

THE USE OF NEGATIVE CONCORD IN ENGLISH AND LINGALA: A MORPHO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper endeavors to compare English and Lingala as far as the use of negative concord is concerned with regard to Morphology and Semantics. After the description on the use of negative concord in both languages, it has been found that the two languages are similar at the morphological level since they use two or more negative forms in the same sentence to express a single semantic negation. The disparities have occurred at the semantic level, where referring to negative concord in Standard English to render a single semantic negation is considered ungrammatical and a double negation reading is attributed to it, i.e., a positive meaning. In contrast, the use of negative concord in the Lingala language is allowable since it is used to express the negation. The study has revealed that the two languages coincide at morphological level since in both languages two negative elements are used in the same sentence and also negative concord is used to express the emphasis in English as well as in Lingala.

Keywords: Morphology- Semantics- Comparison- Usage- Negative Concord.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Blanchette (2013) and Tubau (2008) explain that sentences with multiple negative elements corresponding to a single semantic negation are called “Negative Concord.” For Corblin et al. (2004, p. 427), “negative concord is the general term for cases where multiple occurrences of negative constituents express a single negation.” Discussing negative concord, Thornton et al. (2016) state that in negative concord, sentences with two negation elements may be interpreted as sentences with a single negation. Zwaan et al. (2006) observe that negative concord is generally regarded as non- standard English. In contrast, double negation is usually considered Standard English. Schiller et al. (2017) claim that in languages, two negative markers can cancel each other out and, in turn, creates a non- negated form of words; thus, logically, two negative markers result in a positive one. For example, not impossible is logically equivalent to possible.

For this research paper, we stick to the idea that negative concord is the use of two or more negative constituents in the same sentence to convey a single semantic negation. It can be noted that negative concord varies from one language to another like the other grammatical constructions found in natural languages. This is the reason why both, speakers and language learners need to learn how negative concord is used in a specific language.

The aims of this paper are to investigate the meaning imparted by a negative concord sentence in English and Lingala languages, and to sort out their similarities and disparities at morphological and semantic levels. To achieve the aims, the following questions need to find responses herein:

- 1) Do negative concord sentences express the same meaning in English and Lingala?
- 2) What difficulty can be faced by the learners of one of the two languages as a Foreign Language at the negative concord level?

We can therefore hypothesize that:

- 1) Negative concord sentences do not express the same meaning in English and Lingala. Negative concord in Standard English is considered ungrammatical, whereas in the Lingala language it is used as a normal declarative negative sentence structure.
- 2) The difficulty that can be faced by learners of one of the two languages as a foreign language at negative concord level is the one of semantics.

To carry out this investigation, the Qualitative method with the - Semantic approach within the contrastive framework has been used. The Qualitative method helps the researcher to describe how negative concord is used in each of the languages under study; the morphological approach helps to analyze the different negative morphemes used in both English and Lingala languages to form negative concord sentences; concerning the Semantic approach, this one is helpful herein since it helps us to discover the meaning expressed by negative concord sentences in both languages.

1.1 The Use of Negative Concord in English and Lingala Languages

This section describes the use of negative concord in both English and Lingala in order to point out their similarities and dissimilarities in the next section and evaluate their seriousness in the learning of one of these two languages by non- native speakers.

1.2 Negative Concord in the English Language

Negative Concord has attracted the attention of too many researchers nowadays as it has been shown in our introduction section, and the main understanding of all this research reveals that the Negative Concord is the use of two or more negative elements in the same sentence (clause) to express a single semantic meaning. All this research tries to show that at a descriptive point of view, referring to Negative Concord is considered ungrammatical in Standard English. Alanazi (2013, p. 21) states that "negative concord is expressed when two negative constituents, a negative particle and an N- word, contribute negation only once."

Note that Blanchette (2013), Tubau (2008), Corblin et al. (2004), Thornton et al. (2016), Zwaan et al. (2006), Schiller et al. (2017) and many others have worked on Negative Concord in the English language.

As said earlier negative concord refers to the use of two or more negative constituents in the same sentence to impart the same semantic negation. This is illustrated in (1).

(1) a. I don't have nothing in my bag. (A sentence produced by a learner of English at University of Kisangani).

(Meaning: I have something in my bag).

b. I haven't done nothing wrong. (Larousse, 2011, p. 179).

(Meaning: I have done something wrong).

c. John didn't eat nothing. (Blanchette, 2015, p. 123).

(Meaning: John ate something).

d. Nobody didn't eat. (Blanchette, 2015, p. 123).

(Meaning: everybody ate).

The examples in (1) show that in Standard English negative concord sentences do not express the negative meaning, in contrast, double negation meaning, i.e., positive meanings. So in Standard English referring to negative concord to render a single semantic negation is considered incorrect even though this is allowable in other dialects of British English. The examples, in (1) in Standard English to express negative meaning are then as shown, in (2).

(2) a. I have nothing in my bag.

b. I have done nothing wrong.

c. John ate nothing.

d. Nobody ate.

All examples in (2) are declarative negative sentences since they are expressed by using no-negation. The negative meanings may also be expressed by using not- negation as, for instance, in (3).

(3) a. I haven't anything in my bag.

b. I haven't done anything wrong.

c. John didn't eat anything.

Referring to Negative Concord in Standard English seems ambiguous since it gives room to two main interpretations to the interlocutor. That is, a positive or an affirmative meaning, which refers to the Double Negation principle in which it is stated that when two negative elements are used in the same clause, they cancel each other out. And finally, a negative meaning which is not well expressed in Standard English even though the latter is admissible in many other dialects of the English language. Blanchette et al. (2018), Zwaan et al. (2006) and many others assert that referring to negative concord to render a negative meaning is ungrammatical and stands for non- standard English.

From Blanchette et al., Zwaan et al. 's statements, it is understood that if a learner of English is referring to negative concord to render the negative meaning, he/ she is using a non- standard English which is known to be ungrammatical.

1.2.1 The Use of Negative Concord in Standard English

The present subsection discusses the context in which negative concord is admissible in Standard English.

Note that negative concord is not only to be avoided in Standard English but also to be used when expressing the emphasis and in that context the meaning is positive

(4) a. They didn't come without money. (Emphasis).

(Meaning: they came with money).

b. I am not incapable of teaching English. (Emphasis).

(Meaning: I am capable of teaching English).

c. The son couldn't stay unpunished.

(Meaning: The son was punished).

1.3 Negative Concord in the Lingala Language

Lingala is a bantu language which is used as a vehicular language in a major part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is used by the inhabitants in their everyday conversation, i.e., at home, school, church, market, court, fishing, hunting, to name only these.

The present point also needs a thorough analysis since it will help us to see if the differences which may occur can cause difficulties to the Lingala learners of EFL.

We already mentioned that negative concord stands for the use of two or more negative elements in the same sentence (clause) to render a single semantic negation. Negative concord structure is also observable in the Lingala language as illustrated, in (5).

(5) a. Tɛ! nazangi elɔkɔ tɛ. (Biblia Bangala in 2 Kings 4: 13).

'Not, I miss thing not.'

(No, I do not miss anything).

b. Tɛ! koboma ye tɛ. (Biblia Bangala in 1 Samuel 26: 9).

'Not, kill him not.'

(No, do not kill him).

c. Basi na bango bakokoka ata kolela bango tɛ. (Biblia Bangala in Job 27: 15).

‘Wives of them cannot weep them not.’

(Their widows cannot weep for them).

d. Nasali ata eləkə məkə ya mabe tɛ. (Biblia Bangala in Psalms 59: 5).

‘I did not thing one of wrong not.’

(I didn't do anything wrong).

From these examples, it is observed that negative concord is used in Lingala to express the negation. For example, in (5c) where two negative elements are used, i.e., ata: not, no and tɛ: not, no. If we translate literally, it could be “wives of them will succeed not to weep them not.” This sentence could also express the negative meaning with a single negative marker, as “basi na bango bakokoka kolela bango tɛ.” (Their widows will not weep for them). This is the same thing in (5d).

From this description, it is established that the use of negative concord in the Lingala language to render a single semantic negation is admissible.

1.3.1 The Use of Negative Concord in Lingala

Negative concord is used in the Lingala language to express the negation. For example, in (6).

(6) Naboi nakosala yango tɛ.

‘I refuse I can do it not.’

(I refuse; I cannot do it).

This sentence expresses a negative meaning in Lingala even though there are two negations. The finite verb “naboi: I refuse” is by itself negative and it does not need another negative marker as for our case “tɛ: not” to be non-assertive. But from a descriptive point of view, the sentence is correct, and it imparts a negative meaning. Negative concord is also referred to in the Lingala language to express the emphasis, as illustrated in (7).

(7) a. Tɛ, nakoki kəkənde kuna tɛ.

‘Not, I can go there not.’

(No, I can not go there).

b. Tɛ, mokonzi, ezala boye tɛ. (Biblia Bangala in Genesis 19: 18).

‘Not, chief, it will be like that not.’

(Not, Chief. Let it not be like that).

Note that in the Lingala language, the negator *ata* is also used in a declarative negative sentence to emphasize the negation, as shown in (5d).

(5) d. Nasali ata elókò mókò ya mabe tɛ. (Biblia Bangala in Psalms 59: 5).

‘I did not thing one of wrong not.’

(I didn't do anything wrong).

2.0 A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS ON THE USE OF NEGATIVE CONCORD IN ENGLISH AND LINGALA LANGUAGES

2.1 Overview on Contrastive Analysis

The Contrastive studies went ahead in discovering and predicting the learning difficulties by conducting systematic comparisons between the native language and the target language of the learners (Fries, 1945). Odlin (1989) states that the comparing process between the first and the second language leads to language transfer. For Klein (1986), the contrastive hypothesizes that second language acquisition is conditioned by either positive transfer or harmful transfer/interference between the first and second language differences. Based on the above quotations, we can assert that if the learners find some words or structures of the target language similar with the mother tongue, the learners perform a positive language transfer. In contrast, if the second language words or structures are dissimilar from the mother tongue, this leads to a negative language transfer (error). Widyastuti and Victoria (2022, p. 74) state that “historically, second language acquisition was begun from the contrastive analysis in which the learners compare their first and second language. Though the study is quite old, however, it is still useful for the truly beginners, especially in EFL context.”

It is to be noted that serious studies into contrastive analysis began with Robert Lado’s 1957 book, *Linguistics Across Culture*. Its central tenets and other observations on second language acquisition became increasingly influential in the 1960s and 1970s. It built upon ideas set out in linguistic relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which believed that language structures affect cognitive thinking. This led to the automatic transferring of one language’s rules to another.

Robert Lado (1957, p. 2) argues that,

individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture-both productively and when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives.

Many learners start the acquisition of a foreign/ second language by trying to find first the meaning of words or sentences in their mother- tongues (first languages) and then they translate them into the target language, that is to say, many second/ foreign language learners think first in their mother-tongues before thinking in the target language. For many learners, the target language must work similarly with their mother-tongues or first languages. If the element of

the target language doesn't fit with the one of the mother- tongue, they put the question to say for example, why this in French and not in English? Concerning this way of thinking of the learners, Robert Lado (1957, p. 2) says that... "those elements that are similar to this native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult."

2.2 Morphological Commonalities and Divergences

Danesi (2004, p. 12) explains that "the study of morphological systems includes determining not only how words are formed, but also what constitutes a word, and how units smaller than words, called morphemes, convey meaning."

In this subsection, we determine morphemes used in both English and Lingala languages to express the negation by sorting out their commonalities and disparities.

2.2.1 Morphological Commonalities

English and Lingala languages are similar at morphological level regarding negative concord because both English and Lingala use two or more negative forms in a negative concord sentence. Consider (1a) for English and (5b) for Lingala.

(1) a. I don't have nothing in my bag.

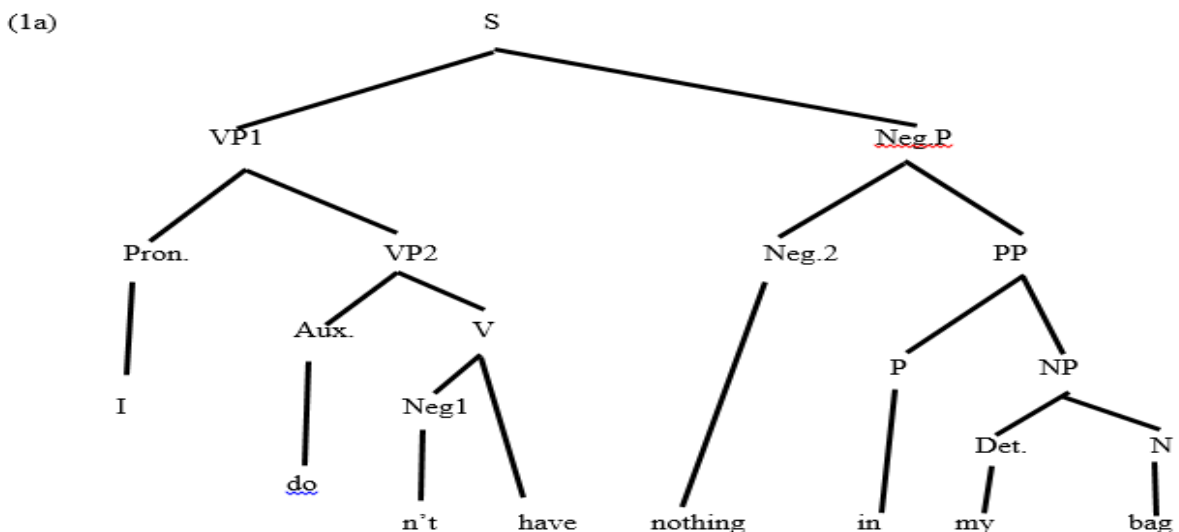
In this example, the speaker has used two negative forms to render a single semantic negation, namely not and nothing. And this is the same thing for the Lingala sentence (5b) below.

(5) b. Tε! Koboma ye tε. (Biblia Bangala in 1 Samuel 26: 9).

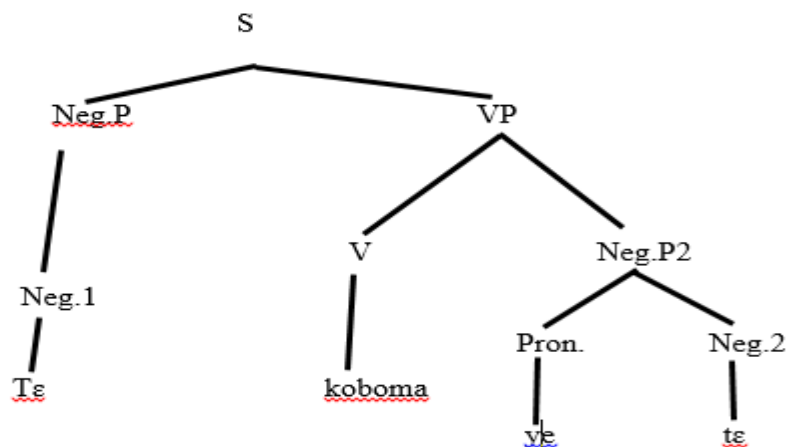
'Not, kill him not.'

(No, don't kill him).

The negative marker "tε" is used twice in this sentence to render a single semantic negation. Let us represent them in the tree diagram below.



(5b)



2.2.2 Morphological Divergences

English and Lingala languages are not almost different at this level if not the use of the same negative form in the same sentence as observed in the Lingala language. Our example (5b) illustrates this. Another element of divergences is that in the Lingala language, the negator *ata* is also used in a declarative negative sentence to emphasize the negation, as shown in (5d).

2.3 Semantic Similarities and Dissimilarities

Discussing semantics, Riemer (2010, p. 6) states that semantics is “the study of meaning.” Brown and Miller (2013, p. 399) observe that “semantics is the study of meaning”. They continue by stating that in current usage, semantics is usually taken to be the study of the language code rather than the use of language in context, which is seen as the province of pragmatics. On this view, they state that semantics deals with lexical words, the relations between them, and how the meanings of words combine to yield the meaning of phrases, and the meanings of phrases combine to yield the meaning of clauses. In the present study, semantics refers to the real meaning imparted by a negative concord sentence in both English and Lingala languages. The reason why, the present subsection tries to find out the areas of similarities and differences between English and Lingala negative concord sentences with regard to semantics.

2.3.1 Semantic Similarities

The targeted languages, that is, English and Lingala are similar at semantic level with regard to negative concord only when used to express the emphasis and in this context they impart the positive meaning. The examples in (4) for English and (7) for Lingala illustrate this.

(4) a. They didn’t come without money (Emphasis).

(Meaning: they came with money).

b. I am not incapable of teaching English. (Emphasis).

(Meaning: I am capable of teaching English).

c. The son couldn't stay unpunished.

(Meaning: the son was punished).

(7) a. Tε, nakoki kəkənde kuna tε.

‘Not, I can go there not.’

(No, I cannot go there).

(Meaning: I stay here).

b. Tε, mokonzi, ezala boye tε. (Biblia Bangala in Genesis 19: 18).

‘Not, chief, it is that

2.3.2 Semantic Dissimilarities

From a descriptive point of view, English and Lingala languages are not only similar, but also different at semantic level concerning the use of negative concord. In Standard English, the use of negative concord to render a single semantic negation is considered non-standard and is attributed a double negation meaning, that is, the negative markers cancel each other out and impart an affirmative meaning. Let us exemplify this in (1a) a sentence produced by a learner of English at University of Kisangani.

(1) a. I don't have nothing in my bag. (A sentence produced by a learner of English at University of Kisangani).

In using these two negative markers, i.e., not and nothing in the same sentence to render a single semantic negation, from a descriptive point of view, not and nothing cancel each other out and the sentence conveys a positive meaning. The conveyed meaning is then, ‘I have something in my bag.’

Note on the contrary that, in the Lingala language, negative concord is used to express a negative meaning as shown in (5c).

(5) c. Basi na bango bakokoka ata kolela bango tε.

‘Their wives will not succeed to weep them not.’

(Their widows will not weep for them).

In (5c), the Lingala language has used negative concord to express the negative meaning. This shows that from a descriptive point of view, the use of negative concord to render a negative meaning is admissible in the Lingala language. These dissimilarities between English and Lingala languages at semantic level may have a serious incidence on the learners of EFL and also to the English speakers who will desire to learn Lingala as a Foreign Language.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

English and Lingala are from different origins. English is a language from Low West Germanic language of the Indo-European family of languages, whereas Lingala is a Central Bantu language that belongs to the largest African languages phylum: The Niger- Congo.

The analysis on the use of negative concord in both languages has revealed that negative concord sentences have the same form, i.e.; they use two negative constituents in the same sentence. The difference springs from the fact that negative concord sentences are considered ungrammatical in Standard English and they express positive meanings.

In contrast, in Lingala negative concord sentences are used to convey the negation. These results confirm the first hypothesis according to which negative concord is considered ungrammatical in Standard English, whereas in Lingala it is used as a normal declarative negative sentences structure. Another element of difference is that in the Lingala language the same negator may be used twice or more in the same sentence to express the negation. For instance, (5b) and (7a). These disparities at semantic and morphological levels may cause problems to the learners of the other language. These also partially confirm the second hypothesis which states that the difficulty that can be faced by the learners of one of the two languages as a foreign language is the one of semantics.

The results of the present research concord with the one of Zwaan et al. (2006) who assert that negative concord is generally regarded as non- standard English and Schiller et al. (2017) who also state that in languages, two negative markers can cancel each other out, in turn, creates a non- negated form of words; thus, logically, two negative markers result in a positive one.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The present research paper has been devoted to Morpho- semantic comparison between English and Lingala languages as far as the use of negative concord is concerned. After the description on the use of negative concord in both English and Lingala languages, it has been found that both languages are more similar at morphological level since they use two or more negative forms in the same sentence to express a single semantic negation. The disparities have occurred at the level of semantics where referring to negative concord in Standard English to render a single semantic negation is considered ungrammatical and a double negation reading is attributed to it, i.e., a positive meaning. In contrast, the use of negative concord in the Lingala language is allowable since it is used to express the negation. The study has revealed that the two languages coincide only when negative concord is used to express the emphasis. These disparities between Standard English and the Lingala language on the use of negative concord may cause serious difficulties to the learners of the other language as a Foreign Language.

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