The Study of the Plural Form in English and Siin Seereer

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ABSTRACT: *The present work refers to a descriptive study of the plural in English and Siin Seereer. In other words, it is devoted to the formation, the structure, the semantics, etc. of words or forms denoting more than one element in both languages. Thus, the work aims to analyze this class of grammatical forms usually used to denote more than one, or in some languages more than two elements. Thus, the study of the plural in the noun phrase is in the heart of the current study. However, to collect data, in order to have a corpus, we have done some research, organized interviews with English and Siin Seereer native speakers. The collection of data has conducted us to have a clear presentation, analysis and interpretation of our corpus. The work provides new and authentic data drawn from a variety of documents, interviews, etc. that enable us to implement a descriptive approach. This approach of descriptive analysis of the plural has helped us to point out that there are differences and some similarities in these languages. In other words, the formation, the semantics, the structure, etc. of the different types of nouns in both languages are different. Furthermore, we have noticed that there are differences as far as the determiners, used with these types of nouns, are concerned.*

KEYWORDS: determiner, language, noun, plural, study

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

The work is devoted to the descriptive study of the plural form in English and Siin Seereer. The latter are two different languages belonging to different language families. English is a West Germanic language which is part of the Indo- European languages. As for Seereer, it is an African language belonging to the West Atlantic group of the Niger Congo language family. Thus, the study deals with the formation, the structure, the semantics, etc. of words or forms denoting more than one element in both languages. In other words, it is tantamount to analyzing the noun and its different forms in English and Siin Seereer in order to stand out the differences and similarities which exist in the two languages and that can be analyzed to facilitate the teaching and/or learning of these languages.

A noun is a linguistic sequence which may function as subject, object, subject complement, complement of a preposition, or as a dependent element of another noun head. The description of complex units, having the status of nominal group is also targeted in this study. That internal

structure can be described as the realization of determination relations. All the notions that grammarians use in the nominal system description, emanate definitely from the way the meaningful units behave towards the realization of the determination relations. So, the study aims to highlight the functioning of the plural form in both languages, basing on a contrastive study.

Statement of the statement
The study of the plural form in English and Siin Seereer languages raises a lot of questions. What is the plural form? How many types of plural form are there in English and Siin Seereer? How is the plural formed in both languages? What is the difference between the plural with countable nouns and the one with uncountable nouns and compound ones? What are the similarities and differences in both languages? From one point of view, the analysis of the words denoting more than one element causes problems to English or Seereer learners or researchers for the form and formation (in singular and plural) of these elements depend on the type of noun and on each language; what brings about a misunderstanding in the linguistic world.

Theoretical Framework
The study of the plural form, referring to the analysis of words or forms denoting more than one element in both languages is based on the theory of the functionalism. In the linguistic field, there are several schools (one of which the Prague School) which have suggested many definitions of the functionalism. Thus, the functionalism can be defined as a theory that can refer to any one of various approaches to the study of grammatical descriptions and processes that consider the purposes to which the language is put and the contexts in which it occurs.
According to Christopher S. Butler (1984:29), Bates & Mac Whinney (1982: 178) discern at least four levels of functionalism, ranging from a relatively conservative historical view to some radical proposals about the nature of adult grammatical knowledge. Each level requires qualitatively different kinds of evidence, although the stronger levels presuppose the more conservative ones both logically and empirically. The four respective positions involve (1) claims about diachronic or historical correlations between form and function, (2) synchronic or ongoing correlations between form and function in real-time processing, (3) use of these form-function correlations in the acquisition of language by children, and finally (4) a functionalist approach to the grammar or system of representation that mediates the relationship between form and function.

Butler keeps stating that a functionalist approach, however, given the emphasis on language as communication, must be centrally concerned with the relationship between linguistic patterning and contexts of use. Some functionalists are willing to recognize that there is a distinction to be made between knowledge of rules and regularities, on the one hand, and the use to which this knowledge is put, on the other. But even for such linguists, the linguistic knowledge involved goes far beyond knowledge of the syntactic, semantic, morphological and phonological rules, to include knowledge of how these rules can be appropriately used in particular types of context.

Thus, as it is often said, the starting point for functionalists is the view that language is first and foremost an instrument for communication between human beings, and that this

fact is central in explaining why languages are as they are. This orientation certainly corresponds to the layperson's view of what language is.

Hypotheses and Objectives
The current work focuses on the analysis of the plural form in English and Siin Seereer. Thus, through the research we have conducted, we have pointed out that there are some similarities and differences in English and Siin Seereer languages. Furthermore, many nouns can be countable in English and uncountable in Seereer and vice versa. Their natures and functions are also totally different in the two languages.

So, this article aims to bring out the formal structure of these forms of words denoting more than one element. In addition, it intends to enlighten the grammatical, syntactic, phonological, etc. functions of these concepts. Through this work, we would also like to shed light on all the problems and semantic, grammatical and phonological misunderstandings of the plural form and on the confusion made by Siin Seereer students or learners of English and by English students or learners of Siin Seereer language. Furthermore, this work will help understanding the very status of this West African language and its similarities and differences from the English language.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Data Collection
The collection of data information in order to write this article and answer all the questions related to the plural form in English and Siin Seereer has been done through much research that has been carried out in certain libraries, books, sources and in the Internet. As a linguistic study, this part of the work aims to indicate the ways we have taken to write this research work. However, to complete the work at the right time, some research has been done. For literary documentation we have read books and documents containing some of the nouns in plural and singular. We have also searched on the internet for some definitions and explanations of certain concepts in English.

Moreover, for literary documentation, we have visited some libraries such as the university library, the library of the English Department, the library of CLAD (Centre de Linguistique Appliquée de Dakar) and so and so forth. We have also gone to WARC (West African Research Center), IFAN (Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire) and to other centers. Besides, several interviews with some Siin Seereer native speakers who can speak English have been organized. These interviewed people have helped us not only in the finding and collection of words, but also in the transcription and explanation of these words.
This research has allowed us to have a lot of information and build our corpus. After the corpus building, we have moved on to the presentation and analysis of the data and we have ended up in the following results.

Data Presentation

The collection of data has helped us to have a clear presentation, analysis and interpretation of our corpus data. The article provides new and authentic data drawn from a variety of documents, interviews, etc. that enable us to implement a new analytical approach of the words or forms denoting more than one element. So, the data of this paper are composed of first- hand and second-hand data. The former are made up of some authentic documents, speeches and interviews from where some information about the plural form in both languages is taken and analyzed in order to bring some contribution to the field of our study. The second-hand data consist of some insights analyses and research findings.

These sets of collected and processed data provide an overview of these concepts regarded as words or forms denoting the plural in the two languages, in a context dominated by the contact of languages (local and foreign). The data are made up of sentences, paragraphs, speeches, etc. adapted, elaborated and analyzed in the current paper. The data analysis is based on various approaches, techniques and or theories of scholars or schools such as the functionalism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research we have conducted has allowed us to have a lot of information and build our corpus. After the corpus building, we have moved on to the presentation and analysis of the data. In so doing, the words or forms designating more than one element in English and Siin Seereer are analyzed according to their nature. In other words, the analysis is based on the plural form of the different types of nouns, mainly countable, uncountable, compound, etc. in both languages.

Plural form of Countable Nouns

Countable nouns or count nouns, are nouns which can be modified by a numeral and occur in both singular and plural forms. They can occur with quantificational determiners or quantifiers. So, countable nouns refer to things that can be divided up into smaller units which are separate and distinct from one another. They refer usually to what can be individually seen, heard or presupposed. To deal with the plural form of countable nouns is tantamount to dealing with the noun morphology of this type of words in both languages. Countable nouns in English and Siin Seereer have two forms: a singular and a plural. Thus, to one lexeme in singular, there must correspond a plural form consisting of a root and a plural marker.

However, countable nouns in English have two different types of plural form: the regular plural and the irregular one. The regular plural consists in adding suffixes, expressing plurality, to lexemes. Most of the time, the English language refers to "**s**", "**es**" or "**ies**" for suffixes expressing plural. "**S**" is suffixed to lexemes ending with consonants such as *t, k, p, g, b, m, n*, etc. Ex: *dog→ dogs; stop→ stops*. As for "**es**", it is added when the noun ends with consonants such as *s, z, x, sh, ch,* etc. Ex: *mistress→ mistresses; church→ churches.* For nouns ending with "**y"** preceded by a consonant, the ending "**ies**" is added. Ex: baby→ *babies; party→ parties*.

Thus, unlike English language, Siin Seereer works differently. The study of the plural form in Seereer is characterized by the nominal class. This latter is essentially defined by "a nominal prefix" indissociable to the nominal constituent; "a pronominal class marker (**o, a, ө**)"; and "the nature of the initial basic consonant" that varies from one class to another. The nominal system and the consonant alternation are the most important points in Siin Seereer language and more specifically in the plural form. Seereer language does not resort to the morpheme **"s"** or **"es"** or "**ies**" when there is a noun shift from singular to plural. Thus, in singular there is always the **"a"** and **"o"** class markers for most of the Seereer countable nouns. In plural these class markers are omitted with some nouns.

➢   Ex: *house→ houses;*   *lady → ladies*
➢   Ex: *a ndok→ tok ;*   *o tew → rew*

The examples show that English and Seereer work differently as far as the plural is concerned. English refers to affixes while Seereer resort to an erasure of class markers and an initial consonant alternation. Furthermore, in Seereer, with other countable nouns these class markers are replaced by other class markers called plural class markers. Ex: *o ƒaam (donkey)* that becomes *xa paam (donkeys)*. The class marker can also be kept. Ex: *a ngid* becomes in plural *a kid*. This structure exists in the two languages and can be regarded as an irregular plural, which constitutes the main point of the following part of the study.

The irregular plural is characterized in both languages by the variation of the form of the noun. In English language, there can be a vowel shift; *a→ e* as is *woman* that gives *women*; *oo → ee* as in *tooth* that becomes *teeth*; *goose → geese*. This morphology of vowel shift does not exist in Siin Seereer language. What is more striking in this African language when there is a shift from singular to plural is the consonant shift, commonly called an "**initial consonant alternation**". In Siin Seereer, all the prenasals (words composed of one **nasal** (**m** or **n**) and one **plosive**) alternate with the voiceless corresponding plosive; **nd → t**; as in *ndaxar* (tree) that becomes *taxar* (trees); **mb→ p**; as in *mbaal* (sheep) that gives *paal* (sheep), etc. Thus, this initial consonant alternation is the most determining fact in the identification of a noun class. But as it is known, the homogeneity of the group in the regularity of the changes of these elements groups constitutes the essential characteristic of a good classifying.

Unlike Seereer language, English does not use an initial consonant alternation where there is a shift from singular to plural. What is noticeable with some irregular plural nouns is the **mid** or **final** consonant shift; **f** (e) → **v** (es); as in *calf* that becomes *calves*; *wife* that gives wi**v**es. However, apart from the position of the consonant that alternates, the two languages work differently in so far as, Seereer language does not use a suffix with the plural form.

The irregular plural can also be characterized by the non- variation (meaning without any change of basic word) of the form of the word. In other words, this form of plural refers to words whose forms are invariable, whether it is in singular or in plural.

➢   Ex: *sheep* (singular) → *sheep* (plural)

➢ Ex: *naak* (singular) → *naak* (plural)

The examples show a similarity between English and Siin Seereer languages. These words are invariable; whether it is the singular or the plural there is no change. However, if you would like to know whether the noun is in singular or in plural, you should use it in a sentence in which it is the subject of the verb in present tenses. If it is the Seereer language, to know if the noun is in singular or in plural, you can also use it in the definite form.

The manifestation of the plural form of countable nouns in Seereer language is dominated by the initial consonant alternation. In general, the class marker (**a** or **o**) that is not sometimes varying, is generally affected by the shift from singular to plural. The consonant alternation and the nature of the variation can allow people identify the noun class. In other words, they constitute the essential points that help distinguishing the different nouns or the noun from the other grammatical categories. Unlike Seereer, English language resorts to the suffix "**s**" (that varies in "**es**" or "**ies**" according to the type of noun) to form the plural of countable nouns. Some similarities can also be noticed in both languages with the irregular plural of countable nouns. There are some nouns in English and Seereer whose singular and plural forms are identical. However, how is the plural form of uncountable nouns formed?

Plural form of Uncountable Nouns
Uncountable or non-count nouns are nouns which represent things that cannot be counted as separate words. They refer to things that cannot be counted because they are regarded as wholes which cannot be divided into parts. So, they indicate substances, abstractness, collective meaning, human activities, language names, colors. They have only one form; that is to say they are either in singular or in plural even if their translation into other languages can be in plural.

According to Otto Jespersen (1914/1970), the term "mass-noun" as used in grammar, only refers to a certain function of substantives. Mass-nouns are formally characterized by the use of the zero or definite article. They are distinguished from proper names by their being unable to take any article. These nouns linked to the zero article may denote an indefinite quantity of the designed thing. They are uncountable nouns and present entities as unbounded mass. In English, they are characterized by the fact that they cannot be directly modified by a numeral without specifying a unit of measurement and they cannot be combined with an indefinite article. In Siin Seereer, most of them are used with the particles "**fo**" or "**fa**" indicating mostly the provenance. These nouns used with such particles do not generally have a plural form. They are always in singular.

➢ Ex: *fo suun* (smoke) coming from the verb *suun* meaning "to smoke"
➢ Ex: *fa yar* (education) coming from the verb *yar* meaning "to educate"
➢
The two studied words do not have plural; they are always used in singular. However, there are some uncountable nouns in Seereer that are always in plural. Ex: *lanq* (ground); *ñaamel* (food). English language, as Seereer does, has also some uncountable nouns that are always in plural.

It is the case of *alms, clothes, odds, thanks, savings, congratulations*, etc. That is, English and Seereer share some similarities. Still, these uncountable nouns that are always in plural can be translated in other languages by countable nouns which may be either singular or plural.

Plural Form of Compound nouns
Compound nouns can be analyzed as combinations of two or more than two elements, each of which may in turn be compound. The impression is that this is even truer of items containing more than two elements which have usually more formations than items containing only two elements. The normal way of classifying compound nouns is by the function they play in the sentence as nouns. Thus, there is a subgrouping of compound nouns; several types of semantic relationships can be isolated within this grouping, as well as different syntactic patterns. The majority of compounds in this class are endocentric. While it would be possible to classify these compounds in terms of their countability or animacy, such classifications do not appear to be particularly helpful to the learner of word formation.

The most traditional and pervasive semantic classification of compounds used in linguistics is based upon the work of Bloomfield (1933) who suggested that: *Compounds fall into two main groups: the endocentric constructions and the exocentric constructions; the construction represents a sub classification of the entities expressed by the head noun"*. In the case of the exocentric or headless construction, however, the compound is not a hyponym of the head element and in the majority of such cases there is some sort of metaphor or metonymy at work in the meaning of compounds. Thus, the basic semantic relationships and morpho-syntactic criteria can be considered to be a more helpful classification. In English, the pattern of **noun + noun** exocentric compounds is very restricted in productivity, but there can be some examples of this kind: *Hatchback; skinhead.*

In a large proportion of established appositional compounds, the first element marks the sex of a person: *boy-friend, manservant, woman doctor*. This function is still productive, but most obviously with pronominal sex markers used for animals: *she-goat, he-cheetah*. In Seereer, what is most remarkable about the compound nouns is the diversity of semantic relationships that can exist between the two constituents on the one hand and between the individual elements and the compound as a whole on the other hand. In Seereer, there are two or more words, linked by a **class marker** that can be a linker, or another particle that can be used as a linker.

- ➢   Ex: **O**   ɓox **a** koβ   **xa** ɓox **a** koβ
  c.m- dog-c.m-forest   c.m-dog- c.m- forest
  "a   jackal"   " jackal**s**"

- ➢   Ex: **O**   ngag roog   **xa** kag roog
  c.m - Noun - god   c.m- noun-god
  "Rainbow"   "rainbow**s**"

These two examples show that in Siin Seereer the compound nouns are very important in the sense that they deal with two different terms linked by a class marker. So, in a compound noun, the first term manages the compound noun in the plural form. In other words, when the first noun is used with the **"a"** class marker (a.cm), in the plural or definite forms, the compound noun will concord with this noun. If the first noun is used with the **"o"** class marker (o.c.m), the noun will agree with this noun. But contrary to the **"a"** or "zero" class marker which are invariable if they are used with the second noun, the "o" class marker (o.c.m) becomes "**no**" if it is with the second.

However, Seereer and English share some similarities as far as compound nouns' plural forms are concerned. In English, several compound nouns follow the same rules as countable or uncountable nouns do in plural. In other words, the plural of some compound nouns is formed by suffixing **"s"** to the noun. Compound nouns in Seereer also follow the rules of countable and uncountable nouns in plural. But the difference between the two languages is in the semantic level; for the interpretation may not be the same. In English for example a compound noun like a **water mill** can mean "*mill powered by water*"; "*mill which produces water*"; "*mill located near the water*"; "*mill for analyzing the content of water"; "mill where the employees drink water,* etc." In Seereer a compound noun has only one meaning; an example like ***mbaat fo ɗen*** can mean nothing but the *Benjamin*.

Compound nouns are highly intriguing sets of linguistic phenomena. Not only do they form the largest groups of compounds in English, but children learn to produce the type of compounds. However, what is most remarkable about the plural of compound nouns is the diversity of semantic relationships that can exist between the two compounds on the one hand and between the individual elements and the compound as a whole on the other. However diverse the semantics of noun-noun combination may be, linguists have attempted to systematize the constraints that apply in their creation and interpretation. In addition, compounding processes form a central work when dealing with the syntax-morphology interface. Compound nouns are even more in between syntax and morphology than other types, since sequences of 'noun + noun' can be treated either as compounds or as noun phrases with modifiers which happen to be nouns. There is, in fact, considerable disagreement regarding the treatment of 'noun + noun' combinations and many compounds collocations that others regard as phrases. A reason for this seems to be that some linguists are reluctant to analyze nouns as modifiers within a phrase.

Implications for Teaching

The findings have implications for teaching. Teachers play an important role in developing interest in learning and in helping learners to improve their acquisition of particular grammatical properties in a second language. It is in the interest of the learners and the responsibility of the teachers to be able to relate the learners' first languages to their second languages. A comparison would serve to highlight the similarities and differences and lead to greater sensitivity to problems such as those of interference or over generalization.

Additionally, since there is a pattern of acquisition, it is recommended that teachers teach according to a sequence based on a difficulty index. Therefore, teachers could teach the plural

marker before the genitive marker and the third person singular present tense marker. This is in line with the learnability hypothesis which states that learners cannot acquire a complex structure before simpler ones. The hypothesis is based on observations that second language learners follow a fairly rigid route in the learning of certain grammatical structures. The structures become learnable when the previous steps in the acquisitional or developmental path have been acquired.

Finally, the findings could prove useful for material development in the acquisition of the plural form for these second language young learners. A certain amount of attention is needed to impress on the consistent use of the morphemes even within the same sentence. Training in accuracy must be emphasized to give the edge in grammatical competence among second language learners who are considered to have attained a high level of communicative ability.

CONCLUSION

English and Seereer work differently as far as the plural form of nouns is concerned. English language focuses on countable, uncountable and compound nouns to deal with the form denoting more than one element. In Seereer, what is most striking is the class marker and the initial consonant alternation which are very important and cannot be put aside if one wants to talk about the plural form of nouns. Furthermore, countable nouns refer to things that can be divided into smaller units which are separate and distinct from one another. So, there are differences related to their morphology and more specifically when the nouns shift from singular to plural. In English all the countable nouns take the morpheme "s" (or "es" or "ies") in plural; apart from some nouns that have what is called "irregular plural". This irregularity can be explained by the fact that these nouns are not from English origin. Some of them have Greek or Latin or German… roots.

Seereer language does not have this morpheme "s" when the nouns shift from singular to plural. What is important and interesting is the initial consonant alternation when shifting from singular to plural with the countable nouns. Thus, in singular there is always the "a" and "o" class markers for most of the Seereer countable nouns. In plural these class markers are omitted with some nouns; but with others these class markers are replaced by other class markers called plural class markers. The class marker can also be kept with some noun classes. Yet, the class marker and the consonant alternation constitute the essential points that help to distinguish the different nouns or the noun from the other grammatical categories. As for uncountable nouns, they are in Siin Seereer as well as in English nouns that represent things which cannot be counted. They refer to things that cannot be counted because they are regarded as whole things which cannot be divided into parts. So, they indicate substances, abstractness, collective meaning, human activities, languages names, colors. They have only one form; that is to say they are always in singular or in plural even if their translation into other languages might change.

But, even if the uncountable nouns in English or what can be considered to be uncountable nouns in Seereer are used with the zero or definite articles, there are differences between these

languages. In Seereer, instead of using class markers such as "o" or "a" in the indefinite form, only the word is used in the plural form; or it is used with some particles such as "fo" or "fa" if it is the singular form. Thus, if one takes into account the compound nouns, they would say that these nouns do not have the same morphology even if there are two or more than two words to deal with the compounding. The compounding processes form a central work when dealing with the syntax-morphology interface. Thus, there are differences between the two languages. As far as the semantics is concerned, the interpretation is not the same. In English for example a compound noun can have several meanings whereas in Seereer each compound noun has only one meaning. As for these nouns, there is no great difference between syntax and morphology. But, the syntactic aspect of the analysis is focused on the fact that the determiner can be kept, if there is any, when there is a shift from singular to plural with the English countable nouns. In Seereer, there is a change or a loss of the class marker and most of the time an initial consonant alternation when there is a turn from singular to plural.

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