

EMERGING ISSUES IN HAUSA SIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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Abstract

Countries all over the world developed sign systems that are derived from the gestures and language spoken in their various communities. This paper intends to assess the need to develop Hausa sign system for the education of persons with hearing impairment in Hausa communities. Some constraints that hinder the development of this language will be looked into, and finally offer suggestions and recommendations.

Introduction

Language is a wonderful phenomenon which makes man a complete being Yar'adua, (2008). The defect of language cannot be seen in the same manner like other crippling defects of the body yet, its effects often are more pervasive and insidious than other acute organic defect Mosunmola, (1991}. Awoniyi (1991), described language as the tool of significant expression of the thought. The expression of the complex communication needs of the people is enhanced by their use of language. Language promotes understanding among people who share the same linguistic identity.

In fact, language has been recognized as one of the human endowments, more important than all the physical tools invented in the last two thousand years. The acquisition of language is unique to human beings, although lower animal have developed communication system. Only humans have attained the most highly developed communication system-speech. Yar'adua (2008:2) asserts that;

Without language, human society would have been chaotic and quite unimaginable for, if some utterances (or even sign) are often misconstrued. What would have been the situation if no language at all is in use in the society? Furthermore, how could someone who is misunderstood to have offended another refuse or exonerate himself from the wrong allegation?

These and many oilier reasons are some of the justifications or the needs for language by-. people living together in a community. Since deafness itself does not affect a person's intellectual capability to learn, deaf children generally require some form of special intervention and schooling in! order to gain an adequate education (UNESCO, 1987).

Concept of Sign Language

Sign language is a term defined by a number of linguists in different contexts depending on their own perception. Edmunds and Krupinskihive (2003), explain sign as the use of hand, shape, movement and placement to represent a word or concept.

Tucker and Powell (1991), stated that, though language has structure and vocabulary governed by certain rules which are followed by those who use that language, it is possible to communicate without using language. The look, the touch, the gesture which in a given situation, convey a thought to others, are nothing but element of sign language.

In agreement with the view above Tucker and powell (1991:57), asserted that:

The communication approaches used with deaf children, therefore are intended not simply to allow communication to occur, but to bring about the acquisition of language. The goal is to ensure that every deaf child has secure first language, be that spoken or signed.

This is what stimulated Garuba (1996), to argue that language and speech complement each other while language involves the transmission of ideas, speech provides one of the vehicles through which such transmission or expression can take place. This therefore brings us to the issue of speech Van-riper { 1972:20 indicated that:

Speech is assumed defect if it deviates from the speech of other people to the extent that it attract attention to itself, interferes will communication or gives rise to maladjustment in the person using the speech.

This does not deviate from what Heward and Orlansky (I 98-1), Posited that, deviant speech is a situation where the child's speech grossly abuses the speech mechanism. This is a situation where child's speech is unintelligible, personally and culturally substandard.

Definition on speech disorder cannot be complete without that of language disorder Kolo (1998). He describes language impairment as a state in which an individual does not display knowledge of the system of linguistic need, commensurate with the expected norms. He concluded that a child is typically language impaired when his expected skills in the use of primary language are deficient as compared to expectations of the language and vocabulary level of his chronological age

From what have been discussed above, a lot has been said about sign language. Researchers often forget that, the possible uses of sign language are infinite and unpredictable. It is not by learning 100 grammar rules, 1000 verbs and 3000 items of vocabulary. One can suddenly communicate with the deaf and understand his language, more especially if it rubs across different cultures and linguistic variations. The statement of Ibrahim (2007) further supports this, thus:-

Deaf children have unique communication needs because of their inability to hear
Continuous repeated flow of language interchanged around them, they are not automatically
Exposed to the enormous amounts of language stimulation expressed by hearing children.

For deaf children early continuous use of visible communication modes such as sign language, finger spelling, cued speech together with complication, oral/aural training, total communication, lip reading and manual alphabet etc can help them a lot in the acquisition of speech language and knowledge.

These and many other things informed the need for Hausa sign language.

Needs for Hausa sign language

- a) Researches have indicated that sign language studies are not only useful to the deaf people; such studies are also useful to the normal children.
- b) Hausa sign language studies would also help teachers understand the technicality of the deaf language of which can be used in any class of deaf children.
- c) It is also useful at finding (the sign and finger spelling) that will accommodate a wide range of learning styles.
- d) Its study will be used to compare American sign language (ASL), British sign language (BSL) with Hausa sign language to come up with some similarities and dissimilarities.
- e) There is also need to study Hausa sign language more especially in the representation of information through seeing, hearing and movement which will
- i. Bring into focus the role language can play in enhancing effective teaching and learning process, especially as it relates to deaf children or deaf learners,
- ii. Move sign language to go along with linguistic structure that will add to sociological field of study.
- iii. Situate sign patterns in a multi dialects setting of Hausa society in order to determine which aspects are universal and which ones are peculiar to deaf Hausa signers alone.
- iv. Shed light on some of the functions that sign language can play in a social setting of Hausa society.
- v. It may also be of great help to the rehabilitation of deaf people through the techniques and skills which the study intends to provide in the process.

Method to be Used

Ibrahim (2007) reported that, this has been the topic of heated controversy over the last two centuries, it is the general belief that education of the deaf is placed on two key objectives, i.e development of language and communication. These are the most important vehicles through which child acquires knowledge processes information and expresses himself or herself.

Those speaking English have no option than for the child to learn to read and write the English language, while those concerned with the education of the deaf however, have different views on the modes of communication to be emphasized in teaching language to deaf children. For emerging indigenous languages, they prefer another method, which is the goal of communicating with a larger hearing society. This group emphasized the need for speech training and speech reading (lip reading) which is highly required in this aspect. The other group prefer the use of manual or hand communication with the goal of early mastery of language and valuable communication system with other deaf individual.

This conflict according to Ibrahim (2007), led to the formation of different types of communication method. For example, American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign

Language (BSL), Chinese Sign Language (CSL) to mention but a few. Each of these sign was formulated based on environmental considerations i.e considering the culture and tradition of the people. In Nigeria, last option was selected which enforced American Sign Language (ASL) on our hearing impaired children.

Hausa Signers find this method extremely difficult to comprehend such signs due to environmental exigencies. Some of the ASL do not fit the gesture, customs and language spoken in our local areas. For example:

- a) *Mother*:- Hausa sign Language indicates mother by making gesture of the breast at the chest or woman carrying a baby, but in American sign language mother is signed by placing the thumb tip against the cheek twice.
- b) *Father*:- In Hausa Sign, father is signed by touching the beard with the thumb and index straight (or horizontally). For ASL the sign for father is to place the thumb tip against the forehead twice.
- c) *To marry*:- Hausa sign language indicates this by crossing two indexes, but in ASL the hand is clasp (with the right hand on top).

The above is enough to convince us that the best method to teach Hausa sign language is ; natural or conventional sign. This is the method that will carry along the school signers and non school signers. The school signers in particular will feel there is smooth transition from home to the school.

What the research is advocating here is to make them better prepared to raise achievement level. This therefore prepared the ground for the introduction of bilingual education for Hausa Signers. This is in line with what Okafor (1991). posits that. No meaningful education can be attained without the use of language of the people involved. Werner (19X7:37), also has the same view with Okafor, thus, he asserts:

If people in your area already have gestures or signs for something, use that instead of inventing new ones or foreign ones this is because sign used by another country may be offensive to some people in other countries

Constraints Against Learning Sign Language

People have joined hand together to create their own sign system for use in their deaf schools. Countries such as America, England, Spain, Thailand, Nepal, Germany, Denmark, Ghana, Kenya and Zimbabwe have developed sign systems that are a tuned to the gestures and the language spoken in such countries. Even Ghana our neighbouring country has developed her own sign language. Nigeria is still copying from a readymade American sign Language.

The above constrains is what make Hausa signer to face some problems in his leaning career. The following are some of them:

- I. American Sign Language is an offshoot of French sign language which was developed by Abbe de l'eppee and taken to America by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudent which was later transformed into American sign Language (ASL) is based on French Language rules for word order and syntax. Northern and Lemme (1975) Due to this, hearing impaired child is faced with learning two languages at the same time.
2. The ASL called "the joy of signing" comprises about 2000 word which were formulated and put into use through the level of culture, environment and language spoken by American people.
3. ASL was written having American impaired persons in mind.
4. ASL was developed and used to leach American impaired hearing individuals.
5. That ASL reflects the American culture, and impaired hearing children represent signs for what they see in their environment.

The above constraints are what make Hausa signers to have problem with basic idea of language more so he is faced with learning two systems at the same time. He learns to read and at the same time learns how to sign. This is too demanding and confusing for Hausa deaf child.

Recommendations

1. Hausa sign Language must be taught in the school of the deaf with a designed syllabus reviewed by professional in the language. The current usage of half baked Hausa curriculum should stop immediately. This is for the purpose of achieving good result. There is need to recruit specifically (trained teachers and (hey should be screened before appointment.
2. In-service training, conferences and seminars will intensify their knowledge and awareness on the new pedagogical approach in the subject.
3. The universities should be mandated to create department of Hausa sign Language. They should also involve criteria of uniformity in admission for N.C.E. or Degree to read Hausa special education, where Hausa sign language will be given priority.
4. Government should create more schools of deaf with this more teachers are needed to upset (he inadequacy of teaching personnel.
5. The research also recommends adult literacy classes for the non school signers. They should be literate so as to communicate effectively.
6. Finally, the paper recommends the establishment of signers parents Teachers Association. Parents will be acquainted to know the right of their children and to protect it, if the need arises, since hearing impaired child is entitled to the best education that can be provided for him, just as can be provided for the normal child.

Conclusion

From the content of this paper, it has proved tentatively that Hausa Sign Language is an emerging issue in the education of hearing impaired children in the present century. Our inability to develop this sign system (Hausa) for our children, is always an off-hand resistance to innovation. Let us at this juncture borrow the word of Ibrahim (2007), to concluded the work that when times and circumstances change we must change our operational tools and practices to match them.

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