examples 5a-g proved that the distinction between a present habitual construction as in 5a-e and past habitual construction as in 5f-g in the Ogbia language is the presence of the auxiliary verb “dĩ” ‘be’ in the latter (past habitual construction). In contrast, this study affirmed that the present habitual construction is realized in the English language through the use of the simple form of the lexical verb while the modal auxiliary “used to” marks past habit in the language.

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that aspect is one of the secondary grammatical features of verbs in the Ogbia and English languages. This study proved that the aspectual marking in the Ogbia and English languages have their areas of similarities and

dissimilarities. In terms of resemblances, this study observed that aspect in both languages can be classified into two: complete (perfective) and incomplete (imperfective) action or event. It was also found out that the imperfective aspect in both languages can further be grouped into: durative/progressive and habitual. This suggests that the Ogba and English languages mark progressive and habitual aspects. It was further noticed that whereas the Ogba language uses the auxiliary verbs “gà” and “dí” to indicate both the present and past habits, the English language uses the simple form of the main verb and the modal auxiliary verb “use to” to indicate the present and past habits respectively.

6. Conclusion

The application of the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) in the analysis of the aspect in the Ogba and English languages has shown that the aspectual marking in both languages have their areas of resemblances and discrepancies. The study has proven that whereas there are three types of perfective aspects (present, past and future) in the English language, there is only one type which is the past perfect in the Ogba language. This study affirmed that both languages have two types of imperfective aspects (durative/progressive and habitual). It was ascertained that both languages marked duration through the combination of the auxiliary verb and affixation. However, whereas the Ogba language uses prefixation, the English language uses suffixation. Following the CA theory, this study posits that L2 learners of the English language in Ogba speech communities will have difficulty in understanding present and future perfect tenses in the language.

7. Recommendations

Following the Contrastive Analysis Theory (CA) that the areas of differences between two or more languages can pose learning difficulty for the L2 learner, this study recommends that English language teachers within Ogba speech communities should focus on the present and future perfect tenses when teaching tense and aspect in the English language.

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