

The Impact of Language Interference on Communication

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Abstract: *Communication is vital to man's existence. Man cannot function effectively without communication whether verbal or nonverbal. The vehicle for human communication is language. Human beings have the capacity to speak more than one language. Some are bilingual, others multilingual. This eases the problem of communication yet creates a greater one known as language interference. This paper considers the effect of Language 1 (L1) on Language 2 (L2) and vice versa. The different levels at which interference occur will be the focus of this work; using the English Language and two Nigerian languages, Igbo and Hausa as case study.*

Keywords: *communication, Interference, language, bilingual, multilingual*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is process of transmitting ideas, facts, images, feelings, thoughts, concepts etc, from a source to the receiver through common acceptable symbols. This message transmission is done using language.

Ndimele (1999:123) in crystal (1977:72) sees communication as the transmission and reception of information (a message) between a source and a receiver using a signaling system: in linguistic contexts, source and receiver are interpreted in human terms, the system involved is a language and the motion of response to the message becomes of utmost importance.

THIS IS TO SAY CONCLUSIVELY THAT COMMUNICATION IS:-

- a. **Cyclic:** This means that communication is circular. It is continuous, therefore has no definite end.
- b. **Social:-** Communication empowers transactions that take place in different fields of endeavour like business, office, religion, school, establishments. It is imperative in every discipline.
- c. **Sharing:-** Communication exists between a minimum of two persons. Communication is sharing of ideas, opinions, feeling etc., except occasionally when it is intrapersonal.

Since communication is sharing, there must be a giver and a receiver. The interlocutors therefore must have a common language through which this sharing is done. If "A" is for

apple, the mindset of the people involved in communication must agree that 'A' is for apple, otherwise, there will be communication failure. This is referred to as noise/interference in communication.

Interference is a barrier, noise, breakdown, failure in communication resulting from lack of proper reference or differences in referencing pattern. It is the influence of one's first language (L1) on a second language (L2).

L1 is a speaker's first language, it is also known as mother tongue, first language or native language. L1 interference or language transfer occurs when a learner's primary language influences his/her progress in the secondary language.

Communication is about using same symbols/sharing same symbols. It is an exchange. One sends information, another receives and interpretes. Once there is a problem with the exchange, it is said that an interference has occurred.

OBJECTIVE: This paper analyses the problem of interference in communication caused by the acquisition of more than one language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fred Harris (2008), describes interference as an undesired signal added to the desired signal... a loud horn playing in the background while we are trying to listen to someone, will degrade our ability to understand the speech signal.

According to Wikidepia: Language transfer is the application of linguistic features from one language to another by a bilingual or multilingual speaker. Language transfer may occur across both languages in the acquisition of a simultaneous bilingual, from a mature speaker's first language (L1) to a second (L2) or third (L3) language they are acquiring, or from an L2 back to the L1. This means that language interference does not only emerge from L1 to L2 or L3, it can occur in reverse order.

Interference can affect any aspect of language, it can be negative and positive depending on the features of both languages. The greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative the effects of interference are expected to be. (www.google.com)

LEVELS OF INTERFERENCE IN COMMUNICATION

Interference can occur at various language levels:

- f. Phonological level
- g. Semantic
- h. Syntactic
- i. Morphological (Lexical)

Phonological interference refers to the breakdown in communication that arises either from the inability of the encoder to pronounce certain words the way it is generally done or the inability of the receiver to decode pronounced sounds accurately. This may be as a result of the effect of language one(L1) on language two(L2). For instance: The Ibibio man (Akwa Ibom State) who is discussing a word like champion, may be greatly misinterpreted as he tries to use the closest sound /ny/ to replace /ch/ , which is lacking in his Mother Tongue.

An Igbo speaker of English Language will most likely carry a heavy accent into the English Language. His/her pronunciation may be punctuated with double consonants that are not found in the English Language eg /gb/ /kp/ /gb/ etc. This has the tendency to disfigure meaning and lead to a breakdown in communication.

1. SEMANTIC INTERFERENCE

Semantics is the arm of language that deals specifically with meaning. Meaning can be obstructed even when the right words are used. This can happen when the decoder fails to understand the intention of encoder, or when the encoder fails to transmit his intention properly; a breakdown in communication ensues. Semantic interference may occur for the below reasons:

i. Homonyms: These are words that have same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings. Eg.

Well, well

Pen, pan

Sea, see

Red, Read

And others.

The statement "Move towards the pen" will have about two meanings for the receiver.

(ii) Move towards the writing instrument:- Pen

(iii) Move towards the holding area for animals.

Without the right context, meaning is disfigured as communication becomes halted.

ii. Wrong Use of Dictions:- An encoder who does not know the exact meaning of a word may use such word with the confidence that it means one thing when it means another. This will pass the wrong intention to the decoder, which may trigger confusion, unexpected feedback and a total breakdown in communication.

(2) PHONOLOGICAL INTERFERENCE: Wrong pronunciation of words can send wrong signals from the source to the receiver. Example is the replacement of /r/ in English language with /L/ (vice versa) by a particular Ibo tribe.

RICE – LICE

Instead of "I had a plate of rice as lunch" you have "I had a prate of lice as runch" The receiver is most likely to be confused as meaning is lost.

Homophones

A homophone is a word that is pronounced same (to varying extent) as another word but differs in meaning. A homophone may also differ in spelling. The two words may be

spelled the same, such as rose (flower) and rose (past tense of "rise"), or differently, such as carat, and carrot, or to, two, and too. Example: boy/buoy, aloud/allowed, altar/alter etc. Context plays a major role in helping interaction achieve intended meaning when homophones are involved.

3. SYNTACTIC INTERFERENCE: This has to do with the grammatical structure of a language. When statements/sentences are constructed in ways that flout the grammatical rules of a language, syntactic interference occur.

Examples:

5. Ada go to school

The rule of subject/verb concord broken in the above sentence, will likely result in the confusion whether Ada goes to school or Ada is being directed to go to school. Context may be the intervening factor which will help power intended meaning.

❖ **Grace is kicking the bucket of water yesterday.**

Is kicking indicates an ongoing action while 'yesterday' suggest that the action is in the past. There is a problem with the tense (the time of action) in the statement. This leaves the audience/listening/reader wondering. This confusion is created by the failure to follow proper grammatical rules which results to an interference in communication.

MORPHOLOGICAL/LEXICAL INTERFERENCE

This has to do with the interference that arises from word formation. As a result of language contact, there is an outright borrowing of words among languages. Such words as soldier/soja, father/fada etc. are improved versions of borrowed words. There is also what is referred to as absurdity in utterances, which takes the form of direct transliterations, following the pattern of indigenous languages. This happens when a speaker uses English language (for example) to express thoughts carried out in the mother tongue (colloquialism) For example (a) "I am coming" which is usually uttered when the speaker is going away from the scene. This is a mother tongue transfer from Igbo language 'A nam abia' which means I will be leaving now to return later. This is confusing to the English language user who watches the person saying I am coming, leave/do otherwise.

(b) She ate the money I gave her

The lexical item 'spent' has been displaced by a lexical item 'riri' (o riri ego m) in Igbo Language which is transliterated 'ate'. There are several other factors that can deter/enhance communication. Psychological, social, cultural factors, can also facilitate or interfere with communication.

CONCLUSION

So long as languages vary, and people are either bilingual or multilingual, language interference will continue to exist in communication. Concern however, is how to reduce it to the barest minimum.

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