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SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT ON TEXT PROCESSING

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Abstract
High level academic attainment in the University mainly depends on the existing pre-entry attributes including the mastery of some fundamental language skills such as text processing. Text processing is a complex and meaningful socio-cultural, cognitive and linguistic process in which processors simultaneously use their socio-linguistic context to construct meaning with text. An in depth study of English as a second language (ESL) text processing must take into consideration socio-economic background variables that impact on students' academic achievement in the university. This study looked at text processing proficiency from the sociology of language viewpoint. It started by describing the key concepts and sub-concepts of Sociology of Language and Text Processing. Five research questions (hypothesis) were stated among them were to ascertain to what extent socio-economic background (SEB) of first year students in the University in Enugu State affect their text processing, to identify the SEB variables that affect their text processing and which of the variables exerts the greatest influence on text processing of these students. The research adopted survey design which is quantitative based. The population for this research consists of all the first year students in the four major universities in Enugu State. The sample size for the study comprised four hundred and ninety eight (498) students from the major universities in the study area. Primary data for the study were collected, using text passages selected from familiar and unfamiliar social contexts, using multiple-choice questions. The data were analyzed using simple percentage and Z-test analysis. The work revealed that the level of parents' education, income, home environment, language of the home, social class and attitudes were prevailing socio-economic variables that exerted very high influence on the first year students' text processing in the selected universities in Enugu State. The study concluded that economic and social background of parents has important influences on students' text processing.
Keywords: ***Language, text processing, socio-economic variables, social class, students.***

INTRODUCTION

Current text processing research in general shows that several key factors affect students' personal and cognitive variables at primary and secondary levels which impact on their achievement level of text processing in the University. Text processing during primary and secondary school focuses on decoding and fluency which require both phonemic awareness and phonics skills. This involves mainly the use of bottom up or top down models of text processing. The use of any or both of these models at the university limits the students from attaining the required level of proficiency needed to process texts.

These students struggle to study and process numerous texts before them. Many of these students have low working memory capacities which negatively affect text processing and so

are more or less subsumed in the class. These students struggle to process texts and so do not exhibit high level achievement in their university program. They avoid processing numerous texts (before them) in their chosen fields of study because some important variables are neglected in their early training. The negative impacts of this situation include high failure rate in examinations, increase in students' dropout rate, and production of half-baked graduates with its attendant negative impact on the country socially, economically and politically. The above negative impacts of poor text processing achievements by first year students in the University calls for urgent need to high light and clarify the nature of socio-economic backgrounds' factors militating against viable text processing performances for first year students in the university in the study area.

Therefore, the researcher deems it necessary to look into other factors outside the language skill itself that prevent these students from being competent in this all important language skill. There is an urgent need to give adequate attention to this area in order to find out why students still lack deep approach to text processing. What is require is a paradigm shift from the attention to other factors in the language to factors outside the language skill that exert tremendous influence on the mastery of the text processing. This is because despite all the attention given to ESL text processing below the university level, students come into the university without being proficient in this area. Poor educational background and the need to ascertain the nature of socio-economic variables that brought about students' poor performance in text processing necessitates was the focal point of the research.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sociolinguistic theory is concern with language as used for communication among different social groups in various social settings. It has strong bearing with culture and sociology through the study of language and the role language plays in the formation of social groups and institutions. Sociolinguistics was pioneered by Basil Bernstein in the United Kingdom and William Labov and their theories formed the theoretical base for this work. Basil Bernstein Theory of Language Codes brought to light the concepts of 'Restricted and Elaborated codes'. This theory studied the relationships between social class, family and the reproduction of meaning systems. His work in this area was very popular because of its anchor on social class differences in language. He differentiated between the restricted code of the working class and the elaborated code of the middle class. The theorist stated that a restricted code is particularistic with reference to meaning and to the social structure which controls its inception. It is universalistic as its use depends on the characteristics of form of social relationship which can arise at any point in the social structure. An elaborated code is universalistic with reference to its meaning and potentially universalistic reference to the social structure which controls its inception'' (Bernstein 1973, p.61).

The language codes can be used in many ways in various social settings. Bernstein sees the restricted code as the type of language used by low socio- economic background families and elaborated code is used by middle and high socio-economic background families. The language code a student is exposed to in the environment determines the impact home variables bear on the school variables. Bernstein says that ''low socio-economic background child attaches much significance to an aspect of language different from that required by the learning situation and is responsible for his resistance to extensions of vocabulary, the manipulation of words and the construction of ordered sentences''((Bernstein 1973, P.25). This is because the student has previously learned to make ''personal qualifications through expressive symbolism, lacks the desire to acquire new words or order the existing vocabulary in a way which expresses this qualification'' (Bernstein 1973, p.26). The reverse, according to this

theory, is the case with students from middle or high socio-economic background because ‘‘the child in the middle class and assertive levels is socialized within a formally articulated structure.

The future is conceived of in direct relation to the educational life of the child. The child grows up in an ordered, rational structure in which his total experience is organized from an early age’’ (Bernstein 1973, p.19). Any attempt to adjust and switch codes, that is, from the restricted code of the home to the elaborated code of the school in order to change the order of communication, ‘‘creates critical problems for the working class child as it is an attempt to change his basic system of perception, fundamentally the very means by which he has been socialized’’ (Bernstein 1973, p.26). Language is used not only to communicate information but also to establish position in social relationships within the family, at school, work and within the class structure of our society. These various ways of using language is known as codes. Elaborated codes are relatively context free. They enable language users to call on universalistic meanings, to be reflexive and thus to manipulate ideas. Restricted codes limit language users to their immediate, specific context (Ginsborg 2006, p.15).

William Labov, an American linguist, brought in the quantitative study of Language Variation and Change. Labov’s Difference Hypothesis aimed at the explanation of all linguistic variations caused by the involvement of social variables. The study highlighted the relevance of social determinants of linguistic variations and their correlations with the social structure. This theory introduced a social approach to language through his sociolinguistic model in which the linguistic theorization was linked with the society. The theory states that variation is inherent to linguistic structure. The way a language is spoken and written differs across individuals and situations encountered by the individual. These differences are not only normal but crucial to a language’s functioning. This is because variation is seen as being highly structured between language forms and social categories like socio-economic backgrounds. These linguists and their two linguistic ideologies, Bernstein’s ‘Language code theory’ and Labov’s ‘Variability Concept’, culminated into innovative methodological tools, theoretical and practical insights in language studies. Their works encouraged many scholars to study language with new perspectives. These two theorists move for a stronger empirical way of studying language. They question the validity of analyses based on the intuitions of language owners instead of observing naturally produced speech.

Hence, patterns of co-variation between linguistic forms and social constructs are clearly revealed through statistical analysis. This input by Bernstein and Labov made different linguists to see language studies from different perspectives. Their stand is at variance with theoretical linguists who Labov says ‘‘emphasized the role of language–internal structural factors in bringing change but variationist approach hinges on speakers’ attitudes and social attributes…speech community not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements but by participation in a shared set of norms’’(Labov 1972:p.120). Changes in proficiency in language typically begin as indicators when the innovative usage comes to be adopted by certain groups of speakers. As changes become more firmly embedded in the community, it attracts some degree of social awareness and people vary their use of it across styles making it a marker. In some cases, the level of awareness rises and the innovative forms become objects of explicit stigma or prestige as stereotypes (Labov 1972: p.178). Gumperz sees language from the social point of view as “an attempt to find correlations between social structure and linguistic structure and to observe any change that occurs”(Gumperz 1971: p.2). Holmes explains that it is “the relationship between language and society”(Holmes 1992: p.3).

There is a strong link between language and social sciences. Language is seen as a social and cultural phenomenon" (Trudgill 2000: p. 4). There is a strong debate among linguists as a result of how to view and study language. Some linguists have the view that it should be studied as a closed system while others have the opinion that it should be studied as an open system. Chomsky, a theoretical linguist, perceives language as a closed system that should be studied for its own sake. He is of the opinion that emphasis should be on studying the underlying structure of the linguistic system and to devise a theory of grammar.

Therefore, differences between speakers have to be ignored. Chomsky states that "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener in a completely homogeneous speech community who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest and errors"(Chomsky 1965: p. 9). Theoretical linguists are aware of the relationship between language and society but ignore it to have a deeper insight into the language system. Mehrdad, contrary to the theoretical approach to language studies which seek for categorical rules to explain the underlying principles in language, claims that language varies systematically in line with social characteristics of the students (Mehrdad 2013, Cousdiline and Zappala, 2002).

Hudson, on his own part, approaches language as an open system interacting with a variety of factors. He is of the view that "since speech is a social behaviour, to study it without reference to society would be like studying courtship behaviour without relating the behaviour of one partner to that of another"(Hudson 1996: p.10). To these linguists, there is a close link between language and society. It is not possible to separate language from society and so it should be studied in the cultural context. The users of language come from different social classes. Their language use is influenced by the social norms and cultural patterns in their environments. The ethnography of communication takes language first primarily as a socially situated cultural form while recognizing the necessity to analyze the code itself and the cognitive processes of its speakers and hearers. The function of language in society is to build and sustain meaningful relationships among people. When we meet people for the first time in a social context, our first reaction often includes speculation, on the basis of their spoken language about where they come from and what social class they belong to. Such speculation leads one to form a fuller image and understanding of people which may or may not be accurate (Chaika, 1989).

Method

This investigation was carried out to ascertain the influence of socio-economic background on the English as a second language text processing potentials of first year students in four universities in Enugu State, Nigeria: University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu (ESUT), Caritas University, Amorji-Nike and Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuomu-Nike (GO). In total, 498 first year undergraduates in the four universities were the participants. Two different groups of passages were used for this study. The two sets of passages were taken from texts with familiar and unfamiliar cultural backgrounds. The passages were selected based on two considerations: the degree of difficulty and the degree of relevance to the research study.

A multiple-choice processing test consists of 20 items were given to the students to ascertain their text processing abilities and check overall assimilation of the content of the passages. A questionnaire was also used on the participants to test the home, students and school variables that affect text processing. The researcher aimed at 498 responses for the questionnaire and generated text samples each. The participants were asked to fill in questionnaires about their demographics and other questions on their home, personal and school constructs.

The statistical techniques used in interpreting the data are simple percentage and Z –Test tools. Simple percentage analysis was the preliminary analysis of compilation of percentage to measure the ratio of the exhibition of particular features by the samples. The Z – test of the hypothesis formulated was based on the evidence obtained through questionnaire. Hypothesis was either accepted for the time being or rejected as untenable. The Z–Test measured the difference between the expected and observed frequencies. It was used to compare the frequency observed in a sample with expected frequency distribution based on some theoretical methods.

Z-T Formula: $P - \pi$

$\overline{Z(\alpha)/2} = \sqrt{(\pi\underline{(1-\pi)}}$

π While $P = x/\pi$

$Z(\alpha)/2$ = the critical 1 region 1.96 p = sample proportion

π = 0.5 (population proportion) x = Number of favourable outcome n = Total number of responses $(\alpha)/2$ = 0.025 (for one tail test at Z table)

α = Alpha = 5% = level of significance

$(\alpha)/2$ = 5%/100/2 = 0.05/2 = 0.025 (for one tail test at Z table) Z = needed value

Decision Rule: The respondents that agreed on the item up to 50% and above were accepted. Also, the respondent that did not agree were considered rejected and was not accepted.

Hypothesis: If the computed Z test is ≥ than the value of Z, we reject the hypothesis and if the computed Z test is ≤ than the value observed, it will not be rejected (Iketaku: 194-8).

RESULT

Both the Null or H_O and Alternate or H_A statistical hypothesis were highlighted.

$$Z = \frac{p-\pi}{\sqrt{\frac{1-\pi}{n}\left(\quad\right)}}$$

while P = x = Number of favourable outcome or number of Yes

n = Total number of respondents
π = Population proportion
$Z\propto/z\propto$ = Table of Z
$\propto$ = Level of significant or 5%

The law of Z-test states: reject H_O or Null hypothesis and accept H_A or Alternate Hypothesis if Z calculated is greater than Z from the table (see appendix VII) (i.e. $Z \leq - Z\propto/2$ or $Z \geq Z\propto/2$).

Hypothesis One H_O**:** The students' socio-economic background (SEB) does not have any effect on text processing achievement. **H_A:** The students' socio-economic background (SEB) has effect on text processing achievement. Minor question 1 was used for the analysis.

Table 1: Effects of Socio-economic Background on Respondents' Text Processing

	Effects on Respondents	**Responses**	**Proportion of Responses**	**Population Proportion**	**Z-text**	
					Table	**Calculated**
Socio-economic Background	Positive	351	0.783482	0.5000	1.96	7.8249
	Negative	97	0.216518			
	Total (n)	448	1			

Therefore Hypothesis 1 in Table 1 was derived thus: $P = \frac{351}{448} = 0.783482$

$$Z = \frac{0.783482 - 0.5000}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5(-0.5)}{448}}} = \frac{0.28342}{\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{448}}} = \frac{0.283482}{\sqrt{0.0005580357}} = \frac{0.283482}{\sqrt{0.0.36227792}} = 7.8249$$

Here the Z calculated is greater than Z from the table. The Z values (table) are set at a significant level of 5% (i.e.$\propto$). Table 1 showed the Z-test result for the respondents in order to determine if there was a difference in effects of socio-economic background on their text processing. The Z score of 7.8249 was used for assessing the impacts at the university level. Since the Z calculated ($7.82 \geq 1.96$) is greater than Z from the table (1.96) that is ($7.82 \geq 1.96$), we therefore, reject the null hypothesis (Ho) which says: The students' socio-economic background (SEB) does not have any effect on text processing. We then accept the alternate hypothesis (H_A) which says: The students' socio-economic backgrounds (SEB) have effect on text processing achievement.

Hypothesis Two H_O: There is no variable that exerts the highest influence on first year university students' text processing. H_A: There is a variable that exerts the greatest influence on the students' text processing. Minor questions 32-35 were used to elicit data from the respondents on their awareness on different impacts the three variables (home, school and student) could have on their text processing output (see appendix III questions 32 - 35). The summary of the responses were presented in Table 2a below. For proper analysis of this H_2, the responses were re-coded 'Positive' for 'Yes' and 'Negative' for 'No'.

Table 2a: Socio-economic Background Variables and Awareness of Different Levels of Impact

	Awareness	Responses	Proportion of Responses	Population Proportion	Z-text	
					Table	Calculated
SEB Variables	Positive	1291	0.720424	0.5000	1.96	18.66
	Negative	501	0.279576			
	Total (n)	1792	1			

Therefore Table 2a was derived thus: Hypothesis 2: P = 1291 = 0.720424
1792

$$Z = \frac{0.720424 - 0.5000}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5(1-0.5)}{1792}}} = \frac{0.220424}{\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{1792}}} = \frac{0.220424}{\sqrt{0.001395089}} = \frac{0.220424}{0.0118113885} = 18.66$$

From Table 2a, the Z calculated is greater than the Z from the table, that is, $18.66 \geq 1.96$. We therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_O) that says: There is no variable that exerts the highest influence on text processing. We then accept the alternate hypothesis (H_A) that says: There is a variable that exerts the highest influence on text processing. This strongly agreed with the respondents' choice made in the data presented in Table 2b below:

Table 2b: SEB Variable and Degree of Impact

SEB Variable	Degree of Impact	Responses	Proportion of Responses	Population Proportion/ Mean
Home	Highest	294	0.65625	0.5000
School	Higher	98	0.21875	
Student	High	56	0.125	
	Total (n)	448	1	

Source: Field work

From the analysis, it was apparent that 294 of the respondents agreed that 'Home' exerted the highest influence on their text processing. 98 respondents said it was 'school' and 56 respondents said it was 'student's interest.' The result is in agreement with the result of research question 3 where analysis revealed that 'Home' exerted the highest influenced on the students' text processing.

Hypothesis 3 H_O: There is no relationship between students' socio-economic background and text processing achievement. H_A: There is a relationship between students' socio-economic background and text processing. Minor question 31 was used to elicit data for the analysis

Table 3: Relationship between Students' SEB and Text Processing.

	Relationship	**Response (x)**	**Proportional of Responses**	**Population /Proportion Mean**	**Z Table**	**Text Calculated**
SEB and Text processing	Positive	247	0.55139286			
	Negative	201	0.44866074			
	Total (n)	448	1	0.5000	1.96	2.173

Source: Field Work

From Table 3 Hypothesis 3 was derived thus: $P = \frac{247}{448} = 0.551339$

$$Z = \frac{0.55139 - 0.5000}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5(1-0.5)}{448}}} = \frac{0.051339}{\sqrt{0.0005580357}} = \frac{0.051339}{0.0236227792} = 2.173$$

Here the Z calculated is greater than the Z from the table, that is, $2.173 \geq 1.96$. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_O) that says: There is no relationship between students' socio-economic background and text processing achievement. We then accept the Alternate Hypothesis that says: There is a relationship between students' socio-economic background and text processing achievement.

Hypothesis 4 H_O: The relative influence of the school on the student does not affect text processing ability. H_A: The relative influence of the school on the student affects text processing ability. A lot of minor questions in the instrument were used to elicit data to test this hypothesis (see Appendix (III) questions 11 and 13-18). The summary of the data were presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: School and Students' Text Processing Ability

	Types of Responses	Number of Responses	Proportion of Responses	Population proportion/ Mean	Z-text	
					Table	Calculated
School and students' text processing ability	Positive	1780	0.56702041	0.5000	1.96	7.57
	Negative	1356	0.43239759			
	Total(n)	3136	1			

Source: Field Work

From Table 4 Hypothesis 4 was derived thus: $P = \frac{1780}{3136} = 0.567602$

$$Z = \frac{0.056702041 - 0.5000}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5(1-0.5)}{3136}}} = \frac{0.067602}{\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{3136}}} = \frac{0.067602}{\sqrt{0.00079719}} = \frac{0.067602}{0.0089285} = 7.57$$

From the above analysis, the Z calculated is greater than the Z from the table, that is, $7.57 \geq 1.96$. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_O) which says: The relative influence of the school on the students does not affect text processing ability. We them accept the alternate hypothesis (H_A) which says: The relative influence of the school on the student affect text processing ability.

Hypothesis 5 H_O: The income and educational background of the parents does not have any effect on students' text processing achievement. H_A: The income and educational background of the parents have effect on students' text processing. Minor questions 2-12 were used to elicit data to test the above hypothesis (see Appendix III for questions 2-12). After careful analysis of the respondents' responses, a summary was presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Income and Educational Background of Parents and Text Processing Achievement

Parents' Income/Educational Background	**Types of Responses**	**Number of Responses**	**Proportion of Responses**	**Population Proportion Mean**	**Z – test**	
					Table	**Calculated**
	Positive	2389	0.592509921	0.5000	1.96	11.75
	Negative	1643	0.407490079			
	Total (n)	4032	1			

Source: Field Work

Therefore Hypothesis 5 in Table 5 was derived thus: $P = \frac{2389}{4032} = 0.59251$

$$Z = \frac{0.59251 - 0.5000}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5\,(1-0.5)}{4032}}} = \frac{0.09251}{\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{4032}}} = \frac{0.09251}{\sqrt{0.0000620039}} = \frac{0.09251}{0.00787425} = 11.75$$

Analysis of the above Table 5 showed that the Z calculated was greater than the Z from the statistical table, that is, $11.75 \geq 1.96$. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_O) which says: The income and educational background of the parents does not have any effect on students' text processing achievement. We then accept alternate hypothesis (H_A) which says: The income and educational background of the parents have effect on students' text processing achievement.

Hypothesis 6 H_O: Students' motivation and interest does not affect text processing ability. H_A: Students' motivation and interest affect text processing ability. To be able to get unbiased data to test the above hypothesis, minor questions 19-30 were used (see Appendix III for questions 19-30). Thorough study and analysis of data obtained were made. A summary of the result was presented in Table 6 below:

Table 6: Students' Motivation and Interest on Text Processing

	Types of Responses	Number of Responses	Proportion of Responses	Population proportion / Mean	Z – test	
					Table	Calculated
Interest and Motivation	Positive	3590	0.655588	0.5000	1.96	23
	Negative	1886	0.344412			
	Total (n)	5476	1			

Source: Field Work

Therefore Hypothesis 6 in Table 6 was derived thus: $P = \frac{3590}{5476} = 0.655588$

$P = \frac{3590}{5476} = 0.655588$

$$Z = \frac{0.65558 - 0.5000}{\sqrt{\frac{0.5\,(1-05)}{5476}}} = 0.155588 = \frac{0.155588}{\sqrt{\frac{0.25}{5276}}} = \frac{0.155588}{\sqrt{0.000045654}} = \frac{0.155588}{0.006756774} = 23$$

Analysis of Table 6 above showed that the Z-calculated was greater than the Z from the statistical table, that is, $23 \geq 1.96$l. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis (H_O) which says: Students' motivation and interest do not affect text processing ability. We then accept the alternate hypothesis (H_A) which says: Students' motivation and interest affect text processing ability. This agrees with the simple percentage result in table.

CONCLUSION

One of the major socio-economic variables is 'home' which is made up of minor variables: educational level of parents, income disposition of parents, and location of the family, general home environment, language of the home, family size/type and parents' interest. All these minor

variables are contributory factors to the level of text processing performance by the first year students in the university in Enugu State.

Even though many of the students have parents whose educational qualifications were

university graduates and post university graduate levels, the language of the home remains the mother tongue (L_1) which means that these students were not exposed simultaneously to their native languages and English language that are very important in early mastery of text processing.

A reasonable number of the students came from a type of parent-homes where the duty of providing sound early and consistent text processing foundations were difficult due to financial stress. Most of the parents lacked interest in text processing and this indirectly affected their children's interest in text processing at the present academic level. First year students in the university in Enugu State lacked the requisite interest needed for advanced text processing. There is an association between family environments and text processing proficiency. The level of the influence of general home environment on text processing at the university level is significant since there is an association between family environment and text processing development and/or performance and the family environment determines the result of the association.

Poor home environment is one of the major causes of the students' weaknesses in text processing. Students were not aware of the obvious weaknesses/lapses they have in understanding processing task(s) and possible strategies to be used in order to achieve high level proficiency in advanced text analysis This is because the students lacked knowledge of how the texts are structured, how information is organised and what kind of meaning(s) to search for. Rather than contextualise the author's line of thought, they took the ideas at surface value.

Students lacked knowledge of different social backgrounds due to insufficient exposure(s) and this hindered them from drawing from what the text task(s) presented. The home was the variable that exerted the greatest influence on first year university students' text processing in Enugu State. Hence, the 'home' as an indispensable variable plays an important role and it determines the influence of 'school' and 'student' as socio-economic variables. The totality of 'home' variables resulted to what the 'school' and 'student' variables built on. There was a strong link between socio-economic background and text processing achievements throughout the school programmes. This study establishes that where socio-economic background is stimulating and encouraging, achievements tend to be high as against poor achievements when it is not conducive to text processing. There is a relative influence of previous text processing skills acquired before entering the university on the students' present text processing ability. This was because the nature and level of this language skill acquired by the students under study reflected in their weak performances. This implies that their background knowledge of text processing was weak. Findings from this study have shown that application of information processing theories alone to text processing is inadequate to the mastery of advanced text processing. This is because the theoretical process neglects the power and influence of social interaction. Through this study, attentions is shifted from departmentalised and disciplinary text processing to integrated and inter disciplinary exercise where students process text(s) with the knowledge, attitudes and skills of a variety of domain.

The findings of this work is in line with Vygotsky's Constructive Theory that socio-economic background positive interactions are crucial and that text processing is co-constructed between two people. Developing text processing proficiency occurs through cultural transmission of language skills which starts from social interaction to personal and then to inner/covert problem solving.

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