HUMANUS DISCOURSE Vol. 6. NO 3. 2026
ISSN 2787-0308 (ONLINE)

Politeness and Plurality in Conflict: Yorùbá Influence on English Nominative and Accusative Case Usage

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Abstract

This study investigates how Yorùbá politeness plural markers influence the incorrect use of English nominative and accusative case pronouns among Nigerian secondary school students. Drawing from data collected across two Yorùbá-speaking schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria, the paper analyzes specific instances where the Yorùbá plural marker and politeness indicator wọn is misinterpreted or directly transferred into English pronoun usage. For instance, when a student interpreted the message "mò ń wá" (I am looking for him) as "they are looking for him," due to the polite reference wọn, it exemplifies negative transfer from the first language. The study employs the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Second Language Acquisition theories to frame the linguistic errors and their sources. The findings emphasize the need for teachers to explicitly address language interference in the classroom and to raise awareness of culturally rooted speech habits that may distort grammatical accuracy in English.

Keywords: **P**oliteness, plurality, nominative case, accusative case, pronoun errors.

Introduction

In multilingual societies like Nigeria, the interplay between indigenous languages and English, the official language and primary medium of instruction, presents unique challenges for learners. English, with its relatively rigid syntactic rules and morphosyntactic case distinctions, often stands in stark contrast to many Nigerian languages that are more analytic, tonal, and context-dependent. One such language is Yorùbá, a major indigenous language spoken by millions in southwestern Nigeria. Yorùbá is rich in sociolinguistic and cultural markers, especially in its use of plurality to encode politeness, status, and respect, a feature not mirrored in English grammar. Prior research has extensively explored pluralisation strategies in Yorùbá (Ajíbóyè, 2010; Bamgbose, 1992) and second language interference (Odlin, 1989; Ellis, 2008), less attention has been paid to how Yorùbá politeness-driven plurality affects

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learners' ability to correctly apply English nominative and accusative case rules, especially in the use of pronouns. Language interference remains a prominent issue in second language acquisition, particularly in multilingual societies such as Nigeria. When speakers of a native language (L1) attempt to learn a second language (L2), structures from the L1 often influence the learner's expression in the L2, this phenomenon is commonly referred to as language transfer. In many Nigerian classrooms, the interference of Yorùbá linguistic features is evident in the grammatical errors made by students learning English, especially in their use of pronouns. Among such features, the Yorùbá strategy of expressing politeness using plural markers has been observed to lead to confusion in the nominative and accusative case usage of English pronouns. In standard Yorùbá, the plural pronoun wọn can be used not only to refer to a group of people but also as a politeness marker to refer to a single respected individual. This practice often causes learners to mistakenly translate wọn as "they" in English, even when referring to one person. The impact of this transfer becomes especially clear in school environments where children are taught by parents and elders using such forms, and these forms are then carried over into English usage.

This paper, therefore, explores the intersection of plurality and politeness in Yorùbá and how these socio-linguistic elements interfere with English pronoun case usage among secondary school learners. Drawing on theories of second language acquisition, especially Contrastive Analysis and Interlanguage Theory, the central aim is to uncover how politeness-driven plurality in Yorùbá contributes to recurring pronoun errors in English and to propose pedagogical approaches that help students distinguish between language etiquette and grammatical agreement.

Literature Review

The relationship between language and thought is well established in linguistic theory, and the process of acquiring a second language (L2) often reveals the influence of the first language (L1) in both subtle and overt ways.[3] Scholars of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have long examined how L1 structures, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic, interfere with or support the development of L2 proficiency[4]. In bilingual and multilingual settings such as Nigeria, where English serves as the official language and is taught as a second language, learners' performance is regularly shaped by the structural and cultural features of their native tongues. Among the Yorùbá-speaking population, this influence extends not only to surface grammatical errors but also to deeper patterns of language transfer related to plurality, politeness, and syntactic case distinctions.

Language is not only a vehicle for communication but also a medium for enacting social norms, expressing hierarchy, and signaling deference, especially

[3]Edward Sapir, Language: *An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1921): pp. 207-220; Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, ed. John B. Carroll (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956): pp. 134-159.

[4]Rod Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): pp. 323-350; Terence Odlin, Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989): pp. 27-39.

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in African languages like Yorùbá. Among the most significant cultural-linguistic features of Yorùbá is its use of plurality as a politeness marker, which can obscure the intended number of referents and create confusion for learners transferring this habit into the grammatical structures of English. While English pluralisation is largely governed by number and agreement rules, Yorùbá's plural system is intricately tied to respect, age, and social distance, often overriding strict numerical logic. Several scholars have explored the internal mechanisms of Yorùbá plurality and politeness, Ajíbóyè's work remains foundational in the field.

Ajíbóyè in his seminal paper Plural Strategies in Yorùbá, categorized Yorùbá plurality into three primary strategies: syntactic, lexical, and pragmatic. Among these, pragmatic plurality, where plurality is used not to indicate "more than one," but to show honor, social distance, or politeness, is the most culturally nuanced and linguistically problematic when transferred into English usage.[5] For example, in Yorùbá, the use of plural forms such as àwọn before a singular person's name (e.g., àwọn baba mi, "my father" in respectful address) functions as a marker of politeness or status rather than an actual indicator of plurality . Similarly, plural pronouns such as ẹ̀yin (plural 'you') may be used when addressing a single respected individual, often to show deference. This stands in stark contrast to English, where plurality is semantically and grammatically obligatory and strictly tied to quantity.[6] Scholars like Bamgbose and Lawal have emphasised that Yorùbá politeness systems are deeply embedded in its syntax and semantics, creating a high degree of pragmatic opacity for learners attempting to map these norms onto English.[7] The pragmatic use of plural forms in Yorùbá is context-sensitive and largely learned through socialization rather than formal instruction. As such, many Yorùbá-speaking learners do not consciously distinguish between plural as a grammatical category and plural as a politeness strategy. When these habits are transferred to English, learners often overextend plural forms where none are required or, conversely, omit necessary plural markers, assuming politeness or respect is being communicated.

Furthermore, Adebayo (2008) notes that in Yorùbá, plural forms are not inflected via morphology as rigidly as they are in English. pluralisation is often indicated through contextual inference, reduplication, or numerals, rather than consistent suffixation. This morphosyntactic flexibility means that Yorùbá-speaking students may find English plural rules "unnecessarily rigid," and thus either simplify them or unconsciously ignore them. The danger here lies in the substitution of politeness-driven plurality for grammatically required plurality, especially in written English, where formal rules about subject–verb agreement

[5]Ajíbóyè, Ọládiípọ̀. "*Plural Strategies in Yorùbá*." Studies in African Linguistics 39, no. 2 (2010): pp. 203–210; Bamgbose, Ayo. Language and the Nation: *The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992: pp. 1-25.
[6]Akinlabi, Akinbiyi, and Olasope Oyelaran. "*Yorùbá Morphosyntax and Language Use." In Languages and Linguistics in Nigeria, edited by Olanike Ndimele*, Port Harcourt: M & J Grand Orbit, 2006: p. 113; Bamgbose, Ayo. *Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992: pp. 1-25.
[7]Bamgbose, Ayo. *Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa;* Lawal, Adebayo. "Aspects of Yorùbá Pragmatics." Pragmatics and Language Learning 8 (1997): pp. 179–192.

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and case marking are strictly enforced. This mismatch between the functional role of plurality in Yorùbá and its formal grammatical role in English is compounded by the absence of overt case distinctions in Yorùbá pronouns. For instance, Yorùbá uses ó (he/she/it) and òn (he/she/they emphatic), without morphologically distinct forms for subject and object. In contrast, English requires learners to differentiate between he and him, they and them, with plural marking further complicating case assignment in both spoken and written contexts. Ajíbóyè's work (2010) is particularly useful in showing that even Yorùbá native speakers sometimes fail to overtly recognize plurality unless the context demands it, making it a peripheral grammatical feature. This peripheral status clashes with English, where plurality and case marking are central grammatical categories. As a result, Yorùbá-speaking learners often internalize English forms based on L1 conceptual frameworks, leading to systematic morphosyntactic errors, especially in the use of plural nominative and accusative cases such as they vs. them or we vs. us.

While many researchers have analyzed Yorùbá politeness as a sociolinguistic or pragmatic feature (Fakoya, 2009; Lawal, 1997), few have linked these markers to proficiency in English grammatical case usage. This gap is precisely what the present study seeks to address: how the culturally motivated use of politeness plurals in Yorùbá interferes with, or delays, the mastery of case distinctions inEnglish plural pronoun among secondary school learners. In English, case distinctions, particularly between the nominative (subject) and accusative (object) forms of pronouns are central to sentence structure, syntactic function, and clarity of meaning. Pronouns such as he/him, she/her, they/them, and we/us follow strict morphosyntactic rules that mark their role in the clause. However, these distinctions often pose significant challenges for learners from language backgrounds like Yorùbá, where such case inflection is either absent or not formally marked. Yorùbá lacks morphological case distinctions in its pronominal system. For instance, ó can function as both subject and object in varying contexts, with meaning clarified by word order and context rather than grammatical case. This lack of overt case markers means that learners do not internalize the functional need to distinguish between forms like he and him or they and them in English. As a result, errors such as "Him is going" or "Give they the book" are common among Yorùbá L1 English learners, particularly in oral language production and informal writing.

This grammatical gap is not simply a matter of lexical substitution, but reflects deeper transfer-related interference. When learners map Yorùbá sentence structures onto English, they often disregard subject–object case distinctions because they are not semantically necessary in their L1. This is compounded by the fact that plural marking in Yorùbá is often fused with politeness, as shown in earlier sections, further confusing learners who struggle to distinguish between they as a plural subject and them as an object form.[8] In addition, research by Ubahakwe and Afolayan confirms that even at advanced stages of secondary education, many Yorùbá L1 learners continue to show

[8]Adejare, Oluwole, and AdekunleAdejare.*Grammar and Usage for Schools and Colleges.*Ibadan: University Press, 2005: pp. 45-63.

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inconsistencies in pronoun case usage, especially in written tasks.[9]These include: Subject–object reversal (e.g., "Me and her went to school" instead of "She and I went to school") Lack of plural agreement (e.g., "Them is here" instead of "They are here") Hypercorrection due to classroom prescriptivism (e.g., "Between you and I" instead of "you and me") One of the underlying reasons for these persistent errors is the lack of an internalized case system. Learners from L1s without morphological case often acquire English case markers as memorized chunks rather than as rule-governed systems. Without explicit instruction and contrastive awareness, they are likely to overgeneralize, omit, or misuse case-marked pronouns.[10]

Ajíbóyè, students may fail to perceive they/them as both plural and case-sensitive, seeing them instead as interchangeable tokens of plurality or social address. This leads to faulty constructions like "Give they the books" or "Them go to school every day." Case errors in English are often reinforced socially within Nigerian speech communities where non-standard English varieties are widespread. According to Jowitt, Nigerian English displays features of "localized grammar," including altered case forms that are widely tolerated in informal contexts. While this variation reflects linguistic nativization, it also means that errors rooted in L1 transfer may go uncorrected, becoming fossilized in learner interlanguage.[11]

The contrast between Yorùbá's context-driven grammar and English's form-driven grammar, especially in pronoun case and plurality, thus creates a "double barrier" for learners. First, they must learn unfamiliar forms (he/him, they/them) and second, they must unlearn the L1 strategies that previously served politeness or communicative clarity. Addressing these challenges requires more than prescriptive grammar teaching. Scholars such as Odlin and Gass & Selinker suggest a contrastive pedagogical model, in which learners are guided to consciously reflect on the structural and functional differences between L1 and L2. This awareness, especially when reinforced through targeted classroom instruction, has been shown to reduce case and plurality errors among ESL learners.[12]

This literature review has established that the intersection of Yorùbá politeness markers, plurality strategies, and English case grammar represents a complex linguistic and pedagogical challenge for Nigerian secondary school learners. The review traced how Yorùbá, a tonal and isolating language, uses plural forms not strictly to denote numerical quantity but to express social deference, respect, and politeness, a feature particularly evident in the use of plural pronouns like

[9]Ubahakwe, Ebo. *The Teaching of English Studies: Readings for Colleges and Universities.* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1991: p. 20-25; Afolayan, Ayo. "*Sociolinguistic Problems in the Learning of English in Nigeria." In New Englishes: A West African Perspective,* edited by Ayo Bamgbose, Akinbiyi Banjo, and Andrew Thomas, 133–148. Ibadan: Mosuro Publishers, 2004.
[10]Rod Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition: pp. 323-376*
[11]Jowitt, David. *Nigerian English Usage: An Introduction. Lagos*: Longman Nigeria, 1991: pp. 85-110.
[12]Odlin, Terence. *Language Transfer: Cross-Linguistic Influence in Language Learning,1989: pp. 27-39*; Gass, Susan Margaret, and Larry Selinker. Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2008: pp. 112-1118.

àwọn, ẹ̀yin, and plural nouns when referring to individuals of high status. These culturally embedded strategies are transferred often unconsciouslybinto English, where plural and case markings function within a rigid morphosyntactic system based on grammatical role and number agreement.

The review also explored how second language acquisition theories, particularly the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, Lado and Interlanguage Theory Selinker, provide frameworks for understanding the types of errors Yorùbá L1 learners make in English. These include subject–object confusion, overextension of plural forms, and inappropriate application of Yorùbá politeness plurality to English grammatical constructions.[13] Scholars like Ajíbóyè, Bamgbose and Ellis have contributed significantly to the understanding of L1 transfer and the structural differences between Yorùbá and English.[14] However, despite extensive work on Yorùbá plurality and English grammatical challenges, there is a notable gap in scholarship linking Yorùbá politeness-based plurality directly to nominative and accusative case errors in English. Yorùbá pluralisation strategies are multidimensional. Ajiboye explains that beyond morphological plurality (e.g., reduplication or quantitative modifiers), Yorùbá employs honorific plurality, a phenomenon where plural markers are used to show deference or politeness.[15] For instance, a respected elder may be referred to using the plural pronoun wọn even if they are singular. While this practice enhances social harmony in Yorùbá communication, it inadvertently complicates English pronoun acquisition when transferred directly by learners. Other scholars such as Oluga and Yusuf have noted similar syntactic interference in bilingual Yorùbá-English contexts. These errors are not merely lexical; they stem from deeper cognitive and cultural structures.[16] The polite plural form in Yorùbá is an example of what Richards and Schmidt describe as "pragmatic transfer," where L1 social norms influence L2 structure usage.[17]

This study, therefore, builds on existing work by offering a focused investigation into how Yorùbá politeness-induced plurality habits affect English case proficiency among secondary school learners in Nigeria. In doing so, it emphasizes not just the grammatical errors produced, but also their cultural-linguistic origins, advocating for contrastive and culturally aware teaching strategies in the ESL classroom. By highlighting how sociolinguistic features of

[13]Lado, Robert. *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957: pp. 59-61; Selinker, Larry. "*Interlanguage."* International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching 10, nos. 1–4 (1972): 214–220.
[14]Ajíbóyè, Ọládiípo "Plural Strategies in Yorùbá." Studies in African Linguistics: 2010: pp. 187-200; Bamgbose,Ayo. Language and the Nation: The Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa, (1997): pp. 179–192; Rod Ellis, The Study of Second Language Acquisition: pp. 323-376
[15]Ajiboye, Oladiipo. Plural Strategies in Yorùbá. Lagos: University of Lagos, 2005.
[16]Oluga, Samuel O. "Influence of Yorùbá on English Usage in Secondary Schools." Nigerian Journal of Applied Linguistics 20, no. 2 (2014): 67–82; Yusuf, Olusoji. "L1 Interference in the Usage of English Pronouns: A Case Study of Yorùbá English." Journal of Nigerian English Studies Association 13, no. 1 (2010): 1–14.
[17]Richards, Jack C., and Richard Schmidt. Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. 4th ed. London: Routledge, 2010.

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Yorùbá interact with English grammatical norms, this research hopes to contribute to both linguistic theory and practical classroom intervention.

In summary, this literature review underscores the need for a nuanced, culture-sensitive approach to grammar instruction in multilingual contexts like Nigeria. It calls attention to the urgent need to equip teachers with the knowledge of cross-linguistic interference patterns, particularly those arising from Yorùbá politeness plurality, to foster more accurate and contextually grounded mastery of English nominative and accusative case usage among learners.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key theoretical frameworks: the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, with additional support from Interlanguage theory. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (Lado, 1957) posits that errors in second language learning can be predicted by identifying structural differences between the learner's first and second languages.[18] When L1 and L2 structures differ, negative transfer (interference) is likely. In the case of Yorùbá, the plural form wọn is used as both a plural marker and a marker of politeness. English, however, lacks such a functionally polite plural pronoun, leading to predictable case errors among learners who translate wọn directly as "they."

The Second Language Acquisition (SLA) framework, particularly its focus on transfer and interlanguage, supports the analysis of how learners create a mental system that combines elements from both their L1 and L2. Selinker's Interlanguage theory explains that learners often develop a hybrid linguistic system influenced by their native grammar, which leads to systematic errors.[19] The confusion between he/she and they in subject or object position is an example of such interlanguage development among Yorùbá L1 speakers. Together, these frameworks provide a robust basis for analyzing the interference observed in this study and for proposing practical classroom interventions.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach involving 35 students from two secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria: 20 students from Òmuò Ekiti and 15 from Oye Ekiti. All participants are Yorùbá L1 speakers. Data were collected through a typed task-based exercise where students were given messages to translate or relay from Yorùbá into English. Specific attention was paid to messages where plural forms in Yorùbá were used to refer to a singular person out of politeness.

[18]Lado, Robert. *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957: pp. 59-61;
[19]Selinker, Larry. "*Interlanguage.*"International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching 10, nos. 1–4 (1972): 214–220

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Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter presents the data obtained from the research questionnaire, which was designed to investigate how Yorùbá politeness strategies influence English nominative and accusative case usage. The instrument included items that required participants to interpret Yorùbá sentences, especially those marked by politeness-based plural pronouns such as wọn into English. This approach was intended to reveal the extent to which sociolinguistic factors like age, hierarchy, and respect shape pronoun and case selection. The responses were analyzed qualitatively, with particular focus on how cultural norms affect the grammatical choices made by the participants. A detailed analysis of four selected items is presented below. In each analysis, pronouns functioning as nominative, accusative, or used for emphatic purposes are bolded to aid clarity and to emphasize their syntactic and pragmatic functions.

1. If an elderly man sends you to deliver a message in Yorùbá to an English speaker who is also an elderly man, how would you interpret the following Yorùbá sentences into English?
   a) Wọ́n fún wọn ní ìwé
   b) Wọ́n ń wáa yín
   c) Wọ́n ní pé kí wọ́n wá

Purpose of the Item:
This item assesses how students interpret Yorùbá third-person plural pronouns, often used for politeness or respect, into English, where such plurality is not typically used for singular referents.

Summary of Responses:
(a) **Wọ́n** fún **wọn** ní ìwé ("He gave him the book"), 11 out of 35 respondents interpreted it as:
"**He** gave **him** the book" (31%)
While, 24 out of 35 interpreted as:
"**They** gave **them** the book" (69%),
Interpretation shows that some respondents are aware of the honorific plurality, while others translate literally, missing the politeness function therefore using the nominative 'He' as 'they' and accusative case 'him' as 'them'.
(b) Wọ́n ń wáa yín ("He is looking for you"), 11 out of 35 interpreted it as:
"**He** is looking for **you**" (31%)
While 24 out of 35 interpreted as:
"**They** are looking for **you**" (69%)
This suggests a stronger awareness of respect-based plurality when interpreting actions directly involving the addressee.
(c) Wọ́n ní pé kí wọ́n wá ("He said he should come"), only 11 out of 35 respondents could accurately interpret the implied politeness:
"**He** said **he** should come" (31%)
While 24 out of 35 interpreted as:
"**They** said **they** should come" (69%)
Many interpreted it literally, possibly due to the presence of multiple "they" forms in the sentence. Most of the students therefore use the nominative 'He' as 'they' and the accusative case 'he' as 'they'

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Analysis summary

The analysis of these responses indicates that most of the students struggle with recognizing honorific or polite plurality in Yorùbá and mapping it appropriately onto English structures. This supports the study's thesis that Yorùbá politeness norms can lead to case usage conflicts or deviations in English, especially when translating plural forms intended for singular respect.

2. If two elderly men send you to deliver some messages in English to a Yorùbá woman who is older than you, how would you interpret the following sentences in both Standard Yorùbá.
   a) Wọ́n fún wọ́n ní oúnjẹ
   b) Wọ́n ní kí ẹ wá
   c) Wọ́n sọ pé kí ẹ sùn

Purpose of the Item:

This item explores the student's understanding of politeness and plurality in both Standard Yorùbá, particularly how honorific "ẹ" and plural "wọ́n"function in elder-younger relationships..

Summary of Responses:

(a) Wọ́n fún wọ́n ní oúnjẹ ("They gave her food"):
4 out of 35 interpreted as:
"**They** gave **her** food" (12%)
While 31 out of 35 students interpreted it as:
"**They** gave **them** food" (88%)
Most of the respondents use "they" which is correct marker for the nominative. However 31 out of 35 misused the usage of "wọn" at the accusative to be plural instead of singular.

(b) Wọ́n ní kí ẹ wá ("They said you should come"):
11 out of 35 respondents maintained the politeness "ẹ" even though the referent is singular, indicating awareness of respectful address toward elders. Same outcome with (c) Wọ́n sọ pé kí ẹ sùn ("**They** said **you** should sleep").

Interpretation of Findings:

The majority of respondents consistently used honorific plural forms in both languages, even when referring to a singular older woman. This shows a strong internalization of Yorùbá cultural norms where plurality expresses politeness. These patterns reinforce the study's argument that Yorùbá politeness conventions influence how speakers choose pronoun cases and modulate tone in translation.

3. If your mate sends you to deliver some messages in Yorùbá to your elder brother, how would you interpret the sentences below?
   (a). Ó ní kín ṣọ fún wọnkiwọnrànmílọ́wọ́
   (b). Ó níṣéwọ́nń bọ̀níilélèìwé
   (c) ṣé ẹmáawá?

Purpose of the Item:

This question assesses how speakers adjust Yorùbá pronouns and politeness markers when relaying messages from a peer to a superior. It helps to identify how indirect politeness and status-based plurality function in reported speech.

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Summary of Responses:

(a) **Ó** ní kín ṣọ fún **wọn** ki **wọn** ràn mí lọ́wọ́("**He** said I should inform **them** to assist me / **He** said I should inform **them** that, **they** should assist me ").
All the students used "he/she" for **Ó**. However, 24 out of 35 students substituted "them" for "wọn" a singular respectful pronoun to match the elder's status. Only 11 out of 35 were able to answer using the accurate nominative and accusative case.

(b) **Ó** ní ṣé **wọ́n** ń bọ̀ ní ilé ìwé? ("**He** asked if **they**'re coming to school"):
Most students rephrased it in more respectful form for their elder.

(c) Ṣé **ẹ** máa wá? ("Will **you** come?"):
11 out of 35 students interpreted as:
"Will **you** come?"
24 out of 35 retained the honorific "ẹ", confirming it as "they" the expected respectful form to an elder, despite being singular.

Interpretation of Findings:

The responses reveal that students instinctively upgrade pronouns and adjust structures when relaying messages from a peer to an elder. Even when the original utterance uses neutral or plural forms, many reinterpret them using Yorùbá honorifics to fit the context. This supports the thesis that cultural norms of politeness and social hierarchy directly affect pronoun case usage in Yorùbá-English contexts. It also demonstrates how translation decisions reflect pragmatic considerations beyond grammar alone.

4. If you want to report to your schoolmate what your father did to your elder sister, how would you interpret the following Yorùbá statements?
a) Bàbá mi ní ìfẹ̀ẹ wọn púpọ̀
b) Wọ́n ra ìwé fún wọn
c) Wọ́n ní kí wọ́n máa gbádùn

Purpose of the Item:

This question examines how students navigate the translation of sentences where plural pronouns (wọn) are used to show respect for a singular subject (e.g., elder sister). It particularly explores whether speakers maintain plural forms in English or convert them into appropriate singular forms to match actual referents, while preserving politeness.

Summary of Responses:

(a) **Bàbá** mi ní ìfẹ̀ẹ**wọn** púpọ̀ ("**My father** loves **her** so much"):

11 out of 35 interpreted it as: "**My father** loves **my sister** so much" (31%).
While, 24 out of 35 interpreted as: "**My father** loves **them** very much" (69%).

(b) **Wọ́n** ra ìwé fún **wọn**"**He** bought a book for **her**."

11 out of 35 interpreted it as: "**He** bought a book for **he**r" (or "**My father** bought a book for **my sister**")
While, 24 out of 35 interpreted as: "**They** bought a book for **them**"

(c) **Wọ́n** ní kí **wọ́n** máa gbádùn "**He** said **she** should enjoy **herself.**"

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11 out of 35 interpreted it as: “He said she should enjoy herself, / my dad said my sister should enjoy.”
While, 24 out of 35 interpreted as: “**They** said **they** should enjoy themselves.”

Interpretation of Findings:

Students demonstrated mixed ability in disentangling plural forms used for politeness from actual plural reference. While some accurately translated Yorùbá respectful plurals into English singulars when referring to one person, others applied literal translation rules. This indicates an ongoing influence of Yorùbá politeness norms on English pronoun choices, especially in oral translation. The inconsistency suggests that without formal awareness of honorific plurality, learners may incorrectly use "they/them" instead of "he/she", leading to pronoun-case mismatches in English.
The four sample items analyzed above provide clear insight into how Yorùbá speakers apply politeness-based plurality across contexts, peer to elder, elder to younger, and family relationships.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that the Yorùbá politeness-driven plural system, while linguistically rich and culturally significant creates consistent challenges for learners acquiring English pronouns, particularly in nominative and accusative cases. Analysis revealed consistent patterns of pronoun misusage among students when translating polite Yorùbá expressions into English. Over 70% of responses misused “they” for “he” or “she” in subject positions. Similarly, “them” was often incorrectly used instead of “him” or “her” in object positions. This shows that the interference is not only linguistic but also cultural, a case of politeness norms disrupting grammatical correctness. These challenges arise not from grammatical ignorance but from deep-seated social language practices.

Recommendations:

1. Explicit Instruction: Teachers should include contrastive lessons that highlight how Yorùbá and English treat respect and pronoun use differently.
2. Cultural Contextualization: Teaching should embrace discussions around cultural norms and how they influence language choices.
3. Curriculum Development: Educational materials should integrate sociolinguistic awareness alongside grammar.
4. Teacher Training: Workshops for English teachers in Yorùbá-speaking regions should emphasize interference and contrastive analysis.
5. Peer Correction & Practice: Students should be engaged in peer tasks that identify and correct these patterns with teacher guidance.

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