

# Plural marking in Yorùbá and English and its pedagogical implications

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**Resum. La marca de plural en ioruba i anglès i les seves implicacions pedagògiques.** És un fet conegut que molts nigerians afronten un gran nombre de dificultats en l'ús de l'anglès en la seva activitat quotidiana. Una raó important es troba en les diferències estructurals entre l'anglès i les llengües de Nigèria. En aquest article es tracta de forma empírica i teòrica una d'aquestes diferències, concretament un aspecte de la marca de número en anglès i en Yoruba. Empíricament, l'autor presenta dades que mostren els diversos morfemes que estan implicats en la marca de plural en anglès i Yoruba, destacant àrees amb similituds i diferències. Teòricament, es demostra que mentre l'anglès marca obligatòriament els noms i altres elements d'una expressió nominal utilitzant un mecanisme de concordança de plural, el Yoruba ho fa de forma opcional utilitzant un mecanisme de percolació. A continuació es mostren algunes implicacions pedagògiques de les diferències observades des del punt de vista dels parlants nadius de Yoruba (actors i actrius, estudiants i professors, entre altres) que aprenen/usen l'anglès com a segona llengua.

**Paraules clau:** tret, percolació, concordança, ioruba.

**Abstract. Plural marking in Yorùbá and English and its pedagogical implications.** It is a known fact that many Nigerians face a lot of difficulties in the use of English in their day to day activities. One major reason for this is the structural differences between English and Nigerian languages. In this paper, one of such structural differences namely, an aspect of number marking in English and Yorùbá is addressed. This phenomenon is accounted for empirically and theoretically. Empirically, the author presents ample data that show the various morphemes which are involved in marking plural in English and Yorùbá pointing

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out areas of similarities and differences. Theoretically, it is shown that while English obligatorily marks nouns and other elements within a nominal expression using a plural matching mechanism, Yorùbá does so optionally using a feature percolation mechanism. It further points out the pedagogical implications of the observed differences from the point of view of native speakers of Yorùbá (L1) (movie actors/actresses, students as well as their teachers among others) who learn/use English as a second language (L2).

**Keywords:** feature, percolation, matching, Yorùbá.

## 1. Introduction

Number marking across languages falls into two types: inflectional and non-inflectional. According to Wiltschko (2008), in languages such as English, French, German, etc. where number marking is inflectional, the choice between the expression of singularity and plurality is a forced one. Witness the following examples.

- |     |               |                |
|-----|---------------|----------------|
| (1) | a. book-books | <i>English</i> |
|     | b. livre-s    | <i>French</i>  |
|     | ‘books’       |                |

On the other hand, in languages such as Halkomelem, Salish, Yorùbá, Ìgbò among others, where plural marking is non-inflectional, the choice between the expression of singularity and plurality is not a forced one. In this latter case, it is optionally possible to unambiguously distinguish plurality by means of a variety of expressions. Consider the examples in (2).

- |     |          |          |                          |
|-----|----------|----------|--------------------------|
| (2) | a. ye    | swíweles | <i>Halkomelem Salish</i> |
|     | PL -DET  | boy      |                          |
|     | ‘boys’   |          |                          |
|     | b. àwọ̀n | ìwé      | <i>Yorùbá</i>            |
|     | PL       | book     |                          |
|     | ‘books’  |          |                          |
|     | c. ọ̀mọ̀ | nwoke    | <i>Ìgbò</i>              |
|     | PL       | man      |                          |
|     | ‘men’    |          |                          |

Inflectional plurality is a process whereby plurality is marked on a noun by affixation which in most cases is a suffix. On the other hand, non-inflectional plural marking is

reflected by a morpheme or word that is not solely dedicated for pluralization (Schane 1973, Wiltcsko 2008). In (1), the plural marker is the suffix *s* in French and English. On the other hand, in Halkomelem example (2a), the plural morpheme is embedded in the determiner and it gives the noun the plural interpretation. Similarly, in the Yorùbá example in (2b), the third person plural pronominal *àwọn* ‘they’ enforces the plural interpretation on *ìwé*. This latter case is regarded as non-inflectional marking. This paper considers the two mechanisms of number marking in English and Yorùbá, two unrelated languages and draws out the pedagogical implications of the differences on Yorùbá native speakers learning and or speaking English as L2.

## 2. The morphological account of English and Yorùbá plural marking

This section is aimed at accounting for the morphology of plural marking in English and Yorùbá laying particular emphasis on areas of their differences.

### 2.1. English plural marking

It is necessary to briefly discuss the various ways by which plurality is marked in English. First are nouns such as those in (3a) which have zero morphemes to express plurality. The next type of plural marking involves suppletion. Suppletion according to O’Grady and Archibald (2008, p. 536) is a morphological process that marks a grammatical contrast by replacing a morpheme with an entirely different morpheme. This plural marking is internal as the noun cannot be segmented into the noun and its plural marker, (3b).<sup>2</sup> We also have a bunch of nouns which can have *-es* as the plural morpheme. What is observed about this morpheme is that it induces variation in the last consonant of such nouns. For example, nouns ending in *f* must first change the *f* to *v* before they take the *-es* (3c). Also, nouns that end in *y* must first change the *y* to *i* before *-es* is added (3d). Yet we have some other nouns as illustrated in (3e) which take *-(r)en* suffix.

- (3) a. sheep-sheep, deer-deer, swine-swine  
 b. man-men, woman-women, goose-geese  
 c. knife-knives, life-lives, calf-calves  
 d. lady-ladies, baby-babies  
 e. ox-oxen, child-children  
 (cf. Chomsky and Halle 1968, Lyons 1968, Yusuff and Adeniyi 2004)

2. See also Schane (1973, p. 110).

The last group which is the focus of this paper is the regular nouns such as in (4) which are marked by the plural morpheme, *s*.

- (4) a. book-s  
 b. hat-s  
 c. bag-s  
 d. ball-s  
 f. badge-s  
 g. house-s  
 h. boy-s

Phonetically, this plural morpheme has three allomorphs: [s], [z] and [əz]; which are phonologically conditioned (Chomsky and Halle 1968, Spencer 1991). The author's concern in this section is the morphology of pluralization in English Determiner Phrase (DP) with a focus on regular nouns only; as such he will not dwell on its phonology any further. Readers are referred to the cited works.

Apart from nouns, it is observed that plurality is also expressed on other grammatical elements within a nominal expression. In particular, when a noun takes a demonstrative, there is agreement between the noun and the demonstrative with respect to number. Thus, if a noun is in the singular form, the demonstrative must also be in the singular form (5).

- (5) a. this book  
 b. that dog

On the other hand, if a noun is in the plural form and it takes a demonstrative, the demonstrative has to agree with that noun with respect to its [NUMBER] feature (6).

- (6) a. these books  
 b. those dogs

Like demonstratives, when a noun takes a quantifier, it must also agree with respect to number marking.

- (7) a. i. a book  
 ii. few books  
 b. i. a dog  
 ii. all dogs

Consider (7a-ii) and (7b-ii) where the nouns are preceded by *few* and *all* respectively, the corresponding nouns *book* and *dog* obligatorily take the plural morpheme *s* because the quantifiers are inherently plural.

What is applicable to cases involving demonstratives and quantifiers extends to numerals. Thus, a noun that takes a numeral other than *one* has to take the plural form so as to agree with the inherent number feature of the numeral.

- (8) a. one book  
b. two books

Unlike what operates with demonstratives, quantifiers and numerals, it appears that with English determiners, the issue of plural marking is only partially attested. In particular, with indefinite articles, plural marking is obligatory.

- (9) a. a book  
b. some books

However, with the definite determiner *the*, the number marking is neutralized, as such, a noun can either be in its singular or plural form when it takes this determiner.<sup>3</sup>

- (10) a. the boy  
b. the boys

There is more to say on this in the sections that follow. Let us turn to Yorùbá to see how plurality is marked.

## 2.2. Yorùbá plural marking

It has been established in Ajíbóyè (2005) that plural marking in Yorùbá is expressed in one of three ways: contextually, semantically or morphologically. This suggests that there are three types of plural marking that are available for expressing plurality in the language. The question that should agitate the mind of readers is whether native speak-

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3. One other environment where one can look for plural agreement is in the modifiers. However, it appears that like definite determiners, English modifiers are blind to number marking as both singular and plural nouns can take the same modifier, e.g. *a black dog*, *black dogs*, etc. This seems to be a cross-linguistic phenomenon as even in languages where plural is morphologically marked, a noun that takes a modifier is ambiguous between singular and plural interpretation. Yorùbá nouns too can take modifiers irrespective of their [NUMBER] feature, e.g. *ajá dúdú* 'a black dog', *àwọn ajá dúdú* 'black dogs'. Note however that Yorùbá goes a step further in the sense that it uses the copying strategy on modifiers to make them become plural words. See the examples in (13c) below.

ers have the opportunity to make a choice among those three types. We will return to this later.

When plurality is expressed contextually, a noun is ambiguous between a singular and a plural interpretation. Thus, it is the context of occurrence that determines its number interpretation.

- (11) Adé pa eku  
 A. kill rat  
 (i) 'Ade killed a rat'  
 (ii) 'Ade killed (many) rats'

The second mechanism of plural marking in Yorùbá is what is referred to as semantically determined plural marking. By virtue of their semantics, certain lexical items force a plural interpretation on nouns that they co-occur with. There are two types of lexical items in Yorùbá that fall into this category. These are the quantifiers and numerals.

- (12) a. Adé pa [eku púpò]  
 A. kill rat many  
 (i) 'Ade killed many rats'  
 (ii) \*'Ade killed many rat'
- b. Adé pa [eku méjì]  
 1SG kill rat two  
 (i) 'Ade killed two rats'  
 (ii) \*'Ade killed two rat'

Plurality is semantically realized in the above examples in the sense that it is the presence of *púpò* in (12a) and *méjì* in (12b) which themselves are inherently plural that forces the plural construal of those nouns.

Lastly, plurality may also be expressed through the mechanism that is morphologically conditioned. In Yorùbá, some morphemes have (an exclusively) plural function. I call such morphemes plural words. They fall into three categories: the third person plural pronoun in (13a), the low toned *wọ̀n* in (13b), and the modifiers in (13c). In order for plurality to be attained, a modifier must necessarily be copied to the left of the base.

- (13) a. Mo ní [àwọ̀n ajá] ní ilé  
 1SG have PL dog in house  
 (i) 'I have dogs at home'  
 (ii) \*'I have dog at home'

- b. Ajá wòn<sup>4</sup>-yẹn tóbi  
 dog PL DEM be-big  
 (i) 'Those dogs are big'  
 (ii) \*'Those dog are big'
- c. Yorùba kò ní aṣa burúkú burúkú  
 Y. NEG have custom COPY bad  
 (i) 'Yoruba does not have bad customs'  
 (ii) \*'Yoruba does not have a bad custom'

It is necessary to give supportive evidence to show that *wòn-* in *wònyí* and *wònyẹn* is a prefix. The first thing to note is that *wòn* cannot stand on its own as a meaningful unit. Second, it cannot take any other bound morpheme, itself being a bound morpheme e.g. \**ì-wòn*, \**ẹ̀-wòn* are not attested in the language. However, the derived plural demonstratives can in turn take a nominalizer prefix namely, *ì-* as in *ì-wòn-yí* 'these ones' and *ì-wòn-yẹn* 'those ones'. In addition, *ẹ̀-* and *ì-* prefixes can be attached to the two demonstratives *yí* and *yẹn* respectively when not marked for plural to derive *èyí* 'this one' and *ìyẹn* 'that one'.

From the ongoing, it is very clear that English and Yorùbá employ two distinctive strategies of plural marking. The focus of section 3 is to account for both syntactic strategies in a principled way.

### 3. A syntactic analysis of plural marking in English and Yorùbá

In this section, the account of the English and Yorùbá data so far presented is given using the feature matching and feature percolation mechanisms (cf. Owolabi 1995, Ajíbóyè 2005, among others). First is the analysis of English data.

#### 3.1. English feature matching mechanism

As shown in section 2, there are four environments that can be examined in English to illustrate feature matching. The four environments are summarized in (14) and (15).

4. Note that *wòn* can only co-occur with the two demonstratives: *yí* 'this' and *yẹn* 'that' in the language. Once it makes the demonstrative plural, the whole plural demonstrative in turn enforces the noun to have a plural interpretation. Contrary to the view of a reviewer this plural morpheme is not treated as a third person plural pronoun for the two are different. The latter has two forms: high toned *wòn* and mid toned *wòn*, depending on its syntactic location whereas the latter is low toned. Another area of difference is that *wòn* is only found with demonstratives as such we do not have \**wòn-yí* or \**wòn-yẹn*.

- (14) a. Demonstrative-Noun  
 b. Quantifier-Noun  
 c. Numeral-Noun  
 d. Determiner-Noun
- (15) a. these boys  
 b. few boys  
 c. two boys  
 d. a boy

Next is the case involving ‘demonstrative-noun’ sequence. This presents an interesting contrast with the facts of Yorùbá already accounted for. The fact of English reported in section 2 is that if a noun takes a demonstrative, both must agree with respect to number feature. When the noun is singular it can only take a singular demonstrative, (16a). On the other hand, a singular noun cannot take a plural demonstrative, (16b).

- (16) a. *this* book  
 b. \**this* book-s

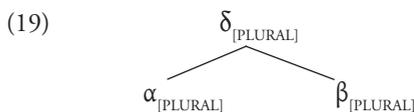
Further, when the demonstrative is in the plural form, the noun and the demonstrative must also agree with respect to plural marking (17).

- (17) a. *these* books  
 b. \**these* book

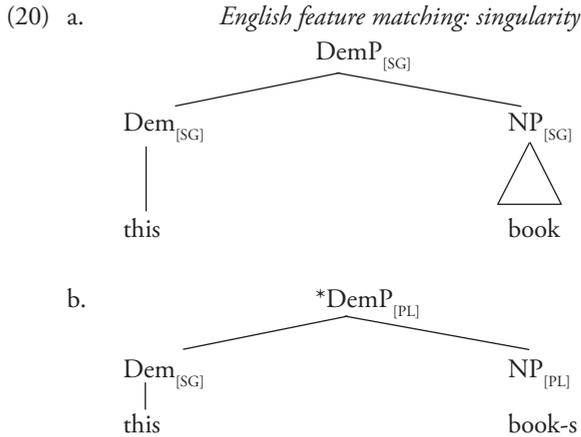
The fact reflected in (16-17) is referred to as concord or agreement in the literature (Corbett 2000, Wiltschko 2004, 2005, Yang 2004, among others). In the current account, the English plural marking is analyzed as an instance of feature matching. The Feature matching is defined as a mechanism whereby plurality is marked on all members of a nominal expression. In a language like English, which makes use of this mechanism, the way it works is stated as (18).

- (18) Let  $\delta$  be the XP and  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  be constituents under  $\delta$ . If  $\delta$  has a [PLURAL] feature, then both  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  must also have a [PLURAL] feature (cf. Yang 2004, Wiltschko 2004).

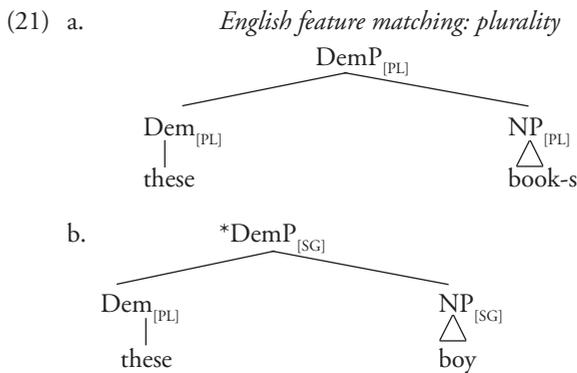
This is illustrated with the tree diagram in (19).



This suggests that all members of a nominal expression must have the same number feature specification. (20) and (21) further illustrate this. In (20a), the demonstrative *this* and the noun *book* have the same [SINGULAR] feature, hence the derivation converge since feature-matching is observed. However, in (20b), where the singular demonstrative *this* combines with the plural noun *books*, feature-matching is violated, the derivation crashes and this leads to ungrammaticality (cf. Chomsky 1995).



Similarly, in (21a), the demonstrative *these* and the noun *books* obey feature matching in that they both share the [PLURAL] feature. On the other hand, in (21b) where the plural demonstrative combines with the singular noun, the derivation crashes since there is no convergence.

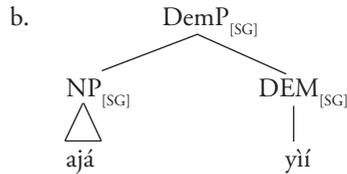


This much accounts for the fact of English data. As it is shown below, the ill-formed ones in English are indeed well-formed in Yorùbá.

### 3.2. Yorùbá feature percolation mechanism

At a first glance, one would think that Yorùbá is similar to English in terms of number agreement among members of a nominal expression. Consider (22) where the singular demonstrative takes a bare noun and the only interpretation that is available is that of singularity. We can infer that the noun itself is singular, as such there is feature matching.

- (22) a.    ajá        yíí        NP        DEM  
           dog        DEM    [SG]    [SG]  
           ‘this dog.’



In that case, one may be tempted to say that both languages use the same feature matching mechanism. However, Yorùbá crucially differs from English in the sense that the noun needs not agree with a demonstrative in terms of number feature. Indeed, what is required is for one of the entities in a nominal expression to have a plural [FEATURE] and the whole entity obtains a plural construal. In (23a), only the noun is marked for plural by *àwọn*, whereas the demonstrative remains unmarked and the whole DemP is interpreted as plural. Similarly, in (23b), the demonstrative and not the noun is marked for plural by *wọ̀n-* and the output is well-formed.

- (23) a. *àwọn*        ajá        yíí        PL-NP    DEM  
           PL        dog        DEM  
           ‘these dogs’ (cf. English \*this dogs)

- b. ajá            wọ̀n-        yí        NP        PL-DEM  
    dog            PL        DEM  
    ‘these dogs’        (cf. English \*these dog)

Yet, it is also possible for the noun and the demonstrative to be marked separately for plural in order to have the whole nominal expression receive a plural interpretation. This is shown in (24).

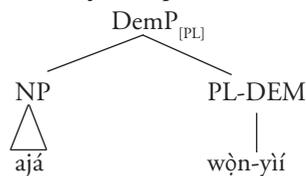
- (24) *àwọ̀n*            *ajá*            *wọ̀n-* *yí* *PL-NP* *PL-DEM*  
 PL                    dog            PL    DEM  
 ‘these dogs’

The disparity between English and Yorùbá is straightforwardly accounted for by assuming that while English adopts feature matching, Yorùbá makes use of feature percolation. The feature percolation is defined along the lines of Selkirk (1982) as follows:

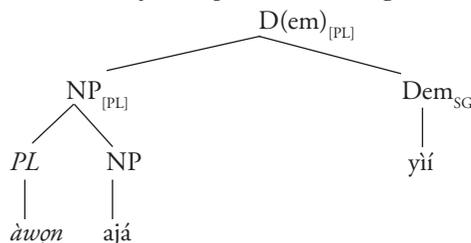
- (25) If a constituent  $\alpha$  is the head of a constituent  $\beta$ ,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are associated with an identical set of features (syntactic or diacritic) (Selkirk 1982, p. 21)

In the same spirit, Owólabí (1995, p. 106) claims that percolation is a device which enables a complex word to inherit the syntactic properties (or features) of its head. The way percolation mechanism works is that plural feature is copied from a node onto the node that immediately dominates it. What is essential for a plural interpretation to be obtained in Yorùbá is for one of the nominal elements dominated by the higher constituent that is to be so marked to have that [PLURAL] feature. In (26a), it is the demonstrative that supplies the [PLURAL] feature through *wọ̀n-* prefix whereas in (26b), it is the noun that supplies the [PLURAL] feature through *àwọ̀n*; yet in both cases, the DemP is interpreted as plural. So the issue of head parameters plays no role here.

- (26) a. *Yorùbá feature percolation through the demonstrative*



- b. *Yorùbá feature percolation through the noun*



In summary, the table below illustrates the similarities and differences between the two languages in relation to how demonstratives and nouns interact to effect plurality. In particular, this table reveals that both English and Yorùbá partially converge in the sense that nouns and demonstratives can both be singular (27a) or both plural (27c). They differ in the sense that agreement is optional in Yorùbá whereas it is obligatory in English. All that is required in the former is for either the demonstrative or the noun to be marked for plural and the whole nominal expression is construed as plural as reflected in (27b) and (27d).

(27) *Plural marking on noun-demonstrative in Yorùbá and English*

		Yorùbá	English
a.	DEM <sub>SG</sub> + NP <sub>SG</sub>	√	√
b.	DEM <sub>SG</sub> + NP <sub>PL</sub>	√	X
c.	DEM <sub>PL</sub> + NP <sub>PL</sub>	√	√
d.	DEM <sub>PL</sub> + NP <sub>SG</sub>	√	X

In the next section, the author looks at the exceptional case to the plural marking discussed above.

### 3.3. *The deviants to number marking*

As we know, demonstratives, quantifiers and numerals are not the only elements that co-occur with nouns. One other grammatical category is the article, a subgroup of determiners. There are two things that are very important to point out in the two languages. First are the articles: *a* which marks nouns as indefinite and *the* which marks nouns as definite in English. Such articles are absent in Yorùbá as shown by the gloss in (28c).

- (28) a. a snake  
 b. the snake  
 c. ejò            ‘a/the snake’

To buttress the claim that *ejò* in (28) can either be definite or indefinite consider the following discourse context.

(29) Mo rí ejò níbí ní ànà, mo wọlé lọ mú àdá  
 1SG see *snake* here in yesterday, 1SG enter-house go take *cutlass*  
 'I saw *a snake* here yesterday I went in to get *a cutlass*.'

Ìgbà tí mo fi máa padà dé ejò ti lọ  
 Time that 1SG use FUT return arrive *snake* ASP go  
 'By the time that I returned, the snake has disappeared.'

The second thing to notice is the asymmetry behaviour of English determiners with respect to pluralization. For while the determiner *a* co-occurs with singular nouns only (30) itself being inherently singular, *the* co-occurs with both singular and plural nouns (31).

(30) a. a book  
 b. \*a books

(31) a. the book  
 b. the books

The question that arises is this: why do *a* and *the* behave differently? One can only guess that, *the* is probably neutral or blind to plurality in English. There is the need to do more research on English determiners so that this problem can be resolved.

### 3.4. The convergence of English and Yorùbá in plural marking

From the presentation of data and discussions so far, it appears there is nothing in common between the two languages. However, there is a restricted set of English words that points to the contrary. The particular case that the author has in mind is reflected in examples in (3a) repeated below as (32).

(32)	<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
a.	sheep	sheep
b.	deer	deer
c.	swine	swine

What remains to be established is where to place those examples within the current proposal. It appears that a plural interpretation of those nouns requires the presence of a numeral greater than *one*, a quantifier or a plural demonstrative.

- (33) a. I bought sheep  
 b. I bought three sheep  
 c. I bought many sheep  
 d. I bought these sheep

From the above, it is clear that those words may be contextually marked as in (33a), semantically marked as in the case of (33b-c) or morphologically marked as in the case of (33d). Going by the discussion above, the feature percolation mechanism proposed for Yorùbá is extended to account for this exceptional case.

In conclusion, the generalization that emerges is that all languages are exposed to the feature matching mechanism but when a language fails to adopt this, it results to the feature percolation. This latter case is referred to as the elsewhere condition.

#### 4. Problems arising for Yorùbá L1 speakers learning English as L2

Having presented ample data on the various ways and contexts of plural marking and the theoretical account of this morphological phenomenon in the two languages, three facts emerge. First, while English is an inflectional language, Yorùbá is not. Second, whereas English makes use of feature matching strategy thereby inducing number agreement among all entities in a nominal expression, Yorùbá makes use of feature percolation which does not require such number agreement. Third, English plural morpheme is both phonologically and morphologically conditioned but Yorùbá plural is only morphologically conditioned. What remains to be addressed is the presentation of the common errors relating to plural marking that Yorùbá L1 speakers learning English as L2 commit. This is treated in §4.1. This is followed by an analysis of those errors in §4.2. Finally, in §4.3 is a discussion of the pedagogical implications of the plural marking in the two languages and the implications for Yorùbá L1 speakers who have English as L2.

##### 4.1. *Common errors relating to plural marking*

Krashen (1988) identifies two independent systems of second language performance which are the acquired system and the learned system (cf. Yule 2006, p. 166). For the purpose of this paper, the learned system is what we need because the L2 speakers in view are those who acquire English as second language in school or in working environments. Krashen (1988, p. 45) defines learned system as the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge *about* the language. Such conscious knowledge includes knowing the rules of the grammar of the language in question. From what has been presented above, it is clear that there are

many problems that Yorùbá L1 speakers learning English as L2 face<sup>5</sup>. The case of errors relating to plural marking in English can be easily traced back to the influence of L1 i.e. Yorùbá.

In the error or contrastive analysis theory, it is observed that English L2 learners often assume that features that are not in the source language (i.e. L1) are also absent in the target language (i.e. L2) (Krashen 1988, Mitchell and Myles 2006, Ortega 2009). The domain of errors will be narrowed down only to the aspect of plural marking in English nominal expressions as established in this paper. Recall that in Yorùbá if plurality has to be marked, the issue of the type of plural word to be used as well as the issue of agreement is not crucial. All that is required when a speaker wants to mark plural is to make use of one of the available plural morphemes in his cognitive system. Consider the English example in (34) which can be rendered in Yorùbá as any of the options in (35).

(34) these two black dogs

(35) a.	àwọ̀n PL	ajá dog	dúdú black	méjì two	yí this	
b.	ajá dog	dúdú PL	dúdú black	méjì two	yí this	
c.	ajá dog	dúdú black	méjì two[+PL]		yí this	
d.	àwọ̀n PL	ajá dog	dúdú PL	dúdú black	méjì two-[+PL]	wọ̀n-yí PL-this

The two obligatory elements in this nominal expression are the noun and the demonstrative. More crucial is the fact that it is even possible for a noun not to be marked for plural even when plural interpretation is intended. This latter case has been described as an instance of contextually determined number interpretation. So, a Yorùbá L1 speaker in most cases carries this knowledge to learning English leading to errors such as complete absence of plural marking or partial plural marking within a nominal expression. Another problem deals with the English plural marking that is determined by the kind of nouns in view as discussed in section 2.1. So, there is the tendency for English L2 learner to mark plural wrongly based on these variations. The task before Yorùbá L1 speakers learning English as L2 which must tackled is in two folds: the problem from

5. However, the identified problems are not peculiar to Yorùbá L1 going by what has been established in second language acquisition (SLA) literature (Brown 2000).

the source language relating to the way Yorùbá marks plural which is optional and the problem of the target language which is multi-dimensional as enumerated above.

As a starting point, the author presents some sets of data to show some errors that have been established in the day to day use of English language. The examples in (36)-(39) are taken from two sources: (a) recordings that the researcher did when speakers (students, discussants on TV programs, Church pastors) were not aware that their utterance was being recorded, (b) subtitles in Yorùbá home videos.

- (36) a. *Dog* are dangerous animal  
 b. Things fall apart and Weep not child are literature *book* that I like.  
 c. Ballot *box* were stolen at the collation centre in Ido-osi.
- (37) a. I decided to kill *two bird* with one stone.  
 b. I spent *three week* in exile.  
 c. I don't understand how *two kid* of the same parent behave like this.
- (38) a. I saw ten babys in the hospital.  
 b. Fadeyi has many wifes.  
 c. The Herdsmen sold some oxs.
- (39) a. There are many womens in the garden  
 b. My father has ten sheeps  
 c. I learnt that Hannah gave birth to seven childs at last.  
 d. Some of us have seen woman as one of our furnitures.

The errors in the above examples are analyzed in 4.2.

#### 4.2. Error analysis

Sanusi (1996, p. 2) states that error analysis as a methodological tool consists of five tenets: recognition, description, classification, explanation and correction of errors. On recognition of errors, Ellis (2007) claims that there are three groups of errors. These are omissive, additive and substitutive. Omissive is the situation whereby L1 speaker omits certain morpheme in the target language (L2) as a result of the fact that the parallel morpheme does not exist in the source language (L1). Additive involves the situation whereby a L1 speaker adds a morpheme or more in the target language due to the fact that that morpheme exists in L1 and s/he thinks the same should be present in L2. Substitutive involves replacing one morpheme with another. Of the three, only the omissive has been found in Yorùbá L1 learning English as L2. The omissive error in (36) is a case

involving absence of a plural morpheme which is possible in the source language where the interpretation of such nouns as singular or plural may be contextually determined. The error in (37) is another kind of omission that is premised on what Yule (2006, p. 107) refers to as transfer or cross-linguistic influence. By transfer it means the speaker uses sounds, expressions or structures from the source language (L1) when using the target language (L2). However, I have to make a slight modification to Yule's proposal by adding that transfer also includes the abstract knowledge of what operates in L1 to L2. In (38), what the speaker does is simply transferring his knowledge of marking plural on just one element within a nominal expression. Note that native speakers of English will not be able to process these examples since they involve feature mismatch: while the numerals have the inherent plural feature, the nouns have the singular feature. Take for example (37a) where the intended form is the plural *bird*. The speaker is probably conscious of this hence, the inclusion of *two*, which is all that is required in L1 for the noun to be construed as plural. So, the speaker unconsciously omits the plural morpheme in *bird*. The errors in (38)-(39) are a type of overgeneralization of the application of the Saxon *s* as the plural marker for all English nouns, though there are some slight differences in the way this error is committed. The error in (38a) is due to the L2 learner's inability to change *y* into *i* as well as the omission of *e* before the Saxon *s* is added whereas (38b) is due to the L2 learner's failure to change *f* to *v*, its voiced counterpart. The error in (38c) is a violation of voice agreement; *x* and *s* are voiceless. Finally, in (39a), the L2 learner erroneously assumes that *women* is in its singular form and simply adds the plural marker to it. The case in (39b) is similar to (39a) with the assumption that sheep requires the plural marker *-s* even though English L1 speakers know that there is no morphological distinction between the singular and plural form for this noun. The overgeneralization in (39c) does not take into consideration the fact that there are some irregular nouns which take a plural morpheme different from the Saxon *-s* found with regular nouns and the error in (39d) comes about when the English L2 learner assumes that collective nouns are countable as such all that is required to express more than one entity on furniture is to add *-s* at the end. In what follows, the pedagogical implications of these errors are discussed.

### 4.3. Pedagogical implications

In the preceding sections, the reasons errors relating to number marking are made have been identified. As established in Corder (1973, p. 280), "errors made by learners are frequently (though not exclusively) related to their different mother tongues". A contrastive study of the rules of number marking in the two languages presented in this paper has helped in predicting those errors. The task before Yorùbá L1 speakers learning or using English as L2 is in two folds: the problem from the source language relating

to the way Yorùbá marks plural which is both optional and varying and the complexity of number marking in the target language. The two combined together form the task that Yorùbá L1 speakers must tackle when trying to apply the plural-marking rules. The classroom teacher needs a linguistic knowledge concerning the characteristics of the two languages (source and target). This will enable him exploit the similarities shared by the two as well as the differences and prepare him on how to overcome the errors that arise as a result of the differences in a class room situation. As it has been observed, teachers need not be deterred by errors made by L2 learners because this is a signal that some progress has been made in their struggle to communicate in the target language. For example, the error in (38)-(39) whereby the Saxon *-s* is applied to those nouns to give the unattested forms: *womens*, *sheeps*, *childs* and *furnitures*, can be seen as a kind of overgeneralization of *-s* as the plural marker (cf. Yule 2006, p. 166). While the learner is encouraged to use the plural marker on nouns that connote more than one, teachers should make efforts to also let the students know the peculiarity of English especially on the irregular nouns.

The other error which is a cross-linguistic phenomenon is transfer<sup>6</sup>. What the L2 learners do in (36) is to assume that a noun that is not marked with plural morpheme can still be interpreted as singular or plural in context as it is applicable in the L1, whereas the error in (37) is traceable to what operates in L1 where once a numeral other than *one* accompanies a noun, the noun is automatically construed as plural.

In order to overcome these problems, the language teacher must create awareness in L2 learners on the importance of number agreement among elements within a nominal expression in this target language. It is advised that teachers first teach regular nouns before introducing irregular ones. Teachers are also advised to introduce only one plural marker at a time and ensured that that rule is practiced thoroughly with many examples before the next rule is introduced.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper has accounted for the various strategies that Yorùbá and English adopt in plural marking. It establishes that markers of plural in English and Yorùbá are categorically distinct. The analysis of plural marking proposed in this paper makes a prediction that there are two ways by which languages may mark their nouns for plural cross-linguistically: languages like English which show agreement will use plural feature matching while languages like Yorùbá which do not show agreement will use plural feature percolation. Finally, the discussion in this paper has shown that feature percolation and

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6. The term *transfer* is defined as using sounds, expressions or structures from L1 when performing L2 (Yule 200, p. 167).

feature matching yield different results with respect to the typology of number marking. When a language adopts the feature percolation mechanism, marking plural on all the entities within an NP/DP is optional. This is what Yorùbá does. When a language makes use of the feature matching mechanism, it becomes obligatory for all members of an NP/DP to agree with respect to the plural feature. This is what English does. It goes further to establish that errors relating to number marking that are committed by Yorùbá L1 learning English as L2 are due to the influence of the former on the latter. Specifically, it establishes that the plural strategies in Yorùbá are transferred to English. Finally, the paper has drawn out some pedagogical implications of these errors, making a number of suggestions to teachers of L2 on how to overcome problems relating to such errors.

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