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## AN OVERVIEW OF PROBLEMS OF LANGUAGE/COMMUNICATION

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### **Introduction**

In this paper we will consider general language problems arising from the learning of such language as a second language, we believe that, because of competence and performance of the native speakers, much problem is not observed with the mother language, except where the problem is medical/ biological. We will therefore concentrate mostly in this presentation on the second language speakers. Meaning that whether intentionally or non-intentionally, some problems must be recorded in second language. The problem such as interference, lack of effective learning and teaching methods and materials among other things may be the obstacles. We will therefore concentrate on these problems one after the others with their possible solutions.

To have good insight to our discussion, we will define two concepts that are paramount in the understanding of the topic. i.e language

### **Abstract**

*The research work intends to look into the general problems associated with language and communication among Nigerians and subsequently provides relevant solutions to each of the problems. The aim of the research work is to acquaint these problems and solutions to Nigerians, especially, the students so as to assist them in their compulsory learning of English as second language. The theoretical frame work is a descriptive survey. The researcher collated his data through the methodology, called "observation". Hence, the government, students and language users from different backgrounds were thoroughly observed. From the observation, two broad problems of linguistics and non-linguistics problems were*

*Identified with their solutions such as government policy; good teaching and practice were identified among others.*

**Keywords:** *problem, language, communication, linguistics, Nigerians*

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and communication. Language is part of communication and even the most effective means of communication for the fact that it involves the use of vocal apparatus, unlike other means of communication, such as symbol, gestures, signs, facial expression or body movement.

Crystal (1985: 282) observed that of all the means of communication, language is the most frequently used and most highly developed. What is the role language plays in a society? Brown and Yule (1983) have answered that language is used for interaction and transaction. Thus implies that all human daily routine are propelled by language.

## **PROBLEMS**

Having briefly gone through language and communication, their problems are spelt below one after the others along with their solution;

## **NON- LINGUISTIC PROBLEM AND SOLUTION**

Government Altitude can be shown through:

### a. Government policy

All languages, even the acquired language (L1) is supposed to be given much planning by the government of any nation. Through this, every individual will know roles the language in question is playing in that society. Everybody will know whether the language in question is functioning as in-group language, out-group language or language of specialized information. These professional names, must be known by every individual; he/ she must know at which particular setting he speaks his first language and other languages. All these we have explained shows that government's altitude is one of the problems of language and communication. The former Tanzanian president (Nyerere) made the Swahili language to become national language through positive altitude to language of the Kenyan (Quate). He therefore protects the linguistic right of all the 'Kenyan' by speaking their language anywhere with confidence. Also, protect the language

right of Swahili by making it developed and used publicly as many languages of the world. On the other hands, Nigeria government, using multilingualism as an excuse is having negative altitude to language policy/ planning that is why Nigeria languages are being down-graded for English language. Negative altitude of the government, being one of the problems of language can be tackled by the government through being positive and therefore create some policy to encourage development of our languages.

b. Finance

If the government can finance in the language development through Setting up committee for the development of the native languages, through increasing its vocabulary for technological objects, by coining, borrowing and agreeing with the phonological constraints of our language or even forming a new word from already existing words in the language. Like this, Swahili was planned to have achieved its international position today ( see --- for more on Swahili language.

c. Employment of qualified teacher

Government positive altitude can also be shown through creating qualified teachers for the teaching of the languages in the school, because school is one of the great instruments for the dissemination of a language.

d. Creation of teaching aid

Accompanying with these is provision of teaching aids, such text books for learning of language. A good projector is also needed, especially in teaching oral aspect of language.

e. Provision of conducive classroom

The government should provide a conducive classroom setting. For instance, teaching language under trees can assist in learning language

## LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

a. Linguistic Interference

Linguistic interference of second language (L2) with first language (L1). As a result of contact, (a situation when two or more languages co-exist in the same environment), there must be inference, whether in language teaching or in ordinary communication with the languages. A multilingual or, in the least, bilingual who uses more than a language in

an extended form tends to have this linguistic phenomenon. When two or more languages are brought in contact via an alternating use by the same person, the tendency to transfer the linguistic features of the more grounded code- usually the first language- into the second is higher. This arises owing to the differences in the two languages in contact. For instance, English Language being the second language in Nigeria will be taken as a practical experiment in this our discussion. Obviously, it is the language of communication in our classrooms in Nigeria, some pupils have acquired communicative competence of the language right from home while some had their first contact with it in the classroom. When some Yoruba speakers of English language speak for instance, it is noticed that 'received' rhythm as well as some phonological features are not present. Instead, some features of the mother tongue (MT) are manifested in the speech. This phenomenon is simply called Interference which is one of the problems of languages/communication. The following quotation from shows that interference is a problem of languages:

*"To some linguist, interference is seen as errors in the learner's use of foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue"(Alabi: 2007)*

Learning of native language takes place in a very natural way and through proper imitation and exposition. The language listening and speaking skills are learnt at home while reading and writing skills are learned at schools. Children have more exposure to the use of their native language and possibility of getting corrected is higher. Native language is learnt by birth, but the process of second language learning is quite different. The language listening and speaking skills precede reading and writing at school. Learning of second language is an artificial process, and mistakes are not corrected on the spot (Radhika & Kala, 2013).

The interference of Native language in learning English as a second language is generally a lifelong experience. Learners never manage to shake off the lexical stress pattern of their native language in their English oral production. Children learn their mother tongue by imitation, but when learning a second language, they face difficulties of accepting the rules different from that of their mother tongue.

Therefore, the interference of native language is felt in their language learning and communication. Interference can be described as deviations in a learners' use of a foreign language which can be traced back to the learners' first language that has been acquired before. However, interference included those errors that occur in the learning of a second language (Sinha et al., 2009; Radhika & Kala, 2013).

So, the term errors here is a problem, and more of the types of these will be discussed from number three (3) with their relevant solution.

- i. Phonological interference- these happen in six major way following Weinreich's (1968) identification of four. These are: Under-differentiation, Over-differentiation, Re-interpretation of sound, Phonemic substitution, Hypercorrection Epenthesis and simplification. *Under-differentiation*: occurs where two or more phonemic segment which are acoustically contrastive but appear similar are confused. Here, one sound in the MT, for instance, is used for many sounds in the target language (TL). A case we are explaining can be seen in the English vowel system which is more elastic than those of Nigerian languages ; for example / /, / /, /3:/ and /a:/ as in words father, cat, birth and star respectively may all be replaced with the cardinal /a/ by the Nigeria speaker of English. *Over-differentiation*: this occurs where language speaker pronounces a single phoneme in many different ways which are not in any ways allophonic. An example is when an average Hausa man pronounces /p/ as /f/ and vice versal. *Re-interpretation*: coincides with a case where a speaker gives a totally different sequence of phonemic cues in the target language. This is otherwise known as sequence of error of re-ordering. For instance, an average Yoru/;.ba learning English may call 'ask' 'aks' . *Substitution*: is a major type of phonological interference triggered by language contact phenomenon, owing to the differences of phono-structural rudiment of the language, substitution becomes an handy results when the speaker is confronted with an 'alien' segment in his speech. What he does is to look for the closest approximation of the sound in his MT with which the "alien" will be replaced. This case is very common in Nigeria. For example, the absence of inter-dental fricative/ ð / AND / ə / in major Nigeria languages calls for their

replacement with /t/ and /d/ ( with /z/ for / / in some cases), as in the words: theme being pronounced as team. *Hypercorrection*: arises as a result of over-sensitivity to contrasting features in the target language. A typical illustration of this is characteristic of a Nigeria who is prepared at all cost to learn an alien sound in the target language. Such an individual may over-generalization or over-do it to the extent that certain segment he is already familiar with in his mother tongue are now misinterpreted. For example “watch” for wash, “zoak” for soak. *Epenthesis*: is a superfluous insertion of vowel segment as a way of alleviating the complexity of consonant consonant which characterize English. This unfamiliar segmental patterning is indigenized by infiltrating it with phonemic peculiarities of the Nigerian Languages. For instance, buread for bread. *Simplification*: occurs when clusters with up to three or four consecutive consonants are reduced to two or three. E.g, sixth’s /siksθs/ is reduced to /siks/.

- i. *Lexical interference*- Weinreich (1968) describes this as transfer of meanings in language most especially through borrowing. However, owing to the fact that language varies in alignment with contact with new ideas and development, with meaning being shifted or extended in new context, “lexical” may not be adequate enough to describe this phenomenon. “Lexical-semantic” is a more recent coinage which has become established as a concept which encapsulates. In functional terms, ‘mutation’ and permutation of meanings of lexical items conveyed on a given occasion of use. Adebija (1989) and Bamiro’s (1991) theses on lexico-semantic variation (interference) of English as second language in Nigeria.
- ii. Grammatical interference – this implies a transfer of the grammatical system of one language into another. This is noticeable in the areas of pronouns; for instance, in relation to politeness phenomenon in Yoruba where “they” is used to refer to singular “won” in B’s response below:
- A. Where is your father?  
B. They have gone to the farm.

(Notice the implication of the plural subject on the auxiliary verb too)-



Morphological generalization (as in affixation like suffering- “ness” for suffering un-appropriate for in appropriate.) is another major area of concern that is instigated by a carry-over of the analogizing process( Wilkins, 1990) in the L1 in to the use of L2. Question tag( and answer) in expression of even the educated users in Nigeria reflected MT- constrained variation. This idea is captured in the example that follows:

*He is you friend, isn't it instead of isn't he*

*You mean she is not your mother?*

*Yes, she isn't-instead of “No, she isn't”.*

Kraft and Kirk-Greene (1973) while using Hausa as example of interference stated that English adjectives cannot stand alone with an article as sentence subjects or objects. For example, ‘the big went home’ is incorrect in English, but in Hausa it is correct to say ‘*babba ya tafi gida*’, meaning, the big (one) went home. Another difference as identified by Muhammed (1978) is that adjective in Hausa can come before or after the noun. For instance, it is incorrect in English to say ‘car white’ instead of ‘white car’, but in Hausa it is correct to say ‘*mootaa faraa*’ meaning ‘white car’ or ‘*farar mootaa*’ meaning the same as “white car” in English. It is tacitly assumed in Hausa linguistic literature that an adjective in pre-position means the same as those in post-position.

Other problems faced by students in learning English sentence structure include the use of pronominal, the order of adjectives, the use of the determiners, possessives, and predicatives (Adeyanju,1972). Several studies revealed that non-native speakers of English language face problems in knowing the correct order of adjectives, especially when there is more than one adjective qualifying a noun. For example, Zawahreh (2013) asserted that the process of finding the correct equivalents of Arabic adjectives in English language by TEFL students when they translate from Arabic to English is considered a highly challenged issue. This indicates that the process of choosing the correct equivalents of adjectives in English might be difficult and misleading for EFL learners in most cases.

During the process of English learning, students mostly face difficulties in using adjectives especially when they write descriptions. Non-native

speakers of English mostly think in and use the pattern of their first language (L1) rather than the second language (L2) (Omar,2012).

- iii. Another problem of language is **code-mixing and code-switching** are two important aspects of sociolinguistics given their use in the society. In a society where every individual speaks more than one language, there is usually a language naturally influenced by the others one(s). therefore , **code-mixing and code-switching** are features of language contact and bilingualism. Hamers and blanc (1989: 35) say code mixing is “the use of elements of one language in another language” (for example, the use of English –lexemes in a Yoruba conversation). Hudson (1996:53) says the purpose of code-mixing is to symbolize ambiguous situation..... the write takes words from one language and mix it with few words from another language”. Oloruntoba- Oju(1999) asserts that code-mixing occurs when elements of two or more linguistic systems are randomly mixed it is often an illocutionary act in naturally occurring conversation. Code-switching refers to a change-over from one semiotic mode to another in other to accommodate other kinds of variety dialects and registers.
- iv. **Pidgin**: just as language may develop varieties in the form of dialects and argots, languages as a whole may change (Latin, for example, evolved into the different Romance Languages). Sometimes rapid language change occurs as a result of contact between people with different linguistics background. In such circumstances, a new language called a pidgin may arise. Pidgins are based on one language from which they take much of their vocabulary ( this is in sociolinguistics called **superstrate** ) but also influenced by atleast one other language ( technically called **substrate**) pidgin’s small sound system, reduced vocabulary and simplified and altered grammar shows it is a problem to standard language by affecting its communication and teaching.
- v. **Creole** : Holmes (1988:6) defines Creole as “a language with jargon or pidgin in its ancestry; it is used by natives of a community often, whose ancestral ties, geographical and socio-cultural identities are broken”. Romaine (2001) says “Creole is a nativized pidgin, expanded in form and function to meet the communicative need of



a Native society. It should be noted here that when speaker of a pidgin have children who learn pidgin as their first language, that language is then called **Creole**. By itself, it is a problem to standard language by affecting its teaching and communication, such that speakers of standard varieties may not even understand both pidgin and Creole.

- vi. **Diaglosia: diglosia** was introduced as into English from French by ferguson (1959) ferguson (cited in Hudston ( 1996: 49-50), defines diglosia as stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialect there is a highly codified super-imposed variety, learned by formal instruction for formal transaction. Ferguson identifies high and low a variety which differs in dialect, prestige, acquisition and stability. The low is acquired the first language, usually enjoys low prestige while H is learned by formal education. Fishman (1971:74) extend the term to include varieties of a language and languages. For example, in Paraguay, Spanish is the H language and Guarani (an Indian language unrelated to to Spanish) is L language. This itself is a problem of language teaching and communication because it affects linguistics right/ language right.

- vii. Language Shift, Loss and death.

Language is used to describe a change from the habitual use of a language to another. This situation arises when a given language is disused , not given priority or in the sociolinguistic sense, not maintained over a period of time owing to a switch to another for status, demographic, institutional, political or religious reasons. On the other hand, language loss is consequent upon language shift. Appel & muysken (1987: 42) write that:

As a language loses territory in a given community, speakers will become less proficient in it. In linguistic minority groups children will often speak the language of the group less well than their parents... the loss of lexical skills in the minority language goes hand in hand... words in the dominant language are replacing words in the minority language.

The foregoing implies that a shift from use of language 'A' for instance to another instigates loss on the part of language 'A' owing to a recessive impact arising from its disuse. Where this trend

continues ceaselessly unabated, death would be staring the language in question at the face. It is however arguable that while language shift and loss are realistic phenomena, language death; as in its total extinction is quite uncommon. Even though there appears to be zero speaker of the language in the native environment, speakers who have migrated to other territories still carry on the linguistic legacies of such a language.

In the Nigeria case, language shift and language loss are noticeable especially with respect to indigenous language which have suffered serious backlash effect from the ever-increasing premium placed on English at the expense of local languages. This explains why borrowing, code-mixing, code-switching and interlarding have come to stay in our day-to-day use of indigenous languages in Nigeria.

### **SOLUTIONS TO LINGUISTIC PROBLEM**

These errors might reflect poor academic performance amongst the students. Therefore, the students should develop both English speaking and reading culture, and their teachers should encourage them, since language learning requires constant practice.

Kannan (2009) stated that twelve years of study might not make students master English language. Also, students are being taught in schools that mastery of English requires constant practice and patience. This kind of feeling that prevails among students makes them think that achieving fluency in English language is impossible. The author suggested that to address these problems, English teachers have to encourage the students to talk in English and make them feel confident. By taking extra care, English teachers can create studentfriendly or learner-centric environment, as students will actively participate in the English classes. Amer (2013) also posited that one of the major causes of committing errors is assumed to be the linguistic differences between L1 and L2.

Amer (2013) used descriptive analytical method to describe the differences between

English and Arabic position and order of adjectives, and analysed the pedagogical implication for teaching adjectives in both languages. The study found that the position and order of English adjectives are problematic for

students, due to the differences in structure of both languages. The author suggested that English should be taught inductively and not deductively, so that learners can use adjectives easily and appropriately. Similarly, Firas (2013) found that the process of finding and choosing the correct equivalents of Arabic adjectives in English language is difficult and misleading among students because of the problematic differences between Arabic adjectives and their possible equivalents in English.

### CONCLUSION

So far, we have seen problems of languages, which are broadly divided into two; linguistic and non linguistic problems. Non-Linguistic problems are majorly solved by government and stake- holders in the society, while linguistic problems, such as interference, pidgin, among others are majorly solved by government, stake-holders and other language users.

### RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that government and leaders of the society should make policy that will mandate using our indigenous Nigeria languages for official purpose as was done for Kswahili in Kenya. In doing this, a strong committee needs to be put in place for selection of National indigenous language, from Hausa Yoruba or Igbo, Ebira, Mumuye etc and implementation through teaching, propagating and punishing the defaulter

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