

## Language Attitudes: Effect of Teaching English Language in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** *Language attitudes; effects of learning English language in Nigerian secondary schools are the main focus of this article. Language is one of the major determinants of human behavior in an environment. Human attitudes towards a particular phenomenon determine the level of success or failure of the programme. This article tries to overhaul teacher attitudes towards English language and student's level of competence in using English in Nigeria. The authors highlight on the paper that the shift from Standard English to Pidgin English and mother tongue among teachers and students in classroom setting is as a result of cultural effects. Teaching English language for different purposes, especially for science and technology development in Nigeria was discussed. The authors also unveiled issues on English language in Nigerian contexts, adjustment of English language lessons on the school time-table, possible approaches to the learning of English language in Nigeria, impediments in the acquisition of proficiency skills in English language in Nigeria which phonological, level, lexical level and syntactic level which were seen as the main problems facing Nigerian learners of the subject. The conclusion of this article was drawn based on the ideas discussed and their relevance to Nigeria and the world at large.*

**Key Words:** *Attitudes, English Language, Effect, Teaching.*

### Introduction

One of the major determinants of the pattern of human behaviour in society is attitude. Attitudes are likes and dislikes; affinities for and aversions to objects, persons, groups, situations, or any other identifiable aspects of the environment including abstract ideas and social policies (Bamgbose, 1995). Attitudes are seen as consisting of three components: (1) belief which account for (2) dispositions which in turn account for (3) actions or human behaviour. Similarly, attitudes have been found to act on objects categorized or discriminated according to motives and goals. The importance of attitude to the survival or decay, the prominence or marginalization of languages cannot be overemphasized. Olapade (1981) maintains that:

Any policy for language, especially in the system of education has to take account of the attitudes of those likely to be affected. In the long run, no policy will succeed which does not do one of the three things: conform to the expressed attitudes of those involved, persuade those who express negative attitudes about the rightness of the

policy; or seek to remove the causes of the disagreement. In any case, knowledge about attitudes is fundamental to the formulation of a policy as well as to success in its implementation.

Because of the role that English and the other languages have been playing in the various sectors of life in the Nigerian speech community, people have developed different attitudes to each category of languages. Distinctive among these attitudes are those expressed about the role of English language.

Language attitudes in Nigeria are characterized by two main influences. The first major influence is a centripetal force reflecting the desire for cultural and language self-determination. This language attitude is integrative or identificational; the language behaviour arising from it is motivated by the need to have a sense of belonging, the desire for solidarity and group identity through the use of English medium as social interaction (Omodiagbo, 1992).

English language is deliberately used as the language of instruction because of the high educational background of some parents in Nigeria. Many of these parents speak English to the children at home. They believe that the acquisition of English at this level gives their children some academic head start (Karavas-Doukas, 1996).

Then, English is supposed to be the language of instruction at the junior secondary school level. In some community secondary schools, *Hausa*, *Igbo* and *Yoruba* are heavily used to supplement English language which shows the level of teaching English in Nigeria secondary schools. Some improvement is noticeable at the senior secondary school level. Undoubtedly after class, English is not normally used in or outside the classroom. In situations where *Hausa*, *Igbo* or *Yoruba* are not spoken by every student, conversations are conducted with much effort in *Pidgin* English. The tendency to congregate according to ethnic or linguistic groupings makes the use of English language in the school environment or outside classroom almost impossible. Even teachers conversing with students outside the classroom frequently use most of the mother tongues.

### **Teach English for National Unity, National Consciousness and Cultural Awareness**

The promotion of national awareness, national consciousness and cultural awareness involve the cultivation on a national scale, of group identity and solidarity motivated by the need for national self-determination in all its ramifications (Omodiagbo, 1992). This is naturally influenced by integrative and identificational attitude which has been characterized as a centripetal and inward looking tendency. These national ideas and values can only be propagated and inculcated through the teaching of English language from lower to upper secondary school level.

Imperatively, the modern local Nigerian culture will embrace the technological educational, political, administrative, social and economic importations, the domestic and

institutional adaptations as well as the academic, legal and cultural borrowings (Jibril, 1986). Even though each language has to some extent made allowance for these cultural innovations in its speech community, the English language seems to maintain a dominant position as the medium of teaching and propagating this elite Nigerian value. It is the Nigerian variety of English, a domesticated English language in the classroom can adequately function in this role. To enhance the use of English language in Nigerian environment, every cultural norm and social value is conducted in the same language.

### **English language for Science and Technology Development**

As set out in the National Policy on Science and Engineering infrastructure, the Fourth National Development Plan 1981-1985 and the National Rolling plan (1990-1992) government has formulated policies on health, agriculture, industry, transport, communication and housing that will enable science and technology to make positive contributions to national developmental efforts in these sectors (Jibril, 1986). Some of the features of the measures adopted to achieve the policy objectives involve the use of high-level technology, conduct of applied research and the transfer of adapted technology, through international technical cooperation. There is no doubt that main medium for implementing the policies in these sectors is the English language. The variety of English language needed in this context should enable Nigerian students particularly to have access to information in international scientific texts and journals published in English (Aliyu, 1995). Proper teaching of English language should facilitate interaction and exchange of technical information with foreign and local colleagues. Jibril (1986) maintains that:

Today, like it or curse it, English is the closest thing to a lingua franca, around the globe. Roughly 700 million people speak it, an increase of 40 percent in the last twenty years and a total that represents more than one-seventh of the world's population.

From the view of the scholar, English language replaced French in the world of diplomacy and German in the field of science. It is the dominant language of medicine, electronics and space technology of international business and advertising of radio, television and film.

### **English Language in the international Relations**

English language is the most important language of foreign relations because it provides access to trade and technical cooperation in almost all the regions of the world. So, in terms of the realities of language need, practice and behavior, in spite of the absolute of a firm national language policy, the English language has carved for itself an important role in the communications network of Nigeria. It is an active medium of communication in so many sectors of the national life and it has established itself as a vehicle for carrying goodwill to all the corners of the earth (freeman and freeman, 1992).

Communicative competence developed through language planning based on well-considered policy has to be evaluated according to the relevant context. The English language in Nigeria remains different things to different people. To some, it is a first language, to others it is a third, some use English on formal occasions only use it for local interaction, and while to others it is the medium of formal and informal interaction with foreign colleagues. The target competence at the various levels of education should vary according to need (Ajayi, 2002). It is hoped that in the nearest future, a detailed policy on language practice will set out goals of English language competence. A functional approach to language treatment and planning in view of the above realities should set out targets of English language competence and proficiency according to the domestic and foreign interactional needs of the country. These needs should be guided by the potential role of the learner in the various sectors of national life, national efforts and international relations. Codification of the standard varieties of English language will have to take into consideration the communicative competence required in different contexts of use (Tudor, 1993).

### **English Language in Nigerian Context**

It is very unequivocal that since the incident of colonialization in the country, English language has remained a powerful medium of communication in classroom and outside the classroom. It is the only one language Nigerian across linguistic boundaries employ for effective communication on this; it has gained the status of language of unity among Nigerians (Adetugbo, 1987). It is also the language of government; all official transactions in the nation are carried out in English, so much that today it is important pre-requisite for employment in government. No doubt, it is a language of instruction from the upper primary to tertiary. At the tertiary level, credit pass in English language is a necessity for admission into the university undergraduate course (Maisamari, 2002). In addition to these functions, Nigerians have bestowed on English language nationally, at the international level Nigerians depend on it for effective communication. For effective communication with the international world, Nigerian teachers must effectively teach English language which will ensure international intelligibility.

Over 80 percent of Nigeria population speaks a version of English language commonly known or referred to as Nigerian English which is different from the Standard English. Ikanne (1986) believes that a student who has only been exposed to Nigerian English may find communication using English internationally very difficult. Among the reasons advanced for the emergence of Nigerian English are interference from the mother-tongue, and scarcity of well-trained teachers of English language. The phenomenon of interference which is the transfer effect of the mastery of elements of either the first language or mother tongue into the use and expression of English language results in many varieties of English in Nigeria. By this it is possible to describe the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria according to the first language acquired before learning English language at different levels of education (Adeosun, 1998). In Nigeria secondary schools, these variations in *Hausa*, *Igbo*, *Yoruba*, *Ijaw* could hinder

intelligibility as English language teaching and communication as intelligibility will be limited to just the speakers of the local varieties.

Another salient issue in teaching English language in Nigeria secondary schools is the quality of teacher. There are no well-trained teachers of English language. This was the situation then when English language was the pride of every educated man (Ikanne, 1986). Now that the language is being put to less effective use by the rising trend of using mother tongue as medium of instruction at the primary and secondary school levels, it may not be surprising if the standard of use grows from bad to worse. The teachers of English language that will emerge in the future will be products of mother-tongue education having had less hours of English language exposure and much more exposure to their mother-tongue (Maisamari, 2002). This is the challenge of the English language in Nigerian secondary schools.

Further still, one psycho-linguistic concept that has come to be a reality in English Language learning is transfer or interference. Theorists of interference believe that errors in language learning especially second language learning are attributable to transfer of elements from the first language to second language. There are nonetheless arguments for and against attributing errors in second language learning tongue mother interference (Williams, 1990).

The phenomenon of interference can occur at the phonological, morphological, syntactic or even semantic level of language use. At the phonological level, every language has a set of phonemes from which all words, known and unknown, which are and can be spoken in the language are built. English and most African languages belong to different language groups with different characteristics. Studies have clearly shown that most African languages do not have the elaborate vowel sounds of the English language (Nwoke, 1987).

### **Adjustment of English Language Lessons on the school time-table**

In many schools in Nigeria, English language features on the school time-table from primary to secondary level, at least once daily in each class. In some classes, especially the upper primary, one or two days of the week have a double period of English language lesson. In the lower primary, where it is different to keep the students doing the same thing for a double period, the time table provides different language activities such as story time, writing and creative activities. It is possible to have two days where there would be two periods of language lesson in a day.

With the statement above, English language features 7 to 9 times on the school time-table as may be observed from school to school. This is in addition to the general exposure to the language especially at the upper primary school from 7.30am to 1.30pm when the child arrives the school premises to the close of the school in the day. Despite their total exposure, the performance of the students in English language both at the certification examination and in everyday communication competence has been below expectation. It is hardly impossible for

anyone to read examiners reports without coming across remarks such as “the written essays of the students being unintelligible”. If the standard English after the adoption of the mother tongue education would continue to meet academic expectation at both secondary and tertiary institutions, then what is lost in the number of hours of exposure as a result of then on use of English as a medium of instruction must be made up for (Onochie, 2002). The ideal and logical thing to do here is to adjust and step up the number of English language lessons on the school time-table. This will no doubt ensure the accommodation of the many language activities that would be introduced as a result of the adaptation of communication activities which will require longer hours of exercises in learning English language (Adegbija, 1989).

### **Possible approaches to the learning of English language in Nigeria**

Learning English as a second language in Nigeria takes one of two technical approaches, the formal or the informal. The choice of approach by a learner may however be a function of the primary purpose for seeking to acquire skills in an L<sub>2</sub>. On the other hand, for the general purposes of educational pursuit, English is both a compulsory subject and a medium through which other curriculum subjects are taught in, schools pertinently, when the knowledge of English is not sought primarily for educational purposes, its learning often follows an unplanned and informal process (Omoniyi, 2004).

#### **The Technical formal Approaches**

The primary objective of this approach is to attain a certain level of competence in English at which one’s speech can be regarded as educated and intelligible. Four levels could be identified in the buildup of educated competence: these are pre-school, primary school, secondary school, and tertiary level. The level is not often gone through by all formal learners of English as an L<sub>2</sub> in Nigeria.

##### *Pre-school Level*

This includes all learning of L<sub>2</sub> (English) done at home and in the Nursery schools. There are kindergartens in which pupils are interacted with and taught in the local language of the school setting. In some others, pupils are taught English from the first day of nursery education. The average age of pupils at this age is three years. It is remarkable that, at this age, most children are still learning to talk. At this level, there are those who even acquire English as L<sub>1</sub>. This is common feature in many elite homes. Pupils are taught often in their immediate environment greetings, songs and so on. The texts used at this level are usually pictures and name-tags which aid the pupils in learning English language (Bamgbose, 1995).

##### *Primary School Level*

There are normally four categories of formal learners of English as L<sub>2</sub>; those that have gone through English-medium nursery schools and for whom English is already a medium of

communication then those who have their first lessons in English upon enrollment in the primary school, those who spend the first three years or so of primary school being taught in the indigenous language before a change to English in the succeeding years, and those who enroll on the now popular adult literacy programmes (Adeosun, 1998). At the primary school level, pupils are gradually introduced to more complex expressions beyond mere identification of items by name. Although, the vocabulary development process continues, pupils are exposed to the relationships between words of the same root and thus are the story passages in textbooks also used in teaching grammar.

#### *Secondary school Level*

At this level, there is a nationwide syllabus provided for English language and the curriculum content is usually strictly adhered to, since students face the same assessment at the end of the programme. Students are exposed to a body of materials written in English language (Ageigbe, 2004). They are made to read novels, short stories either in the English language library or literature in English class.

According to Ayodele (2001) some schools run the West African Examination Council (WAEC) syllabus in Oral English in addition to the English language course". This pays more attention to turning up proficiency level in students' speech performance by helping them to identify and check interferences of L<sub>1</sub> in L<sub>2</sub> speech. That is to say, the concern of English language at this level is phonological. It is necessary to note a lot of work is done in grammar at this level to get students acquainted with more complex structures in English language. According to Adetugbo (1987) the learner is exposed to all the rules governing the use of the language and he is helped to intuitively construct and operate an Error Detection Device by which he knows that certain sentences and expressions are well-formed and other are not.

#### **Technical Informal Approach**

This is an un-systematized learning process. The major tool in the hand of the learner is his ability to mimic. The learner picks up bits and pieces in the language which he attempts to string together into a network as his learning progresses even though slowly. There is possible ignorance of the rules governing language use among learners in this level. Adekunle (1974) observes that the "learning environment in the technical informal Approach could be the playground, market place, church or sometimes through the radio or television which are very effective audio-visual aids in second language learning situations"

#### **Impediments in the Acquisition of Proficiency skills in English language in Nigeria**

There are notable impediments in the acquisition of proficiency skills in English language in Nigeria. Some of these impediments are discussed under the following areas:

##### *The phonological Level*

It is impracticable that Received Pronunciation (RP) speech skills can be generally available to Nigerian learners of English as a second language. The phonological system of the various indigenous languages are different from those of English and, because English is learnt as a second language, what simply takes place is an adaptation of indigenous phonological systems for English speech sounds and patterns rather than an attempt to manage two phonological systems separately (Ayodele, 2001).

Divergence between these phonological systems is at both segmental levels. At the segmental level, most Nigerian languages have between five and ten vowels and have no diphthongs. These are therefore stretched to serve the purposes of the twenty English vowels (12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs). At the suprasegmental level, one can identify wrong pitch and intonation patterns. English stress-timing is dropped for syllable timing in Nigerian English. As a result, prosodic features like rhythmic prominence, primary stress, secondary stress nuclear stress, are non-existence. Problems encountered on this level make it possible to identify sub-varieties and dialects of English language in Nigeria learning environment (Babatunde, 2001).

#### *The Lexical Level*

A language gives expression to its environment. It is a reflection of the total culture. The acquisition of lexical proficiency depends to an extent, on the richness of the environment in terms of the events, experiences and items which provide the vocabulary of a language. The implication of this is that, the more English-like an environment is, the richer the lexical repertoire available to learners of English as L<sub>2</sub>. Those words that express the sophistication of the English society may not be readily available to L<sub>2</sub> learners (Crystal, 1996). For example, one observes that children in traditional homes play with traditional toys like small mud-huts, pots and others which express the local culture. In the homes of the elite sophisticated toys like tubes, military tanks, aeroplanes, helicopter, rockets, provide the L<sub>2</sub> learner in that setting with a vocabulary stock which reflects such exposure (Bamgbose, 1991). A deficiency in lexical repertoire has an effect on speech. The learner becomes very limited and predictable. Some learners are unable to determine the appropriateness or otherwise of some words in their speech. As a result of basic differences in culture between the English native environment and Nigeria, the English language is not able to totally give expression to the Nigerian environment. Certain highly culture-bound experiences or roles are in the indigenous language with English structures.

#### *The Syntactic Level*

There are rarely any points of convergence between the syntactic structures of a number of indigenous Nigerian languages and the English language. This is evident at the morph-phonemic level but at least in the general componential analysis of the sentence in terms of its subject predicate structure. There are some structural differences between the languages, and L<sub>2</sub> learners of English exhibit features of L<sub>1</sub> interference in L<sub>2</sub> speech (Adeyemi, 2004). The problems of

over-generalization and direct one-to-one transaction from  $L_1$  to  $L_2$ . For instance, the popular Nigerian expression, 'I'm coming' which is a direct translation of

Mo nbo (Yoruba)

Ana m abia (Igbo)

N na zuwa (Hausa)

is used to mean 'just a minute, or 'I' will be right back. Also, structures that contain a compound subjects pose problems of ordering. In the indigenous languages the speaker or first person comes before the second or third person. This language pattern influences the English speech of most  $L_1$  learners completely without marring their intended messages for example,

"I and Peter ate the food

Instead of the native speaker's

Peter and I ate the food".

## Conclusion

In this paper, effort have made to give a critical look on language attitudes; effect of teaching English language in Nigeria secondary school. Language attitudes determine the level of English language development in Nigeria. The effective use of the language by the teachers, students' disposition to learn the rules involved in language acquisition. The issue remains that the level of teaching and learning English language in Nigeria is still very poor because in the sense that both teachers and students are not properly prepared to master the skills in the use of English language in Nigerian classroom. The crux of teaching English language in Nigerian Education system is for national unity, technological development, and communicative competence and for international relations.

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