

Distinctive Use of Second Language Techniques: A Study of the English Language in Nigeria

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Abstract

English language which serves as the official language in Nigeria has certain socio-cultural variables influence its usage in the Nigerian context. The English language spoken in Nigeria is influenced by the various indigenous Nigerian languages. In order to meet the communicative needs of Nigerians, there is rapid expansion of the vocabulary of the language. This has brought about new coinages to suit the situation and context of usage. The English language spoken in Nigeria has undergone the process of rebirth to suit the Nigerian environment. The paper therefore examines the distinctive use of English language in Nigeria by looking at the features of the language that set it apart from other varieties of English. This paper then notes that the English language spoken in Nigeria is characterized by direct translation, transference, coinages and language mixing. The paper does not try to justify all the usage of the language as standard neither does it condemn them. However, some of these expressions are unavoidable since culture and language are interwoven.

Keywords: Nigeria, English language, Second language, English language in Nigeria, bilingualism

Introduction

The concept of second language (L2) implies the prior availability to the individual of a first language (L1), in other words some form of bilingualism. It is any language that a person uses other than a first or native language. 'Second language' may also refer to the chronology of language learning. It is any language acquired later than the first language. Second language is also used to refer to the level of language command in comparison with a primary or dominant language. In this sense, 'second language' indicates a lower level of actual or believed proficiency. In this paper, second language is seen as any language acquired after the first language. English serves a number of purposes in Nigeria and certain socio-cultural variables influence its use in the Nigerian context.

Nigeria as a multilingual country comprises different tribes who occupy geographically, a complicated landscape from its historic-cultural, political, economic and educational development (Shaibu, 2013:4). The linguistic situation in Nigeria has made English to become the official language in the country. English is widely practiced and occupies a prominent function both at the workplace, in the media, in politics and as a medium of instruction in schools along with the three

major languages: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba. The status of English as a second language in Nigeria coupled with the numerous roles it plays compels every Nigerian citizen to learn and speak it.

English language in Nigeria is a consequence of colonialism. The English language in Nigeria has undergone ‘domestication’ (Achebe 1975), ‘localization’ (Kachru 1983) and nativization (Odumuh 1993). These nomenclatures are central to explaining that English has come to stay with us in all our endeavours. Achebe (1975) opines that we should bend the language to accommodate our thought patterns and perform tasks suitable to us instead of looking at it as the language of the colonizers. Adegbiya (2004: 20) also referred to the process of rebirth of English to suit the Nigerian environment as “domestication of English in Nigeria”. In his words, “the term “domestication”, in the context of English in Nigeria, connotes “home – grown”, “made native”, “adapted and tamed” to suit the Nigerian environment”. Achebe in Bisong (1993:129) said:

I think that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my

African experience. However, it will have to be a new English still in full harmony

with its ancestral home but altered to fit its new African surroundings.

Ajewole-Orimogunje (2013, 261) notes that the English language lacks the ability to perfectly capture all aspects of Nigerian culture, hence it is frequently augmented by fresh coinages and importations derived from Nigerian English lexis as different from native speakers’ lexis. She goes further to state that there is the introduction of culture-specific vocabulary items into the English language by Nigerian speakers of the language (Ajewole-Orimogunje 2013, 261). This has led to creativity which manifests in coinages to reflect the Nigerian experience. The English language spoken in Nigeria to a great extent is influenced by the numerous indigenous languages spoken in the country.

As a result, English language in Nigeria is characterized by certain features such as translation, transference, neologisms and coinages, borrowing and loan words, language mixing, extension of meanings among others. These features of Nigerian English are sources of creativity in the language. For instance, Nigerians use these expressions instead of the standard variety: ‘not on seat’ for ‘not presently in the office’, senior sister’ for ‘elder sister’. Hence, this paper aims at examining some of the distinctive use of second language techniques as seen in the English language spoken in Nigeria.

The Status and Roles of English Language in Nigeria

English due to its long stay in Nigeria, has been adopted and appropriated by Nigerians and is used as the language of education and made to fulfill all the roles normally reserved for the mother tongue (Eze and Igwenyi, 2016, 107). Bamgbose (1995:9-11) observes that the present form and status of English in Nigeria are as a result of the contact between English and Nigerian languages in the socio-cultural and political situations. He identifies five dimensions of the influence of English in the Nigerian environment: educational, political, cultural, sociolinguistic and linguistic. The educational dimension concerns the language policy which entrenches English as the language of education; the political dimension concerns the emergence of an English-

speaking elite and the role played by the language in the fight for independence as well as in the evolution of the various constitutions under which the country has hitherto been governed. The cultural dimension concerns the introduction of new concepts and values, as well as modes of interaction, as reflected in both Nigerian English and Nigerian languages. The sociolinguistic dimension concerns the mode of acquisition and use of English, and the emergence of bilingual elite speaking English and one or more Nigerian languages, while the linguistic dimension concerns the way English has permeated the vocabulary of Nigerian language and the sound system.

Alo (2004:78) highlights a variety of important functions of the English language in Nigeria:

- a. Official language
- b. The lingua franca among educated Nigerians
- c. The medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary institution, including the last three years of primary education
- d. A school subject
- e. The principal language of wider communication, business, commerce, industry, public administration
- f. The language of science and technology
- g. An instrument of national, state and local politics
- h. A medium of creative expression.

It is worthy to note that English also serves the purpose of uniting the various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Translation

Translation is one of the second language techniques. It is a translation of a people's view or culture which may be linguistic or socio-cultural' (Opara, 2016:53). Oyeleye sees translation as 'the replacement of textual material in one language (source language) by equivalent textual material in another language (target language). Translation may be full or partial. In a full translation every part of the source language is replaced by the target language text material. In partial translation, some parts or parts of the source language are not translated: they are simply transferred to and incorporated in the target language text (Oyeleye, 1985). Opara (2016) notes that 'in translation cultural and sociological features of the source language are usually rendered in the target language.

Direct translation or transliteration from the mother tongue entails the creation of new structures with words that are English lexis but are direct translation from indigenous languages examples include: cow leg, bush meat (game), long leg (to be connected), goat head, goat meat, pork meat (pork), assorted meat and so on.

- * I am coming (for 'I will soon be with you')
- * He is a big man (for 'He is an affluent man')
- * He ate our money (for 'He embezzled our money').

Transference

This has to do with transfer of culture, sense or meaning from the native language into English or reinterpretation of an existing meaning in English to cover new areas of experience in Nigerian English. Achebe incorporates elements of the Igbo language into his novel. By incorporating Igbo words, rhythms, language, and concepts into his works, Achebe goes a long way to bridge a cultural divide. In *Things fall apart*, the Igbo vocabulary is merged into the text almost seamlessly so the reader understands the meaning of most Igbo words by their context. Such Igbo terms as 'chi', 'Ogbanje', 'obi', 'egwugwu' are untranslatable.

Transfers from Nigerian languages are found in the areas of clothing such as: 'agbada', 'babariga', 'buba'. The desire to patronize local dishes has encouraged the use of local words for food stuff such as 'akara', 'eba', 'akamu', 'tuwo', 'amala', 'ogbono', 'ewedu', 'garri'. All these words are transferred from the local languages with semantic import into Nigerian English.

Domestication of Idioms and Proverbs

This changes the meaning of such idioms and proverbs from the Standard British English (SBE) as they are used in the Nigerian context. Examples

- * Cut your coat according to your size.

(Cut your coat according to your cloth - SBE).

Other socio-culturally influenced words that take the form of idioms include:

- * 'Wash your car' to mean 'celebrate with one for the purchase of a car'.
- * A woman 'taking in' to mean 'to become pregnant';
- * To put sand in one's garri to mean 'to thwart one's efforts';
- * Off head to mean 'by heart/off by heart'.

Coinages and Neologism

This is a situation where new terms are created from existing English words. Alo (2006:26) also states that coinages are newly coined words and expression in English resulting from the prevailing socio-linguistic factors in Nigeria. Generally, it exposes the dynamic nature of language. In English for instance, vocabulary expands both in the first and second language contexts to reflect: (a) change in social outlook, (b) scientific discoveries and technological innovations as well as other forms of development, or (c) the inadequacy of existing words to express new ideas or events (Adejumo and Osunbade, 2014, 56). These include, big boys, tight friend, flowing gown, go-slow, talking-drum, high life, co-wife, senior wife, been to, bush meat, assorted meat, arrangee, invitee, decamp, academician, light (electricity), issues (children) etc.

Also, some words that have their origins from Nigerian languages are now used as loan words with their meanings from the Nigerian languages transferred into the Nigerian English usage. Such words are used when the English substitutes cannot be readily identified. This can be found in the titles of traditional rulers like 'Igwe', 'Emir', 'Alafin', 'Obi', 'Sultan' among others. These titles function in standard writings with preposition to denote the ruler's domain as in: 'Obi of Onitsha', 'Emir of Kano', 'Sultan of Sokoto', 'Ooni of Ife etc. Jowitt (1991) noted that a very large number of words belong to the registers of food, dress, transport, religion and traditional customs. The following are some examples:

- a. Akara (Yoruba) – fried cakes made of bean flour
- b. Buka (Hausa) – a cheap eating place
- c. Ogbono (Igbo) – name of a soup
- d. Agbada (Yoruba) – a large gown worn by men
- e. Danshiki (Hausa) – gown with wide armpits worn by men.

Semantic Reduplication

This is also referred to as tautology or redundancy. It is saying the same thing twice over in different words. Examples Include:

- The bag is red in colour.
- The little girl is fair in complexion.
- Repeat what you said again.
- That is my personal opinion.
- Nigeria's past history is worth studying.
- She is at the extreme end of the class.
- Return back my textbook.
- The evidence was completely destroyed.

Extension of Meaning

In Nigerian English, there is the extension of the semantic boundaries of existing English words to cover unfamiliar meanings. This is what Akindele and Adegbite (1992:5 5) refer to as the addition of meanings to a Standard English words.' Here, the meanings of some words have been fore-grounded and semantically adjusted. Hence, the standard meanings of certain lexical items and expressions have been modified to explain certain Nigerian concepts and objects. For instance, the kinship terms such as father, papa, mama, mother, brother, sister, aunty, uncle have extended meanings in the Nigerian contexts. Also, the exclamation 'ok' has been incorporated into the Nigerian English to mean several things such as 'acceptable to me', 'yes', everything is fine' and so on. This is also the case with the word 'sorry'. Other examples 'include'.

- I gave the police kolanut (bribe)
- Chike hears (understands) English language well.
- I stayed (lived) in Abuja for five years.

Language Mixing

This is the alternate use of two languages, codes or dialects in a sentence or discourse. The many years of co-existence of English and the indigenous Nigerian language has led to this trend in the speech of Nigerian bilinguals who share a common mother tongue. According to Udofot (2003:130), hardly can any educated Nigerian make two sentences in any Nigerian language without English words being inserted into them. Examples include:

*The man wu a pilot (The man is a pilot).

*The man wu onye ire abuo (The man is not trustworthy/ The man is a liar).

*Ada passiri exam ya (Ada passed her exam).

Semantic Back-formations and Affixations

Backformation was coined by a Scottish lexicographer James Murray, and is said to occur when speakers of a language invent new words by removing what is wrongly thought to be a suffix (i.e. element added to the end of a word) from an existing word for example, 'baby-sit' is derived from 'baby-sitter'; 'negate', is derived from 'negation'; 'chain-smoke' from 'chain smoker'; 'back-form' from 'back-formation'; 'vacate' from 'vacation'; 'barb' from 'barber' 'convocate' from 'convokes'.

Affixation occurs when speakers of a language coin a new word by adding to an existing word. It could be prefix (before), infix (middle) or suffix (at the end) of a word. Examples — follow + er follower; follower + ship followership; overspeed +ing overspeeding; chance+d chanced.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to examine distinctive use of second language techniques. The study has shown that Nigerian English is greatly influenced by the numerous indigenous languages in the country. It examined some of the features such as language mixing, semantic extension,

transference and so on. The paper neither justifies all the usage of Nigerian English as correct nor does it condemn them. However, it shows that there are aspects of it that are unavoidable since culture and language are interwoven. English language has become a Nigerian language which has provided another means for Nigerians to express their culture.

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