

**MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON ARABIC LANGUAGE
COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS AMONG JUNIOR SECONDARY
SCHOOL ISLAMIC STUDIES STUDENTS IN
ASA, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This paper examines the influence of mother tongue interference on Arabic communicative skills among junior secondary school Islamic Studies students in Asa, Kwara State, Nigeria. The objective is to explore how mother tongue interference affects students' ability to acquire and effectively use Arabic for communication. Findings reveal that students' acquisition of effective communicative skills in the Arabic language is significantly hindered by the phonological, syntactic, and semantic interference of their native languages. This linguistic interference poses a major challenge to students' proficiency in Arabic, which is essential for their academic and religious studies. The paper recommends that adequate facilities for teaching and learning Arabic should be made available and accessible to both teachers and students. The government should employ qualified, experienced, and competent Arabic language teachers to promote effective instruction in schools. Additionally, teachers should familiarize themselves with the processes, methods, and potential challenges associated with teaching Arabic. Encouraging students to take their Arabic studies more seriously is also essential to overcoming mother tongue interference and enhancing communicative competence.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Communicative Skills, Language Interference, Mother Tongue

Introduction

Language is central to human social life. Beyond being a thinking creature, the ability to use language to express feelings and thoughts is one of the unique features of humanity. Language differentiates human beings from other creatures that God created. Sriprabha (2015) defines language as a medium by which human beings communicate their ideas, thoughts, feelings, and desires through the use of sounds. He further posited that humans utilise language to ensure their psychological and physiological survival.

Chaman and Jyonica (2015) emphasise that language is a divine gift from God to humanity. It enables self-expression and communication of feelings among individuals. Indeed, language significantly eases life for humans, facilitating the satisfaction of needs and enabling a meaningful existence.

Rajathurai (2020) highlighted the essential role of language in human life, arguing that it helps individuals comprehend and interact effectively with their environment. It also enhances self-expression and the development of thinking capacity. The ability to acquire and use language places human beings above all other creatures on earth. While animals have their specific communication systems, non-human communication does not meet the linguistic criteria required to qualify as a language. Yihua (2023) identified these criteria as arbitrariness of units, semanticity, displacement, and productivity.

The capacity to acquire language is one of the innate characteristics of human beings. It is a unique feature endowed at creation. However, Noushad (2015) argued that language is not genetically transmitted from parents to children. Instead, it is acquired through interaction with the environment. A child born in a particular linguistic environment will naturally acquire that language without formal instruction or conscious learning of its rules.

In the context of junior secondary school Islamic Studies students in Asa, Kwara State, Nigeria, the influence of mother tongue interference on Arabic language communicative skills has become a critical concern. Many students struggle with the accurate pronunciation, syntax, and semantic usage of Arabic due to the phonological and grammatical structures of their native languages. Mother tongue interference occurs when linguistic features from a student's first language negatively affect their acquisition and use of a second language.

This linguistic interference manifests in various ways, such as incorrect pronunciation of Arabic phonemes that do not exist in the students' mother tongue, improper sentence structure, and the substitution of Arabic vocabulary with native language terms. These issues hinder effective communication and comprehension in Arabic, which is essential for Islamic studies.

Understanding the underlying causes and impact of mother tongue interference on Arabic language acquisition among junior secondary school students is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies. Addressing these linguistic challenges will enhance students' communicative competence, enabling them to engage more meaningfully with Islamic studies and other Arabic language applications in religious and social contexts.

Mother Tongue

The language children learn to speak before any other is regarded as their mother tongue (MT), native language (NL) or first language (L1) of their parents. Olu (2017) defined the mother tongue as the first language a child picked up in his environment to speak. He asserted further that the mother tongue is not learned by a child but acquired through the interaction with the environment. Children acquire the mother tongue during the early years of their development, and this naturally transforms into a tool for expressing their thoughts and communicating their ideas with others (Obungu, 2016).

In the Nigerian context, languages like Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Nupe, Ighala, and a host of others are considered native languages. Thus, anyone who is born to a tribe that speaks any of those languages would be regarded as his mother tongue. Zubeida (2012) used a typology

that was developed by Skutnabb-Kangas (1984, reproduced in 2000) to define the mother tongue. The typology is based on four criteria which are Origin, Identification, competence, and function. She defines mother tongue, based on origin, as the language an individual first comes in verbal contact with. Based on identification, she defines mother tongue as the language an individual identifies him/herself with as a native speaker or the language that people identify an individual with as a native speaker of. She went on to define it based on competence as a language that an individual speaks effortlessly than others. And finally, she defines the mother tongue, based on function, as the language an individual uses more than any other language.

Arabic Language

Arabic language is considered as the first ever foreign language to arrive in Nigeria. Umar and Uthman (2017), submitted that Arabic language is one of the civilized languages with international recognition. It belongs to the semitic branch of the Afro-Assiatic family of language categories which has its origin traced to Semi, one of the progenies of prophet Nuh. Arabic is a widely recognized language, native to 25 countries in Africa and Asia, and serves as a vital means of communication, particularly for Muslims worldwide (Abdullahi and Salisu, 2021). As the language of the Holy Qur'an, Arabic holds significant cultural and religious importance. It is taught globally in schools and universities, and its political and diplomatic applications are evident in international organizations such as the UN, AU, and OPEC. Abdullahi and Salisu, (2021) posited that Arabic has a notable presence In Nigeria. It is spoken as a mother tongue by the Shuwa Arab community in Borno State, and as a second language by many Muslim Nigerians. Additionally, Arabic has influenced the local cultures of Hausa and Yoruba, with many loan words incorporated into these languages. Given its relevance, Arabic was introduced into secondary education and became a popular course of study at various educational levels in Nigeria, including Colleges of Education and universities (Abdullahi and Salisu, 2021; Abdullahi and Oladosu 2021).

Despite its importance, the performance of students in Arabic Language has been a concern, with many expressing dissatisfaction with the falling standard of education (Abdullahi and Oladosu 2021). The public has criticized the lack of skills and personal integrity among school leavers, and there have been outcries over poor performance in Arabic Language, particularly in SSCE examinations. This highlights the need to address factors that act as barriers to students' ability to attain proficiency in Arabic in Nigerian schools.

Improving our understanding of the complex dynamics between languages is crucial in the field of education. For years, researchers have extensively explored the impact of mother tongue interference on target language acquisition, yielding insightful findings. However, a significant knowledge gap remains in investigating mother tongue interference specifically on Arabic language acquisition in Nigeria. Addressing this gap through dedicated research could provide valuable insights into the unique challenges and opportunities arising from language interactions in this context, ultimately informing effective language instruction and learning strategies.

Language Interference

When learning a second language, one of the obstacles and hindrances that an individual may come across is the interference of the mother tongue. Language interference is an important aspect in language acquisition which needs to be taken into serious consideration. It constitutes one of the reasons why students struggle to learn a new language, Elchin (2023). In fact, it can serve as a barrier that may prevent a student from acquiring another language.

Language interference is a linguistic term used to describe the influence of one language on the learning of another. Durratul and Irfan (2023), posits that language interference is the positive or negative impact the first language has on the learning of a particular target language. The cases of mother tongue interference happen when the previous knowledge of the grammar of the mother tongue affects the learner in his efforts to learn a new language. There is no escape from the mother tongue interfering in the learning of a new language most especially in a case where some linguistic elements of the new language are not present in the previously acquired language. In a case of a Yoruba speaking individual who learns Arabic language as a second or foreign language will inescapably face some challenges of his language interfering in the learning of Arabic language due to some linguistic elements of the Arabic language that are absent in his native language. Manjula (2021) viewed language interference as the linguistic and structural elements that a native language exhibits in the process of acquiring a new language. He however posited that a speaker who has carefully mastered the grammatical rules of the two languages i.e. mother tongue and second language will be free of interference problems. But when he has no command over the second language there is the possibility of the first language interfering in the learning of the second language.

Mother tongue interferes in the learning of a target language at different linguistic segments. The interferences are classified into phonological, grammatical, lexical, orthographic, stylistic and intra-linguistic (Elchin, 2023; Olga and Nataliia, 2022; Tania and Andri, 2021).

Communicative Skills (التواصل مهارة)

Communication can be defined as the acquisition and transmission of scientific facts, concepts, and principles through writing, images, movements, actions, or presentations (Abd-Rahman et al, 2024). According to them, 21st-century skills encompass communication as the capacity to effectively transmit and receive information through various channels, including verbal (written and spoken) and nonverbal (body language, facial expressions, and eye contact) means, ultimately aiming to accomplish specific goals.

Effective communication skills play a vital role in the pedagogical process, significantly enhancing student learning outcomes. The success of any teaching and learning endeavor is largely dependent on the quality of communication between teachers and students. Effective communication skills encompass more than just clear expression of information. They also involve the ability to pose thoughtful questions, construct strong arguments, and engage in productive discussions. Students should strive to ask clear and concise questions that facilitate understanding among their peers.

In an educational process, clear communication is only one aspect of effective idea exchange. Students are also expected to encourage and respect their peers' thoughts and ideas. Active listening, offering constructive feedback, and responding with further questions or ideas are essential skills for fostering a collaborative learning environment. Respecting diverse perspectives is another critical component of effective communication. By being open to various ideas and viewpoints, students can cultivate critical thinking, promote inclusive learning, and gain new insights. When students integrate skills like listening, feedback, and appreciation for diverse ideas, the classroom can become a hub for in-depth discussions and fruitful collaborations. Through shared learning, students develop critical thinking, effective collaboration, and comprehension skills, in addition to acquiring knowledge.

Ultimately, effective communication skills are essential for successful collaboration in team-based projects, where individual contributions, clear communication of ideas, and constructive feedback are vital for achieving shared goals (Pujiana et al, 2024).

Communicative takes place through verbal and nonverbal means. The verbal means of communication could be categorised into writing and speaking skills. These two skills fall into what is termed as productive skills.

Challenges of Mother Tongue Interference on Arabic Communicative Skills Among Junior Secondary School Islamic Studies Students in Asa

Students' acquisition of effective communicative skills in the Arabic language is adversely affected by various factors, one of which is mother tongue interference. Tanya (2023) observed that acquiring a second language can be a challenging task, with one of the most significant hurdles being the ability to communicate accurately. This is a common challenge that many language learners encounter throughout their learning journey. Tanya further explained that the syntactic differences between a learner's native language and the target language often result in syntactic transfer. In such cases, the learner's existing language structures influence their use of the new language, leading to a blend of both linguistic systems in their interlanguage.

A study conducted by Durratul and Irfan (2023) identified morphological and syntactic structures as the primary sources of language interference. Among students at Al-Mashduqiyah, key areas of syntactic interference included word order, verb omission, and the omission of subject pronouns. In the context of Arabic language learners in Asa, similar patterns are evident, where students struggle with proper sentence construction and accurate use of grammatical structures.

Morphological interference was another critical area highlighted by the researchers. Issues such as literal translation, incorrect third-person singular usage, reduplication, and misspellings were prevalent in students' writing assignments. Structural factors, such as the linguistic differences between students' mother tongue and Arabic, significantly contribute to these challenges. Additionally, non-structural factors like bilingualism, language loyalty, limited vocabulary, and a tendency to revert to the mother tongue further exacerbate the problem.

For junior secondary school Islamic Studies students in Asa, these interferences impede their ability to develop effective communicative competence in Arabic. Understanding these challenges is crucial for implementing strategies that mitigate mother tongue interference and promote better language acquisition.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper concludes that mother tongue interference constitutes a significant barrier to the effective acquisition of Arabic language skills among junior secondary school Islamic Studies students in Asa Local Government Area. However, it was also found that mother tongue interference is a natural part of the language learning process, which can be leveraged positively to enhance learners' language acquisition if managed properly.

The paper, therefore, suggests the following recommendations:

1. Adequate facilities for teaching and learning Arabic should be made available and accessible to both teachers and students.
2. The government should hire qualified, experienced, and competent Arabic language teachers to promote effective instruction in schools.
3. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the processes, methods, and potential challenges associated with teaching Arabic.
4. Students should be encouraged to take their studies, especially in Arabic, more seriously to improve their communicative competence.

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