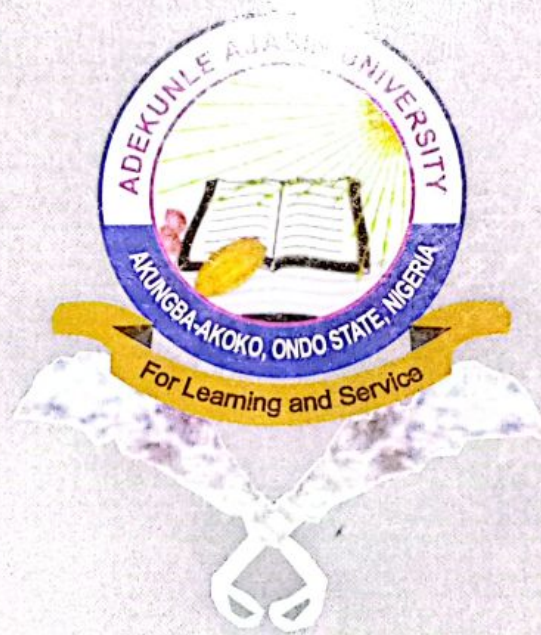


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DEVELOPING LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AMONG SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS: THE CASE OF YORUBA TONGUE TWISTERS AND MNEMONICS

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Abstract

The prime value placed on English as the Nigeria official language and the medium of education from upper primary to tertiary education level has made some indigenous language speakers (learners) to be incompetent in their native language use. The premium placed on this official language and medium of education makes some school pupils neglect the learning of their mother-tongue and thereby become ineffective and inefficient in the use of their mother-tongue. Therefore, there is a need to help these school pupils sharpen their organs of speech and guide them at their formative stage to become efficient bilinguals, especially in the mother-tongue. This paper, therefore, examines how to develop language competence through the vehicles of Yoruba tongue twisters and mnemonics. The paper believes that these instruments (Yoruba tongue twisters and mnemonics) are veritable tools that can be employed to aid young pupils' language competence. The paper concludes that if tongue twisters and mnemonics are effectively utilised in teaching Yoruba language, learners would become fluent speakers, efficient readers and proficient writers in their native language. The paper, therefore, recommends that tongue twisters and mnemonics be employed in teaching Yoruba language to young learners in order to ensure a high level of competence in the language.

Keywords: Language, competence, Yoruba tongue twisters, Yoruba mnemonics

Introduction

South-west is one of the six geo-political zones of the Nigerian federation. The zone comprises six Yoruba-speaking states, namely: Ekiti, Lagos, Ondo, Ogun, Olòsùn and Olòyòò. The Yoruba is an ethno-linguistic group that inhabits the South-western part of Nigeria as well as the language used by this ethnic nationality as a means of communication. It is one of the three major languages/ethnic groups recognised by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The other two major languages/ethnic groups are Hausa and Igbo (FRN, 2013). The language belongs to Kwa cluster of the Niger-Congo language family. It is a tonal language with three level tones: high, mid and low. The high tone is indicated with a grave accent (̀), the low is indicated with an acute accent (́), while the mid tone is left unmarked, except on syllabic nasal /n/, where it is indicated with a macron (̄).

Primary education is the education given to children between the ages of six and eleven years plus (FRN, 2013). This education has two tiers, lower primary and upper primary, otherwise refers to as lower basic and middle basic. As stipulated in the 2013 edition of the National Policy on Education, the language serves as a medium of instruction and a subject at the lower

and upper primaries respectively. The primary school pupils in South-western Nigeria are predominantly Yoruba speakers who are expected to be exposed to learning through their mother-tongue. The process of facilitating learning through a sequence of interaction between the teacher and the learner(s) is referred to as teaching. Teaching could be virtual or physical: it is virtual when the interaction is online, while it is physical when the interaction between the two parties demands physical presence. Teaching is the basic means of education because it aims at bringing a meaningful learning via a method or technique that is morally and pedagogically acceptable (Abdul-Hamid, 2021). Language, which is a form of ability to communicate or exchange ideas, opinions or feelings among members of a society, is very crucial to the sustainability and development of such a society.

Language teaching is the process of helping learners through an appropriate and relevant technique or method to achieve communicative competence in a language. Therefore, the basic purpose of teaching and learning any language is to be able to effectively communicate with it. Language teaching, which involves the activities of taking learners through the rudiments of skills of a language essentially social communication, is one of the major aspects of formal education (Oladosu, 2012). Through this social communication, individual members of the society would learn the values, norms, culture, ideals, and traits in form of knowledge, skills and beliefs of that particular society. All these will help school pupils to become productive members of the society. By implication, therefore, the ultimate aim of language teaching is to develop communicative competence or ability to create meanings in the learners (Lawal, 2002).

Communicative competence (CC), which is a linguistic term, refers to learners' ability to use the knowledge of language for successful communication. It could also be seen as a process of transmitting and receiving verbal and non-verbal messages that produce a response (Emmanuel, 2012). CC is a new outlook to the purpose of teaching the basic language skills for production of meaningful written or spoken texts. Communication plays crucial roles in human relations and ability of individuals to use any given language effectively remains a great asset to such individuals. This could be the reason Olajide and Abdullahi-Ildiagbon (2010) opine that languages are tongue competences and describe human utterances as craft of habit formation. These scholars regard grammatical structure as conceptual foundation of competence and performance. Language competence (LC), as Sun-Mee (2006) asserts, is the implicit internalised knowledge of a language that a speaker possesses and that enables him or her to produce and understand the language.

In spite of Nigerian language stipulation that mother-tongue or language of immediate community shall be the medium of instruction at the lower basic level and as a subject at other levels of education, where English shall be progressively used as a medium of instruction (FRN, 2013), many schools, especially the private-owned basic schools did not implement the policy. Over-emphasis of English language by the Nigerian Government and its over-generalisation by the basic schools (especially private ones), who most times prohibit the speaking of local language, which is often tagged 'vernacular' is having a negative effect on school pupils' local languages (Yoruba inclusive) competence. This invariably leads to the breeding of school pupils with weak Yoruba vocabulary which in turn, would affect them in speaking the language

fluently and writing it proficiently. Before the advent of the Colonial masters and the introduction of Western education, however, the Yoruba people treated the linguistic development of their children with a rapt attention (Adeyeomii, 2010). This was done through tongue twisters, mnemonics and other forms Yorulbàì oral literature.

Yoruba Tongue Twisters and Mnemonics

Yoruba tongue twisters (TTs) are a great way to practice and improve pupils' pronunciation and fluency. They have the capacity to enhance pupils' language competence which would lead to fluency in speaking and proficiency in reading and writing. Similarly, they can also help school pupils to improve accents using alliteration. Some Yoruba TTs involve repeating some short statements multiple times in a row. Tongue twisters are not only for school pupils; they are as well meant for other individuals who may want to sound clear when speaking. The main purpose of Yoruba tongue twisters, as Adeyemii (2010) observes, is to sharpen the pupils' organs of speech in order to make them sharp in their speech. Yoruba TTs are thus created to make pupils sharp in their speech and grasp the correct pronunciation of some specific phonemes of the language.

Aids to memory such as acronyms, rhymes, linking information by creating virtual images or making up a story are regarded as mnemonics. Teaching through mnemonics is one of the appropriate strategies for remembering information such as shopping list, vocabulary, appointments, speeches, names and facts, dates, phone numbers, ideas, jokes and so on. The primary value of teaching language competence using mnemonics is to help children recall information that needs to be remembered in a particular order. In this regard, use of songs remains one of the media by which school children can remember information, although some songs are better than others. Songs that can serve this purpose need to have simple tunes with a lot of repetition.

McPherson (2019) summarises the uses of mnemonics to include: when information only needs to be remembered for a short time; as a reminder for well-learned information (to help overcome memory blocks); to remind one of the order of a particular information; and when written records are impossible, inconvenient, or inappropriate to anchor facts. Yoruba mnemonics are aid-memoire; effective tools for rote memorisation, though it may require a great work to master. They can aid school pupils in learning basic facts and new vocabulary about a particular thing or event. Mnemonics are composed to help learners remember various things which they may not be able to remember in dry and abstract form. Yoruba mnemonics provide solid foundation in language acquisition because some of them actually introduce the school pupils to the first rudiments of Yoruba language analysis (Adeosun, 2010).

Some Yorulbàì Tongue Twisters and their Teachings

1. *Aalira n lora re ila* (Aalirai is sluggish in cutting the okro).
2. *Eeri ara Ìlòràa lera ara Ìlora je* (It was the maize chaff of the Ìlora (name of a Yoruba town) people that was eaten by the Ìlora people's goat).
3. *Mo je dodo n'Idoo, mo wa fo òwo dodo roòmoo ni dodo ni dodo n'Idoo* (I ate dodo (fried plantain) in Ìdo (name of a Yoruba town), I then used my hand of dodo to rub the dodo seller's child's navel in Ìdo).

4. *Opolòpo òpo lo lopolo lopolòpo* (A lot of frogs have plenty of brain).
5. *Opolòpo opolo lo ni ko mo popolopo opolo lopolopo lopoolo* (Many frogs do not know that most frogs have plenty of brain).
6. *Obo ngbobo gope, kofiru obo bobo lenu. Bii o ba tete gbobo bogbe, obo yoo gbe e bogbe* (A monkey carries another monkey up the palm tree, but the monkey's tail is in the monkey's mouth. If you do not quickly carry the monkey into the forest, the monkey will carry you into the forest).
7. *Koloko lo loka rin to fi denu oka, oka kii joka, eranko tojoka loka je.* (The millet got into cobra's abdomen indirectly. The cobra doesn't eat millet but eat animals that ate millet).
8. *Bisi ba baba bo bata* (Bisi helped the father take off his shoes).
9. *Femi Ferainmi feran fila funfun* (Fem Feranmi (name of a person) likes white hats).
10. *Gbenga Adeaga ge igi giga gogoro* (Gbenga Adeaga cuts down a very tall tree).
11. *Adiye funfun mafunfunnifunfunkifunfunmo, o ti lefunfunnifunfunkifunfunju* (White hen, stop being white in such an objectionably white fashion, you have been too objectionably white).
12. *Ki sorosoro soro soò, ko ma baa sooro so.. Nitori sorosoro ti n ki sorosoro soro so. Ki sorosoro le sorosi sorosoro. Ki sorosoro o ma baa le soro mo* (Speech maker orator should be cautious of his speech in order not to misfire. Because of critics who wish the speech maker to make a speechless speech in order for the critics to make speech against the speech maker. So as to prevent the speech maker from making speech again).
13. *Araba rabamba loya dina aba, ni rabaraba babara aba, lara aba obaraba lo* (It is the big obeche tree that fell against the village road that ran the villagers into pandemonium and prevented the villagers from entering the village).
14. *Edumare je n la, ma je n ku. Edumare ma je n ku, je n la* (God, let me survive; do not let me die. God, do not let me die; let me survive).
15. *Aso aja, aja ja. A ni eni s'aja ni o s'aja ire. Eni s'ajai si s'aja ire. Oruko aja lo r'aja taja fi ja* (We tethered a dog, the dog broke loose. It was said that the one who did the tether did not do it well. The one who did it did so well. Just that the dog's character characterised the dog for it to break loose).

The first tongue twister teaches phonemes /a/, /r/ and /l/. This type of Yoruba tongue twister would enable school pupils to become sharp in pronouncing words that have these phonemes. Similarly, the second tongue twister teaches five Yoruba phonemes /e/, /r/, /a/, /l/ and /oò/. This tongue twister would sharpen school pupils' speech making involving these phonemes. In the same vein, the third tongue twister teaches phonemes /d/, /oò/, /o/ and /r/. Aside the teaching of these phonemes, the lexical repetition of *dodo* gives aesthetic pleasure to the statement. In the same development, the fourth tongue twister teaches phonemes /oò/, /p/ and /l/. Aside teaching of these three phonemes, it also teaches reduplication, i. e. *lopo+lopo=lopolopo* and *opo+opo=opolopo*.

Like the fourth, the fifth tongue twister also teaches phonemes /oò/, /p/, and /l/ as well as reduplication of the words *opo* (*opolopo*) and *lopo* (*lopolopo*) respectively. In the sixth tongue twister, phonemes /oò/, /b/ and /gb/ are taught. In addition, it teaches that one needs to be fast and vigilant in whatever one does. The seventh tongue twister teaches phonemes /k/, /l/, /oò/, /o/, /j/ and /eò/. Aside this, it also teaches noun formation, i. e. *kolo+kolo = koloko lo*. In the

same token, it teaches significance of tonal marks in differentiating words with the same consonant and vowel, i. e. *oka* (millet) and *oka* (cobra). In addition, it also teaches play on syllable with (-ka) appearing in *loka*, *oka*, *joka* and *loka* respectively.

The eighth tongue twister teaches both phonemes /b/ which appears seven times, and /a/ which appears five times. The ninth teaches Yoruba phonemes /f/, /eò/, /an/ and /un/. It also teaches figures of speech i. e. repetition. For instance, the repeat of *fe* (to like/love) in *Femi* (love me), *Feranmi* (like me) and *feran* (like/love) on one hand, and the reduplication of *fun* in the word *funfun* (white) which is an adjective, qualifying the noun *fila* (cap/hat). In the tenth tongue twister, Yoruba phonemes *g* and *a* are taught. With the reoccurrence of syllable *ga* in *Gbenga*, *Adeaga* and *giga*, the tongue twister teaches repetition and play on syllable respectively. Similarly, it also teaches how school pupils the use appropriate adjective to qualify a noun. For instance, *giga* qualifies the noun *igi*. Also, *gogoro* qualifies *giga* (now a noun).

The eleventh tongue twister teaches Yoruba phonemes /un/, /f/, /i/ and /k/. For instance, both phonemes /un/ and /f/ appear fourteen times respectively. It also teaches figures of speech i. e. repetition, with the word *funfun* (white) appearing repeatedly seven times. The twelfth teaches five Yoruba phonemes: /s/, /r/, /oò/, /k/, and /i/. Re-occurrence of these phonemes (sounds) helps the school children to improve their accents. Aside this, it also teaches tone play as in *sorosoro* (orator) and *sorosoro* (destructive critic) where the tonal marks in the two words differentiate them. In addition, it teaches reduplication, i. e. *sorosoro* + *sorosoro* = *soròsoro*. Similarly, it teaches one-syllable (*sorò*) repetition which appears three times. In the thirteenth tongue twister, Yoruba phonemes /a/, /r/, /b/ and /l/ are taught. It also teaches the beauty of repetition, i. e. *ba* which appears ten times.

The fourteenth tongue twister teaches lexical and partial-sentential repetitions. There is a lexical repetition of *Edumare* (God). Similarly, *je n la* (let me survive) and *ma je n ku* (do not let me die) in Line 1 were repeated respectively in Line 2. This tongue twister is a prayer. However, if one is not sharp and careful in its rendition, conversely, the prayer can turn into a curse. This is because a misplaced phrase could turn the statement otherwise. For instance, in Line 2, placing "...je n la" (let me survive) after "*Edumare ma...*" (God, do not...) and before "...je n ku" (...let me die) would read *Edumare jeò n kuì, ma je n la* (God, let me die; do not let me survive).

The last (fifteenth) tongue twister, on the furthest end, teaches the palate-alveolar (*afaja-enuferigi-pe*) sound of the Yoruba phonemes /j/. Aside this, it also teaches lexical repetition of "*aja*" which is repeated ten (10) times. Similarly, "*ja*" appears three times. Also, the tongue twister teaches pun, with the syllable "*ja*" and the word "*aja*".

Some Yoruba Mnemonics and their Teachings

Children songs remain an important instrument through which Yoruba language competence is taught to children at the formative period. One of such songs is:

Eni bieni (One like one)

Eji bieji (Two like two)

Eta ntagba (Three like selling calabash)

Erin woòroòko (A curved four)
Arun ngbodo (Five carries mortal)
Efa tiele (Six for ele)
Biro n biro (Biro is biro)
Biro bata (Bata's biro)
Mo b'Alakesan (I met AlaìkeÌòsòain)
Gbangba lewa (Ten is open)

This children song could aid school children in counting of numbers from 1-10. With the use of this song, it would be easy for the school pupils to remember and recall these numbers (1-10) in appropriate order. Another song related to the one above is:

Eni bi eni (One as one)
Iyen lomo nkawo (That is how the child counts money)
Ejì bi eji (Two as two)
Iyen lagba n tayo (That is how the adult play games)
Eta bi eta (Three as three)
Eje ki a ta arawa lore (Let us give alms to one another)
Erin bi erin (Four as four)
Eni rinnì laariìn (We smile only to those who smile at us)
Arun bi arun (Five as five)
Oba ma se wa larungun (May God not make us destroyers)
Efa bi efa (Six as six)
Eje ka faarawamora (Let us draw ourselves together)
Eje bi eje (Seven as seven)
Olugbon soro o kije (Olugbon [name of a Yoruba paramount ruler] performed rituals and lived beyond the seventh day)
Ejo bi ejo (Eight as eight)
Eni bini laajo (We resemble only our parents)
Esan bi esan (Nine as nine)
Oba je kale ò san wa (May the Lord let our later life be prosperous)
Ewa bi ewa (Ten as ten)
Oba ma wahala wa (Do not trouble us oh God)

Like the first children's song, this song also teaches arithmetic of the Yoruba language, i. e. counting of numbers from 1 to 10. This would aid school children's memory in remembering and recalling these numbers orderly. Aside the teaching of arithmetic of the language, it also teaches direct comparison through the use of simile marker *bi* (like, as) ten times in the song. The song is in pairs of ten, with two-line each. Every second line is a rider to the first, which gives additional information about the content of the first line. Each pair teaches repetition (i. e. the re-occurrence of *eni* and *eji* in lines 1 and 3) which enhances school pupils' accents. In addition, the song teaches pun. For instance, there is a play on syllable /ta/ in the words *eÌòta* and *tarawa* in lines 5 and 6 respectively. Also, there is a re-occurrence of syllable /rin/ three times in lines 7 and 8; /rin/ four times in lines 9 and 10; and /fa/ three times in lines 11 and 12. In the same token,

syllables/*je/*, */jo/*, */san/* and */wa/* re-occurred multiple times respectively. The educational implication of these repetitions and re-occurrences for primary school pupils is that it will improve their accent and make them more proficient in speech making and language use in general.

Another mnemonic that aids school pupils' language learning are acronym and abbreviations. Examples of such in Yoruba include:

<i>abbl</i>	-	<i>ati bee bee ló</i>	(and so on)
<i>a.y.</i>	-	<i>atawonyooku</i>	(and others)
<i>o. i.</i>	-	<i>ojú-iwé</i>	(book page)
<i>ork</i>	-	<i>oro-oruko</i>	(noun)
<i>apl</i>	-	<i>àpónlé</i>	(adverb)
<i>ors</i>	-	<i>oro-ise</i>	(verb)
<i>arpork</i>	-	<i>aropooruko</i>	(pronoun)
<i>atk</i>	-	<i>atokun</i>	(preposition)
<i>apej</i>	-	<i>apejuwe</i>	(adjective)
<i>apork</i>	-	<i>apola oruko</i>	(noun phrase)
<i>apors</i>	-	<i>apolaise</i>	(verb phrase)
<i>apatk</i>	-	<i>apolaatokun</i>	(prepositional phrase)

The above mnemonics teaches parts of speech, sentence structure among others. They serve as a short-cut to the teaching of the Yoruba parts of speech and sentence structure.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded that effective utilisation of tongue twisters and mnemonics in teaching Yoruba language competence to school pupils will improve their mastery of the language. School pupils that master tongue twisters very well and can make use of mnemonics appropriately tend to have high level of competence in the use of language. The school pupils' accents are improved and use of figures of speech is enhanced, especially in tongue twisters which invariably aid their understanding of the rudiments of Yoruba language and add value to their language use. Through these instruments (tongue twisters and mnemonics), school pupils can become competent in the language in all its ramifications: fluent speakers, efficient readers and proficient writers. The paper recommended that tongue twisters and mnemonics be employed in teaching Yoruba language and developing competence in school pupils. This will lay a solid foundation for their language use and ensure they become great speakers, readers and writers respectively.

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