

Cross Linguistic Effects of the Passive Construction: A Case Study of Dholuo and English Language

Awuor, E. Quin¹ & Nyamasyo, Eunice²

¹Department of Language and Communication Studies, The Technical University of Kenya

² Department of English and Linguistics, Kenyatta University

Abstract: *The current study investigated the processes by which Dholuo speaking pupils acquire the English language passive constructions. The study focused on the cross linguistic effects of the Dholuo passive on the acquisition of the English passive constructions. An eclectic theoretical paradigm involving Learnability and Interlanguage theories was used. The study adopted the descriptive cross-sectional design which involves categorising respondents in different groups according to their respective levels of development. The cohorts were pupils aged 6-8; 9-11 and 12-14 years. The design allowed for child cohort comparison. Data was collected using research instruments that consisted of receptive and production tasks which were administered to the pupils. Data was analysed and interpreted qualitatively in terms of percentage scores in pie-charts and quantitatively in prose form. The study found out that pupil's interlanguage is characteristic of most linguistic systems in the sense that it has properties of both the Dholuo passive and the English passive constructions. It emerged that pupils use a number of strategies as they come to terms with the target English passive structures. The pupils displayed adult like behaviour in their construction of the English passives and had problems only with the by-constructions. The findings of this study have implications not only on the acquisition of English grammatical structures, but also on the cross-linguistic influence in Second Language Acquisition and recommends as follows: syllabus designers and material developers should take due cognisance of the cross linguistic influence while designing syllabi and developing instructional materials for lower primary classes, and teachers handling English language in the corresponding grades to be made aware of the potential effects of the L1 on the acquisition of English target structures. The study also creates an opportunity for further research in other aspects namely: the interaction of Dholuo with the acquisition of other aspects of English grammar; interaction of other languages with English during the acquisition process and lastly, focus on child language acquisition within the African background so that*

inherent differences can be noted and accounted for.

1. Introduction

The native languages of Kenya fall mainly into three language sub-families namely Nilotic, Cushitic, and Bantu. *Dholuo*, also known as *Luo*, is a Western Nilotic language spoken by approximately three million people in south-western Kenya (GoK, 2009 census). Closely related languages include Acholi and Lango, spoken in Uganda (See Tucker, 1994; Okombo, 1997; Storch, 2005 and Orwenjo, 2009).

The particular dialect used in this study is spoken in Bondo District, Kenya. According to The St Joseph's Society (1921: 54), *Dholuo* expresses passive voice by means of 'the root of the transitive verb and prefixing of 'o' as an impersonal pronoun' in perfect tenses and 'when one indicates an action still going on the 'o' is dropped and an 'i' is employed with the active verb'. Ochola (1999:15) has argued that *Dholuo* lacks central passive constructions but has 'a pseudo-passive construction in which a fronted Noun Phrase (NP) has very interesting properties. Ochola (1999:20) further notes that 'unlike languages such as English, the only difference between the *Dholuo* passive and its counterpart active construction is tone placement on the verbal morphology' and that more interestingly, the *Dholuo* passive has more properties in common with a true passive in English than pseudo-passives in other languages.

The debate on the process of second language acquisition has drawn a great deal of interest from a number of second language acquisition scholars. Most such scholars argue that pupils who are proficient in their first language (L1) should not experience any problem in acquiring a second language. For instance, Pérez and Torres-Guzmán (1996:96) state that "Pupils who develop proficiency in using their native language to communicate, to gain information, to solve problems, and to think can easily learn to use a second language in similar ways".

Cummins (1991), while writing on bilingualism, also opines that when a child is able to learn first language, he or she will be able to learn the second language in the same way the first language was

learnt. The present study sought to contribute to this debate by focusing specifically on how the acquisition of the English passive form occurs in pupils who already have an established first language which is *Dholuo*.

The present study focuses on the acquisition of English passive constructions by second language learners of English, namely *Dholuo* speaking pupils who have undergone about six years of English instruction.

2. Statement of the Problem

Ochola (1999) has argued that the NP movement illustrated in the *Dholuo* passive is a characteristic of a true passive. She concludes that "these peculiar properties of the *Dholuo* passive present an interesting phenomenon for further grammatical investigation" (p. 21). Of particular interest to the present study was the issue stated by Ochola (1999) that unlike languages such as English, the only difference between the *Dholuo* passive and its counterpart active construction is tone placement on the verbal morphology and that *Dholuo* passive has more properties in common with a true passive in English than pseudo-passives in other languages. The study, therefore, sought to establish how the already acquired structure of the *Dholuo* passive affects the acquisition of the English passive in terms of the cross linguistic influence of the properties of *Dholuo* passive on the acquisition of English passive given that both have shared properties. There is a paucity of research on the acquisition of other aspects of English syntax by Kenyan pupils. Indeed, Onditi (1994) has recommended further research on the acquisition of various aspects of English grammar by Kenyan pupils: hence the present study.

3. Objectives of the study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- a) To determine the acquisition profile of English passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils.
- b) To investigate the effect of cross linguistic influences of the properties of *Dholuo* passive on the acquisition of the English passive.

4. Justification of the Study

It was particularly interesting to find out whether the *Dholuo* passive which the pupils shall have already mastered would enhance or inhibit their acquisition of the English passive.

Other studies that have grappled with the nature of cross-linguistic influence have claimed that it occurs in the form of transfer (Lado, 1957), non-transfer (Sharwood, 1983), transfer in reverse (Odlin, 2003), or avoidance (Kellerman, 1979). Related studies using data drawn from local African languages are not readily available, hence the present study.

On a more practical level, the findings of this study contribute to linguistic theory by providing more data and furthering the already existing discourse on passive, pseudo-passive and cross-linguistic influences in second language acquisition. 4). Curriculum developers and syllabus designers in Kenya are also likely to benefit from the insights of the study as they prepare instructional materials for *Dholuo* and the English syllabus.

5. Theoretical Framework

An eclectic theoretical paradigm involving Learnability and Interlanguage theories was used.

5.1 Learnability theory

Learnability theory is not an acquisition theory per se but was developed by psychologists to account for the learning process. Since the study makes no distinction between acquisition and learning due to the fact that there will be elements of classroom instruction in the pupils' acquisition of English passive constructions, it will adopt the theory to account for acquisition of English passive constructions by *Dholuo* speaking pupils. Learnability theory has defined learning as a scenario involving four parts:

- a) A class of languages

One of them is the "target" language, to be attained by the learner, but the learner does not, of course, know which it is. In the case of pupils, the class of languages would consist of the existing and possible human languages; the target language is the one spoken in their community in this case *Dholuo* and in the target language would be English, specifically the English passive constructions.

- b) An environment

This is the information in the world that the learner has to rely on in trying to acquire the language. In the case of pupils, it might include the sentences parents utter, the context in which they utter them, feedback to the child (verbal or nonverbal) in response to the child's own speech, and so on. Parental utterances can be a random sample of the language, or they might have some special properties. Within the context of the present study, this would also include input from the teachers during classroom instruction and any English utterances that pupils encounter during school hours.

- c) A learning strategy

The learning strategy is the algorithm that creates the hypotheses and determines whether they are consistent with the input information from the environment. For pupils, it is the "grammar-forming" mechanism in their brains; their "language acquisition device."

- d) A success criterion

Learners may arrive at a hypothesis identical to the target language after some fixed period of time;

they may arrive at an approximation to it; they may waiver among a set of hypotheses one of which is correct. The study will employ the Learnability theory as a means of determining the processes by which *Dholuo* speaking pupils acquire the English passive.

5.2 Interlanguage Theory (IL)

Learner's language is what Selinker (1972) calls 'interlanguage' – an evolving linguistic system that incorporates features of both the learner's L1 and L2. Inter language is, therefore, neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but instead falls between the two; it is a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. Interlanguage theory basically looks at second language learning as "a creative process of constructing a system in which the learner is consciously testing hypotheses about the target language from a number of possible sources of knowledge ..." (Brown 1980: 162).

5.2.1 Selinker's View of Interlanguage

Selinker holds the view that interlanguage is "a separate linguistic system resulting from learner's attempted production of the target language norm" (McLaughlin, 1987: 60). The system is the product of five central cognitive processes involved in second-language learning. The processes are: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of second-language learning, strategies of second-language communication, and overgeneralization. In his research, Selinker, (1972) presents three main characteristics of interlanguage. The first one is permeability. As he stated, the second language learners' language system is permeable, in the sense that rules that constitute the learners' knowledge at any stage are not fixed, but are open to amendment. The second one is that interlanguage is dynamic, i.e., interlanguage is constantly changing. However, a learner's interlanguage does not jump from one stage to the next, but rather slowly revises the interim systems to adapt new hypotheses to the target language system. The third one is that interlanguage is systematic. The learner does not select accidentally from his store of interlanguage rules, but in predictable ways. It is with this in mind that the present study sought to use the interlanguage theory, together with the learnability theory for the purposes outlined.

6. Literature review

6.1 Acquisition of Passive Constructions

Borer and Wexler (1987) have claimed that a child's ability to form an A-chain (involving an A-binding relation between the subject and the object) undergoes maturation. Before the maturation occurs, the adjectival analysis of passives is all that

is available to the child. In the adjectival passives like "*The island was uninhabited*", no NP movement is invoked. They propose that the derivation of verbal passives become available after A-chain maturation. Hence, their main claim, therefore, is that the constructions in which A-chain is involved are acquired later than those that do not invoke NP movement. It is clear that in this case, the study of *Dholuo* throws more light into the issue. The present study, being quasi-experimental in nature, also contributes to the above argument using data from *Dholuo* speaking pupils who are in the process of acquiring English as a second language.

6.2 Theoretical Perspectives on the Passive Construction: A Cross-linguistic Survey

One of the languages in which the passive has been extensively studied, apart from the Indo-European languages, is Japanese. Although extensively studied, questions about a modular analysis of the different types of passive constructions in Japanese remain. Ishizuka, (2008) distinguishes two types of passives: "direct passives" and "indirect passives". According to "Japanese Verbs at a Glance" by Chino (2001, p.81-82), the structure of a direct passive sentence in the Japanese language is "Subject + wa + agent + ni + transitive verb in passive form" whereas indirect or suffering passives follow the structure of "Subject + wa + agent + ni + direct object + wo + transitive verb in passive form" or "Subject + wa + agent + ni + intransitive verb in passive form.". Both types contain the same passive morpheme – *rare-* but show different clusters of properties. In English, only transitive verbs (verbs that require objects) can be converted into a passive form. Thus, there are no passive forms for verbs like "go", "sneeze", and 'die'.

According to Siewierska (2010), a linguistic construction may be classified as passive if it displays the following five properties:

- It contrasts with another construction, the active
- The subject of the active corresponds to a non-obligatory oblique phrase of the passive or is not overtly expressed
- The subject of the passive, if there is one, corresponds to the direct object of the active
- The construction is pragmatically restricted relative to the active
- The construction displays some special morphological marking of the verb.

These criteria are crucial for the present study in as far as the distinction between the *Dholuo* and the English passives are made. It further came into play in explaining how the cross-linguistic variations between *Dholuo* passives and English passive come to bear in the Second Language Acquisition

(SLA) of the English passive by *Dholuo* speaking pupils. Ashton (1947:224) provided prototypical example of the passive, as defined in the Kiswahili example illustrated:

1. Kiswahili:

Siewierska (2010) also provides taxonomy of passive constructions across languages. She for instance, makes a distinction between synthetic passives, where the lexical verb exhibits some form of marking, like in the Kiswahili example above, and periphrastic or analytical passives, in which the special verbal morphology involves the use of a participle form of the lexical verb and an additional auxiliary verb. In Swahili, and English, the subject of the active may be expressed in the form of an oblique constituent or remain unexpressed. In many languages only the latter is possible: the subject of the active cannot be overtly present in the passive (Siewierska, 2010).

7. Methodology

The study was carried out within Bondo District in Siaya County in the Republic of Kenya. The district like most parts of Siaya County is predominantly occupied by the Luo tribe speaking the *Dholuo* language. The study conveniently sampled one primary school (*Singapala*) within the District through random sampling from which subjects (*Dholuo* speaking pupils) were identified for the study since all the primary schools in Bondo district are structured in the same way as follows: they follow the same national English syllabus stipulated by the Kenya Ministry of Education of Science and Technology, the pupils are taught by the teachers with similar training background and they have *Dholuo* speaking pupils with limited influence of other languages, especially Kiswahili.

The study adopted a time-lag strategy research design. Bennet-Kastor, 1998; Orwenjo, 2009; Salkind, 2010 observed that a time-lag strategy combines both the longitudinal and a descriptive cross-sectional design. The present study therefore, adopted the descriptive cross-sectional design which involves classifying respondents in different groups according to their respective levels of development, assumed on the basis of age or any other defensible criteria. The design enabled the study to compare cohorts as they successively reached a given age or points of development. The cohorts were pupils aged 6-8; 9-11 and 12-14 years. The study population consisted of ninety eight (98) *Dholuo* speaking pupils within Bondo District, of the ages between 6-14 years. These

ages were suitable for the study because the critical period for language acquisition is normally the ages

a.	Hamisi	a-li-pik-a	Chakula
	Hamisi	3sg-pst-cook-ing	Food
	‘Hamisi cooked the/some food.’		
b.	Chakula	ki-li-pik-w-a	(na Hamisi)
	Food	3sg-pst-cook-pass-ind	by Hamisi

between two years and puberty.

The selection of respondents was done purposively based on those in the same socio-economic status, age and taking consideration of the gender disparity. The study sought to keep within the sample population only those pupils in whose homes no other language apart from *Dholuo* was used. This was to ensure homogeneous population with regard to exposure in English. The pupils selected were both male and female in order to understand gender influence in acquisition of English passive.

According to Milroy (1982), language is a largely homogeneous phenomenon and studies involving language use run the risk of having unnecessarily enormous amount of data with decreasing analytical returns. Therefore Milroy (1982) suggests that where homogeneous data is elicited, there is no need for larger samples as would be the case in other social and behavioural sciences. Data on the test scores were analysed quantitatively and were presented in terms of percentages in pie-charts. In order to determine the syntactic properties of the pupils’ English passive constructions, their responses were analysed to establish the linguistic nature of their passive constructions.

8. Discussion

8.1The English passive acquisition profile

8.1.1The Order and Profile of Acquisition

According to Merriam Webster dictionary, a profile is “a set of data often in graphic form portraying the significant features of something” Merriam-Webster.com (2013). Adopting this definition, it would suffice to say that the “something”, in the case of the present study, is the acquisition of English passive constructions by *Dholuo* speaking pupils who were the subjects of the current study. Accordingly, in discussing the acquisition profile of these pupils, we present the significant or landmark features that characterise their acquisition of the English passive constructions. This is done by highlighting the significant structural and syntactic properties of such constructions. We, however, begin with a broad overview of the two issues of order and profile of acquisition.

Krashen (1987) hypothesizes that every person learning a language will acquire that language in a predictable order. For example, pupils learning English, regardless of their cultural and linguistic background, will acquire the plural “s” e.g in *girls* before the third person singular “s” e.g in *likes*. Despite the time a teacher spends practicing the grammatical aspect of third person singular “s” with the pupils, the pupils will not use the grammatical aspect in the target language conversations until they have naturally acquired it. The natural order of acquisition is not affected by instructional sequences.

The Natural Order hypothesis is based on research findings (Dulay & Burt, 1974; Fathman, 1975; Makino, 1980 cited in Krashen, 1987) which suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a 'natural order' which is predictable. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This order seemed to be independent of the learners' age, L1 background, conditions of exposure, and although the agreement between individual acquirers was not always 100% in the studies, there were statistically significant similarities that reinforced the existence of a Natural Order of language acquisition.

With the above views by Krashen (1987), it was predicted that the production of English passive constructions would follow a discernible, if not predictable pattern. Consequently, each of the 18 pupils was allocated 15 minutes each to perform a production task. To ensure the occurrence of the passive constructions, the students were instructed to form sentences with all the given nouns as subjects. Examples of the attested results appear in (1-3) as shown below.

Write complete sentences from the subjects and the verbs given. Example:

1. *Father, laugh* *The father was laughed.*
2. *Boy, beat* *The boy was beaten*
3. *disaster, occur* **The disaster occurred.*

From the examples, majority of the pupils from ages 12-14 years old were able to generate well-formed passive as a result of the exposure from the environment and classroom instruction, whereas the other pupils also over-generated passives. This supports the argument that learnability issue becomes more complicated because of age and level of learning among other parameters.

8.1.2 Passive Sentences Construction

The passive constructions were divided as follows: well-formed passives (WP), malformed passives (MP), actives (Act.), possible pseudo-passives (PP), and other constructions (Oth.). The well-formed passives refer to native-like passives, while the malformed passives are the ones with agreement errors and those with errors in past participle markers. The active sentences are those

with agent subjects and active verbs, whereas the possible pseudo passives are the ones that are similar to the IL pseudo-passives. The ‘other constructions’ are non-sentences like the noun phrase or ungrammatical sentences that cannot be connected to any of the above four passives. Since the purpose of the task is to test the knowledge of passivization, the spelling is not considered.

8.2 Cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of the English passive constructions

8.2.1 Theoretical Issues

The role of cross-linguistic influence (CLI) or linguistic transfer in second language acquisition has been a field of extensive research in the past few decades (Ellis, 1994; Gas and Selinker, 1994; Kellerman, 1995; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Odlin, 1989; Selinker, 1992). Transfer is a traditional term from psychology of learning which means imposition of previously learned patterns onto a new learning situation. In second language acquisition, the knowledge of the native language (L1) in acquisition of a foreign language (L2) can indeed have a facilitation or inhibition effect on the learner's progress in mastering a new language. Traditionally, facilitation effect is known as positive transfer, while inhibition is considered negative transfer. Erroneous performance in L2 ascribed to certain constraints existing in the native language can be the simplest example of negative transfer.

Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965) tried to predict the likelihood of linguistic transfer in second language acquisition based on the similarities as well as differences between various aspects of L1 and L2. That is, similarities in linguistic structures in two languages will result in positive transfer, while differences will create an interference which is known as negative transfer. However, the survey of the recent research on CLI shows that the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis fails to find significant support and its validity has been questioned by many scholars (Gass and Selinker, 1983; McLaughlin, 1984). Therefore, Sharwood-Smith and Kellerman (1986) came up with the term ‘cross-linguistic influence’ which is theory-neutral and can be used as a super ordinate term for the phenomena of ‘transfer’, ‘interference’, ‘avoidance’, ‘borrowing’ etc. One of the most effective theories to explain CLI has been the interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972).

The notion similar to “interlanguage” was first seen in “The Significance of Learners’ Errors” (Corder, 1967) as “transitional competence” to describe foreign language learners’ linguistic ability which did not match that of native speakers. Selinker (1972) has suggested five principal processes operated in interlanguage. These are (1) language; (2) overgeneralization of target language

rules; (3) transfer of training; (4) strategies of L2 learning; and (5) strategies of L2 communication. Interference, then, was seen as one of several processes responsible for interlanguage. The five processes together constitute the ways in which the learner tries to internalize the L2 system. They are the means by which the learner tries to reduce the learning burden to manageable proportions and, as such, it has been suggested by Widdowson (1975:12) that they can be subsumed under the general process of 'simplification'.

In this study, of the written and recognition tasks overgeneralisation, codes switching, transfer and borrowing were identified from their work. The age group 12-14 performed best in the tasks. This result is displayed by figure 1, where the proportions of the various types of cross-linguistic influence in the study corpus are given.

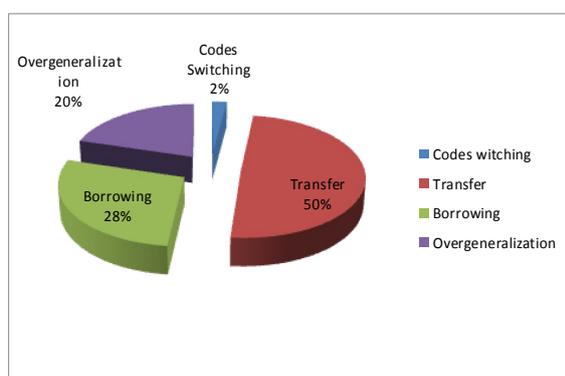


Figure 1: Proportions of the various types of cross-linguistic influence

It can be postulated that transfer is the most dominant cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of English passive constructions by *Dholuo* speaking pupils who have had some exposure to English through formal instruction. Learners have limited processing space and, therefore, cannot cope with the total complexity of a language system, so they limit the number of hypotheses they test at any one point in time. In analysing the cross-linguistics influences in the acquisition of English passive constructions by *Dholuo* speaking pupils, Selinker's (1972) and Widdowson's (1975) paradigms were used.

8.2.3 Positive and Negative Transfer

Transfer was considered responsible for error occurrences in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies Lado, (1957); Stockwell & Brown (1965); Corder, 1967; 1975:5). Nevertheless, Richards (1971) evidenced that transfer of strategies was but partially responsible for the learner's errors.

To Gass (1979), transfer helps us to see the grammatical elements that are universal in human languages. The present study investigates transfer as a cross-linguistic phenomenon by specifically focusing on the aspects of *Dholuo*-pseudo passive

that were transferred to the *Dholuo* pupils' English interlanguage.

According to Kasper (1992) it is imperative to find certain constraints on a pragmatic transfer, so that our work will be operational. The usual way to identify a transfer in SLA research is something like an informal estimation method (Kasper, 1992). In informal estimations, we decide whether a transfer can be established by looking at the similarities and differences of the percentage by which a particular category of interlanguage features (such as a semantic formulae, strategy, or linguistic form) occurs in the NL, TL, and IL data. Similar response frequencies in all the three data sets are classified as positive transfer (Blum-Kulka, 1982; House & Kasper, 1987; Faerch & Kasper, 1989), while different response frequencies between IL-TL and NL-TL combined with similar frequencies between IL-NL register as negative transfer (Beebe et al., 1990; Takahashi and Beebe, 1992; Olshtain, 1983).

Another way to determine a transfer is to use a statistically significant method. A statistically significant method determines whether the differences between the interlanguage and the learner's native language on a particular pragmatic feature are statistically significant, and how these differences relate to the TL. A general guiding principle is, if a pragmatic feature is lack of statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature in NL, TL, and IL, then it can be operationally defined as positive transfer. On the contrary, statistically significant differences in the frequencies of a pragmatic feature between IL-TL and NL-TL and lack of statistically significant differences between IL and L1 can be operationally defined as negative transfer.

The process of identifying a transfer, according to Kasper (1992), follows basically three steps namely: an observation on the learner's productive interlanguage data; concentration on the different means that learners employ in expressing and understanding a speech act in the TL and sorting out from collected data the transfer features. The procedure outlined by Kasper (1992) was applied in this study due to the fact that it was felt to be more rigorous, systematic and scientific as compared to the informal estimation method. The transfer features were then categorized as positive transfer, or negative transfer. Positive transfer was considered to have occurred where a feature or aspect of *Dholuo*-pseudo passive was also present in the English passive, so acquisition of this item made little or no difficulty for the learner. Negative transfer was considered to have occurred where there was no concordance between L1 and L2 and thus, acquisition of the new L2 structure would be more difficult and errors reflecting the L1 structure

would be produced (Powell 1998: 2 and Dulay et al. 1982: 97).

8.2.4 Positive Transfer

As has been stated earlier, positive transfer was considered to have occurred where a feature or aspect of *Dholuo*-pseudo passive was also present in the English passive, so acquisition of this item made little or no difficulty for the learner. Three categories of positive transfer were identified in the corpus, namely, where there was an agentless passive, cases of passive analogue, and finally cases of oblique agents. These are further discussed and exemplified below:

8.2.5 Agentless passives

English language also has agentless passives. These occur in English, in situations among others, where the agent is obvious, not known or irrelevant. In all these instances, the agent is normally recoverable either from the immediate context or from the co-text. However, the agentless passives identified in this study as aspect of transfer differed from the usual agentless passives in English in that the agent was neither recoverable from the immediate context, nor from the co-text and as such they were evidently instances where the agent was erroneously omitted in line with the *Dholuo* passive construction. To Omondi (1982: 38), the type of sentences found in *Dholuo* passive are 'agentless sentences which is the nearest *Dholuo* gets to the passive construction'.

8.2.6 Passive analogs

The 'passive analog' is a construction in which the subject remains preverbal, agrees with the active verb and the object is fronted. According to Noonan and Woock (1978) and Noonan (1992), resumption is optional with a third person object, obligatory with first and second person pronouns and complement of prepositions, and illicit with non-human third person objects. The pseudo-passive approach of *Dholuo* is consistent with what has been observed in other Southern Luo languages like Lango Noonan, (1977); Noonan and Woock (1978) as they are described as lacking passive morphology.

8.2.7 Oblique agents

The oblique passive is a type of impersonal passive with the expression of an oblique agent. The impersonal passive voice is a verb voice that decreases the valency of an intransitive verb to zero (Kula and Marten, 2010). The impersonal passive deletes the subject of an intransitive verb. In place of the verb's subject, the construction instead may include a syntactic placeholder, also called a dummy. This placeholder has neither the thematic nor referential content. The oblique passive is attested in other languages and is not at all uncommon. It is found in a number of Bantu languages, the family neighbouring *Dholuo*. Impersonal passives with optional expression of an

oblique-agent are found, for instance, in Bemba, spoken in Zambia (Kula and Marten, 2010).

8.2.8 Negative Transfer

Negative transfer was considered to have occurred where a feature or aspect of *Dholuo*-pseudo passive was not present in the English passive, so acquisition of this item presented difficulties to the learner. Four categories of negative transfer were identified in the corpus, namely, where there was a thematic patient without an agent; a thematic patient with an optional agent in an adjunct; a thematic patient with a non-canonical word order; and finally a thematic patient with an instrument instead of an agent. These are further discussed and exemplified below.

8.2.9 Thematic Patient without an agent

Also called the target or undergoer, the patient is the participant of a situation upon whom an action is carried out. A patient as differentiated from a theme must undergo a change in state. A theme is denoted by a stative verb, whereas a patient is denoted by a dynamic verb. In sentences where there is a grammatical patient, whether thematic or otherwise, the agent is usually obligatory, both grammatically and semantically.

8.2.10 Thematic Patient with Optional Agent in an Adjunct

There were also cases where there was a thematic patient but with an optional agent in an adjunct. An agent, in grammatical terms, is a word or phrase that constitutes an optional element or is considered of secondary importance in a sentence. As has already been pointed out above, in sentences with patient, the agent becomes both semantically and syntactically obligatory. The presence of sentences with a patient but with an optional agent in the study corpus was thus analysed to have been a transfer from *Dholuo* impersonal passive where this is quite legitimate.

8.2.11 Thematic Patient with non-Canonical Word Order

The third type of negative transfer were cases in which there was a thematic patient and an agent, but with non-canonical English word order. In such cases, instead of the thematic patient preceding the verb as in a proto-typical passive, it followed the verb in the order *V-O-by Agent*. Thus, in such instances, whereas the obligatoriness of the agent was observed, word order was changed.

8.2.12 Thematic Patient with an Instrument instead of an Agent

The final case of negative transfer involved cases where the thematic patient had an instrument instead of an agent. It should be noted here that where there is a patient as opposed to the agent, the instrument is never semantically or syntactically obligatory in sentences with thematic patients. This, therefore, was also considered as one of the instances of negative transfer from *Dholuo*

impersonal passive constructions in which such a structure would be legitimate.

8.3 Borrowing

Linguistic borrowing is a sociolinguistic phenomenon and a form of language interference which appears among bilingual speakers (Dulay et al. 1982:113). Powell (1998:8) defines borrowing as “the incorporation of linguistic material from one language into another.” Most commonly borrowed items are, as Dulay et al. (1982:113) explain, “lexical items that express either cultural concepts that are new to the borrowing group, or notions that are particularly important in a given contact situation”. For example, after discovering the American continent, English and other old European languages borrowed words from the Native American languages, such as maize, tomato, igloo, etc.

Words that are borrowed into a language usually preserve their general sound pattern, but they also modify it according to the phonetic and phonological system of the borrowing language. Two types of lexical borrowing have been identified in literature, namely integrated borrowing and creative borrowing. *Integrated borrowing* refers to a word which was borrowed into a language and speakers of that language learn this word from each other without understanding its original meaning in the language of origin. On the other hand, *creative borrowing* is characterized by speakers using a word from another language to express a concept closely related to the culture of that language (Dulay et al.1982:114).

Although much of the works that have been done on linguistic borrowing have focused on lexical borrowing (loanwords), the present study concerns itself with grammatical borrowing as a cross-linguistic phenomenon during second language acquisition. A number of recent approaches to language contact (Matras & Sakel 2007b) distinguish different types of loans, namely *matter* (MAT) and *pattern* (PAT). The former (MAT) is the borrowing of morpho-phonological material, i.e. taking a word from one language and inserting it into another. The latter (PAT) is the replication of patterns and is often referred to as calque or loan translation. While the distinction between MAT and PAT is very useful in analysing contact phenomena, it has its limits. MAT is not always a clear copy of the source language form in that it is often phonologically integrated and may have been restricted or extended in its function or meaning. Similarly, PAT is not always an exact copy of the source language, and differences to the original are common. This study focused on the identification of cases of MAT with specific reference to cases of loaning *Dholuo* passive structure into the English passive structure. The analysis of interlanguage data in the study revealed

that cases of borrowing from the *Dholuo* passive construction involved the placement of agent in the English passive construction.

8.4 Code Switching

The term ‘code-switching’ refers to “an active, creative process of incorporating material from both of a bilingual’s languages into communicative acts” Dulay et al. (1982: 115). Code-switching is most frequent among the most proficient bilinguals and is governed by strict structural and grammatical rules of both the languages involved. Code-switching can take the form of (a) inserting words or short phrases from one language into single sentences in another language or (b) altering the languages in terms of entire phrases or clauses. Code switching, clearly serves some functions either beneficial or not.

Eldridge (1996) names these functions as: equivalence, floor-holding, reiteration, and conflict control. In equivalence, the student makes use of the native equivalent of a certain lexical item in the target language and therefore code switches to his/her native tongue. In floor-holding, the pupils fill the stop gap with native language use. The third consideration in pupils’ code switching is reiteration, which is pointed by Eldridge as: “messages are reinforced, emphasized, or clarified where the message has already been transmitted in one code, but not understood” (1996:306). In this case, the message in the target language is repeated by the student in native tongue through which the learner tries to give the meaning by making use of a repetition technique. The last function is conflict control. For the potentially conflictive language use of a student code switching is a strategy to transfer the intended meaning.

9. Conclusion

The present study has made what could be considered as a modest contribution to debate and scholarship on language acquisition; especially where the subjects acquiring certain target structures in one language have more or less similar structures in their first language. By focusing on *Dholuo*, an African language, and looking at how its structure impacts on the acquisition of English structures (specifically the English passive constructions), the present study opens new grounds for further research and scholarship by deviating from the often trodden path in such studies which have hitherto concentrated on languages with the same family or related families.

10. REFERENCE

- [1] Ashton, E. O. (1947). A Swahili Grammar. In *Comprehension of Passive Sentences by Native and Non-native English*. London: Longman.
- [2] Bennet- Tina K. (1998). Predictions and non-referential cohesion in Irish- speaking pupils’

- narratives. *Functions of Language* 6(2):195-241. DOI:10.1075/foL.6.2.03ben
- [3] Blum-Kulka, S., & Levenston, E.A. (1983). Universals of Lexical Simplification. In C. Faerch, C., & G. Kasper (eds.). *Strategies in Interlanguage Communication*. London: Longman.
- [4] Borer, H., & Wexler, K. (1987). The maturation of syntax. In T. Roeper, & E. Williams, *Parameter setting* (p. Dordrecht). 123–172: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- [5] Brown, H. D. (1980). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs.
- [6] Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of Learner's Errors. *IRAL*, 161-9.
- [7] Cummins, J. (1991) Language Development and Academic Learning. In Malave, L. and Duquette, G. *Language, Culture and Cognition* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters
- [8] Dulay, H. & Burt, M. (1974). 'A New Perspective on the Creative Construction Process in Child Second Language Acquisition'. Working Papers in *Bilingualism* 4, 71-98. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- [9] Dulay, H., Burt, M. and Krashen, S. (1982). *Language Two*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [10] Eldridge, J. (1996). Code-Switching in a Turkish secondary school. *ELT Journal*, 50,4: 303-311
- [11] Faerch, C. & Kasper, G. (1989). Internal and external modification in interlanguage request realization. In S. Blum Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (1982) (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies* (221-47). Norwood, NJ: Able
- [12] Gass, S. (1979). An investigation of syntactic transfer in adult L2 learners. In Robin, S. & Krashen, S. (ed.) *Research in Second Language Acquisition*, Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- [13] House, J., & Kasper, G. (1987). Interlanguage pragmatics: requesting in a foreign language. In Loerscher, W., & Schulze, R., (eds.): *Perspectives on Language in Performance*. Tuebingen: Narr.
- [14] Ishizuka, T. (2008). *Pseudo-passive constructions in Japanese*. Poster presented at the 82nd Annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, Chicago IL.
- [15] Kasper, G. (1992). Pragmatic Transfer. *Second Language Research*, 8(3), 203-231.
- [16] Kellerman, E. (1995). "Cross Linguistic Influence : transfer to nowhere?" *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 15:125-150
- [17] Krashen, S. D. (1987). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Prentice-Hall International.
- [18] Kula, N., & Lutz, M. (2010). Argument structure and agency in Bemba passives.
- [19] Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers*. University of Michigan Press.
- [20] Matras, Y., & Sakel, J. (2007). Investigating the mechanisms of pattern replication in Language convergence. *Studies in Language*, 31(4), 829–865.
- [21] McLaughlin, B. (1987). *Theories of Second Language Learning*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd.
- [22] Merriam-webster Dictionary (2013). Profile. Retrieved from <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/profile> on 12th February, 2013).
- [23] Milroy, J. (1982). Probing under the tip of the iceberg: Phonological 'normalization' and the shape of speech communities. In S. Romaine (ed) 35-48
- [24] Noonan, M. (1977). On subjects and topics. In *Proceedings of the 3rd annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 372–385.
- [25] Noonan, M. (1992). *A grammar of Lango*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- [26] Noonan, M., & Wock, E. B. (1978). *The passive analog in Lango*. In Proceedings of the 4th annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society.
- [27] Ocaya, V. (2004). Logic in the Acholi language. In K. Wiredu, *A companion to African philosophy* (pp. 285–295). Blackwell.
- [28] Ochola, E. D. (1999). Is there a Passive in *Dholuo*. *Studies in African Linguistics*, 28(1).
- [29] Odlin, T. (2003). *Cross-Linguistic Influence*. In C. Doughty and M. Long (eds.) *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 436-486). Oxford: Blackwell.
- [30] Okombo, O. (1997). *A functional grammar of Dholuo*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- [31] Olshtain, E. (1983). Sociocultural competence and language transfer: the case of apology. In Gass, S., & Selinker, L., (eds.) *Language Transfer in language Learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- [32] Omondi, L.N. (1982). *The Major Syntactic Structure of Dholuo*: Berlin: Deitrich Reiner Verlag
- [33] Onditi, T.L. (1994). *Acquisition of English WH-Interrogatives by Dholuo L1 speakers.* Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis University of Reading.
- [34] Orwenjo, D. O. (2009). *Lexical Innovations in Child Language Acquisition: Evidence from Dholuo*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- [35] Pérez, B., & Torres-Guzmán, M. (1996). *Learning in Two Worlds: An Integrated Spanish/English Bilingual Approach*. New York: Longman.
- [36] Powell, G. (1988). *Women and Men in Management*. London: Sage
- [37] Richards, J. (1971). Error analysis and second language strategies [J]. In *Language Science*, Vol.17, 1971: 12-22.
- [38] Salkind, J. N. (2010). *Statistics for People Who (Think They) Hate Statistics* (3rd ed.). University of Kansas: Sage.
- [39] Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10, 209–231
- [40] Selinker, L. (1992). *Rediscovering Interlanguage*. New York: Longman.
- [41] Sharwood S. M. (1986). 'The competence/control model, crosslinguistic influence and the creation of new grammars'. In Kellerman, E. and Sharwood Smith, M. (eds.) *Language Transfer in*

- Language Learning. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House.
- [42] Sharwood, S. (1983). *Crosslinguistic influence in second language acquisition*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [43] Siewierska, A. (2010). *The Passive: A Contrastive Linguistic Analysis*. Budapest: Croom Helm.
- [44] Stockwell, R.P., Bowen, J.D. and Martin, J.W. (1965). *The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [45] Storch, A. (2005). *The Noun Morphology of Western Nilotic*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.
- [46] The St Joseph's Society. (1921). *A handbook of the Kavirondo language*. Nairobi: Caxton Printing and Publishing Works.
- [47] Tucker, A. N. (1994). *A Grammar of Kenya Luo (Dholuo)*. Köln: Köppe.
- [48] Widdowson, H.G. (1975). *Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature*. London: Longman.