

Mother Tongue Interference In The Use Of English In Secondary Schools In Oshimili South Local Government Area Of Delta State

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Abstract

The study was designed to examine mother tongue interference in the use of English in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State. Three research questions were formulated for the study. The study adopted survey design. The target population of the study consists of 164 English teachers from 12 public Secondary schools in Oshimili South L.G.A. of Delta State. The sample of the study was Ninety-two (92) respondents. Stratified and random sampling technique was used to obtain the sample. Data collected from respondents were obtained using structured questionnaire and analysed using mean and standard deviation. The results of the analysis revealed that mother tongue negatively influenced communication in English Language. Poor socio-economic background of learners, media of learning, cultural factors, deficiencies in pedagogic method by teachers, knowledge and personality of teachers, amongst others were factors responsible for students' inability to learn English in the study area. Number of dialects found is so large that it is practically impossible to address all the accents in a classroom. The study recommended amongst other that Teachers of English Language are reminded that teaching of English Language should not be geared towards passing examination in English per se; rather the emphasis should be on competence of students in writing, reading and speaking as well. This will help in

no small measure in making them understand not only English but all other subjects that are taught in English Language.

Keywords: English Language, mother tongue, Interference

Introduction

The importance of English language acquisition as a stepping-stone for proficiency in other school subjects cannot be over emphasized. The knowledge is important for educational, economical and national development of a country. The importance of English language as a school subject derives mainly from its utilitarian value to the larger Nigerian society. English is the official language of administration and commerce. It is the major language of science. Above all, Salami (2012) had emphasized the importance of the use of English language in improving communication among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. He further highlighted the need for improving the quality of spoken and written English language among school children.

English is without a doubt the actual universal language. It is the world's second largest native language, the official language in 70 countries, and English-speaking countries are responsible for about 40% of the world's total GNP. English is very important in this modern world. Apart from our mother tongue, we need to have a common language which makes us able to communicate with other parts of the world. English is the common language which is known to most of the people in the world. It is very important to have good English because effective communication can reach people better. English words used must be simple so that it can reach the people easily as well as easily understood by everyone. Nowadays English is being taught to children at primary school level. Students are strictly made to speak in English when they are in college premises. Communicating in English has quite a big role in day-to-day life. English is used in banks, railway stations, bus stations, airways, educational sector, medical, and private sectors. English is a trade language with other countries.

However, one of the current educational problems of public interest is the influence of mother-tongue on the acquisition of what is taught by the teachers of English to students during English lessons, hence hindering the realization of expected communication skills. Mother tongue (MT) refers to the language which a group of people, considered to be the inhabitants of an area, acquire in their early years and which normally becomes their natural instrument of

thought and communication (Awoniyi, 2014). In essence, each particular language in the world (i.e. Ibibio, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, English, French, and German) is a mother tongue of a particular place and time. In Nigeria, English coexists with about 250 Nigerian indigenous languages. This language contact and interaction situation has produced reciprocal influences between English language and Nigeria's indigenous languages (Akere, 2015).

An analysis of the utterances of those who teach or learn English in Delta State which Oshimili South L.G.A. is part of, showed hybridization in morphological and syntactic structures in English patterns resulting from the interaction between English and mother tongue (Akere, 2015). Research studies on the bilingual situation in Nigeria using contrastive analysis of English and Nigerian languages (mother's tongue) reveal some interference features and pedagogical defects in the methodological orientation of those who teach and learn English in Nigeria (Brown, 2016).

In a country where there are at least 250 indigenous languages (mother tongues), there are odds against the Nigerian student in learning English, because the student is automatically placed at a disadvantage when he already has a language of his/her own and he is being asked to learn another language (Adamu-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2018). An analysis of senior secondary school certificate results in English between 2016 and 2018 by Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2018), shows that the percentage of failure in English language is increasing with 53.36% in 2016 and 72.7 1% in 2018. This poor performance is attributed to the lack of a rich and stimulating language environment needed for the development of verbal and intellectual skills needed for language learning during the formative years and beyond. This lack of English language skills, have impacted negatively on the academic performance of the Secondary school leavers (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu 2018). For instance, Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2018) indicated that Secondary school graduate skills have deteriorated over the past decade. This is particularly evident in two areas; poor mastery of the English language and lack of requisite technical skills. These shortcomings were particularly observed in oral and written communication and applied technical skills.

These deficiencies, the World Bank Report said, mother-tougue have made the secondary school leavers in Nigeria unproductive and unfit for the labour market and sometimes the larger society and this has been socially costly to the country (Akujobi & Chukwu, 2014). The report traced the deficiencies in English to insufficient academic preparation and communication,

necessary for social interaction in the work place, school and for functional literacy. It is against this background the study seeks to examine mother's tongue interference in the use of English in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine mother's tongue interference in the use of English in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine mother tongue challenges students face in the use of spoken English in Secondary Schools Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State
2. identify factors responsible for the students' inability to learn English as a second language
3. determine the perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What mother tongue challenges do students face in the use of spoken English in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State?
2. What are the factors responsible for the students' inability to learn English as a second language?
3. What is perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State State?

Research Methodology

Area of the Study

Oshimili South Local Government Area headquarters is located at the town of Asaba. It has an area of 603 km² and a population of 149,603 at the 2006 census. The names of the secondary schools in the study area include: Agulu Secondary School, Asagba Mixed Secondary School, Basic Secondary School, Government Model Secondary School, Isioma Onyeobi College, Niger Mixed Secondary School, Oko Mixed Secondary School, Okwe Secondary School, Osadenis Mixed Secondary School, West-End Mixed Secondary School, Zappa Basic Secondary School and Zappa Mixed Secondary School.

Research Design

The research design for this study is descriptive survey design. Mouley (2003) and Kerlinger (2003) observe that survey design is used to gather data from a large population at a particular point in time, with the intention of describing the nature of the existing situation in order to plan for the future.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of 164 English teachers from 12 public Secondary schools in Oshimili South L.G.A. of Delta State

Sample and Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 92 respondents. Eight (8) teachers were randomly selected from each of the 12 schools (Strata) to make the sample of the study

Instrument for Data collection

Structured questionnaire was used for data collection in the study. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A elicited the personal information of the respondents while part B was divided into sections A, B & C, based on the specific purpose of the study. Section A elicited responses to the challenges that mother tongue brings to students in the use of spoken English in secondary schools; Section B elicited information on factors responsible for the students' inability to learn English as a second language. Section C elicited the perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State. Four scale responses were used as follows: strongly agree (4); agree (3); disagree (2); strongly disagree (1).

Validation of Instrument

Two experts from Department of Educational Administration (English Unit), Delta State University, Abraka were requested to review the questionnaire items to: determine the accuracy; relevance; clarity and total coverage of the content; determine the appropriateness of the instruction to the respondents; and evaluate the suitability and adequacy of the questionnaire in line with research variables. The corrections were incorporated into the final version of the instrument.

Method of Data Collection

Data were collected from the respondents with the help of two research assistants who were trained in the distribution and collection of instruments from respondents. The researcher and the assistants collected the questionnaire from the government secondary schools where the instrument was administered. Ninety (97.9%) out of 92 copies of the instrument distributed were duly retrieved

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected from the field were analyzed using the statistical tools. Frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations were used for the research questions. Items with mean value of 2.50 and above were accepted while items with mean value of less than 2.50 were rejected.

Results

Table 1: Demographic information of respondents (N=90)

| Characteristics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Designation | | |
| Principal | 23 | 25.55 |
| Teachers | 67 | 74.44 |
| Total | 90 | |
| Years of Experience | | |
| 1 – 3 | - | - |
| 4 – 6 | 03 | 3.33 |
| 7 – 9 | 37 | 41.11 |
| 10 – 12 | 15 | 16.67 |
| Above 12 | 35 | 38.88 |

Field Work, 2019

The result in Table 1 showed that most (74.44%) of the respondents were teachers while 25.55% were principals. Response on years of experience indicated that 54.88% of the respondents were have years of experience above 9 years while 44.44% of them have experience below 9 years.

Research Question 1

What challenges does the mother tongue bring to students in the use of spoken English in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State?

Table 2: Mean responses on challenges mother tongue brings to students in the use of spoken English (N=90)

| S/N | Statement items | Mean | SD | Remark |
|-----|---|------|------|--------|
| 1 | Differences between the forms and meanings of English and those of the native language | 3.73 | 0.62 | Agreed |
| 2 | Problem of phoneme replacement, arising from non-existence of certain phonemes in certain dialect of mother tongue | 3.59 | 0.74 | Agreed |
| 3 | Problem of using the target language because they have already attained communicative competence in their native language | 3.43 | 0.77 | Agreed |
| 4 | Learner selects features of his own language that approximates to that of the target language | 3.68 | 0.68 | Agreed |
| 5 | Transliteration | 3.63 | 0.81 | Agreed |

Field Work, 2019

The result in Table 2 showed that statement items had a mean range of 3.43 to 3.73. The means were above the cut-off points of 2.50. The respondent agreed that the identified items were challenges mother tongue brings to students in the use of spoken English in the study area. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.62 to 0.81. This indicated that respondents were unanimous in their responses.

Research Question 2

What are the factors responsible for the students' inability to learn English as a second language?

Table 3: Mean responses on factors responsible for students' inability to learn English as a second language (N=90)

| S/N | Statement items | Mean | S.D | Remark |
|-----|---|------|------|-----------|
| 1 | Poor Socio-Economic Background of Learners | 3.51 | 0.63 | Agreed |
| 2 | Media of Learning English | 3.31 | 0.72 | Agreed |
| 3 | Cultural Factors | 3.06 | 0.74 | Agreed |
| 4 | Deficiencies in Pedagogic Methods by teachers | 3.51 | 0.78 | Agreed |
| 5 | Knowledge and Personality of teachers | 2.01 | 0.68 | Disagreed |

| | | | | |
|---|--|------|------|--------|
| 6 | Pupil-teacher relationship | 3.03 | 0.54 | Agreed |
| 7 | Attitude of the students towards English | 3.45 | 0.67 | Agreed |

Field Work, 2019

The result in Table 3 showed that the respondents agreed that most of the identified statement items were factors responsible for students' inability to learn English as a second language in the study area. The statement items had a mean range of 2.01 to 3.51. The means were above the cut-off points of 2.50, apart from item 5 which mean score was below cut-off. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.54 to 0.78. This indicated that respondents were unanimous in their responses.

Research Question 3

What is the perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A of Delta State?

Table 4: Mean responses on the perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in Secondary Schools in Oshimili South L.G.A (N=90)

| S/N | Statement items | Mean | S.D | Remark |
|-----|---|------|------|-----------|
| 1 | Learner's attempt to produce utterance in mother's tongue is influenced not only by the sounds that exist in his mother tongue but also by their distribution and phonetic status | 2.64 | 0.82 | Agreed |
| 2 | Morphological and syntactical systems are often transferred directly from the mother tongue to utterances in English language | 3.01 | 0.87 | Agreed |
| 3 | Mother tongue interferes with handling of English tenses, the use of countable and uncountable nouns, articles and prepositions | 3.02 | 0.52 | Agreed |
| 4 | There is considerable linguistic confusion and difficulty on the part of a child who thinks in his mother tongue, but tries to express himself in foreign language | 2.51 | 0.73 | Agreed |
| 5 | Syntactic errors found in first language inhibit acquisition of English skills and thus performance of | 2.14 | 0.73 | Disagreed |

learners in English

| | | | | |
|---|--|------|------|--------|
| 6 | Interference is either positive or negative transfer of the linguistic knowledge of a language into performance in the other | 2.81 | 0.77 | Agreed |
|---|--|------|------|--------|

Field Work, 2019

The result in Table 4 showed that the statement items on the perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in secondary schools had a mean range of 2.14 to 3.02. Most of the means were above the cut-off value of 2.50. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.52 to 0.87. This indicated that respondents were unanimous in their responses.

Discussion of Findings

Challenges mother tongue brings to students in the use of spoken English

The result in Table 2 indicates that difference in forms and meaning of English and those of the native language, problem of phoneme replacement, problem of using the target language, learners selects features of his language and transliteration were challenges mother tongue brings to students in the use of spoken English. This indicated that mother tongue negatively influence communication in English Language. In relation to the findings, Sriprabha (2015) indicates that Mother tongue disrupts the smoothness of communication. Students with lack of confidence tend to use mother tongue instead of proper English. Wang and Frank (2002), suggests that Language reflects culture and tends to control or influence processes used to think and to perceive. Thus, sometimes, the barriers are not due to the use of words in the language, but the ways the speakers speak or how the listeners perceive.

Factors responsible for the students' inability to learn English as a second language

The result in Table 3 showed that poor socio-economic background of learners, media of learning, cultural factors, deficiencies in pedagogic method by teachers, knowledge and personality of teachers, attitudes of the students towards English in the study area. The findings are line with opinion of Kolawole and Dele (2012) also confirmed that the performance of the primary school pupils in English language was very poor. They stressed further that the standard was poor due to a number of other reasons such as: the use of tribal language in the lower classes

of the primary school; some pupils do not understand the grammar because their teachers themselves do not know it; and in most cases English language teachers in the senior primary schools resort to the use of mother tongue to teach and explain the English language even up to the secondary school level. Also, Tomori, (2014) stated that the influence of latent English language is very small and often pernicious. For instance, newspaper reading is very poor and so the child hardly forms a reading habit at home. There are very few children pictures, books and paper magazines, published in Nigeria in English. Added to this, Nigerian dailies are expensive, dull and rarely entertaining. Only very few of them have children columns and more often than not, the language used is not simple enough to get across to the primary school child (Tomori 2014). Most Radio English programmes targeting the school children are on during school hours, but the schools hardly tune in because they fear it might interrupt with the normal timetable.

Perception of teachers on mother tongue interference on the performance of students in English Language in Secondary Schools

The result in Table 4 indicated that teachers percept that amongst others that learner's attempt to produce utterance in mother's tongue is influenced not only by the sounds that exist in his mother tongue but also by their distribution and phonetic status, morphological and syntactical systems are often transferred directly from the mother tongue to utterances in English language, mother tongue interferes with handling of English tenses, the use of countable and uncountable nouns, articles and prepositions. This implies that teachers have the experience that learner picks up the skill from general classroom activities and instructions over a period of time is a false assumption made. As a result, the learners are not able to develop this skill and hence lack confidence while conversing in English. In support to the findings, Sriprabha (2015) indicated that one strong reason that could be attributed to this could be that number of dialects found is so large that it is practically impossible to address all the accents in a classroom. This is serious challenge in the Nigerian classrooms. The areas of sound relating to spoken English and to pronunciation in the Nigerian context needs to be consciously addressed to counter this challenge and to make native-like accent in Nigerian learners more plausible.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that mother tongue negatively influenced the secondary school students' use of English in Oshimili South L.G.A. of Delta State. Mother tongue disrupted the

smoothness of communication especially between teacher-student. Other factors that inhibited students to learn English include socio-cultural background, media of learning and poor pedagogic method use by English Teachers to English Language.

The findings from English language teachers in the secondary school affirmed that their students lack communicative command required in English language. On the whole, the use of English language is poor and if the discovered factors are not tackled on time, it will cause a drastic decline in standard of education in the study area, State and the country at large. These challenges should be corrected by English Teachers in the Classroom

Recommendations

1. Since mother tongue hinders the advancement of English language among day secondary school students, administration and teachers should enforce rules to ensure that mother-tongue is not used in schools in Oshimili South LGA of Delta State.
2. Schools should provide essential resources and facilities such libraries in order to provide an enabling environment for the acquisition of English in secondary schools in Oshimili South LGA of Delta State.
3. Teachers of English Language are reminded that teaching of English Language should not be geared towards passing examination in English per se; rather the emphasis should be on competence of students in writing, reading and speaking as well. This will help in no small measure in making them understand not only English but all other subjects that are taught in English Language.
4. Student should not focus on punishment meted to those who break rules on speaking and writing English if constituted by the authority but focus on how they can improve their use of English. This will help to improve their proficiency in use of English

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