

Academic Leadership: The Online Journal

Volume 8

Issue 4 Fall 2010

Article 71

1-1-2010

The Origin, Notions, Extent And Outcome Of Bilingualism: Implication For Effective Teaching And Learning Of English Language In Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools

Ruth Adebile

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Adebile, Ruth (2010) "The Origin, Notions, Extent And Outcome Of Bilingualism: Implication For Effective Teaching And Learning Of English Language In Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 4 , Article 71.
Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol8/iss4/71>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Academic Leadership: The Online Journal by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository.

Academic Leadership Journal

The Origin, Notions, Extent And Outcome Of Bilingualism: Implication For Effective Teaching And Learning Of English Language In Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools

Issues: [Fall 2010 - Volume 8 Issue 4](#)

Posted On 2010-09-29 08:03:00

Author(s): [Ruth Adebile](#)

Introduction

The meaning and definition of bilingualism varies tremendously from one situation to the other. The Webster Dictionary (1961) defines bilingualism as having or using two languages especially as spoken with the frequency characteristics of a native speaker; a person using two languages especially habitually and with control like that of a native speaker. The merrian – Webster Online Dictionary says that ‘bilingualism’ is:

- the ability to speak two languages;
- the frequent use (as by a community) of two languages;
- the political or institutional recognition of two languages

However, in a popular view, being a bilingual means the ability to speak two languages perfectly. This is similar to Bloomfield’s (1935:56) approach who defines bilingualism as ‘the native – like control of two languages.

Oyetade (1996) opined that the symbolic interactionist tradition as holding the view that language is the most crucial element in identity formation. He opined that language is important for the development of self. As such to know a language well will come with assimilation and internalizing of attitudes and values of the original owners of the language, it is believed that as a consequence of this, any bilingual who is able to gain a tolerable level of proficiency and fluency in the second language would be an alien to his own culture or at best a hybrid not full belonging to any.

On the other hand, bilingualism is a special language phenomenon that just existed since the beginning of language and human history in Nigeria. Perhaps it is true to accept the language notion that, no language group has ever existed in isolation from other language groups, and the history of languages presented many examples of language contact leading to some forms of bilingualism.

Apart from the Nigerian situation, some African or Assai nations, such as Tanzania or Malaysia, bilingualism is the norm; most people speak two or more languages and a large proportion of the world’s population is bilingual (Gosjean, 1982).

An attempt to examine the origin, notion, outcome and extent of bilingual is merely trying to look at bilingualism in the entire world. As such, countries like Canada, Belgium and Finland are bilingual nations because of their supportive role to their linguistic ministries, while others who neglect or repress their linguistic ministries hampered the growth of bilingualism in their areas.

Therefore, comparing the number of languages in Nigeria, the observation will clearly be that, if there are about as many languages as there are different tribes and ethnic groups, it may indicate that bilingualism is not such an important phenomenon after all. Infact, it is difficult to find a society that is genuinely monolingual. (Francis, 1982).

However, it is important to note that the more language groups in Nigeria, the more likely the spread of bilingualism; because different language groups living next to each other will have to communicate. It is either that one group will learn the other, or both group will learn a third language; for between – group communication or lingual franca (Mackey, 1967).

Origin, Scope and Notions of Bilingualism

Origin: As it has been expressed above, bilingualism is a phenomenon that has existed since the beginning of language in human history and it is very difficult to find a society that is genuinely monolingual.

Borrowing some ideas from the inaugural lecture series in 1999, titled “Language Matters”. Exploring the dimensions of multilingualism by Sonaiya, C.O., 1 quote:

Toute la terre une soule langue et les memes mots. (Francis).

Alle welt hatte nur eine sprache und diesdben laute (Deutsch).

Gbogbo aye si ni ede kan, oro won si je okan naa. (Yoruba).

The above, is very relevant to the origin of bilingualism, not only in Nigeria, but in the entire countries of the world. Now, the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in shiner and settled there. They said to each other, “come let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly, “They used brick instead of stone and tar for mortar. “Then, they said, “come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have began to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so they will not understand each other... so the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city... That is why it was called Babel: because there, the Lord confused the language of the whole world (Genesis 11:1-9).

After Babel, language became an issue in the history of mankind. It marked the beginning of the study of language, and the coming of the breed of scholars known as linguists. (Sonaiya, 2009). After Babel, the word “foreign language” entered into the dictionary of human kind. Before the confusing of tongues, language was not a differencing yard-stick as everybody spoke the same language.

In the Pre-Babel era, man have no need of professional translator and interpreters. Even when you have to move from one place to another, there was no need for any bilingual pocket dictionary. At that time, language was not used as a marker for identify i.e. a Yoruba man, an English man, a German lady etc. It was therefore not possible for war based on racial and linguistic strife to erupt.

After Babel, however, and the confounding of human language, the language question became a major component not only of interpersonal relationships, but a reality that is played out at times in rather violent dimensions, among ethnic groups and even entire nations. (Sonaiya, 2007).

Notions and Scope

Webster's Dictionary of the English Language defines 'notion' as a conception, idea, a general concept; a theory or idea lacking precision. It also defines "concepts as a thought or opinion, general notion or idea especially one formed by generalization from particular examples. The Longman dictionary of contemporary English also has defined the word notion as an idea, belief or opinion especially one that has not very clear. It also defines 'concept' as someone's idea of how something is, or should be.

Going by this definitions, the different ideas, opinions and general understanding of what bilingualism is and what it should be in relevance to education in Nigeria could be well considered and defined.

On the other hand, to an average person, most especially in some Nigerian communities, the notion, concept, extent and influence of bilingualism towards education and infact the teaching – learning process means nothing to them. The language notion of many Nigerians is that the majority of Nigerians are monolingual. They see language as being majorly important for the purpose of interaction, no one cares whether you understand any other language apart from the one you speak and people around you can understand.

This is contrary to the statement made by Lewis: "Bilingualism has been and is nearer to the normal situation than most people are willing to believe" (Lewis, 1976:151)

However, it is interesting to note that, no really precise statistics exist concerning the number and distribution of speakers of two or more languages in Nigeria and the entire nations of the world.

Inquisitively, bilingualism offers a fascinating and varied set of patterns; through these patterns are being hindered by many factors such as lack of widely accepted definition of the concept and the fact that not all countries or world institutions are interested in bi – or multilingualism, even when it affects them directly.

Therefore, it is important to note here that the spread of bilingualism and its progression reflects the degree of bilingualism in various aspects of life and language development in general, as we shall examine the following diversification of Bilingualism.

Dimension of Bilingualism and its Educational Implication

Bilingualism is a sociolinguistic phenomenon that has received much scholarly attention, not only because of its importance in communication but also because of educational and demographic

considerations that have led many sociologists to brand some languages as major and others as minor in multilingual settings in Nigeria.

Nigeria is a multilingual nation; and it is difficult to say which ones are languages which ones are dialects. (Ayodele, 2008:87). Briefly, we shall look at the following:

Educational Dimension

Bilingualism in Education is generally a matter of public policy. Many critics usually hold the opinion that children brought up bilingually perform poorly in other subjects, as a greater amount of mental effort has to be expended in the mastery of two languages. However, whatever the opinion of the critics, education in Nigeria is a means of extending bilingualism in many Nigerian societies, where English Language is being used as medium of instruction and the mother Tongue is taught as a school subject or otherwise. (NPE, 2004).

Sociological Dimension

Bilingualism is a social necessity; it opens the door to education, jobs, the media and public services for life actualization, improvement, efficiency, productivity and national growth. It helps the smooth running of teaching – learning process in Nigerian schools. All Nigerian English learners at one level or the other, either consciously or otherwise will automatically become bilinguals. This is for the purpose of academic good performance and teachers' efficient teaching in the classroom.

Linguistic Dimension

In Nigeria as a multilingual nation, some linguists view certain bilingual behaviour like code-switching, code-mixing and interferences impure admixtures and detest them because they lead eventually to language shift and eventual death of minority languages. This happens to be true if, after introducing certain structures to a target language, initiators of these structures maintains them; thus creating; pidgins, creoles, hybrid or mixed languages. This may have a serious negative effect on learners of English who would neither be perfect in English Language or the Mother Tongue (MT).

Political Dimension

The political dimension of bilingualism is a consequence of the contact between two linguistic groups that do not have the same numerical, political and economical importance. However, the conflicts involving languages are usually not about language but about fundamental inequalities between groups which happen to speak different languages. A language can become or be made focus of loyalty for a minority community that thinks itself suppressed, persecuted or subjected to discrimination.

Religion Dimension

Although Islam and Christianity to a certain extent promote bilingualism, it also inhibits its practice on the ground that translation makes a text lose something of the author's original intent. The Bible also was written in the Hebrew Language and latter translated into English and other languages. This also promotes bilingualism (Romaine; 1995:9-11).

Considering the educational implications of bilingualism in Nigeria, one could observe that it has both

negative and positive language influences on the Nigerian Junior English learners.

In Nigeria, the bilingual educational strategy must face the complexity brought about by the free movement of people, services, and goods as a result of the nation's globalize and technological advancement situation.

The controversial practice of bilingual education has been under fire for the last few years from opposition such as the proponents of English only, who as Army (2000) opines that this bilingual education handicaps children cognitive growth due to the confusion of multiple languages. It has been proved that this is however, not true, because well developed national language cognitive skills pave the path for academic growth and it is indeed a very valuable asset.

In most Nigerian junior secondary schools, the teaching of English Language still happens in the foreign language (L2). English Language is taught as a subject but the medium of instruction is English Language as well. This means that the way of transmission of messages and the content of the messages is often of limited relevance to the Nigeria situation. This can lead to inefficient, wasteful and costly educational system.

Generally, it is argues that people educated in a foreign language cannot confidently express their community spirit or project their community's world view, especially if their spirit and world view have to compete with those embodied in the foreign languages used for education.

However, looking at the positive side of bilingualism and education, in Nigerian junior secondary school English learners; it has been proved by many research findings that, in bilingual schools, there would be more dynamic interaction between the teachers and the students and even among students themselves. The teachers are prone to use many more open – ended questions allowing the students to find solutions to the problems. On the other hand, the use of national language to teach as the case in Nigeria permits the teacher to move away from the inefficient method of rote learning. However, this may not be the advantage of children from rural areas, fewer of them that attended schools, often repeated classes and eventually abandon schools because they could not master the language of instruction.

Outcome and Consequences of Bilingualism on Effective Teaching and Learning of English

The following outcome and consequences of bilingualism will be examined in relevance to effective teaching and learning of English Language in Nigerian Junior Secondary School English Learners.

- i. Whenever bilingualism exists, the first outcome is analogical derivation from the first language (L_1). That is, trying to make certain analogy from the first language (L_1) while using the second language (L_2) to express such analogy. A direct drawing of Yoruba (L_1) to English (L_2) will occur, which may not give the direct semantic interpretation that is intended e.g. well done, don't mention, they are coming (whereas the reference is to a single person) etc. This affects learners' linguistic competence, and worse still, some English incompetent teachers do make such mistakes in the classroom.
- ii. Semantic transfers do occur in any bilingual situation. That is, referring to somebody who is old enough to be your father as your biological father. The Africa/Nigerian culture permits this; but in language, it is semantically wrong. All elderly people in the community are regarded as the child's

parents. This affects learner's semantic and interactive competence in English Language. As most teachers also believe the same thing, would never see it necessary to differentiate biological parents from other elders in the community in a classroom situation.

iii. **Honourific Pronoun:** Here, a bi – linguist may transfer the respect and honour in interactive analysis that is present in L₁ to L₂ directly e.g. He will say “They are calling you.” “My uncle is coming” They are coming etc.

iv. There is the emergence of Nigerian English, which is a by-product of contact between Nigerian Languages and English Language. This is simply the influence and outcome of local Nigerian Languages on English Language (L₂).

v. Cross association is another outcome or consequence of bilingualism i.e. association of the Nigerian culture with English Language e.g. phrases like; last born, senior brother, junior brother, instead of, the youngest in the family, elder brother and younger brother respectively.

vi. Ignorance Hypothesis is another outcome of bilingualism in Nigerian schools and the entire environment. This occurs when English Language is not being used as the native speaker will use it e.g. hot drink as hard drink, minerals as orange drinks, fanta drink or coke drink. These and many others such as code-mixing, loan words, linguistic interaction, code switching, interference at different levels etc. are the consequences and outcome of bilingualism in Nigerian junior secondary schools.

Implication for Students' Performance in English Language in Nigerian Junior Secondary Schools

Onukaogu (2008) opines that the government through the NPE sought to deliberately promote bilingualism/illiteracy and multilingualism / multiliteracy in Nigeria through formal education. In the Nigerian education policy, bilingualism is encouraged especially in the primary school education because the NPE states that English shall progressively be used from the fourth year of the primary school.

Relating the consequences above with the classroom situation, these affect effective and efficient teaching and learning of English Language especially the junior learners of English Language. Problems such as communicative incompetence, semantic wrong analysis, linguistic incompetence, wrong analysis of tenses and lots of mechanical grammatical faults or errors in learners' composition, comprehension grammar and summary exercises. This infact is one of the major reasons for lack of students' interest in learning English Language and even regular poor performance in secondary school English Language final results. (Akinrinade, 2001).

The English Language teacher is then faced with series of problem in the teaching and learning of English. Such problems as mention above; interference, code – switching, direct translation etc. which hinders effective learning of the language.

Coupled with the above problems, is the fact that many Nigerian English learners are allergic to reading for recreational pleasure, qualitative knowledge, incisive understanding and creative application of the subject matter that can promote effective learning of English language. Understandably, many children are more engrossed in their mother tongue which structurally differs and

interferes with the medium of instruction (Oyekan, 2004:413).

Concerning the influence of the above problems of bilingualism on efficient teaching and learning of English; it is pertinent for teachers of English language to be well grounded in the language of instruction and communication in order to enhance teaching effectiveness and students' achievement. Teachers should endeavour to adopt Diagnostic Remedial Teaching (GRT) strategy in identifying and correcting the student's learning problems as a result of bilingualism interference in language of instruction and communication in all human life activities (Odeleye, 1998).

Therefore, students' poor conceptual understanding and inability to commit thoughts coherently into writing could be resolved by teachers who understand the nature, notions and problems of bilingualism.

Conclusion

This paper examines not only the factors that usher in bilingualism, but the origin, extent, notions and outcome of bilingualism in Nigeria and its implications for effective teaching and learning of English in junior secondary schools.

The paper hold the view that we live in a world of linguistic diversities accounted for by the Biblical tradition of the Tower of Babel. It goes without saying that, since the recent attempt at globalization necessitate high level of human transactions, present strides towards bilingualism are justified.

However, it will not suffice to end without remarking that the government should apply all positive means of not allowing bilingualism to jeopardize the interest of Nigerian English learners by planning for:

- effective language policy which must be aggressively implemented not mere policy statements;
- define status for the various languages that is available in Nigeria, at least the major ones;
- provide facilities and materials for efficient teaching of indigenous major language to raise their status and standard e.g. textbooks & other instructional resources;
- well defined programme for language teachers i.e. efficient teacher preparation;
- review the policy statements in the NPE to become specific and implementable.

All these and others will help in effective teaching and learning of English language in a bilingual/multilingual situation as Nigeria.

REFERENCE

Ayodele, A. (2008). **Language in Society**. Stebak Books & Publishers. Pp. 99.

Akinrinade, E.O. (2001) **Varieties of English**. Emolaj Prints, Ibadan.

Bloofield, L. (1935). **Language**. London: Allen and Unwin.

Francois Grosjean (1982). **Life with Two Languages**. Harvard University Press. Pp 1-3.

Lewis, E.G. (1976). **Education**. Newbury House Pp. 151.

Mackey, W. & V. Beebe (1967). **Bilingual Schools for a Bilingual Community**. Newbury House Pp 231-255.

Olagbaju, O. O. (2009). **An Examination of the Bilingual Provisions of the Nigerian National Policy on Education (NPE): Implications for Teaching, Learning and Students' Performance in English Language**. An Unpublished Paper Submitted as part of course work for TEE 811- Languages in contact, Department of Teacher Education, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Oyekan, S.O. (2000). **Foundations of Teacher Education**. Ben Quality Prints, Ibadan.

Onukaogu C, (2008). **Biliteracy and the Attainment of Sustainable Development in Multilingual Nigeria**. Hhp//www. Forumon Public policy. Com/summer 08 papers/onukaogu. Pdf. Accessed on Friday, July 10, 2009.

Oyetade, S.O. (1996). **On the Nature of Bilingualism in Nigeria**. Research in African Languages and Linguistics.

Romaine, Suzanne (1995). **Bilingualism**. Black Well Publisher, Oxford. Pp. 1-5, 9-11.

Army, (2000). The Importance of Bilingual Education. **International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism**, Vol. 5, (1).

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). **National Policy on Education** (4th Edition) NERDC Press, Yaba, Lagos.

VN:R_U [1.9.11_1134]