

QUINE'S TAXONOMY, CHOMSKY'S MENTALISM: A DISCOURSE ON THEORIES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING AND IMPLICATION ON YORUBA LANGUAGE

Richard Taye Oyelakin
Obafemi Awolowo University

Abstract

W. V. Quine's taxonomic and N. Chomsky's mentalistic theories of language are the two main rival theories of language learning. Quine argues essentially that what determines how a particular language is learned and the meaning of words is external stimulation. This may be verbal or non-verbal. He therefore recasts meaning in terms of stimulation. The stimulus meaning of a sentence for an individual sums up his disposition to assent to or dissent from the sentence in response to present stimulation. Opposing to this view is Chomsky's mentalistic theory which maintains that the subject matter of language learning, properly so called, does not consist in the systematic structure of the disposition towards stimulation, but it is a mental activity which consists in the mental capacity to discover, study and understand the nature of mental realities of language. The paper argues that neither of these theories, taken independently, can provide an adequate explanation of language learning. Argument is then made for holistic theory of language learning. This is to the fact that language learning can only be adequate when it combines the two theories otherwise inadequate. This, essentially, is the suggested remedy to the deficient teaching and/ or learning of Yoruba language.

Key Words: Taxonomy, Mentalism, Yoruba (a tribe in the south-western Nigeria), Yoruba Language (the language spoken by the Yoruba tribe), Stimulation, Stimulus Meaning, Osogbo (the name of Osun state capital)

Introduction

Language is an essential instrument of communication and interpersonal relationships. In fact, language is a tribal-social definitional marker and distinguishing factor. There is no doubt that there have been series of theories on language learning. For this enquiry, I will consider two main positional theories on language learning; the taxonomic theory of language and the mentalistic theory. The research will show that neither of these theories can independently be a sufficient explanation of language learning. In language learning, the two theories are significantly contributory and without one of the two theories, language could not be claimed to have been properly and adequately learned. In other words the paper will argue for the collaboration of the two theories, therefore bringing about a holistic theory of language learning.

Furthermore, the research will show that Yoruba language teaching and/or learning is deficient because of the dearth of implicit and explicit development of the teachers and/or the learners of the language. Implicit development in the language includes understanding the *value* of Yoruba language in itself. This also includes implicit interest in the language which is a driving force to learning and/or teaching. It will be submitted that these are the contributory factors for the deficiency and weakness suffered by Yoruba language. Therefore, to overcome the deficiency and weakness, the owners of Yoruba language must look towards remedying the identified problems.

Stimulus- Response Theory of Language

Quine's (1990: 37) construal of stimulus-response theory is that in linguistic research, all that the learner relies upon to determine the meaning of the words and sentences are the behavioural dispositions toward external stimulation, and social influence. This theory is expressed in the fact that we come to know external objects through the impacts of stimulations on our nerve endings. This is the summary of Quine's taxonomic theory of language learning. Quine then started with how words are learnt. For him, society teaches people how to use words. The method is by rebuking the wrong use of a certain word and praising its right use. For instance, 'ouch' is a one word sentence. It is used as a response to a certain discomfort or painful stimulation. It might be physical or mental discomfort. When a speaker utters 'Ouch', with the preceding sign or evidence of discomfort, the other speakers or listeners (Quine refers to these as the critics) understand how the word is used. Such 'usage' is rewarded by the other speakers of the language. On the other hand, if a speaker utters 'Ouch' without any preceding stimulation of discomfort, the critics frown at the use.

The presupposition is that the sentence is wrongly used. This is the way words are learnt. The same thing applies to the one word sentence 'Red'. This is used as a response to a certain irradiation of red light. When the speaker utters 'Red', the critics believe that the word is used as a response to a certain impact of red light on the retina of the speaker's eyes. However, the critics can also share from the red light irradiation. In this case, therefore, words are of different categories. Some words are more objective than others. For example, 'Red' is more objective than 'Ouch'. This is because if a speaker utters 'Red', the listeners can also share the irradiation of the red light with the speaker. That is, the listeners also use 'Red' to respond to the same irradiation of red light. This is what Quine refers to as the symmetry between the speaker and the listeners. Symmetry is the production of the same effect by a shared stimulus. Although there are different modes of colour representation and formation in an individual's retina, if there is a general acceptance that what is visible to other people at a given time is the irradiation of red light, then the speaker's sentence is acceptable. But in the case of the sentence 'Ouch', when the speaker uses it as a response to a certain stimulation of pain, the critics do not share this pain. To respond to a painful stimulation, they only rely on the fact that the word is used. This is what Quine refers to as the asymmetry between the speaker and the listeners. This is the basis of the argument that 'red' is more objective than 'Ouch'.

However, more sentences could be created from those learned directly from the response to stimulation. For instance, suppose a child is taught to use the sentence "That is a goat" to respond to a certain stimulation. The child can also build on this to make a similar sentence "That is a dog", having been made to understand the difference between the stimulation by a goat and that by a dog. This is what Quine refers to as the method of learning words and sentences by analogy (Quine 1960: 9). The problem identified with these ways of learning words is that it will only allow us to use words as responses to direct stimulation. With this, we would be limited in what we would be able to say. This is because some things would be left out of our utterances. For instance, we would not be able to respond to stimulation that is not present. But, responding to past and future stimulations is part of our language. Therefore, we should be able to use words and sentences to respond to past and future stimulations, which are not present. Without being able to express past and future events, our linguistic scheme would be incomplete.

Verbal and Non-verbal Stimulation

For Quine, however, there are two main foci of response: non-verbal stimulation and verbal stimulation. The way of learning words explained above is a response to immediate non-verbal stimulation, either directly or indirectly. Past and future stimulations cannot become immediate; we are only left with the memory of past stimulation and the speculation about future stimulation. However, there must be a way of expressing both past and the future. Quine (1960) suggests that we can learn how to express past and future events by responding to verbal stimulation. This verbal stimulation may be in the form of questioning. To elicit the response which will form the expression of both past and future events, the following questions may be asked: “What colour will you have?”, or ‘What colour did it use to be?’ (1960: 10).

What are the consequences of the above in the present discussion? The first consequence is that our language is used as responses to stimulations. Again, since language is used to respond to the world, it follows that there could be no language without some event in the world, or before humans whose responses to stimulations constitute language. Language is an instrument used to respond to the stimulations from the world. For Quine, statements do not have individual empirical significance as some empiricists claim. Language as a whole assumes its pragmatic value in being an instrument for responding to the flow of stimulation in the world. It then follows that statements derive their significance from stimulation.

To use Quine’s words here, we would say that statements have stimulus meaning. It should be noted that stimulations may either be verbal and non-verbal. For instance, I can respond to the verbal stimulation: ‘What is the capital of Osun State?’ My response will be ‘Osogbo’. I might do this without having visited Osogbo. This is a response to a verbal stimulus. But this is different from the statement; “This is Osogbo”. The second statement is used to respond to a non-verbal stimulation elicited by the experience of the city of Osogbo. The statement is uttered when one experiences the city itself. Quine then recasts meaning in terms of stimulation. The affirmative stimulus meaning of a sentence such as ‘Gavagai’ for a given speaker is defined as the class of all stimulations that would prompt his assent to it. Conversely, the class of all stimulation that would prompt dissent for a given speaker is defined as the negative stimulus meaning of a sentence. Therefore, the stimulus meaning of a sentence for an individual sums up his disposition to assent to or dissent from the sentence in response to present stimulation (Quine 1990: 37).

Other Theories of Language

Some philosophers argue that Quine’s theory does not give a satisfactory theory of language and meaning. Noam Chomsky (1971), for instance, argues that the fundamentals of language do not consist in the systematic structure of the disposition towards stimulation; these fundamentals of language, he claims, consist in some other implicit mental properties, so called, which are inherent in human beings. For him: “Hence in the technical sense, linguistic theory is mentalistic, since it is concerned with discovering a mental reality underlying actual behavior” (1971: 325).

For Chomsky, language is to be understood by understanding some mental realities. These mental realities cannot be understood by studying the relationship between language and the conditioning stimulation, as found in Quine’s works. For Chomsky, the best that

stimulus or behaviouristic theory of language can afford us is the evidence to the nature of this mental reality. It cannot be the real subject matter of language. The real subject matter of the theory of language is to be understood by studying the mental realities of language.

In language learning, Chomsky (1971: 325) differentiates the level of competence from the level of performance. The level of competence is the level concerned with the ideal speaker-hearer who has a complete understanding of his language and is unaffected by irrelevances such as memory limitation, distractions, shifts of attention, interest, and error in actual applications of his language. The level of performance is the level of actual application of the language to concrete situations in the world. This includes using the language to perform some tasks in the world such as naming, referring, defining things, describing things, and so on. These two divisions may be simplified as 'understanding' and 'use' respectively. This means that a language needs to be understood first before it can be used. This 'understanding' takes place at the mental level, while 'use' is applied at the physical level to respond and describe the world. To Chomsky, the level of 'understanding' is more important than the level of 'use'. It is insufficient to argue, as Quine does, that a satisfactory explanation of the nature of language learning can be given from the point of view of 'use' or performance alone. This would have left so much explanation out of the nature of language and language learning.

Chomsky identifies Quine's method of explaining language learning as that which associates language learning with the *preliminary analysis of experience, provided by the peripheral processing mechanism*. This leads to the formulation of the *empirical hypothesis of the mind* (Chomsky 1971: 354). Again, Quine's theory is associated with taxonomic linguistics. This means that linguistics consists only of a body of procedures for determining the grammar of a language from a corpus of data, the form of language being unspecified except in so far as restrictions on possible grammars are determined by this set of procedures (Chomsky 1971: 354-357). This is a method of determining the meaning of a sentence by studying the effect of stimulation on the speaker and the disposition that follows. This means that it is the relationship between the stimulation and the human disposition towards it that determines the meaning of a sentence or term. But, Chomsky finds this method unsatisfactory as a method of giving us the idea of what language learning is about. For instance he says,

In general, then, it seems to me correct to say that empiricist theories about language acquisition are refutable wherever they are clear and that further empiricist speculations have been quite empty and uninformative (Chomsky 1971:359).

However, at the level of competence (understanding), some systems of rules are learnt and these are the rules that a speaker uses at the level of performance (use). Therefore, for Chomsky (1971), at the level of performance, every speaker must have mastered the rules that enable him speak his language, whether he is conscious of this or not. Language, as a mentalistic system, therefore "provides the means for expressing indefinitely many thoughts and for reacting appropriately in an indefinite range of new situations..." (Chomsky 1971: 326).

This means that there are certain linguistic properties produced in human beings which are used to structure the way we form our language, express our thoughts, and to react and respond to stimulations before we generate or develop dispositions. This makes the faculty of understanding a complex one. William P. Alston (1986) also holds this mentalistic

theory of language. For him, speakers of the English language are certain that the stimulus sentence 'Rabbit' signifies a whole and enduring rabbit, irrespective of the possibility of conflicting translational manuals. This is because "I will still know what 'rabbit' means in my language. I know this just by virtue of being a master of my language" (Alston 1986: 60).

This kind of knowledge is beyond what the study of stimulus theory can afford. It deals with knowing the appropriate word or sentence to use at a particular time to respond to an event. This is part of the functions of the faculty of understanding. Alston conceptualizes mentalism as "the knowledge of the semantics of language" (Alston 1986: 60). It is the natural understanding of the semantics of language that makes us know what sentences mean in a language and which sentence to use at a certain moment to what degree of determinacy. It is not enough to argue that the meaning and structure of sentences are determined by their stimulus meanings. In his objection to Quine, J. J. Katz tries to explain the issue involved in the mental theory of language which Alston raised (Katz 1971: 371).

Chomsky identified his theory of language learning as belonging to a rationalist approach. To justify this theory, he contrasted it with the empiricist theory on the question of adequacy-in-principle and feasibility about the intrinsic structure of a language. While he found empiricist position refutable, he argued:

...the rationalist approach exemplified by recent work in the theory of transformational grammar seems to have fairly productive, to be fully in accord with what is known about language, and to offer at least some hope of providing a hypothesis about the intrinsic structure of a language-acquisition system that will meet the condition of adequacy-in-principle ... (Chomsky 1971: 359).

The argument is that any theory of language that fails to provide some intrinsic nature of language learning beyond the behaviourist level cannot be an adequate theory. Taxonomic behaviourist theory of language has not been able to supply any information about language beyond what can be studied physically. Therefore, behaviourist theory of language cannot be an adequate theory of language. But, mentalistic theory of language can do this. For instance, it is from the mentalistic theory that language is divided into two levels; competence and performance. If Chomsky is right, then Quine's stimulus arguments are inadequate for giving us a theory of language learning.

Jerold Katz (1971: 374), also arrived at the same position by considering answers to some three fundamental questions of linguistic investigation, description and learning. Questions such as; (1) What is known by a speaker who is fluent in a natural language? That is, what facts about his language underlie his ability to communicate with other in that language? (2) How is such linguistic knowledge put into operation to achieve communication? That is, how does a speaker use such linguistic knowledge to convey his thoughts, opinions, wishes, demands, questions, emotions, and so on to other speakers? (3) How do speakers come to acquire this ability? That is, what innate dispositions and developmental process are responsible for transforming a nonverbal infant into a fluent speaker? In his view;

We have found that the taxonomic linguistic confines linguistic investigation to stating those facts about the structure of a natural language which can be formulated within the framework of a classificational system, while the mentalist goes far beyond this in seeking a full answer to all three questions.

The difference is important: it justifies us in rejecting taxonomic conception in favour of the mentalistic one. Taxonomic linguistic can only describe the utterances of a language; mentalistic linguistic not only can do this but can also explain how speakers communicate by using the utterances, and how the ability to communicate is acquired (Katz 1971: 378).

For Katz, what taxonomic theory of language does is restricted to assembling and studying empirical data about language. Through this, the behaviourists form their conclusions about language. This is an example of what Quine did in his stimulus theory. But Katz argued that the mentalistic theory of language can also do this; it can also provide a deeper understanding of language by explaining – what a speaker knows when he/she speaks a language, how speakers communicate, and what they do when they communicate. What the questions require goes beyond the study of behavior and dispositions to stimulation. This shows that in a way the taxonomic theory of language is inadequate. Mentalism then claims to be better than the taxonomic conception of language learning. Quine's theory is part of taxonomic theory that mentalism is meant to reject.

Holistic Theory of Language Learning

However, radical mentalism would also be inadequate regarding the understanding of the nature and structure of language. By *radical mentalism*, I mean the thesis that mental language is necessary and sufficient as an adequate account of language, without any admixture of the language of stimulation, disposition and behavior. My understanding of Katz on the definition of the 'analyticity group' is that, he might pass for a radical mentalist. This is because he carried Chomsky's argument to some deeper level. Language learning as an enterprise includes the data from experience. Hence, in understanding the nature of language, Quine's stimulus and social explanations of language are relevant and useful. Mentalistic explanation of language, as it were, is also very important. Putnam (1986: 409) also made this point:

Account for the holistic character of belief fixation, by postulating that the step from the meaning of a sentence to its assertibility conditions involves "top down processing" – that is, *the use of general intelligence and the available information*.

It may perhaps be incorrect therefore, to use just an integral part of language to explain the complex enterprise that language is. Wholly, stimulus and mentalistic explanations of language are just two faces of a single explanatory coin. There is no doubt that each can be explained on its own part according to its importance as Quine did on stimulus theory of language, and Chomsky, etc, did on the mentalism theory of language. But, the problem comes in when the explanation of a part is taken as the explanation of the whole. From this, it follows that for there to be a satisfactory explanation of language, such an explanation must be a holistic one. It must be able to take care of some fundamental questions about the nature and structure of language learning.

Mentalism and Stimulus theory of language have to be considered for a satisfactory explanation of language. The implication of this is that there are some properties of language which can only be provided by the study and understanding of our mental make-up. Stimulus theory should also be studied for the explanation to be adequate. Some properties of language must be supplied by stimulation. This is the holistic study of language. This holistic

understanding of the structure of sentences is also identified by Alston:

Since there is this kind of knowledge, the possibility of determining what 'rabbit' means cannot depend *solely* on what can be gleaned from the observation of behaviour and the circumstances of behavior (Alston 1986: 60).

Such a holistic study of language may then allow us to harmonise the information from both theories for a better understanding of language learning. Language learning is a complex enterprise in which stimulation is an essential raw. Between the stimulation and the generation of disposition; there is what can be likened to a mental industry where some kinds of processes take place. In this industry, stimulation from the world is a part of the material used for this processing. There are other materials supplied by the segment or the faculty itself. Let us consider it this way. Stimulation does not have or give any meaning on its own. It is reasonably true that certain arrangements of some qualities we refer to as colours, sounds, shapes, or voices, would not make any sense to us until they have undergone a certain mental processing in the faculty of understanding. This means that there is a certain process working on our stimulation in a certain faculty before any disposition either to assent or dissent is formed. This mental process does not only work on stimulation, it also works on thoughts to produce some other thoughts. So, disposition to assent to or dissent from a certain question about some stimulation does not purely arise from experience, though it may begin with it; it has its root in this faculty of understanding.

This implies that in the learning of a certain language, stimulations come from outside as useful data. But these data undergo certain processes in which speakers learn the appropriate sentences to use in responding to any impinging stimulation. This is how a language is actually learnt. According to Chomsky (1971: 358);

In contrast, the discussion of language acquisition in preceding section was rationalistic in its assumption that various formal and substantive universals are intrinsic properties of the language-acquisition system, these providing a schemata that are applied to data and that determine in a highly restricted way the general form and, in part, even the substantive features of the grammar that emerge upon presentation of appropriate data....

Preceding this he had said;

Thus the form of a language, the schemata for its grammar, is to a large extent given, though it will not be available for use without appropriate experience to set the language forming process into operation (356).

He uses these to establish the point that language learning is mentalistic in nature, even though the mental process uses the data from experience. This is the same point made by Kant:

But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself (Kant 1963: 41).

This implies that the data from stimulation serve as useful raw material which the faculty of understanding works upon to produce what we eventually refer to as language. There is something which the faculty of understanding adds to the data from experience before we can have knowledge.

A child, for instance, does not automatically begin to understand language, even though stimulations from experience are all around it. There is a faculty of understanding that needs to be developed and activated in the child. This is what will make learning possible for the child. Learning will begin to take place when this faculty develops and is activated in the child. This faculty, when activated in the child, structures language usage in the child, and also processes data received from the world which enhances the disposition to either assent or dissent to any stimulus question. During this process, the faculty adds whatever property needed to produce an appropriate disposition to certain stimulation. The segment that forms and structures the language then connects the other segments to determine what sentence to utter in response to certain stimulation. The time the child begins to learn depends, to a large extent, on the time the faculty is activated (Chomsky 1971: 374). The point is that there is a mental structure which underlines, describes and then fixes the linguistic utterances to which we are exposed. It is now clear that this level of understanding is more important in language learning. While the faculty of understanding has processed the data from experience and has determined what sentence to use, the speaker displays whatever behaviour and disposition and uses the right sentence to respond. Even in adults, this process occurs swiftly. This is why it is difficult to understand and then differentiate.

Judging our knowledge and meaning from observable behaviour, as behaviourists hold, therefore, becomes inadequate for understanding the nature of knowledge. And any behaviourist will end up in a deeply distorted conception of human knowledge. For instance, suppose I am in pain. Can the arrangement and the study of the properties of my observable behaviour alone reveal an adequate knowledge of my pain to observers? Or can I get an adequate knowledge of a friend's pain by studying his dispositions and behaviour towards some stimulations? But, this is what Quine's theory claims. This means that Quine's behaviourism, as a theory, fails to give satisfactory knowledge of what I mean when I say that I am in pain. It is also inadequate because the theory "has the problem of determining the intrinsic properties of a device capable of mediating this input-output relation" (Chomsky 1971: 354).

This means that to explain the process of communication among speakers in their language, there is a *highly complex mechanism* (Katz 1971: 369), which underlines linguistic activity between the input, *the data from experience*, and the output, *the observable behaviour*. And this is left unexplained by Quine's behaviourist theory. This is an explanatory gap. The gap identified here is expected to take care of issues such as – how words are formed in a child, how the child eventually learns to use the right word; how it comes to be known to us that we use the right word to respond to stimulations impinging on our nerve endings, and what we come to know when we assent to sentences such as 'Red' or 'He is in pain'. The answer to these would go beyond stimulus meaning. Any research into language learning and understanding cannot bypass these issues. Explaining them will take the researcher beyond the nature of stimulus-response theory. It is impossible to answer all these by stimulus process without leaving out something important.

Implications of Holistic Theory on Yoruba Language Teaching and/ or Learning

The question besetting us now is; what is/are the implication(s) of holism theory of language learning on Yoruba language teaching and/or learning? From the fore-going, it is clear that stimulus-response and mentalistic theories of language are the two faces of a single Yoruba language learning coin. It further means that Yoruba language can not be adequately learned if an individual learner's cognitive capacity and dispositional ability to respond to stimulation are not developed appropriately along language learning line. Responding to stimulation means the ability to develop a disposition to assent or dissent to external stimulation impinging on our nerve endings.

As it has been earlier argued that neither of the language learning theories can provide an adequate explanation of language learning without leaving something out, so also, a Yoruba language learner cannot learn the language adequately with either of the two criteria without the other. In other words, for Yoruba language learning to be adequate and effective, the two criteria must be possessed by and must work together in an individual learner. For instance, a car cannot move without an engine and tyres. Not when one is present without the other; the two must be present. The same way the two theories must be applied well by an individual before Yoruba language can be said to be adequately learned.

Correspondingly too, a Yoruba language teacher or a learner is expected to have what may be termed "implicit and explicit development". By "implicit development", as used in this context, I mean the mental ability to understand what Chomsky refers to as the fundamentals of language learning. These include the rules of language which determines, how words are used, arrangement of words to make a sentence, the propositional meaning of a statement, most importantly, the value and the importance of the language to be learned, etc. In other words, the individual teacher and/ or learner is expected to adequately develop his mental ability in the semantics and syntax of the language including and very essentially too, the value of that language. It will surely be part of that implicit development for a learner of Yoruba language to understand that like English, French, and Chinese languages, Yoruba is a language which is to be *valued in itself* and for its importance.

Being *valued in itself* here means that Yoruba language must not be seen as inferior to any other language in the world. It must be inherently valued by the owners. Yoruba language is a valuable and rich language as rich as the so called foreign languages. The only problem is that the owners of the language need value it that way in order to develop it. I make bold to assert that the only thing that Yoruba language needs now is the ready and responsible people with the right attitude towards Yoruba language development. It must be technically developed and it can be done. It is technical development that made English, French, Chinese language popular not that they are peculiar. They are all languages like Yoruba. It is this inherent value which is lost and it is time we learned this. From the beginning of European contact with Nigeria, what the Yoruba were made to know is that Yoruba language is primitive and has no value. This assumption labeled Yoruba language as vernacular which must not be spoken in secondary schools and colleges. This is sad. This micro understanding of language shows the deficiency in macro perception of things of a people. It is this erroneous assumption that has kept the language, and indeed the race, backward for so long in the world.

Such a mental development must essentially include interest in Yoruba language, if it is to be adequately taught or learned. I seek permission to presume that the way an individual

learning a language in order to teach it should be different and deeper than somebody learning it for communication only. Of course, it is impossible to teach the language one cannot speak. For this reason, not all the speakers of Yoruba language can effectively teach it. Therefore, the emphasis is on the teacher-learners of Yoruba language. By teacher-learner, I mean people who learn the language in order to be able to teach it. This is different from the learners whose sole intention is to learn it to have a certificate or a degree. However, it can only take interested minds to learn Yoruba language to its fundamentals in order to teach it. To learn a language to its fundamentals includes learning it wholly.

“Explicit development” as used in this context is the ability to respond adequately to the external stimulation. This includes ability to receive either verbal or non-verbal stimulation, interpret it correctly, and respond to it appropriately. This is an essential ingredient in Yoruba language teaching and/or learning. For instance, it takes an individual with a functioning sense of sight to teach or learn about colours. This is the saying in Yoruba language that *oju lati’i mo obe ti ko le’po, enu la ti’i mo eyi ti ko ni’yo* (literally means that *you know the soup that doesn’t have palm oil through the sense of sight and the one without salt through the sense of taste*). Perhaps, people without sense of sight may be taught about colours but, of course, it will require a little more effort. These are the kind of schemes that are captured under special education. Let me acknowledge that it will be a difficult task to teach colour to the blind. It is only a physically perfect individual; including ability for perfect pronunciation, that can teach Yoruba language.

What is found out about Yoruba language teaching and/or learning nowadays is appalling. From the foundational schools to institutions of higher learning, Yoruba language teaching and/or learning is deficient. The deficiency can no longer be hidden as it is turning to become a danger for the language. You find out that original Yoruba language is no longer common in towns and cities. It is restricted to the repositories of the elders and is confined within the walls of the local villages and hamlets. The sixth of the ten objectives of the *Yoruba Solidarity Group*, as highlighted by Oyetade (2006) also lends credence to the point made.

The cultural and educational enterprises within and Nigeria have not been as aggressive as those outside because there is the natural tendency to assume that Yoruba language and culture is safe in Nigeria and that children and the younger generation are acquiring it whether they are taught consciously or not. If it appears that this assumption is correct, it is so only with children in local rural environments, where the use of English through the school educational system, have not compelled parents and guardians to engaging in everyday conversation with their children and wards in English at home (Oyetade 2006: 398).

Some attempts at promoting Yoruba language on the World Wide Web are well commendable but it may achieve little. Examples of such World Wide Web *promo* of Yoruba language learning could be found on (www.learnyoruba.com,) and (www.abeokuta.org/yoruba.htm). As much as these efforts are commendable it is based on the assumption that all is well with the language at the source in Yoruba land in Nigeria. But the point is that the original Yoruba language is dying, even at home. If it dies at home, surely the internet promoted one will fizzle away in a matter of time. The call therefore is that for Yoruba to survive it must continually be revived at home. Part of the ways to revive it at home is to revive our attitude towards speaking it and also to be careful who is assigned to teach it, where it is to be taught. Reviving Yoruba language at home is an example of what

Viriri (2010: 31) regarded as a peculiar linguistic problems which “require Africa-oriented solutions in form of knowledge, insights, theories and skills that are relevant to Africa”. We must find and use that African oriented solution to revive Yoruba language because according to Oloruntimehin (2007:10) that is part of the duty we owe ourselves as African to “revive the more dynamic elements of her cultural heritage”. Failure to achieve this, for him, we would be doing ourselves the havoc of self-betrayal, self –denial and self abnegation. As a way to start, the imaginary ban, in other words, *the hatred*, put on Yoruba language must be lifted so as to allow it to be freely spoken all over the Yoruba land and even beyond. In other words let the regional promotion of Yoruba language begins and the time is now.

It would not matter how much *promo* of Yoruba language on the internet or the World Wide Web, if it keeps dying at the source. If Munzali’s (2007: 287) idea of promoting the use of African languages, *Yoruba*, in other domains and media, such as the transaction of all governmental business at all levels, community radio, newspaper publishing, satellite television and the development of websites and other digital devices for the languages in collaboration with linguistic associations and various levels of government, is aimed at developing Yoruba language at home, for instance, it may be considered a positive step to counteract the foreign linguistic bombardment on Yoruba language even at home. But how affective this method may be is another fundamental question.

This is the danger, as the village people die, Yoruba dies, unless there is a revival. This is the reason for Oloruntimehin’s (2007: 14) outcry that “for the purpose of scholarship and understanding and transmission of our cultures, we must recognize the primacy of language and language studies”. Even, the *Lagos Yoruba*, an hybrid of the original Yoruba, which we yet hold onto is being daily compromised under the continuous attack of the western language super-imposition. This comes from all directions; market, music, news, advertisements, etc. To make matters worse, speakers of this language can no longer communicate continuously in Yoruba language without the admixture of the foreign English language. It is believed that you can make better sense when you communicate in English language but with Yoruba, you will be lost. This is why Falola (2007: 40) quoting Ngugi Wa Thiong’o saying “Our knowledge of Africa, ... is largely filtered through European languages and their vocabulary”. But, to this problem, many other reasons or causes have been highlighted with little or no lasting solution forthcoming. An example of a solution is Munzali Jibril’s (2007: 287). Using the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction for the first nine years of basic education will be fantastic. At least the pupils will be able to spell the names of their parents in their mother-tongue. But this will be begging the entire question. The problem of ‘qualified’ teacher in the sense we are discussing, and or teaching aids should be resolved first. Granted that the problem is solved, after nine years where do you throw the pupils? Do you throw them into the avalanche of foreign brainwashment and linguistic enslavement? Cultures with developed languages would not apply this method because it will achieve very little in solving the problem. This suggests that a stronger and more effective method is urgently needed.

From the fore-going, what I have found out as the main cause of the problem is the lack of value for Yoruba language. The second is the erroneous assumption of the qualification of the teachers, and learners of the language. For instance, how do we expect an individual whose teacher and/or lecturer used English language to teach him/her Yoruba language, and through this has a National Certificate, or a First Degree in Yoruba language, to be able to teach Yoruba language effectively? But, as a matter of fact, this is what operates in the schools where Yoruba language is taught. What is found out is that some, if not most,

of these teachers and/or lecturers do not have what it takes to teach Yoruba language. In other words, there is this over-reliance on the assumption that having a certificate or a degree in a language necessitates being qualified to teach that language even when the inherent interest and value of the language is not there. This, however, is not to down play the importance of certificates in the teaching of the language.

But, this is obviously an erroneous assumption. The toll that this assumption is taking on the way we handle Yoruba language teaching and learning is so much that it's time something was done about it. Are the big-certificate-teachers of Yoruba language developed both implicitly and explicitly? Do they all have mental interest and *value in itself* in the language they teach? Do they have the value and/or interest of the language at heart? This is the direction towards which I think we may face to curb Yoruba language teaching and/or learning deficiency and complete extinction in the nearest future. We must be careful of allowing what I may term as the opinion of Robin White, (former editor of BBC's Focus Africa), as reported by Oyetade, to come to pass. "As far as he is concerned, Yoruba is a dying language to the younger generation".(Akintunde, 2006, 403). True to White's opinion, the Yoruba has this to say; *awo ti a ko fi han omode, kiku nii 'ku*, which literally may mean that 'whatever tradition not exposed to the younger generation will eventually die'.

Conclusion

In this research, I have explored the stimulus theory and the mentalistic theory of language learning. I have found that language is a complex enquiry which requires some essential ingredients in order to learn it adequately. Therefore, it is concluded and suggested that in order for a language to be learned adequately one must be ready to learn it holistically. That is, combining the two essential theories together. This is because neither of the two theories can provide an adequate explanation of language learning without leaving some important issues out unexplained. To learn a language, of course, one needs external stimulations (verbal and non-verbal) as well as the mental understanding of the language. Mental knowledge of language without external stimulation is complete as external stimulation without mental knowledge would not provide any meaning.

This finding has been used to argue for the solution to the deficiency and weakness of Yoruba language teaching and/or learning. It is found that for the teaching and learning of Yoruba language to have a meaningful development, teachers and/or learners of the language have to be developed both implicitly and explicitly. It is found that part of the implicit development is the fact that Yoruba language has to be valued in itself. Besides, the teacher and or the learner must, as a matter of necessity, have inherent interest in the language. Without these ingredients, it is concluded that Yoruba language risks extinction. This is however to make a call to the owners of the language to change their orientation of the language and turn towards developing it.

References

- Alston, P. W. (1986). Quine on meaning. In Hahn L. E. & Schlipp P. A. (Eds.). *The philosophy of Quine*. Illinois: Library of Living Philosophers, Volume XVIII, pp. 49-72.
- Akinrinade, S. et al. (Eds.). (2007). *Rethinking the humanities in Africa*. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Faculty of Arts Publication.

- Chomsky, N. (1971). Methodological preliminaries. In Rosenberg J. F. & Travis C. (Eds.). *Readings in the philosophy of language*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. pp. 324-364.
- Falola, T. (2007). Nationalising Africa, culturalizing the West, and reforming the humanities in Africa. In Akinrinade, et al. (Eds.). *Rethinking the Humanities in Africa*. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Faculty of Arts Publication. pp. 25-44.
- Hahn, L. E. & Schlipp, P. A. (Eds.). (1986). *The philosophy of Quine*. Illinois: Library of Living Philosophers, Volume XVIII.
- Jibril, M. (2007). New directions in African linguistics. In Akinrinade, et al. (Eds.). *Rethinking the humanities in Africa*. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Faculty of Arts Publication. pp. 281-290.
- Kant, I. (1963). *Critique of pure reason*. (Translation by Norman Kemp Smith). London: Macmillan and Company Limited.
- Katz, J. J. (1971). Mentalism in language. In Rosenberg J. F. & Travis C. (Eds.). *Readings in the philosophy of language*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall. pp 365-378.
- Oloruntimehin, O. (2007). Rethinking humanities scholarship in Africa. In Akinrinade, et al. (Eds.). *Rethinking the Humanities in Africa*. Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Faculty of Arts Publication. pp 3-24.
- Oyetade, A. B. (2006). Language and nationalism: The role of Yoruba language in the vision, mission and objectives of the Yoruba Parapo – The Yoruba Solidarity Group. In Akinrinade, et al. (Eds.). *The humanities, nationalism and democracy*, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Faculty of Arts Publication. pp. 391- 404.
- Putnam, H. (1986). Meaning holism. In Hahn L. E. & Schlipp P. A. (Eds.). *The philosophy of Quine*. Illinois: Library of Living Philosophers, Volume XVIII. pp 405-426.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1990). *Pursuit of truth*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Quine, W. V. O. (1960). *Word and object*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Rosenberg, J. F. & Travis, C. (1971). *Readings in the philosophy of language*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Viriri, A. (2010). African cosmology and the duality of western hegemony: The search for an African identity. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 3, (6) pp. 27-42.

(www.learnyoruba.com), and (www.abeokuta.org/yoruba.htm), assessed on March 27, 2011

Oyelakin, Richard Taye
Department of Philosophy, Obafemi Awolowo University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria
E-mail – richyman2009@yahoo.com