

**PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES IN CHILD MULTILINGUALISM AND
THEIR IMPLICATION FOR FRENCH STUDY IN NIGERIA**

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Multilingualism is a common phenomenon across the world. Research shows that there are more bilingual and multilingual people in the world than monolinguals. The diversity of African cultures and languages makes French language learning a chore, yet it is mandatory for our social and political interaction, integration and economic transactions, in view of our geographical proximity to Francophone countries and many French Corporate Organisations that are establishing in Nigeria. Developmental psychologists and psycholinguists present that foreign language acquisition is best done as part of early childhood education. However, the magnitude of the implementation of the policy making French a second official language is very daunting, because of the dearth of teachers and the quality of the ill-motivated and inadequately remunerated French graduates that we are producing, who themselves are often intimidated by the enormous difficulties they have to grapple with, like mother tongue interferences, cognitive issues and lack of opportunities to practise their knowledge of French in daily contacts. Our focus in this article is to expose the processes involved in second language acquisition and the general education of the multilingual child. It is hoped that our findings will be useful in the implementation of the National Policy that makes French a second official language in Nigeria.

KEYWORDS:

INTRODUCTION

Why Do Children Become Bilingual?

Children born to parents of different nationalities often end up being bilingual. Both parents might be keenly interested in passing on his/her cultural heritage to the child, therefore they might decide to teach their children their language. In mixed marriages both paternal and maternal families speak their different native languages to their children. Grosjean cited the case of Ingrid whose father was English and mother Swedish. They adopted a one person one language policy on making their child bilingual. Ingrid's father spoke to her in English, while her mother spoke Swedish to her all the time, she also had occasions to visit her Swedish grandparents and such trips helped her to perfect her skills in the language.

Grosjean narrated that Dieudonné's parents migrated from Haïti to the United States. He had grown up speaking Haïtian Creole, his parents had taken up employment in the United States, but did not really plan to make Dieudonné bilingual. Their circumstances had forced it on the child. Dieudonné learnt conversational English from watching television and playground interaction. Dieudonné learnt English in a bilingual education programme, where Creole as well as English was used for instruction. This is the language learning style of a typical Nigerian Child, all across the country. Every child in Nigeria is supposed to learn the three major national languages; Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, at school alongside English, which is largely the language of instruction.

In addition, the national language policy of a country is often a major factor in a child's acquisition of a second language. A country's educational policy may include the teaching of one or several languages in order to enhance a child's adaptation in a pluralist society. For instance, Canada adopted a multicultural policy so that the heterogeneous groups that make up the society would preserve their cultural heritage and that no group would be discriminated against in the Canadian life and that all would participate fully in society. At the time of the First World War

Canada had an influx of immigrants from the British Isles, Germany, Holland, Scandinavia, Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Russia and Italy. Jews, Chinese, Japanese and some other Asians had also been part of the group. According to Bruce Nesbitt

En octobre 1971, le gouvernement fédéral a adopté une politique de multiculturalisme qui a pris avec le temps trois sens : une politique sociale visant à inciter les groupes ethniques à conserver leur patrimoine culturel et à participer pleinement à la vie canadienne. Une philosophie ou une idéologie de pluralisme culturel et une société caractérisée par sa diversité ethnique.

In October 1971, the Federal Government adopted a policy of multiculturalism which took on three meanings: a social policy which aimed at inciting ethnic groups to preserve their cultural heritage and to participate fully in Canadian life, a philosophy or an ideology of cultural pluralism and a society characterised by its ethnic diversity. (Our translation)

This policy by Canadian government would be responsible for educational policy that proposes the teaching and use of both English and French in schools. After the partition of Africa, French and English colonies adopted the language of the colonial governments. Nigeria became a British colony; English was adopted as official language. It became a language for social mobility and of classroom instruction. Children therefore automatically became bilingual.

Ethnic minorities in metropolitan societies learn the language of the majority and hold on to their mother tongue as the main linguistic medium at home and in private conversations in order to sustain their communal life, preserve their ethnic identity and culture. Their children are taught the instructional language in school and if their parents hold tenaciously to maintaining their ethnic linguistic identity they might therefore give much time to teaching them their family language. The adult and the child could become full members of society only by learning its language; incidentally the world possesses a great diversity of linguistic communities. In other words, to have a sense of belonging, individuals must learn the language of the society and its cultural patterns.

The natural way of becoming bilingual is the unplanned bilingualism. Dieudonné found himself in a new community and subsequently became bilingual. Grosjean gives the example of Tanzanians who live in proximity with linguistic groups. Children learn the local language of their locality first from the neighbourhood and then learn to speak Swahili when both parents speak the language to them. Hence by the time they start school, they would have become bilingual.

Furthermore, countries like the U.S.S.R., Singapore, India, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Canada and the United States implement a public education policy of bilingualism. Grosjean also identified community-planned bilingualism, as in the case of Oberwart, Austria, where the people carried out an exchange programme. The wealthier Hungarian peasants would send their sons to live in a German-speaking village for a year and would welcome in exchange a boy from that village for the same period. Franco-Nigeria bilateral relations make provisions for Nigerian teachers and students to spend some time in France in order to enhance their performance. Individuals in Europe travel to countries of interest to learn the target language, some work in families as au pair for complete immersion in the natural linguistic environment. Middle class Anglophone parents in Canada, who send their children to French immersion school often do so because they believe such knowledge, would enrich their children's development.

Learning the world's prestigious languages has also been a reason for teaching one's child a second language. In Czarist Russia, Russian aristocrats acquired French language in compliance with their status. International relations have made some languages indispensable to worldwide interaction and business transactions, consequently those whose mother tongues are different have

to learn those official languages. English, French and Portuguese have been the major official languages of the United Nations, while Chinese has become quite pronounced recently. It is in recognition of the futuristic implications of learning such languages that children are taught.

Psychosocial needs are sometimes responsible for a child's bilingualism. A move to a location in which the majority language is not the child's first language leads to second language acquisition. Grosjean cites the example of Stephen reported by Burling (1978). The boy had just started to speak at six months of age when his parents took him to the Garo Hill district of Assam in India. On arrival, Stephen became immersed in the Garo language because his mother, who has been his major contact with English, was hospitalized on their arrival. His father, his caregivers and house servants spoke Garo to him. Stephen learned to speak Garo quickly and so well that he even spoke it in his sleep. He became more fluent in English through constant contact with his mother. During their trips to other regions of India, Stephen discovered that some other people spoke other languages besides Garo, which he spoke to everyone he met. On their return to the United States, Stephen practically forgot Garo, because the psychosocial needs for communicating in the two languages had been removed. The Garo caregivers and servants had been replaced by English speaking ones. In essence, bilingualism in children usually arises from the need to communicate with significant persons in the child's life.

Language Acquisition

Language acquisition as postulated by developmentalists implies that there is a critical period in a child's development in which a child can easily learn a language, this is in reference to the mechanism of swallowing, a reflex action. They have argued that the critical period ends at puberty. This point remains controversial. The American linguist Noam Chomsky (1928) is particularly associated with the notion of innateness by system of language Acquisition Device (LAD) By 1986 his theory of LAD was replaced by the suggestion that children are biologically preprogrammed with a knowledge of Universal Grammar (UG) This involves some basic linguistic principles, that children are born with pre-ordained options and that they check the possibilities against what they "hear around them in order to set the parameters' of their internal grammars" (CP 27) Jean Aitchison). This view of genetically pre-programmed ability connotes that language in babies is a maturationally controlled behaviour, which is also a function of the development of the brain, precisely the left hemisphere of the brain from which for most individual speech is produced. Barring any damage, malformation, neurological disorders or deficiencies, a baby on attainment of maturational level should be able to learn any language spoken by its caregiver or the people around.

Joahnn Herder, a German philosopher and poet won the Prussian Academy Prize for language for postulating that language is inseparable from thought. While parents teach their children to speak, the children have to invent words and expressions in order to engage in conversations with them. This has led to the concept of baby language. His position is that the capacity to learn a language is innate, language being an integral part of man. Naturalists also carried out empirical studies on evolution. Robert Biehler (1982:76/77) recorded some experiments conducted on intuition and social learning. Konrad Lorenz experimented with birds from which he made speculations about human behaviour. He observed that newly hatched goslings would adopt any moving object that they see as mother, a few hours after they are hatched. This is called imprinting. Lorenz called this instinctive behaviour and may be responsible for language development in the individual. So also René Spitz studied babies raised in foundling institutions (motherless babies' homes). The children were noticeably retarded in development because of the minimal attention and stimulation that they received.

These studies preceded the experimentation of behaviourists about how learning takes place. Language is learned in a social context. A child who is locked up and deprived of associations will never be able to learn a language. Hence it is the child's interaction that enables him/her build the capacity to make syntactic and sound configurations that are primordial to communication. Montgomery (1995: xxvii) states that

The whole process (of language interaction) lays down for the child the outlines of the abstract linguistic system which thereby in turn radically extends his/her capacity to communicate with members of the society at large. In developing a linguistic system, children are developing a resource for making sense of the world of people and things which they inhabit: and they are also developing a resource for interacting in more complex ways with those who people that world.

The wider society into which the child is beginning to move does not, however, typically possess one single, uniform language.

Long before children begin to produce holophrases, they must have started to respond in non-verbal ways to indicate that they understand what is said to them. The first one-word utterances have a broader range than adult language. The one-word does the work of the fully constructed sentences produced by adult. First vocalization of the child's expression in the different forms of cry – the hunger cry, the pain cry, and a cry associated with fatigue, boredom or discomfort – each with its distinctive feature. A child's cry for attention gradually develops into a protolanguage. Protoforms emerge from the infant's immediate, constant and familiar interactions. The child begins to use language to express his desire to play, sleep or enter into a make believe world of his imagination. Language takes on a heuristic function as h/she questions about his/her environment.

Stages in Language Development

Long before the child is able to do the complex task of thinking, he learns to echo and mimic adult words and conversation. His first jabber is referred to as Motherese or what some refer to as baby language. This is explained below.

Motherese: This is the term that is used for baby's first babbling with the caregiver. Babies produced cooing sounds or repeated syllables like ma-ma-ma-ma; da-da-da-da, ba-ba-ba-ba, gee-gee,-gee, moo-moo-moo. These sounds are normally meaningless, but worldwide sense has been imputed to them to create words like papa, mama to signify parents. The fact that the sounds are noticeable in virtually all children of all races and colours except those who are suffering from mutism, lend credence to the fact that language acquisition must be by maturation as it is now generally accepted. This motherese or child talk language leads to the child's first language that is called mother tongue or first language.

Aitchison (1992) gave the timetable of the child language development for an English-speaking child:

6	weeks	cooing
6	months	babbling
8	months	Intonation patterns
12-15	months	Two-word utterances
18	months	Two-word utterances
21	months	Three-word +utterances
18	months	simple negatives
18	months	simple questions

2	years	Inflections (word endings)
3	years	Adult-type negatives
3	years	Adult-type questions
3½	years	Adult-type questions
10	years	Adult-type grammar.

Mother tongue makes reference to the child's first language. It is also called native language. The mother tongue may be an individual language in which case he/she will be described as monolingual. A child could be described as bilingual when s/she can interact communicatively and fluently carry out meaningful social interactions and be able to manipulate language for personal and individual purposes.

Montgomery (1995: 11) extracted the following data on child first interaction.

CHILD: Wassat? (.) wassat? (.) wassat (.)
 PARENT: What's that? That's the other tape (.)
 CHILD: wassat?
 PARENT: that's a spool darling (.)
 CHILD: 'sat? 'sat? 'sat? 'sat? (.) 'sat mummy
 PARENT: what love, show me
 CHILD: 'sat mummy?
 PARENT: What are you pointing to?
 CHILD: look
 PARENT: Oh
 that's a switch
 CHILD: sitch
 'sat?
 PARENT: and that's another one isn't it?
 CHILD: 'sat? 'sat? 'sat?
 PARENT: and that's a little button that you press
 a little red button isn't it?
 CHILD: ((whispers))
 PARENT: no don't you press it now
 because it'll (.) it won't work if you do

The child is motivated to transit from the protolanguage to the adult system because he realizes that his/her interlocutions do not understand him/her; s/he coins new expression for every new meaning, but may or may not make him/herself understood. Montgomery (13) states:

Because of the inherent unwieldiness of this process, it is as if a law of diminishing returns sets in and it thereby becomes more economical to take over adult forms, rather than to go on creating them uniquely for him/herself. For what the adult system ultimately provides is a basic and relatively fixed set of patterns, which can be mobilized for the production of an unlimited range of utterances, each with a unique meaning. Instead of uniquely creating a system as s/he goes along, s/he can take over a system that has creatively built in to it as an inherent and fundamental property.

The child transits through two-word utterance, two separate holophrases in loose tandem into the stage of adult language. In essence, the infant develops syntax, by combining single words into sentences. Montgomery explains further "So s/he has to move from a simple two-level model of language, where meanings are realized directly in sound, to a more complex three-level model, where meanings are realized in sentences and sentences are realized in sound (14)". Thus the child progressively imbibes and interacts communicatively using adult syntactic and sound models. It is

important to note that it is the child's immediate environment as created by caregivers and the most significant persons in his/her life that determines the extent of her linguistic performance.

Language Acquisition and Cognitive Development

All psychologists of cognitive persuasion agree that the human mind is an information processing system. A child's cognitive development should therefore correspond to his/her language development. A child's language and cognitive development is subject to anatomical, neurological, genetic and prenatal changes. Emotional changes and environmental factors might also be implicated in a child's learning process (Biehler, 1981). These factors are responsible for the varied experiences of infants in language learning or bilingualism.

Jean Piaget on the basis of observations of his own children identified the first stage of learning as mutual imitation of sound originally made by parent. This notion conforms with the behaviourist theory of learning while Noam Chomsky's Language Acquisition Device (LAD) makes provision for the ability of children to use language in "unlearned" ways. His postulation of a universal form of grammar used by all children could not really be substantiated. Chomsky's LAD provides the child with innate ideas about given language data (sentences) of that language. On the other hand Cognitivists hold out that learning in normal children should correspond to certain developmental stages.

Therefore if the brain is fully grown by age ten, the child should be able to learn one or more languages by age six. According to Piaget's stages of sensorimotor period, that is the first two years of life, the sixth stage of between eighteen to twenty-four months is deemed a period of exploration and manipulation which equips the child with enough clearly established schemes to be able to engage in mental manipulations, that is when actions could be taught out. This is the stage the child forms images in his mind and could now express them in holophrastic forms. A child's responses in sound or protolanguage indicate that the child could think and therefore understand as against the congenitally mute or spastic child, who for neurological defects might not be able to engage in meaningful speech interaction.

Second Language Acquisition

In this wise, a number of approaches in language acquisition has been identified as simultaneous and successive.

Simultaneous Acquisition of two languages implies that the child has acquired two or more languages before the age of three. From birth the target languages are spoken to the child. This is often the strategy adopted by mixed couples who implement one-person-one language policy.

Successive Bilingualism means that the child gains competence in one language before another is introduced to him/her, within the language acquisition stage (0-6 years). Josiane Boutet (1997) gave the instance of a child born in Turkey and who arrived in Germany at age three would be taught the new language consecutively as the first.

Fratrie is also identified by Boutet as the co-existence of the two preceding forms of bilingualism already explained.

Il en sera ainsi, par exemple, d'une famille immigrée portugaise de première génération. Juste arrivés en France, ni le père, ni la mère ne parlent encore le français. Un enfant naît : la famille est monolingue en portugais. Cet enfant entre dans un bilinguisme successif : il apprendra le français à la maternelle et l'introduira dans la famille en même temps que les parents, qui, eux aussi, l'acquièrent dans les contacts professionnels. Au bout de quelques années, de monolingue cette famille devient bilingue. Si un second enfant naît alors, il s'installera probablement dans un bilinguisme simultané.

This was the case of a Portuguese migrant family of the first generation. Newly arrived in France, neither the father nor the mother spoke French yet. A child was born: the family was monolingual in Portuguese. This child got into successive bilingualism: he learnt French at the nursery school and introduced it into the family at the same time that his parents, who, themselves have acquired it through professional contacts. At the end of a few years of monolingualism, this family became bilingual. If a second child is born, he will likely be established in simultaneous bilingualism.

Natural Bilingualism is identified as language learning in its natural environment and through interaction with native speakers of the language. Grosjean presents that this is quite different from the artificial and formal classroom experience.

Information Processing in Two Languages

Inferences from learning theories and deductive process in cognitive learning support the fact that second language acquisition would usually be affected by the first. If there is a system of association of knowledge from one language to the other, it means then there would be a lot of interaction between the first and second language. Osgood (cited by Steinberg, 1982) proposed a model of second-language functioning as Compound-Coordinate Bilingual theory, which may be implicated for only processing isolated words.

A compound bilingual is said to process second language words through the mediation of first language words, having learned the second language through translation. The coordinate bilingual, however, processes second language through translation. The coordinate bilingual, however, processes second language words without first language mediation, having learned the second language through direct experience (166).

Researchers hold divergent opinions as to whether infant bilinguals are able to keep the lexicons and grammars of the two languages separate in the learning process. Bergman (1976) and Padilla and Libman (1975) studied children, who produced very few mixed utterances. They also differentiated their sound systems from the onset of language. Pavlovitch's son (1920) mastered the French and Serbian phonological systems without confusion. Piaget's experiment with his children proved that language learning is determined by experience and contingent on the environment (for instance acquisition of language by imitation). Confusion of two languages could then be avoided through imitation and learning. Bergman (1976) reports that her daughter Mary, acquired Spanish simultaneously and differentiated the two languages at a very early age of fifteen months. This led to Bergman's hypothesis that

As it is being acquired, each language is able to develop independently of the other with the same pattern of acquisition as is found in monolingual children learning that language (cited in Grosjean:183)

Bergman's view presupposes that it is the mixed language that the child receives that is processed into a combination of elements from the two languages. Other researchers do not support this view. Boutet (1997:26) cites the clinical research carried out by the psychologist Ronjat (1913) in which he did a longitudinal and detailed biographical observation of his son's bilingualism till age five. His mother spoke German and the father French. Louis mastered the two languages without confusion. Boutet opined that this was possible by giving access to the lexical systems of both languages, making distinction between the codes, cognitive development and syntax.

Bilingual children at the stage of one lexical system combine words from the two languages, but there may not be an overlap in the use of words. While they use an appropriate word for a notion in one language they might not use a corresponding word in the other. Grosjean cites the case of a Georgian-Russian bilingual child, who used Russian word for flowers (tsiti) and the Georgian word for ball (buti), but never used their corresponding word in the other language. Bilingual children use blends and compounds at this stage, that is phonemes and sounds of the two languages are blended for more convenient use. The case is cited by Grosjean of Juliette, a two-year-old English-French bilingual and Eric Young, French-English bilingual. Both of them produced the following blends:

French	English	Blend
chaud	hot	shot
cormichon	pickle	pinichon
assis	sit	assit

Bilingual children also have the tendency to create compound words from both languages.

Lune-Moon
 Pour-For
 Papa-daddy
 Chaud-hot

In essence they use the translation of words in the other language simultaneously. This may be due to the fact that the child wants clarification through emphasis that s/he has been understood by the interlocutor especially in one-person-one-language interaction.

At the second stage of acquisition the child has differentiated the two lexical systems, but not the syntactic rules of both languages. Homophones in both languages might create confusion. The child may carefully avoid meaning of words in the other language that are difficult to pronounce. Volterra and Taeschner (1978) noted that children at this transition to two-lexicon mastery continue to mix words in their two languages. The case of the child who blends Italian and German was analysed.

Mami vuole Stickzeug, vuole Arbeit si?

(Mummy wants knitting, wants work, yes?)

A Tok Pisin/ English bilingual child in Papua New Guinea said:

Will you rubim off? Ol man will come.

(Will you rub (that off the blackboard)? The men will come.

At this second stage the child has only one grammar. She would have to make a personal effort that goes beyond rigidly identifying the two languages with the two corresponding significant persons, in order for syntactic mastery to take place. "The act of labeling a person with, one of the two languages makes the choice of words and rules a kind of automatic process, thus reducing the effort s/he has to make (Volterra & Taeschner:325). The case is reported by Redlinger and Park (1980, cited by Grosjean) of language blending in children. Danny an English/ German bilingual child's conversation with his German speaking mother and an investigator is quoted below:

Mother: Was macht der vogel?
 (What's the bird doing?)

Danny: (startled) Nicht vogel.
 (Not bird)

Points to the investigator

Du vogel
 (You bird)

And then points to his mother and says

Du sag birdie.
(You say birdie)

At the third stage, interference is significantly reduced and the child is able to switch much more rapidly from one language to the other. S/he is then said to be completely bilingual. Volterra and Taeschner stated in their conclusion: "At the end of this third stage the child is able to speak both languages fluently, that is with the same linguistic competence as a monolingual child, with any person. It is only at this point that one can say a child is truly bilingual (326).

Dominance in One Language

There is greater tendency for dominance of one language if the language is more spoken by the child and those around him/her. In which case, the child needs one language more than the other. Linguistic differences and complexities may be reasons for the child's dominance in one language. Certain linguistic constructs may be harder to internalize and reproduce in one language than in the other.

The child's dominance in one language could be reversed at anytime that the child changes location. In which case, the child's linguistic competence at anytime is determined by the immediate environment and the psychosocial needs of communication and interaction. This is much the same experience of the adult, who is strongly motivated by his social and economic needs to learn a language but s/he soon forgets when the need is satisfied or the language is not in use. The Nigerian child who learns French and does not leave the country to use it in a Francophone country will definitely forget, nevertheless s/he has a foundation that s/he may recall and build on as the need may arise in future. They may not at the onset be able to create words or innovate in the language like the bilingual child immersed in the first and second languages because the third language (French) is not a language of instruction.

Strategies in Second Language Acquisition

Blends, mixes and inferences are often a result of the child's strategy in second language acquisition. The developmental aspect of language acquisition in a child has earlier been discussed. While opinions about critical period in language development may not be discarded, it has been proved that a child could become bilingual at any age. Some of the cases that have been highlighted were of children who became bilingual before school age. McLaughlin (1978) and Genesee (1978) reported that it is a myth that young children acquire languages more rapidly than older ones. Lennenberg (1967) refuted the myth that the brain is more malleable or 'plastic' before the onset of puberty and may therefore be more receptive to tasks of language learning.

It seems pertinent though that cognitive development is vital to language acquisition. Since age is a factor in cognitive development, it would be appropriate then that the older a learner is the more mature s/he would be and the more sophisticated in certain cognitive skills; "such as the capacity to abstract, generate, infer, and classify that could help them in second-language acquisition (Grosjean 192).

Recent research has also proved that motivation is a variable in second-language acquisition. Gardner and Lambert (1972) found that mastery of a second language is not so much contingent on individual's intellectual ability or language ability as on the learner's motivation. This actually would propel the learner to identify with the linguistic group, communicate with members of the group and possibly adopt certain cultural practices of the group. A child would have no option if the second-language is the language of instruction. S/he might only have to be helped in the process of acquisition by significant persons in his/her life: parents, teachers and caregivers. The input of an educated mother is of vital consideration, particularly when she is knowledgeable in the language of instruction and practices it at a high level (HL).

Transfer from the first language to the second language might not also be overlooked, particularly when they interfere with phonological and syntactical rendition of the second language. For the Nigerian child learner of French it is even more complicated, because of the three different phonological and syntactical patterns s/he has to learn. McLaughlin wrote: “there is a first or second The unity of process reflects the use of similar strategies of language acquisition (206) Young French learners of English are likely to carry the influence of the pronunciation of certain consonants to English, like the uvular [R] for the apical-alveolar [r]; the alveolar [t] and [d] for dental [th] represented in the two sounds [B] [D]. An older learner has a wider knowledge, a wider range of vocabulary, semantic concepts (ex. word derivations), a longer memory span and a more developed cognitive system, which are transferred to his/her new learning. S/he is likely to create more complex sentences, as s/he is more likely to translate previous knowledge into new concepts this may not be so in children. Grosjean (194) sums up a few findings on children’s strategies in second – language acquisition:

For instance, the child will use simple structures (subject – verb – object, for example) before more complex ones, over extend the meaning of words, disregard irregular past tenses, over generalize rules, and relate word order to word meaning. Ervin - Tripp (1974) observed that English – speaking children learning French in Geneva were not using word – for – word translations from English but instead were simplifying their French constructions and using first – language – learner structures, such as simple declarative sentences or uninvited questions. Milon (1974) observed that a seven – year – old Japanese acquiring the English negation progressed through the same developmental stages as English – speaking children and did not transfer the Japanese negation system into English. And Dulay and Burt (1974) found that the vast majority of errors made by Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, and Norwegian – speaking children learning English were all similar to one another. Proponents of the developmental position expect to find, and often do find, more developmental errors involving simplifications and over generalizations than errors involving interference from the first language (194).

Fillmore (1976) proposed three stages in the child’s acquisition of a second language in a natural environment. Firstly, the child establishes social relationships and interactions with the speakers of the second language, secondly, s/he concentrates on communicating with speakers of the language, and thirdly the child uses correct forms of the language. Most children are usually more apt at initiating new social relationships, particularly with their peers. Fillmore stated that the children, who acquire a second language rapidly, make much use of social relationships: they seek out children who speak the target language, they enjoy role-playing games and they are uninhibited in their attempt to speak the language. This may be of relevance to the Nigeria situation if educational and cultural exchange programmes are instituted between Nigeria and Francophone countries. Children from both countries may visit on short or long term basis as learners.

In addition, children in their own way could transfer previous knowledge to second language acquisition. Keller-Cohen (1980) opined that “prior experience with language contributes to a child’s second language learning by providing the child with heuristics for searching and organizing linguistic data and with knowledge about language (both general and specific)” (in Grosjean 196). The child might transfer linguistic elements in the first language to the second, like tense forms or sentence structures. It is the combined use of linguistic, social and cognitive strategies that enables the learner to acquire the second language.

Furthermore, the child uses the differentiation strategy as s/he ensures that the person-language bond is not broken. A child could be distressed when a person s/he has identified with a

language switches into another. Sometimes, bilingual children develop translating skills usually by necessity. Migrating parents may not learn the majority language as fast as their child, who they might subsequently depend on him/her to translate or interpret or explain their interactions. Grosjean (201) records the case of BS an Italian girl who virtually took care of her family affairs in the USA. An American Sign Language–English bilingual had since the age of four become interpreter for her parents at the doctor’s office, on the phone and at home.

It is usually the circumstance that determines the language choice for both adult and children. A child might not speak a minority language except there is a participant. Fantini (1978) carried out an investigation on his two children, Mario and Carla, who had become bilingual in Spanish and English by the age of four. They inserted many Spanish words into their English. In Spanish environment they used Spanish and in an English environment they used English. By the age of four the children could judge the interlocutor’s fluency and would choose to speak to him/her in his/her stronger language. When his parents insisted that Mario should speak Spanish, the home language, he protested because he wanted his grandmother to hear what he had to say in English.

The wrong language choice could lead to autism or mutism in children. In a monolingual school setting, a child who speaks a minority language might resort to silence, passivity or nonverbal communication devices because s/he cannot communicate in the language of the majority. McClure (1997) discovered that Spanish children interact with one another in a language that each prefers and would switch from English to Spanish when emotionally stressed – like someone gets hurt (as would their parents). McClure observed that Mexican children produced different kinds of code-switches; they tended to be nouns and occasionally adjectives and they were English words inserted into Spanish sentences. McClure examined reasons for code-switching as being a strategy adopted by the child to resolve ambiguities or to clarify statements, to attract or retain attention. According to McClure these switches have the same function as raising the voice, touching the person or making eye contact. At a later age switching may be for emphasis. Code-switching may be related to mode-shift that is shifting from narration to commentary or from soliloquy to questioning.

Fantini relates how Mario and Carla would tease their grandparents by speaking to them in Spanish instead of in English and surprise and amuse their parents by addressing them in English. Finally direct translation by bilingual children is a way of playing with the language and having fun. For instance, if the expression “mon petit chou” is transliterated as “my little cabbage” instead of the more appropriate “my little dearie” or “my little lamb” a lot more fun is created. Children exploit many strategies in language learning, apart from classroom instruction, immersion in a natural environment or planned family instruction as in the previously cited examples, children language use is a vital strategy in second language acquisition.

Education and the Bilingual Child

Most bilingual children acquire their second language at school, Government language policy is a major determinant in bilingual education. If the policy is to unify, assimilate minority groups or spread the national language, then bilingual education might be a priority. If the aim is to preserve ethnic identities like in the case of Belgium and India, then equal status would be given to all languages and more linguistic diversity would be created in the educational process. This is often a very expensive project, as each of the languages would be codified, written and standardized for instance, the Nigeria National policy on Education (1998) states that

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages;

Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and it shall be compulsory in schools (9).

This stated policy, makes every Nigerian Child multilingual/bilingual in L1 (language of his/her immediate environment) L2 (English First Foreign Language as Official language) and L3 (French as Second Foreign Language)

The Multilingual Nigerian Child and French Study

According to the National Policy on Education, the French language should now be taught from the Primary School to the Junior Secondary School. Since the Nigerian child living in the country does not have the privilege of learning in the natural environment, an effective classroom formal teaching has to be put in place. It then means that our teachers have to learn the cognitive processes involved in language learning in children and therefore initiate approaches that could meet the diversity of maternal tongues that the child has grown up with.

About four hundred languages have been identified in Nigeria and all of them have the potential to imprint on a child's pronunciation and understanding of basic concepts in the either the second or third languages that have no equivalent in the maternal language. If language is an expression of thought and it expresses the dimensions of each individual's worldview, it becomes intricate to find parallels of some words and expressions in the foreign languages that are taught to children. For instance, in the Yoruba language there are few words that express colours and other concepts that have a wide range of distinctions.

YORUBA	ENGLISH	FRENCH
Dudu	Black, blue, green	Noir, bleu, vert
Funfun	White, cream, grey	Blanc, crème, gris
Pupa	Red, brown, purple, orange, yellow, wine	Rouge, brun, pourpre, orange, jaune, marron,

The greetings in Yoruba are another difficult area to grapple with in the teaching of either English as second language or French as a third language. The Yoruba language beautifully expresses greetings for virtually every hour of the day or activity that is undertaken. The expression "eku" which if transliterated means "you die" precedes every greeting yet the etymology of the word reveals it could simply mean "well" as in the sentence "Eku abo" meaning "welcome" and its response "Eku ile" meaning "hope you had a good stay at home" otherwise transliterated would read "well home stay", which means there is no English rendition of the response to welcome in the same way as in Yoruba. The interlocutor may simply reply "thank you". There is a parallel in French where the response to "bienvenu" could just be "merci" (thank you). The French language appears to have more varieties than English. For instance in Yoruba one can say "eku isimi" which expresses greeting about how well the individual is enjoying his holiday, but this does not exist in daily use or worldview in English. The equivalent in French "bonnes vacances or bonne fin des vacances" The expression "eku ise" appears even complicated in use, it should mean "well done", but in the changing values where nothing goes for nothing it sounds now more like its transliteration "die for work". Misconceptions and misinterpretations often lead to costly incidents. As in the case of the use of the greeting "pele" in Yoruba, which etymologically is meant to say "hello", or

sometime an expression of empathy, but more frequently, is now used for “I’m sorry about your unpleasant situation”.

A child from a middle class family who is in a private school may not face the dilemma of expressing his views in confusing terms as explained in some of the samples stated above. The new value system introduced by Western and American civilisations, expose children to values that are not in any way related to African existential realities. Television programmes and movies teach children new cultural practices and realities thereby giving them new thought patterns that have to be expressed in verbal communication in all the languages the child is learning. The implication of this for the teacher is the awareness that the focus of language is not the translation of words that do not fit into the living reality of the child, but a communicative approach should be adopted which gives the learner the variety of experiences that s/he can identify with. For instance, it is futile to make a child grasp the concept of snow, a weather condition s/he has never been exposed to. Hence our learning materials and teaching have to take this reality into cognisance.

Even when the emphasis is on the child’s use of the language, the issue of daily practice poses a challenge. The essence of a language is its use, but a child who does not speak any language s/he is learning may fall into mutism or autism, particularly if s/he feels intimidated. Hence our teachers must learn the peculiar needs of children for motivation and reinforcement of their achievement. We may not expect Nigerian children to communicate extensively in French because of the limitations that have been highlighted in this essay however a head start should be encouraged. It is in this wise that the following recommendations are made.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Given the indispensable benefits of multilingualism in cognitive and psychosocial development of the child, the following suggestions have been made:

1. Bilingual schools should be located in each state of the Federation, where the French language should be given the same status as English. This means that children in these pilot centres should be taught subjects on the curriculum both in English and French. This is based on the psycholinguistic principle that the learner, who has learned to conceptualise in a first language L1 will associate ideas in the second language L2. In this wise, they would be exposed to a wide range of registers and vocabulary relative to subjects like Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science etc. Conclusion drawn from my observation of adult learners of the French language supports the view that those who have mastered very well the English language carry over their competence into semantic and phonological rubrics of French.
2. This implies that only those who can teach their core subjects in French will be employed in such schools. In most Primary schools, the teachers are expected to teach more than a subject sometimes all the subjects on the curriculum.
3. Psycholinguists should be fully employed in each school to provide continuing support for pupils and teachers. The French learning Centre, The Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry can also be mandated to ensure the continuing education of teachers on a National scale, ensure regular training programmes of French teachers in the Federation and their exposure to emergent techniques in the Teaching of French as Second Foreign Language.
4. Adequate technology should be provided for effective teaching and learning, like standard language laboratories, Smart Boards for direct access to Internet, Projectors and Screens, Computers, VCD/DVD players, Television sets and other useful multimedia equipment and well stocked libraries. Psychiatrists/Psychologists have discovered that seventy percent of what we see are retained whereas only thirty percent of what passes through the ears are remembered.

5. The Pilot schools may be of an International status, making provisions for the intake of children from Francophone countries whose parents would like to expose their children/wards (possibly older secondary school students) to English learning in the natural environment. Of course this option may be cheaper for those who cannot afford going to the United Kingdom or the United States. This initiative should provide social interactions and informal setting for extensive learning and practice in communication in both languages under the skilful guidance of well trained teachers.

It may be quite daunting at the initial stage, imagining the enormity of the task of teaching core subjects in French to pupils from primary four to Junior Secondary School students. Nevertheless, existing infrastructure, physical and human resources could be deployed to take off. We do not presently have enough teachers for this huge project. This is the reason for the Pilot schools, while more teachers should be trained in Colleges of Education and Universities. The issues of language contact, influence of the mother tongue and the relevance of French in the child's daily routine should not hamper the implementation of viable French teaching in the country as we may not anticipate immediate result. What is most crucial is that awareness has been created and the seed is sown for the future benefit of the children, who are already furnished with a working knowledge.

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