

Reciprocal Interferences in Bilingual English-Igbo Speaking Society: The Implications in Language Pedagogy

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Abstract—Discussions on bilingualism have always dwelt on how the mother tongue interferes with the target language. This interference is considered a serious problem in second language learning. Usually, the interference has been phonological. But the objective of this research is to explore how the target language interferes with the mother tongue. In the case of the Igbo language, it interferes with English mostly at the phonological level while English interferes with Igbo at the realm of vocabulary. The result is a new language "Engligbo" which is a hybrid of English and Igbo. The Igbo language spoken by about 25 million people is one of the three most prominent languages in Nigeria. This paper discusses the phenomenal Engligbo, and other implications for Igbo learners of English. The method of analysis is descriptive. A number of recommendations were made that would help teachers handle problems arising from such mutual interferences.

Keywords—Bilingualism, Implications, Language Pedagogy, Reciprocal Interferences.

I. INTRODUCTION

LANGUAGE transfer occurs when two languages are in contact. The mother tongue (L1) interferes positively or negatively with the target language (L2). Positive transfer occurs where the two languages have similar features, and the mother tongue helps the learner to acquire the L2. In negative transfer, conversely, the mother tongue as a result of the differences in the structure of the two languages has the learner transfer the L1 habit to the L2. Negative transfer or language interference is the case of Igbo and English in Nigeria.

The English language is the target language (L2) of all Nigerians including the Igbo people. It is Nigeria's lingua-franca, the official language and the language of everything including the economy, politics and socials. It is the language spoken in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. The 1999 constitution of Nigeria gave it a pre-eminent position. Nigerians have embraced the language passionately for many reasons. Some of the reasons are that it strengthens the country's unity in the midst of more than 400 ethnic groups [1], [2], that it is one of the foremost and influential languages in the world, and that it symbolizes prosperity for Nigerians.

The Igbo language, however, is one of the three most prominent of the 400 Nigerian languages. It is also a minority language in Equatorial Guinea. Traces of its vocabularies are

found in languages of countries such as Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Belize, Barbados, Haiti, Bahamas and the United States [3]. It is spoken by more than 25 million people in the South-East States of Abia, Ebonyi, Anambra, Enugu and Imo, and in the neighboring states. The language has more than 20 dialects but has a standard Igbo regulated by the Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC). A lot has been written on the language and culture of Igbo people by novelists such as Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike, Flora Nwapa, John Munonye and others. The Igbo Language is dying as it is one of the languages UNESCO warned will die in 50 years' time. Scholars have identified the emergence of "Engligbo" as a symptom of its impending death.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The introduction of English in Igbo land has led to mutual interferences or negative transfer between the two languages. At the early stage, English and Igbo had existed side by side in the same community. But with many Igbo people getting educated and the rural, uneducated people being exposed to English informally, a new hybrid language, "Engligbo" developed. "Engligbo" is seen as disruptive of the earnest pursuit of Igbo learners of English to attain perfection in this L2. This study is concerned with this phenomenal "Engligbo".

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study investigates the occurrences of "Engligbo" and the linguistic factors promoting the use of the language so as to prescribe solutions to curb its effects on the learning of English.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will reveal whether "Engligbo" is an obstacle to the learning of English or Igbo. The result will be of interest to planners and teachers of the two languages. In English especially, the study will help in the devising of peculiar strategies to teach English to Igbo people. In effect, it elevates the issue of teaching English to Igbo people to a special case. The outcome will also assist in solving problems in areas of the world where we have the emergency of a language like "Engligbo". It will again increase the pool of information about language available to linguists.

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V. METHODOLOGY

The investigation takes the descriptive approach to the study. We shall take samples from the speeches of Igbo people for analysis. We shall also consider the linguistic factors that promote the new language as well as the implications of “Engligbo” to the learning of English. Some suggestions will be proffered to curb its negative effects.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Interference Theory was an idea in psychology propounded in 1950 to explain memory loss. Forgetting, according to the psychologists, occur because the recall of certain items interferes with the recall of other items. Interferences into two parts: proactive interference and negative transfer. [4], [5]. Proactive interference is a situation where the prior experience of old memories makes it harder to recall new memories while negative transfer is about how the detrimental effect of prior experience affect the learning of a new task [6].

In second language learning, language interference is a key experience. Language interference is the influence the learner’s L1 exerts on the acquisition of L2 [7]. Another view is that explains that 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 [8].

Language transfer in Applied Linguistics can be positive or negative. Positive transfer means that the knowledge of L1 helps in the acquisition of L2 because the two languages share relevant features. Negative transfer on the other hand occurs where the two languages have different features and the learner transfers his habit of L1 to his performance of L2.

The relationship between English and Igbo belongs to negative transfer or language interference. Uzoezie [9] states that the one hundred and fifty odd years of close contact of English and Igbo has produced these linguistic results:

- i. The transformation of the Igbo speech community from a monolingual to a multilingual society;
- ii. The transformation of the present day speakers of Igbo as first language, into bilinguals, if not polygots;
- iii. An aggressive infiltration of many English vocabularies items into the Igbo lexicon;
- iv. The displacement of many Igbo words by words borrowed from English; and
- v. The reallocation of linguistic functions formerly performed by Igbo alone, among the different grammatical system (languages) functioning in the Igbo speech community [9].

The most notable product of the contact of English and Igbo is the emergence of “Engligbo” which he predicts may end up being one more additional language in the repertoire of Igbo speakers. Earlier UNESCO had grouped Igbo as one of the languages that will go into extinction in 50 year’s time. [10]. Uzoezie further argues that the emergence of “Engligbo” is a symptom of what Hassanpour (2000) termed *linguicide* “the deliberate killing of a language...” [11] as he elaborates.

In future, it is possible that “Engligbo” will replace Igbo as the language of the hearth, the first language of the Igbo child after urbanization has taken its full toll on the rural population. Even now one can hardly find Igbo speakers, no matter how old or rural, who do not spice their Igbo conversations with words borrowed from English [9].

As we write “Engligbo” _the system of cutting English words and expressions and pasting them in Igbo sentences _continues to gain grounds in Igbo land.

VII. CASES OF EXPRESSED ENGLIGBO

The use of “Engligbo” is ubiquitous in Igbo land. Everybody engages in it in one way or the other. The researcher observed that the use of Engligbo cuts across age, education, locality, professions, religion etc. Igbo speakers, especially educated ones can effortlessly converse in Engligbo for as long as they want. In the course of this research, the author came across these “Engligbo” sentences on the lips of Igbo speakers:

- A1 Good morning sir, Agam abia ikwu rent tomorrow.
- A2 Good morning sir, I shall come to pay rent tomorrow.
- A3 Ututu oma oga, agam abia ikwu ugwo-ulo echi.
- B1 Exam nkea di difficult.
- B2 This exam is difficult.
- B3 Nlelea siri ike.
- C1 Teacher anyi siri anyi weta broom na cane.
- C2 Our teacher directed us to bring broom and cane.
- C3 Onye Nkuzi anyi siri anyi weta aziza na itari.
- D1 Ezigaram nwunyem letter na five thousand five hundred naira.
- D2 I sent my wife a letter and five thousand five hundred naira.
- D3 Ezigaram nwunyem akwukwo ozi na puku naira ise na nari naira ise.
- E1 Ndi federal Government alugo uzo anyi for seven months.
- E2 The federal Government has built our road for seven months.
- E3 Ndi ochichi etiti alugo uzo anyi onwa asaa.
- F1 The thing siri ike. Come and help me, biko.
- F2 The thing is difficult. Come and help me, please.
- F3 Ihea siri ike. Bia nyerem aka, biko.
- G1 Kedu aha school na teacher gi?
- G2 What is the name of your school and teacher?
- G3 Kedu aha ulo akwukwo na onye nkuzi gi?
- H1 Ndi labourer na eme riot maka na enyero ha promotion na salary.
- H2 The labourers are on riot because they were not given promotion and salary.
- H3 Ndi olu na eme ngagari iwe maka na enyero ha mbugo na ugwo-olu.

The first layer of sentences A1 B1 C1 D1 ... are speeches in Engligbo. The second layer of sentences A2 B2 C2 D2 ... are their translations into English. The third layer A3 B3 C3 D3 E3 ... are the translations of Engligbo into Igbo. Sentences A1 B1 C1 D1 E1 ... show how Engligbo effectively mixes English lexicons into Igbo sentences. It must also be stated that English words usually grafted into Igbo are nouns,

adverbs and adjectives. The reason Igbo people prefer the first strata of sentences to the second strata which is English and third strata which is Igbo will be the next issue to be discussed.

VIII. FACTORS PROMOTING THE USE OF ENGLISH

The factors which are responsible for the promotion and sustenance of "Engligbo" are the following:

A. Where some Igbo words are not universally understood by all the dialects of Igbo speakers. These new Igbo words were created by SPILC during the building of standard Igbo in 1972. This type of Igbo was created to enable all Igbo speakers have an acceptable form that can be used in formal speech and written presentations. Some of these words are

- a. Onyonyo, -Picture
- b. Okoko- Flower
- c. Igbe - Box
- d. nka or teknuzu – technology
- e. Elekere Hour
- f. Uloakwukwo di elu – University
- g. Uloakwukwo ndi nkuzi – college of education.
- h. Uloakwukwo nka di elu - polytechnic

We need to state that some Igbo dialects have their ways of calling those words in their locality.

B. Where some English words have become so widespread in usage among Igbo speakers that they have overshadowed the Igbo substitutes. Examples of such English words which their Igbo equivalents have been forgotten or are burdensome to pronounce

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| a. Handbag | f. Pen |
| b. Handkerchief | g. Baptism |
| c. Belt | h. Shirt |
| d. Shirt | i. University |
| e. Polytechnic | j. Tyre |

C. Where the Igbo word are too generalized and the speaker wants to be specific. The Igbo language suffers from scarcity of words that indicate variety and precision. Some of the generalized words and the words they can represent in English are:

- a. Ugbo miri - Canoe, boat, ship
- b. Ugbo-ala - car, buses, trailers, lorry etc.
- c. achicha-cake, biscuit, bread etc
- d. Ikuku -air, wind, any of the gases
- e. Otu - association, club, cult, group, organization
- f. Akwa - shirt, trouser, skirt, all items of clothing.

Thus, when an Igbo speaker uses 'achicha', the auditor depends on his imagination to know which achicha he is referring to.

D. Where the English words have been adopted into Igbo in pronunciation and meaning but not in spelling. Some of these English words are used because there are no Igbo equivalents. Some of these words are:

- Ball - bolu (no Igbo equivalent)
 Table - tebulu (no Igbo equivalent)
 Cashew - cashiu (no Igbo equivalent)

Radio - Redio Igbe ozi which can stand for both radio and television)

Trouser - trauza (no Igbo equivalent)

Candle - kandulu (no Igbo equivalent)

Street - strit (no Igbo equivalent)

E. Where the Igbo words are jaw-breakers, speakers choose the simpler English equivalents. Examples of such jaw breakers are:

Ulo -akwukwo - school

Ulo -okuko - poultry

Ama -egwuregwu- playground or stadium or sports center

Agalaba - branch

Onye uwe oji - police

Onye Nkuzi - teacher

F. Where there are no Igbo words to express a meaning.

(a) The linguist, Payne (1990), identifies that the Igbo language is extremely limited in the number of adjectives [12] establishing that Igbo has only eight adjectives. Although we agree that Igbo suffers from lack of adjectives, we disagree that Igbo adjective are eight. Igbo has many adjectives but they are inadequate. Examples of English adjectives without definite Igbo equivalents are blue, orange, purple, pink, fruitful, distraught, lousy, optimistic, pessimistic, enthusiastic and hopeless

(b) Again the Igbo language lacks words to represent some development in modern civilization especially in science and technology. Many highly technical words in the fields of science and technology do not exist in Igbo for example; there are no Igbo words for Bunsen burner, tripod stand, stethoscope, microscope, computer, algebra, oxygen, nitrogen, ecosystem, enzyme. etc. In the absence of Igbo words even though the discussion is in Igbo, the speaker has no alternative than to resort to English words.

G. Where the Igbo equivalent of a single English word tends to be an expression or a long sentence. Igbo speakers prefer these English words to Igbo words so as to save time and convey more meaning. Some of these circumlocutory Igbo expressions with the corresponding single English words are:

Toilets - ebe ana eje mkposi
 or ebe anaeje anyu nsi
 (Where one can stool)

Bathroom - ebe ana asa aru
 (Where one can bathe)

School - Ulo-akwukwo
 (a place for study)

Hospital - Ulo-ogwu
 (a house for medicine or a house where people receive treatment)

Stadium - amaegwuregwu
 (an arena for games)

Bus stop - Ebe nkwusi ugbo-ala
 (Where vehicles stop)

Teacher - Onye nkuzi
 (Somebody that teaches)

Having looked at the factors, we shall examine the implication of "Engligbo" in language pedagogy.

IX. IMPLICATIONS OF "ENGLIGBO" IN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

This study wants to observe the following as the implication of "Engligbo" to language pedagogy.

- A. The phenomenon "Engligbo" may continue to flourish in usage but it is not going to graduate to the level of a language. At most it can be referred to as dialect of Igbo or operate at the level of pidging English. It cannot be a language because it lacks its own linguistic resources. It has no vocabularies, no grammar, no syntax, no phonology etc. All that sustains it has been borrowings on the left from Igbo and at the right from English.
- B. The usage of "Engligbo" brings an additional burden to learners and teachers of both English and Igbo. In the case of English which is our concern, there has been the subsisting case of interference of Igbo on English at the phonological level. Scholars have observed that certain English phonemes do not exist in Igbo. Some of these phonemes are /3:/, /ə/, /ʌ/, /θ/, /ð/. Teachers of English have been working hard to cure Igbo learners of pronouncing those phonemes where they occur in English words with Igbo phonemes. Researchers have also remarked that some Igbo learners of English speak English with an Igbo accent or with the accent of their Igbo dialects. The speaking of English with the accent of the mother tongue is a practice that is common among Nigeria speakers of English. It is easy to indicate a person's tribe in Nigeria by merely listening to his spoken English. The usage of "Engligbo" will add to this existing phonological problem of Igbo learners and teachers of English.
- C. There are universal problems of all learners of English. One of these is the need for perfection in speaking, reading and writing in English. Writing especially has posed serious problems to learners of English. Some English learners can do every other thing in English but they become scared when it comes to writing in English. This explains why the modules in writing occur at every level of academic pursuit since you cannot claim to know a language when you cannot write it. It has been stated earlier that "Engligbo" is used informally only in speech and not in writing. But we are concerned with the obstacles that the new way will pose to learners of writing in English. More study on "Engligbo" will reveal these obstacles.
- D. Linguists will have to study "Engligbo" more deeply which is an additional responsibility to them. It is not advisable to throw this language development into the dustbin. It must be studied to unearth more useful information about the language.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS

We wish to make the following suggestions about how government and teachers will resolve the presence of Engligbo so as to eliminate its undesirable impact on Igbo learners of English.

- A. Governments of states in the south-east of Nigeria where Igbo people live and teachers of English and Igbo should mount a determined campaign to dissuade people from using "Engligbo". The campaign should be done in classrooms, schools, churches and the mass media. Users of "Engligbo" do not know that they are committing linguistic infraction by denting the purity of English and Igbo. The campaign should encourage learners to become very proficient in English or Igbo or both. It is not the wish of this researcher that Igbo should be allowed to die. The language should be assisted to survive because it represents the beautiful culture and ways of Igbo people especially their use of proverbs which a renowned Igbo novelist says "is the palm oil with which words are eaten"[13]. The campaign should also motivate learners of English to strive to be perfect in it if they hope to cope with the challenges of modern civilization and of the world being a village.
- B. Teachers of English should work on their learners in the areas where Igbo interferes with the usage of English. One of these areas is the phonological level which we had previously discussed. They should concentrate their lessons with the aim of wiping out these interferences in their learners. The teachers should strive to enable their learners perfect in English.
- C. Government should help schools to build English language laboratories. These laboratories should be built in primary, secondary and tertiary schools. Children should as early as possible be brought in contact with the crux of the Queen's English and the Receive Pronunciation (RP). An Igbo proverb has it that he, who will eat frog, let him go for a very big one. Teachers should also make use of the laboratories and the learning of English a fun.

XI. CONCLUSION

This study has established that "Engligbo" exists and that it is an easy route followed by Igbo speakers during communication. It has also looked at cases of expressed Engligbo by the Igbo speakers and contended that its usage will retard or kill their wholesome and perfect performance in English. Some suggestions were made to strengthen the learning and teaching of English as well as the performance of Igbo speakers of English.

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