Experiencing Language Transfer among Secondary School Students in Tanzania: An Analysis of Syntactic Transfer of Essays from Three Secondary Schools in Moshi Municipality - Kilimanjaro

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Abstract
This paper explores essays from three secondary schools in Moshi Municipality to determine the evidence of language transfer. The study was guided by Selinker’s interlanguage theory. The study involved two classes in each school; the classes were Form Three and Form Four. The essays were analyzed and instances of transfer counted using content analysis and were arranged according to their pattern, namely word order transfer, article deletion, pronoun redundant and subject omission. The instances were then grouped and counted and comparatively described in percentages according to the levels and schools. The findings reveal that students in both levels consistently transferred some syntactic features of their First Language (L1) when writing in English. The transfer types observed from their essays include word order transfer, article deletion, subject omission, and redundant pronoun. However, word order transfer featured more dominantly compared to the other types. It is concluded that the results from the study reported herein suggest that Tanzanian secondary school students use more features of their first language when producing the target texts.

Keywords
Interlanguage, language transfer, syntax, a sentence

Introduction
Acquiring a second language involves many challenges, one of which is the difference that exists between the learners’ native language and the target language. There have been various theoretical approaches to second language learning which have tried to address such challenges, for example Language Transfer (LT) and Interlanguage (IL).
Transfer is a traditional term from psychology of learning which means imposition of previously learned patterns onto a new learning situation (Gass & Selinker, 2008). According to Odlin (1989), transfer is an influence resulting from similarities and differences between the Target Language (TL) and any other language that has been previously and perhaps imperfectly acquired.

Transfer can be observed in all aspects of language. For instance, Singleton (2006), Ringbom (2007), Cenoz (2001) extensively explored on the importance of transfer in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Some have looked at transfer in morphology (DE Angelis & Selinker, 2001). A study by Mwambapa (2012) on phonological transfer reports that students encounter difficulties in pronunciation of English words because of Kiswahili Language. This shows that student’s first language, in this sense Kiswahili, affects their ability in acquiring English because they tend to transfer some L1 features into L2. While Mocho (2012) found that Idakho first language speaker who is learning Kiswahili as a second language transfer their L1 in the areas of pronominal prefixes, adverbial prefixes, verbal prefixes, subject prefixes, augmentatives, diminutives, and locatives.

In (SLA), the knowledge of L1 in the acquisition of L2 can indeed have a facilitative or inhibitive effect on the learner’s progress in mastering a new language (Gass & Selinker, *ibid*). Usually, facilitation effect is known as positive transfer while inhibition is considered negative transfer. Negative transfer appears to be of great concern among researchers working on SLA such as Yip and Mathews, (2000) and Boroditsky, (2000) because it seems that, through proper understanding of negative transfer, one can be able to establish a hierarchy of difficulty and therefore the hierarchy of learning.

It is also said that languages unrelated to the target language influence learning of the target language. This is because second language learners tend to assume such similarities in the L1 even if such similarities do not exist (Ringbom, 2007). Kiswahili and other Bantu languages are said to have different cross-linguistic similarities with English language. For example Kiswahili is described to be a morphologically complex agglutinative language while English is an inflective language (Deen, 2002).
In Tanzania, Kiswahili is both a subject and a Medium of Instruction (MoI) in primary schools. Tanzania employs a late-exit transitional bilingual model where Kiswahili is the language of instruction in primary schools for seven (7) years and then a switch is made to English when students enter secondary schools where English becomes the MoI. However Qorro (2006), Muzale (1993), Campbell and Qorro (1987) assert that, although English is the language of secondary education, it has remained mainly the language of the classroom. This implies that Kiswahili is widely used outside classroom environment something which eventually facilitates language transfer in the process of SLA. This is because when two or more languages come into contact and used simultaneously, there is high possibility that language transfer would take place during writing and speaking. Such transfer between these languages may either be positive or negative. It is said that, between the two, the positive one in most cases facilitates second language learning. This is clearly put forward by Ringbom (2007) as he comments; “learners usually transfer to the target language the properties of their first language or any other language that they have mastery of”. This is because one of the most recognizable traits of L2 learner’s speech is that it bears certain resemblance to the L1. For instance, someone whose L1 is French is likely to sound different from someone whose L1 is Germany when they both speak English (Archibald, 1996).

Looking at the status of education system in Tanzania, where the two languages are used as the medium of instruction, it gives the justification for the present study to examine syntactic transfer in essays of three secondary schools.

Theoretical Consideration
The present study adopts Interlanguage Theory (IL) by Selinker (1972). IL theory holds that transfer is one of the factors associated with the unique system of the L2 learner’s language, i.e. language transfer exists in L2. The theory further explains that learners do not construct rules from the vacuum; rather they work with whatever information is at their disposal. That is to say, their L1 is considered as a kind of input from the inside. This is why IL theory will be used to explain the syntactic transfer on students’ essays.

Before probing into major discussion, it is important to consider the following...
terminologies since the present study focuses on the analysis of syntactic transfer it is important to know some key definitions.

Syntax is the study of the way in which phrases and sentences are structured out of words, and so it addresses the structure of a sentence (Radford, 2004). The sentence can be defined from the point of view of three types of grammar: traditional, structural and transformational.

A sentence is a group of words made up of syntactic units – the Noun Phrase (NP) and the Verb Phrase (VP) and function as a unit (Carnie, 2010).

**Methodological Approach**

The target population was Form Three and Form Four students from three secondary schools in Moshi Municipality, Kilimanjaro Region. The three schools were purposively selected because they share the attributes such as geographical location as they are all located in urban area and second, their medium of instruction is English. For ethical reasons, the selected secondary schools are pseudo-named A, B, and C. A total of 120 students were purposively selected as a sample size whereby each class had a representative of 20 students. Data were thus collected through writing task and questionnaire. The respondents were asked to write a one page essay on the topic “English Language Learning Experience”.

As for the questionnaire, this was administered to all the students in the class so as to collect data regarding the languages they spoke. This was done because the study targeted only the students whose Kiswahili is their first language. However, all the respondents filled in the questionnaire. The analysis was done to only those who speak Kiswahili as their first language. In analyzing the data, the study employed content analysis whereby the instances of transfer were counted and the analysis was grouped into percentages.

**Findings and Discussion**

The findings are presented with regard to the types of transfer pattern as data revealed. The findings show a variety a transfer types in students’ essays. The transfer types include word order transfer, article deletion transfer, redundant pronoun transfer, and null subject transfer. The transfer of some Kiswahili patterns into English writings were observed in the essays of both form Three and form Four students. These
findings are presented below with regard to their respective schools and classes that is, School A, B, and C.

1. Word Order Transfer

Every language has a strict pattern which determines how these words should appear so as to have the concordial agreement. For example, there is one clear difference between the structure of the Noun Phrase (NP) containing one word in Kiswahili and those in English. Whereas in English common nouns will always co-occur with an article e.g. *a chair* in English and *kiti* in Kiswahili while Kiswahili does not have any definite or indefinite articles. The difference between this type of NP in these two languages is that the unmarked order for nouns and adjectives in Kiswahili is noun + adjective. This is exactly the opposite of the adjective + noun order used in English. In this study, the respondents tended to transfer word order structure of Kiswahili into English. For example, from the data, word order transfer comprised of 21(68%) cases in School A, 26 (73%) in School B and in School C it was 19 (60%). School B had a considerable amount of transfer compared to schools A and C, as summarised in Figure 1.

![Figure 1 Word Order Transfer](image)

*Figure 1 Word Order Transfer*
Examples of word order transfer instances from School B were such as, “I don’t feel shame to speak English broken” instead of “I do not feel shame to speak broken English.” In School C, one of the examples observed was, “I like to learn books of stories” instead of “I like to read story books”. From those examples, not only the word order transfer was observed but also the transfer produced ungrammatical sentence structure. In this case, the respondents borrowed the Kiswahili word order structure into English. In Kiswahili language, the dependents are usually right-headed as a result, respondents found themselves transfer this structure when writing in English language.

The data show that a recurring type of word order transfer observed in students’ essays is when pre modifiers are placed in such a way that they follow the noun instead of coming before the noun. Most of the time, noun pre modifiers and adjectives were the most frequently misplaced. Evidence from the data includes:

1. “I love reading book English” instead of “I love reading English books”

   Ninapenda kusoma kitabu cha Kiingereza.

   

Example 1 shows that the respondent transferred the structure of Kiswahili into English language since in Kiswahili modifiers come after the head NP with an exception of distributives and demonstratives.

So *kitabu* (book) as a noun comes first then followed by its post modifier ‘*cha Kiingereza* (of English)’. In this pattern, the word order has been reversed since the pre modifiers in English are the post modifiers in Kiswahili. Also, see the construction below:

2. “In secondary school we use English spoken” instead of “In secondary school we use spoken English”.

   Katika shule ya sekondari tunatumia Kiingereza cha kuzungumza

   In example 2 the adjective ‘spoken’ has been placed after the noun instead of being placed as a pre modifier, a structure which is accepted in Kiswahili. However, this structure is unacceptable in English. List 1 presents other instances of word order transfer observed from the data.

**List 1: Word Order Transfer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) My teacher of primary</td>
<td>a) I love reading book</td>
<td>a) My teacher of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In example 2 the adjective ‘spoken’ has been placed after the noun instead of being placed as a pre modifier, a structure which is accepted in Kiswahili. However, this structure is unacceptable in English. List 1 presents other instances of word order transfer observed from the data.
As can be seen from the data, respondents incorporated features of Kiswahili into English. Consider the following structure:

3. “My teacher in primary school.”
head while in English the NP dependents may appear before its head.

2. Article Deletion Transfer
Lack of definite and indefinite articles in Kiswahili language was also observed in this study. There were a lot of instances when the respondents wrote without considering placing articles. In this case, the sentences produced were either ungrammatical or could hardly be specified in terms of number, that is, it is difficult to say whether they were referring to either a singular or plural subject. From the findings, the cases of article deletion transfer amounted to 19 (98%) in School A, 15 (69%) in School B and 8(43%) in School C. As can be seen, this type of transfer seemed to be more challenging in School A than the other two schools. Figure 2 presents the data in percentages as they occurred in each level.

![Figure 1.1 Article Deletion Transfer](image)

**Figure 1.1 Article Deletion Transfer**

From the findings, the following examples are given. From School A, one respondent wrote

4. “English it is – medium of communication” instead of “English is the medium of communication”.

Sentence 4 shows how the respondents deleted the article and repeated the pronoun unnecessarily hence redundancy.

In School B, one respondent wrote

5. “Kiswahili is - language of – nation” instead of “Kiswahili is the national language”.

In School C, one respondent wrote

The respondents in School C faced the least challenges in article deletion transfer.
This sentence sounds more of a translation from Kiswahili into English. In Kiswahili the sentence would be *Kiswahili ni lugha ya taifa*. From School C one respondent wrote “English make me – good speaker” instead of “English makes me a good speaker” The sentence has a missing article and it also lacks subject verb agreement ‘s’ to make it grammatically correct.

A possible explanation for article deletion might be due to the fact that Kiswahili language does not have any articles both definite and indefinite in the NP, which makes learners of English to overlook them. In an attempt to transfer the structure of Kiswahili language into English structure, respondents even placed a preposition between the two NPs hence forming a structure which seems to rely more on L1. Similar to this finding was the study by Butterworth (1978) who found that, Ricardo, a 13 year old Spanish boy learning English, often used subject-less sentences. This tendency was attributed to L1 interference since it is perfectly acceptable to omit the subject in Spanish language. More examples from the findings see example 6 below:

6. “We were doing – test of English every Saturday”,

Looking at example 6 above, we can see how the respondents have invented their own sentence, as a result, instead of the sentence to read as “We were doing an English test every Saturday”. The structure was revised by insertion of preposition *of*. The insertion of preposition was a rule-governed strategy as they inserted it between the noun and its dependents. In so doing, they created a structure which is neither purely Kiswahili nor English. This is what Ellis (1994) in IL theory propounds about the capability of L2 learners. The theory considers the learner as an active participant since he is capable of constructing rules from the challenges he encounters. Another transfer emanated from the data includes:

7. “I read- book of story and watch the movies of English”

Looking at example 7, the article has been omitted. Similarly, its structure has been reversed whereby a noun ‘story’ which was supposed to be a pre-modifier has been presented as a post modifier. The correct
structure is supposed to be “I read a story book and watch English movies”. In Kiswahili this structure is a normal formation as it would read Ninasoma kitabu cha hadithi na kuangalia filamu za Kiingereza. In this case the noun ‘book’ is placed first in the Kiswahili word order, followed by a noun ‘story’. On top of that, the respondents added a preposition between the noun and its dependents. In so doing they created a Kiswahili structure. This process is what is also termed as interlanguage. List 2 presents other instances of article deletion transfer:

**List 2: Article Deletion Transfer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) English it was - subject that</td>
<td>a) -teacher she can teach</td>
<td>a) I read - book of English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) She will give – punishment to – student</td>
<td>b) I love reading – book of English</td>
<td>b) My teacher of English she is – nice person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) English is – subject of whole world</td>
<td>c) I read – book daily</td>
<td>c) ) I read- book of story and watch movies..</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) English it was – subject which was difficulty..</td>
<td>d) - teacher and - student use English in different</td>
<td>d) English language is giving me – challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) English is – nice subject</td>
<td>e) – student does not speak English language</td>
<td>e) –student in secondary speak English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) English is – communication language</td>
<td>f) Kiswahili is – language of – nation</td>
<td>f) English make me – good speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) - student in secondary must know English</td>
<td>g) You will fail to answer – question</td>
<td>g) - student of secondary speak English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) English it is – medium of communication</td>
<td>h) - teacher speak English</td>
<td>h) All – subjects of secondary are taught..</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. **Redundant Pronoun Transfer**

Another area of syntactic transfer that has been observed in the data is redundant pronoun transfer. In this kind of transfer, unnecessary pronoun is added. In this structure, the respondents placed the noun and pronoun together while each one is a full subject by itself. Redundant pronoun transfer
comprised 26 (76%) cases in School A, 16 (70%) in School B, and 10 (53%) in School C. The percentages for other redundant pronouns are shown in Figure 1.3.

![Graph showing redundant pronoun transfer](image)

Figure 3: Redundant Pronoun Transfer

From the data, other examples include “Me I like the English language”. In this aspect, not only was the pronoun repeated needlessly but also the objective pronoun me in English was placed in the subjective case. By so doing, the respondents created an ill-formed structure in English language. In addition, this transfer pattern seems to take a significant share than the other patterns. This is a result of interference from Kiswahili where a subject prefix is always placed before the verb stem even if the subjects have been specified. That is why the respondent used the NP “my friend” and added the pronoun “she” resulting into unnecessary repetition of the pronoun. This might be due to the differences that exist in the structure of English and Kiswahili languages. From the data another example includes:

8. “English it help people to get employment”

*a-nataka kujifunza Kiingereza*. It can be seen that the Kiswahili version has a subject prefix ‘a’ in the verb stem *a-nataka* which refers back to the subject *rafiki yangu*. That is why the respondent used the NP “my friend” and added the pronoun “she” resulting into unnecessary repetition of the pronoun. This structure is unacceptable in English. In Kiswahili translation it reads as *Rafiki yangu a-nataka kujifunza Kiingereza*.
The structure in example 8 above might tempt us to say that a sentence has double NPs at the subject position as we have the NP English and a pronoun it. On top of that, the sentence lacks subject verb agreement. As it can be seen, the agreement marker ‘s’ is missing while English language requires a singular verb marker to agree with a singular subject. As such, an ill-formed sentence in 8 above should have read as “English helps people to get employment”. Similarly, consider the following example:

9. “Workers they are speaking English”.

From the above sentence, the respondent added a pronoun ‘they’ needlessly whereas the subject NP ‘workers’ was already there. The addition, therefore, created an ungrammatical sentence and an NP redundancy. The following list presents other types of transfer from the data.

List 3: Pronoun Redundant Transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Many students they fail their exams</td>
<td>a) People of Africa we use English language</td>
<td>a) Me I am learning English language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Some they do not know English</td>
<td>b) Teacher she teach English language</td>
<td>b) My friend she want to learn English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) If teacher she is serious about the subject</td>
<td>c) English it help to communicate</td>
<td>c) Me I say thank you God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) My teacher she was coming to the class</td>
<td>d) English language it help me to write in</td>
<td>d) My dad he want me to know English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) My teacher she was motivate me</td>
<td>e) English language it is not a very hard</td>
<td>e) Me I try to speak English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>thing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Me I like the English language</td>
<td>f) Workers they are speaking English</td>
<td>f) Me I am going to the other country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) English it help</td>
<td>g) Me I try to</td>
<td>g) English it help people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
people to know understand English to get job
many things

h) English it is h) Me I say that..
h) English it help me..

spoken..

i) Me like me I started i) Me I like the i) Me I studied in
to English in class English language English school
one

4. Null Subject Transfer
Who or what a sentence speaks about is called a subject. The subject is either a noun or a pronoun. In English language, the subject of sentence is always explicit while in Kiswahili the subject is implicit as the subject prefix in Kiswahili is normally attached to its verb stem. From the findings, the students tended to drop the English subjects when writing their essays. Findings show that null subject transfer occurred in small percentage as compared to other transfer types with 52% in School A equal to 9 instances of transfer, in School B it was 5 (31%) while in School C the total percentage was 12.5% equal to 2 instances of transfer. Figure 4 summarises the percentages of transfer as they occurred in each class:
In this type of transfer, in most cases, the pronoun ‘I’ was omitted. By doing so, the sentences were made without a subject NP. So, from the observation the respondents were assuming that the verb ‘be’ is part of the subject NP. Although the use of null subject is a form of linguistic simplification, its use by the Kiswahili learners of English constitutes an L1 interference as the subject prefix in Kiswahili is normally attached to its verb stem, hence the respondents assumed the same to be the case with English language. These findings prove what the IL theory suggests, that learners do not construct rules from the vacuum; rather they work with whatever information at their disposal, in this case their L1.

Here are more examples to illustrate this type of transfer as extracted from the findings:

10. “Am trying my best.”
11. “Am good at speaking English language”
12. “I was learning English language and I found it difficult.”

Looking at examples 10, 11, and 12, it can be seen that the subject pronouns were dropped. On top of that, sentence 12 was supposed to read, “I was learning English language and I found it difficult”. Furthermore, the object pronoun was also dropped. This structure is acceptable in Kiswahili but not in English since English does not allow null subjects except in imperative sentences. The following list presents other instances of null subject transfer.
List 4: Null Subject Transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School A</th>
<th>School B</th>
<th>School C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) One day - was studying</td>
<td>a) Am getting a friend from another school</td>
<td>a) Am trying my best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) I was learning English and find it difficulty</td>
<td>b) When am in primary school</td>
<td>b) Am not good in speaking English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Teacher was not competent about what was teaching</td>
<td>c) Now am in form four</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Me I like English subject because is subject which can use anytime</td>
<td>d) I don’t feel shy to speak English language because knew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The study’s objective was to analyse syntactic transfer in English essays of secondary school students in Tanzania. The study analysed the essays of two classes that is Form Three and Four. The study found that students’ written English essays featured syntactical elements of Kiswahili language. As a result, the grammatical structure of English sentences has some resemblance with Kiswahili structure which is the first language of the respondents. Similarly, findings reveal that students transfer different kinds of knowledge from Kiswahili in their English essays so as to simplify their writings resulting to the transfer types depicted in the findings namely; word order transfer, article deletion transfer, pronoun redundant, and subject omission transfer.

Also, the findings reveal that both Form Three and Four students in all three schools transfer the patterns such as preposition and pronoun insertion into English. Andersen (2013) compares this situation as he says “language is the product not only of the immediate situation but also the previous experience of the person using the language. Significant transfer was found to those students who wrote longer text than those who wrote short text.
As a general concluding remark, Tanzanian students use more features of their first language when producing the target texts. Therefore, English language teachers need to identify the areas of target language that seem to pose much challenges to the L2 learners so as to give a special consideration while teaching so as to enable the SL learners achieve a native like performance in second language acquisition.

References