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MANIFESTATIONS OF INTERFERENCE IN THE LANGUAGE USAGE OF THE GBAGYI BILINGUAL LEARNER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The English language (from the Indo-European family) is the largest language by number of speakers, and the third most-spoken native language in the world, after Standard Chinese and Spanish. It is the most widely learned second language and is either the official language or one of the official languages in almost 60 sovereign states. There are more people who have learned it as a second language than there are native speakers. However, several factors affect the learning and proficiency of a second language and among them is culture, age, environment, method of acquisition, nature and structure of the first language and the amount of efforts invested. This paper examines interference as one of the fundamental areas that English as a second language manifests in the language usage of the Gbagyi learner of the language: speech production, grammatical structure and the choice of words and expression, wrong placement of stress, idioms and figurative expressions. The mother tongue is mostly used in communication by pupils, students and teachers outside the classroom. Also, the paper brings into light the Gbagyi phonology and the challenges faced by learners because of being exposed to bilingual codes. Finally, it suggests that teaching of pronunciation and other aspects of language teaching in schools should be prioritized in order to minimize or eliminate manifestations of interference in the language usage of the learners.

Keywords: English as a second language, Gbagyi language, Mother tongue, Interference

Introduction

Learning a second language (L2) has been important to human beings right from history. The status of English in Nigeria has often been described as that of a second language because it is learnt and used after the acquisition the mother tongue or native language. Usually, children do not learn the language until they get into nursery or primary school. By the time they enroll in school, they already are proficient in their mother tongue.

One of the major problems the learners confront as they learn and use English as an L2 is that some features of their native language tend to manifest in the English they produce. This is not limited to the young learners of English but with the adult learners or users as well. Other factors that affect the learning and proficiency of a second language are the nature and structure of the first language, culture, environment, age, method of acquisition and the amount of efforts invested. The extent of distinction and similarities between the native language and the target

language are important factors in the learning of a second language. An important feature of second language learning is that the learner has had experience of another language. An experience which enables him to master, assimilate and internalize the system of learning of the first language. In learning the new language, second language learner incorporates the new linguistic input into their model of the language.

Lado (1957) holds that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture. When transfer is positive, we talk of facilitation but when it is negative, we talk of interference. Corder (1974, p. 6) puts it thus, "one explanation of L2 errors is that the learner is carrying over the habits of his mother tongue into the second language." The aforementioned statement by Lado and Corder is true with the Gbagyi learners of English as will be seen in this paper.

The need to expose the areas of negative transfer in the language usage of Gbagyi learners of English as a second language in schools is the focus of this paper.

English as an L2

Good knowledge of the socio-political history of Nigeria will enable one understand how the English language came into Nigeria and occupied a colossal position in the Nigerian Educational system. Our country is made up of multilingual and multi-ethnic nationals wielded together for the benefit of the colonial administration. The English language was then adopted as a language of necessity to enable the British run their colonial government. Clerks and interpreters were trained and those who wished to work with the colonial masters strived to learn English.

The missionaries were the first to establish schools in Nigeria. The main aim then was to train people who would propagate the gospel. When the British Government took over the running of the schools in Nigeria, they harmonized the subjects taught in the different missionary schools. They also came up with a policy that made English Language a core subject as well as the language of instruction in the 1882 and 1887 education ordinances (Ogu, 1999).

From this point, many Nigerians strove to learn English as competence in it was a meal ticket. In fact, it was a yardstick for employment during the colonial era. After independence, the Nigerian system of education did not change much from

what it was during the colonial era. English language remained the pivot of education in Nigeria. It is the language of instruction from upper primary education through secondary, to tertiary education in Nigeria. It is the language through which all other subjects in the curriculum are taught. Not only is English language a compulsory subject in secondary education, a credit pass in it is a compulsory condition for securing admission into Nigerian tertiary institutions. Competence in English is seen as an index of academic excellence. Thus, it is a yardstick for measuring learners' academic performance. More so, before any student can graduate from the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, they must pass the course: Use of English.

English as a second language is the language of anyone who learns it after acquiring their first language (L1) in infancy at home. Using the term this way, no distinction is made between L2, L3, etc. However, an L2 is often learned with English as the foreign language. Someone who learns English in a formal classroom setting, with limited or no opportunities for use outside the classroom, in a country in which English does not play an important role in internal communication (China, Japan and Korea, for example) is said to be learning English as a foreign language. Someone who learns English in a setting in which the language is necessary for everyday life (for example, an immigrant learning English in the US) or in a country in which English plays an important role in education, business, and government (for example in Singapore, the Philippines, India and Nigeria) is learning English as a second language.

From the fore going, we have seen that English language is the bedrock upon which education in Nigeria is hinged, thus English is indispensable to education in Nigeria.

Mother Tongue

The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2010) defines first language as (generally) a person's mother tongue or the language acquired first. In multilingual communities, however, where a child may gradually shift from the main use of one language to the main use of another (e.g. because of their influence of a school language), first language may refer to (L1) as the language a child acquires first in his attempt to communicate with his surroundings (Olaoye, 2008). In some countries like Kenya and India, mother tongue is used to indicate the language of one's ethnic group in both common and

journalistic parlance. Also, in Singapore, mother tongue refers to the language of one's ethnic group regardless of actual proficiency, while the first language refers to the English language, which is the language of instruction in government schools and as a working language despite it not being a native tongue for most Singaporeans (Online free Wikipedia Encyclopedia).

In this paper, the mother tongue is regarded as the language of one's ethnic group which is also the language of the linguistic environment that the learner hails from.

Interference Theory

Interference theory holds that if a learner is called upon to produce some second language forms which he has not learnt, he will tend to produce an erroneous form having its origin in his first language. Interference errors are caused by the influence of the native language, presumably those areas where the language differs markedly. Weinreich (1965) defines it as those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language.

Mother tongue (MT) interference is pronounced in the area of pronunciation. It can also be noticed to some extent in phonology, syntax, lexis and semantics. In Nigeria, most people speak English with Yoruba accent, Hausa accent, Igbo accent and so on depending on their mother tongue or first language. Alabi (2007) stresses that MT constraint has, in every possible assessment, endangered a staggering and persistent decline in the quality of English spoken in Africa. This may not make one to wonder why, in all levels of schools in Nigeria, many learners have so much difficulty with their communication skills in English such that they cannot function effectively in the academic use of English. In line with Alabi, Olaofe (2010) opines that interferences are undesirable, particularly those that affect communication and hamper proper education of the usage of the correct form of the target language.

The Gbagyi Learner and the Presence of Bilingual Codes

Interference in language performance occurs when the features of one language tend to show up in the other language as produced by the bilingual speaker. Interference therefore appears in the language performance of the Gbagyi bilingual learner because of these circumstances he has been exposed to:

- exposure to two separate or distinct languages,

- differences in the systems and features of the L1 and the L2
- acquiring or learning each code separately or singly,
- the human brain being the only source or place in which the two or more language codes are stored and applied by the learner for communication purposes, and
- the other language code intruding because the human brain does not find it easy to keep them absolutely apart.

The Gbagyi Language

Gbagyi or Gbari is the native name and the language of Gbagyi/Gbari ethnic group who are predominantly found in Central Nigeria; with a population of about 10 million people (Members of the ethnic group speak two dialects – Gbagyi-Matai and Gbagyi-Nkwa). While speakers of the dialects were loosely called Gwari by the Hausa Fulani and Europeans during pre-colonial Nigeria, they prefer to be known as Gbagyi. They live in Niger, Kaduna States and the Federal Capital Territory. They are also found in Nasarawa and Kogi States in Central Nigeria area. Gbagyi is the most populated ethic and indigenous group in the middle belt and Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria (en.m.wikipedia.org).

Dialect variation exists in Gbagyi which can be divided into two language communities. The larger community, comprising perhaps as many as four-fifth (4/5) of the Gbagyi population of about 10,000,000 (ten million) today, is spoken in all parts of Gbagyi territory, with the exception of a narrow belt along the southern Nupe boarder. In this belt the dialects of Maikunkele, Bosso, Paiko and Gawun, among other places have been relatively more influenced by Nupe language (Yusuf, 2012).

The Gbagyi Phonology

The Vowel Sounds
According to Peter A. et al., (2018), there are five vowel sounds in Gbagyi language. They are: / æ /, / e /, / i /, / ? / and / u /

Sound	Gbagyi word	English equivalent
/ æ /	azata	chatting
/ e /	begye	crowd

/i/	bigyi	grasshopper
/?/	tukwo	head
/u/	nukwo	friend, comrade

The Consonant Sounds

(a) Labial Consonants

p	with slight aspiration	papa basin
b	with slight friction	aba place
b	implosive	obyi/obwa child/hand
f	with considerable	fwazna/ofwa hunting/farm
v	with considerable friction	ovyi/avn thief/behind
m	omui/mwa	dog/borrow

(b) Alveolar Consonants

t	otnu/otna	aches/without
d	oda	father
s	osu	chief
z	oza	person
l	olu	bird
n	ona/ona	goat

(c) Palatal Consonants

c	aci	needle
j	oje	clothe
sh	shaknu	pot
zh	ozhi	egg
y	oya	mother
wy	onya	thing

(d) Velar Consonants

k	oka	snail
g	ga	give

(e) Labio-velar Consonants

kp	kpe	halt

gb	ogbe	mouth
w	awu	smoke
nw	onwu	rope

Tone System

There are three basic tones in Gbagyi: low (à), mid (ā) and high (á). Monosyllabic systems bear one of these three tones.

High Tone		Mid Tone		Low Tone	
bé	to come	gwɔ	to grind	bà	to count
mwá	to beg/borrow	sī	to pay	gwò	to receive
gyĩ	to eat	knā	to fry	gyè	to sharpen

Manifestations of Interference

Manifestation of the consequences of mother tongue on the English performance of many Gbagyi learners can be found at three major levels. These consequences mark out the features of the English as learnt and used in Nigeria. The manifestations are evident in the following areas:

1. Speech Production

This is the most obvious area of language performance in which the Gbagyi learners of English exhibit a lot of interference. Most school children (and other teachers), tend to transfer the sound characteristics of Gbagyi language into the sound characteristics of English that they produce in speech; where the sounds are similar but not exactly the same, the learners tend to produce the Gbagyi language equivalent /i/ for /a?/, /t/ for /θ/, /l/ for /r/, /d/ for /ð/, /?/ for /k/, /?/ for /?/, etc.

Consider the following:

light /l/ instead of right /r/	sister /æ/instead of sister /?/
stipend /i/ instead of stipend /ai/	fake /e/ instead of fake /ei/
tank /t/ instead of thank/θ/	television /s/ instead of television /?/
this /d/ instead of this /ð/	play /ie/ instead of pray /rei/
chemist /?/ instead of chemist /k/	leverend /l/instead of reverend /r/
money /?/ instead of money /?/	security /ku/ instead of security /kju/
cane /?/ instead of cane /k/	future /fu/ instead of future /fju/

(NEPA la nala)

- Don't put mouth in this issue. -   Don't mediate in this
                                            issue.
(To dna ?oda ye gben)
- Do you drink sugar cane? -   Do you take sugar cane?
(Ho zhna ha snu lenche?)

- Sorry for the delayment. -   Sorry for the delay.
(Bwanubo osagyi)

- That girl she is very beautiful. -   That girl is very beautiful.
(Byinkoi nwo gnyinu wo bmyalo
zam)

- My head is paining me. -   I'm having a headache.
(Tuko sna milo)

- I cannot be able to do it. -   I can't do it.
(Mi tami ma zhikon)

- We suppose to go home. -   We are supposed to go
                                              home.
(Ko kamata yalo apyi)

- Please remember me your name. -   Please remind me of your
                                    name.
(Suku-suku, pami hoye)

- People die because of hungry
every day   -   People die because of
                                          hunger every day.
(Aza fyi miknwu fyi fegyi-fegyi).

- You are chopping my time. -   You are wasting my time.
(Ho gyi mi salo)

- He is not fine. -   He is not handsome.
(Woto bmya lon)

- Sleep is disturbing me. -   I'm feeling sleepy.
(Ogye zhi milo)

- Come and go to your house. -   Go to your house.
(Be halo hayi)

- Don't enter my car. -   Don't board my car.
(To lo mi maton)

- I by name Vadim.   - My name is Vadim.
  (*Ayi minu Vadim*)

3. The Choice of Words and Expression

This is another area interference manifest. What Gbagyi learners of English try to do is to find existing English word to describe local settings. In most cases, such equivalents may not be used in the same way as done by the native speakers of English. For example, persons in the extended family who may not be related in the way the native speakers of English language refer to them.

step mother	-	second mum
cousin	-	sister/brother
niece	-	daughter
nephew	-	son
uncle	-	father
aunt	-	mother

The choice of some verbs and pronouns in certain constructions also shows lexical transfer from the Gbagyi language into English. For instance, 'Dami <u>have</u> come', instead of 'Dami <u>has</u> come', 'Me and my junior brother' instead of 'My younger brother and I' or 'I'm <u>running</u> my degree programme' instead of 'I've enrolled for my degree programme', 'The man <u>splitted</u> with his wife yesterday' instead of 'the man <u>split</u> with his wife yesterday'. 'I don't have <u>much</u> books' instead of 'I don't have <u>many</u> books'.

The manifestation of interference is also obvious in code mixing and code switching.

- Ateacher vyenya nalo workshop (The whole teachers attended the workshop).
- I don't understand woto vyinkwoin (I don't understand s/he has no shame).
- Vyiwyi to bmyan, I told him (Stealing is not good, I told him).
- Hello, fwakwo kwa wakau completely (Hello, allow it to dry completely).

The Gbagyi second language learners also encounter difficulty with decoding the meanings of English idioms and figurative expressions. However, that does not mean there are no idioms, proverbs and figurative expressions in Gbagyi

language. Consider the following:

-	Joy in suffering	-	Be my guest
-	Less is more	-	Clear the air
-	Sunday is a good day to die	-	In your birthday suit
-	Not for the tea in China	-	Rain on your parade
-	The child is the father of the man	-	Slap on the wrist
-	Out of the woods	-	on tenterhooks
-	Over the moon	-	Chicken and egg situation
-	Poverty in wealth	-	On all fours
-	Speaking with the both sides of the mouth		

Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper has attempted to highlight some of the manifestations of Gbagyi language on the learning of English language. Throughout the paper, the guiding factor was the language interference. That is to state that the mother tongue (Gbagyi) actually interferes with the learning and proficiency of English as a second language. This is seen in the cases of speech production, grammatical structure and the choice of words and expression. Mother interference is solvable but an extremely complex problem. It needs strong commitment and intense effort for a period of time. Some of these interferences abound as a result of the inconsistencies in the rules of English language and lack of correlation between phonetic and orthographic features. However, with constant formal instruction and training, in both primary and secondary schools, second language negative transfer can be minimized if not eliminated. Teaching of pronunciation and other aspects of second language teaching should be an integral part of an English teaching programme from the early stages, and it must not be a luxury to be left to the advanced level studies of the language. It must be borne in mind that during language teaching, some certain methods or techniques (such as drilling, phonemic chart, and vocabulary word map, self-correction strategy, etc) should be applied because the task is not a simple one, on the contrary it must be the essential part of language teaching programme.

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