

ON MORPHOLOGICAL VARIATION OF PLURAL NOUN MARKINGS IN ENGLISH AND OKPAMERI

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Abstract

The wrong markings of English plural nouns are usually noticeable in the utterances of Okpameri ESL learners. Therefore, this study seeks to contrast plural noun markings in English and Okpameri so as to see how these plural markings are morphologically realized in the languages. The study is predicated on Contrastive Analysis as the theoretical framework. The adoption of this theory is hinged on the conviction that the theory has observational, descriptive, and explanatory adequacies. Ibillo, being the central community in Okpameri, was selected as the field of research. A test instrument of 58 nouns with their pluralizations in English was requested to be translated to Okpameri language in order to establish the plural noun markings. Adopting a purposive sampling technique, four secondary schools at Ibillo community were selected. Fifty students from each of the school were selected. Students in SS 3 class who are Okpameri ESL learners were the subjects of the study. The study revealed areas of similarities and differences of plural noun markings in the two languages. The similarities indicate grammar universality while the differences revealed cultural variations in lexical structures. The study has revealed the likely problems Okpameri learners may be confronted with while using some of the Z₁ morphemes because they are not morphologically marked in Okpameri words. This study, therefore, concludes by recommending that language teachers are to come up with practical demonstrations of English plural noun markings in the second language being learnt. By so doing, the perceived difficulties in English plural noun markings will be minimized.

Keywords: Morphology, English, Okpameri, Culture, Plural Noun Marking.

Introduction

It is expedient to open a discussion in plural noun markings such as this with a brief discussion on what morphology is. This step is designed to give us a level playing ground for the task ahead. Morphology is the branch of linguistics that studies how words are formed or structured in a language. It studies the rules that govern the formation of words in a language (Tomori 1977, Adewusi 2004,

Ojo 2011, Ojo & Omolaiye 2020, Omolaiye 2023 among others). Carstairs-McCarthy (2002) corroborates this when he submits that morphology is concerned with the structure of words and the relationship that involves the morphemes that compose them. Fromkin and Rodman (1978) distinguish morphology from syntax while they view morphology as how morphemes are combined to form acceptable words in a language, syntax

is seen as how meaningful words are combined to form a meaningful grammatical expression or sentence. In essence, morphology comes into focus while considering the process of word formation as it deals with scrutiny of the internal structure of words (Omolaiye, 2023, p. 30). By implication, morphology is the study of morphemes of a language. In a nutshell, morphology could be defined as the scientific study of how words are formed or structured.

Farinde and Ojo (2005, p. 8) define morpheme as 'the smallest meaningful grammatical unit of language'. In the same manner, Adewusi (2014) describes a morpheme as the smallest meaningful element into which words can be analysed. In his "categories of theory of grammar", Halliday (1961) describes a morpheme as the smallest unit in rank scale that exerts a lot of influence on a word. Rank scale, in this sense, means the hierarchical arrangement of grammatical units of a language, such that the units of higher rank carry the patterns of the units immediately below their ranks in their structure (Jimoh, 2010, p. 43).

It is worthy of mentioning here that a morpheme has grammatical and semantic values. One of its values is its ability to account for meaning within the word. Consider the word 'farm' and its manifestations as used in the following:

- i. My father has a farm (a place – noun)
 - ii. The man is a farmer (an occupation – noun)
 - iii. He has farms (type of farm – plural noun)
 - iv. Ayo farms very well (habitual action verb – singular verb)
 - v. Farming is good (an occupation – gerundive noun)
 - vi. He farmed very well last year (past tense – verb)
 - vii. Ojo was farming while I was teaching (progressive aspect – verb)
- The above can be morphologically explained thus:
 farm – a free morpheme.
 Farmer – two morphemes: farm (free) + 'er' (bound) derivation with a noun affix
 Farms – two morphemes: farm (free) + 's' (bound) - singular verb inflection.
 Farmed – two morphemes: 'farm' (free) + 'ed' (bound) past tense inflection.
 Farming – two morphemes: farm (free) + ing (bound) gerundive noun inflection
 Farming – two morphemes: farm (free) + ing (bound) progressive inflection.
 Farms – two morphemes: farm (free) + 's' (bound) plural noun inflection.

In view of the above, it is crystal clear that a bound morpheme cannot stand alone for meaning realization. It rather depends on the root-word or free morpheme to perform syntactic and semantic functions. Hence, morpheme could be classified as 'free' and 'bound'. Free morpheme can be basically classified at two levels-free and bound morphemes. Free morpheme stands on its own without necessarily being associated with any other morphemes for syntactic and semantic realizations. A bound morpheme on the other hand cannot be in isolation to perform a syntactic or semantic function. It rather depends on a free morpheme to perform its function. Farinde and Ojo (2005, p. 16) identify two basic functions of a bound morpheme. These are:

- i. When attached to a word, a bound morpheme is capable of deriving another word class.
- ii. When attached to a word, it is capable of marking some grammatical categories like tense,

aspect, number, possession, degree of adjective and adverb.

Adewusi (2014) identifies the third morpheme which he refers to as “zero” morpheme. Zero morpheme, according to Adewusi, is a word whose inflection is not morphologically realized. A good example of zero morpheme in the English word is the noun ‘sheep’.

Linguistic scholars have described morphemes as affixes because of their morphological configuration and places of their realization in root-words. Affixation is one of the major morphological processes in word formation. It is a process in which bound morphemes are attached to the base word to form a new word. the morpheme attached are referred to as affixes (Omolaiye, 2023). It must be mentioned here that affixes are of different forms. Some of which are ‘prefix’, ‘suffix’, ‘multiple affix’, ‘infix’, ‘interfix’, zero affix’, ‘phonological affix’ among others.

Since this study is on ‘morphological variation’, the focus of this study is on inflectional markings that revealed areas of similarities and

differences in English and Okpameri plural noun markings. In view of this, English and Okpameri noun inflections are briefly examined below:

The English Inflectional Noun Morphemes

Crystal (1997) describes inflectional noun morphemes as the way in which words vary or inflect in order to express grammatical contrasts in a sentence such as a singular and plural noun. Alo (1995) sees noun morphemes as inflection that occurs in a word that brings about pluralization. Similarly, Jimoh (2010) sees plural noun formation as an inflectional change that occurs in the base or root-word. From the definitions given above, one thing is put to the fore-‘inflection’. Hence, a noun could be inflected to account for pluralization. Some of the plural markers in English are ‘s’, as in (boys), ‘e’ in (men), ‘ies’ in (ladies), ‘ee’ in (feet), ‘ice’ in (mice), ‘en’ in (oxen), ‘ren’ in (children) among others. The inflectional symbol that indicates plural noun inflection is ‘Z₁’. This could be represented in a table below:

Table 1: The English Plural Noun Inflectional Symbols and its description.

Word	Base/Free Form	Inflection	Symbol	Description
Boys	Boy	- s	+ Z ₁	Plural with linear segmentability
Men	Man	-s	+ Z ₁	Plural with vowel mutation
Ladies	Lady	-s	+ Z ₁	Plural with linear segmentability
Feet	Foot	-s	+ Z ₁	Plural with linear segmentability
Children	Child	-s	+ Z ₁	Plural with vowel mutation
Oxen	Ox	-s	+ Z ₁	Plural with linear segmentability
Sheep	Sheep	-∅	+ Z ₁	Plural zero morpheme

The table above has revealed two major positions in which plural noun markers occur in a word. Plural markers can be attached at the end of a singular noun in which case, such a morpheme could be referred to as a

suffix, while the ones that have vowels change at the middle of words are referred to as vowel mutation. It has also been observed that the noun ‘sheep’ that is a zero or null morpheme is realized by phonologically invisible

affix. In other words, the plural form of the sheep can be realized as a combination of ‘sheep’ with an added null affix for the plural.

The Okpameri Inflectional Noun Morphemes

Like the English inflectional noun morphemes, Okpameri words or nouns are morphologically marked for pluralization. However, their inflectional realizations are much different from English. Examples are shown in the table below:

Table2: Okpameri Plural Markers

Singular	Plural
Avbua (dog)	Eybua (dogs)
Ukpoh (house)	Ikpoh (house)
Ala (cow)	Eḷa
Eguo (shirt)	(cows) Iguo
Enyeh (snake)	(shirts) Inyeh,
Izili (goat)	Ilunyeh (snakes)
	Izili (goats)

The table above has revealed how Okpameri plural nouns are morphologically marked. This is done by changing the initial letter of the singular noun to indicate plural number. Just as we have in English, Okpameri also has zero morpheme. In other words, there are some words in Okpameri language that are not inflected for plural numbers. An example of such a noun is izili (goat). In view of the above, it is important to briefly discuss Okpameri as a language and its location in Nigeria.

A Brief Background of Okpameri Language

Elugbe (1989, p. 28) classifies Okpameri as one of the North-Western Edoid languages. Ekharo, Aliu and

Akanji (2007) corroborate this by citing Hakeem (2003) who classifies Okpameri as belonging to North-Western Edoid language in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. Okpameri is a group of people distinguishable by their common language and customs. This group comprises twenty-one (21) socio-cultural communities (Omolaiye, 2023, p. 9). As earlier mentioned, Okpameri natives and communities are found within the confines of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of the present day, Edo State which has Igarra as its headquarters. The Local Government is made up of thirty-four autonomous communities out of which over half are culturally and linguistically Okpameri. This implies that Okpameri is the language widely spoken in the local government.

The natives are predominantly farmers. A sizeable number of the female human population are garri producers. Some trade with the nearby villages and towns of Ishua and Ikare (in Akoko district of Ondo State) and Okene (in Kogi State). Okpameri practises religious syncretism (that is, the fusion of diverse religions, beliefs and traditions). However, two major religions (Christianity and traditional religion) dominate all the communities in Okpameri. In essence, Okpameri natives hold their tradition and custom to high esteem.

It must be added that 2006 human population census conducted in Edo State only shows the overall total of every local government area in the state. Hence, the overall population in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area is 262,110 (Oseghele, 2019). The total population does not really indicate the breakdown of the population into towns and villages so as to know the total human population in Okpameri linguistic environment. This might be attributed to political reasons.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Contrastive Analysis because it aims at comparing and contrasting features of two languages (as in the case of English and Okpameri). The choice of Contrastive Analysis is informed by its descriptive nature which makes it suitable for contrastive grammar. Also, the choice is based on the conviction that the theory satisfies the evaluation criteria. According to Halliday (1964, pp. 155-6), a good grammatical model must have three adequacies. These are 'observational', 'descriptive', and 'explanatory' adequacies. It is worthy of mentioning here that emphasis on Lado's CA (1957) 'linguistics across culture' as well as on the exposition and exemplification of the CA by other Lado-inspired contrastivists like James (1980), Bandjowidjojo (1972), Sander (1976), Gass and Selinker (2001), Josiah (2001) among others had been reviewed.

Contrastive linguists like Di Pioto (1971) and James (1980) report that modern contrastive linguistics began with Lado's *Linguistics Across Culture* in 1957. Lado's work is built on the earlier works of Weinreich (1953) on the linguistic integration of immigrants in the United State of America (Ojo, 1996, Omolaiye, 2013).

Contrastive Analysis (CA) has been variously defined by different scholars. James (1980, p. 3) sees Contrastive Analysis as a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted two-valued typologies. This is why Josiah (2001) describes CA as a culture of contrasting two different languages. Valdman (1966) summarizes the role of CA to be the comparison of equivalent portions of two languages for the purpose of isolating the probable problems that speakers of one language will have in learning the other (as cited in Josiah &

Udoudom, 2012, p. 73). Thus, CA is concerned with a pair of language that is founded on the assumption that languages can be compared. This implies that CA is more concerned with the differences that exist between languages than on their similarities. Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching (1990, p. 141) classifies CA into theoretical and applied. Theoretical CA is the linguistic approach that compares and contrast two languages to identify their similarities and differences while applied CA on the other hand, is the reliable prediction of the learners' difficulties (James, 1980, pp. 181-187).

Similarly, Udodata (1993) classifies CA as a branch of linguistic study that uses empirical and synchronic methods in contrasting two or more language structures so as to examine areas of differences that can enhance language learning, particularly in the ESL situation. CA is, therefore, seen as being anchored on the doctrine of behaviourism (Gas & Selinker, 2001). As earlier mentioned, the focus of contrastive linguistics in its comparison of languages is to provide methods for language teaching. Thus, features of language revealed in CA may suggest modification and will certainly be further modified in the light of future experiences, thereby enhancing final grading of learner's difficulties. This statement highlight the iterative nature of CA and its application to improving language teaching and learning

Quite a number of linguists like Bardjowidjoji (1972), Wilkins (1972), Sander (1976), Banjo (2004) among others have expanded the scope of CA and experimented on comparative study of two languages. CA hypothesis claims that the principal barrier to second language learning is the interference of the first language system with the second language system, in that a scientific structural

analysis of the two languages in question would yield a taxonomy of linguistic contrasts between them which in turn would enable linguists and language teachers predict the difficulties a learner would encounter. Lado (1957, p. 267) claims that where the patterns are similar in the two languages being compared, learners of the Target Language (TL) would find language relatively easy, because the 'inputs' they are now exposed to are not new to them. On the other hand, where the language patterns of the TL and the MT differ, the learning of the TL would be relatively difficult. The difficulties predicted cannot be properly taken care of without recourse to Error Analysis (EA). Since error analysis deals with the actual errors committed by second language learners, it is, therefore, not out of point to state that CA and EA are related in that no contrastivist has ever really predicted solely on the basis of the CA, but has to rely on EA in understanding language learning and teaching. This is why James (1980) claims that CA is always prognostic while EA is diagnostic. This implies that CA and EA are essential because their approaches to second language learning account for L2 learning problems.

Method of Data Collection

The hallmark of every research rests much on methodological application. In other words, the success or otherwise of a research depends largely on the methodology adopted for it (Koleoso, 2000, p. 115). To achieve the goal of the research, Okpameri data were got on-the-field through the research instrumentality of word translation while that of English data were got from the English grammar texts and information obtained from library and internet sources. Adopting a primary source, the researchers' participatory observation and interview

enhanced data collection. Hence, a test instrument of 58 with the plural inflections in English was translated to Okpameri language in order to collect detailed and factual information on Okpameri plural noun inflections. This was done in order to reveal similarities and differences in plural noun markings in English and Okpameri.

The population of the study consisted of Okpameri speakers and users of English as a second language in Okpameri linguistic environment. Ibillo, being the central community in Okpameri, was selected as the field of research. It must be mentioned here that the target population of the study comprises students in secondary schools in Ibillo. Out of ten (public and private) secondary schools in Ibillo community, four selected served as the sample size of the study. Fifty students in each of the schools selected also served as the subjects of the study. With the assistance of the class teachers, the subjects were selected on the bases of outstanding performances in their studies. The selection was also based on the conviction that the subjects must have attained some level of proficiency in English and Okpameri because the subjects are Okpameri ESL learners.

In the case of validity and reliability of the research instrument, the test instrument was scrutinized by some experts in language instruments and evaluation. They were able to offer valuable suggestions on the contents which helped in ensuring the standardization of the instrument. The self-constructed test instrument was administered by the researcher in order to ensure originality of the data collected. For the purpose of effectiveness and efficiency, the test instrument was administered to one school a day. It must also be mentioned here that two hundred subjects in the four schools selected carried out the translation exercise. For the purpose of

reliability, one hundred out of two hundred subjects whose translations were the same in every item translated in Okpameri was taken as the correct translation.

Data Analysis

It must be mentioned again that the focus of this study is on morphological variation of plural noun markings in English and Okpameri. In light of this, the data obtained were classified into ‘human’, ‘animal’, ‘object’, and ‘names of places’ nouns.

The sub-classification revealed how English and Okpameri nouns are marked to signify their plural numbers. For the purpose of clarity, noun morphemes in English and Okpameri were presented side by side in tables and contrasted in order to establish areas of similarities and differences. The findings of the study were used to predict likely problem areas Okpameri learners and users may encounter while marking the English plural nouns. The Z₁ morphemes of the two languages being compared are tabulated thus:

Table 3: Z₁ (Human Nouns)

Singular Nouns		Plural Nouns	
English	Okpameri	English	Okpameri
Wife	Ozha	Wives	Ezha
Elder	Orio	Elders	Erio
Relative	Owhe	Relatives	Ewhe
Lady	Uvizi	Ladies	Ivizi
Father	Isa	Fathers	Isa
Mother	Elho/Olho	Mothers	Elho
Boy	Omohozi	Boys	Ivbiehozi
Man	Ohozi	Men	Ehozi
Girl	Omozha	Girls	Ivbiezha
Woman	Ozha	Women	Ezha
Husband	Ohozi	Husbands	Ehozi
Brother	Omoelho	Brothers	Ivbiaelho
Sister	Omoelho	Sisters	Ivbiaelho
Half-brother	Omoisa/omoelho	Half-brothers	Ivbiaisa/ivbiaelho
Half-sister	Omoisa/omoelho	Half-sisters	Ivbiaisa/ivbiaelho

Table 4: Z₁ (Animal Nouns)

Singular Nouns		Plural Nouns	
English	Okpameri	English	Okpameri
Fowl	Oko	Fowls	Iko
Dog	Avbua	Dogs	Evbua
Cow	Ala	Cows	Ela
Genea	Uwhono	Genea	Ewhono
ful	Ekpəkpeje	fowls	Ekpəkpeje
Duck	Utakolo	Ducks	Itakolo
Ram	Olekule	Rams	Ileluke
Pig	Ava	Pigs	Eva
Patridge	Enyeh	Patridges	Inyeh
Snake	Uzo	Snakes	Izo
Antelope	Obe	Antelopes	Ibe
Cat	Akpe	Cats	Ekppe
Lion	Oyai	Lions	Eyai
Vulture	Uzhamie	Vultures	Ezhamie
Sheep	Izili	Sheep	Izili
Goat		Goats	

Table 5: Z₁ (Object Nouns)

Singular Nouns		Plural Nouns	
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English	Okpameri	English	Okpameri
Yam	Ovie	Yams	Ovie
Broom	Ukha	Brooms	Ekha
Plate	Ugba	Plates	Egba
Basket	Ugo	Baskets	Ego
Shirt	Eguo	Shirts	Iguo
House	Ukpo	Houses	Ikpo
Cutlass	Egbele	Cutlasses	Igbele
Equipment	Emiaeria	Equipment	Isuaeria
Hoe	Atama	Hoes	Etama
Axe	Uze	Axes	Ize
Seat	Etah	Seats	Etah
Trousers	Işokoto	Trousers	Işokoto
Mortal	Aşile	Mortals	Aşile
Maize	Ugbado	Maize	Ugbado
potato	Enema	Potatoes	Enema

Table 6: Z₁ (Names of Places)

Singular Nouns		Plural Nouns	
English	Okpameri	English	Okpameri
Assembly	Uzona	Assemblies	Izona
Room	Egukpo	Rooms	Igukpo
Masquerade	Ukpala	Masquerade	Ekpala
House	Aşa	houses	Aşa
Place	Isikulu	Places	Isikulu
School	Işoşi	Schools	Işoşi
Church	Eyala	Churches	Eyala
Country	Umeh	Countries	Umeh
Farm	Ilakpah	Farms	Ilakpah
Market square	Ame	Markets	Ame
Stream	Ivbuka	square	Ivbuka
Restaurant	Esimugueh	Streams	Işimugueh
Backyard	Ugueh	Restaurants	Ugueh
Garden		Backyards	
		Gardens	

Contrastive Statements

Table (3) has revealed human plural noun markings in English and Okpameri. Human nouns in this sense, simply means common noun used to refers to human beings. Just like every noun type, names referring to humans are also inflected to signify their plural numbers. This is shown in the Table (3) where the two languages are morphologically marked for pluralization. However, while the morpheme ‘s’ is affixed to the root-words as suffix to inflect for plural marking in English, Okpameri morphological marking is done by

changing the initial letter(s) of the singular nouns for plural number. Also, Okpameri morpheme, like ‘ivbia’ (children) as shown in plural numbers – iviaehozì (boys), ivbiezha (girls), Ivbiaelho (brothers or sisters) among others, come before the initial letters that signify plural numbers. The implication of the morpheme or plural marker ‘ivbia’ in Okpameri plural number is to differentiate the plural number ‘boys’ or ‘girls’ from men or women respectively. For example, Ivbia + ehòzi = Ivbiaehòzi (boys) is a plural marker. So, the affix of the morpheme ‘Ivbia’ differentiates Ivbiaehòzi (boys)

from ‘ehoji’ (men), in the plural inflection of boys and men. So, this plural number formation in Okpameri is relatively different from English. The table has also revealed uni-gender in half-brothers and half-sisters plural number in Okpameri. This implies that male and female gender markings (like brother and sister) in English is absent in the linguistic system of Okpameri.

Similarly, Table (4) reveals animal singular and plural numbers in the two languages (English and Okpameri). Data placed side by side in the table are the names of domestic and non-domestic animal inflections. In the table, the two languages inflect for pluralization. Just as it appears in human plural number, the morpheme ‘s’ is affixed to the root-words (as suffix) to inflect for plural marking in English. However, initial letter(s) are changed to inflect for plural marking in Okpameri. It should be noted that ‘sheep’ is not morphologically realized in English for pluralization. However, this same lexeme is morphologically marked in Okpameri as revealed in the table. For example, the initial letter of the word ‘uzhamie’ (sheep) is changed to ‘ezhamie’ to reflect pluralization in Okpameri. There are other morphemes like ‘ekpepeje’ (duck) and ‘Izili’ (goat) that are not morphologically marked for pluralization in Okpameri, but are morphologically realized in English. For example, the plural ‘goat’ is ‘goats’. Also, ‘ducks’ is the plural of ‘duck’ in English. This implies that both languages (English and Okpameri) have zero or null morphemes in their linguistic systems. However, their zero morphemes differ in lexemes. This has revealed cultural variation in word formation in language.

Table (5) has revealed pluralization in nouns that indicate things/objects like ‘food’, ‘clothes’, cooking, utensils, farm, tools among others. Both languages (English and

Okpameri) inflect for plural objects. While English morpheme ‘s’ is affixed to the root-words as suffix for pluralization, changing of the initial letter of the root-word signifies plural number in Okpameri. Just as we have in table (4), there are also zero morphemes in table (5). However, the zero morphemes differ in English and Okpameri. What is described as a zero morpheme in English is an inflectional morpheme in Okpameri. As revealed in table (5), the word ‘equipment’ which is seen as a zero morpheme in English is an inflectional morpheme in Okpameri (emiaeria – singular, isuaeria – plural). It should be mentioned here that a partial change occurs in the inflection of ‘emiaeria’ for the plural number – Isuaeria. As also revealed in Okpameri words, such as ugo (basket) becoming ego (baskets), atama (hoe) becoming etama (hoes) and Egbele (cutlass) becoming igbele (cutlasses), the initial letters are changed to signify plural number. However, ‘Etah’ which is ‘seat’ in English is seen as a ‘zero’ morpheme in Okpameri, but it is an inflectional word in English. It must be mentioned here that, there are some English lexemes that have plural inflections. A good example is the word ‘trousers’. In the real sense of it, ‘trousers’ cannot be seen as zero morpheme because there are two hollows in a pair of trousers, which indicates pluralization. However, this is not so in Okpameri view point. So, the word ‘isokoto’ (trousers) is seen as a zero morpheme because it is not inflected for plural. As revealed in the table, English morphological marking for object is somehow consistent; (that is, affixing morpheme ‘s’ to the root-word as suffix). However, this is not so in Okpameri because its plural marking is not consistent. For instance, there could be initial letter change to indicate pluralization.

Table (6) has revealed the differences and similarities that exist in

the morphological markings to signify pluralization of name of places in English and Okpameri. While English indicates morphological marking for pluralization of names of places in all the data in the table, few of the Okpameri data are inflected for plural number. This implies that many of the Okpameri names of places could be regarded as zero morphemes. Just a few like 'egukpo' (room) – Igukpo (rooms), esumugueh (backyard) – Isumugueh (backyards) are inflected for pluralization. It must be added that the pattern of morphological marking in English and Okpameri differs. While English has suffix patterns of pluralization, Okpameri has prefix pattern of plural realization.

Findings and Discussion

A contrastive analysis of plural noun markings in English and Okpameri has brought one thing to the fore is that languages differ much in morphological realization because the internal structure of some words in a language is culture-bound.

In Table (3), human plural nouns are morphologically marked in English and Okpameri. However, their places of affixations differ. While English has suffix for plural realization, Okpameri language has a change of initial letter of the word for plural marking. For example, the word Ozha (wife) forms its plural ezha (wives) by changing the initial letter "O" to "e". It is also observed in the analysis that both languages (English and Okpameri) have zero morphemes. For example, there is no morphological inflection for pluralization of 'sheep' in English. Likewise, Okpameri language does not have plural inflection for the noun Izili (goat). This implies that there exists a contrast between English and Okpameri plural number formation. Hence, Okpameri ESL learners may tend to mark the noun sheep for

pluralization, since this is possible in Okpameri language. Hence, Okpameri ESL learners may be confronted with the problem of mother-tongue interference.

As revealed in Table (5), an English word like "trousers" has plural inflection. This could pose problem to Okpameri ESL users, as they may produce a phrase such as 'two trousers instead of 'a pair of trousers'. This is because Okpameri language does not inflect for trousers. In Table (6), pluralization for names of places is morphologically marked in English. However, this is not so in Okpameri because names of places in Okpameri have zero morphemes except words like Isumugueh (backyards) and Izone (assemblies) whose inflections have changes in their initial letters to signify pluralization.

In view of the above, Okpameri learners may be confronted with how to use numerical adjectives in English because the morpheme 's' is absent in Okpameri linguistic system. So, an Okpameri ESL learner may tend to express numerical adjectives as 'ten house', 'two cup of rice', or 'six car' instead of 'ten houses', 'two cups of rice', 'six cars' respectively.

Recommendations for Pedagogy

A contrastive analysis of the morphological variation of plural noun markings in English and Okpameri has some implications for the teaching of English as a second language. Due to languages in contact, the teaching and learning of the second language (English) should be given due consideration. To this end, the following, among others, are recommended:

Okpameri ESL learners should be exposed to the grammar of the two languages being compared because the grammatical structure (morphology) of any language might be characterized by

culture of the language. Thus, the learners should be exposed to the culture of the two languages since the lexical items of a particular language are regarded as carriers of the culture that produces the language.

The literature component of the English and the Okpameri language teaching programmes should be emphasized because literature is language in use. For the learners to achieve communicative competence in the English language, language teachers should be encouraged to teach the aspect of literature in our school system.

The teaching of plural nouns markings should be done through a systematic approach. Therefore, language teachers should have adequate knowledge of morphemes of the two languages being compared as this will make teaching and learning to be more effective and productive. To achieve this, standard, adequate and relevant instructional materials, as well as conducive environment for learning should be made available and accessible.

It has been observed that there are variations in the way different language communities engage with the world. It is evident from this study. That some morphemes some usage are culture bound, and a good understanding of them demands familiarity with the cultures that produce them. Thus, morphemes of the languages under study should be handled by language experts. This would aid learners in studying the plural morphological marking in English.

Conclusion

It is realized that something which can be said in English language can also be said in Okpameri language. In other words, some words which are morphologically marked in English can

also be realized in Okpameri language because those morphemes correspond to physical reality but their morphological markings are not exactly the same in all contexts. Thus, the analysis of plural noun realizations calls our attention to the fact that physical reality is necessary but not a sufficient basis for morphological analysis. For the fact that 'sheep' can be counted as 'goat' is counted does not mean that 'sheep' could be morphologically marked as 'sheeps' in English. Also, 'Izili' (goat) in Okpameri cannot be morphologically marked for pluralization. This justifies the assertion that physical reality is necessary but not a sufficient basis for morphological generalization.

The morphological distinctions drawn in English and Okpameri have reflected culturally important features of objects, institutions, and activities in the societies in which the two languages being compared are found. It can, therefore, be deduced that despite the acknowledgement of universal grammatical features, the structure of words are internal to the languages which they belong. This is because each language is integrated in the culture in which it operates and the lexical structure reflects those distinctions that are important to its culture. This implies that morphological markings of some noun pluralization are culture-bound, and a good understanding of their morphological realizations demands familiarity with the culture that produces them. Language teachers are, therefore, advised to come up with practical demonstrations of these plural noun markings in the second language being learnt. This will bring about dynamism and innovativeness on the part of the language experts. By so doing, the perceived difficulties of learning the English plural noun markings and expressing the Okpameri

noun pluralization in English will be minimized.

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