THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS LANGUAGE THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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Abstract

Language is for most people the most important way of expressing and exploring their individuality. The urge to convey one's needs effectively to other people is one of the fundamental origins of language, and this becomes successively more complex as the individual develops and as human affairs become more intricate. This urge compels an individual to attain the mastery of his language (both Language 1 (L1) and Language 2 (L2). This paper examined the processes that are involved in language acquisition and language learning, the obstacles an individual encounters and the essence of language in his life. The main thesis of this paper is therefore that an individual should be adequately exposed to one language at a time as well as a 'natural' conducive second language learning situation. This, it is believed, will enable him to attain the mastery of his language in order to marshal facts and arguments in such a way as to gain maximum attention.

Introduction

The reality of everyday life of every individual is only made possible by his expressivity through language. To speak is a social act. Speech is primarily a form of social interaction and is central to every human society, even animal kingdom. In the history of each individual, speech learned before writing and we do not know of any human community which has a written language before a spoken one. For an individual to adapt as well as survive in his environment, he must acquire and learn a language, passing through the developmental processes, both of which are obviously concerned with how the human being generally accepts language. Man in his nature is in quest of knowledge, thus, a child or an adult who has acquired a first language for six years proceeds to learn a second language. Of course, these are not attained overnight but involve some processes.

A language always belongs to a group of people, not to an individual although he uses language at infra-personal level. But even at that, he uses the language of his community. The group that uses any given language is called "Speech Community". Thus, when we talk of the individual and his language, we mean to examine how an individual acquires and learns the language(s) conventionally used by his speech community,

No individual inherits the language of his parents- the community where he grows determines me language he speaks. The various needs an individual has for language and the complex nature of language require that it should be mastered with proficiency. To attain this proficiency, different factor are at work, making the processes which the individual goes through, in order 10 master his language, complex.

The phenomena or language acquisition and language learning have been areas of comment by linguists, teachers and psychologists, each making efforts to answer

questions that border on the distinction between language acquisition and language learning. This exercise is also one of such efforts, in order to give credence to this study, an explication of what language means is essential.

Language
In this context, language is used to mean human language. Man is known to exhibit different nacres like sleeping, walking etc but in ail, it is the habit to use language that his existence. As a signaling system, language is a mean communication among individuals who are mutually intelligible. This tells to Quirk (1978:42) defines language in the abstract as our faculty to talk to each other; it is the faculty of speech, which all human begin in common. This definition, however, does not tell the whole truth what language is.

More encapsulating is the definition given by Anyanwu (2002:138), To him, language is a system (habitually) composed of symbols, signs and vocal acts arbitrary created and conventionally used in communication. Although he maintains language is not the exclusive property of humans since, animals also use language, we can assert that language is man and man is -man is a thinking animal.

The definition above therefore suggests that language is characteristically conventional systematic, habitual, a vocal behaviour and a means of communication. Language is said 10 DC conventional when a speech community that is mutually intelligible generally accepts it as a means of communication. Language is also systematic indicating that words are meaningless except where they convey messages, ideas or information. Language has a systematic pattern of expression. Language is also habitual. In other words, language is a habit a child, every individual forms and it becomes one's second self and usually very difficult to be changed once it is formed. Again, to say that language is a vocal behaviour means that it primarily oral or vocal. The voice is used in language realization, besides; the word 'language' is derived from a French word 'langue' which means 'tongue' which in some contexts is synonymous with language as in "mother tongue". Then, vocal behaviour presupposes that language is a deliberate and voluntary act. it is a behaviour and this property serves to differentiate it from such involuntary acts as sneezing, coughing, laughing or crying which are not deliberate language behaviour. Lastly; we derive that language is a means or communication. This indicates that people in a community have the need to communicate with one another and it is only through the means of language that this is made possible.

Having known what language and its characteristics are, it is important at this juncture to briefly define language development in the view of Lightbown and Spada in Otagburuagu (1997:23) as:

> *...the acquisition or a set of habits, it is assumed that a person learning a second language starts off with habits associated with the first* language. These *habits interfer with those needed for second language.*
> *. .*

Obviously, an individual who has already acquired his mother tongue (L$_1$) will face the problem of interference in the development process of his second language learning. Although it is true that the acquired version facilitates the learned version, there is this persistent phenomenon of mother-tongue interference

which can inhibit fluency and competence. Let us in me next section examine the language acquisition and learning processor of an individual.

The Acquisition Process (Acquiring the Mother Tongue)

Every normal child born into a speech community is capable of acquiring language as far as the brain is functioning normally. What a child essentially requires is to be adequately exposed to a speech community rather than be isolated like the two new born infants with whom an Egyptian Pharaoh, Psammetichus (around 600BC) experimented for two years in the care of a mute shepherd and in the company of goats. These infants, after two years were only able to speak a Phrygian word 'bekos' which means 'bread'.

No wonder sociologists regard language acquisition as "specie Specific". Thus, Anyanwu (2002:27) sees language acquisition as a human phenomenon which is programmed to be naturally experienced or achieved once other developmental processes are in order. He stresses that its failure to synchronize with the development of the child indicates an intrinsic psychological malfunctioning or an exterior sociological lapse, Acquisition of language is therefore durational, a natural process that is achieved over time, from the moment of birth up until six years.

Naturally, every normal child announces his arrival into the world with a cry known as "universal Grammar (UG) of a child". From birth, a child is endowed with a programmed 'brain box' in which Carnie (2007:15) believes many parts of language are built in, or innate. In his word, much of language is an ability hard-wired into our brains by our genes. This does not mean that language is inherited rather, an individual acquires his language through his ability to understand speech sounds. He therefore goes through some development processes in order to attain mastery.

Processes of First Language Acquisition

The various needs an individual has to accomplish usually propel him from day one to acquire the language of his immediate environment unconsciously and constantly. He does this by imitating his brothers, sisters, mother or father and through trial and error, he attains adult standard.

This process involves informal picking of the language, haphazardly since there is no syllable, no classroom nor teaching aids, hence, no certificate is awarded in the end. The above process implies the other process of immersion demanding that a child should be adequately exposed to human language during the acquisition stage so that he can master the adult standard.

There is also need that first language acquisition should be maturationally set. An individual is expected to acquire his language at the same pace with the developmental processes as every normal child should undergo a series of similar and recognizable stages, although the age at which children pass through a given stage can vary from child to child.

Actually, a child is almost surrounded by native speakers of his language who serve as models for imitation during these processes. He receives every encouragement from his parents and elder ones. Soon, he reaches the stage where his needs are so complex that they can be satisfied only through the use of language.

It is undoubtedly the essential role of language in enabling his individual and social needs to be met that provides the stimulus and 'drives' which enable him to master the forms of his language even with unconscious effort. Essentially, first language acquisition has a diachronic character than the process of learning the second language.

The child's performances therefore go through some developmental stages: - the crying stage which starts the moment a child is born to announce his arrival into the world. It is a cry that brings joy to the parents and this vocal behaviour is seen in every normal child. At this stage, the adult may interpret a child's cry at different situations as hunger, discomfort, pain, fear and they try to solve the child's problem.

The above stage gives way to cooing stage when a child produces complex combination of all sorts of vowel qualities. At this stage, a child is about three months and could through cooing express more of comfort, satisfaction than the initial stage of crying. It lasts for two months and gives way to the babbling.

During the babbling stage when the child is between five and sic months, the child utter sound and sound sequences as ma, da, ba, ga, etc which later form the basis for the child's earliest words.

This stage is succeeded by the one-word or holophrasitic stage observed between twelve and eighteen months of a child. A child tends to develop the sounds he babbled at the babbling stage to words like dada, mama, baba, gaga, tata etc. he can as well utter words like tea, yice (rice) cup (to mean water). This stage ushers a child to the two-word or multi-word stage.

At the two-word stage, a child has improved to producing varieties of combinations as mummy bread, Daddy ball, Chudi shoe etc. The context of such utterances however enables the adult to interpret them. This stage lasts between eighteen and twenty months and is succeeded by the telegraphic stage during his second year of life. He can now make large numbers of words indicating different sentence types. A child therefore continues to improve on making correct sentences as he tries to meet his daily needs until six years when he begins to learn the second (official) language of his nation.

Having painstakingly examined the acquisition of first language by an individual, let us also discuss the process of learning the second language (L2).

Second Language Learning
The use of 'learning' in this context is deliberate in order to distinguish it from 'acquisition' which entails the gradual, unconscious, constant and natural development of language skill. 'Learning' in this context entails a conscious process of gathering knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language (usually L2) which is enhanced with the process of teaching. This distinction may trigger a question in our minds about children who acquire two languages simultaneously, say Igbo and English or Hausa and English. Yes, simultaneous acquisition of two languages is possible but it does a child no good as this may lead to confusion and code- mixing.

However, second language learning is supposed to take place in children who have passed acquisition stage and in adult when they are competent in a language and then

attempt to learn another. So, it should not be surprising that an individual after acquiring the first language, still finds it expedient to learn a second language. The obvious reason is that language is a habit and the natural instinct to imbibe another stimulates an individual to learn a second language.

Thus people learn foreign languages as they translate words and ideas, from one language into another. This lends credence to Chomsky's (1955) argument in Kottak (2004:399-400) that "the human brain contains a limited set of rules for organizing language, so that all languages have a common structural basis", it is such "set of rules" that Chomsky calls "Universal Grammar. Essentially, these rules must be internalized by every individual in order to succeed in knowing what people know when they know a language (that is, linguistic competence) and doing what they do when they use language (Communicative competence). From the point of view of the behaviourists, learning a second language involves trial and error intrinsically determined by such factors as motivation and reward. An individual inculcates the correct version and leaves the incorrect version. Drawing from Thorndike's view, Mueller (1995:13) in Otagburuagu (1997:22) asserts that "learning is a matter of 'stamping in' correct responses and 'stamping out' incorrect responses as a result of rewarding or annoying consequences.

Meanwhile, Anyanwu (2002.141-2) observes that second language learning involves a formal and cognitive exercise with a well-defined programme of activities or curriculum design leading to certification. In his view, second language learning is done systematically, progressing from one stage to another in a regular fashion. He further states that the structural pattern is learnt in an orderly way although there is usually conflict between the contact language and the individual's first language.

Learning a language may be likened to learning to do any other thing in life as one strives to adapt in one's environment. This supports Wiikins' (1982) observation in Odo (2007:216) that:

> Learning a language is like learning to type, to ride a bicycle or to carry out any of the other routines that we characterize as habits. They are forms of human activities which, once learned, can be carried out without the conscious use of one's cognitive process.

We can deduce from the above that learning is a set of habit which must be practiced regularly in order to Internalize and master what one needs to know. Yet, if one is not adequately exposed to good learning environment, effective learning will not take place. This is why Odo (2007:217) believes that "the greater the exposure to language, the more effectively the learner can formulate and revise his hypothesis about the structure of the language", which takes longer time to master.

Therefore, it is essential that learning strategies be applied for developing competence in the target language. From his studies, Oha (2007:226) identifies three learning strategies:
1. The learner-feature oriented approach (formerly-unconscious conceptualization); and
2. The language-feature oriented approach (formerly-unconscious conceptualization); and
3. The middle course conceptualization.

From the view point of Bernhardt and Kamil (1999), Oha (2007:227) explains that the learner-feature oriented approach to the mastery of a second language entails an entirely different path of operation from mastery of first language. Here, there is a glaring distinction, between mastery of first language which is unconsciously and informally done by a process of acquisition, while that of second language is by learning enhanced by teaching. It is also clear that a child acquiring his first language gains control of it without exerting thought process over it but an adult learning a second language mentally works out the problems facing him through 'explanation and analysis'. Hence, he deliberately, at will, recalls and uses learning strategies while trying to get over tasks in language learning (Oha, 2007). According to Tarone, 1980 cited in Oha (2007) a learner can develop word-search, word memorization techniques, conversation initiation, spelling technique, etc as learning strategies. This is unlike the acquisition stage when a child acquires by unconscious imitation and haphazard 'picking' of the language of his immediate environment. It is rather a period of conscious enterprise where the learner employs appropriate technique depending or the learning situation.

Characterizing the strategy-types, Stern (1975) and Rubin (1975) in Oha (2007:229) list among others the following inventory which a good learner will follow to attain learning strategies:
- Strong drive to communicate;
- Ignoring his weakness and always determined to keep on trying in spite of mistakes;
- Monitors his speech and compares to the native standard,
- Communicative strategy-willingness to use language in communication,
- Internalization strategy-developing second language more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it, etc.

Actually, it will not be easy second language learners to be proficient in it as they are in their first language because of some noticeable barriers. Yule (1996:190-191) relates such barriers to the fact that most people attempt to learn another language during their teenage or adult years, in few hours each week of school time (rather than constant interaction experienced by a child during L1 acquisition), with a lot of other occupation, and with an already known language available for most of their daily communicative needs. There is no doubt also that interference of the traits of mother tongue of second language learners will be posing a barrier at different levels - phonological, semantical, syntactical etc. These problems will of course hinder a learner from attaining full mastery of the target language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Conclusion

The individual in his environment needs language to survive as fish in the river needs water to survive. Language acquisition and language learning are therefore very important in the life of every individual and are predicated on communicative purposes. This is why the learner or acquirer should strive to attain communicative competence so that he can use the language appropriately, coherently and flexibly in order to do what people use it to do in difference communicative situations.

There is need also that a child be exposed to a favourable acquisition environment

where he will be immersed in his mother-tongue. This paper discourages simultaneous acquisition/learning of languages although Fromkin, et al (2003:391) feels that children may acquire more man one language at a time. In their view, bilingual children seem to go through the same stages as monolingual children except that they develop two grammars and two lexicons simultaneously. But this will slow down the speed of mastery of each as well as cause poor performance in each and lead to confusion.

Further, efforts should be made by language teachers to use appropriate methods that will facilitate learning. It therefore behooves learners to employ suitable learning strategies that will enable them achieve their target.

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