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**LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION IN NIGERIA:
THE CASE OF ENGLISH**

Professor (Mrs) Inyang Udofot
Department of English
University of Uyo

Abstract

In this paper, the place of English in the National Policy of education in Nigeria is examined. It has been noted that despite legislations to the contrary English has been given a pride of place in the Nigerian educational system and unofficially it has even become the lingua franca in Nigeria and the first language of the younger generation. Rather than entertain the vain hope of doing away with English in Nigeria I have suggested the acceptance and teaching of a domesticated Nigerian variety of English which I have christened, Ninglish. Although the spoken form is the focus in this paper, it is recommended that the Nigerianised versions in the other aspects be accepted and taught in schools to give Nigerians a viable variety of English like those in other parts of the world for identity.

1. Introduction

English has developed in Nigeria as has been the case in other colonies of Britain in Africa and Asia largely through the education system although the antecedent of Nigerian English – the English Based Pidgin - developed through trade (Elugbe and Omamor,1991). Its phonology, lexis, semantics, syntax, pragmatics and acceptability have been variously analyzed (cf^rBanjo, 1995). Certain problems, however, face the English Language in Nigeria. These are: the reluctance of the average educated Nigerian to accept Nigerianisms in English as indicating differences rather

than deviant usages; the reluctance of teachers of English to accept them in teaching and examinations; the future government language policies in education and their implications for the future of Nigerian English. These problems are compounded by the fact that standard reference books of what constitutes acceptable usages in Nigerian English are yet to appear in sufficient number to measure up with research in linguistics.

English has co-existed in Nigeria with her many indigenous languages since the nineteenth century. The many years of co-existence of English with Nigerian languages and its use for expressing Nigerian experiences and situations have resulted in English developing linguistic patterns that have identified it as a distinct variety of world Englishes. Bamgbose (1995) has observed for instance that "the English Language has undergone modifications in the Nigerian environment. It has been pidginized, nativized, acculturated and twisted to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction" (p.26). Other scholars in the field of English studies in Nigeria including Adesanoye (1973), Banjo, 1995, 1996); Bamgbose 1995), Kujore (1985, 1995), Jowitt (1991, 2000), and Udofot (1997, 2002, 2003, 2005), also agree that the brand of English now spoken and written in Nigeria is the kind of English envisaged in Achebe (1965): 'a new English still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings' (p.216).

2. The National Language Policy and the Roles of English

The language question has been a thorny and much discussed one in Nigeria. The fact that the language question has become a genuine political and linguistic problem can be seen from the attention it has received and the discussion it has generated. In the course of my work as a linguist interested in the English Language in Nigeria, I have contributed to this discussion in two journal articles: *Bilingualism, Trilingualism and Quadrilingualism, the language Situation of the Nigerian Child, (2000); The English Language and National Integration: the challenges of the 21st*

Century (2006) and a book chapter: *The English Language in Nigeria in the 21st Century (2003)*. My assessment of this situation is presented below. In Nigeria, the National Language Policy formulated in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004 assigns to English the role of the language of instruction from the fourth year of a six-year primary course to the tertiary level. In addition, English is to be taught as a school subject right from the first year of primary education. The constitution has a clause which recognizes one of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba (the languages of the larger ethnic groups in Nigeria) as an additional language of official proceedings in the federal legislature in addition to English as soon as the implementation is feasible (Banjo, 1996). To this effect, secondary school students are encouraged to learn one of these three Nigerian languages in addition to their mother tongues and English, if one of the three languages is not their mother tongue. These national policies, however, cannot be said to be fully in operation. In urban primary schools, for instance, instruction is given in English right from the first year of primary education while the switch to English in the fourth year of primary education hardly operates fully in the primary schools in the rural areas. Also, the learning of another Nigerian language in addition to the mother tongue hardly operates even in Federal Government schools because of the difficulties of having teachers.

3. English as the First Language of Nigerians

One observable trend in English language usage in Nigeria over the last three decades is that the professional and middle classes who are bilinguals as well as the inter-ethnic marriage couples adopt English as the language of the home with the result that the children speak English as their first language ever before they learn their parent's mother tongues for those who bother to do so at all. In homes where the children are made to acquire both English and the parents' mother tongue/s simultaneously, English soon gains dominance over the other languages. Udofot (2005) examined the language acquisition of two infants from the

age of eighteen months to five years. The aim was to study the process of acquiring of the mother tongue and English. This study was borne out of the fact that many Nigerian parents feel that since English is the language of education in Nigeria and therefore enjoys a higher prestige differential, the child is better off if he acquires English as its first language. The result of this study showed that a typical Nigerian home does not provide a natural environment for English acquisition. This explains why Nigerians who learn French have to spend time in a French – speaking environment. If the Nigerian child grows up in a mother– tongue English – speaking environment, the case may be different. The study also proved that the child becomes a better bilingual if s/he learns the two languages (in this case his mother tongue and English successively rather than simultaneously as the acquisition of both languages takes a slightly longer time.

English, therefore, cannot be rightly described as the official language in Nigeria anymore. It is also the first language of many Nigerians and therefore the language of informal conversation even among family members.

The above situation points to endangerment of Nigerian languages. Given the present situation in Nigeria where two Nigerians (husband and wife) who share a common linguistic background teach their children English as a first language and communicate with each other in their mother tongue but with the child in English, not to mention a situation where two Nigerians from different linguistic backgrounds marry and use English for communication with each other and with the children, the future of English in Nigeria is assured in spite of government policies and nationalistic feelings. This means that in the next decade or two hardly any Nigerian family may use the Nigerian languages even for unofficial purposes. And in the next fifty years when those who speak Nigerian languages must have died out there may be no mother tongue speakers of many Nigerian languages. A language hierarchy for Nigeria at the moment looks something like the illustration below:

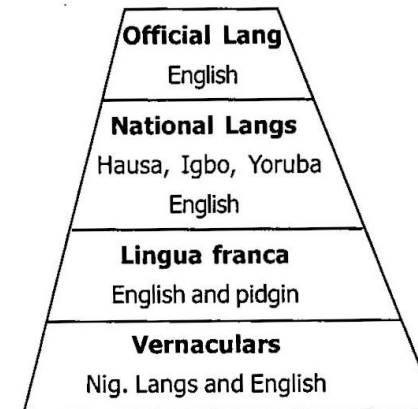


Fig.1: A Language Hierarchy for Nigeria

This process by which English colonizes the other lower layers of the language hierarchy in Nigeria means that English is likely to take over some of the functions currently served by other languages resulting in the Nigerian languages not performing meaningful or any roles and therefore falling into oblivion. A frightening trend of the English Language usage in Nigeria is therefore the endangerment of Nigerian languages and the possible extinction of some of them by the close of the twenty-first century. This situation has also been noted as a global trend by Graddol (2000, p.13) who observes that English is also steadily “colonizing” other languages in the world to the extent that a majority of the world’s languages are likely to become extinct.

4. An Endonormative Model for the Teaching of English in Nigeria

Three main areas of the language problems and prospects in Nigeria have often been addressed: effects on education, development and national integration (See for instance: Essien, 2009, Oyetade, 1993). These studies have made various recommendations one of which is a one–language

option for the purpose of national integration.' The languages frequently recommended have been English, Hausa, Pidgin, Swahili and even a purposely "created" artificial language' (Oyetade, 2003) called Wazobia. Others have recommended the multilingual approach which supports the elevation of one or more Nigerian Languages to the status of National languages while Eka (2000) has recommended a progressive Trilingual Approach which involves 'getting Nigerians to ultimately learn a Nigerian language first of their choice and later of popular (government and public) choice' (pp.5-6). In my contribution to this discussion, I have suggested a nativized) variety of English to be used in Nigeria both as Lingua franca and as the official language while each state should develop and use its own indigenous language in addition to English (cf Udofot, 2003, 2006).

This appears to me the workable alternative because of the peculiarity of the Nigerian situation. Nigeria has not had a comprehensive language policy as an organized attempt to find solutions to language problems in the country. What has emerged as a language policy came about in the context of other centrally defined national concerns such as the development of a national policy on Education and the drafting of a constitution for the country. It is in connection with the National Policy on Education and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that we can talk about language policy and planning in Nigeria (Oyetade, 2003).

With the increased level of literacy in Nigeria and the increasing number of English users in the Nigerian society it is anticipated that by the middle of the twenty-first century Nigerian English may have two main varieties: the Standard Variety used by everybody including the educated Nigerians for communication outside official circles and many Nonstandard varieties. The Nonstandard Varieties will likely reflect the language of the community where they flourish. The bulk of it would be intelligible to people who share the same language with the speaker and partly to other Nigerians who may not understand the codemixed words from the Nigerian Language. This brand of Nigerian English (NNE) will be slightly different

from the present geographical varieties of Nigerian English for instance Esen's (1961) 'Efiglish' and Nwafor's (1971) Englibo, Englihausa 'Engliyoruba' in the sense that the present geographical variations are largely attempts to render the Standard variety with mother tongue interferences on mainly the accent. The Nonstandard Nigerian English of the 21st century will not be Standard English but hybrids of English words and words from Nigerian vernaculars. They will constitute dialects rather than accents of Nigerian English which in time are likely to Creolise.

The Standard Variety on the other hand may become more Nigerianized. Having been taught in the school system, it will be the brand used for official purposes by all Nigerians who learn English in Nigeria. It must be noted that in spite of reactions to the contrary, Nigerian English is the brand being taught and used in secondary and tertiary institutions in Nigeria because for some decades now English teaching in most parts of the country has been done by Nigerians who were taught by other Nigerian teachers themselves. Most teachers who were taught by expatriates (mother tongue speakers of English) are now dead or retired. The point being made here is that the Nigerian (nativised) variety is now being taught in schools and used by products of the school system and, following observable trends in language change, is likely to be sufficiently different from Standard British English to deserve the name **Ninglish**.

The question now is: if in the face of government policies and attempts to develop and encourage the use of the Nigerian languages (at least in the first six years of life before the learning of the second language) people still teach English to Nigerian babies apparently to help them do well in school and be able to communicate outside the home, is English therefore easy to replace in Nigeria in the foreseeable future? Should Nigerian children continue to learn British or American accents and varieties when the English spoken in Nigeria has identifiable features. According to Essien (2009) "...the English used by many Nigerians of the younger

generations may have English words and expressions but little English grammar or meaning" (p193).

Nigerian English if accepted as such and consciously cultivated as Nigerian writers have done in literature can provide a background and an identity for its speakers which an alien English never could. Perhaps giving it the name *Ninglish* would make it Nigerian like the North German variety of English – *Minglish* coined from the name of the North German language Missingch + English' (Martens, 1990, pp.261;269).

Examination bodies could help by modifying the form and content of tests in the light of the nativised standard variety in the country. This is in conformity with the rejection of 'globally normative' features as tests of English as an international language (cf Lowenberg,1993, p.104). This would answer Banjo's (1993) call for 'an endonormative model' for the teaching of English in Nigeria as teachers would now adjust their teaching materials to reflect the form and content of examinations. The next National Policy on Language could go a step further and recognise what has been going on illegally by making English Nigeria's lingua franca while encouraging the development of the indigenous languages. If every state had its own language which is also taught in school and used for the state's mass media at least a good number of Nigerian languages will be developed (Udofot, 2007, p.42).

Scholars in the field of English studies in Nigeria should also intensify efforts in the codification of aspects of Nigerian English and produce standard textbooks for use in schools as Nigerian writers (novelists and playwrights) have done to provide reference materials for teaching and examinations. The current project of compilation of a dictionary of Nigerian English by the Nigeria English Studies Association is a bold step in this direction. This will also help to standardise certain features and usages across the country. The Standard Nigerian English or *Ninglish* would then be used as the official language and the lingua franca while the local languages would be

used for informal and unofficial transactions and as the language of family and friendly interactions.


5. Features of Nigerian English

In the light of the above, certain features of Nigerian English should be allowed, reinforced and actually taught to Nigerian children. The use of certain words, expressions, structures and certain peculiarities of pronunciation have been identified as characterizing Nigerian English. Kujore (1985) and Jowitt (1991) are whole books devoted to the codification of these Nigerianisms. Bambgose (1995) and Banjo (1996) have also identified some of these features.

According to Udofot (2003a) some of these features include:

- borrowing of words from Nigerian Languages into English e.g Oba, Emir (titles for chiefs), agbada, kaftan (dress items), danfo, kia-kia bus, gwongworo (types of bus), eba, tuwo, edikaṅ ikṅṅ, ekpaṅṅkukwṅ (food items).
 - localization of pronunciation as in the substitution of indigenous language phonemes; for instance, the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ which do not exist in Nigerian languages, and the central vowels /ə and ə:/ with the closest phonemes from the sound inventory of the mother tongue of the speaker. Many Nigerians tend to replace /θ/ with /t/; /ð/ with /d/; and /ə, ə:/ with /e/. There is also the tendency to introduce epenthetic vowels to capture the CV-CV syllable structure of Nigerian languages .
- At the non segmental level, some of the features include:
- a general tendency to impose the syllable-timed rhythm of Nigerian languages on English which is a stress-timed language and a tendency to speak reduced vowels as full vowels resulting in a proliferation of prominent syllables.

- Certain stress placements are also peculiar to Nigerian users of English. An example is the forward shift of stress in certain words like 'madam pronounced as ma'dam; 'calendar pronounced as calendar; 'salary pronounced as sa'lary.
- There is also the preference for unidirectional intonation patterns and the preference for the falling tune as in:



 When I get my salary, I will go to Mr Biggs and have a drink.

Some of the peculiarities get fossilized and emerge as a national form which transcends mother tongue differences. For example, the Igbo and Hausa languages have both the tensed /i:/ and the lax /ɪ/ yet speakers from these language backgrounds often pronounce /fi:t/ as /fit/ where both /i:/ and /ɪ/ tend to be produced as /i/ (cf Jowitt, 1991).

Nigerianisms in syntax are fewer but nonetheless present. The prominent ones include:

- pluralization of non count and invariable nouns as in *equipments* and *furnitures* for equipment and furniture
- non native amalgamations as in *afterall*, *moreso*, *infact*;
- the use of reflexive pronouns like themselves in place of reciprocal ones (each other, and one another);
- the omission of the article before singular nouns as in "He went to market";
- the use of transitive verbs intransitively: as in "We went to the party and we enjoyed" and
- class shifts, for instance the use of adjectives and nouns as verbs: "You cannot rubbish your parents like that and she has completely uselessly herself"

It is at the morpho-semantic level that Nigerian English is most productive and noticeable. Aside from the incorporation of lexical items from Nigerian languages into English the following have been recorded in Udofot (1999):

- creative coining of words to suit the Nigerian environment as in the words: go-slow(traffic jam), been to (one who has lived abroad), buharigate (scandal in political circle); Toronto (academic dishonesty), nairacracy(government by the rich, owners of the naira)
- semantic shifts in words and expressions as in long legs (corruption involving nepotism); four –one- nine (a cheat), to branch (to stop over); stranger (a visitor), to settle someone (to give some money to someone as a bribe or an appreciation);
- non-native use of idioms such as to eat one's cake and have it (to have one's cake and eat it), to declare surplus (to throw a party), to put sand in someone's garri (to spoil ones chances), to take in (to become pregnant).
- Extension of meanings as in the extension of meaning of verbs of perception such as "hear" to include the meanings of understand, smell and even feel as in :
I can hear a nasty smell (perceive)
I can hear water running down my back (feel)
I can hear Ibibio (understand)

Such extensions have equivalent translations in the local languages.

- The reference of kinship terms are also extended to reflect the structure of the Nigerian society and the size of the families. This gives rise to brother, sister, cousin, aunt, uncle and even mother and father being extended to include not only family relations but also anyone for whom the user feels respect or intimacy. The terms are also often used to refer to people of the same tribe or religious denominations.
- There is also in Nigerian English the non native use of adjectives like senior and junior (brother or sister) in place of elder and younger
- With regard to pragmatics, there are certain peculiar usages which characterize Nigerian English. Prominent among these is the use of

sorry (when one is not the cause) as a way of expressing sympathy, concern or condolences instead of " what a shame or be more careful;

- welldone (when greeting a person at work);
- fine as a reply to 'how do you do' and,
- I'm coming when one is actually going away.

Some of these expressions are actually translations from Nigerian languages.

Also, Udofot (2011) has shown that the Nigerian speaker hardly uses stress but tone and word boundary raising/lowering which is often perceived by native speakers as shifting of stress gives the impression of pitch accent and shifting of stress to English ears. It can therefore be suggested that the Nigerian English speaker hardly uses stress the way it is understood by speakers of Germanic languages but more or less as tone is used in Nigerian languages. Also vocalic intervals alone may not be conclusive evidence of syllable– timing since as in this study full and reduced vowels do not necessarily correlate with high and low tones.

Although many studies in Nigerian English prosody note the presence of more stressed words/syllables in Nigerian English than there would be in a native English version, the basic assumption in this paper is that the speaker of Nigerian English does not really represent the accents in terms of the pitch accents of West Germanic languages, but in the word tone patterns where each such pattern sounds like a pitch accent to English ears. For instance, the compounds *everyone* and *anyone* have word boundary raising/lowering such as between *every* and *one*; *any* and *one* causing the words to sound like *everyONE* and *anyONE* rather than the native speaker's *EVERYone* and *ANYone*. The same is true of words like *life line* and *landlord* which would be produced as *life LINE* and *landLORD* rather than the native speaker's *LIFE line* and *LANDlord*. It would therefore be wrong to say that the Nigerian speaker places the pitch accent/stress on the wrong word here, rather, he/she uses tone on

each word/syllable causing the native English speaker to interpret the pattern as if the stress and therefore the pitch accent comes on the wrong word. What this suggests is that the tendency for Nigerians' to use tone on every syllable is transferred to English and tone, not stress, is used on every syllable strong or weak, which gives the auditory impression that many and at times all syllables are stressed.

With regard to intonation it has been shown in Gussenhoven and Udofot's (2010) study of Standard Nigerian English which confirms an earlier finding by Gut, (2002) that "Nigerian English speech rhythm is similar to Singaporean English with regard to the proportion of vocalic intervals and stands between stress-timed intonation language and a tone language (pp176-177)". Since this is the variety of English spoken by educated Nigerians the tone - timed description can be used to describe the speech rhythm of the Standard Nigerian accent of English which though different from the performance of the native speaker is not statistically different except in tone which gives the auditory impression of pitch accents indicating stress to the ears of speakers of Germanic languages. It would therefore be a needless venture to teach Nigerians to try to speak English with a stress- timed rhythm or use English intonation tunes when the English they speak shows that the tone that operates in Nigerian languages operate in English too and Nigerian English is therefore tone–timed rather than stress–timed.

6. Summary and Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the place of English in the National Policy of education. It has been noted that despite legislations to the contrary, English has been given a pride of place in the Nigerian educational system and unofficially it has even become the lingua franca in Nigeria and the first language of the younger generation. Rather than entertain the vain hope of doing away with English in Nigeria I suggest the acceptance and teaching of a domesticated Nigerian variety. Although the spoken

form is the focus in this paper, it is recommended that the Nigerianised versions in the other aspects be accepted and taught to give Nigerians a viable variety of English like those in other parts of the world for identity.

Finally, I condemn in totality the practice of teaching English to Nigerian babies. I suggest that every Nigerian child be helped to acquire the mother tongue of one of the parents or both parents if need be and since English is taught right from the primary school they should learn Nenglish, the Nigerian Variety of English as a second language. There is no point for a Nigerian to stress himself or herself trying to speak English as a British or an American. He or she should speak the Nigerian Variety which is one of the recognized varieties of world Englishes. Let the British and American recognize the Nigerian accent too and try to listen and understand the Nigerian. Also, for proper learning, English should be made the language of instruction from the secondary school level and only learned as a school subject at the primary level.

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