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QUALITY ASSURANCE IN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION: A STUDY OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE

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ABSTRACT
We all are still learners of English; some believe that America English is the best while other scholar says no. To what degree can we say that this grammar or sentence is wrong? Isn't when it does not convey his message or isn't when the receiver does not comprehend? This study was carried out to determine the level of difficulties one may encounter in English Language during the process of production of the sound or usage either syntactically or semantically. Some believe that Language teaching and learning, mother tongue interference and transfer, interlanguage, and so on, contributed to difficulties one may see in his/her LI to L2 during communication. In this intralingual study carried out, some primary schools in Awgu Local Government Area in Enugu State (ALGA) were visited. Interactions with the teachers and pupils were conducted with the researcher and errors were discovered.

Keywords: Interlanguage, Language teaching, Difficulties in L_2, Pronunciation, Grammar, Mother tongue interference and transfer.

Introduction
Language acquisition does not take place at one time but through stages. The learner constructs a system of abstract linguistic rules, which underlies comprehension, and production of the target language; this system is equivalent neither to L2 nor to L1 and referred to as interlanguage. At each stage, the learner modifies his/her interlanguage by adding rules, deleting rules, or restructuring the whole system. Such modifications are based on the learners' errors; and if the utterance is grammatical, there will be no need for any modification. Certain errors belong to beginning stages while others are found in other stages. Many errors produced by beginners are not found in the interlanguage of advanced learners, which means that learners need more time for certain features to master; a fact that reflects their stage of development in their interlanguage. These stages in intralingual study include:

InterLanguage
The notion of competence is the central issue in language teaching and learning, especially

in the light of error analysis. Learning theorists and language teachers want to know the answers to certain questions. What does the learners knows? Can we measure or define this knowledge? In some respect, error analysis can answer these questions.

One who is exposed to a particular language makes errors. Anything he/she speaks before he attains proficiency is called interlanguage (IL). It refers to the systematic knowledge of an L_2 which is independent of both the learner's L_1 and the target language. Nemser (1974) refers to it as the approximate system, and Corder (1967:283) sees it as the idiosyncratic dialect or transitional competence. Selinker (1974:35-41) identifies the following as the central components of the learner's interlanguage. (i)Language transfer (ii)Transfer of training (iii)Strategies of second language communication (iv)Strategies of second language learning and (v)Over generalization of target language (TL) linguistic material.

Each of the analysis's prediction of errors or shape of TL utterances should be associated with one or more of these or other processes. Selinker goes further to state that performance situations that are relevant to interlingual identifications are: **(A).** Utterances in the learner's native, language (NL) produced by the learner; **(B).** Inter language (IL) utterances produced by the learner; and **(C)** Target language (TL) utterances produced by native speakers of that TL.
For Nwankwo, (2008) and Ottanes, (1979) learning and communication strategies as well as over –generalization are in relation to learner and target language-induced errors. Proponents of the inter language concept feel there is need for viewing the learner's competence as having many sources, i.e. the native language, the target language and the learner's unique grammar which contains the various rules that apparently stem from neither the native nor the target language.

Language Teaching and Learning
Universally, language serves as a means of communication, therefore, enough attention has been given to teaching and learning of languages, especially, English language as a second language for primary school pupils.

Teaching, according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, (6^{th} edition), is a Process of giving somebody information about a particular subject; process of helping somebody to learn something. According to the same dictionary, learning is knowledge obtained by study.

Taking our line from the above definition, we can infer that language teaching and learning involves providing information about a language to someone so that the person meant study it or learn it. The person who provides the information is designated language teacher while the recipient of this act is a learner, specifically, L_2 learner.

Learning can be seen as activity or process of gaining knowledge or skills by studying, practicing, being taught or experiencing something: the activity of someone who learns. According to 2012 Merrian-Webster, Incorporated, English for language learners gave the above definition.

The array of learned behaviour include discrimination learning where a subject learns to respond to a limited range of sensory characteristics, such as a particular shade of coloration, habituation learning- the cessation of responses to repeated stimulation, concept formation- the process of sorting experiences according to related features, problem solving perceptual learning- the effects of past experience on sensory perceptions, and psychomotor learning- the development of neuromuscular patterns in responses to sensory signals. Association, conditioning, imitation, insight and imprinting represent other types of learning. The above types of learning came from 2012 encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

Mackey (1965:110), points out that "there is a big difference between learning an item and learning items in a language, this involve knowing the forms and meaning of the items and how the items are used".

Littlewood (1984) recognizes that "forcing learning into conformity to a fixed pattern of behaviour determined by the teacher, it could inhibit language learning. He makes this argument from the point of view that teacher input is not at all the same as learner intake"

Crystal (1987) confirms that "difficulties in second language learning depend on the sound; the learner of a L_2 has to combine to form words and sentences in the grammar of the language".

Bright (1992) reports that "teaching is associated with applied linguistics. According to him, in the early 20th century, language teaching was done on the definition of what was to be actual process of learning. The method used was particularity grammar/translation, second language acquisition research should have the general effect of shifting the emphasis in pedagogy from teaching to learning".

Difficulties in learning English language as a second language.

Language teaching practice often assumed that most of the difficulties that learners face in the study of English are a consequence of the degree to which their native language differs from English (a contrastive analysis approach). A native speaker of Awgu dialects of Igbo may face many more difficulties than a native speaker of River State, because Rivers State is closely related to English, whereas Awgu speakers of Igbo is not. This may be true for anyone of thy mother tongue (also called first language, normally abbreviated L_1) setting out to learn any other language (called a target language, second language or L_2).

Language learners often produce errors of syntax and pronunciation thought to result from the influence of their L_1, such as mapping its grammatical patterns in appropriately onto the L_2, pronouncing certain sounds incorrectly or with difficulty, and confusing items of vocabulary known as false friend. This type of difficulty can occur in Chinese speakers learning English than German learning English. German will learn English faster than Chinese. This is known as L_1 transfer or "language interference or mother tongue interference", which we discussed below. However, these transfer effects are typically stronger for beginner's language production, and second language

acquisition (LSA) research has highlighted many errors which cannot be attributed to the L_1, as they are attested in learners of many language backgrounds (for example, failure to apply third person present singular-s to verbs, as in "he make").

Some students may have very different cultural perceptions in the classroom as far as learning a second language is concerned. Also, cultural differences in communication styles and preferences are significant. For example, a study looked at Chinese students and British teachers and found that the Chinese learners did not see classroom discussion and interaction as important but placed a heavy emphasis on teacher- directed lecturers. But here in Awgu primary schools' pupils, classroom is seen as the only means for learning and the pupils learn faster inside the classroom.

Pronunciation

English contains a number of sounds and sound distinctions not present in some other languages. Speaker's languages without these sounds may have problems both with hearing and with pronouncing them. For example;

* The interdentals, /Θ/ and /ð/ (both written as th) are relatively rare in other languages.

* Native speakers of Awgu dialects have difficulty distinguishing /r/ and /L/.

* Native speakers of those schools selected for this work and even native speakers of Spanish, Arabic, Korean, Japanese and Tagalog have difficulty distinguishing [b] and [v].

Languages may also differ in syllable structure; English allows for a cluster of up to three consonants before the vowel and five after it (for example, straw, desks, glimpsed, sixths). Japanese, for example, broadly alternates consonant and vowel sound so learners from Japan often try to force vowels in between the consonants (for example, desks becomes "desukusu" or milk shake becomes "mirukusheku").

Grammar

Tense, aspect, and mood – English has a relatively large number of tense- aspect-mood forms with some quite subtle differences, such as the difference between the simple past "I ate" and the present perfect "I have eaten". Progressive and perfect progressive forms add complexity.

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- **Auxiliaries-** learners of English tend to find it difficult to manipulate the various ways in which English uses auxiliary verbs. These include negation (for example, he hasn't been drinking). Inversion with the subject to form a question (for

example, has he been drinking?), short answers (for example, Yes, he has). And tag questions (has he?). A further complication is that the dummy auxiliary verb 'do, does, did is added to fulfill these functions in the simple present and simple past, but not for the verb "to be".

- **Modal verbs-** English also have a significant number of modal auxiliary verbs which each have a number of uses. These verbs convey a special tense or mood such as of obligation, necessity, ability, probability, permission, possibility, prohibition, intention etc; these include: must, can, have to has to, need to, will, shall ought to, will have to, may, might. All these modal verbs or modals take past or future inflection, that is, they do not have past or future tense. For example; "I am make a nice cup of tea for you". (Can: ability). It may rain today. (May: possibility). They have to take an umbrella as it is raining outside. (Have to: compulsion) etc, for example, the opposite of "you must be here at eight O'clock (obligation) is usually "you don't have to be here at eight O'clock (lack of obligation, choice), while "must'' in 'you must not drink the water" (prohibition) has a different meaning from "must" in you must not be a native speaker" (deduction). This complexity takes considerable work for most English language learners to master.

- **Idiomatic Usage-** English is reputed to have a relatively high degree of idiomatic usage. For example, the use of constructions as "try to learn", "help learn", and "avoid learning" pose difficulty for learners. Another example is the idiomatic distinction between "make" and "do", "make a favour".

- **Articles-** English has an appreciable number of articles, including "the" (the definite article) and "a, an" (the indefinite article). At times English nouns can or indeed must be used without an article; this is called the zero

articles. Some of the differences between definite, indefinite and zero article are fairly easy to learn, but others are not, particularly since a learner's of native language may lack articles or use them in different ways than English does. Although the information conveyed by articles is rarely essential for communication, English uses them frequently (several times in the average sentence), so that they require some effort from the learner.

Vocabulary

- **Phrasal verbs-** Phrasal verbs (also known as multiple-word verbs) in English can cause difficulties for many learners because they have several meanings and different syntactic patterns. There are also a number of phrasal verb differences between American and British English.

- **Prepositions-** The correct use of prepositions in the English language frequently creates confusion and can turn out to be quite a frustrating earning experience for ESL/EFL learners. For example, the preposition "on" (rely on, put on, fall on), "of" (think of, because of, in the vicinity of), "at" (turn at, meet at, start at), "in" (listen in, turn in, step in) "up" (make up, give up, look up, turn up, get up) are used in so many different ways and contexts, it is very difficult to remember the extract meaning for each one. When translating back to the ESL learners' respective L_1, a particular preposition's translation may be correct in one context, but when using the preposition in another context, the meaning is sometimes quite different.

- **Word derivation-** Word derivation in English requires a lot of rote learning. For example, an adjective can be negated by using the prefix in- (for example, inappropriate), un-(for example, unable), dis- (for example, dishonest), or a- (for example, a moral), or through the use of one of a myriad related but rarer prefixes, all modified versions of the first four.

Mother tongue interference and transfer

Extensive research has already been done on the concept of mother tongue transfer and interference on the English language or L_2. Dulay et al (1982) define interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language.

Lott (1983:256) defines interference as "errors in the learner's use of the foreign that can be traced back to the mother tongue". Ellis (1997:51) refers to interference as "transfer", which he says is "the influence that the learner's L_1 exerts over the acquisition of L_2. He argues that transfer is governed by learner's perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L_2..

In learning a target language, learners construct that own interim rules (Selinker, 1971, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L_1 knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L_2 for transfer to be possible. Ellis (1997:51) raises the need to distinguish between errors and mistakes and makes an important distinction between the two, which we will later discuss below.

It appears to be much more difficult for a child to learn a second language (that is English language) whose mother tongue is Igbo. Typically, a person learns a second language partly in terms of the first language (Carroll, 1964, Albert and Obler, 1978 and Larson-freeman and Long, 1991).

Beebe (1988) suggests that in learning a second language, L_2 responses are grafted on to L_2 responses, both are made to a common set of meaning responses.

Carroll (1964) argues that the circumstances of learning a second language are like those of a mother tongue. Sometimes there are interferences and occasionally responses from one language system will intrude into speech in the other language. It appears that learning is most successful when the situations in which the two languages (L_2 and L_1) are learned, are kept as distinct as possible (Faerch and Kasper, 1983).

Beardsmore (1982) suggest that many of the difficulties a second language learner has with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L_2 are due to the interference of habits from L_1. The formal elements of L_1 are used within the context of L_2, resulting in errors in L_2 is different. The relationship between the two languages must then be considered. Albert and Obler (1978) claimed that people show more lexical interference on similar items. So, it may follow that language with more similar structures (for example, English and Igbo or English and French) are more susceptible to mutual interference than languages with fever similar structures/features (for example, English and Japanese). On the other hand, we might also expect more learning difficulties and thus more likelihood of performance at those points in L_2 which are more distant from L_1, as the learner would find it difficult to learn and understand completely new and different usage.

Hence, the learner would resort to L_1 structures for help (Selinker, 1971:40; Dulay et al, 1982; Blum-Kulka and Levenston,

1983; Faerch and Kasper, 1983, Bialystok, 1990 and Dordick, 1996).

But Wilkins observes:

> "When learning a foreign language an individual already knows his mother tongue, and it is this which he attempts to transfer. The transfer may prove to be justified because the structure of the two languages is similar-in that case we get 'positive transfer' or 'facilitation'-or it may prove unjustified because the structure of the two languages are different in that case we get "negative transfer" or "interference" (Wilkins, 1972:199).

Language learning is all about taking risks and rising to the challenge. Teaching

English as a second language presents some difficulties, one of which is mother

tongue interference (MTI), especially pronunciation and transliteration.

The most noticeable hurdle our face is MTI. Mother language therefore, is defined as the language which a group of people considered to inhabitants of an area acquired in the early years and which eventually becomes their natural instrument of thoughts and communication.

Causes /Sources of Second Language Errors

There is a distinction between teaching and learning. What the teacher teaches is not always what the learner's learn. This problem arises not because of teacher's attention to the teaching; though this may be the reason, but it is always the case, students have different ways of learning the material that is presented to them and in the process, errors may occur. Errors may occur as a result of one or more or a combination of the following:

Interference

Adebisi (2006:78) opines that the notion of mother tongue interference as a main contributor to error in the learner's use of a foreign language is related strongly to the behaviorists' notion of language learning-which is that language learning is a matter of habit formation. One set of language habit could interfere with the formation of another. All the second language learners' errors are related to the systems of his mother tongue. These are ascribed to interference from the habits of the mother tongue. Weinreich (1968:78) defines interference as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language, which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of languages in contact…"

(Dulay and Burt, 1974). He goes further to state that when both speakers are bilingual, interference becomes rampant in both directions; when one speaker is monolingual

and the other bilingual, interference in the however, can be seen not as old habits but that the learner is investigating the system of the new language. There is no hard and fast rule for dealing with L_I interference errors. The teacher should patiently re-teach a given structure a student had learned wrongly and given the learners the chance of using the solution in an appropriate situation. Interference is an unconscious activity (George, 1972).

The implication here is that the learner's possession of this native language is facilitative and that errors are not to be regarded as signs of inhibition, but simply as evidence of his strategies of learning. The contrastive approach states that interference is due to unfamiliarity with L_2, i.e. to the learner not having learned the target pattern and is manifested in the language he learns. Lado (1957:58-59) states it thus:

> We know from the observation of many cases that the grammatical structure of the native language tends to be transferred to the foreign language …we have the major sources of difficulty… Those structures that are different will be difficult.

Other sources of errors in an ELS situation were summarized be Selinker (1974: 222) as:

1. Over-generalization of the target language rules: speakers of many languages could produce a sentence such as:

i. What did he intended to do?" Here, the past tense morpheme-ed is extended to the environment in which, to the learner, it could logically apply, but just does not. This is a false assumption based on knowledge of the target language

ii. Transfer of training: A learner's interlanguage may be due to the transfer of training; text books and the teachers' handing of the target language. A student who gets confused about the use of he/she for instance, may be because all the text book drills and the teacher's examinations are always done with be instead of using both. Another cause or error is the tendency on the part of the learners to reduce the target language to a simpler system. According to Jain (1969) as stated by Selinker (1974:40), the results of this strategy are manifested at all levels of syntax in the interlanguage of Indian speakers of English. For example, if the learner has adopted the strategy that all verbs are either transitive or intransitive, he may produce inter language forms such as:

2. I am felling thirty.

3. Don't worry, I'm bearing you.

For Fatunsin (2004:134) are carelessness is often related to lack of motivation; per harps the materials or the style of presentation do not suit them. Norrish (1983:12-24) suggests

that a good way of reducing careless errors in written work is to get the students to check each other's work. They should be involved in active search for errors.

Other sources of errors can be spelling pronunciations, mistranslation from the target language to the mother tongue and vice versa. Translating word for word of idiomatic expressions in the learner's first language can produce classic howlers' (Norrish, 1983; and Onyemachi; 2004). A child falls back to the language he is familiar with in order to communicate.

For Norrish (1983:12-42), errors may be as a result of:

- Choice of teaching materials,
- Teaching points being presented in a certain order,
- Ordering of the examples of the language,
- The practice work accompanying the examples, or
- The learner's processing of these materials.

For instance, a language learnt early may be over used by the students. According to Corder (1973:283), language is a system with all the parts being interconnected, therefore, nothing can be 'fully learned' until all the parts are fully learned. The teacher's role is to allow his students to learn the rule systems of the target language by presenting them with sentences which exemplify the rules so as to develop a competence in the language as a whole.

All the sources of errors mentioned by Norrish are all part of activities associated with the teaching process. They are all within the teacher's control except the last one which is the learner's processing of materials. Corder (1973:283) notes: "The last factor is not within the teacher's control nor yet within the student's own control, and has been classified as part of human psychology by one writer". Norrish goes further to refer to this as "personal factor" involving the student's mind. This boarders on the abilities of the student, whether it is good or he is distracted, which can lead to unnecessary mistakes. Corder calls this 'redundant', as clearly different from an error which arises especially from the language-learning activity (i.e. the inherent error which may be a necessary part of learning a language).

French (1049:22-23) on his own part identifies three sources of errors and they are:

i. Vocabulary errors due to not knowing or misjudging the meaning of a word (e.g. this letter is upset down);

ii. Correct patterns used incorrectly (e.g. it is time for going); and

iii. The case of logic or common sense in deciding upon a word or pattern in the language he is learning on the basis of a pattern existing in his mother tongue, in which case "this solution to his doubt

is strengthened by his vernacular stage".

In a ESL situation, the learner is often affected by these factors from a very early age. By the time the pupil gets to secondary school many of these common errors have been so reinforced by uncorrected repetition that they have become very strong language habits which persistently resists the secondary school teacher's attempt at remedial teaching. This is the process of fossilization. Fossilizable linguistic phenomena are defined by Selinker (1974:36) as:

> Linguistic items, rules, and subsystems which speakers of a particular target language will tend tom keep in their interlanguage relative to a particular target language, no matter what the age of the learner or amount of explanation and instruction he receives in the target language.

All well know errors are among such fossilizable structures.

Summary and Conclusion

From the above discussions, teaching and learning of English Language needs complete attention and the learners must be focused while the teachers must attain a certain level of proficiency in his/her L_1 or L_2 speaking, writing, and spelling especially in the area of phonetics.

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