

Abstract

This paper set out to investigate the amount and nature of language the subject of the study (Onsanse) has learnt for four decades of exposure to several languages after being picked up at the age of 17, when he could produce only one word and one interjection in Ekegusii. The data from conversations and observations audio- and video-recorded for 154 hours show that Onsanse has picked up an amount of vocabulary that enables him to interact with people especially in Dholuo and Kiswahili. However, he has not acquired a grammar that would enable him to produce an utterance longer than two words. In another respect Onsanse's grammar is comparable to that of Specific Language Impairment subjects, since its morphological component is selectively impaired: for instance, in Dholuo, the language he seems to be most "competent" in, Onsanse has greater difficulty in using the singular subject marker prefix than its plural counterpart. At the phonological level, his speech was marked by omissions and substitutions of phonemes, but no typical features stood out as typical of his speech.