MOTHER-TONGUE INFLUENCE INTERFERENCE IN THE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AGO IWOYE, OGAN STATE

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Abstract
This research investigates the influence the mother tongue interference in the study of English language learning among public and private senior secondary schools in Ago Iwoye, Ogun State. Some of the problems observed in the learning of English language in Nigeria are: Problems with the use grammar and tenses, Problems with accent and placement of stresses on words when speaking, difficulties in writing well-structured English sentences and use of punctuations in the appropriate places. This research was carried out using SS1 and SS2 students of some selected secondary schools in Ago Iwoye, where Yoruba is an indigenous language and is mostly used in communication outside classroom setting. Well-structured questionnaire developed by the researchers was the instrument used in collecting data. T-test and chi square were used in the data analysis. The results revealed that public senior secondary school students had a higher level of mother tongue interference in the study of English language than private senior secondary school students with the mean of 16.7 for the public and 15.7 for the private but the difference is not significant (t=1.719, df=158, p>.05). Also there is no significant difference in public and private senior secondary school teachers’ perception and strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in the study of English language. The recommendations proposed based on the findings are: organizing seminars for teachers, creating more time for teaching oral English, schools should come up with a reward-punishment system to encourage the use of English language in schools, teachers should cultivate a positive perception towards the use of English language in schools, students should be discouraged from communicating in mother tongue in classroom environments.

Introduction
Language is a method of communicating ideas, thoughts, and desires by means of sounds for psychological and physiological survival. Language is one of the most important attributes of mankind because it is the medium of communication. There is no country without a language. We all live in a world of many languages. Thus, language and society are so much related. Their relationship cannot be underestimated. It is an indispensable medium that helps man to achieve effective communication as it mirrors the mind in deep and significant ways. It is a fact that language remains the medium of communication in any society. Nigeria, as a multilingual society, has adopted English Language as its lingua franca to enable its over 450 ethnic groups to mutually communicate. Language is so important to man that one can equate it with the air we breathe. To emphasize the place of language in man’s existence, (Awoniyi, 2004) enumerates the use of language to include:
1. To modify and direct the behavior of other people.
2. To influence the ideas of other people. Hence we can persuade another person to change his action, depending on the choice and style of the language we employ.
3. To communicate to others our ideas or information.
4. We also use language as an instrument of thinking because language and thought are like body and soul, each influencing the other, among others.

The language an individual speaks is for him or her, the most expressive and the most beautiful of all languages Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams, (2007). 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 world's total GNP. English is very important in this modern world. English language is a language without which there could not have been an entity called Nigeria. Ogunsiji and Olanrewaju, (2002). Yet, the academic performance of students both at secondary school and post-secondary school is worrisome. This pin-pointed that there is indeed a lot wrong with performance in English even among university students and graduates for that matter. English language is Nigeria’s ‘second language’. Ironically, it is also Nigeria’s dominant language, with the use of English being taught at various levels of the Nigerian educational system – Pre-Nursery schools, Nursery schools, Primary schools, Secondary schools and Tertiary institutions of learning. When every guiding and holding factors are scrutinized, the history and role of English in Nigeria is something noteworthy. The English language has taken the position of a national language in Nigeria. There is no gain saying the fact that English has become a Nigerian language (Adegbite, 2004). The language has become an invaluable legacy of the British colonial masters. Several years after independence, English still survives and has assumed a more important status in Nigeria.

Mother tongue could be defined as the language which a group of people considered being inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thoughts and communication. Mother tongue is the first language that a person learned. In terms of that view, the person is defined as a native speaker of the first language, although one may also be a native speaker of more than one language if all of the languages were learned without formal education, such as through cultural immersion before puberty (Oluwole, 2008). Mother tongue largely refers to not only the language one learns from one’s mother but also the speaker’s dominant and home language. It’s also called native language. Learning of a mother tongue takes place in a quite natural way. Regarding the mother tongue, language is learned through input and reciprocal interaction but it’s also believed that kids are born with an innate and special ability to discover the underlying rules of a language system. In essence, each particular language in the world (i.e. Ibibio, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, English, French, and German etc.) is a mother tongue of a particular place and time. It is then generally accepted that in teaching and learning processes, the mother tongue of the child is of utmost importance. For one thing, it categorizes a large part of the child’s environment, that is, it has names for most of the objects, actions, ideas, attributes and so on that are so important to him, as well as to any society. The mother tongue is the child’s environment and is the natural basis on which verbal skills can be built, children learn through communicating in a language, which they understood. Regarding mother tongue, myth is another important element which is vital to explain one’s first language. “The notion of ‘mother tongue’ is thus a mixture of myth and ideology. The family is not necessarily the place where languages are transmitted, and sometimes we observe breaks in transmission, often translated by a change of language, with children acquiring as first language the one that dominates in the milieu. This phenomenon concerns all multilingual situations and most of the situations of migration. One’s Mother tongue may also be called in other words as first language, dominant language, home language, native tongue or native language.

Mother tongue interference is a phenomenon viewed by many scholars as, ‘mother tongue influence’, which had been an actual response to the applied results of the structural methods,
known as audio-visual, audio-oral and structural-global, (Lekova, 2009). Liu, in (Lekova 2009) defines Language interference or transfer as, a persistent term and has led to diverse interpretations and researches. MT interference, in particular as Language transfer known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and a cross meaning, which refers to speakers or writers applying the knowledge from their native language acquisition method into learning a second language, (Viola, 2013). In fact, interference is the early step to integration perceived as a welcome process of using mother tongue or other languages in the using of a target language. This may be based on the facts that interference can appear in phonology, grammar, word formation, word and sentence sequence, etc. (Negeri, 2011). However, the difficulties in L1 transfer, and its importance into second language acquisition (SLA), besides, the relationships between students’ L1 and L2 linguistic resources always appear difficult, Karim, and Nassaji, in (Kozue 2013) Despite the fact that the mother tongue is said to form a natural and easy means for a child’s further intellectual, emotional, social, and linguistic development, it (the mother tongue) interferes in the efforts of students to learn a second language. Linguistic / language interference occurs whenever an individual uses features belonging to one language while speaking or writing another. Such an individual is known as a bilingual.

In these days, learning a foreign language has been a growing need globally, but since learners express themselves best in their mother tongue, that calls for a special effort because they face different challenges that result in errors with the interference of mother tongue with the foreign language learning. When learning English as a foreign language, it seems to be usual that most of the time students use their first language in order to try to reach an effective communication in the second one, which makes learners follow and accommodate the same grammatical patterns in both languages. Hence, the importance of that influence in the learning process has been a relevant issue for a long time. Mother tongue influence is an important aspect to keep in mind in the learning process of a foreign language. Empirical review has attempted to account for variables detailed by second language learning theories and provide an insight into second language learning processes, which can be applied in educational environments. This review is divided into local and foreign literature review.

Despite the fact that English is a second language in Nigeria, many students from rural areas view English as a foreign language which is spoken only during language lessons (Tom et al., 2013). This is prevalent as they usually come from non-English speaking community and Hiew (2012) stated that students usually experience moderate anxiety and are reluctant to speak in English for fear of being judged negatively. They might feel shy to speak English within their community apart from having fear to be criticized. Rural students, however, are in an environment where English is a foreign language and they have practically zero opportunity to practice it as their peers are also facing the same predicament, their parents are not educated enough to give them the necessary educational support and their families’ socioeconomic status do not allow them easy access to books, CD’s, and even television in some cases (Gobel et al., 2013). Due to that, students’ mother tongue will be used more often and this will develop their linguistic repertoire to a greater extent. As argued by Cummins (2000), in rural areas, the children’s native language would be used in the home and for the development of literacy skills in lower elementary classes.

Ashairi & Suliman, in Thiyagarajah, (2003) opined that the learning of English in rural schools in Malaysia has always been a major problem for educators as they struggle to pull proficiency levels up against a backdrop where the language is almost non-existent other than the few periods of English per week for learners where English is viewed as a foreign language. The learning of English language can be seen as difficult especially when it involves the students in the rural
area. Kozue (2013) asserted that many children in rural areas begin school in a language that they are not familiar with and/or do not fully understand. This is indeed true in Malaysian context, whereby those children in the rural area have difficulties in learning English. This might be due to the surrounding that does not support the exposure of English language as supported by Ting et al., (2011) that for some quarters of the Malaysian population, learning English may be like learning a foreign language and they have limited need for the language in daily life. Therefore, they face difficulties in learning English language in schools.

Ashari and Munir, in Joseph (2015) advocated that the interference occurred in sixteen terms of grammatical errors. The grammatical interference involved word order, number, countability, personal pronouns, genitive and possessive pronouns, it and there, past time, to be, non-finite forms, modal auxiliary verbs, active and passive, negatives, complex sentences, range and choice of vocabulary, transfer, and confusions. However, they claimed that the interference occurred because students did not receive input that facilitated them to write. It also occurred because of the lack of students’ knowledge in second language acquisition.

Most of the errors made are due to the difference in sound systems and due to the misinterpretation of spelling symbols. The ability to pronounce the structures or words is as important as the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Even the simplest words misspoken, keeps one from communicating effectively. Sometimes (for instance in the case of minimal pairs) a change of one sound may bring about a change in the meaning of the word, to an extent that communication might get hampered. The learner begins the learning task of learning a second language from point zero (or close to it) and, through the steady accumulation of the mastered entities of the target language, eventually amasses them in quantities sufficient to constitute a particular level of proficiency. Mother tongue interference when speaking or writing in a second language is generally a lifelong experience which needs continues attention, sometimes even up to adulthood the lexical stress patterns of their mother-tongue in their second language (English) oral production, are not shaken off in spite of years of teaching and listening.

Model speaking, on the part of the teacher, is considered a good way to introduce the proper speaking skill in the average classroom setup. It is believed that the learners will pick up the skill from the classroom environment, but often even the teacher’s pronunciation skills are colored and the learners acquire the colored skills from the classroom thereby being unable to acquire the proper skill in spoken English. Another reason why learning Pronunciation is difficult is because by the time the learners are introduced to the second language sound system they have a fossilized sound system of their mother tongue, which hinders the acquisition of the second language sound system. Cummins (2000) in his analysis stated that there are two independent systems of second language performance: “the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful Language in interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act”. The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge about the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. This is important to this study since the researcher wants to know whether the unconscious system learnt by learners in their mother tongue influences their construction in the conscious system through learning English in school.
Adebayo (2008) uses a survey design to examine the influence of mother tongue on performance of English language in Junior School Certificate Examination in Western Nigeria. He found that mother tongue influences the students’ performance in English language in Junior School Certificate Examination in Western Nigeria. He recommends that English language should be used as a medium of communication within and outside the classroom and both teachers and students should endeavor to improve their proficiency level of the language which will eventually lead to improved performance. Adebayo’s study does not explicitly indicate to what extent mother tongue influence the performance; this sought to establish what Adebayo (2008) failed to capture in his study by analyzing the extent to which mother tongue influences performance of English. It is therefore important for teachers to know as much as they can from the students’ dialect for them to optimally teach them. Mother tongue interference retards the progress for reading, speaking and writing since patterns of mother tongue do not correspond with those of English.

Kolawole (2002) also confirmed that students’ performance in English language in secondary schools of Nigeria was very poor. He stressed further that the standard was poor due to a number reasons such as the use of mother tongue; some students do not understand the grammar because their teachers themselves do not know it and in most cases English language teachers in the senior primary and junior secondary schools resort to the use of mother tongue to teach (code switching); they use mother tongue to explain concepts. The researcher sought to find out whether teachers indeed code switch or use mother tongue and how this had an influence in performance of English.

Olaonipekun et al., (2014) in his study however argued that there is no correlation between students’ academic performance in English and Yoruba language and more importantly, students’ academic performance in Yoruba language has no effect on students’ academic performance in English language among secondary school students. It was identified that the mother tongue instruction will help the children to acquire facts and information easily and quickly interpret information obtained properly and correctly acquire practical and manipulative skills easily and develop desirable attitudes towards people. He further explained that female students were better off in their performance in English language than the males but this was not obtainable in Yoruba language because males outclass their females in Yoruba.

**Research Hypothesis**

**Null hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the level of mother tongue interference in English language learning among public and private senior secondary school students.

**Null hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in public and private senior secondary schools teacher’s perception on the influence of mother tongue interference in English language.

**Null hypothesis 3:** There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in English language learning among public and private senior secondary school students.

**Methodology**

The target population of this study consisted of SSS1 and SSS2 students of selected Senior Secondary Schools in Ago-Iwoye, Ijebu North local government area of Ogun State. The study employs descriptive research design. The descriptive research design is suitable for this study because the study is on the impact of mother tongue on second language learning and proficiently: the Yoruba native speakers’ experience. The descriptive research design will therefore be suitable to ascertain to an extent the impact of the mother tongue ‘Yoruba’ on the
learning and proficiency of the target language (English) of the students of selected Senior secondary schools (SSS1 and SSS 2).

**Instrumentation**
A self structured five likert scale questionnaire was used by the researchers as a tool for collection of data.

**Analysis of data**
The data collected was analyzed using descriptive methods. The descriptive statistics employed involved the use of tables, frequency, and percentage. The first hypothesis was analyzed with the use of T-test, second hypothesis and third hypothesis was analyzed with the use of chi-square. Table, variable, frequency and percentage were employed to depict information sourced from the bio-demographic of respondents.

**General Description of Data**
Descriptive for Demographic Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/ N</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>School type</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Type of Respondent</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>English- Improving Strategy</td>
<td>Story books</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learning resources</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Teacher’s Perception on</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother Tongue Influence</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Results showed that participants were equally drawn from public and private schools. Each category of school accounted for 50% of the participants. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (95%) were senior secondary school students while only 5% were teachers. A majority of the respondents (56%) were female while 44% were male. Of the students, a majority of them (56%) preferred to use learning resources to mitigate the influence of mother tongue and improve their English, while 44% preferred to read story books for this purpose. Of the teachers, a majority of them (75%) had a positive perception on the influence of mother tongue interference, while 25% had a negative perception on this influence.

**Results**

**Table 1**
Ho1: There is no significant difference in the level of mother tongue interference in the study of English language among public and private senior secondary school students.
Table 1: T-test result for difference between public and private schools in the level of mother tongue interference in the study of English language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df.</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>95% confidence Interval of Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>16.675</td>
<td>3.40430</td>
<td>1.719</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>[.13946, 2.01446]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>15.7375</td>
<td>3.49228</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results in Table 1 revealed that although public senior secondary school students had a higher level of mother tongue interference in English language learning (mean=16.7) than private senior secondary school students (mean=15.7), the difference is not significant (t=1.719, df=158>.05). The null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant difference in the level of mother tongue interference in the study of English language among public and private senior secondary school students, is therefore upheld.

Table 2
Ho2: There is no significant Difference in Public and Private Senior Secondary Schools and Teachers Perception on the Influence of Mother Tongue Interference in the study of English Language.

Table 2: Contingency Table for the Difference in public and private senior secondary school Teachers' perception on Influence of Mother Tongue Interference in the study of English language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df.</th>
<th>Assumption sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-square</td>
<td>6.104</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity correction</td>
<td>6.022</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Valid cases</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 revealed a significant result ($x^2=6.104$, N=8, df=1, p<.05). The null hypothesis is therefore rejected and the alternative hypothesis is upheld. It is therefore concluded that there is a significant difference in public and private senior secondary school teachers’ perception on the influence of mother tongue interference in the study of English language.

Table 3
Ho3: There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in the study of English language among public and private senior secondary school students.

Table 3: Contingency Table for the difference in Mother Tongue Interference Mitigating Strategies between Public and Private Senior Secondary School Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Df.</th>
<th>Assumption sig. (2-sided)</th>
<th>Exact sig. (2-sided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-square</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity correction</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Valid cases</td>
<td>160</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 showed a non-significant result ($x^2=.025$, df=1, $p>.05$). The null hypothesis is therefore upheld, leading to the conclusion that there is no significant difference in the strategies adopted to mitigate the influence of mother tongue interference in the study of English language among public and private senior secondary school students.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Students’ use of mother tongue is predominant among students and teachers. Whereby, teachers while teaching code-switched for various motives, so it was concluded that the use of mother tongue interferes with the teaching of English language. Also the view that the use of mother tongue influences negatively on the performance of English was the general conclusion drawn from students. Furthermore, use of mother tongue brings about challenge in pronunciation and writing in English. Students also reveal a challenge of lack of confidence and poor communication skills as a result of mother tongue.

The following recommendations were made based on the findings, in order to improve performance of English language learning of students:

- Organizing seminars for teachers
- Creating more time for teaching oral English
- Schools should come up with a reward-punishment system to encourage the use of English language in schools
- Teachers should cultivate a positive perception towards the use of English language in schools
- Students should be discouraged from communicating in mother tongue in classroom environments.

**References**


