

Adjectives in English and Kabyle

a Contrastive Study

Miss Sadia BELKHIR
Université Tizi Ouzou

My paper entitled “*Adjectives in English and Kabyle: a Contrastive Study*” has originated from my interest in a controversial issue in Berber linguistics, namely, the existence / non-existence of adjectives as a distinct word class in the Berber language. I have noticed that there is disagreement among Berber scholars concerning the existence of adjectives in Berber. Some linguists among whom figures Willms (1972) (cf. Chaker (1996)), Bentolila (1981) and El Moujahid (1997) claim that the category of adjectives is non-existent and that qualification is achieved by means of nouns and verbs of quality. Other linguists such as Penchoen (1973) and Chaker (1996) assert that there is a class of adjectives whose main function is to modify substantives.

I make my own the claim of the secondary category of Berber linguists who affirm the existence of adjectives in Berber. The aim in this modest paper therefore is not to let myself involved in the controversy, but to attempt a confrontation of the word class of adjectives in the two languages and try to find out how this class of words is rendered in English and Kabyle. I will also attempt to

single out the pedagogical implications of the findings. To shed light on this matter, I shall base my research on corpora in English and Kabyle and shall rely on descriptive linguistics and contrastive analysis

Before conducting a description and a confrontation of adjectives in the two languages, I have investigated the concept of adjective in the Indo-European and Afroasiatic language family. The short span of time given to me in this workshop does not allow me the inclusion of a description of my investigation of the concept of adjective in the two language families. I will therefore give only a bold outline of the process of my research interests and its results. My investigation has covered a description of adjectives in both families including sections on adjective formation processes, their grammatical features and syntactic functions. The aim of such a description is to find out how the concept of adjective is conceived in the two families. I have discovered that on the one hand I.E. languages recognise the existence of a distinct category of adjectives. On the other hand, the category of adjective is not relevant to all Afroasiatic languages. In fact, languages, such as Somali, Hausa and Shleuh possess only a small set of adjectives and others, such as Tuareg possess no class of adjectives and instead use verbal adjectives (to be big), verbal participles (being big), or substantives denoting quality. (cf. Saeed (1987), Newman (2000), Galand in Cohen (1988), Prasse in Chaker (1996))

Then, I have carried out a syntactic description of adjectives in English and Kabyle. I have concentrated on their definitions, the concept of adjective in the two

languages, the formation of adjectives, their types, grammatical features and their syntactic functions. This description has allowed me to confront adjectives in English and Kabyle in order to provide answers to the following questions:

- Are adjectives formed by means of the same processes in English and Kabyle?
- Are they of the same types?
- Do they have the same grammatical features?
- Do they share identical syntactic functions?
-

My investigation has permitted me to come up with important conclusions. It has shown that the adjective formation processes used in both languages are different. English derives adjectives from nouns, adjectives and verbs by means of affixation, conversion and compounding while Kabyle mainly from verbs of quality and by means of adjectival schemes, as shown in example (1):

(1) Berber: imsus (v.)

Root: mss (ccc) + adjectival scheme (accac) ... amssas (adj.)

English: taste (n.) + less (suffix) tasteless (adj.)

Moreover, I have discovered that both languages possess adjectives of quality and make use of adjectival equivalents (nouns, participles, prepositional phrases and so on); however, there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between the type of adjectival equivalent used in the two languages, as shown in example (2) & (3):

- (6) Igelillen êwağen lmeiwna. (theme indicator)
poor-people need-pl.help
The poor need help. (subject)
- (7) Ëwağen igelillen lmeiwna. (referential complement)
need-pl. poor-people help
The poor need help. (subject)

Besides this, I have shown that the adjective used as a substantive (theme indicator or referential complement) necessarily corresponds in English to the use of the proform “one” in such a construction as “adjective + one”. This is illustrated in example (8) & (9):

- (8) Amellal yessarwat (theme indicator)
white he-treads-out
The white one treads out.
- (9) Yessarwat umellal (referential complement)
he-treads-out white + S.A
The white one treads out.

My research has also permitted me to reach important conclusions about the concept of adjective in English and Kabyle. Considering the concept of adjective in the Indo-European and Afroasiatic language family to which English and Berber belong respectively has enlightened this question. I have shown that, in contrast to Indo-European languages, which recognise the existence of adjectives, in Afroasiatic languages this class of words seems to be less relevant. In fact, I have

discovered that Afroasiatic adjectives either constitute a small set, or are usually replaced by verbs of quality (e.g. ‘to be big’) and participles (e.g. ‘being big’), or are non-existent altogether. I have discovered that this applies to Berber too, as Tuareg, a southern Berber variety, does not possess adjectives whilst Kabyle a northern variety resorts to verbs of quality and participles though it possesses a class of adjectives. I have also reached the conclusion that in Kabyle the class of adjectives is limited in number in comparison to English, as some English adjectives do not exist in Kabyle. For instance, such adjectives as “poor”, “thrifty”, “earthen” and “weak-willed” do not have equivalents in Kabyle. As a matter of fact, they correspond to the noun “igellil” (poor man), the participle “iêezen” (economising), the prepositional phrase “n wakal” (of earth) and the agent noun “ame\$bun” (weak-willed) respectively. In addition to this, Kabyle resorts to verbs of quality to achieve qualification whilst English does not. With this last conclusion, I can say that I have answered the major question that this research has addressed; i.e. ‘how is the adjective rendered in English and Kabyle?’ What all these findings imply is that the position of adjectives in English and Berber in general and especially Kabyle cannot be considered to be of identical nature even if this class exists in both languages. In other words, adjectives exist in English and Kabyle, but in each language, they have their proper peculiarities and it would be wrong to attempt to define and describe Kabyle adjectives in terms of the same English grammatical class.

In my paper, I have attempted a confrontation of the word class of adjectives in English and Kabyle and have come out with some important findings. These findings have stimulated thinking on the possible contribution of my research to second language teaching and learning. I believe that by drawing the differences and the similarities in the word class of adjectives in English and Kabyle, it may be possible to predict the areas of language transfer that Kabyle learners might encounter when learning English adjectives. Will learners make errors in the formation of English adjectives? Will they confuse between the types of adjectives in the two languages? Will they apply the grammatical features of Kabyle adjectives to those of English? Will they make errors in the syntactic use of English adjectives?

Adjectives are formed by means of adjectival schemes in Kabyle while English adjectives by means of affixation, conversion or compounding. These formation processes are completely different. This leads us to suppose that Kabyle learners will make no transfer from their mother tongue into English.

Kabyle learners might confuse between the types of adjectival equivalents used in English and Kabyle because there is not always a one to one correspondence between the types used in the two languages. Therefore, the learners might produce such an erroneous construction as “a donkey of earth” instead of “a donkey made of earth” due to the transfer of the Kabyle construction “a\$ul n waka\$”.

Learners might also make errors in the application of the grammatical features of Kabyle adjectives to those of English. The former inflect for gender and number while the latter do not. Hence, learners might produce such an erroneous construction as “whites bulls” instead of “white bulls”.

Kabyle learners can also make errors in word order because attributive adjectives occur before substantives in English and after in Kabyle. Therefore, learners can make such an error as “a bull white” instead of “a white bull”.

Learners might make errors in the syntactic functions of English adjectives due to the influence of Kabyle. They might make such an error as “the white treads out” instead of “the white one treads out” in which the learner might transfer the construction “amellal yessarwat” from his mother tongue.

In this paper, I have tried to confront adjectives in English and Kabyle. I have come out with important results and have singled out their pedagogical implications. English and Kabyle adjectives are different to some extent. This might lead Kabyle learners of English to be subjected to language transfers. Information about the potential for transfer of Kabyle structures into English should be used in the training of teachers of English. Teachers in training need to be alerted to the fact that Kabyle learners of English can make errors caused by the influence of their mother tongue. Awareness of how adjectives in English contrast

with adjectives in Kabyle will lead teachers to a greater sensitivity to what is involved in English language learning.

Acknowledgements: I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Riche Bouteldja for his valuable comments and advice on the organisation of this paper.

Références

Bentolila, F. (1981) grammaire Fonctionnelle d'un Parler Berbère (Ait-Seghrouchen d'oum Jeniba (Maroc), SELAF, Paris.

Chaker, S. (1996) Manuel de Linguistique Berbère 2, Syntaxe at diachronie, Ed. Enag, Alger.

Cohen, D. (1988) Les Langues dans le Monde Ancien et Moderne, Langues Chamito-Sémitiques, Ed. CNRS, Paris.

El Moujahid, E. (1997) Grammaire générative du Berbère, Morphologie et Syntaxe du nom en Tachelhit, Série: thèse et mémoires n° 38, Rabat.

Huddleston, R. (1996) English Grammar, An Outline, CUP, Cambridge.

Nait-Zerrad, K. (1995) Grammaire du Berbère Contemporain (Kabyle) 1. Morphologie, Enag, Alger.

Nait-Zerrad, K. (1996) Grammaire du Berbère Contemporain (Kabyle) 2. Syntaxe, Enag, Alger.

Newman, P. (2000) The Hausa Language, An Encyclopedic Reference Grammar, Yale University Press, New Haven & London.

Penchons, T. G. (1973) Etude Syntaxique d'un Parler Berbère (Ait Frah de l'Aurès), Istituto Univeristario Orientale, Na poli.

Quirk, R. & Greenbaum, S. (1996) A University Grammar of English, Longman, England.

Quitout, M. (1997) Grammaire Berbère (Rifain, Tamazight, Chleuh, Kabyle), L'Harmathan, Montréal (Qc)

Saeed, J.I. (1987) Somali Reference Grammar, Dunwoody Press / Wheaton, Maryland.