Syntactic Variation of Arabic and English Language: An Overview of Word Order

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Abstract

This study dwells on some selected linguistic devices of syntactic variation known as word order between Arabic and English language. This is because the two languages under the study have a lot of functions in Nigeria and the globe at large. Some of these include: language of instruction, commerce, official and personal, national and international and many more. Based on this relevancy, this paper sees the need to offer a syntactic baseline between Arabic and English with emphasis on word order. The researchers use some sentences of Arabic and English from already existing literature which showcase that there is word order variation in some structural configurations. The method used for data collection is secondary as a result of scouting information from text books, journals and internet. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the syntactic variation of word order between Arabic and English language to add value to the existing knowledge in field of linguistics. The outcomes of this study demonstrate that the linguistic elements such as Subject, Predicator (Verb) and Object are mostly differ. This is as a result of the Arabic has VSO while English has SVO. Therefore, the two languages prove to have different syntactic environment for both Subject and Predicator but share only Object position as a syntactic environment according to this finding. So, the word order between the two languages could argue to be different.

Keywords: Language, Arabic, English, Linguistic, Syntax, Word Order

Introduction

One thing that is pervasive in all languages is grammar which operates based on different laws and principles of a particular language. For instance, the grammar of the Arabic language is not the same as the grammar of the English language. Even though grammar may share some basic ways in language construction which metamorphoses over a period of time. This entails that every language has a different procedure through which the word order or sentence structure can be constructed. One of the global languages is Arabic which has a distinct system

compare to other languages such as English. On a realistic scale, Arabic has a slightly different word order such as VSO and its likes. Whereas, English has a SVO as it's word order and that make the two languages under the study varied in accordance with the syntactic principles. Therefore, this study accentuates syntactic variation between Arabic and English language with a focus on word order which is most important aspect of syntax linguistically. The rational behide conducting research on this topic is that Modern Arabic Language (MSA) is used for different purposes which include: language of instruction, exergies, published books, journals, newspapers, and official compositions. This entails that Arabic language has some similar functions with English which is the national as well as official language of Nigeria but behaves slightly different in syntax. In a lighter note, Arabic language is equally rich in grammatical structures just like English. So, addressing the syntactic variation in terms of word order intends to benefit language instructors, researchers, linguists and students (Tucker,2010; Al Aqad, 2013).

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the Syntactic variation of Arabic and English through the following specific objectives:

I.To differentiate between Arabic and English language word order.

II.To analyse the variation in sentence configurations.

Research Questions:

I.What are the differences between word order of Arabic and English language?

II.What are the analyses of the variation in sentence configurations?

Statement of the Problem

In a professional description, syntax is defined as the bunch of laws or principles that presides how words are arrange together to layout phrases and more complex structures like clauses and sentences. Basically, all of the words in it have some typical meaning which are disconnected from the study of language. There is more or less to understand what a rule or principle is. A rule elucidates a regularity in whatever transpires in language. For instance, Adam bought a book. This English is grammatical based on the rule which says that: A kernel sentence be arranged in SPO order. So, "Adam" is Subject, "bought" is Predicator and "a book" is Object.

On the other hand, Arabic language has a different principle in which the law posits that PSO. So, this variation is mostly unknown to most of people who are directly and indirectly use the two languages for different purposes. The notion of rule which this study is interested in should be distinguished from the notion of a rule that is an instruction or a statement about what should happen, such as "If the light is green, do not cross the street." As linguists, our primary interest is not in how anyone says you should talk. Rather, we are interested in how people really talk. Based on this, most people do not distinguish between the different word order of the two languages under study which pose challenges on the linguistic variation between the two and therefore, it needs to be addressed.

Related Literature Review:

The Concept of Language

The word "language" is one of the most commonly used words in English; in fact, typing the word "language" into Google nets 85,800,000 hits. Thousands of languages exist on our planet. We all use language as speakers, signers, thinkers, readers, and writers. Language fascinates us with its enormous power: It brings us together and it divides us; it is used to assess our intelligence, our sociability, our class, our potential. Linguistics, or the study of language, includes a variety of perspectives: theoretical, applied, historical, psychological, cognitive, and social among others. Linguists research the relationship between humans and language as well as investigate animal and machine language (Luria, Seymour, & Smoke, 2006).

To be able to describe and analyze language better, linguists examine language through its sounds, words, sentences, and meaning. Phonology is the study of sounds and the rules for the combination and pronunciation of sounds. Morphology is the study of internal-structure of words, the ways words are created, and the ways new words enter a language. One aspect of this is etymology or the historical derivation of words. Syntax is the study of the rules for combining words into sentences. Semantics is the study of linguistic meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Discourse analysis is the tool for analyzing texts of more than one sentence. The study of how people use language to interact with one another and convey meaning in a variety of contexts is pragmatics (Luria, et al, 2006).

Along with the particular areas of study that make up linguistics mentioned above, there is also the philosophy of linguistics, which asks such intriguing questions about language as these: Is language only possible among humans? Is language innate in humans or did language ability evolve? What is the role of language in consciousness and sentience? Are there universal aspects to language? Does language construct our world or simply describe what is already in the world? There are many perspectives with which to approach these questions.

However, the concept of language in regards to this study is considered as a vehicle for humans interaction and cooperation which includes: learning, commerce, official purposes and so on. In essence, this provides a ground for us to address the different word order between Arabic and English as second languages since they are both additional languages.

The Relevance of Arabic Language

The system of Arabic education in Nigeria before the advent of colonialism was informal. There were neither regular classes nor curriculum of study; students converged at the houses of their teachers or at the mosques to receive knowledge from the morning till evening. Every student had to wait for his turn to receive learning and there was no limit to the year of graduation. While some students stuck to a particular teacher, others moved from one teacher to another, the sole objective being to understand Islam and Arabic language. Through this process, they were able to excel and they perfectly understood the language and adequately utilized it for communication, educational instruction, correspondence and documentation of proceedings, history, research and transactions in addition to religious purposes. Above all, they were able to utilize it for composing literary works like poetry of different themes and prose of numerous forms, most especially during the period known as Jihad Period or Fulani Period (17th – 19th Centuries CE), which was adjudged as the Golding Era of Arabic literature

in Nigeria (Ibrahim, & Abubakar,2012). This signifies that Arabic language is use for purposes in this study and so it remains relevant to be studied particularly the word order.

The Relevance of English Language

English is widely rehearsed and occupies a prominent operation both at the workplace, in the media and as a medium of pedagogy in schools along with the three crucial indigenous languages as well as Arabic. Many buzzes proffer solutions to nationalistic state f Nigeria which has epitomized in proposals for confederation, redefined federation or restructured federation. This has impacted the rudimentary character and the function of English in Nigeria as unifying compacts. English provides an anticipated co-coordinating role as a way of inter-ethnic and international communications (Adegbite, 2004). From conception, English served a dual role in Nigeria, serving not only as a contact language between Nigerians who could not interact among themselves on one hand, but also between Nigerians and Europeans. It is now not only a second language, but also the language of commerce, education, politics, law and administration of the entire country affairs, though in different usages and command. Knowledge of English is therefore an essential requirement for anyone to promote or live in any wider context of the community, no matter the variety of English. It is this convenient texture of the English language that provides the group interaction and group relations varieties for inter-ethnic communication and gives individuals the sense of oneness, unity and loyalty – the few that is accessible. Even the ceremonious English as is taught in the formal settings (school) always support the use of it. English in Nigeria is seen as a weapon because it provides an excellent representation of political supremacy. So, to study about the word of the language has a significant impact (Danladi, 2013).

Arabic and English Language Interconnection

It is within the context of linguistics that all human languages are studied. Linguistics is the scientific study of all languages depending on the aspect of language that needs to be analysed. This includes Arabic and English language and so the two are interconnected on this basis. In essence, language is a distinctive attribute of the human species. This entails that all languages share a lot of features in common which is why all level of language analyses like phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics are applicable to all but depend on the area of interest of the researchers. This study dwells on word order which is purely syntactical. Nevertheless, languages differ in many ways but they are all made possible by the same genetic information. They are all processed by the brain in basically the same ways, and, not surprisingly, they all share certain fundamental "design features" and structural characteristics that enable them to work the way they do. For example, although different languages use different sets of sounds, their sounds are organized and combined according to just a few principles. If there were no shared, universal features of language, we would expect the sounds of languages and their combinations to vary randomly. Instead, the sounds of languages and their combinations are limited and systematic. Likewise, all languages follow similar constraints on how they can combine words, word order into phrases and sentences. Understanding and explaining the properties which are universal to all languages – as well as those which vary across languages – is the fundamental job of the linguist. Most linguists believe that language is a modular system. That is, people produce and interpret language using a set of component subsystems in a coordinated way. Each module is responsible for a part of the total job; it takes the output of other modules as its input and distributes its own output to those other modules. Therefore, it

is good to have the knowledge of word order of both languages. Based on this, Arabic and English are said to be interconnected (Fasold, & Jeff,2013).

The Concept of Syntax

If you have thought about language, you will have realised that whether it is spoken or written, it has structure, and that it is not a hotchpotch of randomly distributed elements. Instead, the linguistic ingredients that language is made up of are arranged in accordance with a set of rules. These rules are mostly in word order which on the linguistic behaviour of the language. In essence, this set of rules we call the grammar of a language. Grammar is a vast domain of inquiry and it will be necessary to limit ourselves to a subdomain. In this study we will only be concerned with the part of grammar that concerns itself with the structure of sentences known as word order. This is called syntax (Aarts,2001).

Word Order in the Context of Syntax

Syntax study sentences which are not random collections of words, but strings of words which are organised according to certain rules. It is the task of syntax to give an account of those rules. We saw that sentences can be analysed into subparts which we referred to as constituents. Constituents refer to words that are closely related to each order that any other word in a sentence. Therefore, arrangement of words depend upon word order of a particular language. For instance, Ahmed calls Amina. This sentence is grammatical because is constructed according to word order of English which is SVO. Therefore, this word order is not possible in Arabic sentence configuration. So, this is what exactly this paper comes to investigate (Aarts,2001).

Theoretical framework

This study adopted comparative method in historical linguistics is concerned with the reconstruction of an earlier language or earlier state of a language on the basis of a comparison of related words and expressions in different languages or dialects derived from it. Therefore, it is found relevant and useful in this work as a result of providing a ground on which the two languages are syntactically compared to find out dissimilarity of word order. This model of Historical and Comparative linguistics commonly begin with Sir William Jones' (1792) as cited in (Siew,2018).

Method

Secondary approach is used in this study which helped in sourcing relevant information from ready-made materials such as textbooks, journals and internet. Some basic sentences are tested in this study. In this process, sentences written in standard Arabic language and their correspondence in English, and sentences written in Standard English and their correspondence in Arabic are used as primary data.

Results and Discussion

Table: The illustration of sentences collected in both Arabic and English language during the investigation as thus:

S/No:	Sentence Type	English Sentence	Arabic Version
1.	Simple	The teacher sits on a chair.	جلس المعلم على كرسي
2.	Simple	I read the book.	قرأت الكتاب

| 3. | Simple | Zaid wrote a letter. | كتب زيد رسالة |

Source: Modern Standard Arabic Textbook

This table illustrates that three kernel sentences written in standard Arabic language and their correspondence in English, and three kernel sentences written in Standard English and their correspondence in Arabic are used as primary data. This showcases that sentence 1 is constructed as in PSO order which is the standard Arabic grammar. For instance, consider the verb "جلس" occurs at the sentence initial position which is unusual in English because the position is normally for Subject in simple sentence. Secondly, the noun " المعلم" appears at the second syntactic environment which basically belongs to predicator (verb) in English but only found to be position of noun as Subject in Arabic. The third element which is the Object is occupied by the noun "كرسي" which has no difference with English word order.

On the other hand, the equivalent sentence in English has noun "teacher" as Subject, verb "sits" as Predicator and noun "chair" as Object. This portrays that word order of English is: SPO which is quite distinct from Arabic word order as seen in this analysis.

The second row in the table indicates that the sentence 2 in Arabic begins with the verb "قرأت" as Predicator, follows by pronoun " أت" as Subject and noun " الكتاب" as Object. So, the word order here is PSO. On the contrary, the correspondence English is appeared to have the pronoun " I" as Subject, verb "read" as Predicator and noun "book" as Object. So, the word order here is SPO.

The third row in the table clearly states that Arabic sentence 3 contains the verb "كتب" at the initial position, follows by noun "زيد" as Subject and noun "رسالة" as Object. On the other hand, the English sentence appears to have noun "Zaib" as Subject at the initial position, follows by verb "wrote" as Predicator and noun "letter" as Object. This shows that word order realises here is SPO. It is good to note that PSO in Arabic and SPO are used as functional elements but not forms of language such as: noun, verb, pronoun and so on. So, the term "Predicator" is as functional element which is occupied by verb only in syntax while a predicate position starts from verb to the end of sentence.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings PSO realise in Arabic tree kernel sentences are syntactically varied with the English correspondence tree kernel sentences which occurred to SPO as different word order. Therefore, a logical conclusion can be drawn that Arabic and English language have different word order according to analyses of this study.

Call for further research, to investigate if Arabic language has other syntactic variation of word order apart from PSO.

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