

# The acquisitional challenges of adjective order among non-native learners of English

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## ***Abstract***

This study investigates how non-native English users arrange English adjectives, especially in languages with different Noun Phrase (hence NP) syntax profiles. It examines the challenges involved in L2 acquisition of adjectives and explores how L1 theoretical generalization (linguistic and psycholinguistic models) apply to L2 acquisition. Using survey and interview as instruments, the study collected data from 37 respondents which include 5 native speakers of English (as control group), and 32 non-native users of English who are Hindi (n=7), Nepali (n=7), Yoruba (n=9), and Igbo (n=9). Findings reveal that semantically close adjectives are difficult to acquire when combined (e.g., participle and color adjectives). Therefore, acquisition is easier when semantic categories are distant from each other (e.g., quality and nationality adjectives). Secondly, adjectives that have no sense of referent in learners' L1 are often difficult to acquire. Negative transfer is often evident in the ordering patterns among Igbo L2 users. The study argues that the proposed orderings by researchers and linguists on adjectival patterns are not intuitively alike to descriptive outcomes of the native speakers. Thus, adjectival ordering could be considered more of a psycholinguistic phenomenon on one part and a linguistic phenomenon on the other part. This study posits that while curriculum planners and L2 teachers might propose models to help learners acquire adjectival order they should allow for flexibility in the approach. This would help learners to learn the specific rules to determine the syntax of a language and allow their psychology to participate in linguistic permutations.

***Keywords:*** adjective ordering, acquisitional challenges, ESL, NP syntax

## The acquisitional challenges of adjective order among non-native learners of English

### 1. Introduction

Adjectives vary cross-linguistically, based on their positioning and ordering arrangement (Alotaibi, 2017). For instance, attributive adjectives in the English language are prenominal, that is, they are positioned before the head noun within the noun phrase (NP). Furthermore, according to Rasato (2013), native speakers' intuitions of adjectival ordering in English and corpus research have offered evidence that the order of attributive adjectives within the NP is subject to a fixed order. For example, a native speaker of English would produce **(a)** A large blue box; and **(b)** A lovely white German car, instead of **(c)** ?A blue large box; and **(d)** ?A white lovely German car. This indicates the ordering of multiple adjectives in English follows specific patterns. It could be noted that native speakers of English arrange adjectives intuitively without conscious conformity to some rule. It would, therefore, be interesting to consider how non-native users of English arrange English adjectives when they occur in multiples in the NP especially for speakers whose L1 is one with a language with a different NP syntax profile.

This study focuses on four categories of L2 users namely: Yoruba learners, Igbo Learners, Hindi Learners, and Nepali learners of English. These speakers were queried to see how they acquire adjectival order in English, to investigate the patterns, challenges, and the possibility of cross-linguistic influence. This study focuses on these languages because they exist in language communities where English language exists as a second language. There are two specific features that are of relevance to English adjectives in this study. First, there is a strong tendency for attributive adjectives in English to be prenominal e.g. "*a big red car*". Hindi and Nepali are two other languages that possess the same prenominal feature as shown below:

<b>English Example:</b>	I see (a big red <b>car</b> ).
<b>Hindi:</b>	mujhe ek badee laal <b>kaar</b> dikhaae detee hai I (a big red car) see
<b>Nepali:</b>	Ma e'uta thulo rato kara dekhchu I (a big red car) see

Word order in Hindi (Subject-Object-Verb) and Nepali (Subject-Object-Verb) shows that neither language shares the same features with English language (Subject-Verb-Object) at the sentence level. However, in Hindi and Nepali, attributive adjectives are largely prenominal. Examples above show some sort of similarities in the positioning and order of adjectives in Hindi and Nepali languages in relation to English. Adjectives in the three languages are placed before the head noun. Also, the preferred order of adjectives in Hindi and Nepali with regards to 'big' and 'red' shares resemblance with English. However, native speakers of Hindi and Nepali can vary the order of the adjectives because the structure of adjectival order in both languages is not fixed (Sarah, 2008). According to Sarah (2008), many speakers of Nepali and Hindi would say "a yellow dirty dog" in their L1 translation, while an American English speaker would instinctively re-order the adjectives as "a dirty yellow dog".

On the other hand, the Yoruba language is largely postnominal while the Igbo language has variable patterns of either pre- or post- nominal feature as demonstrated below:

<b>English Structure:</b>	I see (a big red <b>car</b> ).
<b>Yoruba:</b>	Mo ri <b>oko</b> pupa titobi kan I see (car red big a)

**Igbo:** M na-ahu igbe ojii na-adoro adoro  
I see (box black an attractive)

**Igbo:** m na-huru nnukwu *ugbo* ala uhie.  
I see (big car a red)

Comparisons of word order in the English language (Subject-Verb-Object) with Yoruba (Subject-Verb-Object) and Igbo (Subject-Verb-Object) show that Yoruba and Igbo share the same word order with English at the sentence level (Mathew, 2013). However, the positioning of adjectives within the NP in both languages is done differently. According to Adelabu (2014), Yoruba adjectives functioning within the NPs are postnominal in nature, that is, they occur after the head noun. Also, Igbo adjectives are largely postnominal. But sometimes, they appear concurrently before and after the head which they modify. This is often used to achieve tonal changes in the head nouns (Ward, 1936, as cited in Green & Igwe, 1963). Adjectival ordering in Yoruba and Igbo is different from English because they do not follow a strict order like English. For instance, it is acceptable by Yoruba speakers to say ‘Oko *titobi pupa* kan’ (a big red car) or ‘Oko *pupa titobi* kan’ (a red big car); whereas ‘a big red car’ is specifically acceptable to a native speaker of English, unless a speaker wants to mark a unique expression. Although native speakers of Yoruba and Igbo have a preferred order in communication, it does not make a deviant order unacceptable.

This study investigates how second language users of English, representing these four languages, pattern adjective-noun orders in English.

### 1.1 Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions have been formulated.

- What pattern(s) of multiple adjectival order of English do L2 users of English whose L1 is either Hindi, Igbo, Nepali, or Yoruba produce?
- What are the challenges involved in acquiring prenominal multiple-adjective order in English by L2 users?
- How does the difference in the adjectival structures of participants’ L1 compare with the production of English adjectives?

## 2. Literature Review

Prior studies, such as those by Quirk et al. (1985) and Scontras (2022), have proposed explanations for adjectival ordering preferences in the L1. These involved linguistic and/or psycholinguistic approaches. For instance, some of the principles associated with the psycholinguistic standpoint is that adjectives that have positive meanings or good news appear before negative ones (hence; “a powerful dangerous medication” and “an attractive little flower”). The linguistic approach which views adjectives as more of semantic properties contains principles that suggest that adjectives which share similar characteristics with a noun (nouny) (or highly objective adjectives) should be closer to head noun than the ones whose identity is less-nouny and subjective. These principles are based on L1 acquisition of adjectives.

One approach to the analysis of adjective ordering is through the grouping of adjectives into semantic categories. These categories include *opinion, observation, quality, evaluation, measurement, value, physical states, size, length, shape, age, participle, color, origin (or nationality), material* etc. In fact, some scholars have outlined subcategories for some of the semantic categories. For example, Frank (1972) expanded ‘physical states’ category to include ‘size> shape > age > color’. Also, Scott (2002) expanded the ‘size’ category to

include ‘length > height > width > weight’. This study considers the semantic categories provided by Quirk et al. (1985) as the basis for grouping adjectives. This means that identification or grouping of adjectives would be based on “quality, size, shape, age, participle, color, material and provenance/nationality”. The reason is that Quirk’s et al. (1985) model encompasses almost every other category highlighted by other scholars. In fact, Quirk et al. (1985) model is among the few models that integrate participle (or derived) adjectives as a possibility among others. Quirk and Greenbaum’s model is popular among scholars (e.g., Jung 2008, Scontras, Degen, and Goodman 2017, Lee 2018, Scontras, 2022 etc.) and it is also widely used in the school curriculum of countries (like Nigeria) where English exists as a second language. This is demonstrated by Jung’s (2008) empirical study where he found that the English order seems to lend support to Quirk’s et al. principle of subjectivity/objectivity. An outline of Quirk and Greenbaum’s categories of adjectives is presented with examples.

- i. **Quality:** lovely, attractive, poor
- ii. **Size:** big, small, tall
- iii. **Shape:** triangle, square, rectangular
- iv. **Age:** old, new, young
- v. **Participle/derived:** broken, roasted, damaged.
- vi. **Color:** Red, purple, blue
- vii. **Material:** silver, leather, wooden
- viii. **Provenance/origin/nationality:** American, Swedish, Chinese

These labels were used to represent the categories of adjectives produced by respondents in this study. For instance, ‘attractive’ was categorized as ‘quality’ adjective rather than ‘observation’ or ‘opinion’. This study considers these L1 approaches and investigates the extent to which the L1 theoretical generalizations apply to second language acquisition.

Looking at few existing studies on this subject, Jung (2008) investigated the similarities and differences of adjective ordering in English and Korean languages and how Korean EFL learners of English acquire the adjectives. A contrastive analysis showed the order of English adjectives as *size, opinion, age, color, shape, material, and origin*. However, the Korean order was *condition, age, opinion, color, size, shape, material and origin*. The study showed the relative order of the Korean EFL learners of English to be *age, size, opinion, shape, condition, color, origin, and material*, with the exceptions of the order of *condition* coming before *age* and that of *size* being the same position as *condition*. The study found that some adjective combinations were similar to both English and Korean; some were different from either Korean or English while others were different from both English and Korean. Also, while Jung’s study only focused on Korean and Korean EFL learners, this study focuses on ESL learners who are native speakers of Yoruba/Igbo/Hindi//Nepali. This study investigates how learners demonstrate patterns of adjectives across these language categories.

Sarah (2008) studied prenominal adjective ordering in English and focused on how it correlates with how Asian ESL students grasp their English grammar. The Nepali ESL learners produced the structure of ‘*size > color > opinion*’ while Hindi ESL produced ‘*size > condition > origin*’ patterning. The results indicate that geography and linguistic background do not factor into the choices L2 learners of English make in pre-nominal adjective ordering. The present study is similar to this study in a couple ways. First, ESL learners of English from Nepal and India are also participants in this study. Secondly, the present study is also investigating the pattern of prenominal English adjectival acquired by the participants; however, unlike Sarah (2008), the present study is limited to only two adjectival sequences. Also, this study explores possible challenges associated with acquisitional patterns.

Anderson (2008) considers some groups of L2 learners in the development of their acquisition of adjective

position in French. The study focused on word order discrepancies among languages with different structures. The study examined whether English learners of French as L2 arrive at the same positioning. The result revealed that second language learners of French, like native French speakers, acquire the postnominal adjectives. The study stated that acquisition followed a gradual process, and it does not occur early. The study also highlighted that acquisition of both adjectival positions (prenominal and postnominal) in French adjectives did not emerge until at the postgraduate level. This study is similar to the present study in all areas except that it does not assess the acquisitional outcomes of participants based on their proficiency.

The present study explores issues associated with acquisitional patterns and challenges in ordering. This is because L2 acquisition of English among these learners appears later after L1 acquisition due to the status of English in countries where these languages are spoken. The few L2 studies on adjective placement report that the target order can be acquired, with a potential influence of the first language (L1) initially. Bhela's (1999) stated that the way learners used their L1 structures to help them form their L2 texts indicates a direct influence of the L1 on L2. Alotaibi (2017) found that one of the most prominent causes of errors found in this area is assumed to be the linguistic differences between the adjective position and order. Connolly (2020) showed that there is a strong influence of native language on English language learning, as students fall back on the rules of their first language when they do not know the rules of the second language. Alotaibi (2017) also demonstrated the notion of L1 transfer when he mentioned how Kuwaiti learners were unable to produce prenominal adjectives because adjectives in Kuwaiti Arabic (KA) is largely postnominal. In sum, the issues associated with language transfer describing whether their L1 has a negative or positive impact on the learning of prenominal adjective ordering in English are discussed further in the study.

### **3. Methodology**

The participants for the study comprised 32 people (7 Hindi, 7 Nepali, 9 Yoruba, and 9 Igbo) plus 5 in a control group who were native English speakers. Convenience sampling was used, with the main criterion for recruiting participants being their first language. The control group data were collected from 5 native English speakers who were students at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville (SIUE). Other participants were adult learners above the age of 18 whose first language are any of Hindi, Nepali, Igbo and Yoruba. However, those who are considered as L2 users of these languages were excluded from the study. The participants' home countries were Nigeria, Nepal, or India, where English exists as a second language, and it is recognized as an official L1 in India and Nigeria (Yilmaz & Schmid, 2015). Most of the participants were within the intermediate high and advanced level of proficiency. Each participant consented to participate in the study by reading the informed consent form provided to them by the researcher approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants who did not adhere to the research protocol (such as agreeing to sign the consent form) were excluded from the research.

They were grouped into their L1 categories. One of the greatest limitations for this study was accessing relevant information on the specific order or patterning of adjectives in Hindi and Nepali languages. The available information suggests that both languages have no specific or fixed order (Sarah, 2008). Nepali and Hindi respondents were able to confirm this during the interview. This study used qualitative or non-inferential quantitative methods (raw counts) to examine decisions made and data offered by speakers. The output was analyzed based on Quirk's (1985) principle that provides the order of "quality, size, shape, age, participle, color, material and provenance/nationality".

### **4. Results**

Results show that there is a great variation in the outcomes of L2 learners of English with regard to adjectival ordering in English, although there are a few cases where everyone agreeably made a unanimous choice. A typical example of this is the 'age + material' order. Also, there are cases where all the members of the control group completely preferred the same order.

**RQ 1:** What pattern of adjectival order of English do L2 learners of English whose L1 is either Hindi, Igbo, Nepali, or Yoruba produce?

The order that was generated from each of the participants are as follows.

**Yoruba L2:** -Age>size>participle>quality>shape>color>nationality>material>HEAD

**Igbo L2:** -Age>participle>size-color>quality>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

**Hindi L2:** -Participle>age>quality>size>shape>color>material>nationality>HEAD

**Nepali L2:** -Size>quality>participle>color>age>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

The ordering patterns among L2 learners of each language group shows that some semantic categories are closer to the headword than others. For instance, the proximity of the adjectives of ‘material and nationality’ to the headword is a feature found among all the participants although with a slightly different order. All the participants produced the ‘nationality + material’ pattern with respect to ‘*this is an American plastic cup*’, except Hindi participants who exhibited the ‘material + nationality’ pattern (*this is a plastic American cup*). These two categories are often realized by nominal adjectives. The fact that they share the same properties with the head-noun helps to argue why they are closer to the head. Apart from ‘nationality and material’, ‘color’ and ‘shape’ adjectives are immediately placed after these two semantic categories. This is presented below:

**Yoruba L2:** >>>shape>color>nationality>material>HEAD

**Hindi L2:** >>>>shape>color>material>nationality >HEAD

**Igbo L2:** >>>>>>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

**Nepali L2:** >>>>>> shape>nationality>material>HEAD

This shows that Yoruba and Hindi L2 learners of English share somewhat related adjectival patterns as they approach the headword with an inverted order in the last two sequences. It also demonstrates that Igbo and Nepali L2 learners of English share the same adjectival pattern as they move closer to the headword. The study identifies parallel ordering features with adjectives of *shape*, *color*, *nationality* and *material* across the four language groups. The fact that these categories are closer to the headword is a feature common to each L1 category.

Specificity of certain ordering was noticeable in participants’ descriptions. For instance, ‘color + nationality’ ordering (*‘brown German’*) elicited fair representation (Yoruba 8/9, Igbo 8/9, Hindi 5/7, Nepali 6/7, Native Speaker 5/5) in “*this is a brown German dog*”. The high level of representation associated with this order might be connected to the fact that the adjectives of nationality like ‘German’ are ‘nouny’ because they behave more like nouns. Ordering involving such (nominal) adjectives are less challenging to acquire by L2 learners of English because adjectives with the closest proximity to the noun tends to possess similar qualities with it (Posner 1986, cited in Lee, 2018). One interesting thing about the ordering pattern elicited by L2 learners of English with respect to adjectives that are closer to the noun is that they demonstrate more similarities to what the members of the control group exhibited. This is revealed below.

**Control Group:** >>color>nationality>material >HEAD

**Yoruba L2:** >>>>shape>color>nationality>material>HEAD

**Hindi L2:** >>>>>shape>color>material>nationality> HEAD

**Igbo L2:** >>>>>>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

**Nepali L2:** >>>>>>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

While the outcome of the last three features in Yoruba L2 learners entirely correlate with the outcome of the control group, the Hindi L2 category takes the same route with an inverted ordering for ‘nationality + material’ sequencing. For Igbo and Nepali L2 learners, the last two features (nationality + material) match the order of native speakers of English. This informs that there is a level of agreement in some parts of L2 learners acquisitional order of adjectives and the native speaker’s order.

The pattern of adjectives acquired by L2 learners of English with respect to other semantic categories that are distant from the head-noun involves some sorts of complexities. The ordering system is presented below.

- Yoruba L2:** -Age>size>participle>quality >>>>>>HEAD  
**Igbo L2** -Age>participle>size>color--quality>>>HEAD  
**Hindi L2:** -Participle>age>quality>size >>>>>>HEAD  
**Nepali L2:** Size>quality>participle>color>Age>>>HEAD

These sets of semantic categories represent adjectives that are far from the head nouns. A careful look at these patterns shows that there is no significant account of similarities that an L2 category shares with the other. Yoruba and Igbo L2 learners of English place the adjectives of ‘age’ and ‘quality’ as the first and last categories respectively. Whereas ‘age’ and ‘quality’ adjectives are located differently in Hindi and Nepali ordering.

According to Quirk et al. (1985), ‘quality’ tends to be the most subjective and distant adjective from the head noun. The study demonstrates how some of the outcomes represented by Yoruba L2 learners of English (with respect to quality adjectives) match the native speakers’ order while others do not. For Yoruba participants, the following combinations provided unanimous patterns: ‘quality + material 7/9’, ‘quality + shape 8/9’, ‘quality + nationality 8/9’; while others (‘quality + size 4/9’, ‘quality + age 3/9’, ‘quality + participle 5/9’, and ‘quality + color 1/9’) have varying pattern. It follows that, adjectives of ‘shape’ nationality’ and material’ are not semantically close to the ‘quality’ adjectives. This might explain why participants exhibit fewer varying patterns whenever they are combined with ‘quality’ adjective. A majority of the Igbo participants produced similar patterns as native speakers of English in some adjectives involving ‘quality’; e.g., ‘quality + shape 7/9’, ‘quality + participle 7/9’, ‘quality + material 7/9’, ‘quality + nationality 7/9’. In most of the cases where the Igbo participants display the same order with the native speakers of English, the study identified that there are some similarities between what they are doing in L2 (English) and what they do in their L1 (Igbo). Other cases where there is variability might be due to the fact that adjectival features of Igbo language consist of a great deal of variation. Adjectival patterns of Hindi and Nepali participants with respect to ‘quality’, ‘size’, age, ‘participle’ and ‘color indicate different ordering structures in both languages. In other words, they share no similarities with respect to ordering of these categories.

This study proposed that one significant factor that determines the ordering patterns of subjective adjectives, as revealed by these outcomes, is the factor of psychology. Ordering of subjective adjectives tends to be dependent on what is going on in the mind of the speaker. It might also be the contextual factors associated with the objects being described and speakers’ experiences about the objects. This is further explained in subsequent sections.

**RQ 2:** What are the challenges involved in acquiring prenominal adjective order in English by L2 learners?

The overall observation of this study is that the further away the adjectives are from the head noun, the more challenging the ordering becomes.

### **Ordering of Semantically Close Adjectives is Challenging**

L2 participants in this study find it almost challenging to exhibit a specific pattern for adjectives that are

close to each other based on their semantic categories. Semantic closeness refers to the level of interaction that semantic categories keep with one another based on how they increase in their proximity to the noun they modify. Based on Quirk, Greenbaum and Svartvik’s categorical model of adjectives, the proximity of these categories is as follows.

«-----»  
 More Subjective ---Less subjective ---less objective-----more objective  
 «-----»  
**Quality > size > shape > age > participle >>> color > material > nationality**  
 «-----»

This study found that whenever two close categories are combined, ordering becomes a little challenging. Examples below shows the representation of adjectival groups that are somewhat closely related.

<p><b>Participle-color:</b> <i>This is a <b>damaged red</b> car</i></p> <p>Yoruba L2 Learners: 5/9                  Igbo L2 Learners: 3/9                  Hindi L2 Learners: 4/7                  Nepali L2 Learners: 5/7,                  Native Speakers: 2/5</p>	<p><b>Age-color:</b> This is a <b>young dark</b> lady.</p> <p>Yoruba L2 Learners: 5/9                  Igbo L2 Learners: 5/9                  Hindi L2 Learners: 4/7                  Nepali L2 Learners: 2/7,                  Native Speakers: 2/5</p>
<p><b>Color- Material:</b> This is a <b>blue woolen</b> tie.</p> <p>Yoruba L2 Learners: 4/9                  Igbo L2 Learners: 2/9                  Hindi L2 Learners: 5/7                  Nepali L2 Learners: 3/7,                  Native Speakers: 2/5</p>	<p><b>Material- Nationality:</b> <i>This is a <b>plastic American</b> cup’</i></p> <p>Yoruba L2 Learners: 3/9                  Igbo L2 Learners: 2/9                  Hindi L2 Learners: 4/7                  Nepali L2 Learners: 2/7,                  Native Speakers: 2/5</p>

The study observed that nominal adjectives that share close identity with the head noun are positioned closer to it. For instance, in ‘this is a plastic American cup’, although ‘plastic’ is a ‘material’ adjective and it ought to occur before ‘nationality’ (according to Quirk and Greenbaum and Svartvik’s proposed order), yet ‘plastic’ tends to have more of the same property as the head (cup) being a noun. In other words, ‘plastic’ can function as an appositive word to the head. It is possible to say, ‘an American plastic’ to still refer to an object like cup, but when we say, ‘a plastic American’, we tend to lose the sense of referent. The sense of referent is ‘human’ not object like ‘cup’ and the choice of ‘plastic’ does not even collocate with ‘American’ as an entity being described. Also, native speakers of English would prefer to say, ‘an American leather bag’ to saying, ‘a leather American bag’.

Nominal adjectives are adjectives that possess both features of a noun and an adjective. For example, ‘plastic’ and ‘American’ in ‘this is a plastic American cup’. Such adjectives often fall under the categories of ‘material’ and ‘nationality’. The coexistence of both semantic classes as modifiers is often challenging.

**Material and Nationality:** ‘this is a *plastic American cup*’

- Yoruba L2 Learners: 3/9
- Igbo L2 Learners: 2/9
- Hindi L2 Learners: 4/7
- Nepali L2 Learners: 2/7,



Native Speakers: 2/5

The example above shows that the co-existence of adjectives of 'nationality' and 'material' triggers varying patterns among L2 learners. In fact, the control group (native speakers of English) also demonstrates variation in their representation. If the native speakers do not have firm intuition about a specific pattern or order, one couldn't have expected L2 learners to possess such quality. Therefore, the ordering difficulty associated with nominal adjectives cannot be strictly attributed to L2 acquisitional challenge since native speakers of English are also victim of the same phenomenon. This complexity is associated with the fact that it is difficult to determine which item has more nominal features than the other. The data also shows that native speakers of English would rather prefer to say, 'an *American leather* bag' to 'a *leather American* bag'. The overall observation of this study with regards to this is that adjectival nominal that shares same identity with the head nouns has higher proximity to the head noun.

### **Difficulties with Adjectives that have no Sense of Referent in Learners' L1**

Dealing with adjectives that have no sense of referent in subjects' L1 also poses challenges to acquisition. For instance, the poor representation of 'oblong' (a shape adjective) in the subjects' L1 poses some acquisition challenges; as this is represented as 'egg-like' in Yoruba, and 'rectangular' in Hindi and Nepali. The word is coded structurally not as an adjective, but as some other part of speech.

**Shape + Age:** *She has an oblong young face.*

Yoruba L2 Learners: 4/9

Igbo L2 Learners: 1/9

Hindi L2 Learners: 2/7

Nepali L2 Learners: 1/7,

Native Speakers: 0/5

The word 'oblong' is infrequent in the English lexicon. The word 'oblong' does not appear to be a frequent vocabulary item for native speakers of English. Shapes like 'round', 'square', 'triangular' etc., tend to have more frequency compared to 'oblong' which ordinarily would not be used by a native speaker. This situation also affects acquisition by L2 learners because the word 'oblong' has no sense of referent in subjects' L1, thus posing challenges to acquisition. 'Oblong' is represented as 'egg-like' in Yoruba, and 'rectangular' in Hindi and Nepali. It can be said that the cross-semantic identification or representation of English adjectives is crucial to acquiring the target order by L2 learners. Words that do not have a similar referent in another language would not be properly represented by L2 learners.

The study also discovered that sometimes, some adjectives are phrasal in participants' L1. For example, "sad" is not a single word in Nepali. It has a phrasal representation which is "sadness touches me/him/her/you", or else it's expressed by a different word "painful/pain". Also, adjectives of 'nationality' in Yoruba and Igbo are sometimes represented as a prepositional phrase. They are not often realized as a single word since those words are borrowed into the lexicon of their language. For instance, 'an Indian song' would be represented in Yoruba as '*orin ti Ilu India*' that is 'a song from India'. This is another possible feature that possess challenges to L2 acquisition of English adjectives.

## **5. Discussion of Findings**

The study posits that Hindi and Yoruba L2 learners of English tend to generate an ordering system similar to the native speakers of English. The study shows that Yoruba and Hindi participants provided an order more closely resembling the TL than the Nepali and Igbo. This is not specifically linked to the factor of L1

interference because the phenomenon of L1 transfer is evident in virtually all participants across the four L1 categories. The few L2 studies on adjective placement report that the target order can be acquired, with a potential influence of the first language (L1). Mostly, transfer has aided most of the participants to acquire English adjectives except for Igbo where the negative effect of transfer is evident. Ordering could be constrained due to closeness of semantic categories as there is a possibility of variation when two adjectives that are semantically close co-exist. It could also be challenging when participle (or derived) adjectives are involved in the order. Also, when there is no sense of reference in the L1 of the user with respect to the word being described, ordering might be challenging.

Generally, this study has demonstrated that syntactic ordering system in the grammar of a language can be influenced by not only syntactic factors but also semantics and pragmatics. This has caused adjectival ordering to be a complex and not entirely predictable. The study has demonstrated that L2 learners of English approach or acquire English adjectives differently irrespective of the differences or similarities in their L1. For instance, the study earlier predicted that Nepali and Hindi participants might have similar approach to English adjectives. But the results in this study proved otherwise as the study made it clear that Yoruba and Hindi participants had similar approach to adjectival ordering which resulted to them having patterns that were similar to the target order. This is not different from Sarah's (2008) report, who expected Nepali and Hindi learners to have similar approach to adjectival order but later found out that Nepali and Chinese shared similar pattern while Hindi and Korean EFL learners had a different approach. This suggests that positioning of adjectives within the NP is not a factor that determines acquisition of adjectives irrespective of whether it correlates with the target language or not. However, this does not discard the evidence of transfer in the study, as learners might be transferring the preferred order in their L1 into L2. This, in many cases, aided them in acquiring the target order. In fact, Yoruba learners of English have exemplified this despite having an alternate positioning with English adjectives. The study identified instances where participants might have transferred patterns of adjectives with a postnominal architecture in Yoruba/Igbo to complement their target ordering outcomes in the target language which has a prenominal feature.

Findings in this study have semblance with Jung (2008). Both studies show some level of similarity in the behaviour of L2 learners of English with respect to their orderings of English adjectives. For instance, Jung (2008) found that Korean L2 learners of English came up with a pattern that shares similar result with the findings in the present study especially with the ordering of semantic categories that are closer to the head nouns. This is reflected below:

**Korean L2:** -age> size> opinion> shape > condition > color > origin > material >HEAD

**Yoruba L2:** -age>size>participle>quality>shape>color>nationality>material>HEAD

**Igbo L2:** -age>participle>size>color>quality>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

**Hindi L2:** -participle>age>quality>size>shape>color>material>nationality>HEAD

**Nepali L2:** -size>quality>participle>color>age>shape>nationality>material>HEAD

## 6. Conclusion

This study has also demonstrated that acquisition of adjectival order could be dependent on some extralinguistic factors some of which could be psychological, and context based. Results of findings have exhibited support for the proposal that adjectival ordering is dependent on what goes on in the mind of the learners as well as the context that necessitates the ordering which could prime the learners. While adjectives with closer proximity to the head nouns are affected by linguistic factors, adjectives with greater distance from the head noun are patterned based on complex/ extralinguistic factors. This demonstrates that acquisition of syntactic patterns by L2 learners of English might be susceptible to the level of awareness of learners about certain phenomena. Learners' experiences, practices, and situational shared knowledge about life events are crucial factors that shape the mind construct.

With respect to how the L1 theoretical approaches can be used to determine adjectival ordering in L2 acquisition, the study identified two linguistic approaches that carry more explanatory power for second language acquisition. These approaches are Posner's 'nouniness' principle and Quirk's et al., principle of 'subjective/objective' polarity. Curriculum planners, researchers, textbooks designers, and classroom teachers might want to harness these two approaches to explain how adjectives are ordered. This would make adjectival order less challenging for students and, it will demystify the dire need to memorise the patterns/rules. Learners' ability to identify the semantic class of an adjective would be the most important challenge task. Once learners understand and can independently group adjectives into semantic categories of 'quality, size, shape, color, etc.,' then ordering would be easier since they would have been taught ordering preference based on the principles of 'nouniness' and 'subjectivity'.

### 6.1 Implications and Recommendations

This finding might help researchers and curriculum planners to acknowledge the dependence of adjectival ordering on some linguistic factors, possible L1 influence and the circumstance or situation that necessitates the ordering. However, this study maintains that while curriculum planners might propose models to help learners acquire adjectival order (as presented by the British Council, WAEC and Quirk et al. etc.), they should not try to make their materials too rigid. This would help learners to learn the specific rules to determine the syntax of a language and allow their cognition to participate in linguistic permutations. This study suggests a couple of pathways to improve upon similar research in future. First, a test-retest reliability measure can be introduced in the data collection method. This is a measure of reliability where participants would have to take the same test multiple times. An assessment and comparison of these test samples would help to validate and actualize corresponding patterns elicited by each of the participants in the study. Also, it would be advisable for further researchers to adopt a real-time conversational approach as the method of collecting data for this type of research instead of asking participants to describe pictures filled with properties that can enforce some sorts of descriptions on them. Instead, participants can be engaged in naturally occurring discourses that would elicit real ordering patterns. This might appear to be a more challenging methodology, but it could yield better results.

Also, subsequent research may want to increase their population size for the purpose of data collection to a level that it would accommodate a larger representation of each language group. It would have provided a better opportunity for a more robust statistical analysis of data to help identify data trends and patterns. This would achieve a better understanding of various aspects of the data, as well as generalizing potential/reliable findings. This study also recommends that learners and subsequent researchers might want to collect data from participants who did not grow up learning English, especially their own indigenized variety such as Indian or Nigerian English and can be fully considered as learners of English during the data collection process, as opposed to people using nativized varieties of English.

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