

A Descriptive Analysis of English Subtitles in Selected Igbo (Nollywood) movies

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Abstract

The study explores a grammatical analysis of subtitling in Igbo home movies. It is an attempt at investigating the grammar of English subtitles of Igbo home videos. Data were collected from selected Igbo movies with English subtitles through random sampling technique. Data were analyzed from the lens of systemic grammar model, which takes into consideration the context of language use while considering the lexical and syntactic choices open to the language users. The findings reveal that in a second language context, the translator of subtitles is confronted with some challenges such as mother language interference, over generalization of English syntactic rules, misuse of pronouns, concord issues, spelling errors, and poor sentence constructions. The study recommends that translators of Igbo home videos into English should be adequately trained. Significantly, before final production, subtitles should be properly edited to ensure their social acceptance by the viewers and to enhance the market value of the videos.

Keywords: Grammatical analysis; Subtitle; Igbo; Nollywood; Home movies

Abstract in Igbo: Oru a bu ihe gbasara nkewasi okwu na ederede a -na egosi na ihe onyonyo nke eji enwe anuri n'asusu Igbo. O bu mwali i choputa otu okwu bekee ndi a-na ede n'okporu onyonyo okwu Igbo si diri. O bu n'ime onyonyo di iche iche ndi a ka eji hoputa olee n'olee eji mee nkowa a. Nchoputa a gosikwara na ufodu ntughari okwu ndi a e mere site na Igbo tinye na bekee, a dighi ka o kwesiri i di, n'ih i na olu mba ndi mere ntughari a mabatara aka n'ime bekee ha na atughari, ha amaghikwa ebe a na ewebata nnochiaha di iche iche, ma ha enweghikwa ike inweta njiko di na aha na ngwaa, Oru a wee tulee, ma si na ndi niile na atughari okwu Igbo na bekee n'ih e onyonyo ndi a, kwesiri i bu ndi gara akwukwo ma mutakwa ntughari nke oma. Tupu a na egosi onyonyo ndi a, e kwesiri i weputa ezigbo oge, gee ha nke oma, meekwa ka ntughari o bula, na-ahiri, na-ahiri putara ihe onye kwuru ya bu n'uche kwuo ya, n'enweghi ntinye ma o bu nwepu o bula.

Introduction

In English, certain word combinations are acceptable whereas others are not, and every native speaker intuitively recognises and ascertains which expressions are well-formed or ill-formed. “The ability to point out these differences is evidence that native speakers already know the phonotactics of their language, even if they have not formally studied grammar” (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2009, p. 3). Understanding the grammar of a language is essential for effective communication. Grammatical analysis serves as a valuable tool for unraveling the intricacies of sentence structure and meaning. By systematically dissecting sentences, categorising word classes, and analysing relationships, one gains a deeper understanding of the language and enhances his or her communication skills. With practice, grammatical analysis becomes a natural part of one’s language comprehension process. Grammatical analysis enables one to delve into the structure and meaning of sentences, ensuring accurate interpretation and clear expression of thought. According to Kroeger (2004), grammatical analysis encompasses both syntax, which deals with the arrangement of phrases and sentences, and morphology, which examines word structure. It provides the necessary methods and tools for investigating grammatical patterns across languages.

Grammar encompasses more than just syntax and morphology; it involves sound combination, word construction, sentence structure, and semantic relativity. Hagen (2020) notes that grammatical analysis entails identifying the constituents within a sentence. Syntax specifically addresses how words are organised into larger units, with words serving as the fundamental building blocks of syntactic structures. While sentences are typically regarded as the largest units of analysis, syntax is commonly associated with examining sentence structure, even though the elements under analysis may not always be full sentences.

One basic concept which often gives rise to misunderstanding is that of ‘grammaticality’. In this regard, it is necessary not to confuse the descriptive notion ‘grammatical’ with the prescriptive notion ‘correct’. A sentence can be grammatical and still be considered incorrect. This poses an apparent dilemma for the linguist: should he or she describe what people actually say, or should he or she prescribe what he or others think ought to be said? Radford (1990, p. 8) questions what one would think of a social anthropologist who, rather than describing how a society actually functions, prescribes how he or she believes it should function. “We’d probably suggest he or she ought to give up anthropology and take up politics.” He further argues that modern linguistics is purely descriptive and not

prescriptive. Hence, sentences are described as ‘grammatical/ungrammatical’ or ‘well-formed/ill-formed’, while prescriptive statements such as ‘correct/incorrect’ are not used. Grammatical analysis involves uncovering a language’s grammar through the comparison of different language samples. It is a scientific method and, as with any scientific conclusion, it can be revised if new evidence emerges. It requires breaking down sentences into component parts for analysis to determine both suitability and grammaticality.

The development of the movie industry in Nigeria has expanded considerably in the 21st century. Beyond the general umbrella of movie production in Nigeria, termed ‘Nollywood’, several fragments have been carved out from the broader concept. The Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Ibibio, and Edo industries have attempted to establish themselves individually, and some have already developed nomenclature, such as ‘Kannywood’, which has been adopted for the Hausa movie industry. These linguistic groups produce films using their indigenous languages. This mode of production has popularised the languages and promoted their cultural values and beliefs. However, indigenous language-based films have restricted participation by members of other ethnic groups, as non-intelligibility has reduced their consumption rate. Uchenna (2007) observes that Nollywood significantly impacts African culture and traditions, a phenomenon reinforced by the widespread consumption of Nigerian movies both within the continent and across the diaspora. Given the investment in indigenous language films, and considering Nigeria’s multilingual context, it becomes necessary to present subtitles in English, which is both the language of wider communication and the nation’s official language. This enhances broader audience participation and improves marketability.

Subtitles are written texts that accompany oral presentations in films. When they appear in indigenous-language films, they are often translated into English so that non-native speakers of the languages can also access the semantic content, thereby ensuring wider visibility without language acting as a barrier. This has made translation and subtitling indispensable components of Igbo film production. However, since English is not a first language in Nigeria, errors in translation are inevitable. Shahid, Syed, Syed, Shabhaz, and Ahmad (2021) explain that “there is always the danger of incorrect structures and outputs when learning a foreign or second language. As a result, writing in a second language is one of the more difficult challenges that students/people may confront.” Thus, in the course of subtitling, translations often become problematic, with semantics misleading the audience through misrepresentation and misinterpretation due to grammatical issues. This has been a recurring problem, evident in some Igbo films.

The present study is based on a grammatical analysis of the subtitles used in Igbo films to determine their level of acceptability and grammaticality compared with existing standard usage. The study seeks to explain how these features affect the intelligibility of subtitles and to recommend how the issues can be remedied. The study is particularly significant at this time, as the pattern of subtitling under review has become a regular practice, and examining the underlying causes can open new frontiers in syntactic analysis and provide evidence for emerging trends in translation.

Literature review

Subtitling has evolved significantly since its early use in 1929 when *The Jazz Singer* premiered in Paris with French subtitles (Gottlieb, 2002, cited in Morris, 2009). Initially involving both technicians and translators (Georgakopoulou, 2006), subtitling has become central to global media. In Nigeria, Ibbi (2014) stresses its importance for accessibility, particularly for viewers with hearing impairments, while Bordwell and Thompson (2008, in Ibbi, 2016) note its necessity for overcoming language barriers in film distribution. Given Nigeria's multilingual context, subtitling is vital for ensuring comprehension across ethnic groups. Despite these benefits, challenges persist. Subtitles are often plagued by spelling errors, mistranslations, and ill-formed constructions, which hinder comprehension (Kayode, 2020). Morris (2009) explains that subtitling conveys speech into written form synchronised with dialogue, while Ivarsson (2003) distinguishes between removable teletext subtitles and embedded open subtitles, the latter being most common in Nigeria. Daramola, Hamilton, and Omojola (2015) argue that errors in Nollywood subtitling undermine aesthetic quality and frustrate audiences, a concern echoed by Ibbi (2014), who observes that poor subtitling disrupts viewing flow.

Scholars have analysed the causes and effects of such deficiencies. Kugbayi (2012) highlights the difficulty faced by international viewers in interpreting Nigerian English subtitled in home videos, as pragmatic and cultural meanings are often lost. Similarly, Erhieyovwe (2022) categorises errors in Yoruba-English subtitles as syntactic, semantic, and orthographic, attributing them to haste, lack of professionalism, and inadequate editing. Wen (2023) extends this concern beyond Nigeria, noting that subtitle errors—including non-equivalence and false sense—occur globally, reflecting structural differences between languages. He stresses the need for updated vocabulary, sufficient time, and financial support for subtitlers to improve quality.

The broader issue is rooted in translation challenges. Translation, defined as rendering speech or text from a source to a target language, demands high competence to minimise inevitable errors (Ibbi, 2014). Yet, Nollywood's economic pressures and reliance on non-professionals often compromise standards (Daramola, Hamilton, & Omojola, 2015). Subtitling thus involves not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural sensitivity, as some utterances contain colloquial or culturally implied meanings that resist direct translation (Kayode, 2020). Overall, research shows that while subtitling broadens accessibility and enhances audience reach, poor quality undermines its purpose. Nollywood, with its global influence, must address subtitling deficiencies through professionalism and quality control. As Georgakopoulou (2006) observes, technological advancements have improved subtitling's visibility, but without careful linguistic and pragmatic consideration, subtitles risk misrepresenting intended meanings and alienating viewers.

English in the Nigerian setting

Greenbaum and Nelson (2009) state that "English is the first language of over 350 million people in the world. Most of them live in the United States of America, which has about 250 million native speakers of English, and the United Kingdom, 58 million." English, which was initially introduced to Nigeria as a foreign language, has assumed several important roles in the country. It functions as Nigeria's official language and is widely used in education, legislation, commerce, and other forms of communication. Many Nigerians, especially the educated elite, speak English. Its firm establishment in Nigeria is largely attributed to the country's multilingual context and the absence of a single national language. Igboanusi (2001) observes that "in Nigeria, English is generally perceived as a language of prestige, and it is closely followed in order of importance by the major languages (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), and then the non-major languages (all other languages spoken in Nigeria). For some obvious political and demographic factors, indigenous language development in Nigeria favours the major languages."

The term Nigerian English, as used in this work, reflects what Eka (2010, p. 71) describes as "a subset of English spoken or written by Nigerians". He further explains that it is a well-recognised principle of language and communication that when a language moves from its original region and becomes established in a new geographical area, it inevitably takes on characteristics influenced by the local environment. This underpins a large number of concepts, such as the behaviour of languages in contact, interference and facilitation, and dominance configuration.

Greenbaum and Nelson (2009, p. 5) also state that “everybody has attitudes towards the English language and its varieties and has opinions on specific features. These attitudes and opinions affect relationships with other people.” They further explain that if one understands the nature of language, one will realise the grounds for one’s linguistic prejudices and perhaps moderate them. The question of whether intrusions or importations from the mother tongue of a person who speaks English as a second language produce a different variety distinct both morphologically and syntactically has been raised, as has the issue of whether such deviations qualify as errors. That every language evolved from another is not in dispute; the deviations constitute the distinctions often observed. Thus, whether these deviations are to be judged as errors or accepted as formal varieties is yet to be fully established.

The inability of the average Nigerian English speaker to attain the standard variety has been of concern to scholars. Whether this is even necessary remains debatable, since English cannot survive in a pure state amidst contact with, and influence from, the over four hundred indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. Research into Nigerian English has shown that the global process of nativisation of non-native varieties of the English language is also taking place in Nigeria. Such studies relate to variety differentiation, intelligibility, and feature identification. Findings point to the fact that English in Nigeria has identifiable features and varieties which mark it out as a legitimate variety within World Englishes. Thus, one can conveniently speak of Nigerian English just as one may of other New Englishes such as Ghanaian English, Australian English, and Malaysian English.

Banjo (2010, p. 70) makes a subtle revelation that “one important fact which emerges from the foregoing discussion is that in Nigeria, the skills of literacy in English are more important than oracy”. This is true because it is primarily in writing that manifestations of Nigerian English are formally treated as errors, while in speech, even the critic who corrects them may eventually utter the same forms. Nevertheless, Nigerian English is becoming increasingly acceptable, except in very formal academic settings where the use of English is highly restricted.

Theoretical framework

In Halliday’s concept of grammatical analysis known as systemic grammar, he focuses attention on what he termed “fundamental categories for a theory of grammar” (Halliday, 2005, p. 17). These are unit, structure, class and system, and he postulates rank, exponence and delicacy to address the relations of the categories mentioned above to each other and to the data. Halliday’s systemic grammar is a grammatical theory which acknowledges the

primacy of meaning and the need for systemacity. This grammar “is a system founded on a complex network- a system of systems.” (Eka, 2000, p. 26). At the surface plane, the grammar deals with how any given system is ultimately realized in grammatical structures and their elements. At the deep plane, it accounts for how semantic features are organized into networks, with the entry conditions into any given network explicitly stated”.

This study adopts the systemic grammar framework, which emerged as a significant response to structural grammar and transformational-generative grammar. According to Halliday, grammar should be viewed as a system rather than a set of prescriptive rules, focusing on how language actually functions rather than how it ought to function. The framework is grounded in the idea that every grammatical structure represents a choice from a definable set of options, making language a potential for meaning. Grammarians within the systemic grammar tradition use system networks to represent and map these available linguistic choices.

These grammatical systems play a role in the construal of meanings of different kinds. This is the basis of Halliday's claim that language is *meta-functionally* organised. He argues that the *raison d'être* of language is meaning in social life, and for this reason all languages have three kinds of semantic components. All languages have resources for construing experience, resources for enacting humans' diverse and complex social relations, and resources for enabling these two kinds of meanings to come together in coherent text. Each of the grammatical systems proposed by Halliday are related to these meta functions. For instance, the grammatical system of 'mood' is considered to be centrally related to the expression of interpersonal meanings, 'process type' to the expression of experiential meanings, and 'theme' to the expression of textual meanings.

Lamidi (2003) reiterates that this is not to say that SG permits ungrammaticality in sentences. The fact is that emphasis is not on complete grammaticality, rather it is on the context of speaking. So, the emphasis is on acceptability rather than grammaticality, Halliday considers grammar to be a network of system of interrelated contrasts. A suitable example would be: *The mosquito pushed faith*. This sentence is grammatically correct but not acceptable. It is grammatical in the sense that it has a Subject + Verb +Object, yet despite its grammaticality, it is not acceptable because of the sense it conveys, as a mosquito is so small, and has no physical capability to have a space-shifting effect on a human, which is the sense the term ‘push’ conveys. Thus, SG focuses on the correctness of the sense conveyed rather than absolute grammaticality, therefore this work is not an error analysis endeavour but an analysis of the grammar as used in subtitles, taking into

cognisance its acceptability by the native speakers and others who do not speak Igbo. Having highlighted the key components of systemic grammar, the researcher intends to investigate these in an attempt to carry out a grammatical analysis of English subtitling of Igbo home movies.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research design towards data collection and analysis. Data for the study were collected from ten Igbo (Nollywood) movies which were selected through purposive sampling method using participatory observation. The researcher personally collected the data through jotting down some peculiar grammatical applications from the subtitles of the ten Igbo (Nollywood) movies with the aim of describing the grammatical constructions to ascertain deviations that are subject to interference or misappropriation of rules, being discussed in recent times. The subtitles were carefully selected to reveal the featuristic nature of the English language as it is used by some Nigerians and analysed subsequently to show the deviations from the standard form. Documentation method was used to support the data collection. This method was deployed by the researcher to collect ill-formed sentences needed in the grammatical analysis of the subtitles which after the data collected were analyzed using descriptive content analysis through which the effects of mother tongue interference and Nigerian English importations were noted, classified and discussed.

Data presentation, and analysis

Grammar consists of various components; therefore, the data is presented to show how each component of grammar was misappropriated.

Inappropriate use of prepositions

1(a) He is on chain

(b) You are the reason of all our problems.

In the examples above, the use of prepositions was considered unacceptable by viewers; what was translated was grammatical but did not conform to the concord rules of English. This is not to suggest that the speaker lacks a referent or meaning he intends to convey; rather, the choice of words arises from his cognitive framework shaped by his first language. For instance, one may say “in chain” instead of “on chain”, and “reason for” instead of “reason of”. In Igbo, both *for* and *of* can be used interchangeably in certain contexts. Whether one translates the sentence using *for* or *of*, they often carry the same meaning. However, when translating from Igbo into English, the two prepositions have

distinct contexts of usage. This situation, therefore, results from the influence of the mother tongue on performance in English.

The problem is similar to that in example 1(a). In Igbo, when one says “he is sitting on that chair”, it is expressed as “*ọ nọ na oche ahụ*”. If one also says “*ọ nọ na akpa m*”, it translates as “it is in my bag”. In both cases, *in* and *on* are represented by the same word *na* in Igbo. Consequently, it is unsurprising that an Igbo speaker of English as a second language may make such generalisations. From the perspective of English, however, the sentence is unacceptable. The misappropriation arises from what is permissible in the translator’s first language.

Wrong use of pronouns

- 2a. Tell my husband that her wife wants to see him.
- b. Make me you wife.
- c. Which of you friend is this?

In the data in 2(a), the reference to “her wife” is quite absurd, as homosexuality is not accepted in Igbo society, which makes it an error. However, considering the fact that in Igbo there is no gender distinction between *him* and *her*—both are rendered as *ya*—the translator could possibly claim that, since *ya* can be used for either gender and he was unaware of which particular gender was intended, he could not be said to be entirely at fault. Nevertheless, when one considers the pragmatic context, the sentence is erroneous, as only a man can have a wife in Igbo culture, and this should therefore be taken into account in translation. This is why translation goes beyond the simple transfer of meaning; it must also account for the context in which the meaning is derived.

Secondly, examples 2(b) and 2(c) are similar to those discussed above, because the Igbo language has no distinct form for the second person singular *you* and its possessive *your*, as both are expressed by *gi*. Thus, if the speaker had said “*mee m nwunye gi*”, the translation could have been “make me your wife”. However, since *you* and *your* share the same form in Igbo, it appears to be a case of direct translation in which *gi* was rendered as *you* without consideration of the context of possession. According to systemic grammar, culture and beliefs play a role when meanings are transferred from one language group to another, and judgements concerning grammaticality and acceptability should take such beliefs into account. As previously noted, translation is not a word-for-word exercise but rather the transfer of the general or holistic sense of an expression from one language into another. If this principle were followed, such misappropriations would not arise.

Misapplication of tenses

- 3a. We have not finish our discussion.
- b. Pastor Mba promise to marry me.
- c. I have not eating since morning.
- d. I would have go on my knees.
- e. Have you understand?
- f. When did you returned?
- g. How big did you think you are?
- h. What were you given to her?
- i. How are we going to been paying the fees?

Another challenge encountered in the text is the unacceptable use of tense. In the data in 3, the use of tense was inappropriate. For example, in (a) above, we see the misapplication of tense: the context portrays a present communicative discourse, whereas the speech act had already been completed. The second example illustrates a misapplication of the past tense for the present. In (c), the past participle was omitted and replaced with the present continuous tense. This error recurs throughout the films. In (d), for instance, the present tense was used in place of a past participle. In (f), the event involves seeing someone who had been absent for some time. The act of return is in the present, as the speaker encounters the person that very day; therefore, presenting the question as a past action does not accurately convey the intended information. In systemic grammar, the selection from an open set of options is intended to create textual meaning. If pronouns or tense forms are misrepresented in subtitles, the meaning is distorted and the message is not communicated, thereby undermining the central premise of Halliday's work.

In (g), the present form of the verb *be* namely *are* was used in the sentence, showing that the utterance was made in the present. However, the past tense form of the verb *to do* *did* was wrongly introduced, as though the expression were in the past. The latter verb should instead have been *were*. In (h), the phrase "what were you" portrays an action in the past, yet the context requires a present continuous tense, as the discourse refers to a recurring action. Instead, the translator employed a past participle. Thus, "what were you given to her" appears as though spoken by someone observing another engaged in an ongoing action, which had not been completed. In such a case, the present continuous tense *giving* would have been more appropriate, since the verb form *given* portrays an action already completed. Likewise, in the final example, the phrase "how are we going to" indicates a

present state of confusion. It could not correctly be followed by “been paying” but rather by “be paying”, which is the proper verb form for the present. The form “been paying” is inconsistent, as *been* suggests the payment had already been completed, while *paying* implies it is still ongoing. The combination of the two creates further confusion for the viewer, since if they had already been paying the fees, there would be no cause for concern about how to continue paying them.

In semantics, prior knowledge, or foreknowledge, is essential in translation. Therefore, if a translator intends to convey meaning by taking the words or sentences in isolation, he or she must possess a basic knowledge of the movie being subtitled and be conversant with the script, so that the actions displayed in every scene will correspond appropriately with the timing of the events. Only then would he or she avoid issues with tense formation. This reflects a clear case of misapplication or lack of knowledge rather than interference, because the Igbo language has distinct tense segmentation, which cannot be mistaken.

Poor handling of concord/agreement

- 4 a. He have paid you
- b. You looks so beautiful.
- c. You talks a lot.
- d. He have done nothing to me.
- e. She have to go to school.
- f. If they comes back, tell them I came.
- g. Those girl want to play with me.
- h. One of our choir member.
- i. These your friendship with Ikechi.
- j. We are saying all this because of you.
- h. Take a look at this pictures

The data in 4 are indicative of concord, or agreement relations, arising from the non-alignment of verbs and nouns. Normally, verbs are conjugated to agree with different persons or noun forms, but when this rule is not observed, there is no agreement in the sentence, which results in ungrammaticality. Based on the principle of noun–verb concord, the first- and second-person singular forms do not carry an ‘s’; only the third-person singular (he/she) does. Likewise, the first-, second-, and third-person plural forms also appear in their infinitive form. This ensures that sentences are more organised, as compliance with concord guarantees that number and person agree. Thus, from the

sentences above, one would see that the first, which begins with the third-person singular, was supposed to go with ‘has’ and not ‘have’, which is the correct third-person singular form of the verb “to have”. In the first example in 4a, “he have paid you”, translated in Igbo as “o kwuola ya ugwo”, we realise that even if the sentence had been “they have paid him”, which is “a kwuola ya ugwo”, one can see that in both examples, where “have paid” and “has paid” were used, they share the same translation in Igbo. Thus, it might not be unnatural for an Igbo speaker to make such generalisations and undue assumptions. This also applies to sentence 4b above, where “you looks so beautiful” represents a misapplication of noun–verb concord, as the simple present tense marker ‘s’ should not have been used with the verb. The acceptable verb form should have been the base form of the verb ‘look’. This is one of the reasons Halliday insists that, among other factors, the culture and linguistic background of a speaker should be considered before making grammatical judgements.

Use of homophones

- a. Let me take my live. (leave)
- b. Amarachi, stand up from their. (there)
- c. It’s because of you that I wrote a later to them. (letter)
- d. I am going to the altar (alter)
- e. Did you fat in this room(fart)
- f. I need rice with vegetable source. (sauce)

One of the greatest challenges a speaker of English as a second language may face lies in the differences between the phonemes of English and those of his or her mother tongue. In the data presented above, although different lexical items were exhibited, the translator’s misunderstanding and mispronunciation of vowels were a major reason for incorrect sound differentiation. Owing to the similarity in pronunciation, the use of the underlined words in contrast to their counterparts in brackets imposes a limitation on the knowledge of contextual suitability.

From the data in 5(a), ‘live’ as used there signifies a location where a person or thing resides, whereas the intended form ‘leave’ means to move away from somewhere. The latter is the appropriate form since the speaker intended to make an exit. However, because of the similarity in pronunciation, a translator with poor knowledge of English spelling is prone to making generalisations without recognising that, although the two words may sound the same, they have different spellings, meanings, and contexts of use. In 5(b), ‘their’ was used in place of ‘there’. This is inappropriate, as the former is a possessive pronoun and should not be used in a context where a locative would have been

more suitable. This is therefore a clear case of misplacement, not arising from a poor choice of words but rather from the translator's inability to differentiate between lexical meanings, or from spelling errors which are possible since these sounds are phonetically similar. It may also be attributed to incomplete learning or ignorance of the contexts in which a particular word is appropriate.

The same applies to the other examples: 'later', meaning 'subsequently or after some time', was used instead of 'letter', a written communication addressed to someone; 'alter', meaning 'to change', was used instead of 'altar', the sacred frontal position of the pulpit in a church; 'full', meaning 'containing the maximum possible amount', was used instead of 'fool', a person with little or no intelligence; 'fat', meaning 'having enough flesh', was used instead of 'fart'; and finally, 'source' was used instead of 'sauce'. All these misappropriations, which are homophonic in nature, arose from the inability to differentiate the pragmatic contexts of homophones and therefore cannot strictly be regarded as errors. In the last example, 5(e), one observes that the word 'sauce', which denotes a delicacy made of vegetables served with other meals, was contradicted with 'source', which refers to a point of origin or means of obtaining something.

In subtitling, systemic grammar is highly applicable, as it insists on the accurate conveyance of meaning. Halliday advises that the subtitler must have knowledge of both the source and target languages. Thus, grammarians in the systemic functional grammar tradition employ system networks to map the available options in a language, thereby ensuring that the most suitable option, which validates the intended meaning, is chosen since language itself is a meaning potential.

Evidence from interference

- i. She wants me to die untimely death.
- ii. Why are you talking like as if it is not my baby as well.

These are examples that clearly reflect repetitions of meaning and direct translations which cloud the sentences of an average Nigerian speaker, thereby altering the intended message. In 6(a), the concept of 'die' was used in relation to death, and as such, the idea of losing one's life, having already been mentioned earlier in the statement, need not be repeated. Therefore, the clause should have read 'die untimely' instead of combining the two notions which, by implication, referred to the same idea. In 6(b), tautology was also evident in the use of 'like' together with 'as if'. Since both are similes, their usage should be mutually exclusive, as the presence of one should

automatically render the other unnecessary. Other examples of this, drawn from the data includes;

- i. He is not with his eyes.
- ii. I pity for you.
- iii. Be drinking your wine.
- iv. I think the crying is enjoyment crying.
- v. Is not bad me spending money on her.
- vi. Did you senior me?

One can see how the words are conjured to lie side by side, following the sentential pattern of the Igbo language. In the first example, the oral form was “*o jighi anya ya*”, which literally means “*he is not with his eyes*”. This expression is intended to suggest that someone is under a spell or experiencing some form of spiritual manipulation, thereby behaving abnormally. However, the actual meaning of the expression may not be immediately comprehended, as one might assume the speaker is suggesting that the addressee is blind, or has lost his eyes or sight in some way. A similar instance is seen in the example “*I pity for you*”, which is a direct translation rendered through one-to-one correspondence with the oral form “*M na emere gi ebere*”.

Halliday’s Systemic Grammar is significant in addressing mother tongue interference, which often results in direct translations. As a theory of language in use, it creates systematic relations between choices and forms within the less abstract strata of grammar and phonology, and the more abstract strata such as context of situation and context of culture. Direct translations are therefore not permissible, as meaning must be conveyed with cognisance of cultural background and context, not in isolation, so as to avoid producing singular or distorted meanings. This is evident in examples such as “*be drinking your wine*”, translated from “*na-anu manyi gi*”, instead of “*keep drinking your wine*”; or “*I think the cry is enjoyment crying*”, which was spoken in a context that actually denoted “*joyful tears*” or “*tears of joy*”. Here, incompetence and lack of translational expertise resulted in literal rather than contextual rendering. Another example is “*it’s not bad me spending money on her*”, which demonstrates a word-for-word transfer rather than a meaningful semantic conversion.

This suggests that many of the translations were carried out mechanically, without consideration for the broader semantic sense required in effective translation. While these instances do not necessarily qualify as grammatical errors, they clearly represent manifestations of direct translation. Halliday’s theory seeks to explain how spoken and

written texts construe meanings and how the resources of language are organised in open systems, functionally bound to meaning. It insists that, in rendering speech into subtitles, the overriding consideration must be the set of lexical choices that most accurately convey the intended sense, since any conversion that fails to ensure intelligibility is not permissible.

Conclusion

Subtitles are verbal images displayed at the bottom of a cinema or television screen that translate interactions between actors and actresses. They may appear either in the same language used in the performance or in a different language to facilitate wider participation and comprehension. Subtitles are particularly useful at a time when the Nigerian movie industry is expanding beyond the shores of the African continent. Considering the multilingual nature of Nigeria, and Africa more broadly, indigenous movie production would have been almost impossible without subtitling. It enables non-speakers of the languages used in films to follow the discourse, as translations are predominantly rendered in English, Nigeria's official language. However, issues arise during translation, as subtitlers often encounter challenges ranging from ungrammaticality to lack of comprehension. From the data collected and analysed, it was observed that Igbo translators aiming to convey meaning from the source language into English encounter limitations in several areas: the use of prepositions, pronouns, tenses, concord/agreement, homophones, and interference. Prepositions present difficulties because in Igbo, terms such as “*in*” and “*on*” share the same meaning, making accurate translation into English problematic for unskilled translators. A similar situation occurs with pronouns, where distinctions in English are not mirrored in Igbo. These structural discrepancies make it difficult for untrained translators, producers, or directors to present grammatically accurate subtitles.

Systemic Grammar is thus valuable in ensuring that translations convey accurate meaning and comprehension. Its ideational metafunction reflects the contextual value of *field*—the nature of the social process in which language is implicated. Analysing texts through the ideational function involves examining choices in the grammatical system of *transitivity*. Subtitlers should therefore possess the professional expertise to make the most appropriate lexical and grammatical choices from the available options, ensuring that meaning and coherence are maintained. Otherwise, the entire purpose of subtitling risks being undermined. This study has argued that grammaticality, as a descriptive notion, should not be confused with prescriptive correctness. Since there is no universally inductive procedure for discovering linguistic rules, the linguist must describe data as they are used, rather than

relying solely on native speaker intuitions of well-formedness. Accordingly, this work has analysed subtitles in use, identified instances of unacceptability, and examined the factors responsible. Chief among these are mother-tongue interference and the over-importation of Igbo phonotactic structures. This was particularly evident in the misapplication of pronouns and prepositions, which were patterned directly on Igbo usage. Equally notable was the prevalence of direct translation, where meanings were placed side by side without regard for contextual incorporation. Other challenges stemmed from incomplete learning, as seen in the misuse of tenses where past, present, and future forms were inaccurately applied. Finally, lack of awareness of homophony resulted in errors where words of similar sound but different meanings and spellings were wrongly interchanged, thereby distorting intended expressions.

Given the importance of subtitles in multilingual and multicultural settings, dedication and innovation are required within the industry. It is therefore recommended that every film requiring subtitling be handled by a certified translator and language expert. Such professionals should possess not only grammatical competence in both source and target languages but also semantic, pragmatic, and communicative competence to ensure accurate transfer of linguistic content. The role of the editor is equally indispensable, as the editor performs the final screening for accuracy, alignment between spoken and written forms, and preservation of thematic content. While theatre professionals contribute significantly to screenplay, no production can be considered complete without the input of linguists, whose expertise prevents the infelicities highlighted in this study.

Although Nigerian English has been recognised as part of the family of World Englishes, it is important to note that such varieties exist primarily in spoken form. In formal writing, only two standard varieties are widely accepted. For this reason, language experts, editors, translators, and subtitlers must uphold high standards and avoid misappropriations that risk diminishing the quality of English usage in Nigerian film production.

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