

**PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTS OF FIRST LANGUAGE
ACQUISITION (L1) ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF
TIV LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

Ajim Stephen Shiaondo

Department of Languages and Linguistics,
Benue State University, Makurdi
ajimstephenshiaondo@gmail.com
07066894235, 07057437930
&

Daniel Dangana

Department of English and Literary Studies,
Federal University of Wukari, Nigeria
dangana.dnl@gmail.com
07063225511, 08026448303

Abstract

This paper examines the phonological interference of Tiv Language as an L1 on English language learning as an L2. In learning English language, the knowledge acquired in the first language (L1) is transferred to the Second Language (L2). In the analysis, the theories of interference and transfer are applied. The methodology adopted is descriptive and an observational approach. The researchers observed Tiv-English learners in oral English lessons and interactions among students in classes and school compounds at Cornerstone Academy, Makurdi from the year 2014 – 2016 and Saviour Model College, Akpehe – Logo II, Makurdi from 2016 – 2017. Within these periods, one of the researchers taught in the schools. It has been found out that in certain Tiv words /r/ and /l/ are interchangeable and considered to be free variation as in *gure*, - *gule* (to kneel down), *mbamaren* – *mbamalɛn* (parents), the knowledge which some Tiv learners of English transfer to English make them to realize words like: *radio/reidi* ə/ as *ladio/leidi* ə/, *red/red*/ as *led/led*/. It has also been found that /O/ and /ð/sounds are not in Tiv language and as such some Tiv learners of English find it difficult to pronounce words with such sounds but instead replace them with /t/ and /d/ that are available in Tiv phonology as in *faith/feiO/* realized as *fate/feit/* and then /ð ə/ realized as *den /den/* respectively. The paper concludes and recommends that these problems being as a result of first language interference are difficult to overcome but through conscious efforts by both the teachers and the learners, they can be overcome or minimized.

Key words: Phonology, first language, second language, language acquisition, language learning and interference.

Introduction

It is a known fact that every human being is born with a language faculty as rightly attested by Lyons (1981:251) thus: “the language faculty is a uniquely human and genetically transmitted capacity which is distinct from, but operates in collaboration with other mental faculties”. From this assertion, it means that human beings are endowed with Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which enables them to

acquire a language or languages they come in contact within their environment. One can acquire two or more languages in a sequential manner and can be assigned the notations L1, L2, L3 as the case may be. In a similar manner, one can learn a language in a formal setting to enhance his interaction with non-native speakers of his first language (L1). The decision to learn a Second Language (L2) may be motivated by the economic value attached to it.

In Second Language (L2) learning, there is always a tendency to transfer some knowledge of the First Language (L1) acquired to the Second Language (L2). The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria and language policy that favours English Language as well as its economic value creates a quest of its study by Nigeria's citizens who acquired their First Languages (L1). The native speakers of Tiv too have keyed into learning English as a second language (L2).

In learning the English Language by the Tiv native speakers, certain knowledge acquired in the First Language (L1) are transferred to the Second Language (L2) and most of the knowledge transferred is phonological for the phonology of Tiv is distinct and different from the English phonology. Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to carry out a phonological analysis of First Language (L1) acquisition on Second Language (L2) learning with a focus on Tiv as First Language and English as Second Language (L2).

Conceptual Clarification

In order to enhance a thorough digest of the paper, certain key concepts such as: phonology, First Language (L1), Second Language (L2), Language and Language learning are explicated as seen below:

Phonology: Varshney (2001:18) defines phonology as “the study of vocal sounds and sound change, phonemes and their variants in a particular language”. From this definition, it is observed that phonology is language specific. Varshney observes that:

The difference between phonetics and phonology is that of generality and particularity.....if phonetics is likened to a world, phonology is a country. Phonetics is the same for the languages of the world, but phonology of one language will differ from the phonology of the other(2001:18).

In view of the above observation as rightly pointed out by Ajim (2012:10), “we cannot talk of the phonetics of English, Tiv, Idoma or Igede but we can talk of the phonology of English, Tiv, Idoma, Igede and any other

language”.

First Language (L1): This can be said to be the language in which the child first acquired before any other language. This definition is in line with Awolaja (2008) that it is the language acquired at birth and which meets all of a person's needs. Often it is the language of one's parents acquired in one's speech community or inherited from one's parents.

Alternatively, Awolaja (2008:31) opines that it is the language that defines the personality of the speaker and in which he has the greatest facility.

Second Language (L2): According to Awolaja (2008:32), Second Language (L2) is the language in which a bi/multilingual person has the greatest facility after the mother tongue. It is usually learnt but may also be acquired”. Exemplifying, Awolaja (2008) asserts that if you take your 3 years old daughter who speaks Igbo to Lagos, you will soon find that she will acquire Yoruba in the next two years if you choose to stay in Lagos. Thus Yoruba would then become your daughter's second language.

Language acquisition: Yule (1996:191) sees language acquisition as “the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situation. The definition has been validated by Awolaja (2008:44) who sees language acquisition as an “implicit non-formal natural process of mastering language...it is without a conscious effort, without any syllabus and without any teacher”. Awolaja (2008) further linked language acquisition to other skills that a child acquires such as walking, running among others.

Language Learning: Yule (1996:91) avers that language learning “applies to a conscious process of accumulating knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language”. It can also be define as a conscious and formal process of mastering a target language. It is typically a classroom process, and there are teaching aids such as the chalkboard, textbooks, charts, language laboratories, compact disks, projectors, television set and the likes (Awolaja, 2008). Also, a syllabus which is a programme of instruction guides the teaching and learning process.

Theoretical framework

This paper is anchored on the theory of interference and transfer. Interference which is a theory regarding memory occurs in learning when there is an interaction between the new material and transfer effect of the past to the learnt behaviour, memories or thoughts that have a negative influence in comprehending a new material. Bringing to memory, old knowledge has effects of impairing both the speed of learning memory and performance (Tomlinson et al, 2009).

The pioneering study on interference has been credited to a German psychologist, John A. Beistrom in 1892. His experiment was similar to the strop task and required subjects to sort two decks of card with words into two piles, when the location was changed for the second, piles sorting was slower, demonstrating that the first set of sorting was slower and interfered with learning the new set (Reieber, Salzinger and Kurt, 1998).

The foregone discussion points to the fact that in learning a new task, formal knowledge is transferred to the new task, which may interfere with the successful mastery of the new task. Transfer according to Shoja (2005:92) "is the application of the knowledge that is gained from one learning situation". Exemplifying, Shoja (2005:92) avers that:

When the knowledge gain or acquired from situation 'A' is used in solving the problem in 'B' then transfer of knowledge or learning is said to have taken place. This is known as vertical transfer. Horizontal transfer of learning occurs when knowledge is use in solving problem of the same disposition (92).

One of the proponents of transfer theory Edward Thorndike propounded is identical element theory of transfer of learning where the amount of the transfer between familiar situation and unfamiliar ones is determined by the number of elements that two situations have in common.

Relating the above opinion on Second

Language Learning (L2), the elements of the First Language (L1) can be transferred to the Second Language (L2). When the transferred elements are familiar to the first language (L1) and Second Language (L2), learning task will be facilitated but when the two languages are uncommon, the learning of the Second Language (L2) will be difficult.

A critical assessment of the theory examined above proves that the theory is relevant and suitable in a phonological analysis of First Language (L1) acquisition on Second Language (L2) learning, hence its application in this paper.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this paper is descriptive in nature. The paper primarily uses the observation of Tiv – English learners in their oral lessons and interactions amongst themselves in classes and school compounds at Cornerstone Academy, Makurdi and Saviour Model College, Akpehe – Logo II, Makurdi. The researcher's observation at Cornerstone Academy, Makurdi was from the year 2014 – 2016 and at Sviour Model College from 2016 – 2017 where he taught English Language during the periods in the respective schools.

Error Analysis

In carrying out a phonological analysis of First Language (L1) on Second Language (L2), error analysis has to be considered for the transfer of the previous knowledge to a new task and interferences are the products of error. Onyema (2009:63) opines that: "errors are said to be things done wrongly or unintentionally, especially in speaking or writing". This definition has been corroborated by Brown as cited in Awolaja (2008:8) that an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker reflecting his inter-language competence he is speaking or writing". Differentiating errors from mistakes, Awolaja (2008) opines that error is a systematic deviation from the target language but mistake is non-systematic and inconsistency because it could merely be a slip of the tongue, stutters, over sight in writing, among others.

Error analysis believes in a careful compilation and study of actual deviation

made by learners. It emerged from a rationalist theory of language learning (Awolaja, 2008).

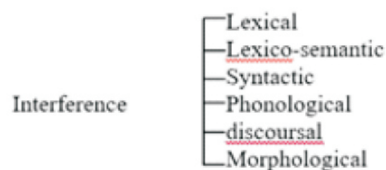
Errors can occur at two stages which are pre-systematic which deals with errors that a learner commits at the stage he is vaguely unsure of the systematic nature of the class of an item in the language and post-systematic which deals with errors that occur at the stage of proficiency that are native-like in nature (Awolaja, 2008).

There are different sources of error such as inter-lingual transfer, intra-lingual transfer, developmental error, socio-linguistic context and effective variable error while its types are phonological errors, fossilised error, interference, honorific error, spelling error, omission error and addition error (Awolaja, 2008). In this paper however, emphasis is on phonological error and interference.

When one observes the speech and writing of a Second Language (L2) learner, one finds many mistakes or errors that if traced will take its roots from the mother tongue (M.T.) which is termed mother tongue interference. This has rightly been captured by Torrey (1971:226) when he asserts that:

When two sets of materials to be learned are quite different or are easily discriminated by the learner, there is relatively little interaction, that is learning of one has little effect upon learning the others. If they are similar in such a way that learning of one serves as partial learning of the other, they may be facilitation or positive transfer if however, the similarities either of stimuli or responses are such that responses interfere with one another, then there will be grater interference as similarity increases (226).

Awolaja (2008:12) asserts that interference error occurs when an individual allows the feature of his mother tongue to interfere with his competence in the target language. Awolaja (2008:12) further presents a table showing the various cases of interference as follows:



Tiv as First Language (L1) and English as Second Language (L2)

Tiv is a language spoken by majority of the Benue State indigenes. Its speakers inhabit fourteen Local Government Areas out of the 23 Local Government Areas in the state (Ajim, 2018). Tiv according to Udu (2009:1) “is a splinter group of the Bantu, that belongs to the Niger Congo language family and is further classified as Benue-Congo language” The native speakers of Tiv have Tiv language as the First Language (L1) because they acquire it before learning any other language. The language mostly learnt by the Tiv native speaker as their Second Language (L2) is English. This is because of its economic value and the quest to interact with non-native speakers. Though the Tiv speakers are with high quest for learning English as their Second Language (L2), the learning task has not been easy because the First Language (L1) always interferes with the mastery of the Second Language (English). The interference noticed in learning of Second Language (L2) is mostly phonological in nature.

The Tiv learners of English as Second Language (L2) are not the only ones faced with the problem of transfer and interference but also other Nigerians learning English. Justifying the assertion, Onyema (2009:68) avails that:

In pronunciation, the Nigeria learner will tend to omit the /h/ of 'hand' and use the vowel / / because the consonant /h/ is not found in his language like many other learners of English will have difficulty with the consonant /ð/ as in 'the', /O/ as in 'thank', /p/ as in 'portion'. This is because in Nigerian languages, there is no contrast between /t/ and /O/, / / and /d/, /z/ and /dz/ (68)

Onyema's opinion above applies to the Tiv learners of English language too but not in all the instances. For example, her opinion that

Nigeria learner will tend to omit the /h/ of 'hand' and use / / is not true of the Tiv learners of English because the consonant /h/ is found in Tiv. In a similar manner, her view that many other learners of English will have difficulty with /p/ is not true of the Tiv learners of English.

Onyema (2009) points out that an error can emanate from the point where a learner of English in his efforts to make utterances in his Second Language (L2) is influenced not only by the sound that exist in his mother tongue (M.T.), but also by their distribution and phonological status. Exemplifying, she says there is a /d/ in her mother tongue (Idoma) which may replace /ð/ in English when learning is influenced by the mother tongue. Her submission is that "...the comparative study of two languages will reveal that the error is caused by differences of syllable structure". (Onyema, 2009:68). Collaborating the above opinion,

Udu (2009:66) gives the following sentences while discussing inter-lingual error:

- i. We were served lice and beans
- ii. Legge is my favourite music
- iii. Is child is my friend.

Explicating, Udu (2009:66) says examples (i) and (ii) typify errors of phonological interference by a Tiv speaker of English who easily confuses the consonants /r/ with /l/ while example (3) depicts a Yoruba child who drops his /h/ as an L1 habit.

Phonological Analysis of First Language (L1) Acquisition (Tiv) on Second Language (L2) Learning (English)

The interference of Tiv as First Language (L1) on English as a Second Language (L2) can be as a result of the interchangeable nature of /r/ and /l/. In Tiv, certain lexical items have two different spellings with the same meaning. One is free to choose from the two spellings of a word hence they are free variation as seen below

S/No	First spelling	Second spelling	Gloss
i	arôm	alôm	rabit
ii	arum	alum	orange
iii	gure	gule	to kneel down
iv	hire	Hile	return
v	iyorugh	Iyolugh	scar
vi	kweregh	kwelegh	lamentation
vii	mrurun	mlurun	one's name (I agree)
viii	mbamaren	mbamalen	parents
ix	kparev	kpalev	the son of Tiv, father of kparev people
x	rwam	lwam	Food
xi	Terkura	Terkula	one's name (God protect)
xii	tire	tile	Stand/tope

From the table above, each word has two spellings with different pronunciations but without any semantic change. The word 'Terkula' can be spelt and pronounced as 'Terkura' with a replacement of /r/ with /l/ and vice-versa with meaning remaining stable without any change.

With the above knowledge in Tiv as First Language (L1), some Tiv speakers learning English as Second Language (L2) transfer the knowledge to the English language and pronounce English words wrongly as seen below::

S/No	Word intended	Word pronounced
1	radio /reidiəə/	ladio /leidiəə/
2	rain /rein/	lain /lein/
3	red /red/	led led/
4	rapheal /ræfə/	lapheal /læfə/
5	rag /ræg/	lag /læg/
6	rice /rais/	lice /lais/
7	right /rait/	light /lait/
8	run /rən/	lun /lən/
9	rope /rəəp/	lope /ləəp/
10	roaf /ru:f/	loaf /lu:f/
11	room /ru:m/	loom /lu:m/
12	black /blæk/	brack /bræk/
13	cry /krai/	cly /klai/
14	friend /frend/	fliend /flend/
15	grass /gra:s/	glass /gla:s/
16	look /luk/	rook /ruk/

Some of the sentences that Second Language learners make with the above words are:

- i. I prefer lice to beans
- ii. It lained yesterday
- iii. Give me brack sanders
- iv. Messi was issued a led card
- v. My father is in Rondon

Furthermore, as a result of non-availability of /O/ in Tiv, some Tiv native speakers replace it with /t/ making the mastery of the pronunciation of such words difficult as seen below:

S/No	English word and Pronunciation	Tiv Learners Realisation
1	Faith /feiO/	Fate /feit/
2	Health /heiO/	Hate /hait/
3	Thank /Oænk/	Tank /tænk/
4	Thin /Oin/	Tin /tin/
5	Thing /Oinə/	Tin /tin/
6	Thought /Oə :t/	Taut /tə :t/
7	Thorn /Oə :n/	Torn /tə :n/
8	Think /Oink/	Tink /tink/
9	Worth /w3:O/	Wort /w3:t/

The above words are constantly pronounced wrongly by many Second Language (L2) learners who are Tiv native speakers in sentences such as:

- i. People have fate in their

- ii. My hate is not sound
- iii. Tank you sir
- iv. Give me dat tin
- v. What do you tink you areə

In a similar manner, Tiv learners of English Language do replaced /ð/ with /d/ because there is non-availability of /ð/ in Tiv Language. Therefore, the following English words are realised:

S/No	Words	Tiv Learners of English Realisation
1	then /ðən/	/den/
2	the /ðə/	/de/
3	them /ðəm/	/dem/
4	they /ðəi/	/dei/

Conclusion

The paper looked at a phonological analysis of First Language (L1) acquisition on the Second Language (L2) learning in which case Tiv is the First Language (L1) and English is the Second Language (L2). It has been established that in learning English as a second language, the Tiv native speakers transfer knowledge from Tiv language to Englishlanguage. The knowledge transferred affects or interferes with the effective learning of the new task in the target language. The phonology of Tiv language interferes with the learning of the English language by the native speakers. The interchangeable nature of /r/ and /l/ as realised in Tiv words like Terkura – Terkula (God protects), gure – gule (to kneel down) interferes with English making some Tiv learners of English to realise 'radio' as 'ladio', 'rain' as 'lain'.

In a similar manner, the non-availability of /O/ in Tiv language and the availability of /t/ in the language makes many Tiv learners of English to replace /O/ with /t/ as in 'faith /feiO/' realised as 'fate /feit/' and 'thin /Oin/' realised as 'tin /tin/'.

In a related way, the absence of the sound /ð/ in Tiv makes many Tiv learners of English as a Second Language (L2) to realise /d/ in its place as in 'them /ð m/' realised as 'dem /dem/'. It should however be known that the

interference is mostly noticed in oral speech rather than the written speech.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations are made:

Firstly, teachers of Tiv learners of English as a Second language should make conscious efforts in teaching the learners to master the sound /O/ and /ð/ in English language that are not found in the Tiv phonology. They should be made to understand that the sounds are not identical with /t/ and /d/ respectively. Lessons aimed at contrasting /O/ and /t/ as well as /ð/ and /d/ should be highly emphasised.

Secondly, the English language teachers should make it known that /r/ and /l/ are distinct sounds in English and are not interchangeable. The mistake of interchanging /r/ with /l/ and vice versa should be corrected by the teachers anytime they are committed by the Tiv learners of English. This should be emphasised right from the time the Tiv native speakers start learning English language as beginners.

Thirdly, the Tiv learners of English as a Second Language (L2) on their part should also make conscious efforts in mastering the /O/, /ð/, /r/ and /l/ sounds in English. This should be through constant practice of the sounds for overcoming the phonological interference in learning the sounds. If these sounds are mastered by the Tiv-English learners, the learning of English will become less tedious.

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