

A Critique of the Contributions of Linguistic, Psychological, Sociological and Pedagogical Principles to the Development of Applied Linguistics in Nigeria

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Abstract. Language is central to the development and integration of any nation. Applied linguistics is essential because, as an interdisciplinary field, it identifies, examines and recommends solutions to language-related existential challenges. Historically, development of Applied Linguistics in Nigeria has been influenced by linguistic, psychological, sociological and pedagogical concepts or principles. This paper has therefore, carried out a critique of the contributions of these principles to the development of language in Nigeria. Some recommendations have also been made toward an improved concepts and practice of English in the teaching-learning process, taking into account the historical and current linguistic contexts of Nigeria.

Keywords: linguistic; education

INTRODUCTION

The field of applied linguistic is an interdisciplinary one which identifies, investigates and offers solutions to language-related real life problems. According to Davies and Elder (eds) (2004), the tradition of applied linguistics began partly as a response to the narrowing of focus in linguistics with the surge of generative linguistics in the late 1950s. Applied linguistic continues to maintain a socially accountable role as indicated in its prime interest in language problem (<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=appliedlinguistic&oldid=465424173>. Accessed 19/12/2011). This field of linguistics primarily concerned itself with principles and practices on the basis of linguistic usage. Some of these principles are presented evaluatively after a general presentation of language development in Nigeria.

Language development in general is a foundational phenomenon in any culture or nation because language touches every facet of life and human endeavours. Development of English Language in Nigeria, in particular has been found to have enjoyed the contributions of linguistic, psychological, sociological and pedagogical principles or concepts. The contributions of such principles are believed to be in-exhaustive in the face of the continuous possibility of improvement which technology affords. This is what Taylor (N.D) meant when he stated that teaching is based on principles and methods to improve skills and practices of other artists because it is goal oriented. It is therefore, necessary to evaluate these variables on the basis of how they have enhanced development of English as a second language, taking into cognizance, the historical and current linguistic contexts of Nigeria.

The paper approaches the subject by examining historical development of language in Nigeria generally. The concepts of learning and theoretical underpinnings of linguistic, psychological, sociological and pedagogical principles are also presented in a succinct manner. The critique of the principles are thereafter carried out.

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is blessed with multi ethno-linguistic groups. As revealed by an internet source, "Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups, with varying languages and customs, creating a country of rich ethnic diversity. The largest ethnic groups are the Fulani/Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo accounting for 68% of population ... while the Edo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Ebisa Nupe and Tiv comprise 27%; other minorities make up the remaining 7%" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria Accessed 14/12/2011). Due to the ethnic nature of Nigeria, languages are currently estimated and catalogued. Out of the number, 510 are living languages, two are found to be second languages without native speakers and nine have become extinct. Some ethnic groups do speak more than one language.

The official language in Nigeria is English and it was chosen to enhance cultural and linguistic unity of the nation. This choice was partially due to the

fact that English was being spoken by a part of the Nigeria population which resulted from the colonization by the British that became aborted in October 1960. Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa are the three key languages used in Nigeria. The fact that most of the ethnic groups have preference for communicating in their own dialects notwithstanding, English being the official language is spoken extensively in the educational, business and official spheres.

The form in which English is found in Nigeria today has to do with the influence of indigenous language in the country. English was derobed of its British flavour after it was introduced first through trade and later through colonization (Adamo, 2007:42-47). Recognizing the fact that the majority of the Nigeria's populace dwells in the rural areas, indigenous languages are the major means of communication. Some are as well found to be using Nigerian Pidgin English also simplified as "Pidgin" or "Broken" as lingua franca with regional influences on dialect and slang. The Nigerian English or Pidgin English is predominantly used in the Niger-Delta regions especially in Warri, Sapele, Port Harcourt, Agenebode, Ewu, and Benin City (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria. Accessed 14/12/2011).

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF PRINCIPLES

An overview of the linguistic, psychological, sociological and pedagogical principles is hereby presented as theoretical framework.

In Relation to Linguistic Principle

The tenet of linguistic principle is that a language is what it is on the basis of the level of similarity or differences within the existing languages. A functional first language enhances the learning of other languages. The language or dialectical preference of a group of persons is dependent upon how similar or different the system within which the language is being used. In the opinions of Noam Chomsky, Dell Hymes and Ferdinand de Saussure, as cited by Alabi (2011), competence is considered as a primary and indispensable issue upon which a person's ability to perform communicatively in a language is based.

To put it in another way, the first language acquisition by an individual results in adequate achievement of competence and performance in a language. That is to say that the first language enhances the innate tendency in an individual and boost competence in other languages. As opined by Alabi (www.unilorin.edu.ng Accessed 11/12/2011), “Although, the early exposure of a child to ideal language stimuli is important, the pre-existence of sensori-motor intelligence (which exists prior to acquisition) is a functional, elementary and practical co-coordinating factor.” That means, sensori-motor intelligence contributes significantly to language learning.

In Relation to Psychological Principle

Clement (2005), explained that there are various types of behaviour and they are defined along the activities of three systems of the body and independent variables which are grouped into (1) antecedent stimuli and (2) reinforcers, consequences or feedback. Regarding reflexive behaviour, some behaviours are likely influenced primarily by antecedent stimuli. These are referred to as elicited, respondent, Type 5, Pavlovian, classically conditioned, or involuntary responses. Such behaviours are simple and can be produced in all physiologically normal persons, and do not require prior learning. Also consequence-controlled behaviours are influenced primarily by the events which follow the behaviours. Such behaviours are emitted, operant, type R, Skinnerian, instrumental, and voluntary responses. As opposed to the reflexive behaviour, consequence-controlled behaviours depend on previous knowledge, relatively complex.

Carew (1988) also saw changes in behaviour as “a function of experience. Most current behaviour theories possess the basic premise that behaviour is dependent upon preceding events and therefore, behaviour is lawful” (23). That is to say that a person would not behave in a particular way without some events which would have precipitated the behaviour. To Carew, what psychologist attempts to do is to determine the relationship between the preceding events and behaviour before laws of behaviour are established. If these laws of behaviour are put in place in form of an empirical body of information, it will thereby

become possible to attempt change or modification by manipulating the antecedent events (38)

Psychological principle or theory employs reinforcement to motivate learning which was discussed by Parrot (2005). Parrot viewed motivation as internal state or condition that activates behaviour and gives it direction to influence needs and desires on the intensity and direction of behaviour. There is similarity between motivation and learning. This is due to the fact that motivation is capable of influencing the direction of thought and behaviour (761).

Parrot went on to discuss seven human motives which may be single or combined. These include hunger, thirst and sex and are shared by both animals and humans. One of the four others which pertain to humans is competence motivations. This is not rooted in any particular physiological needs. It is observed that the need to confirm sense of personal competence is the greater reinforce which keeps many people motivated for a long period of term. Curiosity is another factor and it is the case where humans explore their environment through which they become competent and effective persons. Cognitive consistency is another point which is postulated to correct cognitive dissonance. In other words, humans normally feel it when there is inconsistency between their attitudes and or behaviours. When this is perceived, they are motivated to work on how to avoid dissonance in order to remain consistent in their attitudes and behaviours.

The Last type of motive is the desire to be in control, instead of being at the mercy of external forces in relation to one's life and future. This is illustrated by 'reverse-psychology' whereby a person is made to do something by asking him/her to do the opposite. It is in the process of doing the opposite as an act of rebellion due to the desire to be in control of his/her own life that the person accomplishes the desire of the instructor (Parrot, 762-763).

Aufderheidi (2005) presented a concise discussion on theories of learning. He opined that learning theories are in two main categories which are discussed below:

Stimulus- Response Theories: These theories interpret learning as connection between stimuli and responses whereby a stimuli is defined as “any sensed event, while a response may be any behaviour” (Aufderheidi, 638). A key figure in the stimulus-response approach to learning is B. F. Skinner. Skinner is cited by Aufderheidi (2005) to hold that “respondent behaviours are elicited by specific stimuli after which the response occurs automatically. Those connection are called reflexes, some of which are innate and others the result of condition (639). A relationship is established on the basis of the result of the effect or consequences of the behaviour in a particular situation rather than on what elicited the behaviour. This means that a behaviour may reoccur if it is reinforced (639). Other contributors to contiguity and reinforcement theories are John B. Watson, Edwin R. Guthrie and Edward L .Thorndike.

Cognitive Theories: These theories of learning are concerned with the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the individual about his/her environment and the way the cognition influences behaviour. One of the proponents cited by Aufderheidi was Edward C. Tolman who opined that behaviour is generally goal directed. Tolman was cited to have presented six kinds of learning.

Cathexis is the first of the kinds of learning and it is the tendency to seek certain goals rather than others, when experiencing a specific drive. Equivalence Belief is another one which is a belief that a particular situation is rewarding or punitive in itself. The third one is Field Expectancy which refers to ideas describing the way the world is laid out. Field Cognitions follow and they are tendencies to learn some things more easily than others. Drive Discrimination is what enables one to choose an appropriate goal; while Motor Patterns are the muscular skills used to attain goals. Tolman was cited to have emphasized the issues of the principles of motivation, expectancy, and adaptiveness in the theory of learning. (Aufderheidi, 639).

In Relation to Sociological Principle

Sociological principle or theory is dominated by structuralist/functionalist perspective. The theory views the society as a pool of social systems held together by shared values. Society is likened to a living organism with organogramic structure. Interest is on the cooperation among members for the society to move forward. Like a system, the society has needs to be met for survival. As opined by Haralambos and Heald (1980), there are four basic needs a society pursues. These are: Achievement of goals; Adjustment to the environment; Integration of various parts into a whole; and Control of deviance and accepted norms.

Social position regarding needs is significant in the process of language teaching and learning. Individual members of a society are expected to play their roles for the needs mentioned above to be met. Some factors, however, determine the roles of individuals which may include gender, age and other structures. This means that, as expressed by Labov (1969) and Bailey (1973), linguistic variations and change are the bedrock upon which any study on sociolinguistics relies. Little wonder why specialists in linguistics consider the general process of acculturation to involve modifications of linguistic attitudes and behaviours (Alabi, in www.unilorin.edu.ng. Accessed 11/12/2011). The modifications required in the acculturation process go beyond removal of semantic, syntactic, morphological, and phonological variables, among others. It calls for the addition and re-ordering of new variables, based on the present social context. This is viewed as necessary due to the fact that the way language is used has relationship with circumstantial or contextual usage of same.

Sociological principle of education has contributed greatly to development of education in general, applied linguistics inclusive. For instance, research from the functionalist perspective has indicated that education is related to other social institutions and cannot be manipulated without being influencing and being influenced by such institutions. Family structure, the economy, the labour market, and other institutions must be given prime of place while attempting to bring about reform in education. Lack of consideration for these social structures

will either face strong resistance from the members of the society or the reform programme itself resulting in failure. (Husen and Postlethwaite, eds, 1994:5605)

Husen and Postlethwaite (1994) further explained that, sociological research from conflict perspective “especially from the Marxist oriented sociologists has documented the bias in the educational process in favour of the already advantaged, who seem to get better opportunities” (5605). Also, study from interactional point of view has emphasized the significance of interaction in the classroom in the process of education. It has been discovered that teachers’ expectations have overwhelming influence on the attitude and performance of students. To bring about transformation in the classroom, all stakeholders like teachers, parents and peer groups should be carried along in the design of programme planned for change (5605).

Nonetheless, the importance of involvement of all interested parties in the educational process cannot be over-emphasized. This was what Coleman (1976) argued. He used the experience of rejection of the compensatory and desegregation programme in the United States in the 1960s and early 1970s as example. The educational programmes were flawed because of information about objectives and methods. Coleman therefore observed that:

“Resistance to any social reform can indicate conflicting interests which could have been avoided had adequate information been obtained beforehand. It is only by understanding these social forces that the objectives and strategies of educational planning are appropriately, efficiently, and effectively formulated and implemented” (5605).

In other words, effectiveness of education of any sort require dissemination of information to necessary quarters to gain support and enhance success of the programme.

In Relation to Pedagogical Principle

The pedagogical principle or theory of education “advocates that the classroom should become the arena for intellectual resistance towards the ways in which our roles, our lives and our subjectivities are defined and constituted” (Husen and Postlethwaite, 1994: 5602). The theory utilizes a truly democratic

culture in the educational process as against the dominant ideology. The basis for this approach is that the pedagogical principle views educational process as “social and political, and thus any analysis of the deception inherent in capitalist schooling is inherently sociological, though far from the sociology of education that dominates the mainstream of the discipline” (Giroux, 1992)

Furthermore, since pedagogical principle stresses realism, didactic methodology in teaching and learning process is vehemently advocated. The theory advocates active participation in language teaching and learning in which students learn by doing. Learners are encouraged to practice, do role-playing repeatedly, particularly in language learning which is the basis of man’s holistic knowledge (Tinuoye, 2003). It is therefore, expected that “the pedagogical instances of language should be logical, procedural and systematic. The sequence of learning experience should move from known to unknown, simple to complex, concrete to abstract and familiar to unfamiliar concept” (Alabi www.unilorin.edu.ng). This shows that pedagogical theory of language development is the umbrella for other theories. The reason is that other theories seek to provide conceptual frameworks for language inculcation and attempt to seek concrete method for same, which is the central focus of pedagogical theory.

CRITIQUE OF THE PRINCIPLES

On Linguistic Principle

The main emphasis of linguistic principle is on the importance of the first language in the process of learning other languages. The level of similarity or differences in the first language (L1) and other ones is seen to be paramount in language learning. The fact that a functional first language enhances the learning is a commendable stance. This is because , humans find it easier to reason in their first language before expressing the idea in the other learnt languages.

It is clear that a language teacher will succeed mainly if he/she relates learners’ experiences in first language to his/her teaching of another language. The Nigerian context based on historical development of language calls for recognition of the existing language in an environment to help learners acquire

the language being taught to them. The language teacher should be concerned about linguistic performance of each student. For this to occur, student should be encouraged to participate actively in the teaching-learning process.

On Psychological Principle

Looking into the theoretical framework of psychological principle of applied linguistics, one is quick to note the antecedent and reinforce stimuli in relation to behaviour and language learning specifically. The activities of the body and the independent variables which control, influence or modify behaviours are indeed worthy of note. The principle is strong in the sense that consciousness of a language teacher about intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors will definitely lead to achievement of the goal of teaching-learning process.

Again, the fact that behaviour is influenced by preceding events is a reality in that past experience many times, determines the next line of action. At the same time, the fact that the event that follows a behaviour also controls the way a person behaves is a vital point. The implication is that a language teacher should not limit him/herself to either of the pre or post behaviour events. He/she should apply varieties of method to elicit learning interest in his/her students. In his/her methodologies, language teacher would have to apply various and relevant ones on the basis of the psychological disparities in the learners. Due to the learning by association stressed by this theory, teaching of language should be handled diachronically as well as synchronically as L2 is studied from the point of view of L1.

Teaching-Learning of language, based on psychological theory of stimulus – response is congruent with humanistic theory. This should therefore, spur the language teacher to help students learn holistically by memorization, repetition, practice and rote learning. It should be noted conversely that, psychological approach to language inculcation is problematic as the parts of language deficiency in individual learners may be difficult to ascertain and analyzed. Again, the expectation that learners should practice simultaneously might be a

herculean task because it requires learning L_1 and L_2 at the same time. With the foregoing, motivation by the teacher is a key issue.

Educators can apply motivation to enhance learning in their students through the following techniques: Motivational books written by experts in related fields which contain tips and strategies to spur students to learn may be used. Such books contain inspirational stories or quotes which may be found on desktop calendars and be used to start the class each day. Motivational books may as well be in the form of audio books which students may listen to. Audio books may contain interviews broadcast with successful people. For instance, a student who fails the examination into university will be full of stress and anxiety of how he/she will have solution to the educational problems in life. As an educator, one needs to motivate students with tips from such books to calm them down and encourage them to still believe that they can still make it.

Another motivational technique is the use of what is called "Take a Walk". In this case, the teacher can allow the students to move round the compound within a few minutes to refresh their minds, brains and parts of their bodies to be ready to learn effectively. The teacher can also motivate students by using "Past Successes" method. He/she may share personal experiences of how he/she worked through obstacles and eventually achieved the set academic goal. "End Result" is also a helpful technique in which case the teacher lists down what students will gain by completing a project. What students will lose if a project or an assignment is not completed should also be stated. This method will help student realize the need to work hard to have a good ending, attain higher level of success and be happy.

Furthermore, students can be motivated by varying method of presentation because monotony is a bane in knowledge impartation as it leads to boredom. For instance, the language teacher may tell the students that he/she will not announce when a test will be given. This will spur students into studying assigned materials consistently. Allowing students' participation in the class discussion under the guidance of the teacher also motivates learning from one another. Using tangible and intangible rewards also encourages learning.

This may be in form of appreciating a good work with tangible things like biros, exercise books and the likes. Intangible rewards may be by nodding of head in affirmation of a good performance or saying thank you, well – done, or good (McDonough, 1979:111-112).

Feedback method can also help as the teacher informs students about their performance in previous tests, examinations, or assignments. This may be written on answer scripts or by inviting students for information on his/her performance. Intervening in case of problematic home background can as well enhance language learning since it involves interaction. The teacher may find out about a student who is not coping by asking some friends of such a student about his / her home background. Performance of such a student in some other subjects should be investigated to ascertain whether or not the problem is about a particular subject. If the case is based on problems from home, parents should be counseled to assist so that the language student may learn more easily and become responsible adult in the future (McDonaough, 112).

On Sociological Principle

Given the place of cultural context of language learning, the principle is a relevant one. This is due to the fact that humans are culture-oriented and learning a language takes place within cultural milieus. Language itself has been viewed as a vehicle through which culture is conveyed. It then means that the cultural context within which language is being inculcated should be given appropriate consideration. Language teachers should ensure clarification of the cultural and social context and teach same concurrently with the features of language. This can be done by encouraging real life situations in the classroom setting. Students could be guided to put language use into practice in the cultural context of the particular language. Taking cognizance of the community where the school is cited with its cultural norms will surely enhance language learning.

Moreover, the fact that the theory emphasizes pragmatics is an indubitable fact. It mean that teachers and students should view language as a

social instrument of communication relating to role play and context. This being the case, the linguistic performance or communicative competence should be the critical point of focus of the curriculum of any language teaching. This is necessary because language is a functional instrument of socio-cultural expression. As opined by Alabi (www.unilorin.edu.ng) “if the use of a language is hinged on the sociological realities, then, the use of pragmatic, true-to-life modules of imparting linguistic knowledge should be intensified” (10). In other words, it behooves teachers of language and other educational administrators to give prime of place to cultural norms while developing, evaluating, administering and testing language curriculum.

On Pedagogical Principle

Pedagogy is defined as teaching-learning process whereby the teacher builds on humanistic theory and approaches to learning to enable learners develop their potentials (<file:///c:/users/admin/downloads/heutagogy.html>). The pedagogical principle of teaching has helpful points for language impartation. For instance, the method allows the teacher to deliver the material he/she has in stock for his/her student. The approach to learning is considered helpful as it enables the teacher to be sensitive to the ways people learn in the learning environment/situation (Ferrier, 2007:299). Anderson (1966) had earlier viewed this principle of teaching positively as he asserted that “pedagogy can be seen as discipline that builds or bridges between the learner and what he/she is to learn (16)

The above strength notwithstanding, the pedagogical method is weak in the sense that it is passive, dependent and non-lasting. It also casts the teacher in the role of authoritative presenter of information who exercises exclusive control of the learning situation (Ferrier, 2007: 299). Since the approach is teacher-centered, it cannot yield much the needs of the learners towards self-determined learning. The present society needs the kind of education approach whereby the learner will be the centre of learning. At this age, it should be the learner that should determine what and how learning should take place, to a large extent. This will enhance development of self capability in learning for

proper teaching-learning process of language. This is more relevant when the learners are mature persons. It means that andragogical approach which is to help adults learn, should be employed (<file://c:/user/admin/download/heutagogy.html>, accessed 10/5/2011).

The above indicates that, teaching of language learning be made practical for it to achieve competence and performance in learners. Teachers of language should employ immersion method, didactic strategy and situational dialogues as learner-centered approaches to boost learning. Language teacher should be considerate of the learners' experiences in organizing language learning to allow harmony in order to encourage assimilation of rules. As recommended by Alabi (www.unilorin.edu.ng). "Direct use of referencing should be adopted in the teaching of literary aspects of language." When this is given consideration, it is believed that language learning will be boosted.

CONCLUSION

Language teaching has so far been seen as a vast task calling for employment of every relevant approach to ensure success. Since learning is a wide experience, it is needful to note that all necessary strategies should be made use of. This is due to the fact that no one method of language inculcation has been found to be sufficient in itself.

Efforts have been made in this paper to present and evaluate contributions of linguistic, psychological, sociological and pedagogical principles to the development of language teaching. This is to emphasize the fact that holistic approach to teaching of language will enhance successful learning. Having attempted to present the principles in a succinct manner, the paper only serves as an eye opener to other researchers in related fields of study. It is however, believed that application of the suggested strategies given alongside the evaluation of the principles will enhance the development of applied linguistics. This will also help the teaching-learning of language in general, and English in particular in the Nigerian context.

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