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Effect of Home-Model on the Spoken English of the Nigerian Child

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Abstract

The language proficiency of parents often plays a significant role in forming their children's linguistic abilities. This is because children grow up coming in contact with their parents as their first teachers and role models and also because during their linguistic formative years they spend more time and engage in more communicative activities with their parents. This paper therefore examines the influence of parents' quality of spoken English on their children's spoken English proficiency, bearing in mind the socio-economic status of the parents. I assume that children whose parents' spoken English is flawless and with whom English is used as a code of communication at home, will acquire same or better efficiency. In contrast, children whose parents' spoken English is poor will have their expressions laden with imperfections in the Language. And when they have something better than their parents', it will rise a little above their input. The difference might not be such a significant one reaching the degree of fluency.

Keywords: Parent-Language Influence, Language Learning, Parent-Child Language Proficiency, Second Language Speakers, Nigerian English

General Background

Language learning is an integral part and a milestone process of a child's life. This process mostly go along with it an effective parent - child social interaction which is very important for children's language acquisition and development. This serves as a key determinant of a child's future progress in language and other areas (Hart & Risley 1995; Adamson 1995; Nelson 2007). This means a child's language progress can be quickened by the linguistic input, which is in sync to their developmental capacities that they get from people around them within a social setting, particularly their parents, Mashbur, et al. (2009).

In this study, it is assumed that speaking a language void of errors in the course of parent-child interaction is an important part of child language development. A study by Topping et al. (2011) reveals that amongst other factors that could hinder parent-child interaction leading to child language development is parents' first language. So a parent whose first language is not the one they are using in raising their child may not be able to give a linguistic input which is (totally) free of errors to their children. Nigeria is a complex multilingual nation with over five hundred languages. However, none of these is the official language, but English, hence the influence of the



language in the Nigerian speech community. One of the ways English has greatly influenced the Nigerian society is the continuous rise in parents' decisions in raising their children in English.

As second language speakers of English, it is not rare for many Nigerian parents to be faced with challenges in their spoken English. These problems are especially profound in grammatical and phonological errors, which happen when speakers use a second language based on the structural system of their first language. Manrique (2013). The implication of this is when a speaker's language is not fluent, listeners may be unable to understand vital things they are trying to pass across in their speech simply because their language is not adequately carrying out its primary purpose which is to clearly express the thought of the speaker. Languages have rules which come in form of standard and when a speaker is unable to meet the expected standard, they are likely to do injustice to the ideas they want to pass across, Batko (2004). In contrast, when a speaker has a good knowledge and command of a language, English for example, they tend to demonstrate the feeling of confidence and self-assurance of meeting common standards of correctness.

The relationship between parents' language background and socio-economic status (SES) has a major effect on child-language development. This is one of the reasons many children raised in English in Nigeria are not fluent in the language because their parents are from low SES

background and therefore making a bad influence on their language proficiency. According to Roy and Chiat (2013), the following are, but not limited to, the determinants of socio-economic factors: living conditions, occupation, education, income, the quality of physical and psychological environment. In this study, education is the only social dimension by which subjects' socio-economic statuses are determined and grammatical, semantic variables will be used to analyze their utterances in order to be able to establish the link between social and linguistic factors in the study. It is assumed that educated persons among the subjects have had exposure not only to formal education but to many individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and have been involved in communicative situations within their learning environments. Hence their language is assumed to associated with good quality.

The aim of the study therefore is to investigate whether or not the linguistic ability of parents projects on their children's language proficiency. Only fragments of each subject's conversation are contained in the data and those will be used for the analysis of the study.

Method

In order to obtain relevant data for the study, a surreptitious observation was placed on child-parent A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O, taking each family as a unit of observation. The children ranged in age from four to eight. The families have roughly been categorized



into upper class, middle class and lower class, using education as a social dimension for such categorization. Families A B C D E are of the upper socio-economic class and parents are college educated, FG HIJ are of the middle socio economic class and parents secondary school (or just a little above) educated, while KLMNO are of the lower socio-economic class and are primary school educated and not above junior secondary school educated. All the subjects are residents of the same urban town. They were not selected based on any criteria other than their social statuses, the age range of the children and the code of communication used at home. The conversations were recorded (surreptitiously) and analyzed. Only fragments of the conversations were randomly picked for analysis in order not to make the table of analysis clumsy.

The English Language

The English Language is one of the most used languages in the world. Its dynamism and multi-functional nature makes it universally acceptable and relevant. It is a language that serves different purposes ranging from mother tongue, official language, national language, to second language. A speaker of only English may travel to any part of the world without encountering much of language barrier because speakers of English are almost everywhere. It is the language that people often turn to when other means of communication fails, Trousdale (2010). The world-wide spread, the global acceptance and use

of the English Language is overwhelming. Hardly is any language found that can beat its universality. From record, about two (2) billion people in the world speak English and another one billion are learning it, Nutt, (2009). Seventy-five (75) percent of world's letters and postcards are written in English. Its vastness is projected in the function it performs in many international events that bring together participants from both English and non-English speaking countries. Such events include the Olympics, Miss World/Universe beauty contests, conferences, seminars, etc. Similarly, English is the language used in many African reality TV shows, awards that bring together various contestants and audiences from different parts of Africa comprising French, English, Portuguese, Swahili speaking countries. Such functions include Big Brother Africa, Africa Next Top Model, Africa Viewers' Choice Awards, etc. Many of the world's top movies, books and music are published and produced in English. It is the main language of organizations like the United Nations, African Union, the European Free Trade Association, ECOWAS, etc. The importance of English Language in the international business world cannot be over stated. One who speaks/writes English will have a better access to the internet to read, obtain information, make contribution because more than sixty (60) percent of the information on the internet is written in English.

A very exciting feature of the language is the enormous amount of words it has borrowed and absorbed into its



lexicon from other world languages. This has projected the liberal disposition of the English language to other languages and has made it alluring to learn for speakers of such borrowed languages. The heavy borrowing of these foreign words has truly given English a global reach and acceptance. Knowledge of what is being borrowed and from where, provides an invaluable insight into the international relations of the English Language. Overall, English has been described as the world's lingua franca or common language, Trousdale (2010).

In Nigeria, the use and relevance of English Language is overwhelming. It is the official language as well as the medium of educational instruction. It is used to teach formal educational courses/subjects except for those that are local languages. Moreover, prominence is placed on English Language as a subject which compels primary and especially high school students to make a credit grade in it before they can graduate to tertiary institutions. Even at the tertiary level, students are enforced to take English and Communication Skills at the first academic year irrespective of the course they have been admitted to study and required to make a pass in it before graduation. Usually, it is believed that students whose performance in English is credible often have no difficulties understanding and doing well in other subjects especially in non-science subjects.

Many are the functions of the English Language both at national and

international levels such that it is safe to surmise that it is the language of science, business, technology, fashion, education, entertainment, etc. There are many languages in the world and English is one of those that are highly impactful and as long as one wants to be a global person, the knowledge of it is required.

English Language Learning in the Nigerian Home

When a child is born, its environment, inclusive of its parents, starts a process of equipping this young mind with the tools of speech: vocabulary, grammar, in an unconscious manner. This process is more intensive and effective in the first decade of the child's life, that is, the basic phonological and grammatical system of whatever language(s) they hear around them are essentially established by the age of five (5) or six (6) along with the vocabulary of such language(s). Children begin "learning" languages at birth. Crystal (1986) says learning to speak and listen is a process which usually takes place spontaneously as part of the natural interaction between parent/caregiver and child. A child is likely to end up as a fluent speaker of a language only if there are significant people in his/her life who speak it fluently. For instance, Speaker A, an upper class, urban resident woman, was worried that her six year old child was looking weak. She drew her to herself and said, "Baby, you look weak, are you ok? what is wrong with you? The child answered, "Mum, I am hungry, can't you see? The mum said, "Ok, what would you like to eat?"



Mummy is listening” “Mum, I don’t know what exactly I want to eat”. Clearly, has ‘learnt’

Young children like to model their behavior on what goes around them, be it dress codes, manners in their different forms, body language, and so forth. So, children’s use of language is usually through their parents first and later through other agents of socialization. In other words, they imitate their parents’ way and manner of doing things, inclusive of language, so using simple English phrases for instance at home can influence a child’s English vocabulary. Parents talk to their children about their experiences, their world, their lives, etc. and they learn about all these and more from what they are told. Apart from all these, they also learn their parents’ language and how it has been used to tell them about these things. This is to say that at every point language is used with children, the learning of that language is going on.

Interestingly, children can acquire fluency of the language if they are well exposed to it by the environment. Children’s pronunciation is naturally influenced by the regional and social varieties of the first language input they hear and as long as they are experiencing adequate input and interaction from people around them, the rate and sequence of their grammatical development does not appear to vary systematically according to its source. In reacting to the influence of immigrants on the literacy of the students of a certain school, the Head of the school points to the fact that except for pupils who

live in homes where good English is spoken, students communicate among themselves in “slovenly lingo that the ordinary boy uses”, New York Times of Sunday 11 February 1906 in Trousdale (2013). The claim confirms the influence of language in the home on children’s language.

In Nigeria, presently, children are coming in contact first with English Language which makes it their first language. Many Nigerian parents are inclined to raise their children in English Language probably because of the social prestige accorded it. Often when parents raise their kids in English, they consider it a positive sign that the kids will be proficient and have a good command of the language. They do not take into account that their own communicative capacity will serve as bedrock for their children’s. Many also do it because they feel their children’s exposure to the language from birth will translate to good academic performance. Some parents even express regret and disappointment why their own parents raised them in the local languages and not English because they feel it is something that will help a child intellectually down the line. Also, majority of parents who raise their children in English do so to be socially acceptable and belong to a particular social class; in other words, many see their children being monolingual in English as indicative of membership of an elite class. Giving these reasons, some parents end up raising their children in Pidgin because they lack the linguistic capability to do so in English. Therefore, they use Pidgin as a substitute. However,



coming from a low SES background, many of the parent-subjects are continually faced with second language constraints such as interference, code switching, code mixing, poor and limited vocabulary scope and inability to make input that will significantly expand their children's language skills and expressions as they age. One of the parent-subjects in the course of her interaction with the researcher said, 'My dear sister, I cannot lie you, I will not take that if it is me'. 'I am not boasting and it is not proud, there is no work I do that my customer have a complain'. The omission of preposition 'to', the replacement of 'were' with 'is' using "proud" for "pride", "complain" for "complaint" are indicators of her low level of education.

Data Analysis

English Language has a set of principles in its formation. Consequently, when a speaker flouts these principles when speaking it, it may be accounted against the person as not doing it right or making words or sentences that are not grammatical. An ungrammatical string of words is one in the formation of which the grammatical rules of the language-system are not respected, Lyons (1986). In other words, any combination of forms of a given language which is not well-formed in terms of the rules or principles of the language is ill-formed in respect to that language. Here, I provide and analyze the data got from the subjects under observation. The aim of this

study is to examine the influence of parents' proficiency in spoken English on their children's English proficiency. To achieve this, conversations from social interactions between the parents and their children were recorded and some were randomly picked for analysis. The analysis is adapted from Ellis' in Robinson (1994) procedure for analyzing learner errors. These are identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors and evaluation of errors. These were captured in a table which allows for the possibility of analyzing the correctness of the utterances both semantically and grammatically and in the discussion below.

The data shows that parent-children from low SES have the greatest frequency of errors, both grammatical and semantic. The children are inclined to code-mix English with their parents' L1 and have more frequent use of lexical borrowing of words for objects which suggests incompetence in the language in use. Most of the errors are also rooted in their parents' L1 interference. This is because they use English based on the structural system of their parents' L1. For example, Speaker O's child on hearing his father call his mother said to her "they are calling you". In his parents' first language, pronouns used for older persons are in the plural forms. Hence, his use of *they* for *he*. Similarly, *they* used by Speaker L's child in 'how do they use to sing the song?' has no antecedent in the previous recorded sentences. However, in the first language of his parents, it is a correct sentence, as *they* acts as an expletive.



The use of *use to* in that sentence is ungrammatical and has no semantic relationship with the English *used to*.

From the results got from subjects from middle SES, subjects do not have same frequency of errors in their conversations. While Speaker I had problems only with pluralization, Speaker H had to deal with concord, absence of possessive marker, and literal mapping of L1 on to L2 in her conversations. This confirms that an individual's ability to speak a language (English) well may not be defined by only their level of education but also their level of exposure to that language. In general however, most of subjects' errors are grounded in mother tongue influence. An example is Speaker N who said, 'you see your life outside?'. This in her first language is metaphoric and said to make people feel sorry about what they have done, to question their character, etc. This will mean neither of these in English.

The data from the upper SES reveals that children have a greater knowledge of the use of English and generally have the best quality among the three categories. However, the data reveals no total compliance with the rules of English by the subjects. Grammatical errors of wrong pluralization, wrong tense forms are found. No error based on mother tongue interference was recorded. There are no semantic errors found also in the data. This is assumedly so because their parents don't code switch/mix in their use of English with their children.

Discussion and Conclusion

An analysis of parent-child conversations has been done to see the impact of home-model on the spoken English on the Nigerian child. There is almost no way of stopping children speaking in bad English since their parents do it themselves, Cherry (2009).

In the data below, it is easy to make a distinction between utterances of subjects who are from the high SES and those who are not. The grammatical differences of the speakers gave an insight to their social backgrounds. Studies have shown that differences in language are tied to social status Trudgill (2010). In this study, education is the only social dimension by which subjects' socio-economic statuses are determined and grammatical, semantic variables are used to analyze their utterances in order to be able to establish the link between social and linguistic factors. It is assumed that educated persons among the subjects have had exposure not only to formal education but to many individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and have been involved in communicative situations within and outside their learning environments. Hence, the reason for the associated relatively good quality in their spoken English.

Most of the errors found in the data stem from the influence of (parents') L1, such as mapping its grammatical patterns inappropriately onto the L2, pronouncing certain sounds incorrectly or pronouncing them correctly but with difficulty (not captured in the table but present in the recorded data) over-stretching word meaning on ideas,



literal interpretation of L1 sentences in English Language, etc. The data has shown that many of the parent-subjects have no deep knowledge of English and has also shown how this rubs off on their children's spoken English. So, that parents' use English Language to raise their children does not guarantee fluency of their children's spoken English. The thoroughly skilled ability or incompetence of children's spoken English largely depends on the level of fluency of parents' spoken English. It could be concluded therefore that raising a child with a language that is not the mother-tongue of the parents is not a good idea unless the parents are completely good in the language. In other words, trying to raise a child in a language such as English can be done successfully if only both parents speak it well enough to converse daily in it where the child can hear them, Harding and Riley (1986). But if they don't, high chances are that the sounds and strings of words that will be produced for the children to imitate will be tinged with a strong 'foreign accent' and grammatical errors. Similarly, except parents speak the non-native language exceptionally well, the child will learn the mistakes that parents make in that language. Finally, raising a child in a language the parents do not speak well may confuse the child unnecessarily. To have one's child speak proper English, one would need to speak proper English to them from young age. All grammar mistakes should be corrected when heard otherwise the mistake is engrained in the child's memory for a long time.

Alternatively, parents should wait until the child has mastered their native language well enough to have long meaningful conversations before introducing a language they do not speak well, Harding and Riley, (1986). Moreover, the child will go to school where the language of teaching, learning, and instruction is English and do well in it even without input from the parents. Having a foundation of their parents' first language will be helpful in learning English by for instance, referring to the mental lexicon of the L1 to understand English better.

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Table

Deviant Form	Standard Form	Error Type
<p>A (Mother). You have to loosen your hair tomorrow morning so we can go to the salon early.</p> <p>A (Child). Ok.</p> <p>A (Parent). What hairstyle were you told to make?</p> <p>A (Child). Hmmm! Sade Adu! Mummy, I’m not very sure. Let’s call Aunt Mary to be sure I’m correct.</p>		Error free



<p>B. (Daddy) You guys should stop shouting and let there be calm in this house. You have eaten and now you have the strength for noise making.</p> <p>B (Child). Daddy, we have not eaten.</p> <p>B (Parent). Whether or not you have, no rough plays, so be careful.</p> <p>B (Child). Ok, Dad. Whatever we do will be done quietly. I will make sure none of these noise maker make noise</p>	<p>Ok, Dad. Whatever we do will be done quietly. I will make sure none of these noise makers makes noise</p>	<p>Error free</p> <p>Grammatical error</p>
<p>C (Parent). I am almost done with Joy. As soon as I finish, it will be your turn. Just hang on.</p> <p>C (Child). Please don't finish with her soon. I feel sleepy; I want to sleep, Mummy</p>		<p>Error free</p> <p>Error free</p>
<p>D (Parent). The day you injure yourself with that object is the day you will learn to be obedient. Haven't I warned you against that iron? Now go and throw it outside.</p> <p>D (Child). The door is lock. I can't open it. I will just throw it here.</p>	<p>The door is locked. I will just throw it here.</p>	<p>Error free</p> <p>Grammatical error</p>



<p>E (Parent). Pick that chain and go and put it where I keep my jewelry. Do that quickly and come back here.</p> <p>E (Child). I don't know where you keep your jewelries. I will put it on the table. Are we going to continue with the scrapping?</p>	<p>I don't know where you keep your jewelry. I will put it on the table. Are we going to continue with the scrapping?</p>	<p>Error free</p> <p>Grammatical error</p>
<p>F (Parent). When you finish with that mirror, return it back to where you pick it cause I know you if they don't tell you to return something, you don't know.</p> <p>F (Child). I have not finish. I am looking at my face like you use to do. Let this mirror not break if not I will just run before Mummy know</p>	<p>When you finish with that mirror, return it to where you picked it cause unless you are told, you won't know you are supposed to return it.</p> <p>I have not finished. I am looking at my face the way you do. This mirror should not break cause if it does I will run before Mummy knows</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error</p> <p>Grammatical/Semantic error</p>
<p>G (Parent). Go and tell your daddy it's 4.00 O'clock already. He should be on his way now</p> <p>G (Child). Where does Daddy wants to go to? Me I will follow him</p> <p>G (Parent). I don't want any complain o. Just do what I ask you to do.</p>	<p>Where does Daddy want to go to? I will go with him</p> <p>I don't want any questioning (complaint). Just do what I asked you to do</p>	<p>Grammatical error</p>
<p>H (Parent). Leave me alone; Dem send you</p> <p>H (Child). Nobody send me</p>	<p>Leave me alone; have you been sent to bother me?</p> <p>Nobody sent me</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error</p> <p>Grammatical/Semantic error</p>



<p>H (Parent). Go and pack those shoe in one place. If shoemaker pass, we will give him. Look inside the shakashaka, you will see some there.</p> <p>H (Child). Should I carry that ajaku Mary shoe and add?</p>	<p>Go and gather those shoes in a place so that if the shoe cobbler comes, we will give them to him. Look inside the sack, you will see some there.</p> <p>Should I add Mary's worn-out shoes?</p>	
<p>H (Parent). If I'm done with this one, I must go Mummy Aisha house. She have not return the ladder. Small time now, Baba will come and be talking.</p> <p>H (Child). Mummy, Aisha have not been in school since this week. Aunty call his name many many times, but she is not around.</p>	<p>When I'm done with this one, I must go to Aisha's mummy's house. She has not returned the ladder. Soon, Baba will come around to complain, Mummy, Aisha has not been in school this week. Aunty called her name several times but she was not present.</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error</p> <p>Grammatical error</p>
<p>I (Parent). I must share it into two equal, one for today and one for tomorrow. Agree?</p> <p>I (Child). Yes, but what of if I want to keep everything for school tomorrow?</p> <p>I (Parent). Any how. You're on your own.</p>	<p>I must share it into two equal parts, one for today and one for tomorrow. Agreed?</p> <p>Yes, but what if I want to keep everything for school tomorrow?</p> <p>How ever you want to go about it is up to you.</p>	<p>Grammatical error</p> <p>Grammatical</p>
<p>J (Parent). You have start again; if you don't go and carry your book, you will see. There is no each thing I ask you to that you have done.</p> <p>J (Child). I am not playing o, it's Mummy</p>	<p>You have started again; if you don't go and read your book, you will not like what I will do to you. There is no single thing of the things I told you to do that you have done</p> <p>I am not playing. It's</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error</p> <p>Grammatical error</p>



<p>that say I should drop the ball outside.</p>	<p>Mummy asked that I take the ball outside.</p>	
<p>K (Parent). Careful, no mess your trouser with that thing you are eating. Be eating yaunyaun, like they are pursuing you. K (Child). This one is sweet, I cannot pour it. Yesterday own, I gave the remaining to Ayo.</p>	<p>Be careful! Don't soil your trousers with that thing you're eating. You eat fast like you are been rushed. This one is delicious, I cannot let it pour away. The one of yesterday, I gave the remainder to Ayo.</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error Grammatical/Semantic error</p>
<p>L (Parent). Yes. I am hearing you L (Child). No. look at me; I will know you are hearing me and say what I want to say. L (Parent). E never pain you L (Child). Oya, how did they use to sing the song</p>	<p>Yes. I can hear you No. Look at me; I will know you can hear me, then I will say what I want to say. You are not ready to talk yet. Ok. How is that song sung?</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic</p>
<p>M (Child). Mummy, take! The food is not sweet anything. Me that I think I will finish it sef M (Mummy). It's not the soup that is not sweet, it's the yam floor that is not good, and it's Mama Zach that push me.</p>	<p>Mummy, take! The food isn't delicious. I thought I would finish it. It's not the soup that is not tasty, it is the flour that is not good. It was Zach's mum that encouraged me to buy it.</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error Grammatical/Semantic error</p>
<p>N (Child). Off my uniform for me. That yesterday cleaner, I shaked my bag up and down, I did not find it N (Parent). Where is your bow tie? N (Child). I don't know. N (Parent). You see your</p>	<p>Take off my uniform for me. I turned my bag inside out, but I did not find the cleaner of yesterday Can you see how</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error Grammatical/Semantic error</p>



<p>life outside? Your tie remove and you don't even know. There is no extra. Be doing what I don't know there. Sebi there is nothing somebody say that will enter your ear.</p>	<p>careless you are? Your bow tie removed and you didn't know. There is no extra one. There is nothing one says that you listen to.</p>	
<p>O (Parent). Onidase! Is that not your sister's sweater you are wearing? How many times will I tell you that you should not be wearing her things except the one she dash you? If she beat you now, you will open your big mouth O (Child). They are calling you O (Parent). Who? O. (Child). Daddy</p>	<p>Stubborn boy! Is that not your sister's sweater you are wearing? How many times do I have to tell you not to be wearing her things except the ones she gives you? You are called.</p>	<p>Grammatical/Semantic error Semantic error</p>