

FALSE ANALOGY AND NATIVE LANGUAGE TRANSFER IN TSWANA SPEAKERS' ENGLISH

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In the previous issue of this journal, I discussed the problems of learning a second language. Two of these problems are False Analogy or False Generalization from the mother tongue, and Native Language Transfer or mother tongue interference. These two problems are the subject of this paper, where the focus is on the Plural. This paper consists of the following sections:

- 1) A brief Contrastive Analysis between the English Regular Plural, i.e. those nouns ending in an -s suffix, and the Tswana Plural. The irregular Tswana Plural forms are ignored, because they are irrelevant to the main thrust of this investigation.
- 2) An Error Analysis of some common errors which examines the validity of Contrastive Analysis.

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1) A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS (CA) BETWEEN THE ENGLISH AND TSWANA PLURAL.

The starting language in any "Applied linguistic CA" is the Target Language (TL), in this case, English ("Applied Linguistic CA" is here defined as a CA pertaining to the theory and not to the practice of language learning).

The Common Noun in English is divided into the following categories:

- (i) Mass Nouns

- (ii) Count nouns, and
- (iii) Collective nouns.

The term "Collective" in traditional grammar referred to all these three categories, but in modern communicative grammar, the term "Collective" (or "Group") refers only to those Nouns that can be substituted by both the Pronoun *it* and *they*, e.g.

- 1A *The government (was/were) defeated.*
- 2A *(It/they) [was/were] defeated.*

(See Leech and Svartvik 1975:44.)

In future, the following terms will be used to distinguish between the three categories of Common Nouns:

- Mass Noun (*sugar, butter, hair, etc.*)
- Count Noun (*chair/s, house/s, soldier/s, etc.*)
- Collective Noun (*government, committee, etc.*)

The following general observations are relevant to the Tswana Noun:

- (i) Tswana Nouns are divided into nine classes.
- (ii) The Plural (with a few exceptions which are irrelevant to this analysis) is formed by changing the prefix of the Singular form.
- (iii) There are no Plural Suffixes in Tswana as there are in English.

Consider the following schema:

CLASS	SINGULAR	PLURAL	EXAMPLES
1	mo	ba	mosimane, basimane
1a	-	bo	malome, bomalome
2	mo	me	motse, metse
3	le	ma	leina, maina
4	se	di	setulo, ditulo
5	-	di	tafole, ditafole
6	lo	di	lokwalo, dikwalo
7	bo	ma	borotho, marotho
8	go	-	go rata

- (iv) From the above table, it can be observed that Tswana has

five different Plural prefixes. Class 8 does not have a Plural prefix, and classes 1a and 5 do not have Singular prefixes.

The question to be asked is:

In which way is knowledge of the Tswana plural forms useful to an understanding of how Tswana speakers learn the English noun?

The answer to this question is that these differences within the Native Language (NL) itself, i.e. the various forms of Plural prefix, are only significant for an English speaker learning Tswana, who does not have the concept of Noun "classes" and would therefore perhaps find it difficult to learn which nouns belong to which class. Native speakers find their own language easy to learn, irrespective of the complexity of its linguistic structure. Therefore, the difficulty for the Tswana speaker learning his NL does not reside in fitting NL forms to particular concepts, because he has learnt to master the relationship between content and form at an early age.

In relation to TL, in this case English, the problem, which does not exist in the NL or the untutored TL situation, but which does exist in the *tutored* situation, is not so much the learning of the orthography of different forms, which relies more on memory than on reasoning, but rather knowing how to use the TL forms in the relevant situation.

The English Noun system is difficult for the Tswana speaker for two reasons: firstly, there are many cases where he would use a plural form in Tswana, but a singular form in English; and secondly, some English forms can be either singular or plural depending on the semantic category to which they belong. In other words, Count Nouns in Tswana are often expressed as Mass Nouns in English. This is a common difference between English and other languages (See Coe 1980:6). The Tswana speaker does not only have to contend with possible Negative Transfer from his NL but also with the vagaries within the English language itself, i.e. with False Analogy or False Generalizations.

AN ERROR ANALYSIS (EA) OF SOME COMMON ERRORS

(The correct form appears in brackets)

3A **Advices* (advice)
 kgakololo - singular
 dikgakololo - plural

Dikgakololo could refer to advice given over an extended period;

otherwise the singular is used. When the Tswana speaker uses *advice* to refer to one bit of advice, but **advices* to refer to a lot of advice, the explanation for the error could be NL transfer, i.e.

dikgakololo = **advices*

But the error could also be due to False Analogy with other English Plural *-s* forms.

4A *Homeworks* (homework)

If *homework* refers to different *subjects*, then the plural could be used in Tswana: (*tiro* "work" is understood to refer to "homework" in this context).

Re na le	<i>ditiro</i>	<i>tse dintsi</i>
We have	"works"	much

If *homework* refers to one subject or one task, then the singular could be used:

Re na le	<i>tiro</i>	<i>e ntshi</i>
We have	work	much

However, there is no universal agreement on whether *ditiro tse dintsi* can only be used to refer to more than one subject. The error could be caused by False Analogy with English Plural *-s* forms.

5A **Furnitures* (furniture)

The Tswana equivalent of *furniture* for many Tswana speakers is:

Dilo	<i>tša</i>	<i>ntlo</i>
Things	of	house

which can refer to *cutlery* and *crockery* as well. The attempts of the Department of Bantu Education in its publication *Tswana Terminology and Orthography* to introduce distinct Tswana terms for these English terms, have so far been largely ignored.

Fenitshara is also used for "furniture". The transfer of the NL plural form could explain the error **furnitures*. *Fenitshara* is not a Mass noun in Tswana, because it is conceived as a count noun, i.e. having a singular and a plural form. (See nouns like *metsi* and *maswi* which are Mass Nouns, having only one form with a Plural prefix). Therefore *fenitshara* would be rendered by *difenitshara* in the plural.

So far, the invariable *singular* nouns have been dealt with. There are also invariable *plural* nouns, which, like the above examples, do not take an -s suffix, e.g. *Cattle, offspring, dust*.

6A **Cattles* (cattle) is a common error.

Consider the following:

kgomo "cow" - singular
dikgomo "cows" - plural

Dikgomo means "cows" and "cattle". There could be a NL Transfer from the plural prefix *di-* or a False Analogy from *cows* to **cattles*.

The group of nouns causing most confusion are the variable nouns, i.e. those which may be either singular or plural depending on the context. This group can be divided into three categories:

(A) The singular refers to a category in general, and the plural to different kinds of that category. Here are a few examples:

<i>damage/s</i>	<i>people/s</i>
<i>job/s</i>	<i>food/s</i>
<i>time/s</i>	<i>meat/s</i>
<i>fruit/s</i>	<i>evil/s</i>
<i>sugar/s</i>	<i>truth/s</i>

Common errors are:

7A **I ate some fruits* (fruit)

In Tswana, one item of fruit is *leungo*, two items are *maungo*.

Tsaya leungo and *Tsaya maungo*, meaning literally "Take a fruit" and "Take some fruits" respectively, are both translated into English by "Have some fruit".

An interesting observation was made from diagnostic tests, in the form of a translation, carried out on a group of thirty pupils at Mmabatho high school in 1983: only one pupil translated *dijo* by *foods*, whereas the majority translated *maungo* by *fruits*. This kind of evidence would guard against a too hasty interpretation of errors in terms of NL transfer.

(B) The singular has a meaning unrelated to the plural.

space/s
manner/s

regard/s
trouble/s

Consider the following errors:

- 8A *You'll get into troubles (trouble).
- 9A *All manners of evil (manner).
- 10A *I don't like your manners (manner),
i.e. "behaviour", "attitude" or "way".

In Tswana, *manner* as in *all manner of evil* would be translated by the plural form of *mofuta*, viz. *mefuta* (class 2), meaning "kinds". The form **manners* could be due to NL transfer. But another explanation could be False Analogy with *manners* as in "You have no manners".

Similarly, the third example above, viz. **I don't like your manners*, could have NL Transfer or False Analogy as the cause of error. The Tswana equivalent of *manners* is either *maitseo* which does not have a singular form, or *mekgwa* which is the plural of *mokgwa* (class 2).

Here is a summary of how *manner/s* relates to its Tswana equivalent:

- 12A I don't like your manner. "attitude" - *mokgwa*
- 13A In a manner of speaking. "kind" or "way" - *mokgwa*
- 14A All manner of evil. "kinds" - *mefuta*
- 15A He has good manners. "behaviour" - *maitseo* or *mekgwa*

Let us now consider *trouble/s*:

- 16A O tla tsena (mo) [1] mathateng
([2] kotsing)
- 17A *You will get into troubles.
- 18A O na le [3] mathata a mantsi
- 19A He has troubles many

In Tswana there is no semantic difference between [1] and [3], but in 16A there is a choice between a singular or a plural form, i.e. *kotsing* and *mathateng*, respectively.

The cause of error could be either NL Transfer or False Analogy. Of course, there are other possible causes for these errors, as has been discussed in "Problems in the learning of a second language" (Gamaroff, 1987); but the two mentioned are possibly the most frequent.

(C) This category is a hybrid of (A) and (B).

Consider the following examples:

wood/s, time/s, chance/s, practice/s

where either the singular or the plural may have two distinct meanings, e.g.

Woods - "different kinds of wood" and "forest";

Time - "repetitions", e.g. "the first time" or "temporal measurements";

Chance - "opportunity" or "accident of fate";

Practice - "professional employment" or "activity in order to perfect something".

Wood/s is the occasion for a common error.

In Tswana, one log of wood is *logong*, and more than one is *dikgong* (class 6). The error 20A **Bring the woods* could be the result of NL transfer from *Tlisa dikgong*. But another possibility is False Analogy with *woods* which can mean either "forest" or "different kinds of woods".

CONCLUSION

Although it is probable that the two processes of False Analogy and Native Language Transfer are the two main causes of errors in the learning of a second language, it is often difficult to specify which of these processes, and what proportion of each, is responsible.

In this brief account I have tried to show that knowledge of the learner's mother tongue can be of use to the teacher of a Target Language.

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