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MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE AND INTELLIGIBLE COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE: THE ROLE OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Communication is very vital in any human society, and it is basically through speech or writing that human beings communicate with one another. In order not to be misunderstood, it is important that speakers of English should speak in such a manner that all users of the language should be able to comprehend the message of the speaker or writer without any ambiguity. Unfortunately, English is not the mother tongue of the Nigerian Nation. It is used and studied as a second language. This situation creates certain problems for English as second language learners as they find it difficult to speak like the native speakers of the language as a result of the linguistic differences and interferences between their various mother tongues and the second language. This paper therefore, examines the phenomenon of linguistic interference from one's mother tongue as a significant barrier to effective communication in English as a second language in Nigeria.

Keyword: *Linguistics, Intelligible, Communication, Second Language, Mother Tongue.*

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication in English is crucial in today's globalized world, but many non-native speakers face challenges due to linguistic interference from their mother tongue. 'LINGUISTICS' is simply defined as the scientific study of language. It is so defined because linguistics seeks to gather data concerning a range of phenomena to observe the patterns which underline those phenomena. Linguists gather data from theories and test them, and then establish facts about language.

Ike (2008) describes linguistics as an academic field devoted to studying the various aspects of human language and, to some extent, the interaction of human with other areas of human culture and behaviour. Linguistics tries to find out the common elements of all languages.

Linguists try to answer questions about languages, such as how languages change and why words mean what they mean; Linguists study their own language as well as other languages. Many languages have no written form. When linguists study a modern language, they analyze the speech of some native speakers of the language they wish to study. The person used for this analysis is known as an informant. Linguists use a set of symbols known as phonetic alphabet to write down the speech sounds of the informant.

Linguistics is closely allied with many other disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, speech therapy, education, philosophy, English and foreign Languages. There are three major fields of



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linguistics; they are descriptive, comparative and historical linguistics.

DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS studies the language of a single place and period. It is sometimes referred to as synchronic linguistics. Lyons (1999) states that descriptive linguist produces reference grammar or dictionary for practical purposes. A descriptive linguistic also tries to describe a language as it is acquired by the children of the community and as it is used by the adults there. The ability of people to speak and understand their language is known as linguistics performance whereas the description of the ability of people to use their language is called linguistic competence. Competence has to do with whether specific language ability is present; while performance has to do with the strength of that ability (Williams 1990).

COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS is also called diachronic linguistics. It is concerned with the study of language as it varies from place to place, from speaker to speaker and from one period to another. Lyons (1999) writes that diachronic descriptions of a language trace the historical development of the languages and record the changes that have taken place in it between successive points in time. Ike (2008) notes that speech of a given generations is never quite identical to that of its parent or to that of its children. He notes however that the differences between adjoining generations are slight and for the most part will go unnoticed. The slight change will continue for centuries and the slight changes will have a cumulative effect and often the language will acquire a very new form.

HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS is concerned with investigating the details of the historical development of particular language and with formulating general

hypothesis about language change (Lyons 1999). The historical method studies language through thousands of years ago and it seeks to find out the history and development of individual languages and language groups. The term linguistic is connected with language or scientific study of language.

INTELLIGIBLE COMMUNICATION:

Intelligible communication refers to the extent to which a message is understandable to its intended audience, regardless of linguistic differences or barriers. Intelligibility is a crucial aspect of effective communication, determining whether speakers of the same or different dialects, languages, or levels of proficiency can interpret and respond appropriately to each other. It plays a vital role in interpersonal, intercultural, and professional interactions, where a lack of intelligibility can result in misunderstandings, confusion, and even conflict. This concept is studied extensively in sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and language education to understand how clarity in communication can be achieved across diverse linguistic contexts.

CONCEPTS OF MOTHER TONGUE/FIRST LANGUAGE/ SECOND LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE

Mother Tongue

The "Mother Tongue" is often defined as the language learned from one's immediate family during early childhood and is commonly linked to cultural and ethnic identity. According to Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson (1989), the mother tongue is not only the language first learned but also the language with which an individual emotionally and culturally identifies. In many cases, it serves as the primary medium through which cultural traditions,



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beliefs, and values are passed on. The concept of the mother tongue is significant in bilingual and multilingual communities, where individuals may grow up with multiple languages, yet consider one as their primary cultural identifier. For instance, speakers of minority languages may value their mother tongue as a symbol of cultural heritage, even if it is not the dominant language of their society.

FIRST LANGUAGE (L1)

The "First Language" (L1) generally refers to the first language a person learns to communicate effectively, often in tandem with or as part of the mother tongue. However, in multilingual societies, the first language may be distinct from the mother tongue if a child is socialized into a language different from that spoken in the household (Grosjean, 1982). First language acquisition is typically a natural process occurring without formal instruction, leading to near-native fluency by early childhood (Chomsky, 1965). Psycholinguists often study L1 acquisition to understand how language structures and vocabulary are learned at a foundational level, providing insight into cognitive language processes that occur automatically during early development.

SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)

The second language is that language that is learnt after acquiring the mother tongue. Learning is more complex, more time consuming and more demanding than learning mother tongue. The Nigerian learner of English already has a language; in some cases, he knows two or more of the national languages. As (Baldeh, 1990) puts it: learning a second language after we have acquired verbal behaviors is a matter of adaptation or extension of existing skills and knowledge rather than learning of a completely new set of skills from scratch.

Second language learning refers to the acquisition of a language once a first language has been learned, say after the age of two. However, in Nigerian context, English is a second language, every Nigerian family has its medium of communication using the mother tongue, but uses English for other purposes like in education, law and commerce etc. (Azikiwe, 1998). Teaching a second language is not an easy task because the learner has already learnt and internalized his mother tongue and there is usually an interference between the mother tongue and the second language. In other words, there is the problem of cultural intrusion in second language learning that must be realistically dealt with (Williams, 1990). A language that is learnt is defined as a process that is brought about in a setting where subject matter is selected and graded, and activities are organized and promoted the use of the language.

Linguistic Interference

Linguistic interference refers to a situation whereby two different languages overlap and the linguistic system of one of the languages is transferred into the other. One of the languages used in most cases is the speaker's mother tongue. The learner transfers the forms and structure of native language into the target language. A sample of interference in the Igbo-English speech community occurs when Igbo linguistic system interferes with that of English in the process of learning and producing the latter.

Interference is said to be active where it affects the acquisition of the target language positively. For instance, plosive sounds like /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/ and /g/ that occur in Igbo language aid the acquisition of similar sounds in English.

Interference, on the other hand, is said to be passive when it affects the acquisition of



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the target language negatively. For instance, the absence of some fricative sounds in Igbo such as /ə/, /ɜ/ makes the acquisition in English difficult for an Igbo speaker who is learning to speak English

FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

The official position today is that English is the language of instruction from Mid primary education to the University level. Indigenous Languages are used for instruction in the first two years of primary education. English remains the language of education. It is the Language of educational evaluation, external examination bodies depend on English as the Language of evaluation. The first Nigeria educational ordinance of 1882 strengthen the position of English by officially declaring it as the language of instruction. Oluwadare (2018) points out the 1882 ordinance did not take cognizance of the vernacular, instead, it declared "that all teachings from the lowest class to the highest must be done in the language before a government grant could be obtained.

English serves as a lingua franca in Nigeria. Aingua franca can be described as a language which is used habitually by people whose mother tongues are different in order to fascilitate communication among them. English language is mass oriented because it is used by all the sectors of the linguistics community of Nigeria. It cuts across ethnic boundaries.

English is the language used for government transactions, verbal or written. Minutes of meetings are recorded in English and every form of government reports or letters are written in English. Interviews for employees are conducted in English.

English is used as the medium of instruction from elementary to the university level. This implies that the Nigerian student's access to the cultural and scientific knowledge of the world is mainly through English. Text books have remained in English in Nigeria where there are numerous indigenous languages which deter curriculum planners from providing texts in so many languages. The importance of English language is so felt that it has remained a compulsory school subject and a pre-requisite for further education. Without a pass at the credit level, one cannot possibly advance in the country's educational ladder (Oluwadare 2018).

Without the use of English, it will be difficult to interact effectively with other people that speak other languages in Nigeria. The use of English has made Language as a means of communication possible. English is used to document government policies on the various sectors of the economy scientific, technical and educational journals drama presentations, documentaries, discoveries, as well as educational programmes presented in the various television and radios stations are broadcast in English. The role of English is so diverse hat it is not wise for anyone to isolate himself from its use

English is also used in the process of business transactions. Intra-national and international trade take place because the parties involved understand themselves. Business proposals and instruction manual are produced using English which is spoken in many countries across the globe. The instruction manual helps importers to get relevant information on the usage, maintenance and function of the various parts of the machines or other items so imported. International business transaction are made easier in Nigeria using this unifying language



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English is learnt as a second language (L2) in Nigeria for the purpose it serves within the country. This situation does not make the different mother – tongues irrelevant. NPE (2004) stipulates that the language of the immediate environment should also be taught in schools. Through this culture, value system norms, and aspirations of that immediate environment are inculcated to the child. English is so useful in Nigeria. It is the language that is spoken in gatherings like matriculation or convocation ceremonies, public lectures, induction ceremonies and so on. Presidential messages to the nation are broadcast in English. It is an important language in Nigeria and as such great attentions should be paid to its teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning English as a second language

According to Ekpe (2010), the real date that English language usage started in Nigeria is uncertain. However, it was believed that the first intimate contact between the British and some ethnic groups in Nigeria was in Southern Nigeria. This must have been at some period before the Atlantic Slave trade. It is on records that from 1553, English men paid frequent visits to the Nigerians shores, especially the ports of ancient Benin and old Calabar, and the type of communication in English called ‘pidgin’, while <https://www.languageconnections.com/blog/> states that English has had a lot of impacts on many languages in Nigeria including Igbo language.

English is considered as a second and official language in Nigeria. Children learn English from the very early from their primary school. This is also the position of Ucheoma (2011) who states that “colonization of Nigeria, Ghana etc. by Britian must be seen as the primary factor that gives rise to the adoption of the English language as the second language in these

countries”. The use of English is official in Nigeria. Besides, the Nigerian language policy recommends English as the major language of instruction in schools. Ekpe (2010) stresses that:

Nigerian society today, literacy is attributed to the ability to speak and write English language. Anybody who cannot read and write is called illiterate. As such everybody strives to speak English at least the patois of the market place or the passable kind of English. In some homes these days, many parents do not allow their children and wards to speak their indigenous languages, it is English language everywhere. Most private and government schools do not allow their students to speak their local languages while in school and even the teachers are prohibited from speaking indigenous languages while in school as well, the penalty ranges from fine to suspension or hard labour. With these, everybody wants to be identified with the winning population who are the English speakers.

Nevertheless, it is a worrisome issue that after schooling from primary to secondary education today, a student cannot show his or her mastery to speak and write in good English. Hoque (2009) in Shuchi (2013) asserts that one of the problems for a foreign language learner is that how to accurately utter the speech sound of a language. The main purpose of speaking a language is to communicate with others; therefore, he comments that, if we cannot utter the proper sound of a language, the message will not be understood and communication may even break down”. This is exactly the situation found in Nigeria, because English words are



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pronounced with an accent which is related to the mother tongue.

Among the factors identified as affecting the learning of a second language, Latu (1994) explains two aspects of which include the learner's ability to use L2. According to him, language is generally referred to as a cognitive skill, particularly from a psycholinguistic perspective. The second aspect is a biological ability and this is related to age, "a biological factor that has some influences in learning a second language". He asserts that, learners of a second language who start learning while they are young, learn better and faster than those who start when they are much older. Phon (2017) argues that there are many factors thwarting students from learning English effectively such as: class sizes, learning and teaching resources, learning and teaching practices, motivations and students education background. Corroborating this, Khasinah (2014) adds that motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style and personality are some of the factors that greatly influence someone in the process of his or her second language acquisition. He emphasizes that "Language attitudes are the attitude which speakers of different languages have toward other languages or to their own language. Expression of positive or negative feelings toward a language may reflect impression of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degrees of important, social status". Along this line, Adwani and Shrivastava (2017), add that "without student motivation, there is no pulse, there is no life in the class. This factor leads to perpetual procurement of other mentioned factors for second language acquisition".

Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. This simple fact is known by all who have themselves

learned a second language or taught those who are using their second language in schools. Also, esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/factors.html notes that there are other important factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. These factors can be broadly categorized as internal and external. While the internal factors are those that the individual language learner brings with him or her to the particular learning situation which include age, personality, motivation, experiences, cognitive and native language, but external factors are those that characterize the particular language learning situation. They include the following: curriculum, instruction, culture and status, and access to native speakers. This means that motivation is crucial factors that teachers should promote in order to provide efficient language learning.

INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE USAGE IN NIGERIA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INTELLIGIBLE COMMUNICATION

Mother tongue is also referred to as first language, indigenous, or source language (LI). It refers to the language that you first learn to speak when you are a child. Every learner of English had already acquired his mother tongue. Children acquired the language of their immediate environment early in life through parents, relative or native members of their environment. Language acquisition is a creative process by which the rules of a language are internalized (Williams, 1990). In acquisition, the children learn the language in a natural way or direct method. The mother tongue is usually acquired outside the classroom.

Adenuga (2007) writes that when two or more languages come in contact, there must be an influence of one on the other if the



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speaker uses both alternatively. In essence, a situation where one has to learn a second language, there is usually the tendency to transfer features from the first language to the second language. There is positive as well as negative interference. Positive interference is a situation where the knowledge of the mother tongue promotes the learning of a second language. While negative interference occurs where the knowledge of the mother tongue inhibits the learning of a second language. A child who has Igbo as his mother tongue encounters some linguistic interference in speaking English.

Adenuga (2007) identifies the following as the type of interferences that hinder intelligible communication in English by English as second language learners as a result of mother tongue interference. They include:

- Phonological interference
- Grammatical interference
- Lexical interference
- Semantic interference

Ike (2007) Citing Azikiwe (1998) adds the following to the list

- Phonological difference
- Orthographical interference and
- Consonant substitution

PHONOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE/DIFFERENCE

Bamisaye (2007) defines phonology as the study of the sound system or sound pattern of a language. The sound aspect of language consists segments of phoneme and supra-segmental phonemes. A non native speaker of English finds it difficult to produce sounds as a native speaker because the sound system of English is different. There are some sounds found in L2 which are not found in L1. It then poses a problem to the non-native speaker to produce the sounds as they should be. Apart from the problems encountered as a result

of the difference in the segmental phonemes, there is also the problem of stress and intonation.

Onugbo (1990) asserts that the way stress and intonation are used in English differs greatly from the way the same features are used in most Nigerian languages. Intonation is used in most Nigerian languages. Intonation is used in Igbo for Instance, to distinguish words of the same spelling. The Igbo word ‘*akwa*’ when translated into English could mean “cry” “cloth” “bed” “egg” or bridge. It is the use of intonation that differentiates one Igbo word of the same spelling from another. In English, intonation is used to give special meaning to an utterance. When stress and intonation are used wrongly, the message of the speaker is distorted. English Language teachers should bear the importance of stress and intonation in mind while planning their lessons and put in enough practice that will enhance the speaking skills of their students and help them communicate intelligibly in English.

CONSONANT SUBSTITUTION

There is the problem of substituting a consonant sound with another consonant sound. This hinders intelligible communication. Some of the consonants affected are /f/, and /p/, /u/ , /r/, /l/, /f/, /p/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /sh/

Examples: /face/ /pace/
/Lice/ /rice/
/sheep/ /cheap/
/Glass/ /grass/
/fan/ /pan/

The vowel sounds of English consist of twenty sounds; twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs. Monophthongs are again divided into long and short vowels. This is unlike most Nigerian Languages that have seven or eight vowel sounds, /a/, /e/, /i/, /i o/, /o/, /u/, /u/ – (igbo vowels precisely). In certain



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cases, the non-native speakers of English will definitely find it difficult to pronounce /i:/ and /i/ when found in words like beat, bit, still, steal e.t.c.

LEXICAL INTERFERENCE

Lexical Interference is another type of Linguistic hindrance to intelligible communication in the use of English as a second language in Nigeria. This is direct translation of words from mother tongue to the second language. It is apparent that differences in cultural background and world view result in the use of different terminologies. For instance:

- father/mother - strictly used for biological parents in English but used for all elderly men or women within the community by non-native speakers of English
- brother/sister- is strictly for biological siblings but, cover a wider range of people within and outside the family eg. niece, nephew, cousins, aunts, uncles and others you wish to accord respect.

Grammatical Interference

Grammatical level of interference involves the imposition of the grammatical features of the mother tongue or first language on the second language. This varies according to the education level of the speaker. Below are some grammatically incorrect sentences as a result of grammatical interference

- They are calling you (*honorific use of pronoun 'they' for an elderly person*) instead of He/ She is calling you
- I am coming (*the speaker is leaving*) instead of I will soon join you or I will soon be with you

- He has one hand instead of He has a hand

Semantic Level of Interference

There is also interference in the level of semantics. This is obvious in a second language situation because of the kind of meaning given to words which deviates from the original meaning. In effect, effective communication may not take place when the sender and the receiver operate at different semantic level and can lead to misunderstanding and misinformation. For example:

- Mary has gone to the bank to cash money "In the sentence above, the speaker has used the latter part of the sentence 'to cash money' to inform the interlocutor that the 'bank' referred to in this sentence is not that of a river but that in which monetary transactions are made"
- john has just married a dog. "Given the absurdity of marrying a dog, the sentence above could be interpreted as conveying the speaker's disgust or derision at John's choice of a marriage partner. On hearing the sentence, the interlocutor immediately infers that the speaker cannot mean the utterance literally."
- the man who died last year delivered a lecture yesterday entails contradiction

Orthographical Interference

Orthographical is the system of spelling in a language. In Igbo for instance, we have a spelling pattern of: /V//C/ /V/ Vowel Consonant Vowel and /C//V/C/V/ Consonant Vowel Consonant Vowel

Vowel	+	Consonant	+	Vowel	
/i/	+	/s/	+	/i/	'isi' – head
/u/	+	/k/	+	/a/	'uka' – church

OR



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Consonant	+	Vowel	+	Consonant	+	Vowel	
/gw/		/a/		/r/		/a/	gwara

In Igbo, a consonant does not end a word. If it happens, the spelling is wrong (Ike, 2007). In other words, there is no consonant cluster in Igbo language. But in English, the rule does not apply. We have acceptable English words that end with consonant for instance – /photosynthesis/, /chemical/, /seat/, /man/. The spelling system in Igbo, for example, is different from the spelling system of English. Consonant Clusters are found in English where as it is absent in Igbo. In essence, the spelling system in the mother tongue is quite different from that of English. So, to transfer the spelling system of the mother tongue to English will result in numerous spelling errors in English.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that mother tongue interference is a significant linguistic hindrance to intelligible communication in English. Therefore, the above study concludes that English should indeed be the language of instruction from fourth grade in the primary school as recommended by NPE. This is to checkmate the teachers that are still using the language of their immediate environment in teaching English Language in the upper classes.

Recommendation**REFERENCES**

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In order to promote intelligible communication in English by non-native speaker of English, the researcher recommends the following:

1. language training programmes should incorporate cross-linguistic awareness and mother tongue interference mitigation strategies.
2. language educators should receive training on addressing linguistic interference challenges.
3. language support services, such as language exchange patterns and self-study materials, should be made available to non-native English Speakers.
4. qualified English teachers should be employed to teach English language at the primary School level.
5. enough time should allocated to listening and speaking the second Language.
6. there should be enough drills and activities for the pupils to help them practice more on the L2.
7. policy makers should prioritize language education and support services in multilingual settings.

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