

Language and Gender Distinctions

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Abstract

Language gives a unique distinction to a person, a sex, a group (as in different professions, assemblies etc) and a nation. The focus of this paper is on the gender linguistic peculiarities. Investigations were carried out in the area of language learning between male and female. Through experimental procedures, empirical approach was adopted through some selected teaching methods (Lecture, Discussion and Audio-tape mediated discussion) to determine the performance of male and female users of English language as obtainable in a subset of Nigerian multilingual society. A package of linguistic input was adopted through which some vital areas of speaking skills were considered in the experimental procedures. The sample for the work consisted of 240 Senior Secondary School class two (SSS2). This was selected out of a population of 408306 SS Students. Multi stage and purposive random sampling techniques were used in the process of data collections. The instruments used to collect data included questionnaire and achievement tests. The data collected were subjected to both descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages and mean; inferential statistics of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). The outcome of investigation in this work revealed that gender had no significant influence on students' ability to acquire the tools of language of communication. It is therefore recommended that both sexes should be given equal opportunity in any language programme. The uninformed belief that one sex can naturally perform better than the other should be discountenanced. Both sexes should be given equal exposure to the right method for good performance in any language programme.

Keywords: Learning, acquisition, performance, lecture, discussion, audio tape, method.

Introduction

The natural traits that distinguish individual user of a language can never be denied. It has never occurred in the world history that two persons speak the same way even though they use the same language. The language behaviour of different users of a language spells out the unique language identity. Eloquence, power of oration and ability to acquire the necessary tools of communication in a language may vary from person to person. Heredity may play a vital role in the learning and acquisition of a language. But this notwithstanding, the theory of nurture through which the necessary cultivation of language behaviour is observed can make a difference in language performance.

Language as one of the natural phenomenon has its complex peculiar characteristics but the ability to cope with all its features is given to man. This is controlled through proper nurture in a particular linguistic situation within a language region. Human being is given the power to acquire any language with different individual distinctions: language competence and language performance could be blind to gender variation. The uses of a language are based on individual language acumen rather than the sex. In the process of language acquisition and language learning, every creation (human) has equal opportunity to perform. Apart from illness, accident and some abnormalities, all human beings have equal opportunity of using the tools of communication effectively.

The theory of nativism according to Chomsky (1968) suggests that nature had provided every linguistic paraphernalia needed by any man to acquire the necessary tools of communication in human language. The number of human languages in the world is infinite yet there are common cores. The natural features are similar and every normal person has the potentials to use the features for social interactions. Though the mentalist theorists do not believe in the concept of learning language through stimulus-response, their claim in language learning processes does not deny exposure to language culture as being practised in the environment of the learner/child. The crux of the matter in acquiring the needed tools of language of communication is exposure. The correct language habit is formed through exposure to the right language model. Good language habit is developed as the child/learner imitates the linguistic bits which the mature speakers often demonstrate before him. The drama is carried out through repetition, recapitulation and replication. In language pedagogy, the best methodology is explored in order to develop the standard and globally acceptable linguistic norms in the child/learner as regards the Language of Wider Communication (LWC).

Literature Review

Distinctions between male and female are prominent as regard the use of the tool of language. Language assumes different colours and tones between the sexes. Akindele and Adegbite (2005) echo the suggestion from linguistic research that in many societies, the speech of men and women differs. It has been observed by Kramman (1977) that men's speech is forceful, blunt, efficient, authoritative and serious as opposed to the weak, trivial, ineffectual, tentative, hyper polite and euphemistic nature of women's mode of communication. Hatman (1976) also reports that women's speech is flowery and full of the descriptors-modifiers and qualifiers – than men's speech. Jaspersen (1922) discovers that women use lots of intensifiers which make the speech lack precision.

Thome and Harley (1975) and Trudgil (1975) affirm that women favour the prestigious or correct way of language use. They easily acquire or learn the standard form of a language than their men counterpart. It is discovered that women make greater use of pitch. Brend (1975) finds out that women use high pitch more than men in their daily communication. Women's discussion is more frivolous and domestic than that of men. Although researches reveal that men talk much longer than women. Strodbeck et al, 1957; Wood, 1966; Argyle et al, 1968 and Swacker, 1975 say that private talk, gossiping, free flow domestic language interactions and language of banalities are common to women than men. The language of

women is simple in vocabulary and grammar; easy for babies and infants to acquire in their early years of language formation.

The research findings captured men as the group that talk more for obvious reason. Akindele (1988) observes that it is a rare occurrence for women to initiate discourse when men are present; in fact, Chester (1971) asserts that it is impossible for women to talk when males were present especially if the males were their husbands. In the religious hemisphere, be it Christian, Islamic or Traditional religion, women are rarely allowed to make a public speech, men dominate the scene. In Christian religious group, for example, women are not allowed to speak in public especially in a mixed congregation except they are allowed by men, (1 Corinthians 14:34, 35 KJV).

Akindele (1988) discovers that males interrupt females and even determine turn-taking procedures. The frequent interruption of females by males demonstrates males' dominance in communication system. Males gain the floor of discussion for themselves through interruption mechanism. The aforesaid notwithstanding, research findings do not affirm women inferiority in the area of language acquisition and language learning. Women tend to perform better in quick acquisition of language tool than men. They have the greater potentials to move closer to the native speaker of a language in the area of language learning. The confirmation of this by the research works of some linguists like Trudgill, Thome and Halley (1975), Holmes (2008) reflect in their work that women favour the standard, correct and most prestigious form of the language of communication than men. The discovery that men talk longer and dominate the scene of any discussion only demonstrates men's authority, power and complete control of the world affairs. Masculine dominance cannot be demonstrated if language power is not overtaken and put under their control.

Some words in English language are closely associated with women. Words like lovely, darling etc are relatively common to females than male (Finegan 2004). Though there is no experimental procedure that confirms the superiority of either of the genders in acquiring or learning human language, it can never be denied the structural distinctions and unique natural peculiarities of the linguistic use of the language of communication between the sexes. Carroll (2004) identifies the differences in language ability rather than language learning and language acquisition. There was no empirical evidence as to special favour to any individuals on the ground of gender as regards the language competence and language performance. The idea of hormonal disparity according to Gray and Buffery (1971) as cited in Haralambos and Holborn: *Sociology Theme and Perspectives* by Collins (2001) that the left hemisphere of the brain which is reserved for language activities in man is more dominant in girls after the age of two and that boys have greater abilities in those functions concentrated in the right hemisphere is heavily criticized. For example, Collins (2001) quotes Bleier (1984) that *'comparable populations of males and females have the same range of test scores, the same range of abilities, and in some test situations the mean or average test scores may not differ at all, or differ by only a few percentage points.'* Therefore, hormonal effects could not be relied upon to conclude that there is a superior stand by either of the genders in language acquisition or language learning.

Statement of the Problem

There is a general conservative belief that nature favours females in the area of good language performance. This idea has given a wrong signal to most school children. Some male students believe that language and literature classes in the Arts group are for the females while Mathematics and Science classes are for boys who worth their salt. Consequently, many have been misguided, scared or limited from doing well in the language class. And in the series of investigations into the root- cause of students' poor performance in English language, it was discovered that this negative idea may not be unconnected with the negative trend. It could be a corollary to students' consistent declines in their performance in English language despite the place of the subject in their academic life and its utility stature in Nigerian society.

The above stated problem disallowed the students to develop the favourably rewarding learning attitude toward the acquisition of the needed linguistic skills which can generate in them the good habits that can enhance good language performance. It is not an overstatement that attitude towards a learning task determines the level of attainment.

Purpose of the Study

The study falls within the chains of pedagogical investigations on reasons for students' poor performance in language classes. The work aims at obtaining accurate evidence as to whether gender has effects on language learning and language acquisition. The ultimate target is to design a programme that can assist either of the genders that may be less equipped for language task or if no ground for the perceived gender superiority in language acquisition and language learning is established, to disabuse the mind of learners of English as second language the phobia of gender superiority in language task which may generate negative attitude to learning or acquiring any language.

The Methodology

The research design was a quasi-experimental type. Three methods of teaching combined with a package of linguistic inputs and the control group were used for the study. The three methods include: Audio-tape Mediated Discussion method, Discussion method and Lecture method. These were experimental groups. The control group did not receive any treatment. The diagram below demonstrates the design.

E ₁	O ₁	X ₁	O ₂
E ₂	O ₃	X ₂	O ₄
E ₃	O ₅	X ₃	O ₆
C	O ₇	-	O ₈

Where: E₁ (x₁) = Experimental group 1, treated with Audio-tape Mediated Discussion Method.

E₂(x₂) = Experimental group 2, treated with Discussion Method

E₃(x₃) = Experimental group 3, treated with Lecture Method

C = Control group

O (1, 3, 5, 7) = Pre test

O (2, 4, 6, 8) = Post test

The total number of the target population was 48,306 and the sample size for the study was 240. Sixty students were used for each experimental group and sixty also for the control group. The sample was selected from eight Senior Secondary Schools in Ekiti State of Nigeria through multistage and purposive random sampling.

Research Instrument

The instrument used for the study consisted of two different items namely achievement tests in speech work and questionnaire on students' attitude to oral English. The tests applied in the research were designed and developed by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). It is equally similar to the tests used by the National Teachers' Institute (NTI) to examine Grade Two Teachers' proficiency in the use of English language as teachers in training.

In the process of administering the instruments, the help of research assistance was secured in all the eight schools used for the study. They were given the necessary training and orientation on how to carry out the assignment. Seven of them were given the necessary scheme of work which they used to teach the experimental groups for five weeks. The assessment was personally carried out by the researcher in the sixth week through the use of the instruments to collect the relevant data. The data collected for the study were subjected to

appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The hypothesis generated was tested using Analysis of Co-Variance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Question

Will there be any difference in gender influence among the students instructed with a linguistic package using Lecture Method, Discussion Method, Audio-tape Mediated Discussion Method and the control group?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in gender influence among students instructed with a linguistic package using Lecture Method, Discussion Method, Audio-tape Mediated Discussion Method and the Control Group.

Result and Discussion

ANCOVA showing gender performance in language

Source	SS	DF	MS	F.cal	F. table
Co-variant (pre-test)	91.799	1	91.799	33.048	3.84
Groups	423.178	3	141.059	50.781	2.60
Sex	0.005490	1	0.005490	0.003	3.84
Group X Sex	1.891	3	0.630	0.227	2.60
Error	641.668	231	2.778		
Corrected total	1085.850	239			
Total	7764.000	240			

$P > 0.05$

Discussion

The hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in gender influence among students instructed with a linguistic package using Lecture Method (LM), Discussion Method (DM), Audio-tape Mediated Discussion Method (AMDM) and the Control Group (CG) is retained at 0.05 level of significance. This implied that male and female students exposed to different instructional strategies did not vary in their performances in English language ($F=0.227$, $P>0.05$). The above table shows that $F_{cal}=0.003$ and $F_{table}=3.84$ thus H_0 is accepted. There was no significant difference in the performance of male and female and also it is revealed in the table that F_{cal} which is 0.227 is far less than what is obtainable in the F_{table} (2.60). The null hypothesis is automatically accepted through which the conclusion is drawn that sex had no significant influence on the students' ability to acquire the tools of language of communication.

It has been established through the outcome of this study that male and female have equal chance of learning and acquiring tools of language of communication apart from individuals language variations (ability to use the tools of any language cannot be the same among individuals). The fact revealed here is that good or poor language performance is not as a result of gender factor. The empirical cognitive assessment as stated by Gray and Buffery is not strong enough to convince the linguists as this received major attack by scholar like Ruth Bleier. Male and female have the same range of test scores and the same range of abilities in language learning and language acquisition.

The finding of this study disagrees with the claims of scholars like Kelly (1976) and Kolawole (2002). Kelly says that girls do better in languages. Kolawole equally believes that

girls typically excel in English spelling, writings and arts subjects. The popular opinion that female performs better in language and literature had no concrete empirical support. As said earlier, it has not been biologically proved (beyond a reasonable doubt) that female has superior organ in their system to acquire and learn language better than the males. According to the findings of this study, male and female can perform well in language task not on the basis of gender but on the pedestal of individual ability and also on the factors of prevailing environmental situations.

Dada (2008) working on *Effects of Mastery learning strategy on students' Achievement in Biology* discovers that there is no significant difference between male and female performance in Biology. Omirin (1999) and Jegede (2003) assert, consequents upon their findings, that sex of students does not have significant influence on attitude and performance in science subjects. Therefore, sex dichotomy does not effect any significant difference on students' performance either in language, arts or science if both sexes are given the same or similar atmosphere to operate.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study revealed that mass failure in English language among the secondary school students was due to wrong methodology in the teaching of the language. The idea that sex plays prominent role in students' performance in the language as a school subject should be dropped into the junks. It had been discovered in Nigeria schools that Lecture Method was the commonest and the most popular method used by the teachers not only in English language but also in all other school subjects. This make the teaching teacher centred.

In the process of carrying out the work, it was discovered that Audio-tape Mediated Discussion Method had the highest contribution to students' knowledge followed by Discussion and Lecture Methods in their orders. The results derived from the study exonerated students from academic failure especially in oral English. It has been discovered that instructional method could be responsible. The results therefore strongly supported the idea of learning language by participation and competence through recapitulation. Good and appropriate methods could mount monuments that can facilitate good memory. Therefore, regardless of sex, a combination of well graded linguistic inputs with the right method produces a better result.

Learners must be helped to develop the right attitude through effective teaching programme that will obliterate wrong self perception. There are other important factors that must be considered which have nothing to do with sex; factors that affect language learning and language acquisition programmes may include: intelligence, Maturation, Readiness, Aptitude and Incentives. In conclusion, learning environment and appropriate methods of teaching all will go a long way at helping the learners to perform better in language programmes. The curriculum must be so enriched to the point of providing enough work on language of instruction. The language that plays the major roles in one's life must not be placed on an artificial terrain. English language is vital to every Nigerian. Its teaching must be made practical without allowing any issue like sex to hinder students' good performance and good performance must be enhanced through the natural acquisition of its tools.

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