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Code-Switching and Language Interference in Yoruba Child Acquisition of English

Oluwafemi Emmanuel Bamigbade*

Department Linguistics and African Languages, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

Second language acquisition and second language learning are two linguistic phenomena studied within the ambience of applied linguistics that are interwoven. One of the most widely hypotheses used to describe language acquisition is the innateness theory amongst others. It is in the light of the innateness hypothesis that this paper intends to investigate the pattern of code-switching and level of interference and transfer of linguistic features in the language developmental stages of Yoruba child, while learning to use English language especially in an informal setting. This is significant because an average Yoruba child is exposed to using English language at a very early stage at home and in the neighbourhood thus making the child an early coordinate bilingual. The data for this work include recorded conversation of ten randomly selected Yoruba children of ages four to eight. To collect the data the researcher engaged in participant observation with the children in their school during break period and also collected some other data by interacting with a few of the children in their homes. The data were subjected to descriptive analysis. The findings reveal that an average Yoruba child either employs code-switching, code-mixing, lexical coinage or accommodates language interference and/or language transfer while attempting to use English language during his/her early exposure to the language.

Keywords

Language Acquisition, Innateness Hypothesis, Linguistic Interference, Language Transfer, Coinage, Code-switching

1. Introduction

Language is an extremely complex phenomenon as it allows the combination of strings of sounds to form meaningful units for the sake of communication. Observably, children are always aware of the phonotactic rules their mother tongue at early state of their lives. This makes it possible for children to acquire language without being taught the rules of grammar by anyone. The innateness paradigm maintains that it is not compulsory for children to learn the general linguistic principles such as structure dependency because that is part of universal grammar. This same innateness hypothesis provides the answer to Chomsky's question of how to explain what why language acquisition is easy, rapid and uniform despite insufficient corpus? It should be noted that there is no need for deliberate effort at using general rules of grammar, or any difficult exercises to acquire a language [19].

Acquisition necessitates significant interaction in the second language - natural communication - in a case that speakers are more interested in the messages they are transmitting and the understanding rather that with the form of their utterances.

*Correspondence: Oluwafemi Emmanuel Bamigbade (oebamigbade@oauife.edu.ng)

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2. Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition

Krashen's framework of second language acquisition comprises five key tenets as stated in [11]. These include:

1) The Acquisition-Learning hypothesis;
2) The Monitor hypothesis;
3) The Input hypothesis;
4) And the Affective Filter hypothesis;
5) The Natural Order hypothesis.

The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most fundamental of the five hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language teachers. According to [11] there are two independent systems of foreign 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.

Conventional instruction which includes an intentional course and results in deliberate knowledge about the language leads to the 'learned system' or 'learning; such rule include for example knowledge of grammar rules. An inductive method in a student-centered environment leads to acquisition while a deductive method in a teacher-centered environment produces learning.

The Monitor theorem clarifies the connection between acquisition and learning and outlines the impact of the latter on the former. The monitoring prototype is the real outcome of the learned grammar. According to [11], the acquisition scheme is the utterance initiator, while the learning system functions as the monitor or the editor. The monitor acts in a planning, editing and correcting function when three specific conditions are met, these three conditions include:

1) The second language learner has sufficient time at their disposal.
2) They focus on form or think about correctness.
3) They know the rule.

It appears that the role of conscious learning is somewhat limited in second language performance. According to Krashen, the role of the monitor is minor, being used only to correct deviations from normal speech and to give speech a more polished appearance.

The Input hypothesis is Krashen's way of trying to explain how the learner acquires a second language - how second language acquisition takes place. The interest of the Input hypothesis is acquisition, not learning. Based on this, the learner progresses in the course of the natural pattern when he/she receives second language input that is one step beyond his/her present stage of linguistic competence.

The affective filter hypothesis represents Krashen's position that certain affective variables facilitate second language acquisition. These variables are: motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and personality traits. Krashen believes that the rate of success in learners with great incentive, self-confidence, a good self-image, less worry and sociability in acquiring second language acquisition. These variables can raise the affective screen and form a cognitive block that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is 'up' it impedes language acquisition. In another vein, positive motif is necessary, but not adequate on its own, for acquisition to take place.

The natural order hypothesis hangs on studies [7, 11] which recommended that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a natural order which is expected. For a given language, some grammatical structures tend to be acquired early while others late. This approach is exclusive of the learners' age, L1 background, level of exposure, and although the arrangement between individual acquirers was not always 100% in the studies, there were important resemblances that strengthens the reality of a natural order of language acquisition. Krashen therefore posits that implication of the natural order hypothesis is not that a language paradigm should be based on the pattern found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition. In their work, [8] employ gap-driven to show that 15-month-olds has the tendency to effectively use vocabulary on the condition that they acquire enough verbs to describe this hypothesis empirical.

3. Role of Contrastive Analysis in Language Acquisition

Contrastive Analysis (CA) has been variously defined by different scholars. Contrastive Analysis can be described as a linguistic enterprise aimed at producing inverted (i.e contrastive) two-valued typologies. CA is concerned with a pair of language and founded on the assumption that language be compared. According to [9], contrastive analysis is concerned with the features that differentiates one language from another considering how similar they are in order to give applied fields which include foreign language teaching and translation studies corpus to work with.

The implication of this definition is that CA is more concerned with the differences that exist between languages than their similarities. [4] classified CA into Theoretical and Applied CA. Theoretical CA is concerned with the production of extensive account of the differences and similarities between the languages contrasted while Applied CA on the other hand, is concerned with a reliable prediction of the learners' difficulties.

Contrastive Analysis (CA), like Error Analysis and Translation Theory, is a form of Inter-lingual study in that two languages are involved. This implies that Contrastive Analysis deals with issues that arise in the process of learning a second language after the bases of the first language (L_1) has been acquired. The pre-occupation of contrastive linguistics in its comparison of languages is to provide the methods for language teaching. Thus, features of language structure revealed in CA may suggest modification and will certainly be further

modified in the light of future experiences, thereby enhancing finer grading of learner's difficulties.

The major thrust of CA therefore, is to do a descriptive study individually of the two languages concerned and subsequently juxtapose them for areas of differences and similarities. This will enable the contrastivist predict difficulties and perhaps postulates a hierarchy of difficulties and this is based on the assumption that some problems are likely to constitute more difficulties [10]. It is hoped that this, would help in enhancing teaching methodology which will serve as a tool in the solving of the learning problems emanating from some of the observed difficulties.

Apparently, the study of Contrastive analysis may not be possible in a monolingual situation hence the necessity of bilingualism. Bilingualism according to [1], is the use of two languages either by an individual or a community. This implies that Bilingualism gives room for the existence of two languages in the repertoire of an individual or a speech community. 'One of the inevitable consequences of languages in contact is bilingualism' [16]. [20] defines bilingualism 'as the practice of alternatively using two languages.' [16] posits that 'bilingualism begins from the point where a person can produce complete meaningful utterances and pass for a native speaker in more than one linguistic environment'.

A narrow definition by [5] defines bilingualism as 'the native-like control of two languages.' [6] is of the opinion that bilingualism should be extended to include a 'passive knowledge of written language or any environment of the native language'. Bilingualism is usually a common feature at the frontiers of two language areas and in large cities where many ethno-linguistic groups co-exists.' [3], in his work reviews Myers-Scotton position on markedness theory of codeswitching and gives a simple but succinct response to the question she asked that 'who becomes a bilingual?' [14] by stating that 'almost everyone who is mobile, either in a socio-economic or a geographic sense is a bilingual'. He further maintains that a typical person in Africa speaks at least one language in addition to his/her first language while persons living in urban centers often speak two or three additional languages making such individual a trilingual or quadrilingual [3].

Thus, it is possible for an individual to have the ability of speaking two languages (as in the case of an individual having the ability to speak English and Yoruba) in a bilingual society. However, such an individual could be more proficient in ether of the two languages. The resultant effect of this could be referred as Linguistic Error when a bilingual unconsciously transfers the structure of the language that he is more proficient to the language that he is less proficient. This consequence of which is linguistic interference.

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross linguistic influence) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from one language to another language. It is the transfer of linguistic features between languages in the speech repertoire of a bilingual or multilingual individual, whether from first to second, second to first or many other relationships. It is most commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching, but it can occur in any situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language. When an individual's understanding of one language has an impact on his or her understanding of another language, that individual is experiencing language transfer.

Linguistic interference are those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occurs in the speech of a linguist as a result of familiarity with more than one language. This is why [20] describes linguistic interference as the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly - structured domains of language.

In a speech community where two languages (as in the case of English and Yoruba) co-exist, comparative study of such languages could be carried out so as to examine their area of similarities and differences. By so doing, linguistic analyst will predict the likely problem area(s) for the L_1 in the course of using the second language.

Thus, the challenge facing the L2 learner is to overcome the interference of L1 habits. Based on the habit formation, contrastive analysis sought to identify the features of the L2 that differed from those of the L1 so that learners could be helped to form the new habits of the L2 by practicing them intensively. Most errors made by L2 learners were the result of differences between L1 and L2 structure.

When the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the similar, linguistic interference can result in correct language production called positive transfer: here, the correct meaning is in line with most native speakers' notions of acceptability. In addition to positive transfer resulting in correct language production and negative transfer resulting in errors, there is some evidence that transfer from the first language can result in a kind of technical, or analytical, advantage over native (monolingual) speakers of a language. The results of positive transfer go largely unnoticed and so are less often discussed. Nonetheless, such results can have a large effect. Generally speaking, the more similar the two languages are and the more the learner is aware of the relation between them, the more positive transfer will occur.

Interference, the CA insists, is the result of unfamiliarity with the rules of a TL and psychological causes, such as inadequate learning [18]. Transfer can be positive or negative: linguistic features of the L1 that are similar to those of the TL will facilitate learning (positive transfer); those aspects of the L1 that are different to the TL grammatical and phonological system will hinder Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and cause the learner to make numerous production errors (negative transfer) [12].

4. Native Language and Second Language

In most cases, the term native language refers to the language that a person acquires in early childhood because it is spoken in the family or it is the language of the region where the child lives it is also known as a mother tongue, or first language. A person who has more than one native language is regarded as bilingual or multilingual. Contemporary linguists and educators commonly use the term L1 to refer to a first or native language, and the term L2 to refer to a second language or a foreign language that's being studied.

[5] defines a native language as one learned on one's mother's knee, and claims that no one is perfectly sure in a language that is acquired later. "The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language". This definition equates a native speaker with a mother tongue speaker. [5] definition also assumes that age is the critical factor in language learning and that native speakers provide the best models, although he does say that, in rare instances, it is possible for a foreigner to speak as well as a native.

5. Code-Switching

One of the inevitable consequences of bi/multilingual situation is switching of linguistic codes whether at phrasal level or clausal level, intra-sentential or inter-sentential. Code can be said to be taken as a verbal component that can be as small as a morpheme or as comprehensive and complex as the entire system of language.

[2] in his study on African multilingualism describes Code-Mixing as the insertion of varying chunks of English into performance of the West African languages. It allows mixing two or more languages in a single sentence at various levels of linguistic unit such as affixes, words, phrases and clauses. [15] describes language mixing or code-mixing as the merging of characteristics of two or more languages in any verbal communication. He believes that code-mixing could take the form of language transfers, language borrowings, or even code-switches. More specifically, Odlin explained that language mixing could be used as a cover term in order to express the merging of languages in contact situations in general. He further states that language mixing may be considered to be one type of transfer. Code-mixing may be defined as a speech in which utterances contain elements of language A and B [3]. It can therefore be said to be the alternate use of two or more languages within the same sentence.

Code-mixing and code-switching are used interchangeably in some stead. This is common in formal linguistics studies; both terms are employed to address speech that has elements of two or more linguistic forms. Invariably, the interest of these studies is the placement of segments from different units, or on limitations on code-switching.

While the term code-switching highlights the transition of a multilingual's speech from one linguistic form to another, code-mixing proposes a hybrid pattern, that considers the distinct grammars [2]. Hence, code-mixing emphasises the conventional pattern of language structures or linguistic competence, while code-switching emphasises linguistic performance.

6. Methodology

The data for this work include recorded conversation of ten randomly selected Twenty (20) Yoruba children of ages four to eight. To collect the data the researcher engaged in interactive observation with the children in their school during the break period and also collected some other data by interacting with Ten (10) children in their respective homes. The children were thus given items of gratification to afford them to be free in their interaction among their peers in other to get unmodified data. The data are translated into English and subjected to descriptive analysis.

7. Data

Below are the data collected from the subjects:

i. See my daddy bàtà…
ii. It has jábọ́ lẹ̀…
iii. It is coconut… (referring to breadfruit as coconut)
iv. Don't jẹ́tán o, you must not jẹ́tán…
v. I want to draw like circle circle thing…
vi. Who wants to draw like this one, see something I'm drawing… (what exactly is the something?)
vii. Semílóore, óyá come and be going…
viii. Stupid cake I'm doing gan sef…
ix. You too go and take that ike and pour it there…
x. … no, let us be gégeing… (dribbling)
xi. … ẹ wòó ẹ get out of my way jọ̀ọ́…
xii. Óyá be going…
xiii. … me I want to go and be jangrovaing jàre…
xiv. She has entered the kòtò of the janglova…
xv. Favour is doing sakará now o…
xvi. Ibíbibí ló hang sí…
xvii. A: it cannot remove because it is inside here
B: What is inside here?
C: The igun of the janglova is inside the ground
xviii. A: …it is the stick of the GAN-gan
B: It is called gángan and not GAN-gan
xix. Samson is learning it small-small…
xx. The thing is banging the iron…
xxi. Mummy you have not washed my leg abíyá…

8. Discussions

There are different linguistic strategies that may be employed during the course of language acquisition especially in

a bilingual speech repertoire. These strategies may be dependent on certain socio-economic and socio-linguistic factors surrounding the child in the acquisition situation. Considering the various theories of language acquisition which include the innateness theory, the imitation theory the parenthese/otherese hypothesis amongst others [17], different children respond to language exposure differently, whereas, the exposure itself may also differ which goes a long way to determine the child's acquisition ability. In actual sense, it is generally believed that every child responds to innateness hypothesis because every child has inherent at birth innate ability to acquire any language s/he is exposed to at the early stage in life. It is the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in every child that affords the child the ability to acquire languages. These languages may be L1 (Mother Tongue) or as L2 also referred to as Other Tongue (Indigenous Language IL or Foreign Language FL) and could as well be L3 otherwise known as Further Tongue (Indigenous Language IL or Foreign Language FL).

From our data above, the dominant linguistic strategy observed as employed by the Yoruba child is code-switching and code-mixing. Instances of lexical borrowing and lexical coinage is observable as well. These strategies observed stems on linguistic transfer from Yoruba as the mother tongue; both the negative transfer - linguistic interference and the positive transfer.

The data can therefore be classified into the following linguistic phenomena:

8.1. Code-switching and Code-mixing

i. See my daddy bàtà…
ii. It has jábọ́ lẹ̀…
iii. Don't jẹ́tán o, you must not jẹ́tán…
iv. Semílóore, óyá come and be going…
v. You too go and take that ike and pour it there…
vi. … ẹ wòó ẹ get out of my way jọ̀ọ́…
vii. Óyá be going…
viii. She has entered the kòtò of the janglova…
ix. Favour is doing sakará now o…
x. Ibíbibí ló hang sí…
xi. A: it cannot remove because it is inside here
B: What is inside here?
C: The igun of the janglova is inside the ground
xii. A: …it is the stick of the GAN-gan
B: It is called gángan and not GAN-gan

8.2. Lexical coinage/Linguistic Interference

1) I want to draw like circle circle thing…
2) Stupid cake I'm doing gan sef…
3) … no, let us be gégeing… (dribbling)
4) … me I want to go and be jangrovaing jàre…
5) She has entered the kòtò of the janglova…
6) Samson is learning it small-small…
7) Mummy you have not washed my leg abíyá…

8.3. Lexical Substitution

1) It is coconut… (referring to breadfruit as coconut)
2) Who wants to draw like this one, see something I'm drawing… (what exactly is the something?)
3) Stupid cake I'm doing gan sef…
4) The thing is banging the iron…

From the classification above, one can infer that code-switching and code- mixing is a very effective tool used by children in the process of language acquisition. In the most instances, the children switch from English to Yoruba and vice versa when they lack lexical equivalent for the item of discourse at the trigger point. The need to make up for such lexical incompetence usually triggers such switches many times in the form of lexical or phrasal replacement e.g. the replacement of *bàtà, jábọ́, jẹ́tán, ike, kòtò* for shoe, fall down, finished eating, plastic, ditch in the data.

In a similar vein, since the children are coordinate bilinguals who are exposed to the two languages at the same time, it is predictable that the mother tongue will interfere in the acquisition and use of English - linguistic interference. The cultural pattern of interpreting and understanding linguistic and para-linguistic forms is transferred from the mother tongue system which is Yoruba to the use and understanding of the English form. One of the children could possibly not effectively describe the item she drew in the playground to her mates. She had to refer to in a term closest to her cultural perspective as - 'circle circle thing' - reduplication in Yoruba helped out in the lack of lexical equivalent for the object. The use of '*gan sef*' is an expression that reflect emotional emphasis in Yoruba that is used by the child here to lay emphasis of her tiredness and futility of her effort on the stupid cake she was making. The *gan* is a Yoruba word while the *sef* is a clipped form of self, adapted into Yoruba. In the same vein, Yoruba interference motivated the lexical coinages observed in the data. These include: g*é*géing, which is coined from the Yoruba word for dribble *gégè*; jangrovaing, a coinage from slang that emerged long ago as equivalent for 'playing swing' *jangrova* and 'leg *abíyá*', which obviously was coined by the description of the back part the child's knee when he could find neither the appropriate English nor Yoruba word for it. The part of the leg looks like abíyá 'armpit' hence he coined armpit in the leg - leg *abíyá*. The above is captured in [13] that 'children can use functional categories to infer aspects of a content word's meaning; even though grammatical categories may not correlate perfectly with semantic categories.

The fruit being referred to as 'coconut' was actually breadfruit but for linguistic incompetence, the child substituted breadfruit for coconut which is also a kind of generalization. Also, there is no way cake can be stupid, hence; the child referring to the cake she made as being stupid is an unsolicited use of personification borne out of inappropriate lexical collocation of stupid with cake which is as a result of Yoruba interference of saying: *kékè ìrádaràda* 'stupid cake'. Yoruba is known to use the word *rádaràda* for anything to too good.

Hence the lexical item stupid is used to substitute the appropriate word which should have been 'bad cake' or 'spoilt cake'. Its word have been more appropriate in data Civ to say use the word 'hitting' in place of 'banging' in the context. Words are greatly substituted when there is lack of lexical equivalent in second language acquisition and learning in other to keep the flow of the conversation and fill in linguistic gaps.

Author Contributions

Oluwafemi Emmanuel Bamigbade: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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