

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF LAMBDACISM IN THE SPEECH OF IGBO-ENGLISH BILINGUALS IN ALOR DIALECT

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Abstract

This paper examines lambdacism in the speech of Alor Igbo-English bilinguals. It was observed that many students in Alor use /l/ in place of /r/ during interactions in the English language. The paper investigates the possible causes of lambdacism, its effects, and offers suggestions on how to improve the pronunciation of Alor second language learners of the English language. A qualitative approach characterized by participant observation was adopted in this study to ascertain the students' interaction in the classroom. The researcher being a teacher in one of the schools used for this research at the time the information was gathered had time to observe and interact with the students noting their use of language. In addition, the interview method was used to elicit information from eight language teachers in the two government secondary schools in Alor; students were given a reading task during their break periods. The data were analyzed as a double check for the qualitative approach. Findings show that there is no retroflex liquid /r/ in Alor dialect. The main cause of lambdacism is interference coming from the mother tongue, that even when the students have learnt through the efforts of the second language teacher, the difference between /l/ and /r/, the problem of competence and performance persists. The study concludes by positing that students learning a second language should also learn correct pronunciation in the target language. The study recommends the deployment of adequate trained language teachers to the schools in the above mentioned location. These teachers should address the peculiar language problems of the town. Teaching aids/facilities should be provided to make second language learning more interesting. Slow speech rather than rapid speech should be encouraged for beginners that have the problem of interference.

Keywords: lambdacism, bilinguals, competence, performance.

Introduction

Alor is a town located at the southern part of Idemili in Anambra State, Nigeria. Nwajide (2011), explains further that:

Alor town is located within the triangle formed by the three main towns of Anambra state. Conceptually straightening out the roads connecting the towns, the northern side of the triangle is the Onitsha-Awka road... the eastern

side or southeastern edge of them triangle is the connection from Awka through Agulu or Nimo...the third side is Onitsha to Nnewi (p. 1).

Alor people speak Igbo as their mother tongue. Nwaozuzu's (2008) classification of dialects has Alor under the Idemili speech community. A good number of Alor people, especially the younger ones speak English as a second language. It has been observed that what would have been an interesting speech in their second language has often been marred due to inadvertently mixing /l/ and /r/ sounds, hence 'Rabbit' becomes 'Labbit', 'Aeroplane' becomes 'Aeloplane', 'Florence' becomes 'Flolence' and 'Raphael' becomes 'Laphael'. Millar (2007, p78) explains lambdacism as the conversion of another sound into [l]. The excessive use of the sound l...or its substitution for the sound r is referred to as lambdacism (Random House Unabridged Dictionary (2011). Lambdacism is a source of confusion among users of the English language. It also poses a big concern to some people, especially the elites who did not grow up in the community thereby averting the wrong pronunciation. People from neighbouring communities make fun and mockery of Alor people, calling them 'Aror Rondon'. The name calling is as a result of the interchange of /r/ with /l/. It is worth noting that /r/ is silent in the pronunciation of Alor /alor/ [alɔ].

Review of Related Literature

Existing literature shows that interference is always present in bilingualism. Malmkjia (2002, p.296) observes that the level of competence achieved by a first language speaker is usually not achieved by a second language speaker. This observation holds for Alor Igbo-English bilinguals for even when some of the people from the community have mastered much in their second language (hereafter L2), they still have problems in pronunciation and one of such problems is that they interchange the voiced alveolar retroflex liquid /r/ with the voiced alveolar lateral liquid /l/. Sridar in Croft (1980, p. 93) postulates that a substantial number of persistent mistakes made by L2 students can be traced to the "pull of mother tongue". Croft in Lee (1968, p.186) states that, "The prime cause or even the sole cause of difficulty and error in foreign language learning is interference coming from the mother tongue and this is due to the differences between the two languages". Lee's explanation throws light into the major cause of errors among bilinguals which is interference from mother tongue. Interference comes in as a result of differences between languages.

Observing errors in speech to L2 learners, Corder (1967) in Croft (1980, p.105) equates the errors of an L2 learner to that of a child struggling to acquire his language. He further states that the learner's 'errors' (or hypotheses) are not only inevitable but they constitute necessary part of the language learning process. Lee (1973) assumes that errors of the learner and the response to the errors help him to learn. Lee's postulation shows that errors are regarded as potentially facilitative rather than inhibitory in the learning process. The learner uses his errors to test hypotheses about the language thereby learning from them. Supporting the importance of errors in the learning process, Etherton (1976) asserts that:

The errors may show a teacher area where his teaching has not been effective. A systematic study of errors may lead to improved teaching

methods through a greater awareness of the nature and causes of the mistakes which pupils make (p.69).

Continuing, Etherton asserts that making an analysis of error will have an intellectual reward because anybody who undertakes it finds himself thinking about the nature of errors and reason(s) why they are made. The reasons will lead to making attempts to finding answers to them. Errors equally provide valuable data for the preparation or manufacture of teaching materials, textbooks and examinations. It enables the L2 teacher determine which areas of the language need more attention and the type of attention needed.

Deducing from the postulations of these scholars, mistakes are inevitable in the learning of a second language and these mistakes are useful to the L2 teachers and the learners. Some of these mistakes are as a result of interference from the mother tongue. We shall now examine what interference is. Berthold, Mangubhai and Batorowicz (1997 p.2) view interference as the transference of elements of one language to another at various levels, including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographic. Bose(2005) in Khansir (2012, p.1028) describes interference as the negative and positive transfer between the mother tongue and the target language. Continuing, Bose explains that the negative transfer happens when the forms of the target language and those of the learner's mother tongue are different from each other whereas, the positive transfer between the mother tongue and the target language is similar. Joze Tajareh (2015) avers that:

Nowadays, the widely-used term interference is being increasingly replaced by the label cross-linguistic influence (CLI) in order to avoid associations with behaviorism. CLI is a cover term used to refer to situations where one language shows the influence of another (p.1108).

This work is on the interchange of /r / with /l/ - lambdacism. It has to do with sounds; it is therefore a phonological type of interference or cross-linguistic influence. Berthold *et al* (1997), define phonological interference as items including foreign accent such as stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sound from the first language influencing the second. Anene (1997, p. 28) opines that the phonological level of interference involves the comparison of the phonetic symbols contained in the speaker's mother tongue with that of the target language.

The problem of interference is not peculiar to Alor people. It cuts across other speech communities both in Nigeria and other countries of the world. Anene observes that some Yoruba-English bilinguals (Ibadan dialect) have no palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ and palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/. They use the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in place of /ʃ/ and /tʃ/. Hence, 'seque' (ʃek) instead 'cheque' [tʃek] and surs [ʃɔ] instead of [tʃɔtʃ] 'church'. People sing the song in the appendix to tease Ibadan people for the above mispronunciation. Anene continuing notes that some Hausa-English bilinguals have no bilabial plosive /p/ and therefore use the labio-dental fricative /f/. They say 'farking' in place of 'parking'. Japanese native speakers have difficulty producing the English sounds /l/ and /r/ (Rubrecht, 2007). Most native Chinese speakers of the English language have similar problems. Herlihy (nd) observes that "these sounds are not only unfamiliar; they can easily

be confused with each other. “Rake” becomes “lake”...“low” sounds like “row”. This can make distinguishing meaning between words quite difficult. Umera-Okeke(2011, p. 183) argues that “Bad pronunciation can be a serious problem if it negatively affects understanding”. Just as it is with Alorpeople, the reversing of the two sounds obscures the meaning of the affected words and sentences as a whole. All these show that interference is one of the major challenges to every L2 learner especially when it has to do with negative transfer.

Chun in Croft (1980, p. 182) states that it would be difficult to examine research in L2 acquisition in a vacuum without considering research in the field of first language acquisition. She equally states that first and second language acquisitions are generally believed to be similar. Moreso, both the first and second language learner’s systems seem to progress through a series of stages by means of rules that the learners formulate and try out for himself. For this reason, we shall examine the L1 of Alor people and this we shall do by examining the Alor dialect of Igbo with the standard Igbo.

Methodology

The qualitative information gathering for this work spanned a period of five years, when the researcher was teaching language in Alor town. During the period, the researcher carefully observed the speech of the students. The researcher’s knowledge as a native of the town aided the work. The researcher, in order to double-check her observation, selected through the help of the form teachers, ten final year students each from the two government owned secondary schools in Alor town, who are indigenes, and who started their year one with the schools. Ten students were systematically chosen from each school –ten males and ten females. The reason for choosing the final year students is because they have been taught both Igbo and English languages for six years in the secondary school and can communicate fluently in the two languages. Alor indigenes were chosen based on the fact that the work has to do with Alor town. Moreso, these students have not been heavily influenced by cross-linguistic contacts.

The students were given a reading task during their break period. The language teachers in the two schools were equally interviewed orally, to ascertain the effect (s) and possible solutions of lambdacism among Alor Igbo-English bilinguals. The responses were tape recorded. The responses provided materials for analysis of this work.

Alor Dialect of Igbo and Standard Igbo

It is noticed that the Alor dialect of Igbo (hereafter AD) uses the voiced alveolar lateral /l/ where the standard Igbo (hereafter SI) has the voiced alveolar roll/r/. The oral interview with the selected Alor secondary school students in which they were asked to translate certain English words to Igbo reveals the following deviations between the AD and SI:

	SI	AD	GLOSS
1.	riri	lili	ate
2.	ara	ala	breast
3.	mmiri	mmili	water

4. huru	hulu	saw
5. siri	sili	cooked
6. kariri	kalili	greater than
7. oriri	olili	feast
8. asiri	asili	gossip
9. okirikiri	okilikili	round
10. anuri	anuli	joy
11. akara	akala	bean balls
12. amara	amala	grace
13. ire	ile	tongue
14. unere	unele	banana
15. anara	anala	garden egg
16. aru	alu	abomination
17. okara	okala	half
18. ebere	ebele	mercy
19. ughere	ughele	yawn
20. ndi ntori	ndi ntoli	kidnappers

These examples simply show that AD uses /l/ in place of /r/ in spoken Igbo, the environment of occurrence notwithstanding.

The students were further asked to translate the following English words into Igbo, in order to ascertain whether AD uses the voiced alveolar retroflex liquid /r/ where SI has /l/

SI	AD	GLOSS
ilu	inu	proverb
udele	udene	vulture
le	ne	see
ala	ana	land
ekere	ekene	greeting

It is clear from the above words that AD uses the alveolar nasal /n/ where the standard Igbo has /l/. The examples point to the fact that AD has no /r/ in their dialect. The pronunciation is the same in sentences. For example, the students were asked to repeat sentences 1(a - d).

Sentences (e – h) are the responses.

SI

- 1a. O wufuru mmiri
He/she poured water.
- b. O riri ji
He/She ate yam
- c. O kporo oriri
He/She called a feast
- d. Ha nwere aturu
They have sheep.

AD

- e. O wufulu mmili
- f. O lili ji
- g. O kpolo olili
- h. Ha nwelu atulu.

It should be noted from the given examples that /l/ is a dialectal variant of /r/. They are used in free variation and it does not hinder communication. Emenanjo (2015, p. 6) avers that “the differences between dialects do not inhibit effective communication...”. In spoken Igbo, the switching of /r/ with /l/ poses little or no problem as it is well understood as a dialectal variant.

Mispronunciation among Alor Igbo-English Bilinguals

Having examined the AD of Igbo and the SI, we shall now look into lambdacism in relation to Alor Igbo-English bilinguals. The students were asked to read the passage on appendix 11.

Sixty-seven percent of the responses show a high level of transfer from mother tongue to the target language- English. This group of students used /l/ to replace /r/ from 50% to 100% of the time, the environment of occurrence notwithstanding. The negative transfer disrupts the meaning of the sentences. Ferdinand de Saussure (1966) in Okafor (2005) argues that:

After much groping and many trials and corrections, the child succeeds in pronouncing what he hears around him; here would be the starting point of all changes; certain uncorrected inaccuracies would win out in the individual and become fixed in the generation that is growing up (p.71).

Considering the group of students that were selected for this study, it is very clear that the interchange of /r/ with /l/ is a complete influence by their immediate environment. They reproduce what they hear around them. The students use the pre-existing phoneme /l/ which is similar to the newly introduced phoneme /r/ to replace it. The words in lines 1, 3, 12, 15 and 17 - ‘possibly’, ‘slaughtered’, ‘least’ ‘late’, ‘lost’ respectively, posed no problem to the students as they are used to the sound /l/. Closer looks at the two phonemes shows that they share some features. Both are consonants, voiced, sonorants and liquids. O’Grady, Archibald & Katamba (2011) argue that:

Among the sounds commonly found in the world’s languages are *l* and *r* and their numerous variants. They form a special class of consonants known as liquids. Although there is a great deal of variation in the production of *ls* and *rs* in the languages of the world, they are grouped together in a single category because they often pattern together in phonology (p.31).

The students, it should be noted, are used to the alveolar lateral /l/. They use it freely at home, with no one embarrassing them. They equally communicate freely in Igbo language with their peers in the school, using the same sound /l/ without complaints. It follows that they are used to the sound. In spoken English, they understand one another even when they switch the two sounds. Their conversation flows. For instance, during one of the classes, a

student asked her friend to bring her **led bic (Red Bic)*. The instruction was carried out without hesitation. A stranger will be confused at such instruction. These groups of students are not worried on the effect of lambdacism on other users of the English language. To them, what is of utmost importance is that they are understood in their environment.

Thirty-three percent, which represent the rest of the students used for the study pronounced more words correctly and had a mix-up in less than 50% of the affected words. For instance, pronouncing 'reporter' correctly and 'road' wrongly despite the fact that /r/ have the same environment of occurrence in the two words. Responses from this group of students reveal that they have had good opportunities to mix up with other people / students from other towns and are sometimes embarrassed when they are corrected by their peers.

Interviews with the teachers reveal that the two phonemes have been written separately during classes to draw the attention of the students that they are different phonemes. It is here argued that the mispronunciation has to do with competence and performance. Chomsky (1957) cited by Crystal (1987, p.65) defines competence as "the persons knowledge of the rules of a language and performance as the actual use of that language in real situations". Chomsky argues that there is an innate competence in children which accounts for the speed with which a child masters language. He further argues that competence develops out of basic innate deep structures, through a succession of transformation, which starts from deep structure of Kernel sentence and to infantile structures and structure of the mother tongue. On the other hand, Chomsky refers to performance as inferior to language knowledge because it is mediated by memory limitation and distractions and this accounts for the reason why an actual language user is not perfect in speech, although he may have a perfect linguistic competence. Moreover, we think faster than we speak and most of the time, our speech cannot keep pace with our linguistic competence.

It is now clear that Alor people, as a result of exposure to the target language understand that /l/ and /r/ are two different phonemes. The understanding in this context refers to competence. When it comes to putting what was learnt in practice, that is performance; there is a negative transfer which results in mispronunciation. Chomsky continuing postulates that linguistics should be concerned with the study of competence and not be restricted to performance for the description of the rules of governing the structure of competence should be the important goal.

From the foregoing, it is seen that mispronunciation of some words from Alor people comes in as a result of interference from their mother tongue. Moreso, even when the people are exposed to the correct pronunciation they still make some mistakes and the mistakes are due to negative transfers from their mother tongue. Literacy as well as cross-linguistic contacts is growing in the Alor community. Competence has therefore grown, but performance is not keeping pace. The sense of embarrassment is growing too; practically every extended family has members that have grown up outside Alor who have both competence and performance on the issue under consideration. Mockery for non-performance has therefore become a household thing, and great majority of the mocked

wish they have the performance. Lambdacism is therefore slowly becoming a social concern in Alor – a class issue- which needs to be addressed before it becomes a social problem.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has examined lambdacism as it relates to the Alor Igbo-English bilinguals. The major challenge of the speakers is interference from the mother tongue. The pre-existing phoneme /l/ is negatively transferred to replace the phoneme /r/ in the acquired language – English. The official language in Nigeria is English; therefore, there is every need to speak the language properly. To enhance the correct pronunciation of the liquid /r/ in the target language among Alor Igbo/English bilinguals, there is a need to have adequate trained language teachers in schools in the affected community. These teachers should understand and address the peculiar language problems of the town in order to bring out the desired result. They should equally provide teaching aids/facilities to make second language learning more interesting. It is here suggested that the special training starts at the elementary level. Most indigenes of Alor, who grew up in other communities with a different dialect do not have the same challenge with /l/ and /r/. If teachers start on time to educate the students, they will learn the two sounds and how to use them appropriately.

On the other hand, special classes should be organized for the students that have the problem of interference. Slow speech rather than rapid speech should be encouraged as they begin to make progress. Teachers should equally put more efforts in constructing exercises that will help the students to perfect each sound of the second language. As the students become perfect the two sounds, they should be exposed to exercises like tongue twisters such as the phrase: red lorry, yellow lorry. Such an exercise will help them to be more fluent and keep pace with other users of the language.

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APPENDIX 1

Yoruba Gloss

Omo Ibadan kí ni sódò re?(Ibadan indigene, how are you?).

Sódò sure ni.(Show is good).

Kí lo jẹ lánàà?(What did you eat yesterday?)

Eran síkìn ni.(It is sikhin (chicken) meat).

Kí ló fì jókòó?(What did you sit on?)

Ku^usin Sîa ni.(Cushion chair).

APPENDIX 11

No one who got to the scene of the accident could possibly have left the place with dry cheeks. Even as a reporter, unrelated to any of the victims slaughtered in their prime, I could not stop wishing the driver had never been born for this was one accident which need not ever have happened. The road was smooth, straight and wide. There was no on-coming vehicle and the weather was clear. But the driver had apparently taken some alcohol before the journey. Only that could explain why he ran his car into the deep gorge where four of his passengers died.

The culpability of that driver compares with that of another, a few years earlier. That was on the Mahu-Odahi Road was smooth, and the weather was bright. With all the road signs warning against speeding because of the narrow bridge and the sharp bend, someone with enough sense would, at least, have exercised enough restraint before overtaking another vehicle. So, why the pick-up van driver decided to overtake the trailer just there, where he could not possibly see an oncoming vehicle until too late, beats one's imagination. As a result of his action, the oncoming mini bus ran into his van, while the trailer itself ran over the two vehicles. A total of twenty souls were lost (Amaechi, 2005).