

AN X-BAR ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND OKUN WORDS STRUCTURES AND ITS PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The crucial interactive role played by language has tremendously enhanced transformation in every societal segment. For any language to achieve effectiveness in communication, users must be exposed to the acceptable manner in which each word comprising the language is formed. The objectives of this research are to: identify areas of similarities, differences and account for the difficulties the differences are liable to pose to Okun learners who study English language and vice-versa. The version of X-Bar developed by Noam Chomsky is the model adopted for analysis in this paper because It has been established that the theory captures the structural analysis of English and most languages across the globe. This presupposes that all languages share certain structural similarities in words and in the other larger components which are not adequately analysed by earlier theories. Therefore, this paper affirms that the duo languages adhere to lucid morphological conventions that govern their phonemic/alphabetical sequences in order to form or derive meaningful words. It also unveils the fact that there are simple, complex, compound, compound-complex and multiple words in the two languages. However, the English words contain multiple-complex words which are not attested to in Okun morphology. Similarly, Okun contains calqued words which can form phrases, clauses or sentences which are not obtainable in English. It is also discovered that words do not overtly attract inflections at the plural, possessive, present progressive, past and participle forms in Okun as realized in its English counterpart. This paper concludes that linguists should endeavour to embark on more researches that will provide a platform for contrasting a globalised language such as English with other African or Nigerian languages (dialects) in order to prevent them from extinction.

Keywords: English, Okun, Word, Word-Structure, Pedagogy, implication

Introduction

Language is the common cord that holds the society together and thereby making it possible for ideas and feelings to be cross-bred among the inhabitants of any society in every facet. For language to achieve effectiveness in communication, users must be exposed to the acceptable manner in which words are formed in the language. English, being one of the most embraced and used languages internationally has been studied or analysed in every facet of linguistic description (phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics). In consonance

with this, it (English) provides the pattern for analysis in this paper. In contrast, Okun, one of the dialects of the Yoruba language that is majorly used in six Local Government Areas- Ìjùmú, Kabba-Bùnú, Yàgbà -West, Yàgbà -East, Mopa-Muro and Lokoja of the Western Senatorial District of Kogi state is yet to receive this serious linguistic description. The fact remains that every language is unique at each level of formal linguistic description; the uniqueness has implications on the linguistic concept of language universal. In the light of this, this study will analyse the word

structures of English and Okun in order to bring into limelight areas of convergence; differences in both languages and to account for the difficulties that the differences may likely pose to Okun learners of English and vice versa.

Statement of research problem

A few scholars have attempted the description of Okun words for pedagogical reasons (see Baiyere, 1999; Arokoyo, 2007, 2013, 2017; Olorunmade, 2013, 2019, 2021). In Spite of the efforts of these scholars, words of Okun have not gained considerable description which will attract the pedagogical significance that will make it to be learnt and taught in schools. Therefore, this paper sets to fill this gap by using the X-Bar theory to contrast the word structures of both English and Okun in order to unveil the convergence, divergence of words in the two languages and the difficulties these differences are liable to pose to Okun people that are learning English language and vice-versa.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to carry out an x-bar analysis of English and Okun word structures. The specific objectives of this research are to: identify areas of structural similarities; differences and account for the difficulties the structural differences are liable to pose to Okun people who study English and vice-versa.

Review of related literature

4.1 Word: A Linguistic Perspective

The term, word, is a difficult concept to define. This is because of the distinctive features associated with spoken and written words. Words can be

defined from three perspectives: spoken, written and unwritten.

It is difficult to define word because of the limitation encountered in the process of sorting out which sequence of sounds are words and which are not in unwritten languages.

The spoken word has been defined as a segment of speech which can be isolated for an independent utterance in its own right, in such a way that it can carry at least a primary stress, and in such a form that it can enter into syntagmatic relationship with other such units within the syntactic framework of the language (Tomori, 1977). The written word is a group of letters of the alphabets written two mandatory spaces in a horizontal plane.

In linguistics, a word is an element that may be uttered or written in isolation with semantic or pragmatic content (with literal or practical meaning). Arokoyo (op. cit.) supports this view by stating that, a word is unit of expression which is minimally free and may have different sense realizations. The minimalist school of theoretical syntax sees words as “bundles” of linguistic features that are united into a structure with form and meaning (Adger, 2003). According to Palmer (1984), a word is defined from three principal points: the first sees ‘word’ as a semantic unit, a unit of meaning; the second views it as a phonetic or phonological unit, one that is marked, if not by ‘spaces’ or ‘pauses’ at least by some features of the sound, of the language; and the third viewpoint describes the word by a variety of linguistic procedure that are related with the idea that the word in some ways is an isolable and undividable unit. This attracts the notion that a word is

independent and meaningful; it has form, shape and internal structure; it can either be inflected or derived as earlier stated. Palmer (op. cit.) opines that, a 'word' is said to be a linguistic unit that has a single meaning. He clarifies the problem of identifying the word by suggesting that a word is the smallest unit in a language, which can be used alone as a sentence. He further explicates his views via these utterances: We can say: 'Go'. 'Here'. 'Men'.

However, it should be noted that the above bits of words cannot be used as a sentence with 'un-', '-ise', '-ing'. Consequently, Palmer (op. cit.) notes that the problematic still persists. He stresses that function words 'the', 'my', or 'of' cannot be used in isolation as a sentence. He further suggests that another criterion for identifying a word is 'minimal unit of positional mobility which is simply a precise way of saying that the word is the smallest unit which can be moved from one position to another in a sentence - bits of words cannot be moved'.

A more reliable way of defining 'word' is to view it as a unit, which possesses a fixed internal structure. This is illustrated in 'The policeman coughed politely', - then each of the units of the sentence is viewed as a word because it contains a fixed structure in the sense that the bits which constitute them cannot be rearranged in any way; that is, we cannot have 'manpolice', 'edcough', etc. nor can they be separated into other units. It is ungrammatical to have 'police the man'; 'policeman the'; etc. (see Crystal, 1995). In Okun, any attempt to tamper with the fixed internal structure of words will result in semantic adulteration, alteration or

bastardization. This is exemplified in *ofoṅ* 'neck', *ẹkẹdọ* 'chest', *ponnon* 'road', *jije* 'food', *ùhìn/ ihìn/aké* 'knife', *ighe* 'mulching', *hunwa/sunwon* 'good/beautiful'; that is, none of these words can be restructured to arrive at the same semantic value.

From the above definitions, it is deduced that a word is a sound/letter or a conventional conglomeration of either which serves as an instrument for expressing thought and sense (Olorunmade, 2021). Put in another way, a word can be viewed as a conventional sound/letter or the combination of either which represents a tangible or an intangible (object, idea, concept, philosophy, ideology, creed and credo). This reveals that the principal linguistic tool that makes expression or communication a reality is WORD. A word has the linguistic autonomy to exist in isolation and signal either lexical or grammatical meanings. Other criteria have been postulated in the literature. Ullman (1962) identifies two types of words. These he names 'transparent' and 'opaque' words. According to him the former can be determined from the meaning of their parts while the latter's meaning cannot be arrived at through their parts. Thus 'chopper', and 'doorman' are transparent but 'axe' and 'porter' are opaque (Palmer, 1976).

Words comprise different segments which determine their structural classifications - simple words, compound words and complex words (see Adedimeji, 2009 and Arokoyo, 2013).

Word structure

Morphologically, there are rules governing the structure of words. These rules are conventionally defined. For

instance, the sounds/letters [b], [e], [t] can only generate *bet* and any attempt to string the sounds/letters to generate other words will be futile or result in meaningless words in English.

It should be understood that the orthography of every language has a convention governing its arrangement or ordering to form meaningful words (which further enhance the formation of larger constituents). Thus, morphology equips linguists with the insights that make them adopt all the morphological parameters that will enable them arrange the existing orthographic symbols of a language in order to arrive at new words; modify old words or discard old fashioned ones. It should be noted that every language learner needs to study the rules of word structure in a language (s)he studies. The inability of a language learner to do that will always result in meanings alteration, adulteration or 'basdardization'. For instance, an unconventional rearrangement of the word 'block' as reflected in *kbloc*, *lockb*, *ockbl*, *bcklo*, etc., culminates in gross semantic senselessness. Hence, it is an immutable fact that when the convention governing the word structuring in a language is flouted, communication is distorted or impaired. Word structuring in a language can be syntagmatically or paradigmatically realized.

Okun (a dialect of Yoruba language)

Okun is a dialect of Yoruba which is spoken by a significant number of people from Kogi, Kwara, Ekiti, Ondo, and Osun states in Nigeria. Yoruba belongs to the West Benue-Congo of the Niger-Congo phylum of African languages,

(Williamson & Blench, 2000:31). According to some dialectologists working on the Yoruba language, there are about thirty-two identified dialectal varieties of the language, (Awoboluyi, 1998 and Fabunmi, 2003, 2006).

It is pertinent to note here that, the choice of Oyo dialect as a standardized Yoruba for literary and inter-dialectal communication purposes has not made it superior to other dialects. This assertion is supported by Raven (1971:42) who says "no dialect is simply good or bad in itself; its prestige is of those who use it". Fabunmi (2004) states that "Yoruba language is a dialect continuum; we regard the so-called Standard Yoruba (SY) as part of the Yoruba, it is not the Yoruba language". Capo, (1980:275) opines that "Yoruba should be viewed as a lect within the cluster, a lect socially defined, which has its distinctive characteristics". This has posed a serious challenge and has made scholars in the language call on researchers to start studying the dialects of Yoruba (Okun inclusive) for what thing the dialects may teach us about the Yoruba language, (Awoboluyi, 1992).

Methodology and theoretical framework

The source of data collection for this research is mainly based on the utterances of thirty-five (35) indigenous speakers of Okun. The researcher interacted with them in order to realize effective data collection. Oral interview was also adopted and five (5) elites who are well grounded in the spoken and written forms of both English and Okun were consulted. This fascinated the ample opportunity to seek for ideas, views and suggestions from those

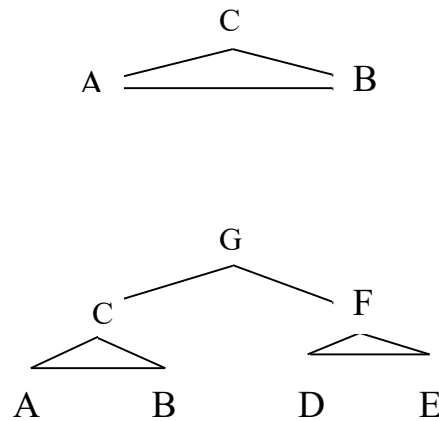
eminent personalities. Both monolingual and bilingual approaches were employed for eliciting the required data. Data were also collected from written materials-books, articles, journals and previous research works available on the words of the contrasted languages.

The X-Bar theory is adopted as a model for analysis of words in both English and Okun. The theory constitutes a component of linguistic theory which attempts to identify syntactic features presumably common to all human languages of the world that fit in a presupposed framework. In other words, the X-Bar brings out what is common in the structure of phrases (words) and projects the characteristics of lexical entries into the syntax which links the D-structure to the S-structure and logical form component to the lexicon by specifying the possible context in which a particular item can occur. The proponents of X-Bar also argue that “there must be certain intermediate categories between the lexical head and the maximal categories” (Ndimele, 1992:12). This intermediate category is normally represented as “X” which is given the name X-Bar Theory. “X” is a category variable which stands for any lexical head such as noun, verb, adverb and adjective.

The x-bar theory generally claims that:

- i. The words in sentences and phrases have not just a linear order but also a hierarchical structure; and
- ii. in generative syntax, hierarchical structures are arranged in such a way that two syntactic objects are joined to form a larger syntactic object. Hierarchical structures are

represented in tree diagrams and syntactic objects or units are treated as nodes. This is explicated in the following diagram:



It is quite glaring from the above illustration that node ‘C’ can join another syntactic object or another complex syntactic unit to form a new unit. It is also pertinent to note here that only two objects can be joined to form a new object resulting in binary branching structures.

The hierarchies as reflected in the diagram above can be expressed with reference to structural relations-motherhood, sisterhood and dominance. Motherhood is perfectly illustrated in ‘G’s role to ‘C’ and ‘F’; ‘C’ to ‘A’ and ‘B’; the role of ‘F’ to both ‘D’ and ‘E’. In the same vein, dominance is reflected in the hierarchical placement of each item on the node. For instance, ‘G’ has super dominance on its immediate subordinates ‘C’ and ‘F’; its (‘G’s) dominance is also extended to ‘A’ and ‘B’; ‘D’ and ‘E’ which are subordinating to ‘C’ and ‘F’ respectively.

Data Presentation

The following lexical items are drawn from the data collected.

1.1 Aspect of English

- i. tries ii. buyer iii. teacher iv. town-criers
- v. malpractices vi. disadvantageous vii. development
- viii. derivational ix. anti-clockwise x. brothers- in-law

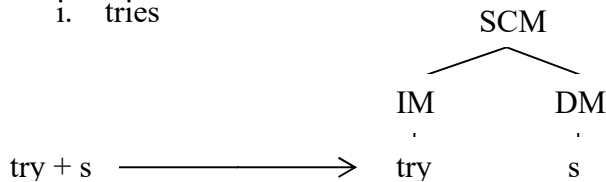
1.2 Aspect of Okun

- i. ìyòkò ii. ainidi iii. alájá iv. olílé v. idunu
- vi. mọ̀tò-pupa vii. ẹ̀rọ̀n-ìgbẹ̀ viii. wéréwéré ix. Mòdúpeolúwa x. Olounghúnmiadé.

2. Data Analysis

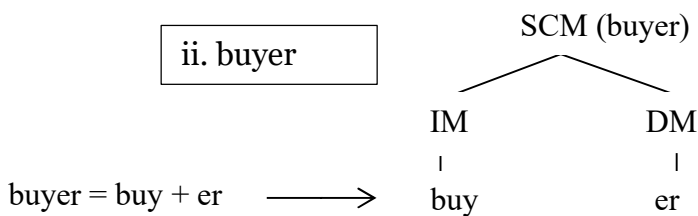
7.1 Aspect of English

- i. tries



The above diagram shows that the word 'tries' is a singular complex morpheme (SCM) that comprises an independent morpheme (IM) 'try' and a dependent morpheme (DM) 's' as a singular marker of lexical verbs.

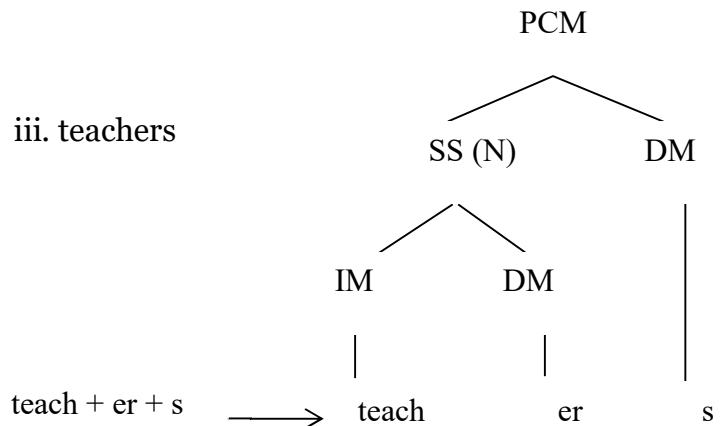
- ii. buyer



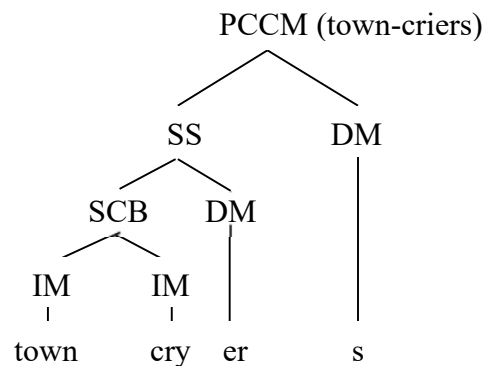
- iv. town-criers

town + cry + er + s →

From the above diagram, a singular complex morpheme (SCM) in the category of noun consists of an independent morpheme (IM) *buy* and a dependent morpheme (DM) 'er' which is derivational in nature.



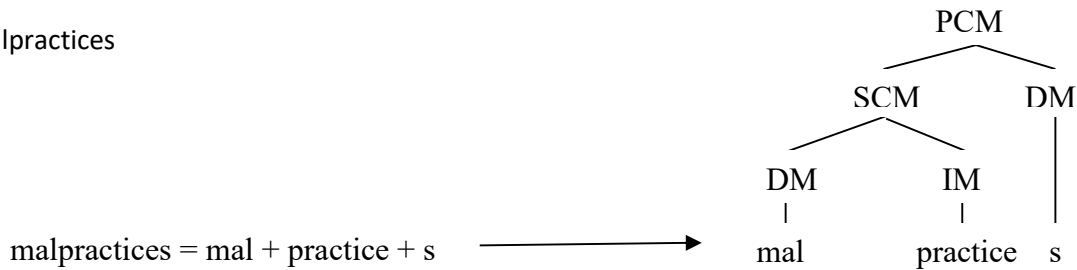
From the foregoing, it is quite clear that a plural complex morpheme (PCM) *teachers* in the class of noun is a combination of singular stem (SS) noun and a dependent morpheme (DM) 's' in the inflectional class which indicates plurality. The SS (N) comprises an independent morpheme (IM) *teach* which is a lexical verb (LV) and a dependent morpheme 'er' which is a derivation that transforms the verb *teach* to the noun class *teacher*.



The diagram above reveals that a plural compound-complex morpheme (PCCM) *town-criers* is segmented into singular stem (SS) and a dependent morpheme (DM) 's' at inflectional level as a plural

indicator. The SS is further divided into singular compound base (SCB) and DM in the derivational class while the SCB comprises IM (noun) *town* and IM (lexical verb) *cry*.

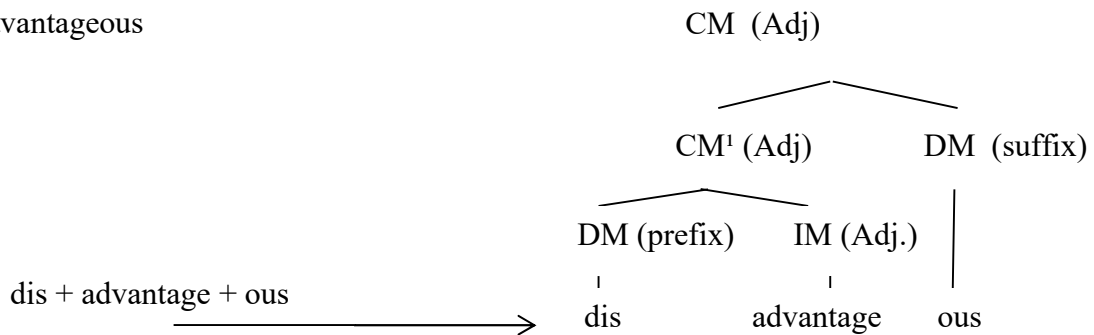
v. malpractices



From the above diagram, it is quite lucid that a plural complex morpheme (Pl. CM) *malpractice* consists of singular complex morpheme (SCM) *malpractice* and a DM 's' at the inflectional category

as a signal of plurality while the SCM comprises a DM 'mal' in the class of derivation at the prefix level and an IM (singular noun) *practice*.

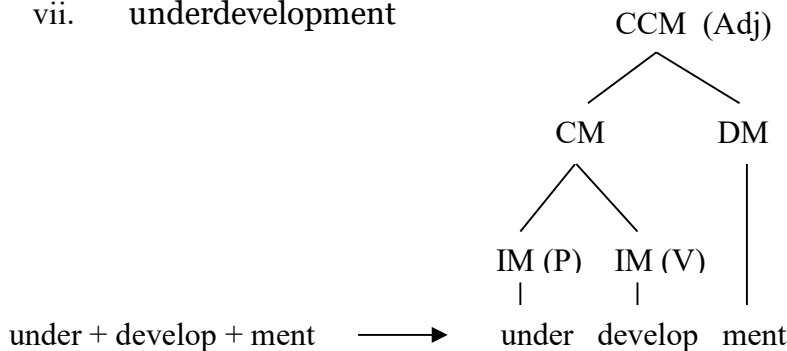
vi. disadvantageous



From the foregoing, it is unravelled that a complex morpheme (CM) *disadvantageous* as an adjective consists of a complex morpheme one (CM¹) also in the class of an adjective and a DM 'ous'

as a suffix at derivational level. The CM¹ (Adj) is further segmented into a DM 'dis' as a prefix at derivational class and an IM *advantage* in the grammatical class of an adjective.

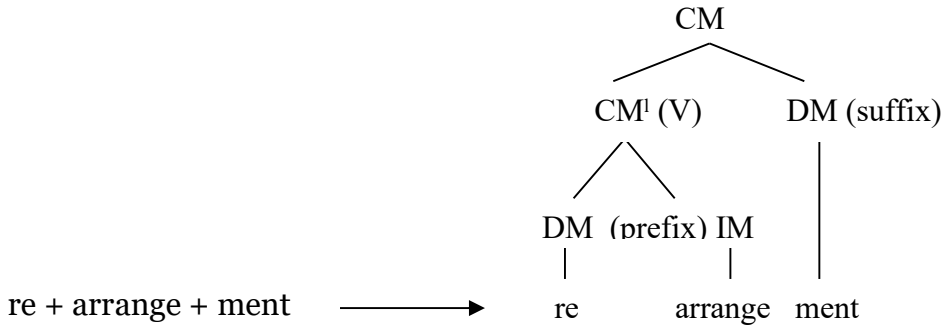
vii. underdevelopment



The diagram above reveals that the compound-complex morpheme (CCM) *underdevelopment* is derivational level.

The CM is further divided into IM (preposition) and IM (verb) also in the derivational class.

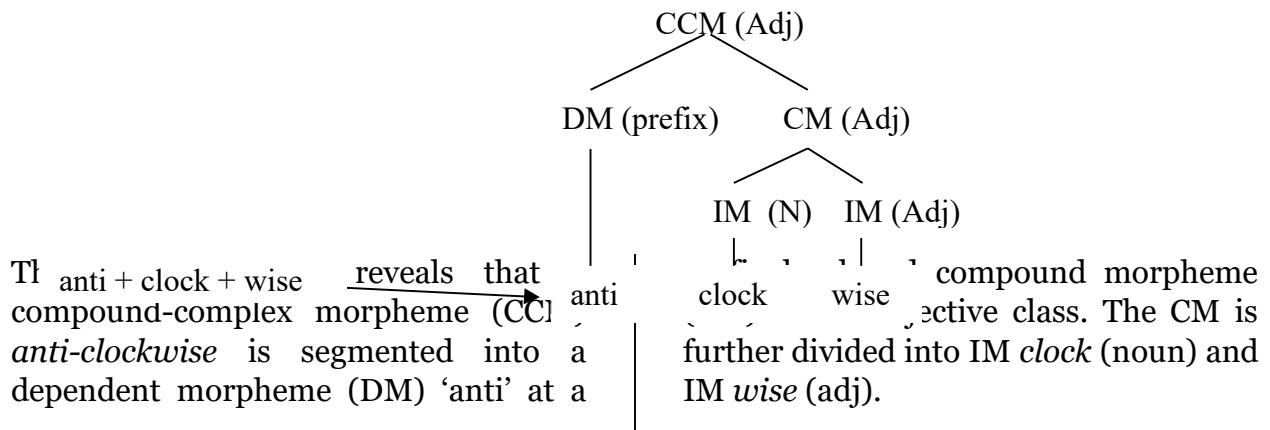
viii. rearrangement



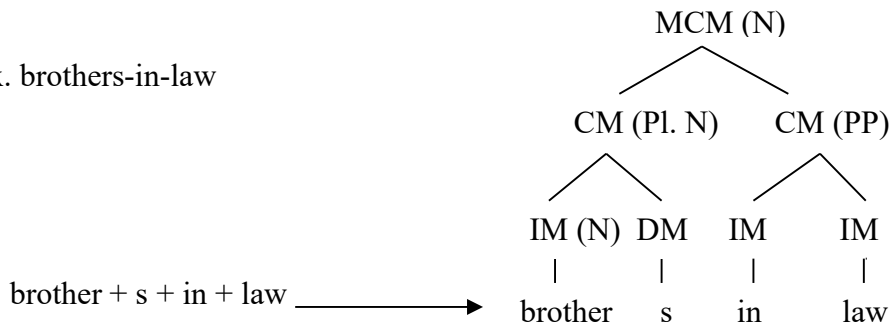
From the foregoing, it is apparently illustrated that, a complex morpheme (CM) *rearrangement* as a noun consists of a complex morpheme one (CM¹) in the class of a verb and a DM 'ment' as a suffix

at derivational level. The CM¹ (verb) is further segmented into a DM 're' as a derivative prefix and an IM *arrange* in the grammatical class of a verb.

ix. anti-clockwise



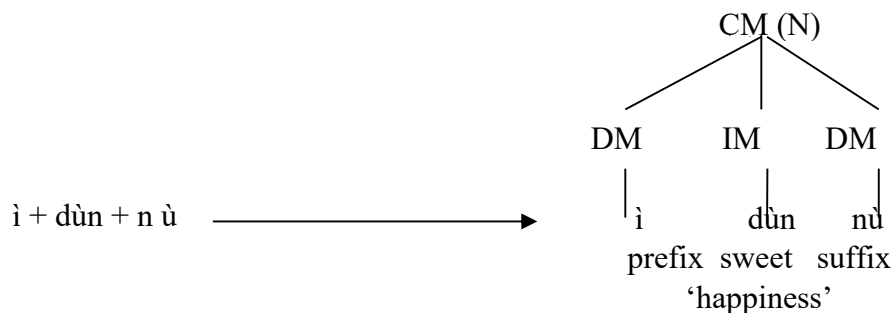
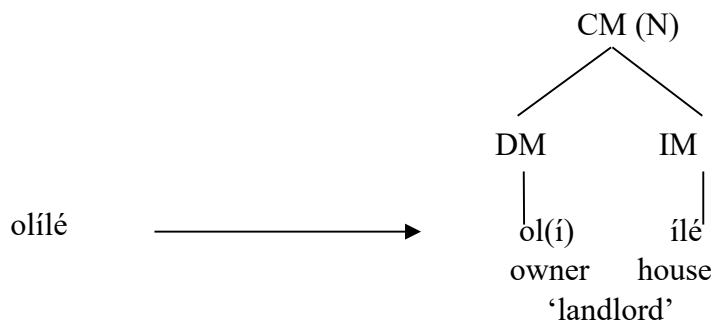
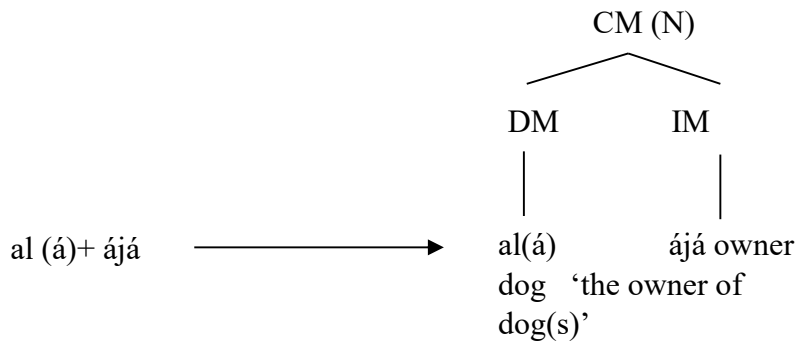
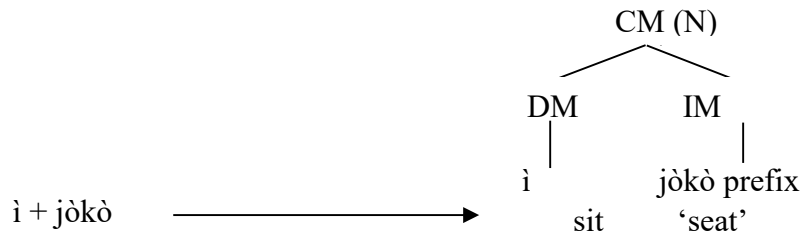
x. brothers-in-law



The diagram above shows that the multiple-complex morpheme (MCM) *brothers-in-law* is a plural noun. It is further divided into complex morpheme *brothers* (plural noun) and compound morpheme *in-law* (prepositional phrase)

in the derivational class. The complex morpheme comprises an IM *brother* (N) and a DM 's' while the compound morpheme contains an IM *in* (preposition) and IM *law* (N).

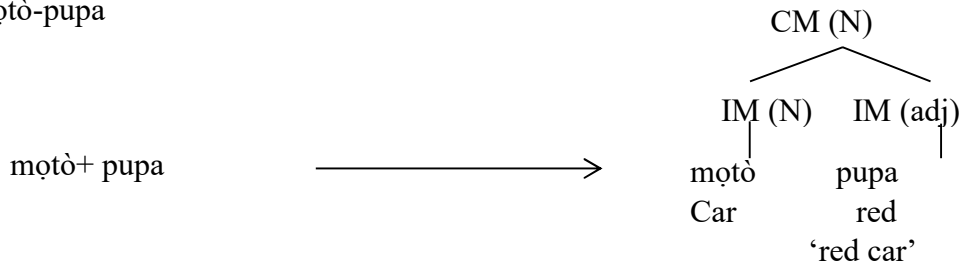
Aspect of Okun



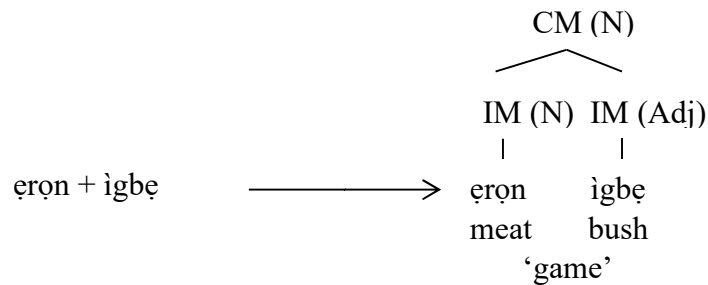
it is quite glaring from the above diagrams 7.2 i-iv that, Okun morphology attests to complex morpheme (CM). The CM is composed of dependent morphemes (DMs) at prefix levels 'i', 'al(a)', 'ol(i)', 'nu' (suffix)

and independent morphemes (IMs) 'joko' (sit), aja (dog), ile (house), dun (sweet). The addition of the DMs convert the root or host words from verbs to nouns

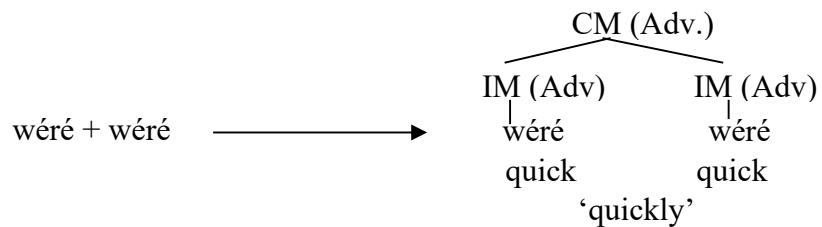
v. mọtò-pupa



vi. ẹrọn-ìgbẹ



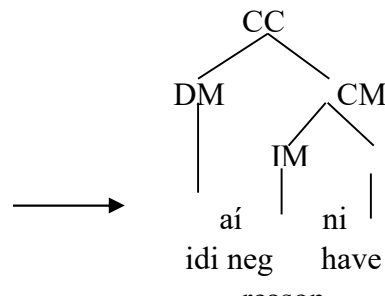
vii. wéréwéré



From the above diagrams 7.2 (v-vii), it is apparent that there are compound morphemes (CM) in Okun morphology. The CM contains two IMs that is, 'moto' (car) and 'pupa' (red). Structurally, an adjectival morpheme/word succeeds its noun thereby resulting in 'car

red', 'meat bush' instead of red car and bush meat. It worth noting that a total or an absolute reduplicated morpheme can also form a CM in the category of an adverb in Okun as reflected in diagram vii.

viii. aínidi

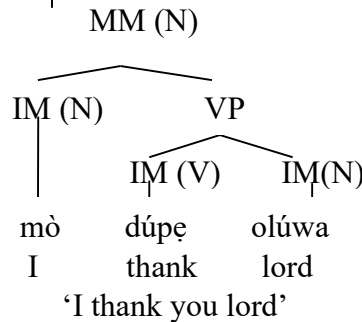
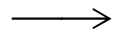


The diagram above unveils the fact that there compound-complex morphemes (CCMs) in Okun words. the CCM consists of a Dependent Morpheme and a CM. the

Compound Morpheme is further divided into two Independent Morphemes that is, 'ni' (have) and 'idi' (reason).

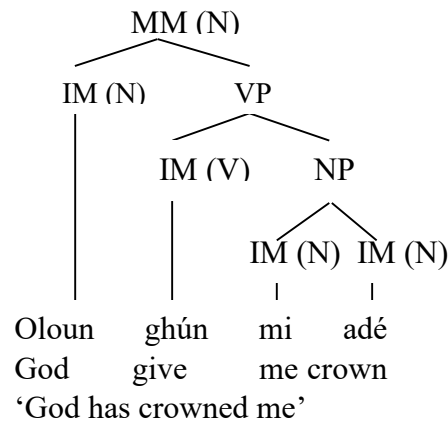
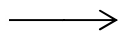
ix. Mòdúpeolúwa

Mò + dúpe + olúwa



x. Olounghúnmiadé

Oloun + ghún + mi + adé



Diagrams 7.2 ix and x reveal that Okun words attest to the morphological reality of Multiple Morphemes (MM) most especially in the noun category. The MM comprises an IM and a VP. The VP is made up of an IM and a NP and the NP coordinates two IMs 'mi' (me) and 'adé' (crown). This obviously shows that, some words are calqued in nature in Okun. This means that a multiple morpheme (nouns in most cases) could mean a whole phrase, clause or sentence.

Findings and discussion
Similarities in the English and Okun word structures

i. The above diagrams reflect that words in the two languages contain

both IMs as illustrated in all the diagrams.

ii. Words in both languages contain DMs (affixes) as exemplified in diagrams 7.1 i-ix and 7.2 i-v respectively. There are cases of affixes most especially, prefixes and suffixes in the structures of words in the two languages contrasted.

iii. This research further consolidates the fact that, words in the two languages are made up of simple morphemes, complex morphemes, compound morphemes, compound-complex morphemes and multiple morphemes

iv. The composition of each of the morphemes in Okun is similar to what is obtainable in its English counterpart as reflected in all the diagrams. Of course, simple morphemes can take the form of any part of speech; compound-complex morphemes are attested to in both English and Okun as exemplified in diagrams 7.1 iv, ix and 7.2 viii.; multiple morphemes in most cases belong to the noun segment in the two languages as explicated in diagrams 7.1 x and 7.2 ix, x.

a. Differences in the English and Okun word structures

- i. There is a slight difference in the morphological composition of multiple morphemes (MM) in both English and Okun. While the analysis of MM of the former does not capture larger linguistic components, the later does. Some words (nouns) in Okun represent a phrase, clause or sentence. That accounts for why phrases surface in analysis (the morphological structure) of the MM in Okun as illustrated in diagrams 7.2 ix and x.
- ii. MCM are attested to in English as reflected in diagram viii while same are not obtainable in Okun morphology.
- iii. Regular content words in English attract DM 's', 'ed', 'ing', and 'er', 'est' at inflectional level as indicators of plurality, past tense, past participle tense, present progressive tense and comparison

which are not realizable in Okun content words.

b. Difficulties the differences posed to Okun people that study English

- i. The differences of the word structures of English and Okun account for the unconscious omission of plural, comparison and tense markers in English complex words by some Okun users of English who are studying or learning English language. This continues until they are thoroughly drilled to overcome the challenge.
- ii. It is also observed that the calqued nature of MM in Okun is largely responsible for why the some Okun users of English hardly hyphenate MM in English where necessary.

Pedagogical Implications of this Study

The pedagogical implications of this study as it has been already observed are reflected in the following.

Firstly, languages are similar or differ in their structure and historical grouping, so do features in the word structure of such languages contain areas of convergence or divergence. Ergo, the points of differences and similarities between the structure of words in the two languages (English and Okun) earlier discussed will immensely inspire the second language authors and teachers to predict or discover areas of learning difficulties that the Okun learners of English might likely encounter so as to proffer relevant and applicable remedies to those daunting challenges. This is only relevant to English-Okun (Yoruba) bilinguals.

Secondly, it will provide the linguists with the morphological tools via which

other African languages' words could be systematically analysed in order to fully understand and explain how such words are formed or derived.

Lastly, this study will tremendously assist the curriculum designers and planners to incorporate all the cardinal word formation patterns of both languages into the school curricula and syllabuses most especially in Okun (Yoruba) community-based schools

Conclusion

Following the analysis made in this study, there are some interesting findings and observations on the structural sequence of words in both English and Okun.

In line with the X-bar theoretical analysis, it is apparent that there is structural plausibility in the words in the sense that both strictly adhere to the morphological tenet governing word formation and structuring as reflected in all diagrams. It is established in this study that each word belongs to a grammatical category.

Recommendations

The recommendations made at the conclusion of this contrastive analysis of words structures of English and Okun, were basically due to the result of the major findings that were discovered in the course of this study. It would become meaningful if this recommendation would be accepted and implemented by those charged with the responsibility to do so.

In order to avoid the extinction of Okun, the researcher recommends the adoption of the following measures:

- there should be more creation of awareness among the native speakers of Okun about the need to promote the language by encouraging contrastive studies on every aspect

the Okun using English (being a global language) as a model.

- the environmental atmosphere should be made conducive for the study of Okun as a language or a dialect of Yoruba language in every facet- trade, agricultural practices, marriages, religious affiliation, etc.
- there should be a forum that would bring the elites of Okun land together as to deliberate on how the language or dialect could be standardized.
- authors should be encouraged to write books as well as other relevant materials that would strengthen the relevance of English and enhance the survival of Okun.

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