
Internationalization of the English Language in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper entitled internationalization of the English language in Nigeria, is a survey of the concept of internationalization generally and that of the English language in Nigeria in particular. Nigeria is a country with an extreme case of complex linguistic heterogeneity (multilingual set up). In the course of the survey, several issues like the prevalent chaotic social order, youth unemployment and accompanying unrest, endemic poverty, lingering sufferings, boko haram crises, IPOB agitations, AREWA/Niger Delta/Oduduwa youths quit notices etc. are considered. In the midst of these tiger headed crises there is a rise in the need for internal and international communication. Emphasis has no doubt shifted from the standard of the communicative tools. It is the opinion of this paper that internationalization of the English language is the way forward on the one hand, but the synergy or intercourse among Nigerian English, (NE) Nigeria Pidgin English and other indigenous Nigerian languages will enhance culture preservation, conflict resolution, internal or national relations. The paper therefore aims at giving a fresh insights into the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria. Suggestions that will enhance learning and make the English classroom more interesting and result yielding were given. A reversal to what is practicable was upheld.

The world has been divided over the years by a “Babel” of voices and this same world is of recent, going global and international by its drift or urge to establish mutual impact among persons and events through interconnectivity and ICT (International Communication and Technology) English has emerged the world most sought after language. It features as the uniting tongue for the development of humanity globally. It is viewed as a central conveyor belt: moving ingredients and products from the feeder belt of other disciplines, to churn out a developed and globalized human capital (Osakwe, 2011: P 13).

There is no argument as to the way the English language is heading for in the international and global market. English has been universally associated with international missions, hence the general scramble for the English language across the globe. English as an international language (EIL) is established. English is the empires

language and anyone who must relate at the international level must Learn and speak the international standard. Compulsory education worldwide is including English in their time tables. English teachers are imported from across the globe to help realize these dreams.

From the foregoing, English has become a global language, a window to the world and the key to being a global citizen. Its mastery enhances global awareness, global connections and participations. These and many more reasons have escalated the unprecedented growth of the English language in the last few decades and a sudden change of its status as a post-colonial heritage in countries like Singapore, Philippines, Nigeria and South Africa to a global language. (Osakwe 2011: P. 7) has this in support of the above:

“English has risen from the status of a vernacular of men standing..... to a language of education, science, diplomacy and ultimately as the quintessential world language”.

Assessing the function loads of English as reflected in (Osakwe 2011: P7), the process of making English the language of international organizations and in diplomatic relations is far gone. Nigeria is indeed the *primus inter pares* in this regards.

In the face of the hydra-headed monsters eating up the fabrics of unity, peace and tranquility in Nigeria, in a stratified society like Nigeria, where social groupings is the order of the day, is it this international English language standard that will be used to address issues in all social groups? It is good to mention that these social groupings are usually differentiated by disciplines, kind of institutions, levels of education, religions, tribes etc. What can be gathered from the insinuation above is that English language use can be conditioned to suit the audience and societal needs of the discourse community in order to facilitate communication effectiveness. Thus the variety of English language that will enhance mass participation and culture preservations may not most likely be suitable for conflict resolution and peace talks within Nigeria.

Internationalization: Meaning

It is on record that internationalization initiatives have developed in virtually all sectors of life in the last decades. “Internationalization is on the tables of policy makers everywhere” (Rizvi and Lingard 2010: p 15). This source sees internationalization as a process of integrating international education into the curriculum in order to increase international cooperation, enhance security and improve economic competitiveness. (Egron Polak 2013) says that internationalization is a dynamic process and a means to multiple ends that can bring numerous benefits. It can be generalized that internationalization is seen in the light of sustainable process of integrating international and intercultural standards into teaching, research and services. It is largely related to collaborative studies, study abroad programs and students/facility exchanges. De Wit (2011: p 12) criticizes these tenets of internationalization. To this source, there are misconceptions and misunderstanding of internationalization policies. Internationalization is less promising than it is conceived and defined. He says that in practice, internationalization is limited to teaching in English, studying abroad and teaching international subjects to international students, worst still having many

international students on campus is inclusive. This source laments that these conceptions of internationalization are short sighted.

Internationalization has transcended the nation-state boundaries and has great impacts on the teaching and learning of English Language. English as an international Language (EIL) will affect the students' English proficiency and identity development.

“The language a group of people speaks can sharpen and influence their beliefs about the world, this is because the vocabularies of a language can limit ones expression of ideas, thoughts, emotions and feelings about the. (Urujzian 2016:399)” to keep pace with the current trend of internationalization of the English language, text books writers in Nigeria have shifted away from local culture subjectivity. Traditional names are seldom included in examples. Meanwhile, it is believed that ‘when familiar features and names are seen in English textbooks, comprehension could be enhanced.

The Marxists are worried about the domineering spread and status of the English language. They see it as the ammunition of the powerful English speaking Britons and Americans. They view internationalization of English language as Linguistic imperialism. The Functionalist on the other hand view the uniting roles of the English language as a neutral tool serving the communication needs of people with different languages. Other critical Scholars and the Culturalists are deeply worried about the fast disappearance of our culture in favour of the English culture. According to these groups of Scholars one cannot separate language from culture. They are of the opinion that local languages should be promoted so as to preserve the ecology of languages.

To do the above as suggested by the Culturalists, alongside embracing internationalization squarely, our cultural contents must be incorporated into the global vehicle of communication (The English Language) i.e. Our local names, names of streets, our idioms and idiomatic expressions, names of mountains and rivers etc. should form parts of comprehensive passages and literature texts should promote our cultural values. By so doing the (vehicle) English Language will be used to transport our cultural values across the globe.

Internationalization of English Language in Nigeria

In the course of reviewing the internationalization of the English language in Nigeria a lot of conflicting concepts have cropped up. Linguistic issues like language and its functions, language and regional variations i.e. mothers tongue interference, language and culture, productivity and creativity etc. Also glaring is the present chaotic nature of the Nigerian communities and states and the prevalent hate speeches, quit notices etc. in these circumstances, in the face of these moral decadence, religious wars and tribal rancour, there is a great doubt as to if English language in its international standard (EIL) can serve these purposes . Already in order to address these prevalent disequilibrium and chaotic social order, endemic poverty, lingering suffering and unemployment, Nigerians and other users of English have twisted or bastardized the English language positively or negatively to enable them communicate effectively as noted by (Udoinwang D. and Urujzian V. 2017.P. 74).

“African writers and other users of English resort to diverse means of translating traumatizing experiences.... by deploying culturally symbiotic languages and creatively coded linguistic signs that serve to signify the dynamics and the complex webs of our post-colonial socio political reality (Udoinwang D. and Urujzian V. 2017:P74)”

The above suggest creativity and intentional deviation from the common core (EIL) to perfect and widen communication. Language is used to respond to recurring situations around us. For instance one needs a suitable variety of English to address the Fulani cattle rearers menace, Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) agitations, AREWA youths quit notice, Oduduwa and Niger Delta youths agitations etc. lexical choices are often affected by the audience and register. From the analysis above, should one completely criticize the alarming spread of the Nigerian English language and Nigerian Pidgin in the face of these predicaments?

Humans, as well as Nigerians are continually creating new expressions and novel utterances by manipulating their linguistic resources to describe new objects and situations. This property is described as productivity or creativity or open mindedness. Pidgin English is wide spreading and becoming popular in Nigerian movies, music industry, markets, parks and campuses etc. There is also a recent shift from the internal structure of language (its form) and the articulation of words (Phonology). Preference is on varied uses of languages in human life (its functions) basically its communicative and interactive functions.

Encouraging Nigerian English in the background will enable the Nigerian users to task their linguistic facilities and their creative genius. They will incorporate lexical items from the indigenous languages into English thus moderating English to suit peculiar Nigerian situations. Nigerian English is evolving into an internationally recognizable standard so while clamouring for the international standard of English for students, professionals and any one with international concerns, linguistic nationalism should be cultivated as well. Chinua Achebe should be our role model. He presents his literary works in “a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African (Nigerian surroundings)” (Achebe 1981: 62). This takes us to the concept of communicative competence.

What is Communicative Competence?

The issue of internationalization of the English language cannot be fully explored without mentioning communicative competence which is the general ability to use language accurately, appropriately and flexibly. Language serves a great number of social purposes. It is not limited to any specific role or function, it is generally accepted that language is used for communication but the two basic communicative functions are:- transactional and interactional functions. Just as the terminologies suggest, communication could be to enhance transaction between participants or to enhance mere interaction among participants. In most cases there is a confluence between the two. Conversation is often a mix of transaction and interaction. Since language can be put into multiple purposes, accurate, appropriate and flexible usage (communicative competence) is needed. Sociolinguistic competence, the ability to use L2 (second

language) to suit the social context is what this paper professes. Strategic competence, the ability to organize a message effectively and to compensate, via strategies for any difficulties is also professed. This flexibility in L2 use is a key element in communicative success.

Also worthy of mention is the facts concerning language and regional variations. Every language has a lot of variations, especially at the level of phonology (the way it is spoken). English language is not an exception. A range of variation is found in different parts of the country all traceable to mother tongue (L1) interference. As people migrate to different part of Nigeria the English language which is the official language becomes equally impaired phonologically as there are deviant usages among users of English in Nigeria. The L1 interference gives L2 a new African flavour. This is reported thus:

“Retroactive interference of mother tongue (MT) with second language (L2) at all levels of language studies is a glaring issue with English language teaching and learning” (Urujzian 2016: p 403).

From the foregoing, the question now is; where is the place of regional varieties of English i.e. Yoruba English, Igbo English, Hausa English, Akwa Ibom English etc. in the face of this clamour for English language as an international standard (EIL)? Internationalization of English language in Nigeria is in progress but Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin English are competing favourably and gradually gaining international recognition.

Conclusion

The advent of internationalization has permeated all facets of human endeavours. Its effect on the English language is great as it has broadened mass knowledge. There is a great flexibility as to what variety of English language to be put to use at all situations. Nigerians are speaking international Standard English to international audience, Nigerian Standard English to national audience and Nigerian pidgin at different occasions. Nigerian beats or music are now presented in Pidgin English. The Nigerian Movie Industry (Nollywood) is having a smooth glide with Nigerian English and Nigerian Pidgin of assorted varieties. As useful as these medium are, the L2 classroom must reflect all the usable standards especially within this season of volatility in Nigeria. Communication should be the key word i.e. internationally, nationally and locally. Teachers must also have a firm grasp of language function and culture in order to cultivate in students good communicative competence. English language teachers should place less emphasis on international standards and focus on teaching English from cultural point of view as this will improve students' cultural sensitivity and cultural acceptance. Understanding cultural differences will promote cultural tolerance in the face of Nigeria's near war postures.

Suggestions

Since this paper posits a mutual coexistence of English as an International Language (EIL), Nigerian English (NGE) and Pidgin English and other Nigerian languages, the following suggestions are given:

1. Suitable materials should be put in place to organize an [2 class room experience that will have salutary effect on our economic situations and communal crises.
2. The fundamental shift from total eradication of Nigerian coinages and tagging innovative expressions as errors should be applauded. These innovative expressions should be looked at as common L2 acquisition process in act on.
3. The different opinions on how to create communicative experiences for L2 learners should be re-visited and emphasis should be on the function of language (what is it used for) not on (form) correct grammatical or phonological structures.
4. Transfer should be seen as an active learning not error. Transfer means using sounds, expressions or structures from L1 when performing in the L2.

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