



Subordinate Clauses in English and Mwaghavul

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Abstract

This research is a contrastive study of subordinate clauses in English and Mwaghavul. It describes the various types of subordinate clauses in both languages which are the nominal, adjectival and adverbial clauses, adapting the descriptive research design and Contrastive Analysis. From the study, it is obvious that there are many similarities and few differences in subordinate clauses of English and that of Mwaghavul, majorly in terms of structure not function. A sharp contrast between the subordinate clauses in English and Mwaghavul is that in Mwaghavul, a noun clause cannot begin the sentence unlike in English where 'that' can begin a sentence. This kind of noun clause in Mwaghavul, comes at the end of the sentence after the main verb. It is also obvious from the study that in Mwaghavul, relative pronouns *nnee* and *dii* introduce relative clauses like in English where the relative pronouns *who*, *which*, among others do that. The relative pronoun, '*nnee*' is used for *that* while *dii* is used for *who*, *which*, *whom* and *whose*. In Mwaghavul, relative clauses could be defining or non-defining just like in English language, where the difference is that commas are not used in defining relative clauses but are used in non-defining relative clauses. However, adverbial clauses in Mwaghavul, like in English function as adjuncts in sentences, providing additional information that are important, telling us the place, time, reason, manner of an event and so on. It is vital to note that generally, subordinate clauses in English language and Mwaghavul are very similar functionally, and also with other Nigerian languages like Owé, Tarok, Epira and Yoruba, as reviewed in part of this study.

Keywords: Clauses; Subordinate clauses; Mwaghavul; English

Background/Introduction

Subordinate clauses are vital in the syntactic structuring of any language. Understanding how subordinate clauses are constructed and their functions in one's native language (L1) goes a long way to helping a student understand subordinate clauses in English language (the target language). Comprehending the similarities and differences in the subordinate clauses of English and that of Mwaghavul is very central to the effective teaching and learning of this concept in English language. Mwaghavul is an Afro-Asiatic language spoken in Plateau state, Nigeria. It is a West Chadic language spoken in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, with an estimated population of 150,000 speakers. Their two main towns are Mangu and Panyam. The Mwaghavul are also known as 'Sura or Mupun'. Mwaghavul is bordered by Plateau (i.e. Benue-Congo) languages to the north and west,

conspicuously Berom and Izere and the closest relatives to Mwaghavul are the Cakfem-Mushere and Miship (Nathaniel 9). According to Selbut (76), clauses function as units of a sentence though they themselves resemble or appear like sentences in having subjects and predicates. Jowitt (14) defines a clause as 'a group of words having a verb and a subject- and this also serves to define a simple sentence'. The number of clauses in a sentence is same as the number of verbs in the sentence. Traditionally, there are two types of clauses; main (independent) and subordinate (dependent) clauses. While a main clause is equivalent to a simple sentence and can stand on its own, the dependent clause cannot. It is vital to note that every clause has a verb, including the so-called *verbless* sentences, where the verb in the latter is a copular one and is part of the subject and corresponding pronouns including focus ones. (Selbut 76).

Example:

1. I spoke to Mary who sat next to me

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Main clause subordinate (relative) clause

The simple sentences in the example above are:

I spoke to Mary

Mary sat next to me

To make a complex sentence, the two simple sentences are joined to give, **I spoke to Mary who sat next to me.** **Mary** is replaced with **who**. This is because the ‘Mary’ in sentence 1 is the same with the ‘Mary’ in sentence 2 and ‘who’ is a relative pronoun, relating the first clause to the second. Other relative pronouns are **which** and **that** used for non-humans but **that** can also be used for humans. Relative clauses are usually embedded in main clauses.

Relative clauses could contain subjects and objects for example:

Jane, **who bought a new bag**, is coming to see you

Here, **who...new bag** is a relative clause embedded in the main clause. The verb in the clause is ‘bought’, and its subject is ‘who’- the relative pronoun is the subject of the relative clause.

Example: She began eating the food **which her mother had kept**
The relative clause is **which...kept**. The verb in the clause is **had kept** and its subject is **her mother**. The relative pronoun **which**, standing for the food is the object of the verb in the relative clause.

Another aspect of relative clause formation is the use of **whose**, which can also begin a relative clause but is possessive.

Example: Mr. John, **whose son is sick**, is here again. **Whose** is used not **who** his son is sick.

A lot of studies have been done on subordinate clauses, especially in English and other languages, however, that of Mwaghavul is at present difficult to access. This study fills that academic gap.

Methodology

All the sentences used for analysis were obtained and modified (adapted) from Aarts (2001) and Carnie (2007) and used for analysis. The direct translation and word –for- word glossing for the words from Mwaghavul language to English is done before the literal translation [3,4].

Framework

Contrastive analysis (CA)

Contrastive Analysis refers to the comparison of two languages or varieties of a language by paying attention primarily to their differences and similarities. It was first suggested by Whorf (1914) as Contrastive Linguistics and later changed by Lado to Contrastive Analysis (1957). The branches which CA is involved include translation, teaching, Linguistics, textbook writing, and error analysis. In Linguistics, to which the present study belongs, CA pays attention to different languages at lexical, phonological, syntactical and semantic levels.

The main focus or idea of Contrastive Analysis as propounded by Lado (1957) is that it is possible to identify the areas of difficulty

a particular foreign language will for native speakers of another language. In CA, the two languages or cultures are compared which determine whether the learning will be easier or difficult. The present study focuses on countries where English language is not a native language, and so the development of a distinct variety of English language peculiar to each country is made “tedious” or quite challenging due to MT interference, culture differences among other issues. CA is based on the theoretical assumption of behaviourism. If L2 acquisition is hampered or disturbed by the habits of your native language, it is only reasonable to focus on the differences between native and target language. Recognizing the differences will help you overcome those linguistic habits of your MT that interfere with the habit of your target language. CA is founded on the assumption that L2 learners tend to transfer in the target language, features found in their L1 (native language) which may be positive or negative.

CA is useful in this study even though the focus of this research is neither centred on mother tongue interference nor pedagogical in nature, which seems to be at the centre of CA. However, the theory of CA is of great help in the aspect of bringing out the differences and similarities between the two languages under investigation.

Review of Subordinate/ Dependent Clauses in Other Languages

According to Selbut (76-7), there are five types of dependent clauses in Tarok which are completive, subjunctive, relative, conditional and causal clauses; similar with that in English language.

Completive- they are introduced by the particle **pá** as in

ÙTali lãpá ògà cít
Tali said that he-has go already
Tali said that he has already gone
This is similar to that of English.

Subjunctive- the subject pronouns of subjunctive clauses have high tones for the first and second persons and an additional particle, **á** between the subject and the stem in the third person as in:

Ù wàlà pá ríngà
It-is-he said that I-should go
He was the one who said I should go

Relative-it is marked by a pronoun **vã** or **vá**. This may be used with the pause marker **té**. The relative pronoun **vã** is used to tie up the clause to the subject of the main clause. When a demonstrative is used, it appears immediately to the right of the relative pronoun. Example is:

Ùnãmvá kÚté , Ùwà amoto ká lãpváá
Person who died then, he-one car TENSE hit
that PART



The man who has died is the one who was hit by the car

Conditional- it is marked by the phrase **á yàpé/pá** in the imperfective and stative aspect and **káyàpé/pá** in the perfective aspect. The use of the marker is optional and here serves as a shortening device. Examples:

‘káyà pé uzá gə gə té, ÛTal iká bá cít
It TENSE be that he got then, Tali TENSE come
already

If he had gone, Tali would have come

Causal clauses- begins with **kákÚI** (because). Example:

Ùzá cír ká kÚI páa yángig bál w ò
He run because that hunger AUX. kill him

He ran for fear of dying of food shortage

According to Arokoyo (2), in Owé, the focus marker (FM) is **ki**, meaning ‘that’ which heads the focus Phrase. He also says that Yoruba and Owé focus constructions are very similar except for the difference in their focus markers because that of Yoruba is **ni**.

For example: motò kim òrá
Car FMI bought
It is a car that I bought

Arokoyo (4), quoting Awoyale (10) says focus markers primarily foregrounds information. Radford (453) says focusing denotes a movement operation by which a constituent is moved into a focus position at the beginning of a clause in order to highlight it. Also, Arokoyo (4), citing Baiyere (1999, 2004) says ‘when a constituent is focused in Owé, it is moved from its original position to the sentence initial position’. Example:

Títí kí óra apo lí ojà
Titi FM she buy pepper at market
It is Titi that bought pepper at the market

Adivè (1989) as cited in Longtau (79) says in Ebira, the conditional dependent clauses usually precede the main clause but purpose and reason dependent clauses usually follow the main clause, which is also same with Tarok. Tarok has five focus constituents which are adverb focus, subject focus, object focus, preposition focus and verb focus.

SUBORDINATE CLAUSES IN ENGLISH

Dependent clauses in complex sentences function in different ways: as nouns (nominal clauses), as adjectives (adjectival or relative clauses) and as adverbs (adverbial clauses). The word beginning a clause tells what kind of clause it is for example: noun clauses often begin with **that**, adjectival clauses with **who, whom, that, which** and **whose** and adverbial clauses with **when, before, after, since, as, if, although** etc. For example: I will eat the food **since you cooked it**

Noun Clauses

These are also known as ‘nominal clauses’. A nominal clause behaves like a noun phrase for example:

I know your wife

I know **that your wife is a banker**

In (1) above, your wife is a noun phrase and the object of the verb, **know** while in (2), **know** again has an object but it is not a noun clause, **that your wife is a banker**. A noun clause object is most often used after the verbs believe, think, know, hear, say, claim, report, among many others and it is not compulsory to put ‘that’ before the clause.

A noun clause is sometimes the subject of a verb and the sentences may begin with **that** for example: *That you have always been caring* impresses me. Most of the time, this kind of noun clause comes at the end of the sentence after the main verb and the subject of the sentence is usually ‘it’ for example: It amazes me ‘that you are so angry’. The noun clause is said to be ‘in apposition’ to ‘it’ (telling us what the ‘it’ is). Noun clauses of apposition are also found after words like idea, belief, suggestion, fact and tells us what the word... is (Jowitt 43).

Example: The fact **that she greeted you** annoyed me. ‘**The fact**’ is the subject of the verb, annoyed; ‘**that ...to you**’ is a noun clause in apposition to it.

Another type of noun clause comes after the verb ‘be’ or ‘seem’ or ‘appear’ and it is said to be the complement of the verb. Example: It seems **that she rarely washes her clothes**.

Adjectival clauses

They are also known as relative clauses, introduced by the words who, whom, which, whose, that. These words are called ‘relative pronouns’, relating the relative clause with which they begin to the preceding or surrounding clause. It is also an adjectival clause because it describes or qualifies a noun phrase in the preceding clause. Relative pronouns function in diverse ways for Example:

The girl **who sits next to John** comes from Plateau State.
She came to a narrow bridge **which crosses a wider river**.

In the first sentence, **who** is the subject of the verb, **sits** and in the second, **which** is the subject of **crosses**. We are expected to use **whose** only if the noun phrase before it is a living thing if not we ought to use **of which**. Example: I spoke to the girl **whose bag was stolen**.

Relative clauses could be defining or non-defining. The difference is that commas are not used in defining relative clauses while commas are used in non-defining relative clauses. Example: **Defining:** The girl who sits next to John comes from Plateau State. The clause **who sits next to John** is defining because it defines **the girl** and without it, we would not know who the girl is, to which **girl** is being referred to. Here, there is no comma after girl.

Non-defining: I hardly listen to Don Moen, whose music is popular



Here, the clause **whose music is popular** does not define Don Moen but tells us more about him so a comma is used after Don Moen.

Adverbial clauses

They function as adjuncts in sentences. Adjuncts provide additional information that are important, telling us the place, time, reason, manner of an event and so on. According to Jowitt (48), there are various types of adverbial clauses. They are:

Time: **When I come to Jos**, I will see you

Condition: **if you go out**, do not come in

Reason or Cause: **Since you don't like me**, I will not call you

Contrast or Concession: **Although I have not seen him**, I love what I hear about him

Place: I live **where the lady stays**

Result: He was so glad **that I came**

Purpose: I am sending you the money **so that you can buy the dress**

Manner: He was so scared **as if he has seen a Ghost**

Degree or Comparison: I appreciate you **more than I can say**

Comment: **As you know**, he is a teacher.

Data Analysis

Subordinate clauses in Mwaghavul

There are various types of subordinate clauses in Mwaghavul, which are mostly similar to that of English. The word **ñnee** in Mwaghavul is a relative pronoun which means **that**. The three major types of subordinate clauses in Mwaghavul are the noun clause, the adjectival clause and the adverbial clause. Also, **dii** or **di**, which are shortened from **di ki** are used as relative pronouns, **who** and **which**. For example:

Ánka kàtpòò Mary dii ton mpèèsi
I Prog speak Mary who sit there

I am speaking with Mary who sits over there

Nominal Clause:

Mwaghavul also has nominal clauses like English, for Example:

Án manñ nee mat fwagha a banker

I know that wife yours is banker

I know that your wife is a banker

In the sentence above, **mat fwagha** (your wife) is a noun phrase and the object of the verb, **man** (know). A noun clause object in Mwaghavul, like in English is most often used after the verbs believe, think, know, hear, say, claim, report among many others and it is not compulsory to put **ñnee** (that) before the clause.

In Mwaghavul, the noun clause cannot begin the sentence unlike in English where **that** can begin a sentence. This kind of noun clause in Mwaghavul comes at the end of the sentence after the main verb and the subject of the sentence is usually **ni** (it), for example:

Ni daampee an ñnee a kiling tughup

It amazes me that you feel anger

It amazes me that you are angry

The noun clause is said to be 'in apposition' to 'it' (telling us what the 'it' is), like in English.

Adjectival Clauses

In Mwaghavul, relative clauses are introduced by relative pronouns who, whom, which, whose, that or subordinating conjunctions because, if and many others like in English Language. The relative pronoun, **ñnee** is used for **that** while **dii** is used for **who, which, whom and whose**.

Also, in Mwaghavul, relative clauses could be defining or non-defining like in English. The difference is that while commas are not used in defining relative clauses, commas are used in non-defining relative clauses. Example:

Defining

Laa di tong kus ki John a la fina

Girl who sit close to John is daughter my

The girl who sits next to John is my daughter.

The clause **di tong kuski John** (who sits next to John) is defining because it defines 'laa' (the girl) and without it, we would not know who the girl in which 'girl' is being referred to.

Non-defining

Wánná John, di laa kiri mut

I see John, who child his die

I saw John, whose child died

Here, the clause, **di laa kiri mut** (whose child died) does not define John but tells us more about him, so a comma is used after John.

Adverbial Clauses

Adverbial clauses in Mwaghavul, like in English function as adjuncts in sentences, providing additional information that are important, telling us the place, time, reason, manner of an event and so on. Examples are:

Time: ka an ji Jos, an náá a

When I come Jos, I see you

When I come to Jos, I will see you

Condition:

ka a son tileng, kachi aba jiin digin

if you go out, do not again come inside

if you go out, do not come in

Degree or Comparison: an dom yi met la

fina

I love you morethan child mine

I love you morethan I love my child

These are just a few examples among others.

Discussion of Findings

From this study, it is observed that the three basic types of subordinate clauses in English also exist in Mwaghavul. While noun clauses in English may begin with **that** for example: *That you have always been caring* impresses me, noun clauses in Mwaghavul cannot begin with ‘that’. Most of the time in English, this kind of noun clause comes at the end of the sentence after the main verb and the subject of the sentence is usually ‘it’ for example: It amazes me ‘that you are so angry’ and this is also true with Mwaghavul Noun clauses.

Adjectival clauses in English like in Mwaghavul perform roles of describing and qualifying noun phrases in the preceding clause and they could be either defining or non-defining relatives clauses in both languages.

Adverbial clauses in Mwaghavul, like in English function as adjuncts in sentences, providing additional information that are important, telling us the place, time, reason, manner of an event and so on.

Example:

Mwaghavul: ka an jin Jos, an náá a
When I come Jos, I see you

English: When I come to Jos, I will see you

It is vital to note that in Mwaghavul, there is no auxiliary to indicate future, “will” instead, a change in tone (rise) in pronouncing the subject is used to indicate auxiliaries like in the example above.

Summary and Conclusion

From the study, it is obvious that there are many similarities and few differences in subordinate clauses of English and that of Mwaghavul. A sharp contrast between the subordinate clauses in English and Mwaghavul is that in Mwaghavul, the noun clause cannot begin the sentence unlike in English where ‘that’ can begin a sentence. In Mwaghavul, this kind of noun clause comes at the end of the sentence after the main verb. It is also obvious from the study that in Mwaghavul, relative pronouns **ñnee** and **dii** introduce relative clauses like in English where relative pronouns **who**, **that** among others introduce relative clauses. The relative pronoun **ñnee**, is used for **that** while **dii** is used for **who**, **which**, **whom** and **whose**.

In Mwaghavul, relative clauses could be defining or non-defining just like in English language where the difference is that commas are not used in defining relative clauses but are used in non-defining relative clauses. However, adverbial clauses in Mwaghavul like in English function as adjuncts in sentences, providing additional information that are important, telling us the place, time, reason, manner of an event and so on. It is vital to note

that generally, the subordinate clauses in English language and that in Mwaghavul are very similar in terms of function with some differences in terms of structuring or ordering.

Relevance of the Study

This research is very relevant because it studies and compares subordinate clauses in English language and Mwaghavul and also a few other languages. It studies the similarities and differences in subordinate clauses in these languages. Contrastive studies of languages are of great help to students of English and Linguistics because they aid them better understand various concepts in the English Language. This is because it takes one with a good mastery of his/her mother tongue to better understand a second language. Effective learning could be said to be complete only when the knowledge acquired can be applied. This study will help students to apply the knowledge gained for deeper understanding of the English language (the target language). This is because we all have L1 and English is at least our L2. It takes one with a good mastery of his/her L1 to fully understand the L2, just as it takes an English man whose L1 is the English language a good mastery of English to effectively learn and understand a new language or an L2. Obviously, one first of all understands what he hears in his L1 before he immediately interprets or translates it to his L2.

This study will therefore serve as a relevant document for Mwaghavul students of English and Linguistics and even other interested scholars, to whom the English language is an L2, as a good guide in contrastive studies of English and other languages.

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