

# How L1 Affects the Learning of L2 in Secondary Schools in Ekiti State: SS 3 Students, Ado Community Grammar School, Ado Ekiti, as a Case Study

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is based on the theoretical framework of Corder's (1974) *Error Analysis Theory*. This study investigates the effect of L2 Yoruba L1 in Nigeria, Ekiti State as a case study from a sociolinguistic perspective. It analyses errors in the written and spoken English of secondary school students in Ekiti State, following Corder's (1974). The study's objective is to investigate the types of errors committed by the students, analyze them and offer suggestions on ways to improving their writing and spoken English. The study used a qualitative analysis to identify, describe and interpret samples of errors identified. The results of the study indicated that writing and speaking skills were the skills in which the students faced more problems.

**Keywords:** language, sociolinguistics, second language, code-mixing and grammar.

## INTRODUCTION

Many researchers have done a lot of works on the problem of mother-tongue interference on the learning and speaking of English language in Nigeria. Language is defined by Sapir (1921) as “a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols” (p.7). He emphasizes that these symbols are first auditory and later produced by the “organs of speech” such as the lungs, the larynx, the palate, the nose, the tongue, the teeth, and the lips. To Carter, (1997) language is related to specific texts and contexts and “usually to a context determined by social and sociocultural factors” (p.12). He notes that an understanding of language history is very crucial to an understanding of language, and that an understanding of language history should not be considered separately from social and cultural transformation. He adds that it is difficult to see language use separately from the power of those who use the language. Crossman (2019) sees language as

Central to social interaction in every society, regardless of location and time period. Language and social interaction have a reciprocal relationship: language shapes social interactions and social interactions shape language.

People therefore, adjust the way they talk to their social situation. As a result, language is not constant but changes to meet the social needs of the people. In view of this, Boroditsky (2020) looks at how the languages we speak shape the way we think. She believes that language is “so fundamental to our experience, so deeply a part of being human, that it's hard to imagine life without it.”

### **Ekiti Sociocultural Context**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekiti\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ekiti_people) describes Ekiti as an independent state before the British conquest.

It was one of the many Yoruba states in what is today Nigeria. The Ekiti people as a nation and districts of Yoruba race trace some of her progeny to Oduduwa, the father and progenitor of Yoruba race even though good reason appear to establish the existence of aboriginal

people in Ekiti region prior to influx of royalty from present day Ile

Ife as that kingdom grew and abound.

According to Babalola (2008), the Ekiti people can be identified quickly among other Yorubas by their common dialect. He explains that Ekiti is a compact State which covers a land area of about 7,000 square kilometers. The average distance from one town to the other is generally about 96 kilometers or 55 miles.

### **Learning English as a second language**

According to Ekpe (2010) the real date that English language usage started in Nigeria is uncertain. However, it was believed that the first intimate contact between the British and some ethnic groups in Nigeria was in Southern Nigeria. This must have been at some period before the Atlantic slave trade. It is on records that as from 1553 English men paid frequent visits to the Nigerian shores, especially the ports of Ancient Benin and old Calabar, and the type of communication which evolved between the English men and the Nigerians was a simplified kind of communication in English called Pidgin' while <https://www.languageconnections.com/blog/> states that English has had a lot of impact on many languages, including Ekiti dialect, it has also been greatly influenced by other languages, including Ekiti dialect. English is considered as a second and official language in Nigeria. Children learn English from the very early from their primary school. This also the position of Ucheoma (2011) who states that "colonization of Nigeria, Ghana etc. by Britain must be seen as the primary factor that gives rise to the adoption of the English language as the second language in these countries." The use of English is official in Nigeria. Besides, the Nigerian language policy recommends English as the major language of instruction in schools. Ekpe (2010) stresses that

Nigerian society today, literacy is attributed to the ability to speak and write English language. Anybody who cannot read and write is called illiterate. As such everybody strives to speak English at least the patois of the market place or the passable kind of English. In some homes these days, many parents do not allow their children and wards to speak their indigenous languages, it is English language everywhere. Most private and government schools do not allow their

students to speak their local languages while in school and even the teachers are prohibited from speaking indigenous languages while in school as well, the penalty ranges from fine to suspension or hard labour. With these everybody wants to be identified with the winning population, who are the English Speakers (p.26).

Nevertheless, it is a worrisome issue that after schooling from primary to secondary education today, a student cannot show his or her mastery to speak and write in good English. Hoque (2009) in Shuchi (2013) asserts that “one of the problems for a foreign language learner is that how to accurately utter the speech sound of a language. Main purpose of speaking a language is to communicate with others” (p.7). He comments further that “if we cannot utter the proper sound of a language, the message will not be understood and communication may even break down” (p.7). This is exactly the situation found in Ekiti State, Nigeria, because English words are pronounced with an accent which is related to the mother tongue (Ekiti accent).

Among the factors identified as affecting the learning of a second language, Latu (1994) explains two aspects which include the learner’s ability to use an L2. According to him, language is generally referred to as a cognitive skill, particularly from a psycholinguistic perspective. The second aspect is a biological ability and this is related to age, “a biological factor that has some influences in learning a second language” (p. 31). He asserts that learners of a second language who start learning while they are young learn better and faster than those who start when they are much older. Phon (2017) argues that there are many factors thwarting students from learning English effectively such as: class sizes, learning and teaching resources, learning and teaching practices, motivations, and students' education background. Corroborating this, Khasinah (2014) adds that motivation, attitude, age, intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, and personality are some of the factors that greatly influence someone in the process of his or her second language acquisition. He emphasizes that “Language attitudes are the attitude which speakers of different languages have toward other’s languages or to their own language. Expression of positive or negative feelings toward a language may reflect impression of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degrees of important, social status” (p. 259). Along this line, Adwani and Shrivastava (2017) add that “without student motivation, there is no pulse; there is no life in the class. This factor leads to perpetual procurement of other mentioned factors for second language acquisition” (p. 159).

Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. This simple fact is known by all who have themselves learned a second language or taught those who are using their second language in school. Also, [esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/factors.htm](http://esl.fis.edu/teachers/support/factors.htm) notes that there are other important factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. These factors can be broadly categorized as internal and external. While the Internal factors are those that the individual language learner brings with him or her to the particular learning situation which include: age, personality, motivation, experiences, cognition and native language but external factors are those that characterize the particular language learning situation. They include the following: curriculum, instruction, culture and status and access to native speakers. This means that motivation is a crucial factor that teachers should promote in order to provide efficient language learning.

### Statement of Problem

English is a world language and Crystal asserts that “A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (p.3). Constitutionally, English is the officially, recognized language in Nigeria. It is the language of legislation, education, business and administration as well as the media. English language is taught as a subject beginning from primary school to the secondary school level in Nigeria. It is the medium of instruction in the institutions such as universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and other higher institutions. Students are expected to have a good command of the English language as they learn it as a subject from primary to secondary school. According to the language policy of the country (Federal Ministry of Education, 2008), students are expected to have good command of the English language and they should have good communicative competence. They are supposed to communicate through speaking, reading, writing and listening at the end of secondary school. In view of this, students have various deficiencies as they learn English as second language; therefore, the level of proficiency in writing, reading and speaking is a challenge. There is a serious problem of understanding the grammar of English and they always co-switch to their Ekiti dialect in spite of learning English language over the years. Scholars like (Oluwaseun 2018, Ayeomoni 2006) observe that most children are exposed to two languages right from primary school. In view of this, they begin to code-mix because they have not properly learnt the grammar of both languages, and this make it easy to take from these two languages

to make a complete sentence. According to them, code-mixing has both negative and positive effects on a child's acquisition of English language.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Error Analysis Theory. Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the Target Language (TL). Wang (2008) refers to Corder as the “Father” (p.183) of Error Analysis. It was Corder's (1967) article entitled, “The Significance of Learner Errors” (p.163) that error analysis took a new turn. Error analysis is an activity to reveal errors found in writing and speaking. Richards (2006, p. 125) states that “error analysis is the study of errors made by the second and foreign language learners.” Error analysis may be carried out in order to find out how well someone knows a language, find out how a person learns a language, and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. This definition stresses the functions of error analysis.

Another concept of error analysis is provided by Brown (200, p.51). He defines error analysis as “the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rule of the second language and then to reveal the system operated by learner.” It seems this view is the same as the one proposed by Crystal (1999) which states that error analysis is “a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics.” The three definitions above clarified that error analysis is an activity employed to identify, classify and interpret or describe the errors made in speaking or writing. It is carried out according to a procedure to obtain information on common difficulties faced in speaking or in writing English sentences. According to Corder (1974) error analysis has two objects: theoretical and applied. The theoretical object serves to “elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language.” (p.23). Therefore, the application of this object enables the learner “to learn more efficiently through exploring the knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes” (pp. 23-25). The investigation of errors can be at the same time diagnostic and prognostic. To Crystal (1999, pp. 138-140) it is diagnostic because it can tell us the learner's state of language at a given point during the learning process

and prognostic because it can tell course organizers to reorient language learning materials on the basis of the learners' current problems.

Our concern in this study is to follow Corder's (1974, p. 32) model for error analysis which includes three stages: data collection, description, and explanation. Corroborating this, Selinker (1974) equally identifies three steps in conducting an error analysis: collection of data, identifying errors and classifying of errors.

## Methodology

This aspect is concerned with the description of the method used in carrying out the research and taking decision. Qualitative analysis of errors was applied. This involves the interpretation of errors made by the study sample in the essay and reading assignments. The target population of this study was secondary schools in Ekiti State, represented by a population sample of senior secondary school students of Ado Community Grammar School, Ado Ekiti. The choice of the school was due to the fact that students from the school are from a wide variety of backgrounds owing to the fact that Ado-Ekiti is the capital of Ekiti State. The instrument adopted in the assessments' written English was a written essay question, answered by the students. The essays were graded using the standard of West African Examination Council marking guide.

## Data analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the linguistic background of students, shows that a larger percentage of the students (35%) communicate using English as a medium of instruction; while those having a bilingual background of English and Yoruba languages are 30.6%. Bilingual students with Igbo and English as well as Hausa and English languages have the lowest percentage of 1.6%.

On the grammatical and phonological errors, the analysis shows the seven most common errors that the participants made were in spelling which accounts for 5.7%, capitalization reveals 4.80%, followed by error of omission, which shows 4.51%. Word choice reveals 4% while subject-verb agreement shows 3.1%. Similarly, singular/plural error shows 3.99% and verbs tense shows 2.93%. Besides, 500 words were pronounced by 80 students, and only 29% of

the words were correctly pronounced while 69% were not pronounced correctly. This shows that a great number of the student encounter problem with the pronunciation of some English words.

**Spelling:** wrong spelling of words is the common and frequent error identified by the researcher. A participant used the adjective, “stuborn” instead of stubborn in a sentence. It can be assumed that the students must have been using those words in their communication, the fact that a student could pronounce a word correctly does not mean that he could write it correctly. Other wrong spelling identified are: “tared” instead of tarred; “very dirt” instead of dirty; “iliterate” instead of illiterate; “mod” instead of mud; “mudy” instead of muddy; “collegues” instead of colleagues; “seasing” instead of season; “adress” instead of address; “gossipers” instead of gossips; “cigarette” instead of cigarette; “sincerely” instead of sincerely; “writing” instead of writing; “bathday” instead of birthday; “lantern” instead of lantern; “cant” instead of can’t; “surdenly” instead of suddenly; “flouded” instead of flooded; “dangerus” instead of dangerous; “convience” instead of convenience; “doin” instead of doing; “know” instead of now; “belive” instead of believe; “accommodation” instead of accommodation; “conflits” instead of conflicts; “arm robbers” instead of armed robbers;

**Capitalization:** Failure of the students to capitalize proper nouns and pronouns is one of the major challenge of the participants. Most of these words were capitalized wrongly. The students put capital letters before a comma, write capital letter within a word and begin a proper noun with a small letter. Some students write personal pronoun, “I” in small letter as “i”. Other examples are:

“What **i** told you instead” of “What I told you.”

“Dear **mary**”, instead of “Dear Mary,”

“**yours** sincerely,” instead of “Yours sincerely,”

“**joseph**” instead of Joseph

“The case **Will** be **Worse**.” instead of “The case will be worse.”

“Moreover **No** good road...” instead of “Moreover, no good road...”

“They litter their clothes any **Where**...” instead of “They litter their clothes anywhere...”

“Dear sister” instead of “Dear Sister”

**Omission:** It was observed that majority of the students omitted lots of words and punctuation marks. However, it could be assumed that some of the omission occurred owing to the participants’ urge to keep up with time allowed for the essay writing. There could be possibility that some of them are oblivious of the need to punctuate their write up. Examples are:

“Am sick of the new area” instead of “I am sick of the new area” (omission of “I”.)

“We don’t borehole” instead of “We don’t have borehole” (omission of “have”.)

“I will like share” instead of I will like to share (omission of “to”.)

“Your sincerely” instead of “Yours sincerely” (omission of “s”.)

“Some thing about the area” instead of “Some things about the area” (omission of “s”.)

**Wrong Word:** Some participants lacked appropriate vocabulary to express some meanings. One of the participants uses the word “not proved anything” instead of “proved abortive.” Another participant expresses the word “resided” instead of “relocated.” While one other participant uses the word, “see” instead of “find.” Others are:

“The killing **population** is high” instead of “The number of those killed is high.”

“The purpose of **written**...” instead of “the purpose of writing...”

“I am **tied** of that place” instead of “I am tired of that place.”

“The **inhaling** of Indian **herms**” instead of “the smoking of Indian hemp.”

“That **should not said that**” instead of “that is not to say that...”

**Subject-verb Agreement:** A single letter cannot be described as “these letter” but this expression was noticed in the writing of the participants. Others examples are:

“She **pick** the dirty objects” instead of “She picks the dirty objects.”

“Many people **is** sick instead” of “Many people are sick.”

“...with **this** points below...” instead of “...with **these** points below...”

“Mum and dad **does not** allow us... instead of “Mum and dad do not allow us...”

Singular and Plural Form: Some of the participants do not know that the plural form using the suffix “s” must be applied to the countable plural noun. However, for some participants, they have already hypothesized that English nouns have plural and singular forms. They were not sure when they should apply the plural form. When the object was in the singular form, they applied the plural form to the noun as shown in these examples:

The **peoples** are very stubborn.

The **roads** is not tiled.

The **environments** is very **dirt**.

**Verb Tense:** Wrong application of verb tense can be seen when the participants do not apply the correct tense to the verb in the sentences. It can be assumed that some of the participants are not aware of the different rules for the tense application. The use of some suffixes like “ing” and past tense forms shows that the participants are aware of the rules on different tenses application and they have already hypothesized that these verbs needed to be used with different tense forms and should not be used in the basic form. This is because some verbs written using different tenses forms are not written in the basic form of verb. For example: “I waiting for my food” could be written in basic form “I am waiting for my food.” This shows that they acknowledged the “ing” form but they were not sure of the complete past continuous tense forms and application in the English sentence.

Under the phonological aspect, the following errors were observed as being a form of deviation from the Standard English pronunciation: The students tend to substitute the English dental fricative /θ/ and /ð/ for either /t/ or /d/ as in: “they” / ðei/ for /de/ and “thief” / θif/ for /tif/. This is because these consonants do not occur in Nigerian languages and students usually substitute the consonants with nearest consonants which occur in their mother tongue.

Moreover, there is the problem of wrong placement of stress on some English words in the course of reading a comprehension passage. For example, the word, “challenge” either as a noun or verb is supposed to be stressed in the first syllable /tʃtʃ/ (CHALLENGE), but majority of the students stress it in the second syllable (chaALLENGE). No

wonder, Ucheoma (2011) laments that the “problem is not only attributed to the fact that ‘the Nigerian languages are syllable time languages’ while ‘the English language is stress- time language’” (p.63).

Another error that was observed is the interference of the Ekiti dialect into the English language, which resulted in the wrong pronunciation of some of the comprehension reading by the students during this research. It was also noticed that some words were wrongly pronounced due to this interference for example, the word “church” /tʃɜːtʃ/ is pronounced as /sɔs/ and “chair” /tʃeər/ is pronounced as /sia/. From the percentage of the deviant pronunciation of words in this study, it is obvious that the phonology of Ekiti dialect hampers the effective learning of the English language.

### Conclusion

From our investigation, it is noticed that the Ekiti dialect actually influences the learning and proficiency of the English language. This is observed in the cases of grammatical errors and phonological errors discussed in this study. From this study, it is germane to suggest that constant communication be encouraged between teachers and students so as to solve some of these problems that could be avoided.

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