An essay of a contrastive analysis of the Present Perfect Tense in English and Mashi

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ABSTRACT: The present dissertation is a contrastive analysis of the present perfect tense in English and Mashi. This work has described the present perfect tense in English and Mashi, with more emphasis on the latter language where some of the verbs given in the twenty-four illustrating corpuses are morphologically analysed. The description is followed by the comparison of the present perfect in both languages, at the phonological and morphological levels. It has been noticed that the present perfect tense has different forms in the two languages and that a pupil who has got Mashi as his/her L1 experiences a lot of difficulties in mastering some aspects of the present perfect tense.

KEYWORDS: Contrastive analysis, Present Perfect Tense, English, Mashi.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE WORK PURPOSE

The present work aims at finding out some differences and/or similarities between the present perfect tense in Mashi and English. Differences between a target language and an L1 are usually obstacles in front of each language learner. This work will be helpful for teachers so as they may be able to overcome the different problems they encounter in their daily work, especially the ones due to their pupils' L1 negative transfer in the present perfect tense conjugation. The topic that has been chosen for contrasting is the present perfect tense of both languages.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

English is taught to secondary school pupils in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In this country everybody has his/her own L1 according to the area where they live. Congolese people acquire the L1, then, at school, they study French, which is the official language, and finally English. Scholars have noticed that the first language exerts great influence on the second language learning. Then the study of the second or third language is always accompanied with problems caused by the L1 negative transfer. That is why this is a great field of research which may help the learners as well as the teachers.

1.3 HYPOTHESIS

Taking into account Shi people's difficulties in the conjugation of English verbs, I may state that if Mashi L1 speakers do not express present facts, actions, or ideas correctly in English, it is probably due to negative transfers from their mother tongue. That is to say that a lot of English speakers who have Mashi as their L1 try to generalize their mother tongue's conjugation rules to English.

Another reason for their defective conjugation might be the speaker's incapacity to master the L2 rules due to the large gap of differences between the two languages, which are English and Mashi, especially in this study, and the teacher's incapacity to overcome the learner's difficulties.

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NOTATIONS USED

AL: Applied Linguistics

CA: Contrastive Analysis

CAL: Centre for Applied Linguistics

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Contrastive analysis is the systematic study of a pair of languages in order to identify their structural differences and similarities. It is part of contrastive linguistics, which, on its side, is part of applied linguistics and seeks to establish the similarities and differences between a learner's first language and the target language in order to attempt to predict where learners will have difficulties and make mistakes. Historically, contrastive analysis has been used to establish language genealogies.

Contrastive linguistics is a practice oriented linguistic approach that seeks to describe differences and similarities between a pair of languages (hence it is occasionally called differential linguistics)[1]. CA is a branch of linguistics. Linguistics is defined as the scientific study of language (s) (Hornby A.S. 2005: 861)

James C. (1980: VI) states:

> "*Because of its closeness, however, to language learning and to the more general concept of bilingualism, contrastive analysis has always been regarded as a major branch of applied rather than pure linguistics, and hence the appropriateness of this new addition to the Applied Linguistics and Language Study Series*".

He also agrees that CA is part of AL (Applied Linguistics) in these words: "I feel justified in assigning it to a science of applied linguistics in drawing on other scientific disciplines; and secondly, because linguistics is the science it draws heavily upon."

Quoted by James C (1980: 8), Wilkins (1972: 224) says: it is one of the few investigation into language structure that has improved pedagogy as its aim and is therefore truly a field of applied language research.

2.2 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Contrastive analysis was used extensively in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in 1960, as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learners' mother language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn.

Second language acquisition or second language learning is the process by which people learn a second language. SLA also refers to the scientific discipline devoted to studying that process. Second language refers to any language learned in addition to a person's first language; although the concept is named second language acquisition, it can also incorporate the learning of third, fourth or subsequent languages. SLA refers to what learners do; it does not refer to practices in language teaching[2].

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[1] *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/contrastive linguistics accessed on 28 March 2013*
[2] *Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/contrastive linguistics accessed on 28 March 2013*

2.3   SLA AND BILINGUALISM

SLA can incorporate heritage language learning, but it does not usually incorporate bilingualism. Most SLA researchers see bilingualism as being the end off result of learning a language, not a process itself, and see the term as referring to native-like fluency. Writers in fields such as education and psychology, however, often use bilingualism loosely to refer to all forms of multilingualism. SLA is also not to be contracted with the acquisition of a foreign language; rather, the learning of second languages and the learning of foreign languages, involve the same fundamental process in different situations.

There has been much debate about exactly how a language is learned and many issues are still unresolved. There are many theories of SLA. As SLA began as an interdisciplinary field, it is hard to pin down a precise starting date. However, there are two publications in particular that are seen as instrumental to the development of the modern study of SLA: Pitt Corder's 1967 essay *The significance of learners' errors,* and Larry Selinker's 1972 article *Interlanguage.* Corder's essay rejected a behaviourist account of SLA and suggested that learners made use of intrinsic internal linguistic process; Selinker's article argued that second-language learners possess their individual linguistic systems that are independent from both the first and second languages (Van Patten Benati 2010: 1-5)

2.4   COMPARISON WITH FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

People who learn a second language differ from children learning their first language a number of ways. Perhaps the most striking of these is that very few adult second-language learners research the same competence as native speakers of the language. Children learning a second language are more likely to achieve native-like fluency than adults, but in general it is very rare for someone speaking a second language to pass completely for a native speaker. When a learner's speech plateaus in this way it is known as fossilization.

In addition, some errors that second-language learners make in their speech originate in their first language. The influence of the first language on the second language is known as language transfer. (Cook 2008: 13).

Also, when people learn a second language, the way they speak their first language changes in subtle ways. These changes can be with any aspect of language, from pronunciation and syntax to gestures the learner makes and the things they tend to notice. (Cook 2008: 232).

2.5   INTERLANGUAGE

Originally, attempts to describe learner language were based on comparing different languages and on analysing learners' errors. However, these approaches weren't able to predict all the errors that learners made when in a process of learning a second language.

To explain these kinds of systematic errors, that idea of interlanguage was developed. An interlanguage is an emerging language system in the mind of a second-language learner. A learner's interlanguage is not a deficient version of the language being learned filled with random errors introduced from the learner's first language. Rather, it is a language in its own right, with its own systematic rules. It is possible to view most aspects of a language from an interlanguage perspective, including grammar, phonology, lexicon, and pragmatics. (Cook 2008: 13). There are different processes that influence the creation of interlanguage.

Language transfer SL learners fall back on their mother tongue to help create their language system. This is now recognized not as a mistake, but as a process that all learners go through.

- Overgeneralization: SL learners use rules from second language in a way that native speakers would not. For example a second-language learner may say 'I goed home' overgeneralizing the rule of adding –ed to create the past tense verb form.
- Simplification: SL learners use a highly simplified form of language, similar to speech by children or in pidgins. This may be related to linguistic universals.

The concept of interlanguage has become very widespread in SLA research and is often a basic assumption made by researches. (Gass and Selinker 2008: 14)

2.6   LANGUAGE TRANSFER

One important difference between first language acquisition and second language acquisition is that the process of second language acquisition is influenced by languages that the learner already knows. This influence is known as language transfer. Language transfer is a complex phenomenon resulting from interaction between learners' prior linguistic knowledge, the target language input they encounter, and their cognitive processes. (Ligtbown and Spada 2006: 93-96). Language transfer is not always from the learner's native language: it can also be from a second language, or a third; neither is it limited to any particular domain of language; language transfer can occur in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, discourse, and reading. (Ellis 2008: 350).

One situation in which language transfer often occurs is when learners sense a similarity between feature of a language that they already know and a corresponding feature of the interlanguage they have developed. If this happens, the acquisition of more complicated language forms may be delayed in favour of simpler language forms that resemble those of the language the learner is familiar with. Learners may also decline to use some language forms at all if they are perceived as being too distant from their first language.

Language transfer has been the subject of several studies, and many aspects of it remain unexplained. Various hypotheses have proposed to explain language transfer, but there is no single widely accepted explanation of why it occurs.

Researchers have also pointed to interaction in the second language as being important for acquisition. According to Long's interaction hypothesis the condition for acquisition are especially good when interacting in the second language; especially, conditions are good when a breakdown in communication occurs and learners musst negotiate for meaning. The modifications to speech arising from interactions like this help make input more comprehensible, provide feedback to learner, and push learners to modify their speech[3].

3   CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE IN ENGLISH AND MASHI

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Mashi is a bantu language that is spoken in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in South Kivu province, in the J linguistic zone. This language is spoken mainly in two territories such as Walungu and Kabare, but partially in Kalehe and Mwenga.

In this chapter I actually analyze the present perfect tense in English and Mashi. About This tense, I pick out the similarities and differences between both languages. As it is a contrastive analysis much emphasis is put on the differences.

Throughout this analysis, the procedural orientation refers to James C. (1980: 29) who agrees that "there has been a traditional procedural orientation which has dictated that, in the course of producing a total description of a language, the phonology has been described before the morphology and the morphology before the syntax."

The concern of the present work is limited to contrasting the present perfect tense in Mashi and English.

3.2   THE CLASSIFICATION OF BOTH LANGUAGES

Mashi is a bantu language, in the J linguistic zone. One feature for bantu languages is the agglutinative one. Linguists accept that bantu languages agglutinative feature helps in the morphemes phonological variations, and explains the existence of a great number of morphological rules in a normal Bantu language.

This statement helps us classify Bantu languages in general and Mashi in particular. Mashi is an agglutinative language. Agglutinative languages' words are made up of formatives which, unlike function words of English, for example, cannot occur alone (Jeperson, 1947: 375, quoted by James C. 1980: 39).

English, on its side, is an analytic language. Hornby A.S. (2005: 47) defines an analytic language as one using word order rather than word endings to show the function of words in a sentence. E.g: We have written.

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[3] *http://en.wikipedia.org: /wiki/second-language -acquisition accessed on 28 March 2013*

3.3   THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE

3.3.1   THE FORMS

The present perfect tense is the present tense of have + past participle (Eastwood J. (2005: 64).

In Mashi it is formed by adding *–ire* to the verb root in its conjugation.

Eg: 1. The teacher has gone home = Mwalimu anajire eka

a-na-ja-ire

° a-: verb prefix, wlass1
° na-: formative of present
° ja-: verb root meaning to go
° ire-: verb final expressing the present perfect

Considering these examples and the analysis of the Shi verb form, what easily catches the attention is the fact that in English the present perfect tense is a compound verb form, while in Mashi it is simple. In English there is use of an auxiliary verb whereas in Mashi there is use of affixes as shown in the above analysis. Moreover the Shi language can have more than one formulas to express a single reality. The formula that is to be used by the speaker depends on the context.

3.3.2   EXPRESSING EXPECTATION

So, when someone has been expecting something that might bring them relief, the occurrence of the event cannot be expressed in the words we have just studied. There is a particular verb form in Mashi that is used for it.

For instance, a child is very ill and cannot eat. His/her parents do what they can so as he/she may swallow something. If, by chance, he/she happens to eat a certain amount of food, his/her parents will say: "Omwana amalya", meaning: "the child has finally eaten". The action is a very recent one.

Amalya can be analyzed a-ma-li-a

3.3.3   VARIANTS OF THE AFFIX -IRE

It is worth noting that the affix *-ire* can vary according to the context. Some of its variations are illustrated here below and will be explained further.

N°	Infinitive Mashi	English equivalent	Mashi present perfect	English present perfect
2	Kulya	To eat	Nalire	I have eaten
3	Kuyambala	To wear, to get addressed	Nayambirhe	I have worn
4	Kuyambisa	To get somebody dressed	Anamuyambisize	He/she has got him/her dressed
5	Kuburha	To give birth	Anabusire	She has given birth
6	Kugera	To pass	Rhwagezire	We have passed
7	Kubuka	To treat	Anamubusire	He/she has treated him/her
8	Kubusa	To help (sth/sb) give birth	Bayibusize	They have helped it give birth
9	Kutamala	To sit down	Rhwatamire	We have sat down
10	Kubwarhala	To sit down	Rhwabwarhire	We have sat down
11	Kugenda	To go	Nagenzire	I have gone
12	Kuyigiriza	To teach	Mwayigirizize	You have taught
13	Kulerha	To bring	Rhwadwirhe	We have brought

As stated earlier, the affix *–ire* in the above verbs takes three forms such as *–ire*, *-irhe* and *–ize*. Moreover it can sometimes lead to the modification of the verb root on which it is affixated. The form it takes depends on the sound that it follows in the verb.

3.3.3.1 Verbs Requiring Modification Before –Ire/-Irhe

After analysis of the above corpuses, I have noticed that they can go into three groups. The first group is made up of verbs whose roots end in –al- (there I take the infinitive form into consideration) these verbs are:

Kutamala: ku-tamal-a (to seat), kubwarhala: ku-bwarhal-a (to seat)

Kurhambala: ku-rhambal-a (to address s.o)

It is noticeable that they all drop a part of their verb root morpheme before taking –ire/-irhe.

The part that is dropped is –al.

Eg: kutamala ⟶ rhwatamire: rhu-a-tam*al*-ire

Kuyambala ⟶ nayambirhe: na-iamb*al*-ire

Kubwarhala ⟶ nabwarhire: nabwarh*al*-ire

In this case, the dropping of a sound at the end of a morpheme is called apocope. Hornby A.S. (2005: 57) defines apocope as the dropping of the last sound or sounds of a word.

3.3.3.2 Verbs Requiring No Modifications Before –Ire/-Ize

The second group of verbs in the above corpus is apparently made up of verbs which do not require any modifications apart from dropping the final vowel.

They are as follows:

Kulya: (to eat): ku-li-a ⟶ nalire: na-li-re (I have eaten)

Kuyigiriza (to teach): ku-yig-ir-iz-a ⟶ nayigirizize: na-yig-ir-iz-ize (I have taught)

Kuyambisa: ku-yambal-is-a ⟶ amuyambisize a-mu-yambal-is-ize (s/he has dressed him/her)

Kubusa (to help give birth): ku-burh-is-a ⟶ bayibusize (they have helped it give birth)

In the case of the first verb "nalire" (I have eaten) there is "I" contraction in its formation. As for the other verbs, they have a common feature in their infinitives. Their infinitives all end in a sibilant. This sibilant sound exerts a strong influence on the tense morpheme's articulation. This morpheme, through this influence, takes a sibilant like sound instead of vibrant-like one. So instead of "nayigizire" (I have taught), "amuyambisire" (she has got her dressed); and "bayibusire", the common forms are respectively "nayigirizize" (I have taught), "amuyambisize" (she/he has got her/him dressed) and "bayibusize" (they have helped it give birth). This is an assimilation process. Assimilation is the act of making two sounds in speech that are next to each other more similar to each other in certain ways (Hornby A.S. 2005: 75).

3.3.3.3 Sibilant Sounds Before The Affix –Ire

In final analysis, the third group of verbs has their base ending with alveolar vibrant or velar plosive sounds. These sounds change into alveolar fricatives, voiced or voiceless according to the replaced sound, as follows:

Kuburha: ku-burh-a ⟶ anabusire: a-na-burh-ire

Kugera: ku-ger-a ⟶ rhwagezire: rhu-a-ger-ire

Kubuka: ku-buk-a ⟶ bayibusire: ba-yi-buk-ire

Kugenda: ku-gend-a ⟶ nagenzire: na-gend-ire

Kurhoga: ku-rhog-a ⟶ hyarhozire: hi-a-rhog-ire

In the verb kuburha, rh ⟶ s before –ire but in kugera, r ⟶ z before –ire, etc. It is curious to notice that a voiceless sound shifts to another voiceless one, and a voiced one changes to another voiced one.

Most of these verbs obey to the rule of assibilation. Assibilation consists in the representation of obstruent sounds by fricative ones under the effect of following vowels

3.3.4   THE PRESENT PERFECT PASSIVE

A passive verb has a form of be and a passive participle. Be is in the same tense as the equivalent active form (Eastwood J. 2005: 212) so the present perfect passive has the present perfect of be and a passive participle.

E.g: 14. Lots of people have been killed on the roads.

In Mashi the passive expressing morpheme is –u-, which is put before the present perfect verb final. Some verbs have to submit to assimilatory processes during this affixation.

E.g: 15. Bantu banji bayisirwe omu ibarabara

The changes that the verb sound on which the –u-e morpheme is affixated can undergo owing to its context can be illustrated by comparing the following passive and active sentences.

VERB		ACTIVE		PASSIVE	
Mashi	English	Mashi	English	Mashi	English
16. kuyambala	To get dressed	Rhwayambi**rhe** emishangi	We have got dressed	Emishangi ya yambi**rhwe**	Cloths have been worn
17. kulya	To eat	Abana bali**re** enyama	Children have eaten meat	Enyama yali**rwe** n'abana	Meat has been eaten by children
18. kuyigiriza	To teach	Ka wayigirizi**ze** abanafunzi?	Have you taught the pupils?	Ka abanafunzi bayigirizi**bwe**?	Have the pupils been taught?
19. kuyambisa	To cloth; to dress	Nyama anayambisi**ze** abinjikulu	Mum has dressed her grandchildren	Abana bayambisi**bwe** na nakulu	The children have been dressed by their grandmother
20.kuburha	To give birth	Mukanie anabu*sire* murhabana	My wife has given birth a baby boy	Omurhabana anabusi**rwe**	A baby boy has been given birth
21. kubuka	To treat	Munganga anabu*sire* oyu mulwala	The nurse has treated this patient	Oyu mulwala anabusi**rwe**	This patient has been treated
22. kusoma	To read	Mwalimu anasomi**re** amaruba	The teacher has read the letter	Amaruba gasomi**rwe**	The letter has been read
23.kurhanza	To give beer out	Barhanzi**ze** amanvu	They have given beer out	Amanvu garhanzi**bwe**	Beer has been given out

The present perfect passive in English has the present perfect of to be and the passive participle. The passive participle is formed by adding the morpheme –d/-ed- to the infinitive of regular verbs. But irregular verbs form their past or passive participle in many different ways.

3.4   COMPARISON OF THE PRESENT PERFECT TENSE IN MASHI AND ENGLISH

3.4.1   INTRODUCTION

The seven first sections of this chapter have focused on description of the of the present perfect tense. In this sub-section I pick the similarities and the differences thereof.

Book readers, however, would like to know whether English and Mashi or their present perfect tense is comparable. Such question was a problem for structuralists. Structuralists, like F. de Saussure, state that the language is "un système où tout se tient" or a system made up and defined by the sum of its constituent terms (Jamed C. 1980: 167). The comparability of languages is first justified by the universals of the language. Human beings encounter the same life emotions: they love or hate, they can be glad or sad, they are born, live and die, etc.

These emotions and more other attitudes are expressed in their languages. Although languages are comparable, they are not identical. They simply have a degree of similarity.

3.4.2 SIMILARITIES

English and Mashi do not have any similarities apart from some phonological elements. A lot of phonemes can be found in both languages. As for morphology, the verb in Mashi are not similar to the English ones. In addition, Mashi verb conjugation morphemes cannot come closer to those of English.

In syntax of tenses, however, there are some similarities. In English, the present perfect tells us about the past and about the present. When we use the present perfect, we look from the present. For example, we can use the present for an action in a period leading up to the present (Eastwood J., Op.Cit.65)

This is correct for Mashi as well

24. English: The child has eaten

    Mashi: Omwana analire

3.4.3 DIFFERENCES

3.4.3.1 PHONOLOGICAL LEVEL

Owing to the fact that English and Mashi do not belong to the same family, I have identified more differences than similarities. First, at the phonological level, English has more than twelve pure vowels while Mashi has got only five.

Second, the consonant system of English counts phonemes which do not exist in Mashi and vice-versa. The phonemes which exist in English but do not exist in Mashi are /ð/, /θ/ and /ʒ/. Those which exist in Mashi but not in English are /ɾ/, /ɲ/.

E.g: kurhola /ku ɾo: la/: to pick up (Mashi)
Kunyaga /ku ɲaga/: to loot (Mashi)
To think /tə θɪŋk/ (English)
To writhe /tə raɪð/ (English)
To measure /tə 'me ʒə (r) /

3.4.3.2 THE MORPHOLOGICAL LEVEL

Since this study is not concerned with contrasting Mashi and English languages, but merely some of their constituents, I can't stretch the phonological differences between both languages as far as the present tense is concerned.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper has looked into the comparison of the present perfect tense in English and Mashi languages. This comparison has found out that English and Mashi present perfect tense has more differences than similarities. This may be due to the fact that both languages belong to different families and systems. Moreover, English is an analytic language whereas Mashi is an agglutinative one. That is why the present perfect tense, in particular, and almost all the Shi tenses, in general, are made up of formatives, suffixes and infixes which agglutinate around the verb. But this is not the case in English.

This study has fully confirmed the hypotheses that I formulated at the beginning. They stated that Shi English learners try to generalize their mother tongue's conjugation rules to English and that some of them are unable to master their L2 rules due to the large gap of differences between Mashi and English.

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