

USE OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA AND AROUND THE WORLD

Dr. Sunday Adejimola Amuseghan

Abstract

Many linguists and researchers are showing more interest and understanding in the use of English around the world. The English we hear, read and write in different parts of the world and even among different socially stratified people in the same speech community, clearly indicates a dozen of varieties of usage. This paper examines some socio-linguistic determinants of English usage in Nigeria and around the world. It is observed that the educated English variety is codified in dictionaries and grammar books which serve as guides to usages. Above all, it is this variety that is taught in the school system at all levels and have become the adopted standard among other varieties occasioned by some other socio-linguistic factors. The paper also observes that though English is used as a second language in Nigeria, it is contributing through an impeccable and Nigerian features to the development of language around the world.

Introduction

There are many varieties of English around the world today. It is rather difficult to categorically state the number of these varieties or dialects of English the world over. There are" certainly about a dozen of them; depending on how detailed we want to be in our linguistic observations. English varieties are even more obviously numerous in old Britain than in such relatively recent English settlements as North America, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. Even more varieties are emerging, mostly in the former British colonies such as India, Ghana, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Despite all these varieties, Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:4) observe:

A common core is present in all the varieties so that, however esoteric a variety may be, it has running through it a set of grammatical and other characteristics that are present in all the others. It is this fact that justifies the application of the name 'English' to all the varieties.

Within each of the regional varieties there is still considerable variation in individual speech due to a lot of sociological indices such as age, sex, socio-economic and ethnic groups, education, occupation and income. Out of these noticeable variations, educated English naturally tends to be given the additional prestige of government agencies, the profession, the political parties, the media, the law, and the pulpit. This brand of English cuts across any dialectological barriers. The educated English variety is codified in dictionaries, grammars and guides to usages. Above all, it is this variety that is taught in the school system at all levels. As a result, it has become the adopted standard. It is, therefore, referred to as Standard English. In contrast to this, all forms that are not associated with the educated standard are generally described or labeled as nonstandard.

English is an international language whose international standard is not narrowed down to any regional variety (Phillipson, 2001). In terms of grammar, vocabulary and speech, the International English maintains codes that are supranational or supra-regional.

However, two national standards stand out distinctively among the other English language varieties. These are American English (Am E) and British English (Br E). Giving the reasons why the two regional standards are predominant, Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:7), state that:

The United States and Britain have been separate political entities for two centuries; for generations, thousands of books have been appearing annually; there is a long tradition of publishing descriptions of both Am E and Br E.

Apart from the reasons given above, it is obvious that although these criteria are crucial to the codification or institutionalization of the standards, it is imperative to add that the influence of the international electronic media such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of

America (VGA) and the Cable Network News (CNN) also contribute significantly to the use, acceptance and popularity of the two most recognized regional standards. Other recognized national standards are Scottish English, Canadian English; South African English, Australian English, New Zealand English and some others which are indigenous in status, e.g. Caribbean English (Trudgill and Hannah 1982).

Nigerian English is, at last, emerging and is being recognized around the world. For instance, Greenbaum and Quirk (1990:8), conclude that: "In addition, some believe there are emerging standards in countries where English is a second language such as India and Nigeria".

Many linguists have observed and recognized the reality of Nigerian English among other varieties in the world. This is why linguists in Nigeria are working relentlessly to codify, institutionalize and classify Nigerian English into standard and non-standard linguistic features.

Kachru (1975:12), says that "English is no more a 'guest' in the linguistic ecology of West Africa but has become an integral part of the linguistic family". After a long period of debate, a decolonized and demythologized canon of Nigerian English has been established and recognized.

The Use of English around the World

There are thousands of different languages all over the world, but English is generally acknowledged to be the world's most widely used language. According to Quirk, et al. (1985), about 1800 million speakers use English either as their native language or as the official one. Also, the spread of English over many countries in different continents makes it an international language.

English is used as a native language in North America, the British Isles, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean and South Africa. Also, English is acquired as a second language (L2) in many countries. Most of these countries are former British territories. The way English is used as a second language (ESL) as well as for specific purposes may make the number of second and foreign users greater than the native speakers, if it has not done so already (Phillipson, 2001).

The importance of English in education in L2 countries is obvious in book publishing, especially in Nigeria and India, where we have very thick population. According to Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), in 1977, out of a world total of 50047 translations of books, 19577 were from English. The nearest competitors were French (6054) and Russian (1771).

English is used as a foreign language in almost every part of the world in radio broadcast, television, books or newspapers, in commerce or travel. For example, American organizations such as the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the Voice of America have been performing an extraordinarily brilliant role in propagating English usage worldwide. The British Council also provides great support for teaching English to Commonwealth nations and other countries. The BBC is noted for and devoted to the teaching of English as a foreign language internationally.

The reasons for the demand for English vary from country to country and from individual to individual. Clearly put, English is the top requirement for good jobs as business is often conducted with the knowledge of sound English. A good mastery of English is also required for access to current scientific literature and journals. It is therefore closely aligned with technological and economic development. Even the great world manufacturing countries, Germany and Japan, use English as their principal advertising and sales medium. It is also the language of automation and computer technology as well as the language of international aviation, shipping, sports, communication and diplomacy. According to Quirk, et al (1985), English is the most frequently used language both in debates in the United Nations and in the general conduct of UN business.

The Teaching of English

Most language teaching and learning take place ordinarily at home and at private or government schools. The efforts of the school are complemented at home by the parents and the media. Apart from the primary and secondary school systems, there are large numbers of learners of English in higher institutions for various purposes. What is of common interest to all these learners is that English is required and used for scientific and technological subjects in the institutions. Following Close (1965), we may agree that there are three stages in scientific or technological English. These are: foundation stage, intermediate stage and advanced stage. The first stage is provided by the normal school English course; the second stage is directed towards general scientific/technological purposes. This stage is provided in the first year university education, polytechnics or colleges of technology. The third stage is for advanced scientific/technological purposes. Many students travel abroad for

their higher and further education to English-speaking countries, where English is necessarily the medium for their studies. In 1979, as further reported by Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), there were 286,340 such foreign students enrolled at the post secondary level of education in the United States alone, with 56,877 in the United Kingdom, and 3,248 in Canada.

In countries where English is predominantly used as the native language, a variety associated with the elite is adopted and taught in the schools. The educated variety thus assumes the status of Standard English in such countries. However, in countries where English is non-native, according to Greenbaum and Quirk (1990), the major models for speech and writing have generally depended on the British and American Standards. According to Quirk et al (1985:7), the choice between the two is essentially influenced by a number of factors:

- (a) Whether the country was formerly a British or a US colony;
- (b) The country's nearness to either Britain or US.
- (c) Which of the two had most influenced the country's economic, cultural or scientific development;
- (d) Which of the two has current commercial and/or political relations with the country.

It must be emphasized that in some countries both American and British English standards are taught. There are divided opinions on the mix-up of the two or the use of one standard at the expense of the other.

However, this confused situation (to both English and other subject teachers, irrespective of their educational qualifications) is being clarified with the language model statement or instruction by the examining bodies such as the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Teachers Institute (NTI) and the National Examinations Council (NECO) which are responsible for the standards in most of the West African countries. Whether British or American English, what is required in terms of spelling is consistency in every situation. When it comes to grammar, the common international model is emphasized by these examining bodies. The irony of teaching the English Language in a Nigerian situation is that though the emphasized standard is international, in reality the teachers who acquired the language through non-native teachers in a non-native environment, do use, teach and accept Nigerian English in the primary and secondary schools. According to Caldas and Caron-Caldas (2002), rearing bilinguals in this environment is a very big challenge. This has great linguistic, socio-cultural and pragmatic implications. Some of the teachers teach this variety of English (Nigerian English) poorly out of sheer incompetence or ignorance while some are forced to use or accept such in certain socio-cultural situations (Clement and Gardner, 2001), thereby leading to lack of international intelligibility. With inadequately qualified English staff and indifferent teaching standards in most of the secondary schools, many students use substandard English.

The English Language in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the countries that have adopted English as an official language. This development is possible because of the expansion of trade and industry to Nigeria and other African countries by the British in the early 19 century. The advent of the British in Nigeria led to a colonial experience that subjected many different ethnic groups from different geo-political areas to the same colonial rule. British administration, according to Moore (1969:235), "presided over communities which throughout remained overwhelmingly non-English in ethnic stock, social habits and language. In the independent VVc.sl African nations like Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, English .? used as the official language of government and commerce. It is also used as the medium .: instruction (Tiffen, 1968). Bamgbose (3971:37), states that "of the entire heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration, probably none is more important than the English language... In order to still maintain the geographical entity, Nigeria finds it convenient to adopt English as a unifying language with which Nigerians of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds within the country could communicate with one another as well as maintain communication links with the colonial lords in their home country. English then becomes for Nigeria an international and international language: the Commonwealth language of the British people are British colonized people.

The language contact situations in Nigeria have led to a socio-cultural and linguistic mix-up, resulting in bilingualism, multilingualism, biculturalism and multiculturalism. This idea is clear., sated in Bamgbose (1971:5X):

In a situation where English is in contact with a second language, it is to be expected that the kinds of English found will be different from the varieties of English spoken in countries where English is the mother tongue.

Even in Nigeria, there is a lot of varieties of English used in different linguistic domains which are brought about by the interference factor of different indigenous languages. Many linguists have classified these varieties into pidginisation of the English language (Todd, 1974; Eze, 1980; Egbe, 1989), decolonization of the English language (Banjo, 1970) or the nativisation of English (Fishmao, 1972; Kachru, 1982). These terms are regarded as normal in studying language varieties in order to describe the socio-linguistic processes of localized forms of target English. Kachru (1982:5) clearly states that:

Once English was adopted in a region whether for science, technology, literature, prestige, elitism or "modernization", it went through a reincarnation, which was partly linguistic and partly cultural.

As earlier stated, the English language serves as a non-native second language (L2) in Nigeria. It then follows that the cultures and indigenous languages play a significant role in the nativisation process of English in Nigeria. Some linguists are apt to identify such nativisation features in Nigerian English in the aspects of phonetic and phonemic sound, lexical borrowings and word-formation or neologisms.

There is a wide claim by some linguists within and outside Nigeria that a Nigerian variety of English termed "Nigerian English"¹ exists, like several other national varieties of English such as American, Australian, Ghanaian, Indian and the rest of national brands of English. This claim has made some linguists in Nigeria (Adetugbo 1979, Adeniran 1977) to be in search of a standard English in Nigeria. According to Oyeade (2000), this has further generated a lot of controversies as there has not been an acceptable explanation and consensus reached among the proponents.

The Role of English in Nigeria

In Nigeria, English gradually replaced Negro-Portuguese as the language of trade on the West African coast during the eighteenth century, but remained very much limited to the coast until the second half of the nineteenth century (Brosnahan, 1958). This was the period of missionary and commercial penetration, which ended with the British taking over control and setting up an administrative system, with English as the official language over the whole country.

Nigeria is a multilingual country. The number of languages spoken here is not accurately known, but it is postulated that there are over 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria (Bamgbose, 1971). These languages belong to non-British ethnic groups in Nigeria that were amalgamated in 1914 by the British Colonial Administration, which led to the creation of Nigeria as a country. The British Administration in Nigeria implemented the policy of Britain. It promoted and developed internal trade and communication, and welded together peoples of different languages, religions and geopolitical backgrounds into an entity. A striking advantage of English in Nigeria was then achieved.

English plays the role of the language of commerce and the law, of politics and administration, of education and culture at all levels above the local level. Therefore, adequate knowledge of English is an indispensable requirement for anyone to rise above or live in any wider context than the village. Ironically, the spread of the ideas of independence and nationalism throughout Nigeria as well as the organization of resistance to European imperialism was made possible by means of the English language which served as an imposed common language of the Nigerian territory by one of the European powers.

According to Spencer (1971:13), English becomes considerably more than a borrowed and alien language in Nigeria:

Newspapers are produced in English; journals in English grow in number year by year; parliamentary debates are for the most part held in English. West Africans are contributing, often through the medium of an impeccable English, to scientific thought and historical investigation, and the new poetry, drama, and fiction in English which is now emerging from West

Africa (Nigeria) is catching the imagination and commanding the admiration of English-reading world.

English is widely used in Nigeria, mostly in the urban areas like Lagos, Ibadan, Benin, Enugu, Kano, Kaduna, Abuja, Port-Harcourt and Calabar which are the centers of urban activities. Thus the population of its primary users in the heavily, commercial and industrial centers rapidly developed into an English-speaking "elite". Therefore, the class uses the opportunity of English as a lingua franca (Seidhofcr, 2001).

The advent of Christian missionaries since the middle of the eighteenth century, and the subsequent government language policies have made English an official language in Nigeria. This has resulted in the growth of a small but important group of professional men and clerical workers.. However, the tremendous expansion of education since 1940, and especially after the 1950s, has opened entry to this "elite" class to a very wide range of the Nigerian educated population.

However, the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria amended the previously practiced language policy in Nigeria by providing for the use of English language and three major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) for the official conduct of parliamentary debates at the national level. To this end, Section 51 of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (p.35) clearly stipulates that:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made therefore.

The constitutional language policy provision as stated above, therefore, is in recognition of one of the linguistic characteristics of Language contact situations in a multilingual community like Nigeria. The language policy gives room for the three principal ethnic and linguistic groups to continually use their languages for official matters; and it allows the English language to be constitutionally recognized as the language of unity (lingua franca) among groups in the National Assembly, thus allaying the fears of language imposition from any dominating group. The provision has adequately catered for the existence of "diglossia". Despite all these functions the indigenous languages serve in Nigeria, English language still serves as the sole official language among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria constitutionally. As a result of this unique role of English, there is a need to achieve communicative competence in the language for the purpose of clarity of expression among Nigerians. In support of this viewpoint, James (1979), calls for a high level of communicative competence in the use of English, particularly by educated Nigerians of high socio-economic standards. She opines that:

Those members of any profession who must contribute to the literature and advancement of (heir profession; those whose jobs call upon them to deal with sensitive national and international issues... must of necessity be able to manipulate the language and exploit its resources to the fullest.

To some Nigerians, English is no longer the language of the colonial masters but something which has been adopted and adapted to their own use. The sociological factors of expanded education and mass media in supporting the extensive use of English in Nigeria, has led to notable linguistic features of Nigerian English and its standard. The continued increase in the population of secondary school graduates and holders of higher certificates as well as an increase in the number of government workers will continue to sustain (he English language and its use among the world's varieties of English or "Englishes".

Conclusion

This paper proves that we have a dozen of 'Englishes' all over the world. This is evidence that the English we hear, speak, read and write is no more either King or Queen's English but geographically, socially and culturally domesticated English. Despite all the local, national and international varieties of English, a common core is present in all of them in terms of grammatical and other characteristics which justify the application of the name 'English' to all the varieties.

The brand of English we use in Nigeria is labeled ' Nigerian English' because it has Nigerian characteristics. However, education and examination bodies have helped a lot to keep and maintain a standard that is intelligible and acceptable to the international community. Also, we still acknowledge the impact of socio-economic factors as well as media houses as part of the linguistic influences of the brand

of English we hear, speak, read and write all over the world, especially in Nigeria where social, education, print and electronic media play important roles in our multilingual setting in order to acquire either pidgin, Nigerian English or international English.

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