EFFECTS OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN ORACY SKILLS INSTRUCTION ON SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study was determined to examine the effects of mother tongue interference on oracy skills instruction in senior secondary school students' performance in spoken English. Four research questions were asked and answered in line with what the study sought to find out. Also two hypotheses were formulated and tested at the probability of 0.05 levels of significance. The study made use of fluency practice activities (FPM) instrument to determine students' entry level in spoken English and their level of attainment in spoken English. A sample of male and female senior secondary 11 students took part in the study. After the administration of the said instrument for pre-test and post-test on the sample students, the investigator analyzed the data using t-test. The results show that the sample exposed to treatment performed better than the control group irrespective of the gender difference.

INTRODUCTION

The oracy skills teacher's focal point should be that of the task of providing the desired communicative, meaningful and productive speaking experiences which should serve as a model to students, which should also make them adjust their speeches from the influence of mother tongue without any change in its meaning of

what is uttered. For students to successfully achieve this, they need sufficient opportunity for listening and participation in the use of language. Morley (1991) calls this "practice opportunity". He postulates three modes of practice - imitation, rehearsal and extemporaneous speech. Summarily, imitation requires concentration, i.e. listening to the spoken speech and saying after or repeating almost exactly what is heard. Rehearsal, just like repetition is the frequent repetition of that same sound heard until the speech is perfected and accepted. Extemporaneous speech practice is the other side of the coin which integrates the speech patterns that are modified into natural and creative speech.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to compare the performance of students exposed to fluency practice activity (FPA) with those not exposed to fluency practice activity. It also intends to ensure that after school students should be able to communicate efficiently in public. The researcher intends to know how effective the treatment will be in helping learners to fluently perform in public speech.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does mother tongue interference affect students' performance in oracy communication in spoken English?
2. To what extent does instruction in vowel and consonant sounds help students improve on their performance in oral communication?
3. What are the students' levels of fluency in oral English test before treatment?

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant difference between the performance of students exposed to operational communicative fluency activities in public speech practice and those taught using the conventional method.
2. There is no significant difference between the performance of male and female students exposed to communicative fluency activities.

ORACY SKILLS

Oracy has to do with an individual's ability to express his ideas fluently in a given language. It is made up of two distinct activities which are production manifested through speech which is concerned with the individual's ability to put what he experiences into words. The second activity is reception which is characterized by listening.

Oracy describes an individual's ability to competently communicate with others through listening and speaking. It is viewed as being synonymous with oral communication and comprehension. It could also be seen as the ability to convey thoughts and ideas orally in a way that others understand and to understand what others say (voice 21). Thus, for an individual to be seen as a skillful orator, in addition to being able to speak a language fluently, he must also be able to comprehend the speeches made using the language.

Alexander (2012) says the concept describes what the school does in trying to support the development of children's capacity to use speech to express their thoughts and communicate with others, in education and in life.

It is important to note that in a bid to enhance the role of oracy in developing the learner, notable researchers on language acquisition such as O'Grady, (2005); Lightbown and Spada, (2006); Gass and Selinker, (2008); Kuhl, (2010); Cutler in Guillen (2014) agree that at an early age, language learning should begin by listening, by understanding the messages and by speaking. Adopting this pedagogical approach will be very useful for effective learning in the Nigerian education system even at the secondary school level. This is because with the advent of the educational policy on the use of the immediate language for instruction at the primary level, most secondary school students though way past the early age of language acquisition, could still be given language instruction through this approach since they are still at the basic stage of the L2.

COMMUNICATIVE FLUENCY

It is clear that most senior secondary school students in Nigeria are not

fluent in spoken English especially when it comes to public speech presentation. The affected ones graduate from either private or public secondary schools and may gain admission into higher tertiary institutions of learning to study various courses. They may turn out to be competent in their fields of specialization, but may display very low level of proficiency in spoken English, sounding very poor in oral production which is characterized by faulty pronunciation, grammar and discourse patterns. These give birth to lack of communicative fluency. Experience has shown that secondary school students are given less opportunities to practice spoken English in the classrooms, apart from answering and responding to one or two questions using simple sentences or phrases. It is sad that even during English language lessons students are not given such opportunities. The chances to create such opportunities for practicing spoken English are mostly abused by teachers. English language has become the medium of official communication and for that reason, it is expected that students be helped to speak the language fluently for the purpose of efficient communication in school, social gatherings, at meetings, during religious worship and also other public places. The pragmatic approach to language teaching is the only means by which such result could be achieved. Smith (1992) suggest that apart from the course work, other programmes of the students in the classroom can be administered by other instructional strategies like oral presentation (by the teachers and asking students to do same), understanding non-verbal communication and fielding questions. Similarly, the teacher can shape the syllabus to promote understanding of the cultures and practice of the community in which the school is located. In addition, Anderson (1990) said the students could be taught to understand the suprasegmentals of the English language. This instruction is done by the use of field specific materials. Myers (1995) also said it is possible to improve speech by using field-specific written text in the classroom situation.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPEECH FLUENCY IN PUBLIC GATHERING

The level of linguistics relevant to public speaking is phonetics. A knowledge

of English phonetics is important because phonetics facilitates effective speech communication and reduces the unpleasantaries associated with encoding verbal messages. loratim-Uba (2004) gave a simple illustration that relates to the breakdown in communication which may be brought about (even within speakers of English in such a heterogeneous country as Nigeria, if we must ignore the intentional intelligibility imperative) by the mispronunciation of the word ''mother", which would then be received to imply something close to "murder". This could be ignored as quite an ordinary defect that can easily be resolved. But the consequence in certain communicative contexts could be grave indeed. For example in legal speech, the sentence, "This is the lady who mothered (heard as murdered) the boy" could only create costly distortions.

The other need for an elementary knowledge of English phonetics is the total implication for an individual's personal outlook in the course of communicative encounter. During the act of public speaking, we derive authority, command and prestige from our audience's point of view and what they think of us. It is often erroneously thought that the best way to create positive impression is to appear corporate through mode of dress and hair style. The effect of enchantment through dress and hair style could be shattered the moment an individual engages in public speaking if such a person ignores the phonetics of the language in use.

Ouillen's (1968:V) assertion is quite illustrative of the importance of phonetic structure in the communicative approach:

> *Any a girl who seems to have a fortune in her face and figure is revealed as bankrupt when she opens her buccal cavity. Speech reveals far more than the meaning of words. It reveals home influence, early environment, breeding, character. It is a window you open to show strangers your history.*

Based on that, conscious efforts must be made to put the organs of speech into use to bring out the phonetic details of words and sentences. Eventually, such efforts become spontaneous and the simplification of speech performance sets in through syllabification and other processes. The speech organs that are mostly involved in speech production include the glottis, the velum, the tongue and the lips.

MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE

Mother tongue interference on its own part constitutes a big hindrance to clear pronunciation, especially if intelligibility is affected. Experience has shown that we often face problems with:

a. The dental fricatives /ö/ and /0/ which are often substituted by alveolar stops /t/, /d/ and such others fricatives as /s/ and /z/ consonant sounds.

b. The velar nasal /j/ is also problematic. It is substituted by the glottal plosive

/g/, and W.

c. The central vowels in /3:/, which are absent from most of our mother tongues, also poses problems (while speaking). The affricate /tf / is often substituted by the fricative /S/.

d. While the positive/p/ and fricative/f/are often substituted in a speech process. This is very common with certain languages in Nigeria - Yoruba and Hausa to be specific within the Wazobia context. Students can overcome these problems by:

- Paying attention to how the person is speaking rather than to what he is saying.
- Not being discouraged by the number of strange sounds they have learnt. - Imbibing the habit of imitation. Some ear-training is required in order to make tongue adjustments, in learning to speak clearly.

Always insist to confirm doubtful pronunciation in dictionaries. Even the conventional dictionaries written in front of the orthographic lexicon. Tuckson (2011 : 128) also recommended the following exercises to learners of spoken English as a second language: Try saying these words

tin thin
tank thank
sue zoo
fussy fuzzy
few view

shall church

wish	witch
wash	watch
heat	hit pool pull
bead	bid

Exercises such as these will enhance efficient pronunciation and clear communication.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING SPOKEN FLUENCY IN PUBLIC SPEECH

Some of these activities that constitute public speaking have been mentioned in the preamble of this paper. Students need sufficient opportunity for listening and participating in the use of language. A language teacher is supposed to organize some of these activities for students in the classroom. The activities must not be within English language, a subject area cuts across other subjects like economics, social studies, business, physics, government and even mathematics. The objectives should be centered on the need for effective communication as it relates to its technical terms. It must be student-teacher centered activities. Rinji (2004) suggested some of these activities as discussed below:

Fluency Practice Activity



Fig. l : Picture showing students sitting in a classroom doing presentation

While one of them is presenting a speech, the speaker is given a period often minutes to talk about his topic. At the end of his presentation other listeners are given opportunity to give immediate feedback to the speaker. The observers or commentator will give their feedback based on

the organization and presentation of the topic; voice quality, pronunciation problem, grammatical constructions and contributions (Tam, 1997).

At the end of the students' comments, corrections are made by the teacher. After taking those corrections, the speaker gets back to his seat to mentally work on his work again. Another one is called or given opportunity to give his/her talk, using the same period as allocated to the first one. Then the, third, fourth, fifth speakers, up to the tenth all follow the same procedure.

Reading Aloud Activity

This activity may seem meant for developing reading skills in students but it can also enable students develop fluency skills in a specific aspect of language. It may give a general view on how words are pronounced — talking about the articulations of scientific words. Teachers are to read fluently aloud to the hearing of students for corrective purposes.

Role Play Activity

For students to develop self confidence in spoken English, this kind of activity needs to be organized. Role play is interactive and it comprises forms of dialogue among different speakers. It involves an interpretation of gaze, facial and body expressions, gestures, and others. Watch and Imitate Activity

A television set can be used as it is placed before students to watch newscasters casting news. The teacher guides students to listen attentively to the English accent in B.B.C news, CNN for American Accent and perhaps NDTV 24• for the urban Indian Accent, etc. (Lynn, 2010). Think in English Activity

Lynn (2010) also suggests that thinking activity in English can improve students' spoken English. She explains further that:

> *You will never be able to truly get the feel of any language till you begin thinking in it. If you wish the words to flow well when you speak, you need to constantly think about what you will say. Spoken English depends greatly on your vocabulary. So when you are constantly juggling words in your head you will find it easier to*

voice your thoughts out loud as you would have probably already spoken the words and found the missing ones in your head before you speak them out aloud.

This implies that the proprioceptive sense is not all that you are retraining when you learn spoken English. There is cognitive learning (memory) which must also take place. Grammar-based English instruction has emphasized cognitive learning to the exclusion of retraining the proprioceptive sense. Nonetheless, cognitive learning is an important part of learning to speak English fluently.

For speech to occur, your mind must be actively involved in syntax development. The more actively your mind is involved in spoken English, the more effective the learning process becomes.

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used SSII students from College of Education Demonstration Secondary School, Akwanga Nassarawa State and adopted a quasi-experimental design of the types pre-test — post-test, non-equivalent, non-randomized control group design. It was a 2x2 factoral design, i.e. sex (male and female) and instructional methods (treatment and conventional groups).

The investigator administered a self-constructed-fluency activities (SDFA) text. He validated the items by allowing experts in English education to do the content and construct validation. He determined the reliability of the instrument by the test retest method. The split-half method was used in computing the reliability coefficient of the instrument.

The researcher used two intact classes of College of Education Demonstration Senior secondary Il students as sample for the experiment. These

classes were chosen from two schools. The other school was Hope Academy Secondary School, Akwanga. This was based on the gender of the subjects and their performance. The performance of the two groups were equivalent, implying that the two groups were equivalent in their levels of spoken English.

The first group represented the experimental group, consisting of 64 male and female students offering either arts, science or commercial subjects. The students in this group received treatment while the 64 in the other group were not given the treatment i.e. they received normal teaching using the conventional method. This serve as control group.

The mean scores and the standard deviation were first computed on the scores gathered from both groups, after which the researcher computed the t-value.

RESULTS

The results are presented in tables 1 and 2.

In table one (1), the treatment group exposed to fluency practice activities performed significantly better (with X=35.33) than the control group i.e. the group taught using conventional methods (with X=25.75). The result in table one indicated that the observed or calculated t-value is greater than the criticalvalue or table value. This seems to imply that a significant difference exist between the two groups. In view of the findings, hypothesis one is therefore rejected. The difference is in favour of the group that received the treatment.

Table 1:

Comparison of students exposed to fluency practice activities and those that received conventional treatment (control group)

Group		**X**	S.D	t-value
Experiment	64	35.33	9.97	6.592
Control	64	25.73	5.80	

Similarly, the performance of male students was compared with the performance of female students using t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The result is shown in table 2 below. The result indicates that the performance of male students is not significantly different from the performance of the female students, since the observed or calculated t-value, that is, 0.168 isn't significantly different from the critical or table t-value, 0.126. Hence, hypothesis two is not rejected. Thus, it can be inferred that gender difference had no effect on the teaching communication fluency in senior secondary students.

Table 2

Comparison of performance of male and female students

Group		X	S.D	t-value
Male	63	17.35	5.38	0.168
Female	65	17.12	5.15	

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

From the reliable evidence, there is a statistically significant difference between the performance of students exposed to communicative fluency practice activities and those taught using conventional methods.

There is no statistically significant difference between the performance of male students and their counterpart females exposed to communicative fluency practice activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the importance of this investigation and its positive pedagogical implications, the paper recommends the following:

a. Secondary school syllabus should be modified to reflect the implementation of practical oral presentation of various subjects particularly English.

b. The government should employ qualified and adequate number of teachers for all subjects taught at the secondary school level of education, particularly English language and literature-in-English.

c. All secondary school teachers should from time to time, regardless of their subject area difference attend refresher courses in spoken English. Doing this would make them 'proficient' in spoken English.

d. Teachers of English while teaching comprehension and summary should select passages of all areas of specialization, i.e. subject areas taught at secondary school levels. This will expose students to the right pronunciation of difficult words as pronounced by the facilitators.

CONCLUSION

There is a gross setback in secondary school students' performance in spoken English. Subsequently, this has an adverse effect on the students due to mother tongue interference. The solution to this problem is to enhance students' spoken fluency while in secondary school. That will not only enhance secondary school learners and university graduates' competency in their areas of specialization but in the general use of English and global communication. Thus, medical doctors and pharmacists will not miscommunicate to patients and an engineer's oral description of plants mechanical faults will also be void of ambiguity; all scientific experiments carried out will be appropriately described. Public speakers will also be mindful of correct articulation of consonants, vowels, purposeful manipulation of voice pitch, use of appropriate discourse makers for the sake of arguing and persuasion in public debates.

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