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I. ARTICLES

SEQUENTIAL BILINGUALISM AND THE TEACHING OF LANGUAGE SKILLS TO EARLY PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT. This paper argues that the poor mastery of language skills in Nigeria's educational system can be attributed partly to the poor methods of teaching language skills in the system, especially in early primary education. Given the fact that the bilingual concept is entrenched in the 1977 (revised 1981) Nigeria National Policy on Education, the approach of 'simultaneous' bilingualism has been utilised in teaching mother tongue and English language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – in the primary schools for a long time now. The use of this approach is noticeable, especially, in classroom presentation and text book development. However, it is apparent that the approach has not been effective and, thus, has not enhanced the inculcation of permanent literacy which is a major objective of the educational policy. Using illustrations from some common Yoruba (mother tongue) and English course books for pupils in early primary education in Nigeria, the paper observes some of the limitations of simultaneously presenting language skills to children in early primary education, and suggests that the sequential presentation of skills be done to promote efficient bilingual education in the school system. The paper suggests that teachers and writers of course books of Yoruba and English should present language skills in a way in which some skills learnt earlier will facilitate the learning of later ones.

1. Introduction

The vital role of language in human life makes it a mandatory feature of social and educational concern. Although Nigeria is generally referred to as a multi-lingual nation because it has over 400 languages (both indigenous and foreign) spoken by over 250 ethnic groups and immigrants spread across the nation, it can also technically be referred to as a 'stable bilingual' community from the perspective of 'societal bilingualism' (Stewart 1968). In such a community of stable societal bilingualism, a worthy bi-/multi-lingual person seeks basically to learn his or her mother tongue (e.g. Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik) primarily for immediate local use and the English language secondarily for national official

use. Most often by the age of six, when a child comes to the primary school, the child already speaks his or her mother tongue (MT) or, more specifically, the local dialect of the language, fluently. A few children of the elite who speak English at home or who have attended nursery schools have either a smattering or fair knowledge of spoken English by this time, but most (over 80%) children do not have any knowledge of the second language at all. On arrival at school, they meet a curriculum of education that is supposed to be guided by the following policy provision:

Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English. *National Policy on Education*, Section 3, 15(4)

Despite the several criticisms made against the above provision, especially in respect of the hasty and abrupt switch from the mother tongue into English and also in the lack of its implementation (Afolayan 1977, Brann 1977 and Omojuwa 1983), the primary role assigned to the mother tongue in it cannot but be recognised and applauded. In view of this recognition, it would be logical to expect that provisions are made to teach these two languages as subjects in the curriculum so that pupils can use them to learn other subjects. A further expectation is that the mother tongue ought to be given priority here in view of the urgent need of it by the learner. Sadly enough, the above expectations are not met in the school system.

Due to certain misconceptions about the status, roles and importance of languages in general, the general pattern in the schools is to overrate English and underrate the mother tongues. A consequence of this is that while five periods are assigned to English on the time-table per week only one or two period(s) are assigned to the mother tongue. So much focus is put on the English language at the expense of indigenous languages. Another consequence is that all the basic skills in both languages are taught concurrently, as if the pupils already have equal previous knowledge of the languages, instead of sequencing some of them for the overall effective learning and consequent utilization by pupils. The inherent danger in the former approach is that there has been so much confusion in learning and all skills are often muddled up. Thus, instead of being efficient bilinguals, pupils end up becoming non-linguals who cannot use language effectively for education.

This study therefore aims to (i) present some of the limitations of simultaneous presentations of the basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing to children in the early stages of primary education, and (ii) suggest that the sequential presentation of some of the skills be done to promote efficient bilingual education in mother tongue (L1) and English (L2) in an English

3. Researches on Language Skills Development

The four basic skills of language, viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing, normally interact with one another in an efficient language teaching programme, whether they selectively combine as oral-aural, literacy, productive or receptive skills. The ultimate goal of an Integrated Language Teaching programme (Howe and Tomori 1980) or Whole Language Approach (Goodman and Goodman 1981) is the improvement of learners' linguistic skills by a variety of means. The development of reading can thus be seen in this paper as part of a wholistic approach of language skills development in education (Muglestone 1979, Olaofe 1983, Onukaogu 1997).

At the primary school stage, suggestions have been concerning the sequential bilingual teaching of MT and L2 skills in order to promote the effective learning and use of these languages (Omojuwa 1985, Akindele and Adegbite 1992, Adegbite 1993). In several observations made by scholars (Cummins 1979 and 1984, Pialorsi 1974, Royer and Carlo 1991), the prior acquisition of some skills in both the MT and L2 was shown to facilitate the acquisition of some other skills in L2. Cummins' (1984) hypothesis, which says that MT 'academic' or 'literacy' (i.e. reading and writing) skills and strategies transfer readily to an L2 whereas basic interpersonal communication skills in each language develop independently of one another, is confirmed by Royer and Carlo (1991). Cummins (1984:143) has suggested that:

... if instruction in the native languages is effective in promoting proficiency in it, transfer of this proficiency to L2 will occur provided there is adequate exposure to L2 (either in schools or environment) and adequate motivation to learn L2.

In the same direction Royer and Carlo (1991:452) have claimed that:

- reading skills learned in MT show up a year later in reading in L2;
- listening skills acquired in L2 show up a year later in reading in L2;
- listening comprehension in MT does not transfer to listening comprehension in L2

From the scholars' findings above, we can infer that:

- listening in L2 can facilitate reading in L2;
- reading in MT can facilitate reading in L2;
- writing in MT can facilitate writing in L2;
- facilitation in 'a' and 'c' above will also depend on effective instruction in MT, adequate exposure to L2 and adequate motivation of pupils to learn L2.

as a second language (ESL) situation. The suggestion is particularly relevant to the area of textbook production for primary education in Nigeria/Africa.

2. Research Procedure

The following popular coursebooks on Yoruba and English used in the first half of primary education in Yoruba-speaking states of Nigeria are analysed in this study:

I. THE YORUBA LANGUAGE BOOKS (THE MT)

- Aláwifáyé by J.F. Odunjo, (1949/1988) Longman, Nigeria – Ìwé Kin-in-ní, Ìwé Keji àti Ìwé Keta (Bks I-III).
- Táíw àti Kéhíndé by T.T. Solaru (1984) University Press Ltd., Ibadan – Ìwé Kin-in-ní, Ìwé Keji àti Ìwé Keta (Bks I-III).
- SYPP Yoruba Project Books, edited by A. Afolayan (1980-84).
Coursebooks in the series include:

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|----|------------------------------|-----------|
| a. | Ìgbàradì fún Ìwé Kíkà (1980) | |
| b. | Wòó wò (1980) | |
| c. | Mò ó (1980) | |
| d. | Ko ó (1980) | |
| e. | Ìwé Kíkà Odún Keji (1981) | Primary 2 |
| f. | Ìwé Kíák Odún Keta (1981) | Primary 3 |

II. THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE BOOKS

- *The New Oxford English Course* Bks I and II (4th ed.) by A. Banjo, S. Miller and D.C. Miller (1980/91) University Press Ltd., Ibadan.
- *Nigeria Primary English* by N. Hawkes, N. Macauley and D. Dallas (1979) Longman, Nigeria.
- *Nationwide English* Bks I and II by R. Ridout, A.A. Baba, O.A. Ismaila and M.E. Muoneke (1978) Evans Brothers Ltd., Ibadan.
- *Primary English for Nigerian Schools* by NERDC (1989) Heinemann, Ibadan.

In carrying out an assessment of the coursebooks just listed, we shall pay attention to these two criteria:

- Basic Skills covered and manner of presentation. and
- Wider Knowledge presentation.

The implications of the above findings for sequential bilingual teaching of language skills (SBTLS) can then be expressed in the following requirements:

- All four skills in MT can be taught in Primary 1. Actually, the emphasis in teaching ought to be on reading and writing since pupils already can listen to and speak the language well before coming to school; oral MT skills practice through use, diagnosis of defects and provision of recommendation, etc., will be achieved in the process of developing MT literacy skills.
- L2 listening and speaking (oracy) can be introduced in Primary 1; L2 pronunciation will be facilitated by the pre-school acquisition of sounds in MT which are similar to other sounds in L2 (Afolayan 1971). Some scholars also believe that L2 speaking may come up a little later in the year than L2 listening as pupils naturally will have to listen first before speaking (Dulay, et al. 1982).
- L2 listening and speaking (oral skills) can be taught in Primary 1 alongside the MT literacy skills.
- L2 literacy skills should be taught after the literacy skills in MT and oral skills in L2 have been mastered. This implies that L2 reading can be taught in Primary 2 or thereafter, after pupils' MT reading and L2 oracy have been reasonably developed. It also implies that L2 writing should not come earlier than Primary 3, or thereafter. Since Yoruba and English, for example, have many similarities in their scripts, only the graphical differences between these languages would need to be emphasized.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1. The Yoruba Language Course books

BASIC SKILLS COVERED AND MANNER OF PRESENTATION

The presentation of symbols, figures, shapes and sketches in two SYPP books *Ìgbàradì fún w Kíkà* and *Wò ó* sets this series apart from the other two Yoruba coursebooks examined. Apart from this, all the three course books in Primary 1 present sounds, letters, syllables, words, phrases, sentences and texts (stories, verses and drama sketches) matching these with pictorial illustrations. These content features project the knowledge which pupils are expected to acquire from the texts. In the process of acquiring this knowledge, pupils are expected to acquire and develop the basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing which are crucial to proper education and language learning in primary schools. The course books examined present these basic skills to pupils in different ways. The manner of presenting the skills attest to the limitations or efficiency of the different texts in meeting their various objectives.

A major limitation of *Aláwiiyé* is the lack of a comprehension teacher's guide to enhance the teacher's efficiency and streamline what s/he will teach. For example, the target of reading is stated in the front cover of the Books I and II. However, the means of reaching this target is not clearly stated. The opening pages of the pupil's book contain brief instructions to the teacher, of which the most extensive requires the teacher to discuss texts with pupils before embarking on each of Lessons 7-40. Apparently, these instructions are very vague and are of little help to teachers who would have to use their discretion in presenting features in the text to pupils. Without a proper guide, the diverse experiences of teachers might result in lack of uniformity in teacher's presentation in different schools.

In contrast to *Aláwiiyé* above, *Táiwò àti Kéhindé* has a workable teacher's guide accompanied by some information in a pamphlet called *Lecture Note*. It is from the guide that we read, for example, that lessons should begin with the introduction of oral skills – the teacher is expected to teach standard pronunciation of certain sounds and words to pupils of different dialectal backgrounds. Also, we read from it that reading should begin in the 1st week of Primary 1 and writing in the 3rd week of the same class.

In the *Lecture Note* some comments are made in respect of teaching the Yoruba language in Primary education which need to be examined for their validity since they provide the basis for the content of the coursework. One of such comments, which is written in Yoruba, reads thus in English: The tasks which pupils should perform with the guidance of teachers are four:

- phonetics,
- language,
- culture,
- literature.

These differ completely from the four classifications done previously thus:

- listening,
- speaking,
- reading and
- writing.

Among several other arguments that could be raised against the above claim, it is essential to note that the two sets of classification are not necessarily exclusive of each other. The first set of terms lists the content areas of knowledge/experience from which illustrative data are provided for pupils' acquisition of knowledge and skills for developing and concretizing the skills in the

second set. It should be noted that acquiring skills is part of the knowledge acquisition process; and even when properly acquired, the skills can help a learner to gain access to further knowledge, unaided. This shows why another statement from the *Lecture Note* (p.3) would have contradicted the one above while attempting to present the course book content:

At the beginning of this books, we saw a lot of pictures. Pictures of reading, listening in order to hear what a teacher calls each picture... let us allow the learner to pay attention to what they see around them.

Unlike the two course books above, the SYPP series give very comprehensive information about the presentation of skills in the texts. The series claim that reading and writing should receive the priority attention of teachers in early primary education, because pupils are already advanced in listening to and speaking their mother tongues by the time they come to school at the age of six. Thus, while the *Aláwiiyé* Bk.1 and *Táiwò and Kéhindé* Bk.1 initially pay less attention to reading and writing, the SYPP books pay attention to developing these skills in pupils. The Teacher's book on *Igbaradi fun Iwé Kikà* 'Preparation for Reading' (p.4) sets up for the teacher certain tasks on presenting pre-reading, and perhaps pre-writing, along the following lines: lilo eya ara eni (ojú, etí ati owó) 'coordination of parts of the body (eyes, ears and hand)', iríran 'seeing/looking', igbórán 'hearing' and idàgbàsóké ede language development'. These tasks will prepare the children for:

- oral language development exercises
- direction
- visual perception and discrimination
- hand and eye coordination
- sorting and grouping
- identification and counting
- auditory perception and discrimination
- concept formation through sensory awareness

Generally, the course books in the SYPP series for primaries 1-3 via the practice of listening and speaking present pre-reading, reading, pre-writing and writing skills.

WIDER KNOWLEDGE PRESENTING

One advantage the SYPP series have over the other two Yoruba course books is that, unlike them, the series include supplementary texts which complement the course books. The texts provide further reading materials which enable pupils

- listening.
- speaking,
- reading and
- writing.

For example, *The New Oxford English Course* Bk.1 introduces the skills thus:

Term 1: Week 1, Lesson 1: listening, listening and doing, listening, looking and saying, oral work with pictures.

Term 1: Week 1, Lesson 2: pre-reading from the wall or blackboard, thereafter reading from the blackboard.

Term 2: Week 1, Lesson 3: reading from books.

Term 2: Week 1, Lesson 1: pre-writing exercises.

Term 3: Week 1, Lesson 3: writing.

The above trend is noticed in the other coursebooks though with some minor variations in the time the features are introduced.

Certain principles guide the sequencing of skills above as some statements in the Teacher's books show. The following statement in *the Nation-wide English* (Teacher's Bk.1, p.5) expresses a general principle of learning language skills:

As soon as you start teaching reading, there is one thing you must make sure of. Your pupils must be complete masters of the language you expect them to read.

The *New Oxford English Course* (Teacher's Bk.1, p.vii) comments on the teaching of the reading skill in a foreign language thus:

... in teaching a pupil the skill of reading in a foreign language, the first sentences he is asked to read should be the same as the sentences he can already hear with understanding.

And The Nigerian Primary English (Teacher's Bk.1) in the following statement on reading attempts to show the authors' interest in second language learning:

The course caters for two types of reading situation (a) where children learn to read first in the local Nigerian language, which is the most natural approach; and (b) where English is the initial reading medium. To satisfy both situations, some pre-reading exercises are provided in Term 1 to reinforce what has been done in the Nigerian language, or to provide a foundation for learning to read in English.

As the discussion later in this paper will show, the statement above does not seem to recognize ESL principles, let alone implement them.

WIDER KNOWLEDGE PRESENTED

Unlike many coursebooks, English course books are usually supported with supplementary readers. This is perhaps because of the long tradition of production of English coursebooks in Nigeria. The readers which project different kinds of knowledge exist in form of story books, link books and general readers.

While the existence of supplementary readers to complement English coursebooks is a welcome event, their production has to be in conformity with SBTLS principles. For instance, supplementary readers in English will not be useful for lower primary classes where oracy or basic readers are being given full attention.

5. Discussion

From the observation made above, two of the Yoruba language coursebooks assessed have two or three major limitations that pertain to language skills development in pupils. First, both the *Alawiiye* Bk.1 and *Taiwo* and *Kehinde* Bk.1 lack the proper introduction of reading and writing skills. Pupils ought to be properly prepared for reading through adequate pre-reading and pre-writing skills development. Ordinarily, pre-reading and pre-writing would have fallen within the jurisdiction of language learning in pre-primary education. However, since the majority of Nigerian pupils come to the primary school straight from home, this programme of preparation for literacy should be integrated into the school curriculum. When this is done the content features of Primary 1 books should go beyond picture reading to reading symbols, colours, shapes, diagrams and figures as we can see in *Igharadi fun Iwe Kikà*.

Secondly, there seems to be no justification at all for Yoruba coursebooks to give sequential preference to listening and speaking skills over reading and writing in Primary 1. What is expected is what the SYPP books have done. The target skills to be learnt at this level are reading and writing. In moving towards this goal, both pupils and their teachers will necessarily listen to and speak the MT in their various discussions. The teaching of MT oral skills will thus not be a case of introducing sounds or words but, rather, the diagnosis and remediation of wrong pronunciations occasioned mainly by speech defects.

Another limitation of the above coursebooks is the lack of supplementary readers to further widen the knowledge of pupils. In addition to the intensive reading materials, there is the need for pupils to have sufficient extensive reading materials (i) to enable them apply and practice the skills which they have learnt intensively and (ii) to enable them learn more of the Yoruba language and the content of diverse texts written in it. The pupils need to be fully

grounded in the language because they will not only use it in the Yoruba lesson but also use it to learn other subjects in the primary school. The characteristic of having appropriate supplementary readers for language teaching in primary education is another asset for the SYPP books.

Concerning the English course books, it is observed that all the texts examined suffer from one major limitation – the improper staging of skills. While it is true that all the course books recognise and state some fundamental principles guiding the grading, staging and sequencing of second language skills in early primary education, they however do not reflect these principles in their presentation of skills. The presentation is done as if English were the MT of the pupils. Thus, even though the coursebooks state that pupils must be masters of EL2 before they begin to learn reading (see 4.2), they nevertheless go against this principle by introducing reading and writing in Primary 1 when pupils have just started learning oral English. In *Nigerian Primary English*, reading is even further emphasized through the inclusion of pre-reading in the programme. This further reduces the attention paid to oracy in EL2 by the text.

It is thus crucial at this stage to consider how language skills in Yoruba and English coursebooks can be properly staged. When some of the English coursebooks introduce reading in the second term of Primary 1, do we expect that pupils would master listening and speaking English properly within one term? Also when they introduce writing in the third term of the same class, how much of the earlier skills will the pupils have learnt before the time? Following the coursebooks, pupils are expected to have been introduced to all the four skills in both Yoruba and English within one year. How does this allow certain skills to be properly taught or to properly facilitate other skills? How economical also will it be for pupils to re-learn in an L2 skills which they have already mastered in their MT?

In line with the SBLT requirements stated earlier in this work, the pupils require a period of at least one year before being introduced to reading English. During this period they will have mastered to an appreciable degree both the listening and speaking skills in English, which will facilitate their learning to read the language. Furthermore, pupils will have learnt extensively how to read their MT and even could have on their own started struggling to read English without the teachers guiding them. In the long run, teachers will not need to teach reading from the scratch but will only concentrate on problematic areas of reading Yoruba and English.

In a similar manner to the above, presentation of the English writing skill will have to be shifted to Primary 3 to allow pupils to thoroughly learn reading the language. By this time, pupils will have been fully literate in their MT. And when this is supported by their previous English reading experience, such pu-

pils would already have started writing English on their own, having problems mainly in terms of spelling. Such problems as these can then be focused on and tackled later.

6. Conclusion

Arising from the discussion above, this paper suggests that the following general principles of teaching language skills, be followed by Yoruba and English textbooks for effective acquisition and learning of the MT and English by Yoruba pupils.

- Course books should aim at making pupils achieve literacy in Yoruba and oracy in English in Primary 1.
- English coursebooks should aim at making pupils literate in English reading in Primary 2 and English writing in Primary 3.
- From Primaries 3-6, course books should aim at consolidating all the skills learnt from Primaries 1-3 through further intensive work in oral language development, reading comprehension, composition and creative writing.
- Supplementary readers in MT should aim at widening the acquisition of pupils' knowledge (of people and things, social environment, language and literature, number, etc.). Those in English, which should come very late in primary education should aim at widening pupils' experiences about other people and things in the world.

The suggestions above have two major implications for language coursebooks. First, they imply that more Yoruba textbooks need to be written in accordance with the principles of SBTLS. The content of some of the existing coursebooks need to be revised. Also, the coursebooks should be supported with appropriate supplementary readers. Second, the present English coursebooks generally ought to be re-oriented towards achieving the goals of efficient learning of English. In this respect, all sections relating to teaching English reading and writing skills must be expunged from Primary 1 coursebooks and shifted to Primaries 2 and 3 respectively. It may well be that Pupils' Book 1 would no longer be necessary, or that it should contain only materials that will present practical oral English through only materials that will present practical oral English through role play, games, conversations and drills. Finally, it is assumed that the issue of adequate and appropriate text book development discussed in this paper can yield fruitful results in the context of the provision of other essential facilities such as well-trained language teachers, suitable and adaptable materials and equipment, essential infrastructure and a conducive atmosphere for learning.

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