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A Contrastive Analysis of Cultural Differentiation in Ìkálẹ̀ and English Dialects

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Abstract

Some dialects in Nigeria are gradually facing extinction due to advertent or inadvertent neglect of their essential cultural and linguistic components. Addressing this concern, this study conducts a contrastive analysis of the cultural differentiation between Ìkálẹ̀ (a dialectal variety of the Yoruba language) and the English language (Nigeria's official language). Data were collected from adult native speakers of the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect, aged fifty and above, utilizing structured interview methods. Grounded in Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as the theoretical

framework, the study systematically examines the areas of similarities and differences between the Ìkálẹ̀ and English dialects across specific semantic fields. The findings highlight significant cultural differentiations between the two linguistic systems, particularly in the conceptualization of colors, seasons, and greeting patterns. This paper delineates these cultural variations and discusses their pedagogical implications, aiming to enhance the teaching and learning of English as a target language among Ìkálẹ̀ speakers.

Keywords: Contrastive Analysis, Culture, English Dialect, Ìkálẹ̀ Dialect, Second Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

Over the years, linguistic scholars have predominantly focused on the relationship between major languages, particularly the three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), often neglecting their dialectal varieties. These dialects, however, serve as vital tools in enriching the bi/multilingual landscape of the nation and facilitating effective social interaction. Nigeria, characterized by its vast linguistic diversity, necessitates an official language that its citizens must aspire to master for national cohesion and global communication.

A significant factor impeding the proficient use of the English language in Nigeria is the profound difference between indigenous Nigerian cultures and the English culture. As posited by Adegbite (2010) ^[1], variations in cultural conceptualizations constitute substantial difficulties for some Nigerian speakers of English. Consequently, it becomes imperative to examine such cultural differences with the aim of improving the communicative competence of Nigerian speakers in English. Given the utilitarian importance of English in Nigeria and the pedagogical challenges posed by cultural disparities, this paper analyzes the cultural differentiation between the Ìkálẹ̀ and English dialects. Specifically, distinct aspects of culture are differentiated to establish points of convergence and divergence for pedagogical application.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is fundamentally concerned with a pair of languages or dialects and is predicated on the assumption that linguistic systems can be systematically compared (James, 1980) ^[9]. The foundational premise of CA, as articulated by Lado (1957) ^[10], is that elements similar to the learner's native language will be simple to acquire, whereas elements that differ will present learning difficulties.

Lamidi (2004) ^[11] notes that Contrastive Analysis remains a crucial linguistic tool employed by language scholars to assess and improve learners' performance. It serves as an instrument for comparing languages or dialects, thereby refining the

methodologies and outcomes of language teaching. Essentially, CA is the systematic study of a pair of languages or dialects aimed at identifying their structural similarities and differences.

Historically, CA encompasses two versions: the strong and the weak hypotheses. The strong version posits that all second language errors can be predicted by identifying the differences between the target language and the learner's first language. Conversely, the weak version claims only a diagnostic capability, acknowledging that errors in a target language stem from various sources beyond mere first language interference (Ayenbi, 2014) [4].

In the realm of language teaching, Contrastive Pedagogy involves presenting learners with terms in the linguistic system of a second language (L2) that contrast with the corresponding first language (L1) system (Ogunsiji & Farinde, 2010) [12]. This pedagogical approach entails the simultaneous presentation of L2 and L1 systems, encompassing grammatical, lexical, and phonological dimensions. It provides learners with transparent, contextualized instances of such pairs, allowing them to infer rules or receive prescriptive guidance from educators. Furthermore, contrastive teaching advocates for dialect expansion and domestication, fostering bi-dialectism and encouraging minimal pair drills (Ayenbi, 2014) [4]. Beyond language teaching, CA is instrumental in translation theory, the discovery of linguistic universals, and language typology (Filani, 2013) [8].

2.2 The Concept of Culture

The intricate definition of culture is succinctly captured by Adeola and Laden (2009:59-60) [2] as the appreciation and understanding of the arts and skills of a given period; the entire range of customs, beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a religious, social, or racial group. It is universally acknowledged that language is deeply rooted in culture, acting as the repository of the cultural values of its speakers. Oke (2002:19) [13] aligns with this perspective, defining culture as encompassing language, means of making a living, family arrangements, group loyalties, and ways of perceiving both the physical and metaphysical worlds.

Similarly, Babalola (2013) [5] defines culture as encompassing experience, education, ethnicity, geographical location, climate, greeting patterns, color perception, language, seasons, and religion. Essentially, culture represents the total way of life of a people—a learned pattern of behavior shared within a specific group and transmitted across generations. It serves as a primary marker of identity in intercultural interactions.

2.3 English Dialect versus Ìkálẹ̀ Dialect

The English language evolved from an Indo-European language known as Old Germanic (Adegbite, 2010) [1]. Historically, English belongs to the Anglo-Saxon group, which includes the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. While approximately twenty-five to thirty percent of its vocabulary is of native stock, the majority consists of words borrowed from other global languages. Historical records indicate that English was introduced to Nigeria between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Portuguese traders who established contact with the Benin Kingdom.

Today, the English language is an integral part of Nigeria's linguistic ecology. It has transitioned from a foreign

language (EFL) at its advent to a second language (ESL) and serves as the official language—a role ideally suited for an indigenous language. In a heterogeneous nation characterized by linguistic pluralism, English functions as a crucial tool for unity. Orisawayi (2007:8) [14] asserts that English will continue to perform utilitarian functions necessitated by the complex linguistic situation of the country.

Conversely, Ìkálẹ̀ designates a linguistic group located in the South-West of Yorubaland (Bajowa, 1993:3) [6]. Ìkálẹ̀ is a dialectal cluster of the Yoruba language, spoken predominantly in Ìkálẹ̀ land, encompassing over thirty towns in Okitipupa, Irele, and parts of the Odigbo Local Government Areas in the Southern Senatorial District of Ondo State. It is also spoken in parts of the Ogun-Water Side Local Government Area of Ogun State (Faduyile, 2008) [7]. Ìkálẹ̀ is spoken as a first language by the natives of the kingdom across several mutually intelligible communities. Linguistically, Ìkálẹ̀ derives directly from Yoruba, which belongs to the Yoruboid group under the Niger-Congo Kordofanian phylum.

3. Rationale for the Study

Adegbite (2010) [1], as cited in Akere (2009) [3], asserts that the initial phase of English Studies in Nigeria heavily focused on Contrastive and Error Analysis. However, the majority of these early works concentrated on major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo), largely neglecting dialectal varieties such as Ìkálẹ̀.

The phenomenon of learning English as a second language by Ìkálẹ̀ speakers necessitates a dedicated contrastive analysis of the two linguistic systems. It is pertinent to conduct this study to understand learners' classroom performance and to provide empirical data for the development of pedagogical materials specifically designed for Ìkálẹ̀ learners of English. Furthermore, the study aims to examine how these languages operate within their specific cultural contexts, identify lexemes within identical semantic fields, explore linguistic relationships, and outline implications for translation between English and Ìkálẹ̀. Ultimately, the research seeks to project the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect for broader academic recognition and domestication.

4. Methodology

To conduct an analysis of the cultural differentiation between the English and Ìkálẹ̀ dialects, empirical field research was undertaken for data collection. Three adult native speakers of Ìkálẹ̀, who acquired the dialect as their first language, were purposefully selected as informants and subjected to structured interviews.

Also to ensure the reliability and validity of the data, the responses were cross-verified by interviewing additional native speakers to confirm the existence and precise meanings of the elicited lexical items. Specific lexical items pertaining to cultural domains—namely color, season, and greeting—were randomly selected for comparative analysis. The researcher subsequently identified and analyzed the areas of cultural differentiation based on the linguistic data obtained from both dialects. The cultural lexical items of Ìkálẹ̀ were systematically compared with their English equivalents, facilitating the derivation of contrastive statements and the identification of potential pedagogical difficulties for Ìkálẹ̀ speakers learning English.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Colour Specification

Colour specification varies significantly across languages, with each language possessing distinct lexicons for colors, which serve as excellent indices for pointing out linguistic similarities and differences.

English Colour Terms: English possesses a highly differentiated and extensive range of color terms. The language recognizes eleven major dominant colors: black, white, red, green, blue, yellow, brown, orange, pink, purple, and grey. Additionally, Ogunsiji and Farinde (2010) [12] identify numerous minor or secondary color terms, including beige, bronze, chartreuse, crimson, gold, ivory, khaki, magenta, mustard, olive, rust, scarlet, tan, and turquoise.

Ìkálẹ̀ Colour Terms: In contrast, the major color terms among the Ìkálẹ̀ people are fundamentally categorized into four broad spectrums: Oghùn (Red), Èfun (White), Dídún (Black), and Bèjé (Green). Other specific color terms in Ìkálẹ̀ are primarily realized through linguistic borrowing from English, such as Búlúù (Blue) and Yélò (Yellow).

Contrastive Statement: Ìkálẹ̀ conceptualizes color primarily in terms of redness, whiteness, blackness, and greenness. Consequently, Ìkálẹ̀ exhibits a lexical deficit regarding the twenty-one specific color terms found in English. These specific English colors are semantically embedded within the four broad Ìkálẹ̀ color categories:

- *Oghùn* (Red) encompasses red, brown, scarlet, rust, and crimson.
- *Èfun* (White) encompasses white, grey, silver, cream, and brown (in certain contexts).
- *Dídún* (Black) encompasses black, purple, and tan.
- *Bèjé* (Green) encompasses green, blue, ivory, gold, and chartreuse.

5.2 Seasons

Filani (2013) [8] observes that the lexicon of seasons reflects the specific geographical and climatic conditions of a people's habitat. It denotes periods observed by a group in their daily agricultural and social activities. Significant differences exist between Ìkálẹ̀ and English regarding the conceptualization of seasons.

English Seasons: English universally recognizes four distinct seasons that align with specific calendar months, primarily based on temperature and vegetation changes:

1. **Winter:** A period of cold weather (November/December to February).
2. **Spring:** A period marking new vegetative growth (March to June).
3. **Summer:** The warmest period, characterized by blooming flowers (May/June to August).
4. **Autumn:** The season for fruit ripening and harvesting (September to November).

Ìkálẹ̀ Seasons: Ìkálẹ̀ dialect speakers experience two major seasons, which are tied to their nine-month lunar calendar and agricultural cycles:

1. **Òjò:** The rainy season, beginning around April and ending in September.
2. **Èrùn:** The dry season, manifesting from November to December.

The Ìkálẹ̀ nine-month lunar calendar is intricately linked to these seasons and specific agricultural activities:

- **April (Ìnédọ́n):** Planting of new yam, maize, melon, etc.

- **May (Èjídọ́n):** Marking the end of planting.
- **June (Ètádọ́n):** Staking of new yam and eating of new maize.
- **July (Èrẹ̀ndọ́n):** The old yam gives way to the new yam.
- **August (Èròndọ́n):** Period of heavy rain.
- **September (Èfádọ́n):** Period of early planting of new yam.
- **October (Èjedọ́n):** Period of heavy thunder.
- **November (Èjọ́dọ́n):** Period of plentiful food and yam harvest.
- **December (Èhándọ́n):** End of the rainy season.

It is crucial to note that January, February, and March are collectively termed Àlẹ̀ghò in the Ìkálẹ̀ agricultural cycle, representing a period for harvesting yam, selecting farmland, and clearing bushes in preparation for new planting (Bajowa, 1993:124) [6].

Contrastive Statement: The English seasonal cycle spans twelve calendar months, whereas the Ìkálẹ̀ conceptualization is heavily tied to a nine-month lunar calendar and specific agricultural activities. English seasons describe weather conditions (heat/cold) and vegetative states, while Ìkálẹ̀ seasons are strictly defined by rainfall patterns and farming activities. The temporal alignment also differs significantly, highlighting a fundamental divergence in environmental conceptualization.

5.3 Greeting Patterns

Osisanwo (2008) [15] notes that a fundamental function of language is to express phatic communion, establishing interpersonal relationships between interlocutors. Greeting terms vary widely across cultures, making them highly suitable for contrastive analysis.

English Greetings: English greeting terms are generally stereotyped and frequently utilize the lexical item 'good' combined with the time of day (e.g., good morning, good afternoon, good evening, good night) (Ogunsiji & Farinde, 2010) [12]. Other common expressions include welcome, take care, congratulations, and bless you.

Ìkálẹ̀ Greetings: Ìkálẹ̀ greeting terms are highly spontaneous, context-dependent, and deeply rooted in ongoing activities. While English often uses phrasal structures, Ìkálẹ̀ frequently employs single words or highly specific markers.

English Greeting	Ìkálẹ̀ Equivalent
Good morning	káárọ
Good afternoon	káásún / léèò
Good night	káalé
Take care	rọra
Welcome	káábọ
Well done	kúsé

Furthermore, Ìkálẹ̀ society possesses a strict hierarchy of seniority that is explicitly reflected in greeting protocols:

Hierarchy	Greeting Term
King (Oba)	Àbááyé o / Kábiyèsí o
High Chief (Ìjámà)	Ìjámáfẹ
Chief (Ìjọyẹ)	Ìjọyẹjọyẹ
Age-grade (Otu)	Ootu

The responses to these greetings depend entirely on the status of the initiator. Equals re-echo the greeting, whereas a

subordinate must use the specific honorific appropriate to the superior's status.

Contrastive Statement: In Ìkálẹ̀, greeting terms function not merely to establish phatic communion but serve as crucial markers of social hierarchy and situational context (activities). Conversely, English greeting terms primarily serve the function of phatic communion within a broader, more egalitarian social milieu.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The pedagogical exploitation of this contrastive analysis is highly significant, particularly regarding how Ìkálẹ̀ cultural conceptualizations affect second language learning. As Lado (1957) ^[10] observed, structural and cultural differences are the primary sources of difficulty in acquiring a second language. Individuals naturally tend to transfer the forms, meanings, and cultural assumptions of their native language to the target language.

This study has systematically reviewed the cultural differentiation between English and the Ìkálẹ̀ dialect across three specific semantic fields: colors, seasons, and greetings. It establishes clear areas of divergence, demonstrating that the two linguistic systems operate on fundamentally different cultural and environmental paradigms. Recognizing these differences is crucial for facilitating the effective teaching of English to Ìkálẹ̀ speakers. By anticipating areas of negative transfer (interference), educators can design targeted pedagogical materials and instructional strategies that explicitly address these cultural disparities, thereby enhancing learners' communicative competence in English. Furthermore, these findings provide valuable insights for translation theory, highlighting the necessity of cultural equivalence rather than mere lexical substitution when translating between English and indigenous dialects.

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