

Language and Power Dynamics in Nigerian English. A Study of Language Use and Social Identity

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Abstract

This work shows the relationship between the English language and Nigerian English as it affects our local or native languages both in speech and writing. It also stresses how the English language is regarded as a national language thereby hiding our social identity because it is now the language of the upper class who are being recognized in terms of politics, economics and commerce. This is because our local or native languages could not be used as our lingual Franca in the sense that they are termed “not superior”.

Thus, we witness language changes which shows that language is dynamic and also symbolizes our identity wherever we found ourselves.

Keywords: Language, power dynamics, Nigerian English, Social Identity

Introduction

Origin of the English Language in Nigeria

English Language came to Nigeria through the slave trade activities along the west coast of African in the 18th century through the initial contact between the European, his language and the native language paved the way for the emerging missionaries and the British Colonial Masters.

Omolewa (1975) states that English came to Nigeria before the advent of the missionaries in the country. The coastal English spoken then according to him, was highly adulterated.

The coming of the British and English-Speaking Missionaries in large numbers to the southern part of Nigeria as from 1842 brought up the question of a language to adopt for communication between the indigenous population and the quests. From a very early period, the colonial masters had a very poor attitude

towards the Local Language. The missionaries felt that the language of the natives was neither very extensive nor of a high quality and only interesting to comparative philologist and never likely to become of any practical use to civilization.

Nigeria English (Definition/Origin)

Nigeria English is an indigenized forms of English used in Nigeria. It is characterized by the use of domesticated lexical items and syntactic structure.

Nigeria English is today one of the Englishes existing as a result of the interaction between the foreign English and Local Languages in Nigeria. Nigeria English is also

known as Nigeria Standard English. It is a dialect of English spoken in Nigeria. It is the most widely spoken Africa variety of English and a nativized form of English.

Characteristics/Items of Nigeria English

Nigeria English can be viewed under the following sub-headings such as:

- a. Lexis
- b. Phonetics/Phonology
- c. Morphology
- d. Syntax
- e. Meaning
- f. Discourse structure

- a. **Lexis:** Every Language borrow words in order to increase its vocabulary. English Language borrows a lot of words from Latin, French, Greek and also

- b. **Lexical Meaning:** Lexis and Meaning combined together to get what you want.

E.g. Trouble Shooter – be the opposite in Nigeria which is peace maker.

Put up with – staying with my brother.

Nigeria

But in English

British – You are tolerating your brother

form non-Europeans

Languages such words like:

“Humorous” is borrowed from Japanese, Boss – Dutch, Zebra – East Africa.

Word variation is by borrowing. They are peculiar with the type of English spoken on other parts of the world.

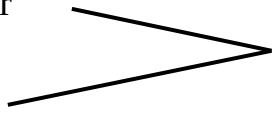
So, what Nigeria English does in English, is to borrow from the Local vernacular.

E.g. Motor park – is only used in Nigeria (Car park).

Pepper soup – We borrow pepper and soup – concept and sound

Garri – no equivalent, so we have to borrow from the local language and used English word to substitute them.

Senior brother Elder in British English
 Senior wife
 Big man – You are huge (British English)
 But in Nigeria English – Rich man



- c. **Phonetics/Phonology:** Here, Nigeria English defers a lot in sound production and articulation. In R.P, English has forty-four sounds while Nigeria English has little or less but British has twenty vowel sounds. Nigeria English hardly operates diphthongs, only monothongs that are not central are used in English. Inter-language or first language interference in the use of vowel. So, Nigeria English substitute the vowels that sound nearest to the British vowels.

E.g. Vowel No 11/3:/

As in girl

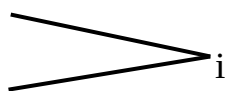
Vowel (No 10) Λ – Cup, but as c Λ p, b Λ t

Vowel (12) ∂ – ∂ b ʌ

About

They don't exist in Igbo language.

Seat /1:/



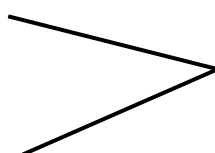
Sit / I ɪ

Nigeria English use fewer number of vowels than any other varieties because these vowel sounds do not exist in their indigenous language.

Biological, once, an individual masters the first language, he may find it difficult to adopt the second language and teachers do not have much knowledge of this target language.

This, under – differentiation, average Nigeria cannot differentiate these words.

E.g Cut



Court Can replace them by one cardinal vowel

Cot

Cat = / ɔ̃ /

t d

□ ð: They don't exist in Nigeria language they are replace with:

E.g. Thin/Then - □ in, □ en

Tin /Den -

Also, under-substitution, we have 's' and 'z' S – plural marker, if this a noun at the end of a word.

Absence of diphthongals:

Goat but it will be
Gǝut substituted by O.

Tour - ðu > :
Poor - ʌ > :

Some diphthongal glide are more difficult for instance as question/Kw, Kã
- Cow - In Igbo, it is ɪw but in English, it is one

- d. **Morphology:** Bungs together individual sounds into higher unit. It simply sounds is company sounds to together in groups i.e allophones Segmented and super segment.

Non – segmented

E.g $C^{-3} VC^{0-4}$ > Formular for a syllable in English

Phoneme /Word

e.g.

o/ke/ke in Igbo

= $C^1 VC^0$ > dominant are open syllable

Streets: Stri:ts

Qualities of speech, you can
produced with one check pulse.

Any syllable that close with

C3 VC2

no consonant is an open syllable

This led to consonant cluster simplification

1. Stri:t in English, they delete one consonant or the other.

2. Transposition: E.g ∂esk (desk)

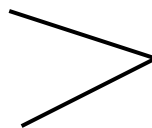
∂esks

Ast instead of ∂eskt

This is because we don't have consonant cluster in indigenous language.

3. Pencil > Pensulu

Buredi – bread



This is because of their level of education, standard of education, standard of person who taught you or standard of Education.

e. **Syntax:** It can be grouped in to two namely: Adaptation and Deviation.

Adaptation is though indigenization and cannot be regarded as error.

E.g. On the dot

At the dot.

The entire member

You will able

I can be able to

Deviation – It cannot be defended; it marks a short coming in your deficiency.

E.g. Machineries - Machinery

Stationeries - Stationery

The whole member - The entire member

f. **Change (Varieties of English)**

They came into existence during the dark ages. E.g. French, Greek, Latin, Italians, Many Nigeria Language has died within some 300 years.

As a result of Globalization. Another language has been born. E.g. Pigin English especially in Delta areas where it is their first language. There are other pigins in Nigeria which we realized is the first language of the people living there. Nigeria Pigin derived from English is used mostly in informal conversation.

As Pigin language is increasing, its vocabulary and syntax become more difficult.

In Nigeria now, more schools start with the English language and the consequences is that their mother tongue will die gradually.

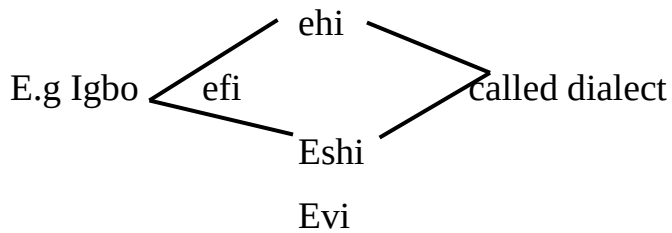
English has spread to all the continent and it is known as a global language, it has become a material for export just like any other goods for export and for the users at the area where it is being spoken as a second language.

They are having economic and political problems because they are still battling with the language varieties as they move from place to place.

Another example is that if you take your child to America, in twenty years' time, he will totally change to American i.e. he will be acculturated.

We have the parameter for classifying varieties of Nigerian English. All languages have varieties. You can also use different yard sticks. In terms of religion – the way he uses that language. E.g. They can pronounce or use

certain words differently i.e we take Nigerian, British or American English.



Another example: Child/Offspring

Baby – English/i.e/

Nigeria/ei/ - Nigeria allophones of the same sound.

Therefore, social varieties are called sociolects ie language resulting from being classified as a socio-economic group.

E.g upper-mid-lower-working class i.e you use language to place someone's social class.

There is co-relationship between language used and the class of people that belong to a certain level. They use language alike in terms of language behaviour. It is the way you use language in terms of words, construction etc. It depends on income, the type of home, starting from

0 – No formal Education.

1 - Little education

2 - Semi little education

3 - Average education

4 - Formal education

5 - Full formal education

Thus, occupation shows the type of English someone speaks e.g if you are a minister, you see him talking in certain languages.

E.g. Lawyer – crime, punishment

Mechanic – tyre, spanner, oil

Teacher – Study, evening class, lesson note

However, Accent is the way you pronounce words related to region but not always,

Idiolect – Individual use of language in different voices and qualities of your voice.

Finally, variation takes different forms, the way people speak differ a lot in terms of words. In using any language, you have to use different variants ie there is an occasion to use Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, broken English, Standard English etc.

You can vary your speech in terms of variations. Variants lead to choices between alternatives.

Relationship between Language and Social Identity

Nigeria is a multi-education with over 400 local languages such as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Fula, Ijaw, Kanuri, Bolewa, Nupe, Kamanta, Amuda, Gwong, Bahumono, Atsam, Zauna, Jewish, Oron, Yerwakanuri, Akunakuna, Efik, Itsakiri, Isoko, Jukun, Kunembu, Igala, Igede, Urhobo, Edo, Beron, Idoma to mention but a few.

Moreover, three of them are major while others are minor. The three major languages are Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. To accommodate this diverse unguistice landscape, English serves many purposes.

However, language symbolizes identity and are used to signal identities by those who speak them. People are also categorized by other people according to the language they speak. People belong to many social groups and have many social identities and connects with other members of various groups in society as ethnic, national, religious, gender class etc. language is not homogenous rather, it is not always what you say but how you say it.

Language Dynamics

There are several forms of language dynamics. Some of them which are change in meaning, language borrowing, slang, updates and revision, evolving grammar codes etc.

These languages dynamics can be seen both in local language and

foreign language through the interferences between the two languages.

This is because language changes a lot. In Nigeria today, English complements the indigenous language because it facilitates inter-ethnic interaction as well as international communication in the Nigeria linguistic context in which the indigenous language can neither perform. Examples are:

1. Birds of the same feathers flock together – now birds of a feather flock together.
2. More grease to your elbow – more power to your elbow
3. Cut your coat according to your size – Cut your coat according your cloth.

Language Use as It Affects our Identity

Language affects us culturally, educationally, politically and in economically.

In the cultural aspect, the English language has changed some of our native cultures like the way of

dress, eating, dancing, walking and traditional festivals.

Educationally, English language is the language of the elite in Nigeria, therefore, if you cannot speak this language, you are a nobody. It is regarded as the only medium of communication in schools, neglecting our native language.

Thus, in the area of politics, it is being used as the language of the authority or people in power.

Finally, if you can speak English language very well, you can travel to any part of the country either for business or trade without any problems or barriers.

Conclusion:

Both English language and Nigeria English have merits and demerits which we cannot do without. Therefore, we should try as much as possible to improve on our local languages by making these three major languages compulsory in our school curriculum in order to enhance our cultural heritage and identity.

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