

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Influence of Gender on the Acquisition of Olutachoni Lexicon

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Abstract:

Language acquisition is a complex process which involves several variables such as age, gender, social class, ethnicity among others. These variables have been extensively studied in relation to language learning. The aim of this paper is to investigate if gender has an influence on the acquisition of Olutachoni lexicon in terms of lexical borrowing. Lexical acquisition among children has been manifested through lexical borrowing. Lexical importation and lexical invention are strategies employed under lexical borrowing by the learners during first language acquisition. A total of twelve children, six females and six males aged between 2-7 years participated in the study. Data was collected from children in mixed and single language family set ups. The study adopted the ethnographic approach to collect and record utterances. A contrastive and comparative analysis of the cases of lexical borrowing in relation to the gender of the children was done. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to test the relationship between lexical borrowing and gender and the significant difference between them. The results were presented through frequency tables and diagrams followed with explanations. The findings showed that there was a significant gender difference in the use of lexical borrowing strategies among male and female children. Male children had a tendency to use lexical borrowing language learning strategies more often than female learners.

Keywords: Gender, First language, Lexical borrowing, lexical importation, lexical invention

1. Introduction

Many variables, both internal and external, influence the acquisition of language. These variables can be physical, social, cultural, or a combination of all three. One particularly interesting variable is gender. It is interesting to both sociolinguists and language acquisition specialists because gender affects language development and use. According to Ellis (1994), there is a long tradition of research that has recognized that learners vary enormously in their rate of learning, their approach to learning, and in their actual achievements in relation to gender differences.

When examining the role of gender on the acquisition of language, one must consider that there are numerous ways in which it can affect language use and development. Gender is a variable that can affect language use and acquisition as a result of biological, psychological, or socio-cultural differences. Gender is an important subject variable which may influence the analysis and interpretation of results in a child language acquisition research (Sanchez 2003). Many studies on language acquisition show that there are linguistic variations in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary attributed to gender differences among children (Crawford 1995). Studies conducted by; Korecky-Kroll; Dressler (2007) and Gleason (1994) indicate that girls are usually more advanced in language development than boys. Girls begin to talk earlier; they articulate better and acquire a more extensive vocabulary than boys of the same age. Ellis (1994) studied the acquisition of vocabulary by eighteen children between the ages of one and two. The study showed that all the boys fell in the group with the slower acquisition rate. Ellis 'study proves the girls' superiority in vocabulary growth.

It was reported in a study conducted by Aslan (2009 on "The role of gender in L2 interaction" that males tend to use linguistic devices such as interruptions, directives, and sentence-initial conjunctions. Females, in contrast, tend to rely more heavily upon questions, justifiers, intensive adverbs, personal pronouns and word-initial adverbs. This implies that gender influences learning strategies adopted by either gender where by females and males are observed to employ various strategies in language acquisition. It has been demonstrated in other researches that differences between the genders are not significant in language development. Notable ones include Orwenjo, (2009) and Llach (2009a). Orwenjo (2009) for example, reports that gender does not seem to play any role in the child's process of lexical innovations in *Dholuo*.

Language learning strategies are believed to play a vital role in acquiring a language. The strategies may assist learners in mastering the forms and functions required for reception or production in the target language and thus affect achievement (Hashemi, 2012). In general, language learning strategy (LLS) is specific behavior or an action taken by the learner to facilitate acquisition, retention, retrieval, and performance. These strategies make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations (Oxford 1990).

Gender differences in language learning strategies have been found in many areas of human, social and cognitive development. In language learning strategy research, many studies across different cultures show more frequent strategy use by females than males,

especially the social-based strategies (Oxford, 1995). Existing research shows that motivation (Kaylani, 1996), cultural background (Oxford, 1996), attitudes and beliefs (Oxford 1990) and gender (Kaylani, 1996) are some of the factors which influence the choice of strategies used among students learning a first language. Studies such as that of Larsen-Freeman & Long, (1991) indicate that females show more interest in social activities than males, females are less competitive and more cooperative than males. The same study claims that females are better than males both in second and first language acquisition.

This study considers lexical importation and lexical inventions as communication strategies that are used by both male and female children acquiring *Olutachoni* as their first language. According to Lanstyák's (2006), "Importation" (called lexical importation in the current study) is defined as the direct transference of a lexeme, that is, both meaning and form. Cenoz (2000) defines lexical importation as the transfer of a word from a donor language to a recipient language as a result of contact between the speakers of the two languages. According to Cenoz, this is one of the most common types of interaction between languages. According to this study, lexical importation means introducing source-language (SL) lexical items when using the target language (TL) among children. Many of the outcomes of cross-linguistic influences involve innovations or creations that have no counterparts neither in the source language nor the target language. Some of these innovations may be created out of donor materials; others may be created out of the source language materials, still other creations are blends of the source language and the target language items (Winford 2003). Using Winford's definition of lexical invention, the current study has explored blends of the target language (*Olutachoni*) and the source language (*Olubukusu and Kiswahili*) materials hence called them lexical inventions. According to the current study, lexical invention therefore, is the production of forms in which a free or bound non-target morpheme is bound on a different free or bound target morpheme to form an approximated target language word.

1.1. Theoretical Issues

This study adopted an eclectic approach whereby two theories were used to account for the external and internal factors behind the use of lexical borrowing as a strategy in the acquisition of *Olutachoni* lexicon. The usage-based language acquisition theory by Tomasello (2012) accounts for the external factors that lead to first language acquisition among children. This theory considers the use of lexical borrowing as a result of the linguistic environment of the child. The main tenet of this theory is that the linguistic environment plays a crucial role in language acquisition in early childhood. The family provides the socializing environment and introduces the child not only to the language-in-acquisition, but to preferred language use patterns in the family and in the wider community. Other proponents of this theory include Littlewood (1989) and Lust and Foley (2005). According to them, language is not a mental phenomenon but it is a subset of learned behaviours through the process of habit-formation.

Language is conditioned through association between a stimulus and the following response. The child *imitates* the sounds and patterns which he hears around him. People recognize the child's attempts as being similar to the adult's models and *reinforce* (reward) the sounds through feedback, by approval or some other desirable reaction. In order to obtain more of these rewards, the child *repeats* the sounds and patterns so that they become habits. In this way, the child's verbal behaviour is *conditioned* (or shaped) until the habits coincide with the adult models.

This theory provides the current study with useful insights on the nature and use of lexical borrowing among male and female learners while acquiring the lexicon. Lexical borrowing could be as a result of the children imitating the language behavior of their parents or other people within the linguistic environment. This is meant to enable the child to effectively and meaningfully communicate as she/he moves towards the target language. In this case, language learning is based on modeling, imitation, practice, and reinforcement and as such, language is modified by the environment. Most young children like repetition and imitation (Littlewood (1989). Imitation gives them a sense of assurance and achievement. Therefore, cases of lexical borrowing that children employ when acquiring the *Olutachoni* lexicon provide us with vital insight into the child's level of linguistic knowledge based on gender.

This framework has also provided available tools for an analysis of the sources of the use of lexical borrowing during the acquisition of the *Olutachoni* lexicon. The usage-based language acquisition theory over emphasizes the role of the external factors (environment) in the process of language acquisition and gives little importance to internal (innate) learner strategies. Levelt's theory of speech production by (Dawae 1998; 2001) explain the internal processes involved in the use of lexical borrowing during first language acquisition. Levelt's theory of speech production is a nativist theory based on Chomsky's hypotheses (1965, 1968, and 1975) which assume that the child is equipped with an inborn linguistic knowledge and has an innate understanding of grammar at his or her disposal. In contrast to empirical theories, this approach does not fully regard language acquisition as being stimulus-controlled or external to the child. It views a child as having innate abilities to acquire language.

This theory is used to account for the differences that occur among male and female children by use of different levels of mental activation to determine internal processes that give rise to speech output. The highest level of activation occurs when a language is 'selected' and controls the speech output. The level of activation of a language is controlled by the incorrect or incomplete information attached to the lemma in the target language. Rather than retrieving the missing information from lemmas belonging to other languages, the learner makes a calculated guess based on his/her knowledge of the grammar of the target language rules and produces an approximate lexeme. This is because the learner is confronted with an information gap for a particular lemma in his/her interlanguage and therefore he/she intentionally or unintentionally, retrieves the necessary lexis-morphological information corresponding to the conceptual information but attached to a lemma which belongs to another language. Whether the borrowed word carries traces of interlingual influence or not, it is plausible that the target language and the source language lemmas can be activated by the same conceptual plan, the result being forms that could share lexical, morphological and phonological characteristics from all the languages known to the speaker.

According to this theory, the child becomes a main player in the acquisition process, but the complementary role of the child's gender is not also downplayed. Levelt's theory of speech production was useful to the present study since it is used to account for the different levels of activation that explain incidents of lexical borrowing among boys and girls in the current study. During language acquisition, male and female children do not switch to a particular language on or off but their languages have different levels of activation depending on the way these children are socialized in terms of gender and their cognitive development. When an *Olubukusu* word is selected instead of an *Olutachoni* word during lexical importation, it means that *Olubukusu* language has the highest level of activation and *Olutachoni*, the lowest level of activation and vice versa. The two languages can also be activated at the same time, resulting into cases of lexical invention. The language with the highest level of activation produces the base, and the lowest level language produces the prefix.

1.1.1. The Interaction among the Theories

Linguists often give two theoretically opposing explanations for the acquisition of language: the behaviourist (or empirical) theories, which are based on Skinner's theoretical ideas (Skinner 1957), and the nativist theories, which are founded on the work of Chomsky (1965, 1968, 1975). In the last few decades, however, these two contrary positions have been brought increasingly in line with each other. Recently developed interactionist explanatory approaches take into account both a biological basis as the precondition for language acquisition and other factors such as social environment, socialization and the general learning mechanisms and capacities of the child.

The two theories discussed earlier, the usage-based language acquisition theory by Tomasello (2012), Levelt's theory of speech production (Dawaele 1998; 2001) interact in the present study in the sense that the child's family and social environment exerts a major influence on lexical borrowing among both male and female children during the acquisition of *Olutachoni* as a first language. Nonetheless, it is the linguistic environment which stimulates the cognitive processes of acquisition and provides the material on which they operate. The parent's speech seems particularly well suited to help the child learn the rules, meanings, words, sounds and structure of the target language (Tomasello, 2012). If this kind of input is, indeed, an important factor in the learning process, it may provide reasons for the differences among male and female children in the production of lexical borrowing. The above theories have made it clear that learning a language among male and female learners is dependent on both social and psychological factors.

1.2. Methodology

The study adopted a "time-lag strategy" research design which combines both the longitudinal and the cross-sectional designs. The design put subjects in two cohorts according to their respective levels of development and gender. The two cohorts represented the longitudinal growth of one child at each stage because they were studied at the same time. This enabled the researcher to investigate the acquisition of *Olutachoni* lexicon through lexical borrowing from a developmental perspective.

The study further employed a triangulation approach in which qualitative and quantitative approaches were combined to overcome the limitations involved in using either of the approach separately (Kothari 2003). While identification and description of the nature of lexical borrowing were interpreted using qualitative methods, correlations were based on quantitative measures. Quantitatively, data was subjected to statistical analysis that involved the computation of frequencies and percentages in summary tables followed by an in-depth discussion of the data.

The sample population comprised of twelve children aged between 2-7 years, all living in Bungoma East Sub-County in Kenya at the time of data collection. All the 12 subjects were acquiring *Olutachoni* as their first language. From each gender, six children were chosen; six boys and six girls. The subjects were assumed not to have been exposed to any other language apart from *Olutachoni* (father's native language), *Olubukusu* (mother's native language). Although *Olutachoni* was the language of the entire community, the study did not rule out the existence of other languages like English and Kiswahili. This was because, Kiswahili being both a national and official language, and English the official language, there was a high chance of the children getting exposed to these other languages either at home through their parents or at school through peers, teachers and the media. The age bracket of 2 to 7 years was suitable for the study because the critical period for language acquisition is normally the ages between 2 years and puberty (Brandenburg, 1979). According to Orwenjo (2009), ages between 2 years and puberty characterize the child's linguistic development. The children were divided into two cohorts composed of 6 children each, differentiated in terms of gender and the language family set up. This information is presented in table 1.0 below:

Subjects	Gender	Mother's Native Lang.
S1	M	Olubukusu
S2	F	Olutachoni
S3	M	Olubukusu
S4	F	Olutachoni
S5	M	Olubukusu
S6	F	Olutachoni
S7	M	Olubukusu
S8	F	Olutachoni
S9	M	Olubukusu
S10	F	Olutachoni
S11	M	Olubukusu
S12	F	Olutachoni

Table 1: Gender and the family language

From table 1.0, subjects 1(S1) to Subject 12 (S12) were acquiring *Olutachoni* as their first language (their father's native language). Subjects 2 (S2), 4 (S4), 6 (S6), 8 (S8), 10 (S10) and 12 (S12) have had natural exposure to *Olutachoni* from their fathers, mothers, school and the rest of the linguistic environment. Thus, *Olutachoni* is equally the native language of their mothers. On the contrary, subjects 1 (S1), 3 (S3), 5 (S5), 7 (S7), 9 (S9) and 11 (S11) have been exposed to *Olutachoni* (father's native language) and the language of the environment and *Olubukusu* (mother's native language). It was established that those who are school going were exposed mostly to *Olutachoni* in class and playground. They received formal instruction in *Olutachoni* as per the Kenya's education language policy. The policy stipulates that lower primary children learn their school work in mother tongue. The Sessional paper 14 of 2012 requires teachers to teach children below eight years in the language of the catchment area.

There were three sources of data: audio-video recordings from the interviews, written notes kept by the researcher during the interview and observation schedule. Lanvers (2001) points out that the three data collection methods complement each other and give room for an ethnographic approach of data collection. Orwenjo (2009) acknowledges that the ethnographic approach yields different and complementary types of data such as observations, interviews and recordings across a wide variety of contexts enabling the different types of data to be contextualized, an aspect which the current study borrows.

The process involved observing, listening, audio-recording and taking notes as the children named objects and body parts they had been presented to in their naturalistic environments: their homes. The approach suited the present study due to its flexibility and responsiveness to the unexpected situations that could emerge in the course of data collection. The audio-taped data that formed the basis for analysis consisted of 10-15 minutes of speech recorded in the children's homes every three days over a period of two months. By the end of two months, the researcher had recorded at least two sessions for each child. A total of 50 utterances per child were sampled for analysis giving a total of 600 utterances to be analyzed. At each session, either of the parents, or both parents were present. The researcher tried to minimize the involvement of other people during the sessions in order to capture the contributions which were only beneficial to the study. For the cases of school going subjects (pre-primary), all recordings were done at home. The study relied heavily on the questioning technique of elicitation. Owens (2008) says that children aged 2-6 years are able to produce and respond effectively to questions from adults and peers. In different homes, the researcher pointed at objects, people and parts of the body within the home in the interview schedule and asked (in *Olutachoni*) the respondents to name the objects in *Olutachoni*.

The objects, people and the parts of the body to be named were nouns from five semantic fields: *domestic animals* (dog, cow, hen, goat, sheep, cock, fish, cat, chick and calf), *household appliances and utensils* (cooking stick, water pot, cup, spoon, sufuria, knife, plate, chair, door and house), *people and body parts* (grandmother, mouth, hands, hair, tongue, stomach, ears, head, nose and chest), *foodstuff* (maize, flour, bananas, potatoes, beans, water, egg, vegetables, millet and milk), *Environment and clothing* (walking stick, bird dress, shoes, rope, snake, short-trouser, bicycle, tree and basket). O' Grady (2001) reports that noun-like words make up the single largest class in the child's early vocabulary, with verb-and adjective-like words being the next most frequent category types. In general terms, it can be asserted that children use vocabulary that is related to their familiar environment and vocabulary related to concrete objects (Philips 1993). The items that were not visible within the home environment were elicited mainly under the conditions of a visual elicitation design (Levinger 2006). This technique included visual stimuli which were devised in order to encourage the child to perform a picture naming task in order to identify cases of lexical borrowing. The decision to use visual stimuli was based on previous findings suggesting the technique to be the preferable procedure to elicit speech productions among the young subjects who cannot engage in a coherent conversation. In this task, every test word was matched to a compatible picture that visually described it.

The study employed a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative data presentation and analysis. The qualitative analysis involved the identification and description of instances of lexical borrowing among boys and girls in the study. The researcher with the help of two research assistants marked and identified such incidents from the tape-recorded utterances which were compared with the written notes for accuracy. The data was transcribed, translated into English and categorized into cases of lexical importation and lexical invention as the main strategies of lexical borrowing employed by the children during the acquisition of *Olutachoni* lexicon.

Quantitative analysis was followed by conducting a comparative analysis of lexical importation and lexical invention with reference to the child's gender. This was done by use of frequencies and percentages which were then presented in the form of tables. Each table was followed by a figure for clarity purpose. A brief explanation accompanied each table and figure to make the analysis more user-friendly and easy to understand. Sociolinguistic and cognitive explanations based on the usage based and Levelt's theory of speech production were used to justify some phenomenal features of the words produced by male and female children. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to test the relationship between lexical borrowing and gender and the significant difference between them. The findings were presented in the form of frequency tables, percentages and figures. The findings of both the qualitative and the quantitative analysis were interpreted in the framework of the usage-based theory (Tomasello 2012) and Levelt's speech production (Dawaele 1998; 2001).

1.3. Gender and Lexical Importation

Lexical importation is a language acquisition strategy that entails the speakers' introducing source-language (SL) lexical items when using the target language (TL) in order to fill the lexical gap in the mental lexicon during communication. This section examines the influence of gender on the acquisition of *Olutachoni* lexicon through lexical importation. Aslan (2009), for example, argues that girls are usually more advanced in language development than boys. Girls begin to talk earlier; they articulate better and acquire a more extensive vocabulary than boys of the same age. Studies of verbal ability have shown that girls and women surpass boys and men in verbal fluency, correct language usage, sentence complexity, grammatical structure, spelling, and articulation. Table 1.2 and figure 1.2 below present the results for the present study:

Gender	Cases of Lexical Importation in Mixed Language		Cases of Lexical Importation in Single Language	
	(N)	%	(N)	%
M	67	54.9	27	65.9
F	55	45.1	14	34.1
Total	122	100	41	100

Table 2: The Influence of Gender on Lexical Importation

The results in table 2 above are also graphically presented in figure 1. below for clarity:

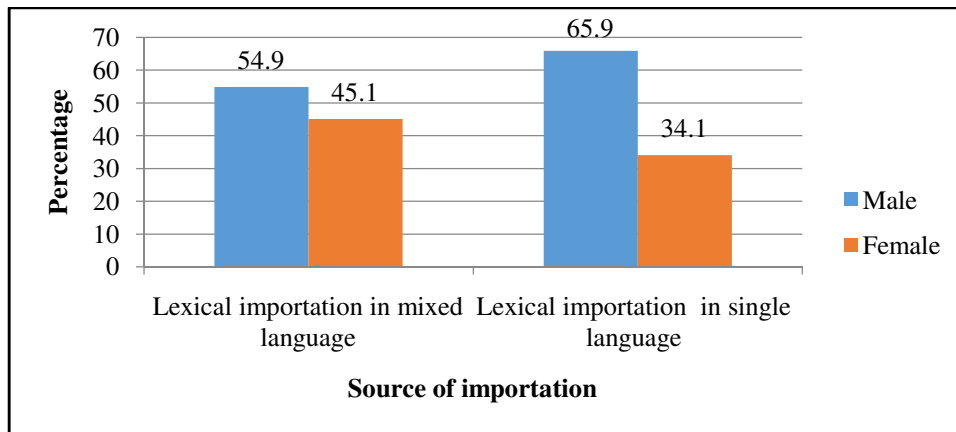


Figure 1: The Influence of Gender on Lexical Importation

From the results above, male subjects from both the mixed language and the single language family set ups tend to import more words 67 (54.9%) and 27 (65.9%) respectively than their female counterparts 55(45.1%) and 14(34.1%) respectively. The above gender differences between females and males in terms of the use of lexical importation in acquisition of the lexicon can be explained basing on the children’s linguistic background and the socialization of children in the *Tachoni* community. The *Tachoni* child who is born and brought up in the remote rural area such as the ones studied here is socialized to talk less in the presence of adults, and more so, strangers but to talk freely among peers and grandparents (Wekesa 2014).

The above kind of socialization is also differentiated along gender lines where girls are expected to be more reserved in terms of speech compared to boys. For this reason, the rate of lexical importation for girls was generally lower than that of boys. Boys imported words slightly more than the girls because they responded to naming questions more than the girls who sometimes remained silent hence reducing their cases of lexical importation. These gender differences are sociologically and culturally significant. For instance, Ellis (1994: 206-207) says “In stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women.” In this study therefore, cases of lexical importation can be said to be the nonstandard forms.

These results are also in line with other studies conducted by Cameron (1995) and Block (2002). According to Cameron’s (1995:33) deficit model, females are seen as disadvantaged speakers and communicators due to their upbringing and socialization as females. In other related studies that examined the conversational behavior of male and female second language learners, Block (2002) found that men dominated the conversation whereby they received more speaking practice than women in such interactions. However, they concluded that men use the opportunities to interact to produce more output, whereas women use it to obtain more input.

Further analysis involved testing the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the gender of the children and the production of lexical importation. Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient was used to establish the relationship and to test the significance of the relationship. Table 3 gives the Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis on the relationship between gender and lexical importation.

		Gender of the Respondents	Lexical Importation
Gender of the respondents	Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient	1	-.771
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015*
	N	12	9
Lexical Importation	Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient	-.771	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015*	
	N	9	9

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3: Correlations between Gender and Lexical importation

The results reveal that there is a very strong (negative) correlation (-.771) between the two variables; gender of the child and the production of lexical importation. This relationship was found to be significant at 0.05 significance level. Therefore, the study

hypothesis that there is a relationship between the gender of the child and the production of lexical importation was accepted. Male respondents have high lexical importation statistics than female respondents.

These results are in line with other studies conducted earlier on gender differences on early language acquisition. Notable ones include those of Dressler (2007); Gleason (1994); Makeni (2007) and Karmiloff-Smith (2002). Studies conducted by Dressler (2007) and Gleason (1994) indicate that girls are usually more advanced in language development than boys. Girls begin to talk earlier; they articulate better and acquire a more extensive vocabulary than boys of the same age. Studies of verbal ability by Karmiloff-Smith (2002) have shown that girls and women surpass boys and men in verbal fluency, correct language usage, sentence complexity, grammatical structure, spelling, and articulation. Dressler (2007) claims that female children are usually quicker than male children to obtain language. Everything from babbling to the timing of first words and speed of vocabulary growth, girls seem to be more ahead than boys. All these studies prove that there is a significant relationship between the gender of the child and language development a hypothesis that is also proved in the present study.

1.4. Gender and Lexical Invention

The study also sought to establish the influence of gender on lexical invention and the correlation between the two variables. The findings are presented in table 4 and figure 2 below:

Gender	Lexical invention in mixed language (N)	%	Lexical invention single language (N)	%
M	40	53.3	18	45.0
F	35	46.7	22	55.0
Total	75	100	40	100

Table 4: The Effect of Gender on Lexical Invention

The results in table 4 are also presented in figure 2 below:

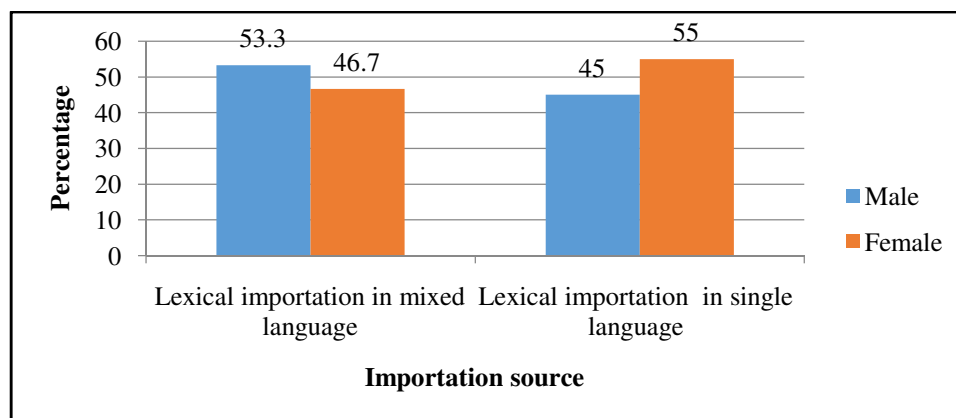


Figure 2: The Effect of Gender on Lexical Invention

Table 4 and figure 2 above indicate that the extent of the production of lexical invention for boys, 40 (53.3%) surpasses that of girls 35, (46.7%) in the mixed language family set up. This could be attributed to the fact, as mentioned earlier, that girls in the *Tachoni* culture right from birth are socialized to talk less compared to boys. Due to this reason, girls tend to produce few lexical inventions compared to boys because they are socialized to talk less. During data elicitation, it was even observed that girls would remain silent in some cases when asked to name an object. Girls from the single language family set up on the contrary, produce slightly more cases of lexical invention 22 (55.0%) compared to boys who produce 18 (45.0%). The explanation to this could be attributed to the cognitive development of language among children where by females are said to be faster learners than males.

There are several studies on first language acquisition which have shown girls to be better learners than boys because they use more language learning strategies (Dressler 2007; Lanvers 2001; Karmiloff-Smith 2002). This means that by virtue of the girls using more lexical invention, it means that they are successfully progressing faster than the boys towards the acquisition of the target words. For example, Dressler (2007) concluded that females reported greater use of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies than their male counterparts. They offered many possible biological and sociocultural reasons for gender differences in language learning. Extensive research in the field allows us to state, however, that even though in some aspects of language acquisition boys might be considered to lag behind or experience more difficulties than girls, they reach the same level of linguistic competence as girls.

Further analysis involved testing the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between the gender of the children and the production of lexical invention. Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient analysis was used to establish the relationship and to test the significance of the relationship. Table 5 gives a summary of the results:

		Gender of the Respondents	Lexical Invention
Gender of the respondents	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient	1	-.825
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001**
	N	12	12
Lexical Invention	Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient	-.825	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001**	
	N	12	12

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5: Correlations between Gender and Lexical Invention

The negative correlation -.825 indicates a strong negative relationship that exists between the gender of the respondents and the production of lexical invention. This was found to be significant at 0.05 significant level. This implies that male and female children employ the strategy of lexical invention at different rates. Thus, the significance of 0.05 indicates that there exists a significant correlation between the gender of the children and the production of lexical invention. This implies that the declarative hypothesis for the study is accepted. Studies on child language acquisition, as has been mentioned earlier, have given varied degrees of the relationship between the gender of the child and the acquisition of language. The studies are in unanimous agreement that language development in children is differentiated along gender lines.

For example, a study conducted by Ellis (1994) on the acquisition of vocabulary by eighteen children between the ages of one and two proves girls' superiority in vocabulary growth. Her study showed that all the boys fell in the group with the slower acquisition rate. The girls would have a vocabulary of fifty words at eighteen months old but the boys at twenty-two months.

A study conducted by Fontecha (2010) found out that boys and girls differ in elicited production of vocabulary. From these results, it was believed that gender differences are determined by two main aspects: type of task and social nurture. Concerning the type of task, it was argued that different tasks require different mental processes. Research conducted by (Halpern and Wright, 1996) on mental processes underlying cognitive tasks revealed that girls are superior to boys in performing several mental processes. In this sense, it was concluded that only when learners have to face different cognitive tasks do gender differences appear.

1.5. Conclusion

The study revealed that language learning strategies play a role in first language acquisition among both male and female learners. From the study findings, both male and female children acquiring *Olutachoni* as a first language engage in two lexical borrowing strategies: lexical importation and lexical invention in striving to fill the lexical gap within their mental lexicon. This occurs when they fail to retrieve the appropriate word during language acquisition. Learners are capable of modifying the production of sounds and words so that their pronunciation comes closer to the target language norms of their respective gender. The modification in the current study however, does not result in the attainment of target language norms, but rather approximations that are not fully native-like. This reveals that the ability to acquire language through lexical borrowing is a universal phenomenon among all children regardless of their gender.

The results also reveal that males have significantly higher scores for cases of lexical importation and lexical invention than females. These findings suggest that although both male and female learners use the two strategy categories, but male learners tend to use these strategies more than female learners. From the study, male children from the mixed language homes produce more cases of lexical importation (54.9%) and lexical invention (65.9%) than their female counterparts who produce (45.1%) and (34.1%) respectively. This is contrary to the single language family set up where girls display higher rates of lexical invention (55.0%) compared to boys (45.0%). The difference in the production of lexical borrowing between the male and the female genders arise from the different ways in which males and females are socialized within the *Tachoni* community. Biological and social basis are preconditions for language acquisition differences along gender lines.

This study also attempted to investigate whether there was any significant difference between male and female learners in their language learning strategies or not. Despite the limited scope of the study (*Olutachoni* first language speakers), it seems that male and female learners differ in the language learning strategies. This means that there is a significant correlation between the gender of the children and the production of lexical importation and lexical invention. The findings of this study were consistent with former studies such as Oxford (1995) in which female learners tended to use social/affective strategy more frequently than male learners. Oxford concluded that the effect of the use of learning strategies that are attributed to gender difference may originate from biological and socialization related causes.

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