



Review Paper

Acculturation and its influence on the acquisition of English as second language in Northern Nigeria

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Abstract

This conceptual paper deliberates on the influence of Schumann's (1978) acculturation model on the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL) in northern Nigeria. Although the model was developed in the second language (L2) acquisition within its native country environment, some of its eight social factors can be applied to other situations especially where the target language is an official/national medium of communication. Hence, this paper started with a brief discussion of acculturation model and its eight social variables. Next, it reviewed the status of English in Nigeria. Then, cultural influence on ESL acquisition was deliberated upon and northern Nigerian culture with its devastating consequence on the overall success of ESL learning discussed. At the end, a conclusion reemphasized the cultural situation in Nigeria and suggested an awareness campaign in the northern areas as a means of uplifting the chances of acculturation for improving ESL learning.

Keywords: Acculturation, acquisition of language, English as second language.

Introduction

Culture is very important in target language learning and according to Cook¹, the goal of the language learners is to make sure that they can communicate what they have in mind effectively. This is the essence of learning the English language in Nigeria. But like other Islamic communities who regard western education as a subtle and benign tactics of Christianising their descendants², the northern Nigerian Islamic society seemed to view the learning of English culture as an indirect method of changing their youths' way of life to that of the western Christian oriented one. Consequently, their hesitant attitude towards acculturating and appreciating English speech habits that may aid its learning and students' inability to think in the language.

Though English is not only an L2 but also an official and instructional medium in Nigeria, teachers constantly complain of their inability to make students at all levels think in English which can be associated to the effect of acculturation³. Acculturation model pointed out that the extent to which learners are successful in the acquisition of a target language (TL) is determined by the degree of comfortability and interactions in the given language as well as amount of adaptation of behavioural patterns and values of its linguistic community. Researches on acculturation are usually focused on L2 learning of immigrants, but its effects can also be noticed where the L2 is learnt in homesituations⁴. For example, the habit of some Nigerians espousing western English attitudes and

cultures³ while others try not to even adapt them. Hence, this paper will conceptualize the influence of acculturation on the learning of English as L2 in northern Nigeria by surveying and reflecting on the situation.

Acculturation

Eda⁵, pointed out that this model can assist as an overall outline of how social and psychological variables can affect second language acquisition (SLA). This paper looked at the eight social variables as discussed by Chizzo⁴. These are: i. Social dominance where superiority of the English Language Learning (ELL) group over the TL group will elicit a tendency of not learning the TL or resisting the learning due to inferiority of their group. Northern Nigerian Hausa language being the dominant speech medium around the sub-Saharan regions gave it such social dominance influence. ii. Assimilation, preservation, and adaptation which are giving up one's culture and adopting those of the TL group, maintaining one's culture and rejecting those of the TL, and adjusting to the culture of the TL group but maintaining own for intragroup use respectfully. iii. Enclosure which is the extent to which two groups share similar social constructs such as schools, churches, clubs, recreational facilities, crafts, professions, and trades that will make enclosure low and facilitate the L2 acquisition or high to incapacitate L2 learning. iv. Cohesiveness of the ELL group which will breed a tendency to remain separated from the TL group. v. Size where large ELL group will make intragroup contact to be more frequent than contact with the TL group and

so, reduce chances of learning the L2; vi. Congruence which is similarity of two cultures that will enhance potential social contact and facilitate L2 learning; vii. Attitude which will make L2 learning to be facilitated with mutual positive attitude amongst the LL group and TL group; and viii. Intended length of residence which is the eighth social construct that serves as a drive for learning an L2 when a learner plans to reside longer in the TL environment.

Pavlen⁶ asserted that the production, reproduction, transformation and performance features which language serves are recognised by the reciprocal relationship that exist between language and identity, and that L2 learning outcomes are affected by interactional opportunities that might have been influenced by racial, ethnic and class identities.

Al-Qahtani⁷ who views the model as being committed to the favourability of the learning situation to SLA and not challenging or opposing the role of SL learners' cognitive processes, asserted that there are many other factors affecting SLA besides acculturation. He used questionnaire, interview, and field observations to discover the apparent social distance amongst an Arab community who live in USA, examine its impact on the process of their acquisition of ESL and found that despite the great social and psychological gaps that exists between their NL group and the TL group, some learners could effectively acquire the English language. His overall findings, however, show that effective skills of communication correspond with the extent of L2 learners' acculturation to the TL.

Furthermore, Anemon⁸ views the model as serving the social and psychological variables' effect on SLA but felt that there is a need to visibly categorize its affecting factors. Although Chizzo⁴ has shown that the model does not illustrate how its social and psychological aspects differ from learner to learner or explains how existing social and psychological distance correlates to the learners' proficiency while they acquire the SL, most of the aspects he mentioned in his overview can be applied to the northern Nigerian situation. Learning an L2 has connection to the acculturation process since identification with the TL culture is related to a higher level of proficiency in the L2. So, participation in its native cultural activities will lead to positive encouragement in ELL⁹.

While, as pointed out before, researches on acculturation are usually based on the learning of the L2 by immigrants in their receiving countries, its effects can also be visible in situations where an L2 is used as official language through which all national transactions are executed; such as Nigeria. Most Nigerians adopt certain west English native attitudes and customs while a few declined from doing so. Accordingly, reflections and researches on such circumstances, can help to foster learner engagement and promote proficiency in the use of the English language. Reflections in this area are necessary considering the status of the English language in Nigeria.

The Status of English Language in Nigeria

Currently English has an elevated position of global importance due to its status of being an L2 in over seventy countries and the language of media, technology, education, non-governmental aid organisations, commerce, and entertainment in over one hundred countries¹⁰. Consequently, there is a competitive desire to be proficient in the use of the English language worldwide, especially in countries like Nigeria where it serves as the major official medium of interactions.

The status of English in Nigeria is that of a national official language as well as the medium of instructions at all stages of schooling, through which every other subject (including indigenous languages) of the country's curriculum are imparted and learnt. Thus, it is a means of internalising and reproducing all formal educational knowledge which is conveyed to the learners by their teachers. This status of English in Nigeria gives it prestige and uplifts its reputation and recognition as a necessary tool for educational, employment, political and/or business success. In this regard, Dearden¹¹ in a British Council sponsored survey that involved 55 nations across the world, reported that English Medium of Instruction (EMI) is highly supported by Nigerian parents. But, this support mostly comes from the southern part of the country where the policy of EMI is abided by and English culture highly incorporated and practiced. In other parts of the country, like the north, the situation is different.

In some parts of Nigeria there is no effective and appropriate use of EMI as stated in the national policy on education because majority of teachers lack the ability to use language of instruction due to influence of local or indigenous languages and the compounded nature of some features of the English language. Educational lessons in public schools of the northern areas of the country are characterised by teachers and pupils code mixing, code switching and/or using various languages such as Hausa and English throughout classroom instructions¹².

In agreement with the above assertions, other researchers have found out that EMI policy is not effectively implemented in Nigerian schools and that Hausa language is mostly used as MOI in public schools of the northern part of the country¹³. But, subject contents' basic skills and knowledge cannot be effectively conveyed when EMI is not well implemented because the role of a language of instructions is very vital for learning facilitation. Yet, the process of teaching the English language in most Nigerian schools does not engender students' fluency in the skills of the language¹⁴ due to the EMI conflict.

Moreover, conflict in the proper use of a given MOI at early levels of schooling may negatively affect the future educational successes of the learners because it can make some of the learner sidle all through instructions and, by implication, lead to negative outcomes on their proficiency in English¹². Amount of contact with the language for a lengthy period is said to be

needed for successful language attainment because it will assist increased exposure to the language in a variety of situations¹⁵. Taking this into consideration, it would have been expected that all Nigerians should learn English easily at all levels. But, as found by Owolabi and Dada¹⁶, the current lack of competence in speaking and literacy skills amongst Nigerian youths has led to discouraging performance in public English examinations. Cultural influence on the learning of ESL might be responsible for this.

Cultural Influence on ESL Acquisition

Without acknowledging the cultural situation in which a language is used, it will be hard to teach it due to the strong entangled nature of culture and language. So, there is need for L2 users to comprehend its communication as a cultural process and realize their own culturally rooted communicative habits as well as that of other people¹⁷. It is observed that many students, who have excellent academic performance in English subject, sometimes, find it very difficult to correspond with native speakers or in real life situations. This might be the result of learning English without proper awareness of its culture. Okediji¹⁸ is of the view that it is the cultural beliefs, norms, traditions, needs and aspirations of the society that combine to articulate educational policies and eventually the content of the curriculum at all levels of education in Nigeria. Hence, these cultural entities are, by implication embodied in the nation's ELT syllabus and its contents.

Influence of what cultures observe is associated with language development. Cultural observations can promote or hinder language development because the L2 learners' communicative growth is not only associated with the degree of their exposure to the TL but also to the opportunity for using it. Ribot, Hoff and Burrige¹⁹, showed cultural variations in the patterns of learners' interaction as being able to produce a link in how the receptive and communicative skills of learners are related. The authors said this is because some cultures expect their children to listen to grown-ups more than they talk to them which can have a negative influence on language acquisition. When the amount of learners' output is minimized, possibility of learning the language is also reduced. They proposed that developing receptive skills before expressive skills will be normative to a higher degree for children from this kind of cultures than is typical of children who belong to cultures where talking and freedom of expression are expected and encouraged. This is further emphasized in the fact that learners tend to achieve greater proficiency in the use of a target language when they positively associate with its culture. So, to enhance TL learning, its culture should be incorporated into its teaching and learning.

According to Choudry²⁰, the culture associated with ESL should be taught with it to enable the learners to attain proficiency in its use. Hence, teachers and designers of ESL are supposed to take into cognisance the position of culture in the learning of language. This argument is because culture plays a very

important role in the teaching and learning of language which is inescapable in the planning and development as well as the classroom instructional situations. Besides, in Kramsch's²¹ view, there should be reflections of both the target language culture as well as the students' culture in a language policy to avoid any misinterpretations between cultural entities and language.

Furthermore, Jabeen and Shah²², regard culture as an active and constantly fluctuating entity which is a reciprocally dependant term with attitude and associated with knowledge and beliefs. There searchers also supposed that the issue of attitudes to language and its culture has a paramount implication particularly in the language teaching classes. They feel that any language teaching exercise that does not take into considerations learners' culture is going to be unsuccessful and may attract negative influences on the language learning. This is especially true where the language taught is a non-native L2. SLA is a complicated process which involves various intellectual capacities, that has been connected to different variables including motivation and context of L2 acquisition²³ as well as attitude and culture.

Since, mutual dependency exists between the terms effective attitude and culture²², owning a constructive attitude towards a given cultural group and its language can escalate engagement of the TL learners and in turn improve their language proficiency⁹. Yet, Ayodabo and Acheoah²⁴ are of the view that the ESL learning situation in Nigeria is incapacitated due to some cultural and preservative restrictions which prevents learners from attaining the level of proficiency that is crucial for phonological fluency. In the same regard, Lysonski and Durvasula²⁵ agreed that with globalization exposure, Nigerians will change and assimilate other world cultures in their own way, because they were never keen on emulating global culture due to the indigenous traditions encircling them. This situation is more pronounced in the northern Nigerian culture.

Northern Nigerian Culture

Okediji¹⁸ defines culture as the totality of the circumstantial ethnic, religious, tribal, language and principles through which people's upbringing and lives are shaped. It shows the collective amount of knowledge, views, values, experiences, behaviours, civilizations, religions and ideas of people within an area and time. Culture, being an inherent part of human being, is a process of imparting acceptable values, knowledge, costumes, norms and behavioural patterns for the development of individual groups. Its transmission is said to ensue through a blend of members' experiential trials and communal knowledge which develop progressively through social interactions²⁶.

However, Crozet and Liddicoat²⁷ emphasized that with contact to other cultural experiences and knowledge, culture is liable to change. Fundamental changes and transformations have been connected to European colonization, and its successive

involvements and interventions in most African countries in practically all frontages of the natives' developments and lives. A lot of changes were shown to have occurred in the natives' socio-cultural customs due to the acculturation processes of adapting and adopting to the western European ways of life¹². This could be the reason why some social groups try to prevent any encroachment from other cultures and languages regardless of their global importance. The Arabs' resistance to adapt European values and habitual patterns even though they desire to acquire the English language due to its widely valued prestige could be an instance of such preventive tendencies. Hence, a visible variation could be perceived in value preferences and principles amongst the people of the two cultures.

In a study it was found that the perceived similarities of the Arab and English cultures from actual witnessed facts is highly poor and the low score from his data on the congruence of the two cultures proved that their lifestyle and everyday activities are vastly varied. These lead to the conclusion that the Saudi Arabs do not demonstrate the required level of acculturation with their TL culture. And the current valued culture of the people of northern Nigeria being a combination of local tribal and Arab/Islamic traditions, the same attitude to their L2 acquisition can be expected even though the two learning circumstances are varied. The Arabs in this research were based in college town of Midwest of the USA which is an English native community, while the northern Nigeria is a community where English is an official and second language⁷.

Moreover, in a research article on the challenges of EMI in Nigerian primary schools, Ibrahim, Anka and Yabo¹² mentioned the bearing and attitude of the women populace as one of the noticeable features of the effects of British civilisations on the people of northern Nigeria. This might be one of the motives behind most northern Nigerian elders' efforts to cut down the younger generation's desires for exalting the English language and imitating the western way of life by emphasizing their exiting local languages and ethnic/Islamic traditions. The older generations might be afraid that the obvious transformations in the habits of their people due to adaptations to the English culture will escalate to total adoption as is the case in the eastern part of the country where Euro-Cristian traditions are reverend, highly practised and considered part of the native culture.

Conclusion

Bisong³ proclaimed that Nigerian cultures comprises of basic values and principles of the varying ethnic groups with those of the two dominant foreign cultures (Euro- Christian and Arab-Islamic) in the country. The eastern culture comprises of ethnic and Euro-Cristian traditions, while the north has a combination of ethnic and Arab-Islamic cultures which have a devastating consequence on the overall success of ESL learning. Currently, the situation is still the same if not intensified due to the acculturation processes where the eastern populace adores and adopt the English culture while the northerners avoid it.

Furthermore, Hausa, being the dominant language in northern Nigeria, is frequently and widely spoken as lingual franca by the different language tribes and code mixed/ codes witched or used as MI in most public schools¹². This state of ELT affects those in the rural parts who have no access to private commercial schools more and prevent them from having the desired contact with the TL. Yet, individuals' ability to perceive and emulate behaviour is dependent on the level of contact to that behaviour²⁸. And since, as Hammer and Dewaele²⁹ found, learners who have the highest contact with the TL have the uppermost levels of L2 proficiency, most English learners in the northern Nigerian public schools will be disadvantaged.

Besides, learners' home situations can equally have effect on their language acquisitions³⁰. Pupils from an educated family background are exposed to English more and in most cases, have access to modern technological resources that can accelerate their TL acquisitions. They might be able to achieve proficiency better due to a possibility of listening to and using the English language as well as learning its culture in their everyday life interactions. Yet, not all learners are that privileged as to have such opportunities. There exist learners who hardly get exposure to the English language in everyday life because they originated from very poor homes where no television and other media facilities are handy and their elders dreaded the English culture because they are not educated in the Western schools and tend to associate it with imperialism.

Thus, acculturating to the English culture, which can help the L2 learners' in successfully acquiring the TL, is minimized or completely hindered in the remote rural areas. Also, the relationship of the learners' language community to the TL as one aspect of the culture of an ethnic group is extremely important in SLA. So, efforts should be made by educational policy makers and language teachers to find ways of encouraging positive attitudes towards English language learning in northern Nigeria. Both learners and their elders need to be made aware of the importance to acculturate (at least the speech aiding features) as prerequisite to English language learning. The fact that adapting to some aspect of the TL culture does not make one assimilate its peoples' way of life should also be pointed out and emphasized.

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