

MOTHER TONGUE AS A VERITABLE INSTRUMENT IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN A LINGUISTICALLY MIXED ENVIRONMENT BY

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ABSTRACT

Mother Tongue is a veritable tool due to several reasons. It is vital in framing the thinking and emotions of people. Learning to speak in the mother tongue is very necessary for a child's Comprehensive development. Being fluent in it, which is also known as the native language benefits the child in numerous ways. It associates him to his culture, ensures enhanced cognitive development and support in the learning of other languages. This paper therefore focuses on the question on whether there is a use of the Li in second language teaching classes. If yes, to what extent and in what occasion is it used? The paper examines and collaborates the methodological strategies that English teachers employ in other to accommodate and facilitate the need of the students who have been raised and educated in a multilingual setting. Three research questions were raised and data collected were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. In conclusion, the findings from this study suggest that balanced and careful use of Li in the English Language classes seem not to affect the students' exposure to the target language. It can even be beneficial of the learning process and may be needed for increasing comprehension. Finally the study recommended that to develop the quality of education, language policies need to take care of mother tongue learning. Models of education which ignore the mother tongue in the early years can be unproductive, ineffective and have a negative effect on children's learning. Mother tongue teaching at least in the early years can enable teachers to teach and learner to learn further effectively.

Keywords: Mother tongue, veritable instrument, English Language, Second Language, Linguistically mixed environment.

Introduction

Language as a system of arbitrary vocal system which human beings employ conventionally is used for the purpose of communication. It is a system of communication by vocal sounds within the group of people who use it to convey meaning. Language is conventionally meaning-laden at the disposal of man, and is used by man to convey ideas, thoughts, emotions, as well as helps man to understand his fellow man and the environment around him. Novelists, poets, playwrights are people, generally often use language without much attention to its nature, essence and function. This is not the case among many contemporary philosophers, for whom language and knowledge are deeply enmeshed in each other.

Even though not generally the case, the very founders of western civilization-Homer, Hesiod etc and Plato gave thought to the nature of language. In the dialogues- Cratylus, Sophists, Theaetetus, Plato laid down certain foundation on language that have remained current to this day.

In our contemporary period, language has been given more intellectual consideration; this involves not just mere surface interest in words, but beliefs about fundamental matters. For instance, it is language that enables us to develop the power of abstract thinking. This helps us to conceptualize and cope with those aspects of reality which are not present to us. This power of abstract thinking differentiates us from animals. It is through the acquisition of language that we become selves. For this, language is fundamental to these and other reasons linguists now take powerful and passionate interest in language.

Literature Review

Literature in this study is reviewed under two broad headings, conceptual and theoretical framework.

Conceptual Framework

Mother tongue (henceforth L1) is the language which a group of people in an area- acquired in their early years of language development and which normally becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication (Awoniyi 27). Mother –tongue according to BBC English dictionary; A dictionary for the world (1992:752); is the language a child-learns from his parent during his tender/childhood years. Bamitaye supports this new when he states that “first language or mother tongue(Li/mT) the first language a child learns to speak from childhood to adulthood. It is naturally learnt and acquired. It is the language that encodes early concepts of the child. It is also seen as “ones nature language” (The websites comprehensive dictionary of the English language 830).

In some countries, Nigeria inclusive “Mother tongue” is used to indicate the language of ones’ ethnic group in both common and journalistic jargons. A similar usage of the term was employed in Ireland early to mid-twentieth century, with Irish been referred to as the “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 not being a nature tongue for most Singaporean (Online free Wikipedia Encyclopedia)

Reinforcing Bamisaye's view Nutonkpo defines "mother tongue" as the child's first language as well as the language of the child's father or mother or of both. In this study, mother tongue will be regarded as the language of one's ethnic group which is also the language of the linguistics environment of the child.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on the theory of inter-language propounded by Selinker (1974); has it that in the head of a language learner, there are posited three different and of course conflicting linguistic codes which the learner is grappling with, namely the linguistic code of his first language, the linguistic code of the target language (TL) and a unique and separate linguistic code which he has formed for himself in his attempt to master the target language. The language learner is defined as an adult who already speaks a language that is different from the one he is learning. The unique and separate linguistic code that he has formed is viewed as a psychological language which is derived from the first and second language but which is none of the two in its entirety. The learner is in a long and progressive journey starting from his first language pressing through a lonely path of conflicting linguistics rules which he must harmonize or reformulate until he arrives at the current version of the rules of the second language which is his target.

Two relevant factors about inter-language must be mentioned role. The first is its stages and the second is its content. There stages of the inter-language continuum are given, namely the base language stage (Basilect), the middle language stage (Mesolect) and the high language stage (Acrolect). Each stage is known to be better than the preceding stage and so inter-language features as a transitional dialect which in developmentally adjusted in favour of the learner who is attempting to masters his target language. With reference to content, inter-language is also said to be the domain of the language learner's error. These errors differ in quality and kind from stage to stage. The earlier error stand a chance of being overcome with time and training but the error of the last stage are viewed as permanent or fossilized error which may be traced to a number of factors especially the speech habits of the learners first language.

As propounded by Selinker, Inter-language is caused by five factors. The first factor which is known as language to his first language. The learners' inter-language to his first language. The learner is known to be in the practice of transferring the habits and rules of his first language to the target language. Such transfer may be positive of the element transferred is also available in the target language or it may be negative where there is lack of correspondence. The second factor is transfer of training which is often traced to the fixed expressions in the mechanical drills used in teaching the target language.

Sometimes, the textbooks and quite often too, the teachers are the major instruments in this transfer of training. The third factor that causes inter-language is cited by Selinker as the strategies of second language learning. The learner is like a child who creates and tests his own hypotheses.

In the process, he may simplify the target language rules to suit his learning strategy. The error which most of our students commit in the use of the inert verb may be traced to this factor e.g.

- I am hearing you
- I am seeing you

Sehinker traces the fourth factor to the strategies of second language communication. Clearly the learner has his communication strategies especially when conversation ensues and his limited knowledge of vocabulary, structure and idiom forces him to look for paraphrases, simplifiers and ways out of a rigorous rule (avoidance). Thus, a major problem of communication strategy is the tendency by the learner to simplify the rules of his target language or in some cases to avoid the use of the rules that he has not mastered. Strategies of communication are many and varied. Some are phonological, some cultural and some idiosyncratic but they force the learner's performance to fall short of the target language norms. Since language is essentially for communication, it follows that the learner's pitfall here may be intense and systematic.

The last factor in Sehinker's inter-language is the problem of over generalization of the target language rules. Many language teachers are of course familiar with this problem as it shows again and again in the productive grammar of the students.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria in particular and of course the world over, language learning and teaching have become a major professional industry. With particular reference to the teaching of English as a second language in Nigeria, decades of the enterprise have, however, seemed to create more and more problems if not frustrating results for both the learner and the teacher as the products of years of such teaching and learning efforts at any given tier of Nigeria's education industry demonstrate regrettable proficiency levels that belie their training in second language learning and its teaching have become a major professional preoccupation of many linguists and grammarians in the country from the primary, through the secondary to the university levels and yet there are lingering inaccuracies of speech, grammar and calligraphy among learners [and we dare say among teachers too].

Nigeria has seen decades of the teaching of English in the country but widely as its use appears to be, the proficiency level is on the decline with attendant errors

Objectives of the Study

This study has the following objectives;

1. To examine the amount of L1 that English teachers use in a second language classroom in a multilingual society
2. To ascertain the usefulness of L1 in a second language classroom
3. To determine students' attitudes towards the use of L1 in English classes in a multilingual society.

Persisting in the light of the modern linguistics studies these errors are traceable to the learners' and users' inter-language due to their acquisition of the mother tongue [M.T] or LI. The statement of the problem therefore in the learning of English as a second language in multilingual society

Significant of the Study

The paper examines the students' attitudes towards the LI use in a second language classroom. It also aims to give deeper insight into why English language students prefer to use their mother tongue in their English language classes. It will reveal student perspectives and attitudes on the LI use, which will help teachers understand why their students tend to use LI and in what context.

Be aware of this fact, teachers will become aware about which material and methods should be used in order to help students learn English effectively with ease. This may lead to the eventual improvement of the students' English language skills.

Research Question

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the amount of LI that English teachers use in a second language classroom in a multilingual society?
2. Why is the LI used in a second language classroom?
3. What are the students' attitudes towards the use of LI in English classes in a multilingual society?

Methodology

This study was carried out in Ankpa Local government Area of Kogi in the 2019/2020 academic session in senior secondary school English language classes on Reading comprehension. Students filled in questionnaire and thirty (30) teachers were observed in English language classes and to what extent, as well as its role in the teaching and acquiring of the target language.

To obtain more authentic classroom data the students were not informed about the observation purpose. I have equally contacted and explained to the teachers that I will need their permission to observe their classes for methodological issues, thus the teachers were not alerted about LI usage. The researcher observed the class activities and conversation for 35 minutes. During the observation, notes about teachers and students talking in the class were recorded and observation forms were used to collect data. Observation categories were developed which selected the aspect of behaviour to be observed. Since similar observations have been conducted in previous research, the categories are mostly based on a combination of some previous studies categories and are adjusted according to this paper's research objectives.

Sampling

Participants of this study were the senior secondary school students in Ankpa L.G.A between the ages 16-18 years. The total sample consists of 100 students from different ethnic groups in the local government (Igala, Idoma, Tiv, Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo).

Instrument of Data Collection

For the purposes of this study, the following instrument were used

- Questionnaire for students. Students were asked to fill in a questionnaire with their impression about the use of LI in English class
- Classroom observation thirty teachers' classes were duly observed and observation forms were filled according to the rubrics and comments.

Method of Data Analysis

Data was analysed using quantitative and quantitative method. Their use was based on the fact that they are easier to interpret by majority of readers.

Analysis: The Likert rating scale was used with the following keys. S.A- Strongly, Agree, A- Agree, D –Disagree, SD-Strongly Disagree

TABLE 1

Research Question 1: What is the amount of LI the English language teachers' use in an L2 classroom in a multilingual society?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	DEC
1.	The student have positive attitude towards the teachers' use of L1 of a second language classroom	50 50%	30 30%	15 15%	5 5%	Agree
2	The students use their L1 when they do not understand a particular word or concept	45 45%	40 40%	8 8%	7 7%	Agree
3	The use of LI during the classes help the student to become more confident and have firm grasp of the content.	40 40%	35 35%	15 15%	10 10%	Agree
4	English teachers use of the LI helped the learn and understand English easier.	40 40%	45 45%	8 8%	7 7%	Agree

Sources: Field survey, 2021

In Research question 1 which asks on the amounts of Li that English language teachers use in an L2 classroom, Table 1 items 1, 50% of the respondents strongly agree that students have positive attitude towards the use of Li while 30 respondents representing 30% also affirm to it. If in only an insignificant number of 15% and 5% that disagree with the statement. On the usage of Li by students when they do not understand a particular concept or word, 45% and 40% of the respondents agree with the assertion on the use of Li to explain a particular concept or word not understood by students. Table 3 item 3 which sought to find out whether students are confident on the usage of Li during class session, 40% and 30% of the respondents agree with the statement while only a handful 15% and 10% disagrees. Finally 40% and 45% of the respondents affirm that Li makes students learn faster and easier. It is only 8% and 7% that disagrees with the statement.

Table 2

Research Question 2: why is the Li used in second language classroom?

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	Decision
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5	It helps the students to comprehend difficult concept and learn English better.	45 45%	35 35%	10 10%	10 10%	Agree
6	Teachers' use of the Li in an L2 classroom helped the students to become more confident to able question when they cannot comprehend complex teachers questions or instructions.	35 35%	35 35%	15 15%	15 15%	Agree
7	The use of English exclusively makes it difficult for students to understand the lesson properly.	45 45%	35 35%	15 15%	5 5%	Agree

Sources: Field survey, 2021

Research question 2 which asks why the Li is used in an L2 classroom, 45% and 35% of the respondents agree that it helps the students to comprehend difficult concepts and learn English better, which an insignificant percentage of 10% disagree with the statement.

In table 2 item 6, 35% of the respondents positively agreed that teachers use of the L1 helped the student to become more confident to ask question when they cannot comprehend complex teachers question or instruction. On the contrary, 15% both disagree and strongly disagree with the above statement.

On the use English exclusively that makes it difficult for student to understand the lesson properly 45% and 35% of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively. On the other hand 15% and 5% of the population disagree that the use of English entirely in the classroom does not make it difficult for student to comprehend the lesson

**Table 3: Research Question 3:
Student attitudes towards the use of L1 in English**

S/N	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	DEC
8	Students feel unhappy and frustrated when English is used to explain difficult concepts and complex grammatical rules.	50 50%	30 30%	10 10%	10 10%	Agree
9	Students are happy when the teacher uses L1 to explain difficult words on vocabulary and explanation of new items	45 45%	35 35%	7 7%	8 8%	Agree
10	The use of English language only in the classroom makes the lesson uninteresting and making student to exhibit negative attitude	50 50%	34 34%	8 8%	8 8%	Agree

Sources: Field survey, 2021

In table 3 item 8, 50% and 30% of the respondent agree that student feel unhappy and frustrated when English is used to explain difficult concept are complex grammatical rules. On the contrary, it is only a handful 10% of the total population that disagrees with the statement.

Item 9 in table 3, which asks whether students are happy when the teacher uses Li to explain difficult words on vocabulary and the explanation of new items, 45% and 35% of the respondents both affirm that student are happy when the teacher uses LI to explain new items or to explain

difficult concept . On the other hand, 7% and 8% disagree and strongly disagree with the above statement.

Finally in table 3 item 10, 50%and 34% of the respondent agree that the use of respondents agreed that the use of English language only makes the lesson- uninteresting and as a result students exhibit negative attitudes towards the lesson, on the other hand 8% of the respondents disagree with the statement above.

Discussion of results

Results from the questionnaire showed that students have positive attitude towards teachers' use of the Li in a second language classroom in a multilingual environment. The majority of respondents (70%) expressed a positive attitude towards using the Li answering with strongly agree and agree respectively, the results illustrate that students use their mother tongue when they do not understand a particular word or concept. They discuss with their colleague before speaking in English, ask question, and express opinions which they are not able to do in the target language. Students expressed the necessity of using the Li during the classes about helped them to become more confident. They claimed that English teachers use of the Li helped them learn and understand English better and easier students conformed that English teachers usually use the Li to explain difficult concepts used in comprehension and grammatical rules.

Furthermore on research question I, majority of the respondents confirmed that they would like their teachers to use the Li more often, adding that they would like 30% of the English period to be in the Li. As evident from the respondents answer, they always use their Li during the English lessons. Most of the respondents 76% claim that it was very difficult for them to understand the lesson if the teacher exclusively use English. The results clearly have indicated that using English all the time is not feasible. Medgyes (1994:66) also argues that the monolingual approach to English language teaching is "unattainable on any ground, be it psychological, linguistic or pedagogical". Hence, it is advisable for teachers to resort the students' native language or L1 in certain situations.

Finally on students' attitudes towards the use of English exclusively in the classroom in a multilingual environment, the study revealed that the students are very unhappy and frustrated when they could not understand complex grammatical rules. This example supports their answers in the questionnaire where majority of the respondents supported the use of L1 to explain difficult concepts.

Findings

The following were the major findings of the study;

1. That the use of the L1 in the English language classes is beneficial in the learning process.
2. The students feel more relaxed and not hesitate to ask questions or express opinion which they cannot do in the target language

3. Finally it was discovered from the study the use of L1 in the second language classroom helps the students to have a firm grasp of the course content and learn English easier and faster.

Conclusion

The overall impression of the conducted study is that both teachers and students should have positive attitude towards using L1 in the English classes. However, this attitude depends on teachers' ability to speak the students L1 as in contrary it will be disrespectful toward the students. In such situations, teacher choices to use English only policy, allowing students to interact with each other in their L1. So when students are trying to say something, but have diffidently to express themselves, they can say it in their own language and the teacher can help them reformulate the question in order to make the students feel less stressed and anxious.

Undoubtedly, there are advantages and disadvantages of using the L1 in the English classroom especially when teaching low proficiency level of students, who come from different language, culture and religious background.

As the paper unfolds, L1 is seen as beneficial because the teacher is able to support the process of acquisition by explaining complex structures, words that cannot be demonstrated or showed to the students. On the other hand, L1 helps students to feel more relaxed and not hesitate to ask questions or express opinions which they cannot do in the target language. Although L1 seems to help students during the teaching process, the use of L1 should not be misused to waste teaching and learning time, because the students' exposure to the target language is mostly limited to the classroom.

From the result obtained from the questionnaire and observation clearly show that the target language should be the primary means of communication in either a second language or in a foreign language when the need arise, but the usage was limited only for the purpose stated earlier in the paper. In addition, it is the teachers' responsibility to limit the usage of L1 and they should be selective when and to what extent they use the learners' native language in the English classes, so as not to harm the acquisition of the target language.

In conclusion, the findings emerged from this study suggest that balanced and careful use of L1 in the English language classes seem not to affect the students exposure to the target language, it can even be beneficial in the learning process and may be needed for increasing comprehension of the target language.

Recommendations

From the study carried out, the following are the major recommendations;

1. To develop the quality of education in the country, language policies need to take account of mother tongue learning
2. Government should develop policies and programmes which take account of mother tongue in the early stages of learning

3. Adequate resources should be channeled into the teaching and learning of mother tongue (L1) in our schools because of the vital role it plays in the learning of English language or any foreign language.
4. Finally, the teachers should not discourage the students in the use of their mother tongue (L1) especially in explaining difficult concepts and grammatical rules.

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