

A contrastive analysis of articles in English and demonstratives in isiZulu

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An analysis of the use of demonstratives in isiZulu (izabizwana zokukhomba) has shown that they go beyond the known deictic functions of demonstratives as used in other languages like English. In isiZulu, demonstratives tend to also denote specificity, a function normally performed by the definite article in English. This article, therefore, compares the functions of articles in English to those of demonstratives in isiZulu, with the aim to demonstrate the similarities in terms of use between the two languages. This added function of demonstratives, it is argued, may account for some of the errors in English second language learners' use of articles, as evidenced by data from written exercises of learners whose first language is isiZulu. The findings suggest that second language learners of English tend to confuse articles because of the differences between the two languages, especially during their (learners') interlanguage stage.

Contribution: The article highlights a significant difference in the use of demonstratives between English and isiZulu due to the added function of specificity in isiZulu demonstrative (isabizwana sokukhomba) which is performed by the definite article in English. It also demonstrates how, without an article system, isiZulu can convey meaning like any language with an article system.

Keywords: articles; demonstratives; English; interlanguage; isiZulu; language transfer.

Introduction

Minor features in language make a huge difference, significant enough to create confusion and distortion of meaning, especially by second language (L2) learners. Such features may define an L2 learner as having successfully learned the target language (TL), or as being in the interlanguage stage of L2 learning and/or acquisition. This article discusses the demonstratives in both languages, and then compares isiZulu demonstratives to articles in English with the aim to highlight similarities with regard to the marking of specificity, a function reserved for articles in English. These differences, it is argued, may account for some of the second language learners' incorrect use of articles during their interlanguage stage of language development. After an observation of incorrect use of articles in the written exercises of high school L2 learners of English who speak isiZulu as their L1, a contrastive analysis (CA) of articles in English and demonstratives in isiZulu was done to establish whether the errors could be ascribed to the differences in terms of the two areas in both languages. The examples used are from different exercises, such as learner essays, translation exercises, and so forth.

Theoretical framework

This article is underpinned by the Interlanguage Theory (Selinker 1972). According to the theory, an interlanguage is a separate system that is neither the learner's L1 nor the TL. In support of this definition, Tarone (1994) adds that the learner's L1 is linked to his/her TL by interlingual identifications in the perception of the learner. This view is supported by Yule (1985), who maintains that there are features of the interlanguage that are independent of the L1 and L2.

Literature review

Deixis

Deixis may be defined as the phenomenon whereby some contextual information is required in the understanding of meanings of certain words and phrases in an utterance or sentence (Dylgeri & Kazazi 2013). Diessel (2012) and Fillmore (1997) extend deixis to include personal

pronouns, such as 'I' and 'you', spatial adverbs, such as 'here' and 'there', temporal adverbs, such as 'now', 'today' and 'recently', motion verbs, such as 'come' and 'go', as well as tense morphemes, such as the future auxiliary 'will' and the past tense suffix '-ed' as deictics. This article, however, limits its focus to demonstratives. The argument is that demonstratives in isiZulu are comparable to articles in English in terms of functions, resulting in negative transfer from isiZulu by L2 learners of English whose L1 is isiZulu during the interlanguage stage of their language development.

Pronouns

A pronoun is generally used to replace a noun. According to Ndimele (1996), pronouns are substitutes for nouns as they occur in the same syntactic environment where nouns and noun phrases do. Pronouns such as 'you', 'himself' and 'they' are used to make sentences less cumbersome and less repetitive as there is no need to keep mentioning the same noun or noun phrase in the communication. Grammarians (Quirk et al. 1985; Yamada 1977; and others) classify pronouns into several types, including the personal pronouns such as 'we', 'they', and 'it', the possessive pronouns such as 'your', 'our' and 'its', the interrogative pronouns such as 'why', 'which' and 'what', the reflexive pronouns such as 'yourself', 'herself' and 'themselves', and the demonstrative pronouns such as 'this', 'that' and 'those'. In isiZulu, Wilkes (1976), Louwrens (1990), Jiyane (1994) and Kosch (1991) argue that pronouns are determiners that gain their pronominal status only after the nouns with which they occur in appositive structures have been deleted.

Demonstratives in English

A crucial role that demonstratives play in language is to instruct the interlocutor to maintain attention to the intended referent, according to Zaki (2011). In a sentence, demonstratives can function as determiners or as pronouns

(Nelson & Greenbaum 2016; Rustipa 2015). Demonstratives in English are 'this' and 'that' (singular), and 'these' and 'those' (plural). The former points to things that are nearby either in space or in time, while the latter points to things that are removed or farther away from the speaker in space or in time. Radford (2004) has observed that demonstratives and the adverbs 'here' and 'there', as well as 'now' and 'then' share the same notion of near and distant reference and convey the sense of relative immediacy and relative remoteness in English. The following examples (from the latter author) show the use of demonstratives as determiners (1) and as pronouns (2):

1. This boy is very naughty.
2. I can't take this anymore.

Demonstratives in isiZulu

Like in English, demonstratives are deictic words in that they depend on an external frame of reference that indicates which entities a speaker refers to, and distinguish those entities from others. They are usually employed for spatial deixis, that is, they use the context of the physical surroundings – where the entity referred to is in relation to the speaker (Laczkó 2010). Depending on the language, these may be used also as discourse deictics, in that they may be used to refer not only to concrete objects, but to words and phrases mentioned in speech. According to Nyembezi (2016:89), in isiZulu, '*Isabizwana sokukhomba sikhomba into eseduze nalowo okhulumayo; eseduze nalowo okhulunyiswayo, kodwa buqama nalowo okhulumayo; kanye nento eqhelile kulaba bobabili kodwa ebonakalayo, umuntu anokuyikhomba*' [in isiZulu demonstratives point to something near the speaker; to something near both participants but nearer to the interlocutor; and to something distant from both participants but which is visible to both of them], such as in examples 3 and 4 (from the learners' written exercises) below:

TABLE 1: The Zulu noun class system.

Class	Prefix	Noun example	Isabizwana sokukhomba first level English equivalent – 'this' or 'these'	Isabizwana sokukhomba second level English equivalent – 'that' or 'those'	Isabizwana sokukhomba third level Yonder (no English equivalent)
1	umu-/um-	umuntu/umlungu	lo	Lowo	Lowaya
1a	u-	ubaba	lo	Lowo	Lowaya
2	aba-/abe-/ab-	abantu/abelungu/aboni	laba	Labo	Labaya
2a	o-	obaba	laba	Labo	Labaya
3	umu-/um-/u-	umuthi/umthombo/unogwaja	lo	Lowo	Lowaya
4	imi-/im-	imithi/imeqo	le	Leyo	Leya
5	ili-/il-	ilitshe or itshe	leli	Lelo	Leliya
6	ama-/ame-	amatshe/amehlo	lawa	Lawo	Lawaya
7	isi-/is-	isisu/isoni	lesi	Leso	Lesiya
8	izi-/iz-	izisu/izoni	lezi	Lezo	Leziya
9	iN(n,m)-	inkomo/imvu	le	Leyo	Leya
10	iziN(n,m)-	izinkomo/izimvu	lezi	Lezo	Leziya
11	ulu-/u-	uluthi or uthi	lolu	Lolo	Loluya
14	ubu-/ub-/u-	ubuso/uboya/utshani	lobu	Lobo	Lobuya
15	uku-/u-/ukw-	ukudla/ukona/ukwakha	lokhu	Lokho	Lokhuya
16	Pha	phandle	-	-	-

Source: Adapted from Zawada, B. & Ngcobo, M., 2008, 'A cognitive and corpus linguistics re-analysis of the acquisition of the Zulu noun system', *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa* 39(2), 316–331. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228190802579718>

3. *Lo muntu mdala.* [This person is old.]
4. *Lowo muntu mdala.* [That person is old.]

While demonstratives are limited to just four in number (as discussed under Demonstratives in English above), demonstratives in isiZulu are not as limited and they point to things even farther than English demonstratives do, and they depend on the nouns they qualify if used as determiners, because nouns belong to different noun classes in isiZulu. Table 1 shows how the functional noun classes in isiZulu link to demonstratives that apply in each case, as well as their English demonstrative equivalents, where applicable.

Demonstratives may also appear with descriptive possessive constructions with or without a head noun, such as in examples 5 and 6 below:

5. *Umthombo lo wamanzi ucwebile.*
[This spring water is pure.]
6. *Lo wamanzi ucwebile.*
[This of water is pure] – (Mngadi 1999:172)

It is interesting and worth noting that while the first and second level demonstratives *leli* and *lelo* (noun class 5), *lawo* and *lawo* (noun class 6) and others in the first and second level positions, respectively, have English demonstrative equivalents 'this' and 'that', as well as 'these' and 'those', respectively, third level demonstratives such as *leliya* and *lawaya* (the one over there; and the ones over there, respectively) have no equivalent demonstratives in English, except by additional description such as 'yonder'.

Articles in English

Articles are, in a sense, also adjectives which are used to mark indefiniteness or definiteness, given or new information in discourse, specific or generic reference, and they occur in the central determiner position in a sentence (Ahmed, Abdulrahman & Fawzi 2019). There are two articles in English, according to Leech and Svartvik (1994): the definite article 'the' (such as in 'the tractors') and the indefinite article 'a' (such as in 'a potato') or 'an' (such as in 'an apple'). The indefinite article 'a' or 'an' is used mainly to refer to something general, or that which is not common knowledge to all the parties in a discussion, while the definite article 'the' is used to refer to something definite, specific or that which is common knowledge to the speaker and interlocutor, or writer and reader.

The indefinite article 'a'/'an'

The indefinite article 'a' may precede a noun that starts with a consonant (such as in 7 below), and 'an' may precede a noun that starts with a vowel (such as in 8 below), or that which sounds as such (the examples are from the latter author):

7. If my condition does not improve, I will be forced to see a doctor.

8. You may help yourself to an orange.
9. The minister was here to receive an honorary Doctoral degree.

Harb (2014) also adds that the indefinite article may be used with a singular noun to say something about all things of that kind, like in 10 (from the latter author) and 11 below:

10. A dog will bite you. (Dogs in general will bite you.)
11. A man needs friends. (All men need friends.) – (p. 88)

There are instances where the use of the indefinite article (a/an) does not imply indefiniteness, but may also refer to something more specific, such as in examples 12 and 13 (from the latter author) below:

12. Musa will marry a Chinese. (Any Chinese, or some Chinese I know)
13. I will wear a black suit at the funeral tomorrow. (Some black suit that I have, or any black suit that I will buy)

If the referent is known to both parties (speaker and hearer) or is assumed to be common knowledge, it would be incorrect in English to use the indefinite article 'a'/'an'. The following examples (Taken from written exercises of L2 learners of English) show what is grammatically unacceptable in English:

14. *A sun was shining on her wedding day. (There is only one sun.)
15. *A sea is far from where we live. (It is assumed that everyone knows the sea.)

The definite article 'the'

The definite article 'the' is used to refer to a specific instance of the noun, often already mentioned in the context or easy to identify. As Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) put it, the article 'the' is mainly used to demonstrate that the noun refers to a particular example of something, as can be seen in the following examples (from the latter author):

16. Where is the bridegroom? (The only one in the wedding)
17. Let us look for a good restaurant. What about the restaurant we ate at last week? (The one and only restaurant)

Zero and null articles

There are cases where both the definite and the indefinite articles are not used in sentences, and then zero or null article is used instead. Master (1987) observes that the zero and null articles occur most frequently with indefinite non-count and plural count nouns, and occur when describing generic or non-specific nouns, especially in the plural count form, such as in the following examples – zero (examples 18 and 19) and null article (examples 20 and 21). The examples are from the latter author:

18. I don't eat pork.
19. My neighbour's daughter is in hospital.
20. South Africa is my home country.
21. They were pronounced husband and wife.

isiZulu demonstratives as compared to articles in English

Apart from the ordinary deictic function of demonstratives, as explained in examples 1–6 above, isiZulu demonstratives can arguably be used to denote specificity in a way comparable to a function normally reserved for the definite article (the) in English. Consider the following examples (from English L2 learners' written exercises):

22. *Izolo kufike umfana ehamba nonina. Lowo mfana nguye oweba izicathulo zami mhla kuhlathsiwe.* [Yesterday a boy came here with his mother. I identified him as the boy who stole my shoes on the day of the function]. A direct English translation of the sentence would be: 'Yesterday a boy came here with his mother. *That boy is the one who stole my shoes on the day of the function'. The demonstrative 'that' is misplaced in this meaning and its use is, therefore, unacceptable.
23. *Yiyo le nkampani eyaxosha lo nogada omude ngonyaka owedlule.* [This is the company that dismissed the tall security guard last year.] A direct English translation of the sentence would be: '*This is the company that dismissed this tall security guard last year'. While the direct translation would only be acceptable in English provided the tall security guard is present and is near the speaker, the sentence in the source language (isiZulu) covers both instances where the security guard is present, and where he is not.

Apart from the use of demonstratives to denote specificity in isiZulu, specificity may also be achieved by merely repeating the noun. Consider the following examples (also from English L2 learners' written exercises):

24. *NgoMsombuluko ubaba wathengainja. Inja yathi ayinqiqede sengithi ngiyayiphakela ngakusasa.* [On Monday my father bought a dog. The dog nearly bit me when I tried to feed her the next morning.]. In this sentence, a direct English translation would be: '*My father bought a dog on Monday. *A dog nearly bit me when I tried to feed her the next morning'. The example flouts the rules of direct anaphoric reference (Quirk et al. 1985) whereby the same noun (dog) is in the reference. Note here that the noun 'dog' is unspecified in this direct English translation, whereas its mere repetition in the isiZulu version above specifies it in the same way that a definite article 'the' in English would, such as in the English translation that follows the isiZulu sentence.
25. *Ngihambile udaba ngayolubikela uthisha. Uthisha uvumelane nami.* [I went to report the matter to the teacher. The teacher agreed with me on the matter.]. If directly translated, the sentence would be: '*I went to report the matter to the teacher. Teacher agreed with me on the matter'. Notice that without a definite article 'the', it is not clear whether the noun 'teacher' is the same one referred to in the first sentence.

Acquisition of articles by English second language learners

The English articles system has been found to be one of the most difficult aspects of English grammar for L2 learners of

English. A study by Master (1987) also found that the English article system is one of the last grammatical items to be acquired. This is especially common among English L2 learners whose L1 does not have the equivalent article systems, according to Chen (2000), and Ionin and Montrul (2010).

First language transfer

In his Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Lado (1957) emphasised the roles played by L1 in L2 learning by claiming that L1 patterns have influence on L2 productive and receptive skills because of the differences and similarities between L1 and L2 that determine ease or difficulty of L2 learning. The idea of CA had been introduced by Fries (1945), by assuming that L2 learners will commit errors in the areas of the TL that lack resemblance with the corresponding areas in the L2 learner's L1, as is the case in demonstratives in the two languages (English and isiZulu) that this article analyses. Ara (2021) has postulated that the positive transfer occurs if some structures of both languages are similar, and the negative transfer, also known as interference, occurs if some of the forms and grammatical structures in both languages are not similar, as has been demonstrated in the case of English and isiZulu above. According to Fries (1945), L2 learning difficulties would easily be predicted by merely contrasting the learners' L1 and L2, which would make it easier for teachers to focus on the potential areas of learner difficulty in their (teachers') teaching of the TL.

Using CAH, Anjarningsih and Anisa (2015) investigated the reasons for different kinds of pronunciation of English words by Japanese learners of English. Among their findings, it was revealed that the L1 interference, including syllabic changes, and changed manners of vowel accounted for the learners' incorrect pronunciation of some English words. While Lennon (2008) and others have identified some shortcomings in CAH, Tajareh (2015) and others have emphasised its importance, especially in the prediction of phonological errors.

Selinker (1983) views L1 transfer as a cognitive process and argues that transfer can be positive or negative. In his Interlanguage Hypothesis, Selinker argues that L1 transfer is positive if it facilitates the learning of L2, and it is negative if it interferes with and negatively impacts L2 learning. Another view comes from Faerch and Kasper (1987), according to which learners' previous linguistic knowledge is used to develop their interlanguage skills. A study on L1 transfer in L2 writing by Beare (2000) found that L1 transfer can be expected from proficient L2 learners who are also knowledgeable about the rhetorical structures in their L2 if they are experienced in writing in their L1. This, the authors claim, is not similar to L1 transfer by low-level learners whose L1 transfer is meant to compensate for their lack of L2 knowledge.

Discussion

From the above discussions, it has been demonstrated that while the singular isiZulu first and second level

demonstratives such as *leli* or *le* and *lelo* or *leyo*, have their English equivalents ‘this’ and ‘that’, respectively, as well as English equivalents for their plural pronouns *lawa* and *lawo* – ‘these’ and ‘those’, respectively, isiZulu has a third level demonstrative that points to things farther from the speaker, such as the singular *leliya* and the plural *lawaya*, respectively, that have no equivalent demonstratives in English, except by additional description such as ‘yonder’. This confirms a finding by Doke (1955) that the degrees of definiteness conveyed in isiZulu do not exactly correspond to those of any European language. Such differences in the functions of articles in English and demonstratives in isiZulu have potential to confuse second language learners of English and may result in negative transfer of such features to the TL until they are fully acquired. As can be seen in the examples from L2 learners’ written exercises, the incorrect use of articles may be ascribed to the lack of articles in the learners’ L1.

Conclusion

Equivalence in any two languages cannot always be achieved. The differences in certain areas of the learners’ L1 and TL may culminate in positive or negative transfer especially during the interlanguage stage of the learners’ language development. As has been demonstrated, isiZulu has no article system, but its demonstratives are more informative than demonstratives in English and in some instances they (isiZulu demonstratives) may perform a function normally reserved for articles in English. Teachers of English need to be cognisant of these differences in the two language areas in their teaching of English to isiZulu L1 learners. This would go a long way towards mitigating learner errors that result from L1 transfer.

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The author has declared that no competing interest exists.

Author’s contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

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