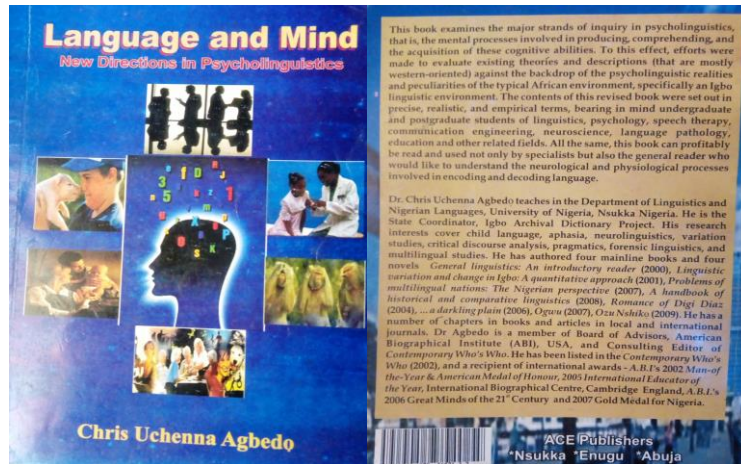


A REVIEW OF AGBEDO'S *LANGUAGE AND MIND: NEW DIRECTIONS IN PSYCHOLINGUISTICS*



Front cover

Back cover

Title: *Language and mind: New directions in psycholinguistics*

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Textual exploration

Language and Mind is a textbook on psycholinguistics, one of its kind in the history of psycholinguistic study in Nigeria in the sense that it is the first indigenous text on psycholinguistics. The text is an introductory text for students who offer psycholinguistics

textbook in different tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The book has eight chapters. Each chapter has subheadings.

The first chapter, 'Psycholinguistics: A conceptual explication' explores the term psycholinguistics, its general scope, historical development of psycholinguistics, the nature of psycholinguistics, language as nature or nurture and psychology of language. This chapter agrees that psycholinguistics is a hybrid of two separate disciplines: psychology and language. Psycholinguistics studies the interrelationship that exists among language, mind and environment. The scope of psycholinguistics as enumerated by the author include: storage, comprehension, production and acquisition of language in any medium i.e. spoken, written, signed, and tactile. As it concerns the historical development of psycholinguistics, the text observes that psycholinguistics is traced to the pioneering work of the German philosopher, Dietrich Tiedemann in 1787 who focused on the development of his son including observations about his language behaviour. From there, other attempts to study language in relation to the mind were attempted. The author reveals that the 1970 and 1980 periods witnessed a general shift within psycholinguistics from models, which take grammar as their starting-point towards more psychologically based models. Concerning the nature-nurture controversy, the author brings forward the operant conditioning argument of B. F. Skinner and its rebuttal by Chomsky. The author observes that the answer to the question of whether language is a matter of nature or nurture seems to lie somewhere between the two in the sense that the role of the mind and that of the environment cannot be overemphasised in meaning construction. The last subheading in chapter one explores the meaning of psychology of language, which according to him is concerned with the complex skills of speaking and listening and their acquisition.

The second chapter of the text 'Theoretical foundations' examines the different disciplines that contribute to the theories in psycholinguistics. One of such disciplines is linguistics, which is further divided into structural and transformational generative linguistics. Structural linguistics began with Ferdinand de Saussure's *Cours de linguistique generale* where he posits that the study of language occurs at three levels, sound, form and structure, and meaning. On the other hand, Chomsky's transformational generative linguistics reorientated linguistics from a taxonomic passion to a science more disposed to theory construction and rationalism. Another discipline that forms the theoretical foundations of psycholinguistics is

psychology with emphasis on behavioural psychology and cognitive psychology. Under behavioural psychology, B. F. Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* stands out. Skinner's functional analysis approach posits that man acquires language the same way he acquires other behaviour. Following criticisms against Skinner's approach, Osgood postulated the mediational approach, which deals with stimulus-response relations by positing internal intermediate processes, functions or steps, occurring within the organism itself. Following Chomsky's criticism of Skinner's approach, a cognitive approach to the study of human mind was birthed. Chomsky argues that man is not born *tabula rasa* rather he has a language acquisition device (LAD) that enables him to pick up the linguistic forms in his immediate environment.

The third chapter investigates the current methodological issues in psycholinguistic research. According to the author, psycholinguistic research focuses on four main areas of interest: language production, language comprehension, the bilingual lexicon, and deviant language behaviour. Notable research institutes involves Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, the Max Planck Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience, Leipzig, Germany and the CNRS, Aix-en-Provence, France.

Speech comprehension, which is the title of chapter four, discusses the concept of speech comprehension, comprehension process, and the three-fold division of speech comprehension. The author observes that comprehension in a narrower sense implies building meanings from sounds; that is, construing a sequence of sounds. In a broader sense, it refers to the actual utilisation of the interpretations, which the listener built from the sounds. As enumerated in the text, there are two processes of comprehension: construction process where listeners interpret sentences in order to achieve the primary goal of building an underlying representation for such sentences and the utilisation process where listeners are expected to figure out what a sentence was meant to express, but they do not register how the sentence was meant to carry forward the purposes of the speaker. There are three-fold division of comprehension according to Aitchison (1991:336), which include: recognition, parsing, and interpretation. Speech recognition, observes the author, deals with the identification of sounds and words. Parsing, on the other hand, involves the assignment of structure to the various words and analysis of functional relationships between them. Finally, interpretation refers to the recognition of semantic relationships and the

linking up of the utterance with the real word. A fuller explorations of these divisions were done by the author.

Chapter five of the book focuses on speech production. This chapter comprises explications of the theories of speech production, the planning and executing processes in speech production and forms of speech errors. One of such theories or models of speech production as captured in the text is that of Lindsley (1975) who identifies three possible planning strategies: Pre-Predicate Model, Post-Predicate Model, and Semi-Predicate Model. As further explored by the author, the first model 'characterizes a speaker who initiates his utterance as soon as he has completed selection of the subject'. The second model 'characterizes a speaker who delays initiating his utterance until after he has completed selecting the verb as well as the subject'. The third characterizes a speaker who delays initiating his utterance until after he has completed some selection of the verb as well as selection of the subject. Other theories *inter alia* include: Dell's (1986) 'Spreading-Activation Theory', McClelland & Rumelhart's (1981) 'Interactive Activation Model' and Fromkin's (1971) 'Utterance Generator Model'.

More so, the author observes that speech production is not a haphazard venture rather it undergoes series of planning stages: discourse, sentence, constituent, articulatory programme and articulation plans. However, when planning is completed, what is planned in most cases are not properly executed and this results in speech errors such as pauses, which could be silent or filled, slip of the tongue and tip of the tongue. Practical scenarios of speech errors were highlighted in the text.

The sixth chapter of the text is preoccupied with discourse on language acquisition. Here, the author explores the concept of language acquisition, who acquires language, how language is acquired, language and thought, learnability theory and parameter-setting, biological factors in language acquisition, developmental stages of language acquisition, language acquisition in a bilingual situation and the role of cognition and motherese in language acquisition. The author remarks that language acquisition is commonly used to describe the process whereby children become speakers and competent users of their native language or first language. He further observes that it is only normal human beings who grew up in a linguistic environment and exposed to such linguistic environment acquires language. He further explicates his claims by outlining the characteristics of language and different experiments that have been conducted on

chimpanzees on language acquisition. In answering the question, ‘how is language acquired?’ the author explores different opinions on language acquisition with particular emphasis on behaviourism, nativism, Piaget’s theory of learning and semantic-cognitive models. The text also captures the relationship between language and thought. The chapter subsequently discussed the different stages of language acquisition and how children acquire language in a bilingual environment.

In the penultimate chapter, the author x-rays language and brain. At first, the author explains the central nervous system and from there gives a biological explication of the brain. As it concerns the linguistic functions of the brain, the text explores hemispheric specialisation (laterality), lateralisation (Lenneberg’s notion of critical period hypothesis) and localisation. In laterality, the centrality of the notion is that language function is dominant in the left hemisphere of the brain in right-handed persons and vice versa. The notion of critical period is that children can acquire language from the age of 2 to puberty. The claim is that after puberty, language acquisition terminates. In localisation, it is claimed that there is a specific area of the brain that is responsible for a particular linguistic function.

The text closes with a discussion on language disorders where different aphasic conditions are explored. The author remarks that language disorders can be acquired or developmental. The different aphasic conditions discussed in the text are anomia, agrammatism and paragrammatism, paraphasia, Wernickes, Brocas, transcortical motor, transcortical sensory, global, jargonaphasia, neologisms, apraxia, dyslexia, dysarthria, speech automatisms and recurring utterances. The characteristics of these aphasic conditions are highlighted in the text.

Textual evaluation

As observed by G. I. Nwaozuzu in the foreword of the text, the book is characterised by the author’s personal research, views, observations, and the opinions and findings of well-known psycholinguists. The book is unique because it cited local examples, which contributes to the general literature in psycholinguistics. The author through examples drawn from Nigeria has also contributed to the growth of psycholinguistic studies in the country. The book is a gift from the author to all psycholinguists and researchers whose research interests lie in psychology and cognitive linguistics. It is a book everyone should read in order to understand how the brain works in relation language.

