THE USE OF NEGATIVE POLARITY ITEMS IN ENGLISH AND SWAHILI: A SYNTACTICO – SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The present paper contrasts English with the Swahili language at the level of syntax and semantics as far as the use of negative polarity items is concerned in order to foretell how divergences may hinder the learning of the other language as a foreign language.

After the description of the structure on the use of negative polarity items in both languages, it has been observed that both English and Swahili coincide on the use of negative polarity items since both use negative polarity items to express the negation and NPIs are preceded by a negative marker in order to be non- assertive. The results have also revealed that in Standard English, negative polarity items cannot be used in the subject position in a declarative negative sentence instead we use pronouns, such as no one, nobody, nothing, etc., therefore, in the Swahili language, a negative polarity item may be used in the subject position and followed by the negative marker without an incidence on the meaning of the sentence. All these dissimilarities between English and Swahili languages on the use of negative polarity items may cause problems to the learners of the other language as a foreign language.

Keywords: Negation- Syntax- Semantics- Negative Polarity- Structure.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Negative Polarity items have interested many other researchers in our era as one can notice in our review of literature. Baker (1970, p. 179) defines negative polarity items as, "negative-polarity items are appropriate in structures within the scope of negations, whereas affirmative-polarity items are appropriate elsewhere." Penka & Zeijlstra (2010, p. 772) state that "Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) are words or expressions that can only occur in contexts that are in some sense negative." For the present study, negative polarity items are words or expressions that impose a negative environment for their use.

The aims of this article are to describe the structure for the use of Negative Polarity Items (NPIs) in both English and Swahili languages; to investigate the meaning conveyed by NPIs in English and Swahili languages; and to find out their commonalities and divergences at syntactic and semantic levels. To reach the aims of the present research, these questions need to find answers in this article:

    i.   Are English and Swahili negative polarity items used in the same way in a full sentence?

ii.   What is the meaning conveyed by Negative Polarity Items in both English and Swahili sentences?

iii.   What difficulty can be experienced by the learner of the other language as a foreign language regarding the use of Negative Polarity Items?

Therefore, we can hypothesize that:

i.   Yes, they are since in both languages Negative Polarity Items to express a negative meaning are always preceded by a negative particle.

ii.   The meaning conveyed by Negative Polarity Items in both English and Swahili sentences is negative meaning.

iii.   The learner of the other language can experience the problem of semantics.

To carry out this research, the Qualitative method with the Syntactic, the morphological, the Semantic, and the Contrastive approaches are used. The Qualitative method helps the researcher to describe the structure of Negative Polarity Items in each of the languages understudy; the syntactic approach is important in this research paper since it helps us to analyze the syntactic structure for the use of NPIs in each language understudy; the morphological approach is helpful herein because it helps us to describe the different constituents used in English and Swahili sentences in order to have syntactic negation; concerning the Semantic approach, this one is important in this research because it helps us to find out the real meaning expressed by Negative Polarity Items in English and Swahili languages; as far as the Contrastive approach is concerned, it is used in this study because it helps the study to contrast the use of negative polarity items in English and Swahili languages at syntactic and semantic levels in order to point out their commonalities and divergences.

2.0 THE USE OF NEGATIVE POLARITY IN ENGLISH AND SWAHILI LANGUAGES

The present section is devoted to the use of negative polarity items in English and Swahili languages so that we can sort out their commonalities and divergences in the next section and try to evaluate their seriousness in the learning of these two languages by non- native speakers.

2.1 Negative Polarity in the English Language

Many researchers have conducted their research on the use of negative polarity items (NPIs) as this is shown in the lines below. All these research shows that negative polarity items are not in themselves negative in order to be so, they need to be preceded by a negative particle/expression. Negative polarity items (NPIs) as mentioned above, "are words or expressions that can only occur in contexts that are in some sense negative." Penka & Zeijlstra (2010, p. 772). Kane (2021, p. 104) asserts that "anybody, anything, ever, etc. are not themselves negative words. They need to be used with not to give a negative meaning."

This topic has been tackled by many other researchers, for instance, Blanchette (2015); Kane (2021); Giannakidou et al. (2017); Penka & Zeijlstra (2010); Ahti- Veikko (2021); Ladusaw (1996); to name only these.

As stated above, negative polarity items are words or expressions that impose a negative environment for their use. Baker (1970, p. 179) argues that "negative- polarity items are appropriate in structures within the scope of negations, whereas affirmative- polarity items are appropriate elsewhere. Let us mention here that negative polarity items, i.e., any, anybody, anything, ever, at all, etc. are not in themselves negative words even though they impose a negative environment for being used. To be so, they need to be preceded by a negative marker. For this, Blanchette (2015), Kane (2021), Downing and Locke (2006) state that the 'any' words in English (any, anyone, anybody, anything, anywhere) are not in themselves negative. In order to be used in a negative clause they must be preceded by not or any negative word. Let us consider the example (1) below to exemplify it.

(1)

        a. *My parents went anywhere yesterday.
   **b. My parents didn't go anywhere yesterday.**

The sentence (1a) is not non- assertive since it is not preceded by not or a negative word. The meaning expressed in the contrary is assertive, i.e., my parents went everywhere yesterday. To be non- assertive anywhere should be preceded by not, as in (1b).

Negative polarity items depend on not or other negative words to be non- assertive. Let us use the tree diagram to make their constituents clearer.

(1a)
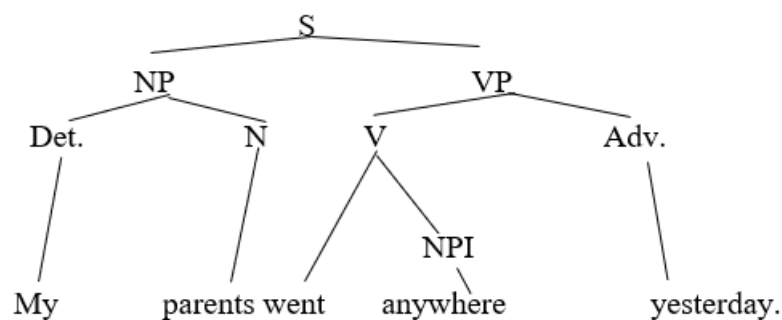
(1b)
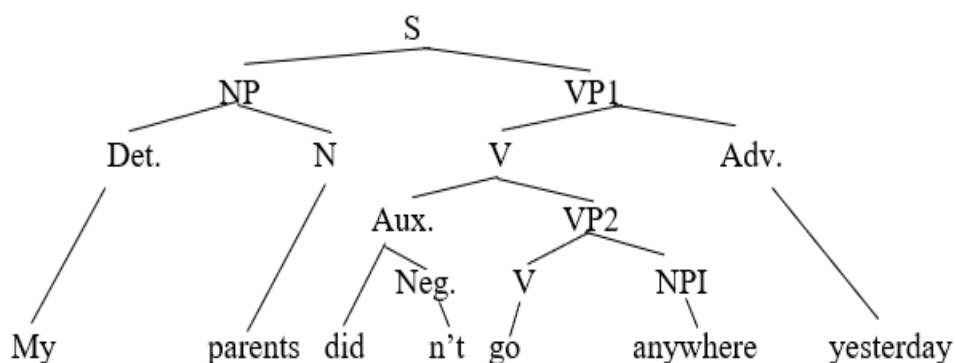
2.2.1 The Structure of Negative Polarity Items in the English Language

The subsection shed light on the environment in which negative polarity items are used. Huddleston (2005) has provided the main negative polarity items in English that he has labeled non- affirmatives. They are any and its compounds (for example, anything, anybody, anywhere, etc.); ever, either, at all, yet, never, seldom, rarely, hardly ever, etc. Downing & Locke (2006) explain that any words in English (any, anyone, anybody, anything, anywhere) are not in themselves negative. In order to be used in a negative clause they must be preceded by not or a negative word. To illustrate this statement, let us use the sentences in the example (2.)

(2)

      a. ***I have any money in my pocket.**
      b. **I have not any money in my pocket.**

Based on this example, the sentence (2a) is not a negative sentence even if there is the presence of 'any.' Since 'any' is not preceded by 'not' or another negative word or expression it is not a negative sentence. Then, it means 'I have some/all money in my pocket.' The tree diagram below has presented the sentence with its all constituents clearly.
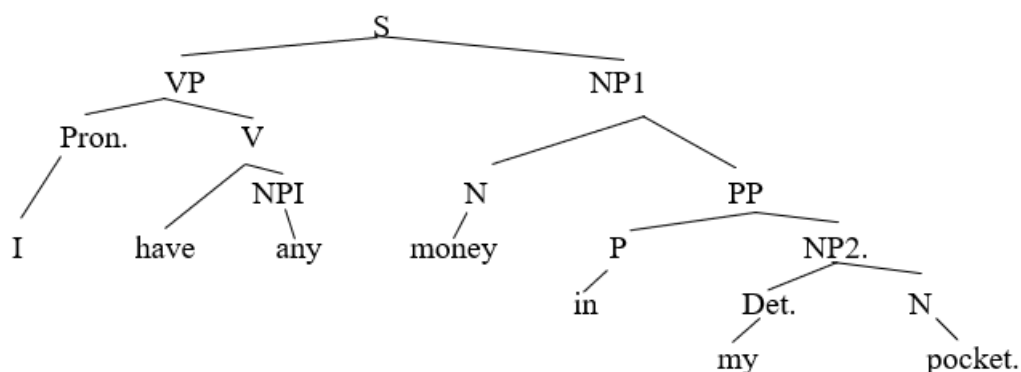
So the sentence (2b) is at the same time syntactically and semantically negative since the negative polarity item is preceded by the negative marker not. Let us represent it once more thanks to the tree diagram.
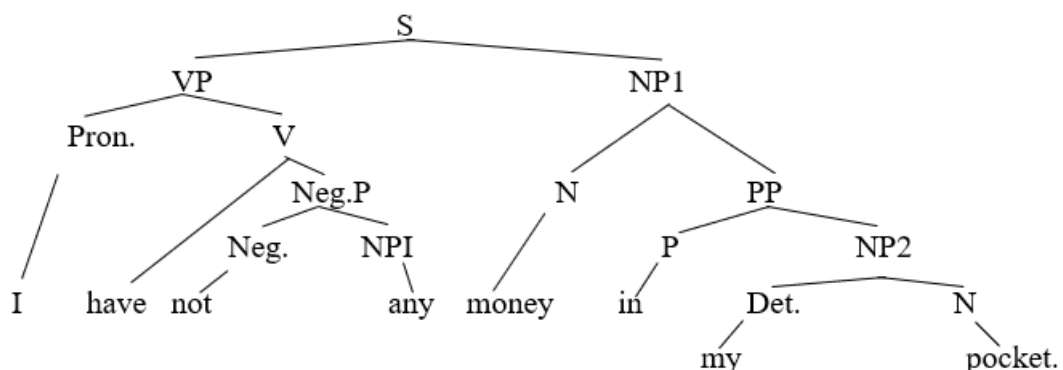
Quirk et al. (1982, p. 171) comment that non- assertive forms can not normally be subject in a negative sentence; instead, we use pronouns, such as no one, nobody, nothing, etc.

Examples:

(3)

     a. *Anyone wasn't seen by John. (Quirk et al., 1982, p. 171).
     b. No one was seen by John. (Quirk et al., 1982, p. 171).
     c. John didn't see anyone. (Quirk et al., 1982, p. 171).

It is to be noted that apart from its negative structure, 'any' with its compounds are also used in interrogative sentences.

Illustrations:

(4)

     a. Have you any money? (Downing and Locke, 2006, p. 23).
     b. Do you know anyone called Stem? (Downing and Locke, 2006, p. 23).

This view is supported by Quirk et al. (1982) who state that we find any in the corresponding question and negation as in (5).

(5)

     a. Did he offer her any chocolates? (Quirk et al., 1982, p. 31).
     b. He didn't offer her any chocolates. (Quirk et al., 1982, p. 31).

Based on the statements of different authors mentioned above and with our own, we propose this syntactic structure for the use of negative polarity items for the syntactic and semantic negation in the English language.

Structure for NPIs in English: Syntactic Negation = Negative Marker + Negative Polarity Item.

2.3 Negative Polarity in the Swahili Language

2.3.1 A Brief History of the Swahili Language

Nurse & Philippson (2003) as cited in Walsh (2019, p. 121) assert that Swahili (Kiswahili) is a Bantu language, and so a member of the wider Niger- Congo family, one of the four main African language phyla. Its name is derived from Arabic Sawāhil 'coast,' hence Waswahili 'people of the coast' and Kisawahili 'language (and culture) of the coast.' Shigeki (2019, p. 1166) writes that "the expansion of Swahili into the inner portion of Africa has routinely been explained by researchers in terms of social and economic reasons, taking into account activities of Arab traders, expansion of Islam and/ or Christianity, colonization, development of mining in Shaba region and other such factors." Kihore, 1976 and Nurse & Spear, 1985 as cited in Shigeki (2019, p. 166) state that "the name Swahili originates from the plural Arabic noun for 'Coast,' Sawāhil. Swahili came into existence as a result of an extended process of contact between East African Coastal people and Arabs as well as with Persians and Indians to a lesser extent."

Many researchers support that the Swahili language has been introduced in DR Congo by the penetration of Arab traders for socio- economic (slavery, i.e., accumulation of workers, and Christianity) reasons and based themselves in Zanzibar. For more details, consult, Fabian, 1986, Nurse & Spear, 1985, etc.

Concerning the Tshopo province, Bokula et al. (1979, p. 27) note that "les voies de communication Lubumbashi- Kindu- Kisangani ainsi que l'axe routier Beni- Kisangani déversent chaque année à Kisangani des centaines de Swahili phones provenant du Shaba et Kivu." [the communication ways Lubumbashi- Kindu- Kisangani and the road axis Beni- Kisangani spill each year in Kisangani hundreds of Swahili speakers from Lubumbashi- Kindu- Kivu].

It can be noted that the Swahili language is used as a vernacular language in the Tshopo province. It is also used in Kisangani town and at some villages as the language of instruction. Bokula et al. (1979, p. 27) state that "Kisangani devient ainsi le center le plus important pour l'expansion de la langue." [Kisangani becomes then the most important center for the expansion of the language in the Tshopo province].

2.3.2 Negative Polarity in the Swahili Language

The section is devoted to negative polarity in the Swahili language in order to be contrasted with the English language in the next section so that we can point out their similarities and dissimilarities.

As mentioned earlier, negative polarity items are words or expressions that impose a negative environment (structure) for being used. Negative polarity items in Swahili are: hata: any, kitu hata moja: anything, fazi hata moja: anywhere, mtu hata moja: anyone, hata mtu: anybody. These negative polarity items are used in the sentences below.

(6) a. Hakuna mtu hata moja kumungini.

   'Not there is anyone in village.'

   (There is not anyone at the village).

  b. Hakupeleka kitu hata moja kumikono.

   'Not he/she brought anything in hand.'

   (He/ she did not bring anything in his/ her hand).

  c. Siwezi kuenda fazi hata moja leo.

   'Not I can go anywhere today.'

   (I cannot go anywhere today).

From these examples that negative polarity items in Swahili to be non- assertive are always preceded by a negative particle, such as - si, - hu, - ha or a verb expressing a negative meaning.

2.3.3 Syntactic Structure of Negative Polarity in Swahili

Concerning the syntactic structure of NPIs in the Swahili language, it has been shown that they are always used in a negative environment, as it is exemplified in (7).

(7) a. Sitaleta kitu hata mɔja kwako.

‘Not I bring anything yours.’

(I do not bring anything at yours).

b. Hautatoka fazi hata moja leo.

‘Not you will go anywhere today.’

(You will not go anywhere today).

c. Mtu hata moja hayafika hapa!

‘Anyone not he/she arrived here!’

(No one has arrived here).

All these sentences are negative sentences since NPIs (negative polarity items) are preceded by a negative marker, but the structure of the sentence (7c) may have an incidence on Swahili learners of English and vice versa. Quirk et al. (1982, p. 171) state that "non- assertive forms cannot normally be the subject in a negative sentence; instead we use pronouns, such as no one, nobody, nothing, etc."

From a descriptive point of view, we propose this syntactic structure for the use of negative polarity items for the syntactic and semantic negation in the Swahili language.

Structure for NPIs in Swahili: Syntactic Negation = Negative Marker + Negative Polarity Item. Or

Negative Polarity Item + Negative Marker + The Verb.

2.4 Contrastive Study on the Use of Negative Polarity in English and Swahili Languages

As a recall, Blanchette (2015), Kane (2021), Downing & Locke (2006) state that the ‘any’ words in English (any, anyone, anybody, anything, anywhere) are not in themselves negative. In order to be used in a negative clause they must be preceded by not or any negative word/expression.

In the present study, negative polarity items are words or expressions that impose a negative environment for being used. As mentioned above, negative polarity items, i.e., any, anybody, anything, ever, at all, etc. are not in themselves negative words even though they impose a negative environment for being used. To be so, they need to be preceded by a negative marker.

2.5 Morphological Commonalities and Divergences

2.5.1 Morphological Commonalities

The commonalities between English and Swahili languages at morphological level on the use of negative polarity items spring on the fact that in both languages, any for being non- assertive, have to be preceded by not or any negative word/expression. The instances in (8) instance this.

(8) a. We weren't brought anywhere yesterday.

　　Negative Constituents: not + anywhere … = negative.

　　　　　　　　　　　Neg.　NPI

　b. Hukupeleke kitu hata moja hapa.

　Negative Constituents: hu + kitu hata moja … = negative.

　　　　　　　　　　　Neg.　NPI

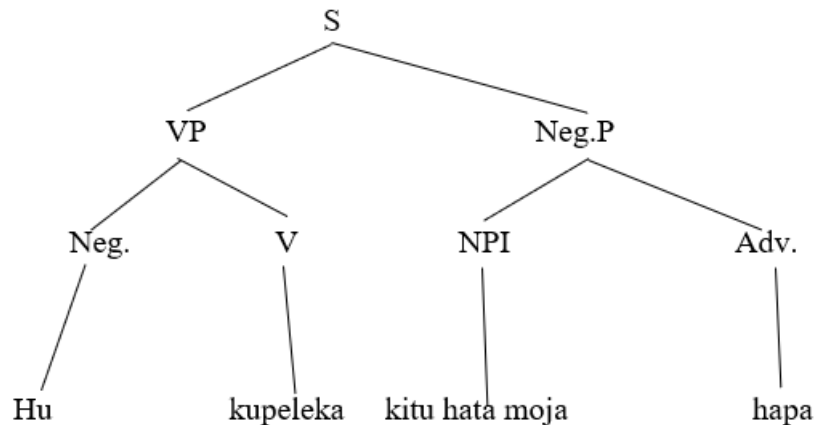'Not you brought anything here.'

　(You didn't bring anything).

Both examples, i.e., (8a) and (8b) to be non- assertive, negative polarity items are preceded by the negative markers n't and - hu in English and Swahili respectively. Let us represent these two sentences in the tree diagram below to show how negative polarity items are preceded by the negative markers n't and - hu.

(8b)
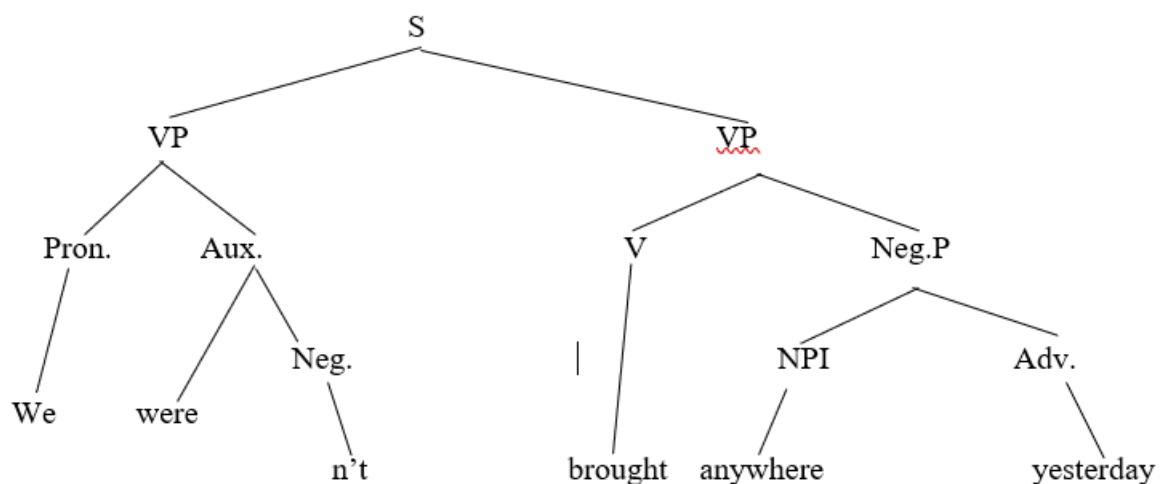
(8b)

2.5.2 Morphological Divergences

After the analysis on the use of negative polarity items in English and Swahili languages, we have found that both languages are very similar at morphological level since we did not find out the features of divergences explaining these disparities.

2.6 Syntactic Similarities and Dissimilarities

Johnson & Johnson (1999, p. 313) explain that syntax is traditionally a component of grammar, alongside the lexicon (lexis) and inflectional morphology, which determines how words combine to form sentences. The subsection explores the syntactic similarities and dissimilarities between English and Swahili languages concerning the use of negative polarity items.

2.6.1 Syntactic Similarities

English and Swahili languages are very similar at syntactic level concerning the structure and the context in which negative polarity items are used. Both languages agree at this point since first, it has been found out that negative polarity items are often used in negative contexts. Second, both English and Swahili languages have shown that for negative polarity items to be non- assertive, they have to be preceded by not or another negative word/expression as exemplified, in (8a) and (8b).

2.6.2 Syntactic Dissimilarities

English and Swahili languages are very different at syntactic level with regard to the placement of negative polarity items. In the Swahili language, a negative polarity item may be used as the subject of the sentence and followed by the negative marker, in contrast, this is not allowable in Standard English. To support this, Quirk et al. (1982, p. 171) comment that non- assertive forms cannot normally be subject in a negative sentence in Standard English in lieu we use pronouns, such as no one, nobody, nothing, etc.

Instance:

9) a. *Anything wasn't left in the room.

Structure: anything + not … = ungrammatical.

NPI   Neg.

b. Nothing was left in the room.

Structure: nothing + positive verb = negative.

Neg. Ind. P

c. There wasn't anything left in the room.

Structure: not + anything … = negative.

Neg.   NPI

d. Kitu hata moja haiko hapa.

Structure: Kitu hata moja + ha … = negative.

NPI   Neg.

'Anything isn't here.'

(There isn't anything here).

= Nothing is here.

These examples show that from a descriptive point of view, the sentence (9a) is incorrect in Standard English, however, the sentence (9d) is correct in the Swahili language.

2.6.3 Semantic Commonalities and Differences

According to Hornby (2000, p. 1209) semantics is "the study of the meanings of words and phrases." This subsection sorts out the semantic commonalities and differences between English and Swahili languages on the use of negative polarity items.

2.6.4 Semantic Commonalities

The commonalities between English and Swahili languages at semantic level on the use of negative polarity items are on the fact that in both languages negative polarity items are used to express the negation. For instance, in (8a) and (8b).

2.6.5 Semantic Differences

English and Swahili languages are not necessarily different in the use of negative polarity items at semantic level since in both languages negative polarity items are used to impart the negative meaning. The only differences may be that in the Swahili language when a negative polarity item is used in a sentence, it expresses two different meanings, namely literal and literary.

Another element of difference is that in Standard English, when a negative polarity item is used alone in a sentence, it expresses a positive meaning, i.e., every.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

English and Swahili languages are from different language families. Itolome (2024, p. 31) states that "English is a language from Low Western Germanic language of the Indo- European family of languages." Nurse & Philippson (2003) as cited in Walsh (2019, p. 121) assert that Swahili (Kiswahili) is a Bantu language, and so a member of the wider Niger- Congo family, one of the four main African language phyla.

The analysis on the use of Negative Polarity Items in English and Swahili languages has shown that both languages use two forms for the syntactic negation, that is, a negative marker and a negative polarity item. These results confirm the first hypothesis according to which English and Swahili languages are similar since in both languages Negative Polarity Items to express a negative meaning are always preceded by a negative particle. The difference has been found at the syntactic level since in the Swahili language Negative Polarity Items are used as the subject of the sentence, in the English language, in the contrary, the negative indefinite pronouns are used instead. As this was illustrated in (9b) and (9d). English and Swahili are very similar at semantic level because when a negative polarity item is preceded by a negative particle in the sentence, the sentence conveys a negative meaning. These results also support the second hypothesis which states that the meaning conveyed by Negative Polarity Items in both English and Swahili sentences is negative meaning. The disparity between English and Swahili languages at semantic level is that when a negative polarity item is used alone in an English sentence, it imparts a positive meaning. These partially confirm the third hypothesis of our study which asserts that the learner of the other language can experience the problem of semantics. Apart from the semantic dissimilarities, the analysis has also revealed that the two languages do not almost share the same structures and these also can cause problems to the learner of the other language as a foreign language.

The results of the present study accord with of my predecessors concerning the structure for NPIs to be non- assertive, for example, Blanchette (2015); Penka & Zeijlstra (2010); Giannakidou et al. (2017); Kane (2021); Ahti- Veikko (2021). All these works confirm as the results of the present study that NPIs are not in themselves negative to be so, they need to be preceded by a negative marker/expression.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The present paper has contrasted English with the Swahili language at syntactic and semantic levels as far as the use of negative polarity items was concerned in order to foretell how divergences may hinder the learning of the other language as a foreign language.

After the description of the two languages, it has been observed that both English and Swahili coincide on the use of negative polarity items since in both languages negative polarity items are used in a negative context and they are preceded by a negative marker in order to be non-assertive. The results have also revealed that in Standard English, negative polarity items cannot be used in a subject position in a declarative negative sentence instead we use pronouns, such as no one, nobody, nothing, etc., therefore, in the Swahili language, a negative polarity

item may be used in a subject position and followed by the negative marker without an incidence on the meaning of the sentence. All these dissimilarities between English and Swahili languages on the use of negative polarity items may cause problems to the learners of the other language as a foreign language.

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