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A Comparative Study between English and Seereer Siin: the Case of the Quantifier MANY in English and MAYU in Seereer

Jean Christophe Faye

Introduction

- 1 The word “quantifier” has been used in many textbooks for several decades. Otto Jespersen used the word as early as in 1925 in his book entitled *The Philosophy of Grammar* (1925). A quantifier is defined in the Universal Dictionary as an operator that links one or many variables to a quantity or to a number. In the notion “quantifier,” there are semantically speaking two important things: the verb to “quantify” which means “to give a quantity to something or to someone” and the noun “quantity.”
- 2 However, owing to these two notions that are found in the word quantifier, it can be defined as an operator which expresses a thing susceptible to be measured or counted, an amount or a number. Otto Jespersen defined it in the aforementioned book as adjectives, adjectival phrases or cardinal numbers which give approximate or precise answers to the questions “how much” and “how many.” Furthermore, the logical study of quantification, according to Stanley Peters, is as old as logic itself. This thread of research focuses on the meaning and inferential characteristics of quantifiers. Recent linguistic study of quantifiers has focused more on the grammatical expression of quantification than on its meaning. However natural language quantifiers can be classified according to their semantic type and their syntactic expressions. Quantificational morphemes, words, and phrases of natural languages vary in the semantic type of quantifier expressed.
- 3 Quantifiers are not only common in human languages but they are also semantically difficult to deal with for the mere fact that their meanings depend on the structure of the

sentence, the context, sometimes on the intonation and even on the intention of the speaker. Their meaning can also depend on the language. Furthermore, selecting the correct quantifier in a sentence depends on one's understanding, and on the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns as this study will show. This study shall be based on a comparison between quantifiers in English (an Indo-European language) and Seereer (a Negro African language), with special attention given to the semantic, the syntactic and the morphologic aspects of quantifiers MANY in English and MAYU in Seereer.

The English quantifier MANY

- 4 English is a language which belongs to the Indo-European languages and more specifically to the Germanic family. Much research done on this language for centuries has shown that it is a language which has a very complex grammar. This grammar is composed of several elements some of which are nouns, verbs, adverbs etc. In English nouns are used with determiners and among these determiners there are articles, demonstratives, quantifiers etc. Quantifiers are very useful in so far as they deal with the notion of quantity and quantifying. In English there are many quantifiers one of which is MANY.
- 5 This quantifier has been analyzed by some linguists as a modifier of an unpronounced noun number. The analysis of these linguists is based on a lexical entry for MANY as a gradable determiner, which may be combined with comparative morphology (and other degree modifiers) having the semantics of degree quantifiers. Furthermore, it can first of all be said that most of the English quantifiers are in fact adjectives morphologically and etymologically speaking. MANY derives from the Old English **Manig**, and still maintains the Germanic adjectival ending **-y** (from the older **-ig**) found in words such as *thirsty*, *mighty*, *windy* and *many* more (Oxford English Dictionary, second edition 1989), such as in the following examples:
 - *Many sophomore students attended the class.*
 - *I have many books to read.*
 - *Many teachers have a notion on grammar.*
- 6 The first example can be read as asserting that the difference between the number of sophomore students who attended the lecture could equate to being 'large' relative to some contextually determined standard.
- 7 In a particular way, the quantifier determiner MANY in its quantificational uses has been the focus of considerable investigation in the context of work on quantification, but little attention has been given to its predicative and attributive uses that set it apart from other quantifiers. Quantification in the mass domain is said to be in general less studied than count quantification; and while there have been several interesting attempts to develop unified analyses of MANY and MUCH, these accounts have again focused primarily on their quantificational uses (Chierchia, 1998).
- 8 On this account, MANY is a quantifying determiner that expresses relationships between two set members of a class that includes the logical quantifiers *every/each/all, some/a* and *no*. It also expresses relationships between other non-logical quantifiers such as *most, several, a few and both* simple and modified cardinal numerals (*three, exactly three, at most three*), and even the definite article and demonstratives. In a general analysis, this quantifier can have lexical entries.

- 9 Nevertheless, it seems that MANY itself requires predicative interpretations, a possibility that is not provided under an augmented quantificational analysis. According to some thinkers secondary well-established views on the semantics of the quantifiers, MANY holds an adjectival semantics, and like ordinary adjectives, denotes predicates or modifiers, perhaps in addition to having a quantificational interpretation as we can see in the following examples:
- *I have seen many lions in the forest.*
 - *Many people don't like being laughed at.*
- 10 In addition, the quantifier determiner MANY expresses the notion of abundance. It evokes a great quantity; but it is not determined. Barwise and Cooper (1981) include MANY among the broad class of lexical items that can be analyzed as quantifying determiners. In doing so, they establish what has become the most standard framework for the semantic analysis of adjectives of quantity. Their analysis also brings to our attention the fact this word fails to fit neatly into the categories in which other determiners can be classified. On the basis of their acceptability in these sentences, as well as formal tests, MANY can be classified as weak, patterning with other weak determiners such as A, SOME, NO and the cardinal numerals.
- 11 This quantifier, however, fails to exhibit other properties characteristic of weak determiners. Prototypical weak determiners such as SOME satisfy this relation; but it is less obvious in the case of MANY. Similar issues are observed with other properties, such as intersection. In a now well-known comment, Barwise and Cooper note that they disagree between themselves about the fact that MANY shares the properties characteristic of weak determiners. Cooper was inclined to think that it did, but Barwise believed it did not. Building on these thinkers' observations, a number of authors have sought to develop semantic analyses of MANY that capture the full range of their possible interpretations, and thereby account for their inconsistent formal properties. The culmination of this field of work remains necessary to deal with the quantifier which is ambiguous between a weak or 'cardinal' interpretation with adjectival semantics and a strong or 'proportional' interpretation with determiner semantics.
- 12 This quantifier determiner has been the object of much research in the linguistic world. The conception of MANY as a gradable determiner is supported by the basic semantics of scalar functions in natural languages. As argued by some linguists, the work in this field of study is to show that MANY can be thought of as expressing a function of measurement just as scalar predicates like NUMEROUS express a function of measurement. The difficulty is that the format of a determiner, meaning a relation between sets, does not lend itself easily to the same reconstruction that scalar predicates allow.
- 13 Moreover, some linguists argue that MANY is ambiguous between a so-called proportional reading with determiner semantics and a cardinal reading with adjectival semantics. More recent proposals for predicative semantics for MANY are found in the research of Kamp and Reyle (1981) who took it to be ambiguous between quantificational and predicative interpretations.
- 14 The most substantive issue with the quantificational and predicative analyses of some quantifiers derives from an examination of their differential uses. While it has frequently been observed that MANY may be modified by a wide range of degree modifiers, it has been less recognized that it may itself serve as a modifier in comparatives formed with

more, producing the complex expression “many more.” Further examples of this differential usage of MANY are given as evidence:

- 15 *There were 100 seats in the lecture hall, but unfortunately many more than 100 students showed up for the lecture* (Stephanie, 2009).
- 16 In this example, MANY can be interpreted as saying something about the extent to which the number of students who attended the lecture differs from 100. In terms of degrees and scales, this can be formalized as a claim that in its differential uses, the quantifier expresses properties not of individuals, but of gaps or intervals on the scale of natural numbers. Indeed, MANY itself makes no semantic contribution to the derivation; it is in essence semantically vacuous. The same point could be made about MUCH. With regards to the semantics of quantifiers, MANY in a positive sentence, is the null morpheme which introduces the neutral range that serves as the standard of comparison, as expressed in the following examples:
- *Many students came to the party.*
 - *Many teachers attended the lecture.*
- 17 The number of students required to establish the truth of this example depends on the context. If one were, for example, discussing the party in an advanced semantics city, twenty students might be considered many; but in the context of a large party held in a big city by an eminent and well known individual, those same twenty students would not likely be considered many. Even with respect to the same real world situation, the truth or falsity of a sentence like this depends on the perspective or frame of reference of the conversational participants.
- 18 In other words, “many students came to the party” might have as its sole communicative function the message that the speaker is relieved, surprised or shocked by how many students came. In that sense, the sentence is not intended to communicate a quantity at all. The moral of the above example is that the elimination of vagueness from a term strips this term from some of its key communicative functions. It remains to be explored, however, the question of how vague quantifiers are compared to each other such as in the following examples:
- *There are many ants in my garden.*
 - *There are many typos in this article.*
- 19 In these examples, the average garden has millions of *ants*, while the average manuscript probably has around twenty *typos*. As such, when someone’s garden counts one hundred *ants*, this person is unlikely to utter the first sentence. However, a manuscript with one hundred *typos* is likely to be described as in the second one. This is what is called “context dependence.” For example, MANY, when talking about *ants* differs from MANY when talking about *typos*. But things are even more complicated. Keenan, Stavi and Westerstahl (1986) show that contrasts like those in these sentences surface even when this quantifier talks about the same group of individuals, in the same context:
- *Many people saw through my disguise, more than I expected.*
 - *There are many people in this queue, more than I want there to be.*
- 20 The above examples show that MANY is not just a word that stands for an amount. It has a -complex non-extensional relation with an amount, which depends on what is normality, what is expected, what is desired, etc. If one is optimistic, they could say that there could be a psychological agenda to find out how this determiner is given a context and the speaker’s expectations. However, such research would be missing the point that

when a speaker uses a vague quantifier like MANY, he or she may do so with a rather specific purpose. In the literature on vagueness, there is an emerging consensus that vague communication is useful. The fact that a speaker may use a vague term, without any intention of communicating the extension of that term is one way in which this manifested.

The Seereer quantifier MAYU

- 21 Seereer is a language which belongs to the West Atlantic branch of the Niger-Congo, according to the classification of African languages by Greenberg (1963). It is a language with many dialects all of which are mutually intelligible. Sauvageot (1965) makes the observation that the differences between the dialects are principally in the phonetics and lexicon, but there are also to a lesser extent differences in the morphology and syntax (Souleymane Faye, 1985).
- 22 Linguistically speaking, this language is spoken in Senegal and especially in the large traditional region of Sine Saloum which has become the present regions of Fatick, Kaolack Diourbel and Thies. The Seereer Siin dialect, also called Sin-Gandum, which is in the main focus of this study, is spoken in the Fatick region and in some parts of the Thies and Kaolack regions. Writing, speaking or studying this Seereer language, is not an easy task for non-speakers due to the complexity of its pronunciation, its phonological system and its class markers or determiners.
- 23 Seereer uses determiners like the other languages and among these determiners, there are the quantifiers. There are several quantifiers in Seereer, each of which has its own use and characteristics. MAYU, which is under study here, is among these quantifiers. This Seereer quantifier can be used with countable and uncountable nouns. When it is used with a countable noun, the latter will be in plural. However, in Seereer, countable nouns are expressed through three forms: those used with zero class markers (ø.c.m.), those with “a” class marker (a.c.m.) and those with “o” class marker (o.c.m.). In the first case, it follows the same rule as some quantifiers such as ‘leng-leng’ (some). In other words, when it is used with the zero class marker, there will be: noun+mayu.

paal mayu ndefu mene
 paal - mayu- ndefu mene
 sheep - many T.M.A¹ (be) here
 “many sheep are here”
 pambe mayu njiru rend
 pambe - mayu - njiru - rend
 goat - many - T.M.A (to be sick) - this year
 “many goats are sick this year”
 naak mayu ta jegu
 naak - mayu ta jegu
 cow - many (s)he T.M.A (have)
 “(s)he has many cows”

- 24 Nevertheless, apart from this zero class marker, the quantifier MAYU can be used with the o.c.m. Furthermore, it is noticed that with the o.c.m. and the a.c.m., this quantifier follows the same rule. But with the o.c.m., there are two forms: the form in which the o.c.m. is erased in plural, (in this form there will be: noun + mayu) and the second one in which the o.c.m. becomes “xa” (in this form there will be: xa + noun + xa+ mayu).

o kiin (wiin in plural) Wiin mayu

wiin - mayu
 People - many
 “many people”
 o tew (rew in plural) rew mayu
 rew - mayu
 women - many
 “many women”
 o hiic (xa kiic in plural) Xa kiic xa mayu
 Xa - kiic - xa - mayu
 P.c.m²- jujube- P.c.m.- a lot of
 “a lot of jujubes”
 o faam (xa paam in plural) xa paam xa mayu
 xa - paam- xa mayu
 P.c.m.- donkey-P.c.m. many
 “many donkeys”

- 25 In these examples, it has been pointed out that the quantifier MAYU is always placed after the noun it determines and that it changes morphologically. However there is with all these examples an initial consonant alternation when there is a passage from singular to plural, even though, the a.c.m. nearly follows the same syntactic and morphological ways. As such, in Seereer, the a.c.m. is used with two different noun classes. In the first class, the nouns have the class marker in singular; but in plural the class is erased. In this context, if the quantifier MAYU is used with the noun, it is formed by: noun + mayu. The second form is composed of the nouns which have a.c.m. in singular and in plural this a.c.m. is going to be kept without any change. So it is formed as follows: a.c.m. + noun + a.c.m. + mayu.

a mbaaw (paaw in plural) paaw mayu
 paal - mayu
 sheep many
 “many sheep”
 a Tat (a Tat in plural) a Tat a mayu
 a - Tat - a - mayu
 a.c.m.- way- a.c.m. - many
 “many ways”

- 26 In these examples and more specifically in the first example, there is an initial consonant alternation. In Seereer when there is a changing from singular to plural, all the prenasals alternate with their voiceless corresponding plosives ([mb] becomes [p]; [nd] becomes [t]; [ng] becomes [k]; [nj] becomes [c]; [nG] becomes [q]). In the second example, there is no changing apart from the reduplication of the class marker. In the first example as in the second one, the quantifier MAYU is thus placed after the noun.
- 27 Nevertheless, this quantifier can be used with uncountable nouns. However, this uncountable noun sometimes refers to liquids in singular. Furthermore, whether it is used with countable or uncountable nouns, this determiner is always placed after the noun. When the noun is used with the zero class marker, there will be: noun + mayu. In this context, it means “much”; “a lot of”.

foofi mayu Rog a dePu rend
 foofi - mayu Rog - a deP - u - rend
 water- many God - T.M.A (rain) - acc³ - this year
 “there is a lot of water this year”
 Nju’ax mayu i yeru
 Nju’ax - mayu i yeru
 Curds - much we T.M.A (drink)

“we drank much curds”

- 28 When it is a noun used with the o.c.m., there will be a reduplication of this o.c.m.: o.c.m. + noun + o.c.m. + mayu. This quantifier, like the other quantifiers, does not vary. In other words it is invariable. Whether it is used with singular or plural; countable or uncountable nouns, there is no change as far as its morphology is concerned.

O sis o mayu naak le jegu

O - sis - o - mayu - naak - le- jeg - u

o.c.m.- milk- o.c.m.- much- cow - Def⁴ T.M.A. (have)-acc

“the cow has much milk”

- 29 However, even if in Seereer there are two kinds of uncountable nouns: those which are always singular and those which are always plural, the quantifier MAYU can be used with both of them. The uncountable nouns that are in plural mostly refer to substantives or have collective meanings, but be that as it may, its morphology and syntax are not going to change. There will be: noun + mayu.

cafel mayu i njegu

cafel - mayu- i- njeg - u

job - many - we - T.M.A (have) - acc

“we have many jobs”

- 30 As we have shown, MAYU is a quantifier which requires a lot of attention. It is always placed after the noun it determines and its morphology does not change whether it is used with countable or uncountable nouns. But as it is mostly regarded, this quantifier is said to come from the Seereer verb “may” meaning to “be full.” Therefore, in this verb, there is the idea of quantity, which makes this operator a quantifier. This determiner MAYU can therefore be said to be composed of two morphemes: the morpheme “may” and the morpheme “u.” The former, is a verb which includes the quantity. As far as the morpheme “u” is concerned, it can be said to mean something that is acquired or accomplished in Seereer language.

Contrastive analysis

Morphological aspects

- 31 The morphological contrast of the quantifiers is very noticeable in so far as the formation of these quantifiers requires a lot of research. In English, quantifiers, like the other determiners, are formed with a single word or morpheme. In Seereer, contrary to English, the formation of a quantifier depends on the kind of quantifier the speaker wants to express. The quantifier MAYU is composed of the morpheme “may” which is a verb that means “to be numerous”; “to be full.” This verb shows the notion of quantity. Apart from this verb, there is the morpheme “u” which designates an acquired or an accomplished character. This morpheme “u” is not only used with this verb but it is also used with adjectives. In the English language, even if the quantifiers are formed with a single word, they can be considered as being etymologically formed with more than one morpheme. If one morphologically refers to these determiners (quantifiers), they can say that the Seereer and English languages have some similarities in so far as each of them can be divided into two morphemes. But there are some obvious differences given that they do not use the same morphemes, even if they are composed of two morphemes. In addition, MAYU comes from a verb whereas MANY does not. Furthermore, the two quantifiers MANY and MAYU share in a random way some phonological similarities given that each

of them begin with the same nasal [m]. However, apart from their morphological similarities and differences, these two languages also share some semantic similarities and differences.

Semantic aspects

- 32 Semantics, dealing with the meaning of words, cannot be neglected in the study of quantifiers. As it was stated earlier and as the name implies, it can be said that there are, semantically speaking, two important elements in the notion of quantifier: the verb to “quantify” which means “to give a quantity to something or to someone” and the noun “quantity.” In English, each quantifier is used in a specific context and has its own meaning. However, the English quantifier MANY is used with countable nouns and has a plural meaning. In this case it can mean “a lot of” with an indefinite quantity.
- 33 As far as the Seereer language is concerned, there are some similarities to the English language. That is, the English quantifier MANY and the Seereer quantifier MAYU can mean “a lot of,” “several” etc. Both of them have the notion of indefinite quantity. They are used with plural nouns. One important difference between these languages in terms of semantics is the fact that the Seereer quantifier MAYU can be used with countable nouns as well as with uncountable nouns, whereas the English quantifier MANY can only be used with countable nouns. If one would like to express a large quantity with uncountable nouns, they are going to use to “much” or “a lot of.” This can be understood thanks to the fact that English focuses on the real quantity whereas Seereer focuses on the noun or on the class markers. Moreover, in Seereer, there is a relationship between the quantifier under study and the verb “may” insofar as this determiner comes from this verb. In English there is no link between the quantifier MANY and a verb from which this determiner may be derived.
- 34 Consequently, this Seereer quantifier can be used with a noun which already has a class marker. In other words, this quantifier MAYU can be used with indefiniteness or definiteness (wiin mayu (indefiniteness) = *many people*; wiin mayu we (definiteness) = *several people*). In English this is not possible because two determiners cannot be used side by side with one noun. This demonstrates the great difference that exists between the two languages and between determiners and class markers even if these latter can be regarded as determiners.
- 35 Furthermore, whatever the semantical differences and similarities between these languages may be, there are as many semantic differences as there are syntactic ones.

Syntactic aspects

- 36 This part of study is going to focus on the structure of these quantifiers and the role they occupy with regards to the nouns they determine. In the English language, all the words or morphemes which are used to determine the noun are always used before the noun they determine, whether they are articles, possessive or demonstrative adjectives or quantifiers (*a teacher, my teacher, this teacher, many teachers...*). That is why the quantifier in question is always placed before the noun it determines. “There are many + noun.” Unlike in English, determiners or the class markers which are used as determiners in Seereer are or can be placed before or after the noun they determine. But the quantifier MAYU is always placed after the noun it determines. “There are noun + mayu.” But if the noun is in

the definite form, this quantifier is placed between the noun and the definite part: “noun + mayu + def.”

- 37 This Seereer determiner can also, however, be placed before the noun it determines, but in this context it is going to be regarded not as a quantifier but as the Seerer verb (*may*) + the acquired or accomplished segment (*u*). Therefore there will be: subject + mayu + noun (Mary mayu paal “*Mary has many sheep*”). These two quantifiers are syntactically different.

Conclusion

- 38 The quantifier appears to require real mental work on the referential holding of the noun. In fact, it requires a psychic activity which is grammatically marked by a sign. Studying a quantifier consists in questioning the particular way of proceeding, in other words, emphasizing the exact type of cerebral work that it is being done.
- 39 The study of the quantifiers MANY and MAYU is very important in so far as these two determiners do not belong to the same language. There are some morphological similarities because both of the quantifiers are composed of two morphemes. In addition, given that they are used to refer to the notion of quantity, a semantic similarity is also revealed. A phonological similarity can also be seen insofar as both quantifiers begin with [m], but, as it has been shown in the study, there are many morphological, semantic and syntactic differences, for the two languages do not use the same morphemes. In Seereer, the quantifier MAYU is derived from the Seereer verb “may.” Furthermore, these quantifiers are not placed in the same position. English determiners in general are always placed before the noun they determine whereas in Seereer the quantifiers are always placed after the noun they determine, even if this noun is in the definite form, which would require the quantifier MAYU to be placed between the noun and the definite part.
- 40 This contrastive study will enable the promotion and the development of the Seereer language and culture around the world. It has been chosen to allow all people who are not native speakers of Seereer to be in a position to understand the functioning of quantifiers in general and the quantifier MAYU in particular.

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NOTES

1. T.M.A. =Time Mode Aspect.
 2. P.c.m. =Plural class marker.
 3. acc = accomplished
 4. Def = Definite.
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ABSTRACTS

The present study deals with quantification in English and Seereer. More specific research questions concern the uses and functioning of the quantifier MANY in English and MAYU in Seereer. However, the study of these quantifiers is based on three main aspects: morphological, semantic and syntactic aspects. However, in relation to these aspects, English and Seereer work differently even if some similarities can be noticed.

INDEX

Mots-clés: contrastive, determiner, English, grammar, language, morphology, noun, quantifier, Seereer, semantics

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