

Impact of Bilingual Attributes on Self-Identity of English Learners in Owerri, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of bilingual attributes on self-identity of English learners among Igbo speaking senior secondary students in Owerri, Nigeria. The study sampled 540 students, randomly selected from some secondary schools in Owerri. The study used a questionnaire as means of data collection, and the data were analysed by using quantitative method of descriptive statistics. Results showed that the subtractive and additive attributes of bilingualism influenced the self-identity, and status of the L1 among respondents. Results also showed that high percentage of the respondents strongly agreed that the subtractive attribute has made them to acquire English more than Igbo, their mother language. However, high percentage of the respondents also agreed that the additive attribute of the bilingualism has enable them to acquire better the language and culture of Igbo as well as the English. From the findings in the study, it is important that there should be strong policy by government to emphasize adequately on the additive bilingualism, so as to protect Igbo language from going into extinction.

Keywords

Subtractive, Additive, Bilingualism, Self-Identity, Igbo, Mother-Tongue, English, Language

1. Introduction

English has become one of the widely used languages among majority of countries around the world. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are Nigeria's three major languages. Having been colonized by the British Government, Nigeria inherited English language as her official language which is foreign to Nigerians. Though, it is not the lingua franca in Nigeria, today, it has become the official language which must be learned for accessing unique educational and employment opportunities. English has assumed a global language that enables people to com-

municate both on a local and international level. The quest to acquire English is due to its importance in business, communication technology in almost all aspects of humanity. Nevertheless, there are many advantages of having a global language like English for easy communication among majority of the language users around the globe. However, in spite of the advantages of English among the users, its acquisition has brought negative impacts on the learners' especially, among secondary school students in the Igbo speaking area of Nigeria. Many researchers have reported that English has affected other languages, including Igbo especially, in the areas of cultural identity of those using English as a second language. Concerns about the negative effects of English and its ability to endanger other languages have been discussed by many scholars in the field (Fillmore, 1991; Hopkyns, 2014; Ahmad Asir, 2019). In the study on influence of English on the identity of senior secondary students learning it as a second language, in Owerri, Onuh (2019) reported that majority of the students sampled had an identity problem after acquiring English as a second language.

Subtractive bilingualism is when individuals learn a second language at the expense of the first language meaning that individuals often lose skills and fluency in their primary language, especially when the use of the primary language is not being reinforced. Thus, subtractive bilingualism is the perception that the acquisition of L2 would be detrimental to an individual's L1. This can be caused by the increased cognitive load due to L2 acquisition which consequently decreases competence in users' L1 (Onuh, 2020a). Subtractive bilingualism, however, is when a student learns a second language at the expense of their first language (May, 2011). In this case, the child will usually lose the ability to speak their first language over time (Lauchlan et al., 2013), Children who develop subtractive bilingualism may not have opportunities to practice their first language and may even feel like that their first language or culture is unwelcome in class.

With subtractive bilingualism, the native Language and native cultural identity are replaced by the target language and target cultural identity. However, "when a second Language and culture have been acquired, with little or no pressure to replace or reduce the first language, an additive form of bilingualism may occur" (Baker, 1993). Hence subtractive bilingualism and additive bilingualism involve changes not only in language proficiency, but also in cultural identity. In other words, the more interested one is in the target language and culture, the more likely he or she is to experience productive and additive changes in self-identity. These two positive changes would in return stimulate learners' intrinsic interest in the target language and culture. On the other hand, productive self-identity change contributes that the command of the target language and that of the native language positively reinforce each other to make the learner to understand his environment well, and be able to interact positively with other people.

In line with this research topic, the study explored the influences of subtractive and additive attributes of L2 learning on the self-identity of senior secondary school students in Owerri zone. The following research question was formed,

from which appropriate hypothesis was developed: “Do subtractive and additive attributes of L2 learning affect the self-identity of senior secondary school students in Owerri zone, Imo State”?

The findings seek to raise awareness on the influence of over dependent of Igbo students in the use of English language at the risk of abandoning Igbo language.

2. Literature Review

Authors and researchers in the area of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) such as Liddicoat (1991); Landry & Allard (1993); and Roberts (1995) stated that subtractive bilingualism occurs when an individual is acquiring or learning a second language. According to Liddicoat (1991), subtractive bilingualism develops when the two languages are competing rather than complementary. Such competition occurs when the minority language is being replaced by the more dominant and prestigious language of the majority group. Liddicoat posits that for many bilinguals, especially the minority group members, contacts with a second language had a detrimental effect leading to lower levels of L1 development. This kind of bilingualism was termed “subtractive” because of the negative consequences on the L1 development (Landry & Allard, 1993). However, according to Lambert (1981), as reported in Baker (1993), subtractive bilingualism is characterized by the loss or erosion of a home or first language and culture.

The conditions under which the second language (L2) is learned or acquired and the conditions under which the L1 is subjected to during the process of learning the L2 determines the extent to which the person learning the L2 develops subtractive bilingualism or not. The status of the individual’s L1 and the status of the language being learned also play an important role. In this case, if the L1 is of a “low status” and L2 of “high status”, as in the case of Igbo and English languages among the Igbo speaking people of Nigeria (Onuh, 2019), the probability of having subtractive bilingualism is high, especially if no strong attention is paid to developing a strong policy that protects and develops the L1.

The language a person speaks is tied to cultural identity and represents every aspect of a person’s life (Hopewell & Gonzalez, 2019). The English language is almost the lingua franca of education, trade, and employment (Dorambari, 2021). However, with such a global influence, the English language sometimes interferes with the native languages via subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism indicates the replacement of L1 with L2. Even though bilingualism traditionally “contaminates” the cultural identity, but most countries have not known how to deal with the problem (Dorambari, 2021).

Nowadays the numbers of people that are able to speak more than one language have increased in so many parts of the world (Yeganeha & Malekzadeh, 2015). According to Trask, (1999) about 70 percent of the people in the world are bilingual. This demonstrates the necessity of investigating the role of bilingualism in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language. Corder (1979) suggests that because bilinguals have some opportunities so they can

make comparison between two languages; this is a facilitator factor and an asset for them on learning a new language. Consequently, bilinguals can benefit this asset to generate the new language's structure and learn more efficiently. The study conducted by Thomas (1988); Valencia & Cenoz (1993) showed that bilingual students have a superiority in learning foreign language in contrast to monolingual students. Thomas (1988) stated that bilinguals are more sensitive to language system and can act more efficiently in formal learning compared with monolinguals.

Subtractive bilingualism (unintentionally) reverses cause and effect, but when subtractive bilingualism occurs, a second language is learned at the expense of the first language, which it gradually replaces (King, 2016). This occurs when the social conditions devalue the child's first language and its associated culture. This form of bilingualism may impede cognitive and social development' (Luck-
et, 1993).

However, children who are bilingual often have an academic advantage compared to their monolingual peers. The cognitive benefits of being bilingual lead to skills that boost every aspect of a child's academic career and impact the rest of their lives. For example, bilingual students tend to perform better on tests that involve problem-solving ability or working memory (Lauchlan et al., 2013). They're also better able to monitor and adapt to their environment, perhaps because these skills are necessary to understand and speak two separate languages (Bhattacharjee, 2012). According to Lambert (1981), subtractive bilingualism may affect the academic performance of the individual trying to learn an L2. Mathe (2020) reported that People in general express their feelings, emotions, imaginations fantasy and understandings of the world and knowledge about various topics through language. Mathe posited that sometimes, people may fail to communicate their ideas because they do not have domain of the language used or because they do not have the needed vocabulary to communicate those ideas and the world may understand that as a failure at first glance, however, they may do better if they are also given a chance to communicate the same ideas in a language they fully understand.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study made use of five hundred and forty (540) randomly selected respondents who are, senior secondary (SS) students in Owerri zone area of Imo State, and whose ages are between 13 - 16 years old. Imo State is located in the South-East zone of Nigeria. All the respondents have the Igbo language as their first language (L_1). The criteria for selecting respondents from senior secondary is the fact that the senior secondary level is made up of mostly teenagers, between 13 - 16 years of age. This is the critical ages at which the students begin to develop their psyche on issues of identity, and can be influenced by the language they are thought.

3.2. Data Collection

There were 540 respondents, collected from randomly selected secondary schools in the Owerri zone of Imo State, Nigeria.

Data were collected by quantitative method, which enabled the use of questionnaires containing questions prepared in the Likert five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), with respect to the influence of subtractive and additive bilingualism attributes of second language learning on the self-identity of the learners. The questionnaire helped to cover most aspects of the study, such as the respondents' attitudes toward second language learning, effects of subtractive and additive bilingualism attributes on students' L1 and its cultural identity.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, based on the Likert 5-point scale. The mean scores of the responses to the questions were calculated by using Mann-Whitney method of estimating mean scores contained in the SPSS software (version 22).

4. Results and Discussion

Findings based on the analyses of the collected data are presented in the following tables.

On the question item 1, “*after learning English, I feel my behaviours have become somewhat westernized. For example, I say ‘Hello/Hi’ instead of ‘kedu’ on the phone or greeting friends and say ‘Thank you’ instead of ‘Daalu’ or ‘Imeela’*”. **Table 1** showed that 245 (45.37%), and 235 (43.51%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to the question item 1, while 1 (0.18%), and 8 (1.48%) of the total respondents, respectively, disagreed and strongly-disagreed to the question item 1. But 51 (9.44%) of the respondents were unsure about the question item 1. The mean score recorded in the question item 1 is 4.29 (**Table 1**).

The opinions of the respondents in the question item 2, “*After learning English, I feel repugnant about some Igbo conventions. For example, I think that Igbo people can hold a hand of a man/woman openly in anywhere*” is presented in **Table 1**. The results in **Table 1** showed that 253 (46.85%), and 230 (42.59%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to the assertion, while 13 (2.40%), and 5 (0.92%) of the total respondents, respectively, disagreed and strongly-disagreed to the assertion. However, 39 (7.22%) of the total respondents were unsure with the assertion.

Similar to the above observation is the opinions of the respondents on the question item 3, “*After learning English, I begin to reject some Igbo ideas such as we should behave in the same way of our parents because of what they have ever experienced before. However, I think that I can do it on my own idea*”. It was observed from the results presented in **Table 1** that 243 (45.0%), and 255 (47.22%) of the total respondents agreed and strongly-agreed to the question

item 3, while 2 (0.37%), and 10 (1.85%) of the total respondents disagreed and strongly-disagreed to the assertion. But 30 (5.55%) of the total respondents were unsure with the assertion.

Looking at the results presented in **Table 2**, the opinions of the respondents to question item 1, “*after learning English, I find myself more sensitive to changes in the outside world. For example, when I read or hear English news about global warming, I feel aware of preservation of environment*”; indicated that 245 (45.37%), and 233 (43.14%) of the total respondents, respectively, agreed and strongly-agreed to the assertion. Only 3 (0.55%), and 7 (1.29%) of the total respondents, disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, to the assertion, while 50 (9.25%) of the total respondents were unsure with the assertion (**Table 2**).

Table 1. Number of respondents in the 5-point Likert scale on Subtractive attribute as self-identity change among English learning students.

Question Items	Response					Total (N)	\bar{x}	%/ Decision
	SD 1	D 2	UN 3	A 4	SA 5			
1). After learning English, I feel my behaviors have become somewhat westernized. For example, I say “Hello/Hi” instead of “Kedu” on the phone or greeting friends and say “Thank you” instead of “Daalu” or “Imeela”	8 (1.48)	1 (0.18)	51 (9.44)	245 (45.37)	235 (43.51)	540	4.29	Agreed (99.98)
2). After learning English, I feel repugnant about some Igbo conventions. For example, I think that Igbo people can hold a hand of a man/woman openly in anywhere	5 (0.92)	13 (2.40)	39 (7.22)	253 (46.85)	230 (42.59)	540	4.25	Agreed (99.98)
3). After learning English, I begin to reject some traditional Igbo ideas such as we should behave in the same way of our parents because of what they have ever experienced before. However, I think that I can do it on my own idea	10 (1.85)	2 (0.37)	30 (5.55)	243 (45.0)	255 (47.22)	540	4.35	Agreed (99.99)

Source: Onuh (2020b). Values in brackets are percentages (%).

Table 2. Number of respondents in the 5-point Likert scales on Additive attribute as self-identity change among English learning students.

Question Items	Response					Total (N)	\bar{x}	%/ Decision
	SD 1	D 2	UN 3	A 4	SA 5			
1). After learning English, I find myself more sensitive to changes in the outside world. For example, when I read or hear English news about global warming, I feel aware of preservation of environment	7 (1.29)	3 (0.55)	50 (9.25)	245 (45.37)	233 (43.14)	540	4.27	Agreed (99.6)
2). After learning English, I have become more understanding and can better communicate with others in a various culture and language not only Igbo or English but also other languages	0 (0.0)	1 (0.18)	2 (0.37)	113 (20.92)	424 (78.51)	540	4.77	Agreed (99.98)
3). As my ability of appreciating English language, literature and art increases, I have become more interested in Igbo literature and art	10 (1.85)	15 (2.77)	45 (8.33)	245 (45.37)	225 (41.66)	540	4.22	Agreed (99.98)
4). I think that punctuality is important. If I have an appointment with other people, I am always very punctual	10 (1.85)	2 (0.37)	47 (8.70)	246 (45.55)	235 (43.51)	540	4.28	Agreed (99.98)

Source: Study Data. Values in brackets are percentages (%).

Similarly, majority of the respondents, 113 (20.92%), and 424 (78.51%), agreed and strongly-agreed to the question item 2 in **Table 2** that; “*after learning English, I have become more understanding and can better communicate with others in a various culture and language not only Igbo or English, but also other languages*”. On the other hand, 1 (0.18%), and zero (0.00%) of the total respondents, disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, to the assertion, while 2 (0.37%) of the total respondents were unsure with the assertion.

The opinion of the respondents in the question item 3, “*As my ability of appreciating English language, literature and arts increases, I have become more interested in Igbo literature and arts*”, as presented in **Table 2**, showed that 245 (45.37%), and 225 (41.66%) of the total respondents, agreed and strongly-agreed, respectively, to the assertion. Only 15 (2.77%), and 10 (1.85%) of the total respondents, disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, while 45 (8.33%) of the total respondents were unsure with the assertion.

The opinion of the respondents on the question item 4, “*I think that punctuality is important. If I have an appointment with other people, I am always very punctual*”, is presented in **Table 2**. It was observed that 246 (45.55%), and 235 (43.51%) of the respondents, agreed and strongly-agreed, respectively, to the assertion. Only 2 (0.37%), and 10 (1.85%) of the total respondents, disagreed and strongly-disagreed, respectively, to the assertion, while 47 (8.70%) of the respondents were unsure with the assertion.

5. Discussion

Subtractive change is one of the effects of acquisition of a second language (target language) whereby the native language and native cultural identity are replaced by the target language and target cultural identity (Onuh, 2020b).

The opinions of the respondents as presented in **Table 1** indicate that the native Igbo language and its cultural identity are threatened in terms of sustainability.

The high mean score in the question item 1 in **Table 1** is an indication that students are gradually replacing the Igbo language and its cultural identity with that of English.

As opined by Onuh (2020a), this will have negative effect on the learning of the first language (Igbo) and imbibing of its cultural identity by the students. This is as a result of the attitude students have about learning of English language as already stated, whereby any person who greets in Igbo language is regarded as not educated.

The subtractive index of self-identity change among Igbos who studies English as a second language is also elaborated in the opinions of the respondents in the question item 2, as earlier reported by Onuh (2020b) “*After learning English, I feel repugnant about some Igbo conventions. For example, I think that Igbo people can hold a hand of a man/woman openly in anywhere*”. The mean score of 4.25 recorded for the question item 2 is significant enough to indicate that

majority of the respondents (students) detest Igbo cultural identities and values. For instance, it is not cultural in Igbo for unmarried man and woman to hold their hands while walking on the road, or to be found kissing themselves openly in the public.

According to Onuh (2020b), the Igbo culture and identity do observe these conventions as a way of instilling discipline in their children, thus, preparing them for descent adulthood. But the opinions of the students as indicated in their strong agreement to the question item 2 are such that they find these conventions very inimical to their social lives. However, the acquisition of English has changed this narrative that today, unmarried man and woman can hold their hands together or kiss publicly without minding the public outcry on the practice. This is among the negative influences of English acquisition on the socio-cultural identity of the Igbos where the Second language culture and identity have gradually succeeded in replacing this aspect of Igbo culture which helps in inculcating moral ethics in the Igbo people (Onuh, 2020b). Adoption of additive attribute of bilingualism would solve this negative perception among the English learners, because they will be exposed to both Igbo and English cultures, simultaneously.

Similar to the above observation is the opinions of the respondents on the question item 3, “*After learning English, I begin to reject some Igbo ideas such as we should behave in the same way of our parents because of what they have ever experienced before. However, I think that I can do it on my own idea*”. The question item 3 recorded a mean score of 4.35 (Table 1). This observation indicates that majority of the students accepts that it is wrong to consult with one’s parents before embarking on any idea. Most Igbo educated people, especially those whose parents did not attend any school, find it difficult to accept their parents’ opinions on some issues, simply because of their level of education and English acquisition; they usually look down on their parents’ opinion, as coming from an uneducated person. The person’s parents may be intelligent in what they are saying, but for the fact that they are not using English language to convey their views, their view will hardly be taken seriously.

On a general note, with subtractive bilingualism, the native Language and native cultural identity are replaced by the target language and target cultural identity. However, “when a second Language and culture have been acquired, with little or no pressure to replace or reduce the first language, an additive form of bilingualism may occur” (Baker, 1993). Hence subtractive bilingualism and additive bilingualism involve changes not only in language proficiency, but also in cultural identity. In other words, the more interested one is in the target language and culture, the more likely he or she is to experience additive changes in self-identity. These two positive changes would also in return stimulate learners’ intrinsic interest in the target language and culture.

Additive self-identity change contributes that the command of the target language and that of the native language positively reinforce each other to make the

learner to understand his environment well, and be able to interact positively with other people. This is made manifest by the opinions of the respondents on the productive aspect of self-identity change.

Looking at the results presented in **Table 2**, the opinions of the respondents to question item 1, “*after learning English, I find myself more sensitive to changes in the outside world. For example, when I read or hear English news about global warming, I feel aware of preservation of environment*”. A mean score of 4.27 was recorded in the question item 1. This high means score value indicates that the respondents (students) strongly agreed that the learning of English has awakened their consciousness about some environmental issues. The high mean score of 4.77 recorded in the question item 2 showed that the respondents strongly agreed to it. These responses indicate the functionality of the additive bilingual attribute of self-identity change, where the learner of the second language can now use the language to communicate and associate with people of other languages. The additive attribute of second language learning is a welcome aspect because, it encourages the learner to, as well, imbibe the socio-cultural identities of his/her first language (Thomas, 1988). The second language learner retains his/her first language identity, while at the same time acquiring the second language identity. Thus, the first and second languages work in synergy to develop the self-identity of the learner (Valencia & Cenoz, 1993).

The mean score recorded in the question item 3 is 4.22 (**Table 2**). This observation indicated that majority of the students strongly agreed that their ability to appreciate English language and literature has increased their interest in Igbo literature and arts. This is the good aspect of additive attribute of self-identity change in second language learning.

Additive bilingual attribute of self-identity change has enabled second learners to observe and appreciate the culture of punctuality with appointments. This is evidenced by the opinion of the respondents on the question item 4, “*I think that punctuality is important. If I have an appointment with other people, I am always very punctual*”, as presented in **Table 2**.

Based on the findings in this work, we note that the subtractive and additive bilingualism influence could be minimized if adequate measures are put in place. It requires more efforts on the parts of government in formulating appropriate policies to protect Igbo language, language experts, curriculum planners, society, families and second language learners, to adopt the additive bilingualism approach to second language acquisition.

6. Conclusion

This study has established the fact that learning English as a second language has influenced the self-identity of Senior Secondary School Students in Owerri zone of Imo State, Nigeria. The learners in this category abandon their mother tongue along with their cultural identity in a pursuit to learn and use a foreign language. It was also affirmed that additive bilingualism is a good model in teaching and

learning a second language, like English, for the protection of the mother language, as in this study, the Igbo language, in the language learners.

Recommendation

This research therefore, strongly recommends a wholistic restructuring of the school curriculum in Imo State, especially as it concerns second language learning, identity and culture of the learner, to additively accommodate the Igbo and English languages. This will make the students to be proficient in both culture and identity of the two languages.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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