

Interrelationship among Languages: Implication for Effective Language Teaching and Communication among Nigeria Learners

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Abstract

Knowing the language of a foreign country helps a person to understand how the people of that country think, feel and live. Since the Nigeria independence (in 1960), interest in foreign language teaching has grown at a slow rate in Nigeria institutions of learning. Consequent to the introduction of the National Policy on Education (2004), some federal and state schools have added, at least, one foreign language to their curricula. Subsequently, parents expressed enthusiasm and satisfaction in schools where a foreign language such as French has been tried. In spite of these, more efforts are needed to infuse more languages into the schools' curricula. This paper lists (he values of language communications and its primary goals in Nigerian schools. It suggests ways by which foreign languages could be handled.

Keywords: *interrelationship, language teaching, learners, implication*

1. Introduction

Man has long been aware of the importance of language. Speculation as to the nature and origin of language appears in the work of Plato and Aristotle. The word "language" comes from the Latin *lingua* (tongue). Language is the expression of thought or emotion by means of words, spoken or written (Eagleton, 1995). In a broader sense, language may include sign language and facial expression. Subsequently, as more emphasis is placed on literacy, research in language teaching has become an innovative area of education today. Such research focuses on the broader aspects of language development. This paper discusses language as expression through words.

Communication of ideas among people of various countries is made difficult by language differences. The language barrier often prevents people of one country from understanding the attitudes, goals, and accomplishments of those of another country. At various times in history, certain national languages have assumed international prominence because they were understood by certain classes of people in many countries. Latin was the language of scholarship until modern times and still it is the language of the Romans. For many years, the French language was the language of diplomacy and German the language of science. Today, English is widely understood in foreign countries. It has since been adopted in Nigeria as a language of instruction.

Knowing a foreign language helps a person to understand how the people of that country think, feel, and live. Works of literature, especially poetry, always lose something translation. Translation can distort meaning; a word in one language may have no exact equivalent in another, and a word may have a different shade of meaning. Even if the original meaning remains intact in the translation, the rhythm and sound patterns of the original are usually lost. There are practical reasons for knowing other languages. Scholars need to consult foreign writings while business people need to correspond with firms abroad. Travelers need to order meals and understand directions. The government of a nation must have employees to handle its affairs in other countries of the world. Even, the study of dead languages has practical value enabling scholars to gain information on people and events of ancient times.

2. Nature Of Language

According to Halliday (2002), language could be seen in various ways depending on whether one is interested in dialects and those who speak their words and their histories, the difference in language in different cultures, the formal proprieties of language systems, language as an art medium, uses of language and the like. For instance, Omolewa (2000) in his own view, defines language as a learned systematic, symbolic vocal behaviour, and a culturally acquired and exclusive mark of man.

Language, from the foregoing could be said to be a means of social control, it is a collection of major responses, it functions symbolically and so is use of verbal communication. Again, only human-beings had evolved a communication system with the properties of natural language. The existence and use of verbalized language, the lower animals.

Indeed, man has used language as one way of representing experience. This is the assertion of Sapir (2001).

Brunfi (1999), is in line with Sapir's on language which could be said to mean, the relationship between words and experience and it could be produced and received in form of the verbalization. These two terms have different meaning which explain language as a means by which we represent our experiences.

The Traditional Method of Teaching Foreign Language:

Teaching foreign languages has, in the past, emphasized reading ability. Mastering the grammar and memorizing vocabulary was stressed; little attention was paid to the spoken language. In the teaching of dead languages, this traditional method is still used. According to Flood et al (1996), conversational methods of teaching were developed in the 1880's, but were used by few schools. In world war II, for example, when it was important to teach soldiers to speak other languages in a short time, a conversational method was used. It was so successful that it was widely adopted.

In the conversational method, student begin by hearing the language spoken either by the instructor on a disc or tape recording. Many schools have language laboratories, in which each student use recording and playback equipment to listen to his own and to his instructor's voice repeating the foreign phrases., By listening and repeating, he or she learns vocabulary, correct pronunciation and the structure of sentences. Attention is then centered on learning to read and write the language. The modern foreign languages most frequently taught in schools and special classes for adults are French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Russian. In many schools system, foreign language instruction begins in the lower primary classes. Young children are initiated and learn to converse in a new language very readily.

Most Nigeria have never had a great need for the knowledge of a language other than English as a lingua Franca as well as a language of businesses. With a country like the United States of America, people can travel hundreds of miles in any direction and find themselves in English speaking territory. This contrasts sharply with the situation in Nigeria where one needs to travel only a few miles to find himself unable to communicate with others in his native tongue. Presently, many Nigerians are having primary contacts with non-English-speaking people and are, therefore, beginning to appreciate some problems of communication that have faced the nation for many decades. A trip abroad is no longer reserved for the very wealthy. Moreover, many Nigerians contacted non-English-speaking people through employment outside Nigeria and with military services through ECOMOG. In those various contacts, the problem is not, merely matter of the Nigeria not being able to speak with non-English-speaking people. More importantly by his or her lack of appreciation and respect for ' other languages and therefore other people. Nigerians who have had no contact with another language make unjustified value judgments concerning languages. Well intending, but uninformed Nigerians abroad have unquestionably lost our nation many friends because of insensitivity and lack of appreciation of the language of other peoples.

3. Language Situation In Nigeria

An attempt to discuss the language situation will take us to what language itself is. According to Random (2003):

Language is any set or system of linguistic symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people who are thus enable lo communicate intelligibly with one another.

Also Fiinocchiaro (1998) was of the opinion that:

Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal symbols, which permit all people in a given culture or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or internet.

Having discussed briefly what language connotes, the paper shall look at the language situation in Nigeria. Without any doubt, it is easily argued that Nigeria is one of the worlds with mulii - lingual populace. In fact, it is not an over - statement if we say that Nigeria is microcosm of the world if we consider its linguistics density and ethnic multiplicity. That is why Daiby (2001), asserted that "out of the estimated 1000 languages spoken on the Africa continent, over 25% are spoken in Nigeria alone." As¹ a result of this language multiplicity languages in Nigeria are categorized as major and minority languages.

4. Teaching Foreign Languages in Nigeria Schools

The teaching of foreign languages in public and private institutions has never been wide spread in Nigeria. Since 1960, interest in foreign language teaching has grown at a wider scale. With this awareness, some Federal and State Schools, as well as private institutions have added the French language to their curricula following the publication of the National Policy on Education (2004) and the Guidelines on Primary School Curriculum (1971). Some private establishments include elements of foreign language in the language units, and some school leaders are showing at least an interest in the programme. In communities where foreign language teaching has been tried in primary schools, parents have expressed enthusiasm and satisfaction with it. Since foreign language teaching is usually related in one way or another to development of world understanding, a consideration of this topic is appropriate at the primary level across board.

Before embarking on a massive language programme, starting with the primary school, careful thought must be given to major goals of such programme. In doing that, the following questions must be considered:

- If the child is introduced to a foreign language in the primary school, is it likely that he or she will recall this knowledge ten to twenty years later when he or she may go abroad?
- Can the teaching of a language to every young learner ne justified on the basis that some will have contact with non -- English -- speaking people when a substantial number will not have such contact?
- Presuming the child develops some competence with one foreign language, what assurance is there that it will be the one he or she will need later in life?
- What language or languages should be selected for study?
- How can one justify the inclusion of language study in a crowded curriculum?
- What value are there in such study, if any?

These are fundamental questions that suggest that teaching foreign languages have broader implications than merely teaching fluency in another tongue.

While there is a growing feeling of the importance of including foreign language; study in the primary, secondary and tertiary institution, there is not unanimity of agreement concerning *many* details of carrying out such a programme. Perhaps, the chief values of such programme do not lie

in the development of fluent conversationalists in another language, but in the following broad learning:

Language communication helps the learner understand that language is an invention of man and that ideas can be expressed equally effectively in many modern languages. There is no such thing as one language being better for all purposes than another.

- It encourages greater acceptance of other national groups and new comers to Nigeria as, a country. Children are less apt to think that others "talk funny" if they have had some contact with another, language.
- Through an introduction to languages, children become aware of the similarities that exist among many words in the Romance languages. Children learn that many English Word are derivatives of words from other languages and vice versa. This helps combat attitude of smugness regarding one's own language.
- It provides another important means for the child to gain a better understanding of national groups through direct contact with an important aspect of their culture -- language.
- It gives the child who will pursue language study an invaluable familiarity with pronunciation during his or her formative and uninhibited years.
- It serve as a stimulus and motivational factor in the study of other people.
- It helps develop an appreciation of the colour and beautiful tonal qualities of some languages.
- By focused attention upon communication, it helps the child appreciate some problems caused by language barriers in the solution of international problems, which face the people of the world today.

5. Implementing the Foreign Languages Programmes in the School

The inclusion of elements of a foreign language in our institutions of learning may be handled in several ways; two are in common use today. In the first arrangement, the language is taught separately. In the second, the foreign language is integrated with other areas of study. The first method calls for the setting aside of a short period each day when instructional effort is expressly devoted to the direct teaching of another language. Such programmes usually begin in the JSS class, and are not often found below primary four. It is felt that at the primary level, the child is ordinarily establishing the groundwork for his or her own language. The formal introduction of a second language at this time may cause additional complications concerning beginning reading, writing and speaking in the languages. Usually, a single language is selected for study, and the class may be taught by a special teacher who conies to the classroom each day. The preferred arrangement, however, is to have the classroom teacher handle the foreign language teaching himself, provided of course, he has sufficient fluency in it. This is consistent with the self - contained classroom concept and faciillates relating the language teaching to the total life of the classroom. If fluency is the primary objective of the language programme, this type of systematic development is recommended. Because children have a natural curiosity and interest in languages at early ages (as evidence by their devising language systems of their own), and because of their willingness to participate in speaking activities without inhibitions and embarrassment, they make amazing progress under a systematic programme of language instruction.

If fluency is not a primary consideration, many broader goals of language may be achieved in any class by including foreign language teaching in other instructional activities of the schools. This could be accomplished in social studies units. This arrangement does not call for the addition of anything new to the curriculum but is simply an extension of what is already there. A high degree of proficiency in the language is unnecessary and can easily be handled by regular classroom teacher who recognizes the value of such activities. The programme may concentrate upon one language or upon many different languages during the year. The children learned simple greetings

in the language, commonly used words and phrases, poetry and verse, songs, games, counting, names of animals, foods, telling the time, asking directions, making simple requests, courtesy expressions, and many more. Such teaching may be worked into the regular programme of the classroom often during the day informally and with little difficulty. Teachers who are willing to rouse themselves sufficiently from the routines of teaching try something new and exciting will find the informal inclusion of elements of a foreign language challenging and rewarding.

6. Providing for Individual Differences

Within every heterogeneous classroom, there are wide variations in the children's physical and emotional health and in their out - of- school experiences. The children are highly motivated, shaped and influenced by the environment in which they have developed. The teacher's most challenging responsibility is to provide a programme that meets children where they are, recognizes their potential, capitalizes upon their strengths, and moves them along at a pace consonant with their ability. He or she recognizes individual variation in ability to understand and speak standard version of the language at focus; ability to observe and listen; ability to deal with abstraction; size and appropriateness of vocabulary; number and accuracy of concepts acquired; and in desire and ability to verbalise experiences.

Children learn at different rates and consequently require different materials, experiences, and instructional techniques; a single group activity often affects each member differently, Instruction and materials must be adapted to the needs of various types of learner.

7. Conclusion

Language is the one type of communication developed by man, which far surpasses all other types. We all possess a truly extraordinary ability to learn languages during our childhood. Children are not taught a language but learn it by themselves without conscious effort and application. They seem to possess an inborn faculty for language generally. Thus, the values that accrue\ to children from satisfying experience with another language are difficult to measure precisely, but are great. Finally, the implementation of this programme may be easy because instructional materials and resources for foreign languages programme are becoming more readily available. It is now possible to obtain printed materials such as recordings, and films for classroom use.

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