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Cultural Dichotomy and Language Learning among the Yoruba Race of Nigerian Society

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Abstract
This study investigated cultural diversity and second language learning among primary school pupils in Ogun state of Nigeria. The study is a descriptive survey in which 300 primary four school children were randomly selected from among pupils attending public primary schools in Ogun state. The Language Achievement Test developed and validated by the researchers was the instrument used in the study. It was a fifty items test designed to measure language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Its convergent validity ranged from .68 to .91 on Cronbach alpha. Findings revealed significant influence of cultural diversity on listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of the participants. It was therefore recommended that a unified Yoruba accent and grammar should be evolved and adopted in all primary schools in all the Yoruba speaking states of Nigeria.
Keywords: cultural diversity, language learning, Yoruba language

Introduction

Language learning often begins at childhood when the child attempts to imitate the parents and other adults responsible for his/her upbringing (Wolf, 2007). **Language acquisition** is the process by which the language capability develops in a human. First language acquisition concerns the development of language in children, while second language acquisition focuses on language development in adults as well (Share, 1999). Historically, theorists are often divided between emphasising either nature or nurture as the most important explanatory factor for acquisition. Often, it is a hotly debated issue that the biological contribution includes language-specific capacities, often described as universal grammar (Wikimedia, 2007). It has been found that language learning results only from general cognitive abilities and the interaction between learners and their surrounding communities (McCandliss, Beck, Sandak & Perfetti, 2003).

Looking at the sociocultural context of language acquisition, however, one can find evidence that a child's environment nurtures and shapes his or her ability to use language. Specifically, the experiences a child has with language at home and in the community may have a lot to do with later success in school (Twyford, 1988).Nativist theories hold that children are born with an innate propensity for language acquisition, and that this ability makes the task of learning a first language easier than it would otherwise be. These "hidden assumptions" allow children to quickly figure out what is and isn't possible in the grammar of their native language, and allow them to master that grammar by the age of three. Nativists view language as a fundamental part of the human organism, as the trait that makes humans human, and its acquisition as a natural part of maturation, no different from dolphins learning to swim or songbirds learning to sing. Chomsky originally theorized that children were born with a hard-wired language acquisition device (LAD) in their brains. He later expanded this idea into that of Universal Grammar, a set of innate principles and adjustable parameters that are common to all human languages. According to Chomsky, the presence of Universal Grammar in the brains of children allow them to deduce the structure of their native languages from "mere exposure

The common expectation is that the school prepares the young for life in the "real world" gradually and with compassion, school personnel rarely recognize that some fundamental notions that lie behind the language arts curriculum represent harsh demands for language minority children. Thus, the home and the school ought to be partners in the facilitation of language skills. The four major dimensions of language acquisition including listening, speaking, reading and writing deserve adequate attention of the home and the school. Not only is there the general expectation that all children will learn to speak English, but also the assumption that they have internalized before they start to school the norms of language used in academic life (Heath, 1986). Speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. It is more complicated than it seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words. Interactive speaking situations include face-to-face conversations and telephone calls, in which we are alternately listening and speaking, and in which we have a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from our conversation partner. Some speaking situations are partially interactive, such as when giving a speech to a live audience, where the convention is that the audience does not interrupt the speech. The speaker nevertheless can see the audience and judge from the expressions on their faces and body language whether or not he or she is being understood.

The following are some of the identified characteristics of fluent speakers by various authorities (Fletcher-Flinn, Shankweiler, & Frostg, 2004; McCandliss, Beck, Sandak, & Perfetti, 2003; Shankweiler, Lundquist, Katz, & Stuebing, 1999);

- pronounce the distinctive sounds of a language clearly enough so that people can distinguish them. This includes making tonal distinctions.
- use stress and rhythmic patterns, and intonation patterns of the language clearly enough so that people can understand what is said.
- use the correct forms of words. This may mean, for example, changes in the tense, case, or gender.
- put words together in correct word order.
- use vocabulary appropriately.
- use the register or language variety that is appropriate to the situation and the relationship to the conversation partner.
- make clear to the listener the main sentence constituents, such as subject, verb, object, by whatever means the language uses.
- make the main ideas stand out from supporting ideas or information.
- make the discourse hang together so that people can follow what you are saying.

Reading skills acquisition is the process of acquiring the basic skills necessary for learning to read; that is, the ability to acquire meaning from print. According to the report by the US National Reading Panel (NRP) in 2000, the skills required for proficient reading are phonological awareness, phonics (sound-symbol correspondence), fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. According to the National Reading Panel, the ability to read requires proficiency in a number of language domains: phonemic awareness, phonics (sound-symbol correspondence), fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.[2]

- **Phonemic awareness**: The ability to distinguish and manipulate the individual sounds of language. The broader term, phonological awareness, also includes rhymes, syllables, and onsets and rimes.
- **Phonics**: Method that stresses the acquisition of letter-sound correspondences and their use in reading and spelling. This helps beginning readers understand how letters are linked to sounds (phonemes), patterns of letter-sound correspondences and spelling in English, and how to apply this knowledge when they read.
- **Fluency**: The ability to read orally with speed, accuracy, and vocal expression. The ability to read fluently is one of several critical factors necessary for reading comprehension. If a reader is not fluent, it may be difficult to remember what has been read and to relate the ideas expressed in the text to his or her background knowledge. This accuracy and automaticity of reading serves as a bridge between decoding and comprehension.
- **Vocabulary**: A critical aspect of reading comprehension is vocabulary development. When a reader encounters an unfamiliar word in print and decodes it to derive its spoken pronunciation, the reader understands the word if it is in the reader's spoken vocabulary. Otherwise, the reader must derive the meaning of the word using another strategy, such as context.
- **Reading Comprehension** :The NRP describes comprehension as a complex cognitive process in which a reader intentionally and interactively engages with the text. Reading comprehension is heavily dependent on skilled word recognition and decoding, oral reading fluency, a well-developed vocabulary and active engagement with the text.

Jeanne Chall's model of the stages of reading acquisition is well known. In Chall's model, each stage builds on skills mastered in earlier stages; lack of mastery at any level can halt the progress beyond that level.

- **Stage 0. Prereading**: The learner gains familiarity with the language and its sounds. A person in this stage becomes aware of sound similarities between words, learns to predict the next part in a familiar story, and may start to recognize a few familiar written words. Chall's Stage 0 is considered comparable to what is often called "reading readiness." Typically developing readers achieve this stage about the age of 6.
- **Stage 1. Initial reading stage, or decoding stage**: The learner becomes aware of the relationship between sounds and letters and begins applying the knowledge to text. This demonstrates the reader has achieved understanding of the critical concept of the alphabetic principle and is learning sound-symbol correspondences, the alphabetic code. Typically developing readers usually reach this stage by the age of 6 or 7.
- **Stage 2. Confirmation**: This stage involves confirming the knowledge acquired in the previous two stages and gaining fluency in those skills. Decoding skills continue to improve, and they begin to develop speed in addition to accuracy in word recognition. At this point, the reader should be able to give attention both to meaning and to the print, using them interactively to build their skills and fluency.

This stage is critical for the beginning reader. If the developing reader stops making progress during this stage, the individual remains, in Chall's words, "glued to the print." Typically developing readers usually reach this stage around the age of 8.

- **Stage 3. Reading to learn**: At this stage, the motivation for reading changes. The reader has enough reading skill to begin to read text in order to gain information. Readers' vocabulary development accelerates at this point resulting from increased exposure to the written word. Typically developing children usually achieve this stage in 4th grade, around the age of 9.
- **Stage 4. Multiple viewpoints**: The reader at this stage begins to be able to analyze what they read, understand different points of view, and react critically to what they read. Typical readers are developing this skill set during the high school years, around ages 14 to 19.
- **Stage 5. Construction and judgement**: At this stage, readers have learned to read selectively and form their own opinions about what they read; they construct their knowledge from that of others. This highest level of reading development is not usually reached until college age, or later, and may in fact be achieved only by those who have an intellectual inclination.

Reading difficulties have a common source. Problems processing spoken words hinder a student's ability to translate written words into speech. Regardless of age, subtle auditory or phonological (speech-sound) processing issues hinder reading. Cultural dichotomy has been cited has an influencial factor in language learning. Participants' in an oral language experiment were found pronouncing and translating ideas into english language from their local tongue (Alilonu, 2006; Jimoh, 2006). Simlarly, local dialect has been found to impede students' performance in english language examinations (Adekunle, 2007; Idowu & Esere, 2007). The Yorubas spread across several countries in weat Africa have almost a thousand dialects with noticeable variations in cultural practices and heritage (Jimoh,2006). The concern of this study therefore is to investigate cultural dichotomy and language learning among the Yoruba race of Nigerian society.

Hypotheses

HO1: Cultural dichotomy will not significantly affect participants' listening skills.
HO2: Cultural dichotomy will not significantly affect participants' speaking skills.
HO3: Cultural dichotomy will not significantly affect participants' reading skills.
HO4: Cultural dichotomy will not significantly affect participants' writing skills.

Methodology

The study is a descriptive survey in which 300 primary four school children were randomly selected from among Yoruba speaking pupils attending primary schools in Ogun, Ondo and Ekiti states. Participants were drawn from six public primary schools spread across the three states. Using proportional purposive sampling, 100 pupils were selected to represent each of the three dialects. Their age range was 7 to 11years with an average age of 8.2years.

Instrumentation

The Language Achievement Test developed and validated by the researchers was the instrument used in the study. It was a fifty item test designed to measure language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Its convergent validity ranged from .68 to .91 on Cronbach alpha. It also yielded .93 co-efficient of reliability from a test re-test of two weeks interval.

Procedure

The study was carried out in the six schools within three weeks. Participants were administered the instrument after they have been assured of utmost confidentiality. They were guided to respond objectively to the items on the instrument. Administration of the instrument lasted 40minutes on average.

Results

The results of the study are presented below:

Table 1: Influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' listening skills

ANOVA

Listening skills

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.827	3	1.942	3.056	.030
Within Groups	122.661	193	.636		
Total	128.487	196			

Table 1 revealed significant influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' listening skills ($F=3.056$; $p<.05$). This result did not support the postulated hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This means that cultural dichotomy significantly influenced participants' acquisition of listening skills.

Table 2: Influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' speaking skills

ANOVA

Speaking skills

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.062	3	2.687	3.776	.012
Within Groups	138.084	194	.712		
Total	146.146	197			

Table 2 revealed significant influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' speaking skills (F=3.056; p<.05). This result did not support the postulated hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This means that cultural dichotomy significantly influenced participants' acquisition of speaking skills.

Table 3: Influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' reading skills

ANOVA

Reading skills

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.592	3	3.531	6.240	.000
Within Groups	109.205	193	.566		
Total	119.797	196			

Table 3 revealed significant influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' reading skills (F=3.056; p<.05). This result did not support the postulated hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This means that cultural dichotomy significantly influenced participants' acquisition of reading skills.

Table 4: Influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' writing skills

ANOVA

Writing skills

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.170	3	2.390	3.369	.020
Within Groups	137.603	194	.709		
Total	144.773	197			

Table 4 revealed significant influence of cultural dichotomy on participants' writing skills (F=3.056; p<.05). This result did not support the postulated hypothesis. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This means that cultural dichotomy significantly influenced participants' acquisition of writing skills.

Discussion

The findings from the data analysis presented above empowered the researcher to reject the four null hypotheses postulated for the study. Findings revealed that cultural dichotomy significantly influenced participants' language acquisition including listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. These findings are plausible considering the fact that children acquired their first language through listening to their parents and with time they become acquainted to the local tone which may later impair their language skills in the second language they acquire in school. This result lends credence to McCandliss, Beck, Sandak & Perfetti, (2003) who found that language learning results only from general cognitive abilities and the interaction between learners and their surrounding communities. It also supports the notion that experiences a child has with language at home and in the community may have a lot to do with later success in school (Twyford, 1988). The findings further confirm Nativist theories which hold that children are born with an innate propensity for language acquisition, and that this ability makes the task of learning a first language easier than it would otherwise be.

Recommendations and conclusion

The results of this study led to the conclusion that cultural dichotomy exerts significant influences on childrens' language acquisition especially at the primary school level. It also means that cultural variation among Yoruba dialects exerts noticeable influences on childrens' language acquisition. It was observable that the Ijebus' tonation and cultural dexterity encourages second language acquisition and language learning more than the Ondos and the Ekitis. It is therefore recommended that a unified Yoruba accent and grammar should be evolved and adopted in all primary schools in all the Yoruba speaking states of Nigeria.

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