

BILINGUALISM AND INTERFERENCE: A CASE STUDY OF ELLIPSIS AMONG SOME COORDINATE BILINGUALS

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Abstract

Studies in contact linguistics have shown that when two languages come into contact, they interfere with each other phonologically, syntactically and lexically. However, the popular view in Contact Linguistics is that only first languages have the capacity to interfere with the second languages of the bilingual. This study contests this popular view by ascertaining that the contrary is also possible, making interference a mutual phenomenon between the languages of the bilingual. By focusing on the use of the cohesive device of ellipsis, which is both a grammatical and a lexical phenomenon, the present study describes how ellipsis is realised in English and Ewe and shows the extent to which English interferes with Ewe in the use of this cohesive device among Ewe-English coordinate (university undergraduate) bilinguals. The study reveals that English, the second language of the bilinguals in question, has tremendous influence on Ewe, their first language, disproving the popular view that only first languages can interfere with second languages of the bilingual.

Keywords: Ellipsis, Bilingualism, Bilingual, Coordinate bilingual, Interference

BACKGROUND

Language contact is a phenomenon that has been in existence for a long time. According to Thomason (2001), there is no evidence of any language that has developed in isolation. This means that every language has been in contact with another language or languages. In sub-Saharan countries like Ghana, many people use more than one language in their day-to-day activities. Through education, many Ghanaians have become bilinguals who acquire their second language, English, through study at school.

The school language policy in Ghana favours bilingualism. Owu-Ewie (2006) throws light on Ghana's language policy over the years. According to him, the Ghanaian languages taught in schools are Akan (Twi and Fante), Nzema, Ga, Ga-Adangbe, Ewe, Gonja, Kasem, Dagbani, and Dagaare out of about seventy. Owu-Ewie (2006) gives an overview of the history of the language policy in Ghana and confirms that the English language has been used side by side Ghanaian languages as mediums of instruction. Many Ghanaian have, therefore, come into contact with English at school.

Since this study compares English and Ewe, it clearly fits into the field of study known as Contact Linguistics. Contact Linguistics, as its name denotes, deals with the study of the contact between languages. Many studies in contact linguistics deal with bilingualism. Answers to the questions as to who a bilingual is and what bilingualism is have been matters of debate among linguists. There are different definitions and arguments among linguists on what bilingualism is. Definitions of bilingualism are, therefore, multifaceted. For example, for Bloomfield (1933:56), "native-like control of two languages" can be taken as a criterion for bilingualism. According to him, a bilingual must handle both languages as their native speakers do. Haugen (1953), however, talks about a bilingual as the speaker of one language producing complete meaningful utterances in the other language. Weinreich (1953:1), one of the pioneers of contact linguistics, defines bilingualism as "the practice of alternatively using two languages". Romaine (1995) indicates that bilingualism refers to the possessing of two languages by an individual or a society. If an individual possesses two languages, we are talking about individual bilingualism. On the other hand, we talk about societal bilingualism when a linguistic community possesses and uses two languages concurrently.

Grosjean (1994) clarifies the misconception that bilinguals are and must be fluent and well-balanced in their two languages. By these simple and straightforward definitions, it is easy to say that a bilingual is “someone with the possession of two languages” (Wei 2002:7). Weinreich (1953, 1968) classified three types of bilingualism according to the way bilinguals store language in their brains.

Types of Bilinguals

The first Weinreich (1953) identifies is coordinate bilingualism. A coordinate bilingual is one who has acquired two languages in two separate contexts and the words are stored separately. In this type of bilingualism, the person learns the languages in different environments. Halliday et al (1970) consider that this person is not necessarily an ambilingual (an individual with native competency in two languages). This bilingual possesses very high levels of proficiency in both languages in the written and oral modes. He is, however, not a native speaker of two languages. An instance of this type of bilingualism is seen in a Ghanaian child learning English at school with an already developed first language (L1).

The second type of bilingual Weinreich (1953, 1968) identifies is the compound bilingual. This bilingual has acquired two languages in the same context. The individual learns both languages from the same environment where they are used concurrently so that there is a fused representation of the two languages in his lexicon. In this case, a word has one concept but two different labels, one from each language.

The final type of bilingual identified by Weinreich (1953) is the subordinate bilingual. Here, the individual has acquired a first language and another language is interpreted through the stronger one. In other words, this bilingual exhibits interference in his or her language usage by reducing the patterns of the second language to those of the first. Ervin and Osgood (1954) show that this type of bilingual is subsumed under the coordinate type of bilingual.

Ghanaians who learn English as a second language at school can be classified as coordinate bilinguals. This is because their two languages are acquired in different environments, the first at home and the second at school. According to Sey (1973), university students in Ghana are classified under coordinate bilinguals. Since this study is conducted among Ewe-English coordinate bilinguals, it is appropriate that it is conducted among university students who clearly meet this level of bilingualism.

Interference

An increasing body of works such as Akande and Akinwale (2006), Crystal (1997), Cook (1992, 2002), Grosjean (1989), Haugen (1953, 1956) and Weinreich (1974) shows that the coexistence of two languages in an individual is a complex phenomenon. Bilinguals do not use language the way monolinguals do. The bilingual’s use of language, as pointed out by Mackey (1962) and Wei (2002), involves such factors as degree (the proficiency level of the language that an individual has), function (for what an individual uses his languages, the roles his languages played in his total pattern of behavior), alternation (the extent to which one alternates between one’s languages, how one changes from one language to another, and under what conditions) and interference (how well the bilingual keeps his languages apart, the extent to which he fuses them, how one of his languages influences the use of another).

Interference is the transference of elements of one language to another at various levels, namely phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical (Berthold, Mangubhai & Batorowicz, 1997). Berthold et al, (1997) define phonological interference as items including accent such as stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sounds from the first language (L1) influencing those of the second language (L2). When the first language influences the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determiners, tense and mood and so on, we are talking about grammatical interference. Interference at the lexical level provides for the

borrowing of words from one language to another and modifying them to sound and function naturally in another language. Orthographic interference is the spelling of one language influencing that of another. While interference transforms elements of one language to behave like those of the other, switching simply involves the use of the elements of one language in another without the host language having any influence on these elements.

The present study focuses on how English interferes with Ewe in the use of the cohesive device of ellipsis. Many studies have shown that the languages of the bilingual interfere with each other grammatically, phonologically and lexically. Suffice it to say now that in bilingual research, these influences are termed 'interference', defined by Weinreich (1953:1) as "those instances of deviation from the norms of other language which occur in the speech of the bilingual as a result of the familiarity of more than one language". Similarly, Grosjean (1982) indicates that interference is the involuntary influence of one language on another. Thus, interference is not an intentional influence. It happens involuntarily. For example, it is easy to tell from some people's accent when they speak English that they are Nigerian, Ghanaian or Liberian. Their L1s influence their English and modify it, giving these speakers a foreign accent which they are usually not aware of. A Ghanaian is easily recognized in Nigeria by his accent just as it is easy to point out a Nigerian in Ghana when he speaks English.

This study seeks to contest the popular view that only first languages of bilinguals are capable of interfering with their second languages and not vice versa, by ascertaining whether the otherwise is also possible, (making interference a mutual phenomenon between the languages of the bilingual).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All fifty-one undergraduate students who read Ewe and English as their major courses at the University of Cape Coast (UCC) were selected for the study. The purposive random sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents from UCC where some students read Ewe as their major course of study. This particular group of students reading Ewe in UCC is the best sample for the present study since their levels of proficiency in English and Ewe were high and they qualified as coordinate bilinguals. Besides, UCC was chosen as the site for this study because it offers students, courses in both English and Ewe in its Departments of English and Ghanaian Languages and Linguistics and students who read these courses are best suited for the study as they qualify as coordinate bilinguals. The table 1 shows the distributions of these target groups from UCC. These students submitted two essays, one in English and the other in Ewe, on varying topics of their own choice.

Table 1: Respondents from the University of Cape Coast

SEX	LEVEL 100	LEVEL 200	LEVEL 300	LEVEL 400	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
MALE	12	13	6	4	35	68.63%
FEMALE	7	6	2	1	16	31.37%
TOTAL	19	19	8	5	51	100%

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ellipsis in English

One cohesive device identified by Halliday and Hasan (1976) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) is ellipsis. Like substitution, ellipsis is grammatical rather than lexical. While substitution deals with replacing one word with another, ellipsis is the absence of that word, something left unsaid. Ellipsis involves the omission of an item. This is the case where something left unsaid is nevertheless understood by the reader or hearer. It refers to those cases where the grammatical structure itself points to an item or items that can rightly fill the spot in question. Halliday and Hasan (1976) provide an example:

1. *Joan brought some carnations and, Catherine some sweet peas.* – Halliday and Hasan (1976:143)

This sentence warrants only one possible interpretation: Catherine bought some sweet peas. The verb 'brought' is, therefore, deleted in its second appearance. However, it is recoverable from the existing structure. It follows, therefore, that the cohesive device, ellipsis, is endophoric inasmuch as what is deleted is recoverable from within the text, not outside it. Let us look at other examples of ellipsis:

2. *The children must be advised what to do and what not to do.*
3. *Rai submitted an essay on Saussure and another on Chomsky.*
4. *Offenders are always punished but law abiders never rewarded.*

In Example 2, the clause 'the children must be advised' is deleted in its second appearance. However, it is retrievable from the structure for full meaning to be derived from the sentence. In Example 3, the verb 'submitted' is deleted in its second appearance. In Example 4, the verb 'are' is not repeated. The cohesion lies in the fact that what is left unsaid is retrievable from context and the text is therefore held together.

Ellipsis in Ewe

Unlike reference and substitution that form cohesive ties by referring back to preceding information or replacing one linguistic item with another, ellipsis forms a cohesive tie by deleting some information or linguistic items that are recoverable from the context in question. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), this is one of the ways cohesion is realized in English. In reference, a tie can be directed to information that is not overt or present in a text available. That type of reference is exophoric. In ellipsis, however, everything that is deleted is recoverable from the text. Ellipsis is therefore an endophoric phenomenon. Below are some examples from Ewe from data.

5. *Ŋutsuvi sue la ɖu xe, tikpo, fu du, va se de esime wɔdze anyi.*

Boy-small adj. def. dance, jump, run until 3sg-fall down
(The little boy danced, jumped and ran until he fell down.)

6. *De wɔnyo be kpovitɔwo nana ga xɔm le*
3sg-good dem. police-pl money receive-prog. Prep

lɔrikulawo si le miɔfe mɔwo dzia? Ao.

driver-pl hand prep road-pl prep no

(Is it good for the police to be taking money from drivers on our roads? No)

In Example 5 the noun phrase *ŋutsuvi sue la* (the little boy) is deleted before the verbs *fu du* (run) and *tikpo* (jump). It is clear that it is *ŋutsuvi sue la* that is the subject of these verbs. One thing that shows that *ŋutsuvi sue la* is the subject of these verbs is the use of the

pronoun *wò* in 5. This pronoun refers back to *ɲutsuvi sue la* and in that context no other subject is mentioned in the sentence besides *ɲutsuvi sue la*.

The sentence can be further broken down and the deleted noun phrase reinserted to show this point clearly. When that is done the derived sentences read:

ɲutsuvi sue la ɖu ɣe.

ɲutsuvi sue la tikpo.

ɲutsuvi sue la *fu du*.

Breaking the sentence down this way shows that the deleted portion is *ɲutsuvi sue la*.

In Example 6, the Ewe negative response *ao* (no) in response to the preceding question is enough for a meaningful communication to take place. The positive form *ε* (yes) can equally serve the same purpose. In the example, the whole clause is deleted in its second appearance. The cohesion here lies in the fact the reader or listener can fall back on the previous information and retrieve the necessary ideas for easy understanding which, in this case, is found in the question that precedes *ao*. Here is another example showing the use of ellipsis in Ewe.

7. Gatɔ sia tu afe ene sɔŋ ɖe Keta eye wɔgale bubu tum ɖe Gɛ.

Money-owner dem. build house 4 prep. Keta conj. 3sg again other build-prog prep Accra
(This wealthy man built four houses at Keta and he is still building another in Accra)

We see from Example 7 that the noun *afe* is not repeated just as its English counterpart *house* is deleted in its second appearance in the English rendering of the Ewe construction under discussion. We conclude, therefore, that English and Ewe both realize cohesion by ellipsis. There are, however, some differences in the way these languages realize their ellipsis. It is these differences that trigger interference when the two languages come into contact in the use of ellipsis.

English interference on Ewe

We already saw that English and Ewe both realize cohesion by ellipsis. We also saw that though this is so, there are some differences and these differences are seen in the way Ewe handles the deletion of verbs or verbal elements and personal pronouns. We focus now on how the English language interferes with Ewe in these two ways.

Before we continue, let us take one example of ellipsis from Halliday and Hasan (1976) to illustrate a point:

8. *Joan bought some carnations and, Catherine some sweet peas.*

We saw earlier that this sentence warrants only one interpretation – Catherine also bought sweet peas. Although the verb *bought* is deleted in its second appearance, it is still retrievable from the clause for effective communication to take place. The English part of the data also revealed many sentences of the type above. Below are some examples:

9a. *The president announced his intention to run again and the vice president his decision to step down.*

b. *The accused persons were arraigned before court and those found guilty imprisoned.*

It is evident from the sentences 9a and 9b that the verbs *announced* and *were* are deleted in their second appearance. However, these sentences are meaningful and acceptable in English. Unlike English, it is not acceptable to have sentences of this type in Ewe. In Ewe, verbal elements cannot be deleted in their second appearance as we have seen in the case of English. However, the Ewe data revealed constructions of these English types. Let us look at some these constructions.

10a. Axɔlu fɛ awu yeye eye Kɔɖzo afɔkpa kple kuku.

A. Buy shirt new conj. footwear conj. hat

(Axɔlu bought a new shirt and Kɔdzo footwear and a hat.)

b. Dzilawo ɖu akplɛ eye ɖeviawo ya bɔbɔ kple gali.

Parent-pl eat conj. child-pl conj.

(The parents ate akple and the children gari and beans.)

c. Abla va tefea eye Kɔdzo hã.

A. come place-foc conj. conj.

(Abla came to the place and Kɔdzo also)

In Example 10a above, the main verb in the sentence is *fle* (buy) and it appears only once in the sentence. When this sentence is translated into English, it reads:

Axɔlu bought a new shirt, and Kɔdzo footwear and a hat.

In this English sentence, the main verb *bought* appears once, yet the sentence is acceptable. Even if the verb *bought* appears twice, it will still be acceptable. In Ewe, however, only the latter phenomenon is possible and acceptable; the former is not. The deletion of the verbal element in its second appearance is alien to Ewe. The acceptable form of sentence 10a will read:

Axɔlu fle awu yeye eye Kɔdzo hã fle afɔkpa kple kuku.

In this corrected form of sentence 10a, the main verb *fle* appears twice, with the first subject *Axɔlu* and the second *Kɔdzo*. Since these constructions are possible and are acceptable in one of the languages (that is, English) of these bilinguals in question, we can point to English as the source of this influence. English is, therefore, interfering with Ewe in this regard, bending Ewe to realize ellipsis like English.

We must also be aware that interference from one language on another in a bilingual can cause the receiving language to flout its own grammatical, phonological and syntactic rules (Akande 2005, Akande and Akinwale 2006, Bhela 1999, Cook 1993). Cook (1993) points out how German-English bilinguals construct sentences in English modelled on German syntax. In Cook's (1993) example, German, the first language of the German-English bilinguals influences the second language, English. The sentences produced from these interferences are thus not acceptable in English. This means that interference of one language on another can produce unacceptable constructions in the receiving language.

In the present case, nevertheless, it is the second language that is interfering with the first. English, the second language of the Ewe-English bilingual is, therefore, interfering with Ewe, their second language by influencing Ewe to realize ellipsis by deleting the verbal element in its second appearance, a phenomenon that is not natural to Ewe.

Let us continue our discussion with Example 10b. In Example 10b, the main verb is *ɖu* (eat). Evidently, it appears only once in the sentence, something that is all right with English. Once again, this Ewe construction has fallen victim to English interference. This conclusion becomes clearer when we translate the sentence into English. The English translation thus reads:

The parents ate 'akple' and the children 'gari' and beans.

From the translation, the verb *ate* appears only once. It is dropped after the second subject of the construction *children*. There is enough evidence that English is the source of the influence here.

The last example 10c can translate into English thus:

Abla came to the place and Kɔdzo also.

In the English sentence above, the verb *came* is deleted after *also*. Let us go back to Example 10c. In that example, the main verb is *va* (*come*). In Ewe, the deletion of the verb after *hã*

(also) is unacceptable. It is, therefore, worth arguing that English is bending Ewe towards itself as regards ellipsis in the deletion of the verbal elements in Ewe constructions just as English does.

We must note that we are not concluding that the verbal element in constructions cannot be deleted in Ewe inasmuch as they are retrievable from the constructions. That phenomenon is not acceptable in constructions such as the ones we have discussed. There are other instances where verbal elements can be deleted in Ewe and they will be no problem. Here are some examples:

11a. η utsu la kp̄le via yi agble η di sia.
man det. conj. Child.det go farm morning dem.
(The man and his child have gone to farm this morning.)

b. Nufiala la alo sukudzikp̄la koe aw̄ d̄o sia alea.
teacher det. Conj. School-overseer only do work dem dem.
(Only the teacher or the school overseer can do this work like this.)

In the foregoing two sentences, each verb *yi* and *aw̄*, respectively, appears once. However, these sentences are acceptable in Ewe. In each case, the subjects are joined by a conjunction and both subjects share a verb. This type of ellipsis is acceptable in Ewe, not the form we discussed earlier.

Another key area in data where the researcher observed interference from English on Ewe regarding ellipsis is in the deletion of personal pronouns in Ewe constructions. Let us look at some examples from the data to clarify the point in question.

12a. Mēkp̄ η utsu aḍe w̄n̄o bebem ḍe x̄a xa ets̄o.
1sg-see man some 3sg hide-prog. Prep. Room-def. adv. yesterday
(I saw a man and he was hiding behind the room yesterday.)

b. Nufiala la kp̄ ḍevi aḍewo won̄o fefem le sukux̄awo me.
teacher def. see+past child some 3pl play-prog prep classroom-pl prep
(The teacher saw some children playing in the classrooms.)

In sentence 12a above, the Ewe personal *w̄* refers back to *η utsu* (man). As we can see from the English translation under 12a, the personal pronoun that should refer to man is deleted. The sentence reads:

I saw a man eating.

That sentence can also be rendered in these ways:

I saw a man and he was eating.

I saw a man. He was eating.

All three ways of rendering sentence *a* are possible and acceptable in English. From the second and third examples, the personal pronoun *he* and other items are deleted. The dropping of the personal, as we have seen above, is not acceptable in Ewe. Examples 12a and *b* are correct and are acceptable in Ewe since they have the personals *w̄* and *wo* referring back to their respective subjects.

Data has shown some instances where the personals are deleted in Ewe constructions, just as they happen in those of English. This phenomenon, as we have already noted, is unacceptable in Ewe. Let us discuss some of these instances of such usage in the data.

13a. Miekp̄ ḍevi aḍe n̄o nu xlem le atia te.
2pl-see+past child some past. thing read-prog prep tree-def prep.
(We saw a child reading under the tree.)

- b. Kuma be yekpɔ nyɛnuvi eve kplɔ ɲutsuawo ɔ.
say 3sg-see+past woman-small two follow man-pl prep
(Kuma said that he saw two girls following the men.)
- c. Wohe to na ame baɗa siawo hafi ɔe asi le wo ɲu dzo.
3pl-pull ear prep person bad dem. prep leave hand prep. 3pl body go
(They punished the bad men before allowing them to go.)

In Example 13a above, *ɔevi aɔe* (a child) is the object of the verb *kpɔ* (saw). This object in turn is the subject of the verb *xlɛm* and needs a personal pronoun to refer back to it in that context. That personal pronoun *wɔ* is missing. If we look at the English translation of the construction in question, no personal *he* refers back to child in that construction. Of course, it is possible to insert the personal *he* in that construction to refer back to *child*. Either way is possible and acceptable in English. In Ewe, however, the personal pronoun that bears reference to *ɔevi aɔe* must be present for a grammatically accepted construction. The correct form of the Sentence 13a reads thus:

Miekpɔ ɔevi aɔe wɔnɔ nu xlɛm le atia te.

As noted earlier, the personal pronoun *wɔ* is necessary in this construction.

Example 13b shows that there is a personal pronoun *wo* (*they*) missing. The noun phrase *nyɛnuvi eve* (two girls) needs a personal *wo* to refer to it. The personal missing is *wo* (*they*). The right construction reads:

Kuma be yekpɔ nyɛnuvi eve wokplɔ ɲutsuawo ɔ.

The personal *wo* as in *wokplɔ* (*they followed*) refers to *nyɛnuvi eve*. As we have said, this reference in Ewe is a compulsory one. In English, however, it is a matter of style. One could choose to drop the personal in one instance and decide to use it in another. In Ewe, however, there is no choice as to whether or not to use the personal in such constructions. Their use is necessary in Ewe.

The correct rendering of Example 13c is as follows:

Wohe to na ame baɗa siawo hafi ɔe asi le wo ɲu wodzo.

There is a *wo* (*they*) missing before the final verb *dzo* (*go*). In addition, this refers back to the noun phrase *ame baɗa siawo* (*these bad people*). The *wo* is necessary in this construction in order to be accepted as grammatically correct.

It can be concluded earlier on that the construction of these unacceptable sentences by coordinate Ewe-English bilinguals used in this study is as a result of interference from English. One thing, the researcher observed, that made respondents produce this English-influenced constructions is that the English influence does not affect meaning in these constructions. Those who speak Ewe and who are not necessarily scholars of the language can understand them. The researcher tested this conclusion by approaching some speakers of Ewe, literate and illiterate, to find out their reactions to these English influenced constructions in order to discuss this interference issue from a broad point of view, especially those of the native speakers of Ewe. All native speakers of Ewe agreed that these constructions were strange to Ewe, with one specifically stating that the constructions were ‘English sentences using Ewe words’, a proof that the English interference on Ewe in the use of ellipsis is real.

CONCLUSION

Focusing on the use of the cohesive device of ellipsis among Ewe-English coordinate bilinguals, this paper shows that second languages of bilinguals are equally capable of interfering with their first languages, making interference a mutual phenomenon between bilinguals' languages. The popular belief in contact linguistics that only bilinguals' first languages interfere with their second languages is thus not tenable.

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