

A Contrastive Investigation of English and Ekpari Inflection System

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ABSTRACT: *Inflectional morphemes perform grammatical functions. It is often added to a root word to show a particular grammatical function. The inflection system varies from one language to another. Second Language Learners of English tend to encounter problems due to this variation. Guided by Contrastive analysis as the theoretical underpinning, the study focuses on the extent to which the inflectional system of English and Ekpari are similar or different in number, tense, aspect and agreement. Data on Ekpari were generated from two indigenous speakers of Ekpari through interviews and discussion while data on English were sourced from relevant literature and grammar textbooks. Findings revealed that Ekpari typically uses prefixes as inflectional morphemes to mark grammatical categories while the English language typically uses inflectional suffixes to mark the same function. Besides, it was also discovered that Ekpari does not mark genitive case and agreement inflection. In English, nouns are inflected to mark genitive cases while verbs are inflected in terms of person and number to show agreement with the subject but such does not exist in Ekpari. Ekpari does not mark possession, aspect or agreement relations. The nouns do not have to agree or correspond with the finite verb for agreement in the language. Thus, verbs do not change their forms for purposes of agreement in Ekpari. Hence, Ekpari learners of English must be adequately exposed to master the rules guiding inflection process in the English language to overcome the likely problems these differences will pose to them*

KEYWORDS: contrastive, inflection system, English, Ekpari

INTRODUCTION

Previous studies (Banjo, 1969; Bamgbose, 1979; Adegbija 1989; Elugbe, 1994; Bamiro, 1994, Akindede & Adegbite, 2005; Fakoya, 2015) have submitted that interference is one of the problems that second language learners face in Nigeria. In a country where there are about 500 languages (Gordon, 2005), the contact of English (a second language) with these indigenous languages (mother-tongue) inevitably result in the interference of the knowledge of the mother-tongue languages in the second language. Akinjobi (2013) asserts that whether Nigerian spoken English is viewed from the perspective of language groups or education, the English spoken in Nigeria is typically different from the native forms. The levels of differences are seen in the aspect of lexis, grammar, phonology, semantic, pragmatics and so on (Banjo, 1971; Jibril, 1982; Jowitt, 1991; Awonusi, 2015; Udofot, 2000; Akinjobi, 2013; Ojetunde, 2013; Adebayo, 2017).

Researching into the nature of English in Nigeria, scholars have attempted to study the convergence and divergence of English and Nigerian languages. This is as a result of the fact that when two languages come in contact, there are tendencies for the languages that share similar

features to aid learning of the target language while areas with a marked difference will likely pose problems to the learners in a second language situation (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991). This implies that the features of the Mother tongue can either be transferred positively or negatively to the target language (English Language).

Over the years, contrastive studies of English and many Nigerian languages have been carried out by linguistic scholars (Banjo, 1969; Jibril, 1982; Kujore, 1985; Jowitt, 1991; Odumuh, 1993; Banjo, 1995; Lamidi, 1996, 2004, 2010; Zubairu, 2015). However, most of these studies have focused on the three major Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa). Recently, studies have begun to delve into the variation between English and other minority languages in Nigeria. Few of these studies include languages such as Igarra (Godwin, 2014), Ekif (Mensah, 2015), Ibibio (Ubong, 2015), Ebira (Onmoke, 2016), Okpameri (Ojo & Omoliye, 2020) among others. It however appears that little or nothing has been done on Ekpari, one of the minority languages spoken in Cross-River state.

Against this background, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the inflectional system of English and Ekpari languages. Although the inflectional morphemes of the English language may look simple or trivial, they have been identified as the commonest area where learners commit errors (Akande, 2003; Lamidi, 2010; Uwaezuoke & Ogunkeye, 2017). This is majorly attributed to mother-tongue interference, overgeneralization and hypercorrection among others. The study, therefore, focuses on the extent to which the inflectional system of English and Ekpari are similar or different in number, tense, aspect and agreement. This is done to predict the problems that Ekpari learners of English are likely to encounter in the learning of English as a second language. To achieve this, the study provides answers to the following questions:

- i. Are there similarities or differences in the inflection system of English and Ekpari?
- ii. What are the likely problems that these pose to Ekpari learners of the English language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Survey of Ekpari Language in Nigeria



Source: Otronyi and Muniru (2017)

The Ekpari language is spoken by approximately 50,000 people in the Yace/Yache community, Yala Local Government Area of the North Senatorial District of Cross River State, South-South part of Nigeria. Otronyi and Muniru (2017) assert that Yache is a distinct language with its morphology, syntax, phonology and semantics. The Ekpari language of Yache people is not mentioned by Greenberg in his classification of African languages but should almost certainly be included under the Cross River section of the Delta-cross language, a sub-family of the Benue-Congo family (Greenberg, 1963). Following a survey of Eastern Nigerian languages in 1989, Armstrong (1989:323) gives the following linguistic genetic classification for Yache as Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Idomoid, Yatye-Akpa, Yache

The name “Epkari” means “people that pick palm kernel”. The language seems to have borrowed from the languages it has had contact with. According to Lewis, Gary & Charles (2014), of the 50,000 Yache speakers, 15,000 are bilingual in Yala [yba], a neighbouring major language of Yala LGA. The people also use Bekwara [bkv], Igede [ige], Tiv [tiv] and English [eng].

The Yache community has various clans that made up the people that speak Epkari language. These clans include uchu, osina, Alifokpa, Mbuno, Wonye and so on(see map above). Distinct dialect differences exist between and within these clans. This study will be based on the Akpa dialect spoken among the Alifokpa clan which happens to be the biggest clan in terms of population and landmark.

The Yache people are predominately farmers who specialize in the cultivation of yam, cassava, rice, pepper, garden egg, groundnut production and other farm produce while others engage in trade with the nearby towns. Otronyi and Muniru (2017) emphasize that Yache speakers use the language in informal domains—at home, on the farm, in the market and during community meetings. They also reported that the older generations of the Yace speakers are transmitting their vernacular to the younger generations. Parents reported teaching their children to speak their local languages, and the children use the vernacular for communication at most times.

It is worthy to note that little or no study that the researcher came across have explored the linguistic richness of Epkari language whether in the aspect of morphology, syntax, phonology or semantics.

An Overview of English language in Nigeria

English is a global language and has gained international intelligibility. When native and non-native English speakers are combined, it is recognized as the single most widely-spoken global language. English remains the official language of the world's most important institutions such as the Commonwealth of Nations, United Nations and the European Union among others. It is the national language in some countries, the secondary language in another, also the first language of many countries and the second language of many more.

The acquisition of English is very imperative for speakers of other tongues. This is particularly because the English language has had many applications to social life (Lamidi, 2010). In Nigeria,

for instance, English is the country's de facto lingua franca, serving as the dominant language of instruction in the schools, politics, administration, the media, the judiciary and the legislature; and the common medium of communication in inter-ethnic religious and social gatherings (Odeunmi, 2020).

Morphology as a Branch of Linguistics

Words play an essential role in every language of the world. Apart from the fact that it provides the linguistic resources with which humans can produce an infinite number of expressions, it also serves as the ingredient for any linguistic studies and analysis. The branch of linguistics that deals with how words are formed in a language is Morphology. Morphology focuses on the identification, analysis and description of the internal structure of words within and across languages (Seweje & Ayoola, 2015).

O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Aronoff (1989) aver that an aspect of the morphology of a particular language is a set of rules with dual functions. These rules are not only responsible for word-formation or the creation of new words; they also represent the speakers' unconscious knowledge of the internal structure of the existing words in the language.

The major way in which morphologists examine words, their internal structures and how they are formed is through the study of morphemes. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful units with a grammatical function in a language. Katamba (1993:20) describes the morpheme as the smallest indivisible units of semantic content or grammatical function which words are made of. It is the smallest unit in a language that carries information about meaning and function (Seweje & Ayoola, 2015). Morphemes may and may not be equal to words. When it is equal to a word, it is known as free morpheme. It can stand on its own to give a complete sense. Examples include go, jump, eat, sleep, love, watch, slim, shy and so on. Free morphemes are also called base or root words. On the other hand, it is bound when not equal to a word. This means that it cannot stand on its own. It has to be attached to another morpheme to make meaning. Examples are ir-, im-, un-, -ment, -al, -s and many more. When these bound morphemes added to morphemes like 'regular', 'possible', 'able', 'entertain', and 'nation', it becomes irregular (ir+regular), impossible (im+possible), unable (un+able), entertainment (entertain+ment) and national (nation+al) respectively.

Bound morphemes can further be divided into two namely: inflectional and derivational morphemes. Unlike derivational morphemes that lead to the derivation of new words, inflectional morphemes perform a grammatical function.

The Inflectional System of English

Inflectional morphemes in English perform grammatical functions. Unlike derivational morphemes, when added to another morpheme, it doesn't change the word class or derive a new word. This means that the part of speech and the meaning of the word the morpheme is attached remains the same. Ozoekwe (2015) explains that inflectional morphemes account for the grammaticality of a sentence and equally show the syntactic or semantic relation between the words that combine to form a sentence.

For instance, the present tense morpheme (*-s*), in a verb shows agreement with the subject (third-person singular subject) and the verb. The inflectional morphemes of English are used to indicate: number (plurality: bag/bags; class/classes) and genitive (possession: Olu's house; Men's room) in nouns, number and tense in verbs-

-s (present tense for subject-verbal concord: He **goes** to school every day),

-ing (for present participle: Ade is eating),

-ed (for past tense: sleep/slept, sit/sat, jump/jumped)

-en/-ed (for past participle: give/given, buy/bought, do/done).

The Inflectional System of Ekpari

In Ekpari, word meanings are inflected for grammatical function by the process of prefixes. Verbs are inflected in the language to signify tense but not aspect. The language only recognizes tense in past and present form but not in the perfective or progressive form. The present form of the verb serves as the perfect and progressive aspect. Also, subject and verb are not inflected for agreement relations. In this case, person and number are not morphologically marked in Ekpari. Whether the subject noun phrase is singular or plural, the verb remains the same. This is opposed to English which inflects the verb to correspond with its subjects in person and number

Theoretical Perspective: Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive analysis (CA) focuses on the similarities and differences between two languages for pedagogical uses. CA compares two languages and accounts for the phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical differences and similarities. It is based on the assumption that when the elements present in the mother tongue and target language are similar, the learner will likely face little or no problem but when the features of both languages are different, the learner will encounter difficulty in the target language. In second language learning, Interference with the old habits could hinder the learning of the new habits. According to Dulay and Burt (1977), the old habits are the mother tongue while learnt habits are those of the second language. Hence, the more similar languages are, the easier it is for learners; and the greater the difference, the greater the difficulty and errors that will be made

In other words, CA takes the position that a learner's first language 'interferes' with the acquisition of a second language and that it, therefore, comprises the major obstacle to successful mastery of the new language (Ojetunde, 2013). Lado (1957) asserts that linguistic differences could be used to predict learning difficulties that learners are likely to be encountered in the target language. To Lado, positive transfer occurs when two languages are similar and facilitate learning of the target language. In cases where there are differences, negative transfer or interference would result. Lado associated "transfer" with the positive effect and "interference" with the negative influence.

Knowing the areas of similarities and differences between languages are very essential for language teachers and students. The pedagogical uses of contrastive analysis for effective teaching and learning of languages respectively have continued to make the field more relevant. Uwaezuoke

& Ogunkeye (2017) assert that contrastive analysis is a teaching strategy used to predict and overcome errors of differences in the course of teaching a language. It assists teachers to know areas that students are likely to encounter problems in the target language.

Bearing this in mind, this study seeks to compare English and Ekpari languages with particular attention to the Inflectional system of both languages to determine the areas of similarities and differences and possible problems that Ekpari learners of English are likely to encounter.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected from two purposively selected indigenous Ekpari speakers resident in Yache, Cross River State. In order to get authentic data and prevent instances of inference and transfer, the native speakers selected were between 60 and 65 years and have little contact with western civilization. These Ekpari native speakers were interviewed and engaged in discussion on the various structures of the language. From this, relevant structures that reflect the patterns of number and tense marking, as well as the agreement relations, were extracted. On the other hand, relevant literature and grammar textbooks which were retrieved from the library and internet served as the sources of information for English inflectional systems.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

For analysis, the inflection system of English and Ekpari are classified under number, tense, aspect and agreement. Each of these is analysed by presenting them side by side and then contrasting them to identify their areas of similarities and differences.

Inflection of Noun for Plurality

Both English and Ekpari are inflected to show plural number but the process of inflection differs in the two languages. Unlike English which morphological mark plurality with suffixes, Ekpari is typically prefixed. In this case, the attachment of suffixes to the root words such as –s, -es, -ves to show number in English noun is not found in Ekpari. Plural marking in Ekpari are generally prefixes and sometimes infixes or suppletion

Table 1: Plural Noun Inflection

| SINGULAR | | PLURAL | | PROCESS OF INFLECTION | |
|----------|--------|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| English | Ekpari | English | Ekpari | English | Ekpari |
| Sheep | Mkpɔra | Sheep | Mikpɔra | No inflection [Ø] | Vowel infix |
| Child | Iwi | Children | Mimeɣ | -ren | Suppletive inflection |
| House | Ndɔlla | Houses | Ndɔlla epá House two | -s | Numerals |

| | | | | | |
|-------|----------------------------------|-------|---|----------------------|----------------------------|
| | | | Two houses | | |
| Leg | Opu | Legs | Opu etá Leg three Three legs | -s | Numerals |
| Man | Odide | Men | Medide | Vowel alternation | Nominal marker “me-” |
| Woman | Orise | Women | Merise | Vowel alternation | Nominal marker “me-” |
| Girl | Iwiorise Childwoman A girl | Girls | Imēorise Children woman Girls | -s | Suppletive inflection |
| Book | Imgbafẹ | Books | Imgbafẹ eyin Book four Four books | -s | Numerals |

Contrastive Comment

In table one, the process of inflection for plurality in both English and Ekpari differs. Though both languages do not follow a regular pattern of inflection of plural number, yet, the inflection processes do not relate. While "sheep" is not morphologically marked in English to indicate plural nouns, Ekpari inflect "sheep" to show plurality by a vowel infix /i/ in-between the two initial consonants. Similarly, the English suffixes “-s, -ies, -es” do not exist in Ekpari Language. In Ekpari plural noun, the entity takes numeric quantifiers. Numerals are used to state the specific number of the items. Rather than leg-legs, book –books; the actual number of the legs and books are indicated as seen above. In English, the suffix “-ren” and “-s” is used to inflect the root words “child” and “girl” for number as “children” and “girls” respectively but the pluralisation in Ekpari is by suppletion. There is also the occurrence of what Essien (1999:74) refers to as inter-word elision in Ekpari. This is the combination of two free morphemes which should have naturally constituted a syntactic structure in the language. This occurs between the plural marker “mē/imē” and the noun that precedes it. The nominal marker “mē/imē” is being used in combination with the noun stem “odide/orise” to mark plurals. The Inter-word elision for plural inflection is not found in English and would only result in compounding.

Inflection of Noun for Possession

As indicated above, Ekpari does not make use of any form of suffixes for noun inflection. Thus, the inflection of nouns to show the genitive case in Ekpari is absent.

Table 2: Genitive Inflection

| English | Ekpari | PROCESS OF INFLECTION | |
|--------------|--|-----------------------|--------|
| | | English | Ekpari |
| God's people | Mizɛnɛ obaɛ People God God's people | - 's | [Ø] |
| Ladies' room | Ndɔlla Orise House lady Ladies' room | -s' | [Ø] |

Contrastive Comment

It can be seen in the words in table 2 that inflectional morpheme “-'s” is used in English to indicate possession (genitive). A singular noun is marked for possession by an inflectional suffix “-'s” and by “-s” in the plural nouns. However, in Ekpari, the use of inflection is absent. The words above also suggest that Ekpari is a head-first language while the head parameter is head-last in English.

Inflection of Verb for Tense and Aspect

According to Comrie (1976:2), tense relates to the time an event occurred to the moment of speaking; i.e., tense is defined in relation to the time of speaking. The process of inflection in both English and Ekpari to indicate whether an action is present or past is similar. The two languages inflect for present and past tense.

Table 3: Tense Inflection

| English | | | Ekpari | | |
|---------|---------|--------------------|---------|--------|--------------------|
| Present | Past | Inflection process | Present | Past | Inflection process |
| Eat | Ate | Past Irregular | Zi | Etse | Past irregular |
| Keep | Kept | Past Irregular | Baalá | Alaá | a- |
| Sell | Sold | Past Irregular | Siri | Siri | [Ø] |
| call | Called | -ed | Yiji | Yiji | [Ø] |
| Take | Took | Past Irregular | Baa | Abaá | a- |
| Cook | Cooked | -ed | Yimezi | Yimezi | [Ø] |
| Slap | Slapped | -ed | Tiapa | Tiapa | [Ø] |
| Give | Gave | Past Irregular | Akun | Abakun | infix – ba |

Contrastive Comment

It has been observed that verbs are often inflected for present and past tense in both English and Ekpari. In English, the past tense is marked by the suffix “-ed”, *mutation* a replacement of the internal sound of the verb, and \emptyset morpheme. Similarly, in Ekpari, the verb is inflected to mark past tense by the suffix "a-" and \emptyset morpheme, lexical verbs are capable of showing or indicating the

time of an action. The only difference is that not all verbs are morphologically marked for past tense. , For instance, there is the present tense, past tense, and future tense. The present tense in this language functions as past and present future.

Table 4: Inflection to show Aspect

| English | | | Ekpari | | |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Base form | Perfective (-ed/-en) | Progressive (-ing) | Base form | Perfective | Progressive [Ø] |
| Keep | Kept | Keeping | Baalá | Baalá | Baalá |
| Sell | Sold | Selling | Siri | Siri | Siri |
| Call | Called | Calling | Yiji | Yiji | Yiji |
| Take | Taken | Taking | Baá | Baá | Baá |
| Come | come | Coming | Ayiomu | Ayiomu | Ayiomu |
| Give | Given | Giving | Akun | Akun | Akun |
| Cook | Cooked | Cooking | Yimezi | Yimezi | Yimezi |

Contrastive Comment

Despite Ekpari and English sharing similar processes in tense (past and present) formation, aspect is not morphologically realized in Ekpari. As seen in Table 4 above, the forms of verbs in Ekpari do not change when they are used in the perfective and progressive form. The fact is that in Ekpari, the perfective and progressive forms of “-ed/en” and “-ing” are not morphologically realized. While the progressive tense is morphologically marked in English verbs, it is generally a syntactic feature in Ekpari. Thus, Ekpari verbs do not inflect for aspect as the English verbs do. The present tense in this language functions as the perfective and the progressive tense.

Agreement Relations in English and Ekpari

An agreement relation is the correspondence of a verb with its subjects in person and number. Whereas in English, verbs are morphologically marked to show agreement with the subject, it has been observed that there is no agreement marking between the subject and the verb in Ekpari. Whether the noun subject in the third person singular position is one or more than one, the verb is not inflected.

Table 5: Inflection of Verbs Based on Agreement

| English | | Ekpari | |
|------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Singular verb -s | Plural Verb | Singular verb [Ø] | Plural Verb |
| Sweeps | sweep | Wioku | Wioku |
| reads | read | Aria | Aria |
| Calls | call | Yiji | Yiji |
| Works | Work | Okukuo | Okukuo |
| Eats | eat | Zi | Zi |
| Takes | Take | Baa | Baa |
| Calls | Call | ayiomu | ayiomu |
| Gives | Give | Akun | Akun |

Contrastive Comment

With regard to the agreement feature, verbs are inflected in English for the agreement feature, which is morphologically realized as ‘-s’ with third-person singular subjects. However, in Ekpari, there is no overt reflection of the agreement feature, and verbs are not inflected for person. Unlike English, Ekpari verbs are not inflected to show third person singular, it rather remains in the same form. Consider the following structures:

6a. Azimezi omuási
He eat food everyday
He eats food everyday

6b. Mari siri ayiwo
Mary sell fish
Mary sells fish

6c. Okoro ukukwo ni garden
Okoro work in garden
Okoro works in the garden

6d. John kali Mari azimezi omuási
John and Mary eat food every day
John and Mary eat food every day

In 6 (a, b, c and d) above, there is no subject-verb agreement in the singular subject and the verb of the sentence. The verb remains the same both in the case of singular and plural forms. On the other hand, English uses mainly the suffix "-s" to mark agreement relation. In English, the verb sell (singular) in 6(b) was used because the subject Noun Phrase (NP) is singular (Mary) while in 6(d), the verb eat (plural) was used because of the plural subject (John and Mary). However, in both Ekpari, verbs are never inflected for number and there is no agreement relation between subjects and verbs. In the above, the verb *eat* in 6(a) and *work* in 6(c) are uninflected even when the subject Noun Phrase (NP) is singular (he and John). Differences in how abstract properties are realized into their surface forms between English and Ekpari may cause difficulties among Ekpari native speakers in learning the agreement relations in English

FINDINGS/ERROR PREDICTIONS

This study has engaged in a comparative study of the inflection system of English and Ekpari to determine the areas of similarities and differences. This study has demonstrated the universality of language by identifying the principles and parametric variation of the English and Ekpari inflection system. The study shows that the languages shared some inflectional morphological processes and some processes in their inflection systems that are different from the other. In the area of similarities, both languages make use of inflection in performing various grammatical functions. Singular is one and plural indicates more than one in both languages. According to Yusuf (1998), tense is a feature marked in all languages of the world. However, the pattern and the features

involved vary from one language to the other. In the area of tense, both languages inflect verbs to indicate present and past tense. While English marks past tense with the suffix “-ed”, Ekpari inflects for tense with the prefix “a-”. The similarities in the system of inflection can suggest that Ekpari learners of English are conscious that some words are inflected for certain grammatical functions. In addition, learning the present and past tense form of the English language may not pose many problems to the students. Though, much awareness of the rules of tense inflection in English will be needed to guide the students

From our discussion on English and Ekpari inflection process, some major parametric variations are evident. First, In the English language, all grammatical categories in English are indicated through the suffixation process. On the other hand, Ekpari typically uses prefixes to mark noun and verb inflections. This appears to be a direct contrast to the English inflection process. Based on the above contrast, it could be easily predicted that the learners would encounter some difficulties in learning and using the suffixation inflection in English. This is because inflections of nouns take the form of suffixes while the Ekpari learners of English are familiar with a prefix system of noun inflection. This contrast will more likely tempt Ekpari students of English to overgeneralize the noun inflection system. They may have problem correctly applying the proper suffixes to the plural nouns. They will have to learn and be adequately exposed to the language in order to have a good grasp of noun inflection process including the nouns that take -s, -ies, -ves, the mutation and the null morphemes.

In English, possession is marked by an inflectional suffix -'s in the singular nouns and by -s' in the plural nouns. However, the possessive case is not morphologically marked in Ekpari nouns. The noun does not change in the genitive case. With this, students are likely to be faced with the problem of incorrect usage of the possessive case. Students may produce sentences that lack the inflectional suffix -'s/-s' in the possessive case, as in: *Give me John shoe.

As shown in the study, the verbs in English and Ekpari have distinct forms for representing perfective and progressive aspects. While verbs are morphologically marked in English to show the perfective and the progressive form, this is not so with Ekpari where the verbs do not change their forms when they are used in both the perfective and progressive aspects. However, the context of occurrence determines the intended interpretations. How it is been used in context will determine the temporal constituency of a situation. The abstract marking of aspects in English will possibly affect students in using the present tense verb for the perfective aspect. There are many irregular verb forms in English aspects. Irregular verbs may use different inflections than regular ones in a variety of ways. This may likely inhibit students' learning of the progressive and the perfective forms, as sees in expressions like:

- 7a. *He has went to the market
- b. *Neither Mary or joseph have arrive”

The study has also revealed that the realization of agreement features is different between English and Ekpari. Verbs are inflected for agreement which is morphologically realized through the third-

person singular *-s* in English. Noun phrase in English maintains cordial relations with other grammatical elements particularly with the finite verb in the sentence in such a way that a singular noun takes a singular verb and a plural noun takes a plural verb. Ekpari has no suffix and verbs are not inflected to show person or number. The nouns do not have to agree or correspond with the finite verb for agreement in the language. Thus, verbs do not change their forms for purposes of agreement in Ekpari. In sum, in contrast to English, Ekpari does not have an overt reflection of agreement features. This difference in the underlying representation may lead to difficulties for Ekpari learners of the English language in learning the English agreement. The absence of agreement relations in Ekpari will make students have a problem with subject-verb agreement. This means the students have to learn a completely new system which they might find difficult to assimilate. The students may not be able to appropriately pay attention to the singular noun and singular verb concord rule. Hence, instead of "Olu dances well" and "He goes to school daily", students may produce sentences like:

8a. *Olu dance well

8b. *He go to school daily

Inflection system plays an important role in the grammaticality of sentences and the differences in English and Ekpari will likely pose problems to the production of grammatical sentences among Ekpari learners of English. Therefore, adequate measures to mitigate the likely problems need to be put in place by the students, teachers, school administrations and proprietors, curriculum developers and the government.

Pedagogical Implications

To forestall the problems that Ekpari learners of English might face, both the teachers and students should always have in mind that there are no two languages that are the same. They must strive to become conscious of the structural differences between their mother tongue and the English language. Not only that, students must learn to separate the features of one from the other. To do this, students must avoid code-switching arbitrarily, read good grammar textbooks and literature to master the rules guiding the usage of the English language. Listening to the news in Standard English and being exposed to communicative activities such as answering questions in the classroom, debate, quiz competition and other activities, both inside and outside the classroom that can motivate the students to use the target language frequently. These will make students, especially the Ekpari learners of English, communicate effectively and develop their self-confidence.

The teacher of English in the linguistic context of Ekpari should be well-grounded in knowledge of the inflection system of both English and Ekpari. This will not only ensure an effective content delivery but enable the teacher to bring to the forefront the areas of differences between the mother-tongue and English language. This will help teachers to identify errors committed by students and effectively correct them.

Furthermore, adequate time should be dedicated to the teaching of the inflection system of English in primary and secondary schools. Curriculum developers should not subsume Inflection system under any topic but taught as a separate and whole topic. This will allow the teacher sufficient time to engage the students with the topic. Adequate pedagogical skills and relevant instructional materials need to be devoted to language teaching. The teacher must be able to vary his teaching methods not to only suit the needs and capacity of the learners but also to the situational factors under which the learning takes place. In addition, schools should provide an enabling learning environment where students may broaden their communicative skills through the availability of modern technologies that can be used in teaching and learning of English language

CONCLUSION

The study has attempted to show the salient features of the inflectional systems of English and Epari languages. Using the Contrastive Analysis (C.A) approach, the study has revealed that Ekpari typically uses prefixes as inflectional morphemes to mark grammatical categories while the English language typically uses inflectional suffixes to mark the same function. Besides, it was also discovered that Ekpari does not mark genitive case and agreement inflection. In English, nouns are inflected to mark genitive cases while verbs are inflected in terms of person and number to show agreement with the subject. Also, English marks the perfective and progressive aspect but such does not exist in Ekpari. Ekpari does not mark possession, aspect or agreement relations. However, our analysis has shown that the two languages undergo past and present tense inflection. The universality of the two languages exists in the area of inflecting to show grammatical function but how each language undergoes these processes differs. These analyses can, therefore, assist language teachers in identifying points of difficulties to learners in the second language learning situation, particularly, with regards to Ekpari– English bilinguals.

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