

NEWER ENGLISHES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

English language is Nigeria's official language whose emergence into the Nigerian language scene could be dated back as early as the 16th century. The language has developed varieties according to different educational parameters occupied by thousands, if not millions, of its speakers across Nigeria. In the 1990s a conference was held to mark the 50 years of the existence of the British Council in Nigeria. This conference equally introduced or highlighted the existence of "New Englishes," or summarily "varieties of English language in Nigeria as not only the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools: primary, post primary and tertiary institutions but as the language of governance, trade and industry. Today, a newer version of English language is being coined and spoken alongside the already existent "New Englishes". We have tagged this emerging newer version "Newer Englishes", and it is having a swell time in the tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It has within its system, new coinages which are English based but which are used outside the syntactical structure of standard

English which would meet international acceptability and intelligibility.

Keywords: English language, *New Englishes*, *Newer Englishes*, Varieties of English language in Nigeria.

Introduction

In 1993, there was a conference on communicative competence and the role of English as a second language in Nigeria, held in Ibadan, in the month of December. This conference marked the 50th anniversary of the British Council in Nigeria. The result of this international conference was the publication of a book titled “*New Englishes*” *A West African Perspective* edited by Ayo Bamgbose, Ayo Banjo and Andrew Thomas. Communicative competence was the keynote of that conference especially when viewed from the perspective of second language acquisition or language acquisition as a whole. Linguists (Chomsky, 1965; Foder & Carret, 1966, Campbell & Wales, 1970; Kac, 1992; Fernandez & Cairns, 2011) have theorized on competence since the mid 1960s, and prominent applied linguists (Widdowson, 1978; Brumfit & Johnson, 1979) have had their turn in the argument. In Nigeria, English which has escaped becoming Nigeria’s National Language has developed varieties based on the multiplicity of indigenous languages that have beset the Nigerian language ecology.

At one time in the study of English in Nigeria, there were various argument on which variety to teach and speak. The argument posited the following varieties of English: NE (Nigerian English) P.E. (Pidgin English) B.E (Broken English) SNE (Standard Nigerian English) and Popular Nigeria English (PNE) whose words called Loan words, Jowitt (1991) interpenetrates the other varieties. As the argument rages on even to present day Nigeria, what seems to have been agreed on is the need to acquire competence and speak a variety that meets international intelligibility and acceptability. The variety SNE (Standard Nigeria English) seems to meet this objective even though native words from Nigeria's indigenous languages can still infiltrate. "New Englishes" as a text partly focused on not only pidgin but Nigerian pidgin, its problems and prospects. This is understandable when viewed or juxtaposed alongside other pidgins across the world not basically Nigerian but developed in the regions in which they exist through social, trade and other contacts.

Today in our institutions of higher learning another kind of English has come into being. We have called it "Newer Englishes" because they are not only based on loan words from local languages or from both "Broken" and "Pidgin" which are English based, but from standard English as well. "Newer Englishes" does not agree to the rules of syntax and survives on extensive misplacement and

replacement of words with other words which rids the sentence of its grammaticality. Though “Newer Englishes” communicates just like pidgin and other varieties, yet the primary objective of a language apart from communication is to speak it according to the rules and norms that govern the spoken art of that language. If English has come to stay as Nigeria’s official language- and it has, then our students especially in tertiary institutions must speak it to meet world standard and acceptability. Pidgin is not really new in the Nigeria language scene and so is its twin brother “broken.” “Broken” may even be newer than “pidgin” since it is an over dose of pidgin, an attempt to communicate at all cost when every other attempt to communicate in the standard form fails, so you have to break the language into various fragments or even murder it in an attempt to communicate. Pidgin could be dated back as far as the 16th century or even before. The words we use in English language today are not specifically English as some had been borrowed from other languages: Latin German, Greek, Sanskrit, French etc and they have been used by the humanity before us, though not exactly in the same sentence pattern, since sentences are in themselves individualistic and sometimes situational. What is true about “New Englishes,” is the fact that they are coinages that arise from the way we speak English. It is our own version of English, the Nigerian kind of English, not that of the white man.

“Newer Englishes” portray this same fact except that to a certain extent it makes use of the same strata of English words by misplacing or substituting words with words not really supposed to be there in a sentence. This is responsible for the lack of syntax and grammaticality of sentences spoken and even written by our students in higher institutions across the country.

In the 1980s, there was a surge in the study of English language, not only in English colonized countries, but also in developing countries where English is not the mother tongue (MT) of majority of citizens. Adequate attention has been given to the emergence of local varieties which have grown up alongside standard English (SE). Ever since, there has been lots of books written on the teaching of English as a second foreign language with advocates like Kachru, Bickerton Richards, and a whole lot of others attempting to provide a theoretical framework for what has been variously labeled: “indigenous,” or indigenized”, English “nativized” English, “hybridized “English and “non native” English. In this context indigenous English means indigenous in those countries where English is spoken as a second language, but such English could equally be taken for a mother tongue (MT). Mother tongue (MT) English could be indigenized. “Hybridized” simply means that a variety is a mixture of standard

English and local derivatives from the mother tongue, with the term non native coming in between to mean “foreign”

The term “New English” appeared in 1980 denoting a contrast to what is old and the term “old English” denotes the English spoken before 1150, the Anglo Saxon period in the history of English. “New Englishes” posits the usage of an established language variety, but English as a second language specifically deals with language learning.

In highlighting the emergence of “Newer Englishes” alongside “New Englishes”, Platt et al say:

“the acrolects and some of the mesolects can be considered “New Englishes” (in the West Indies situation).” But what Platt failed to understand is that language is dynamic and so is the art of speaking it which may acquire other propensities than those already known. Therefore in studying “Newer Englishes” we will have to look beyond the “New Englishes” with the objective of comparing both and attempting a broad generalization. Again Platt et al posits that: “there are a number of general tendencies shared by some or all of the “New Englishes” and others shared by some or more. For them “general tendencies in phonology are that the fricatives (D) and (Q) are replaced by other sounds, usually (d) and (t) and consonant clusters are simplified in syntax. Nouns are not marked for the plural and the verb

is not marked for the third person singular of the present simple tense or for the past tense. In the area of lexis, Loan words are introduced from background languages, there are local coinages of new words and expressions and meanings of existing English words are extended or restricted.” These common features are equally latent in “Newer Englishes” which like its predecessor fail to make use of the two articles, “the,” and “a” in their sentence formation, dental fricatives are replaced with dental stops and native speakers learn the stops even before the fricatives. All these tendencies are common with both “New Englishes” and “NewerEnglishes users are very common among learners of English whether as a second or foreign language.

The Nigerian Language Situation

To know the relevance of English language and its role on the Nigerian scene, that is in Jowittsterm, its socio-linguistic profile, it will be pertinent to equally discuss indigenous languages from where some versions of “new Englishes” have emanated either as pidgin or broken. The number of languages in Nigeria ranges from 200 to over 400, making it a fundamental linguistic problem. That problem is the problem of distinguishing between language and dialect, and how to annualize a speech system of communication within a social group. For instance are Efik, Ibibio and Anang dialects of the same language “Efik”, “Ibibio”, “Anang” or are they to be taken for different

languages? If they are not regarded as dialect cluster will they then be regarded as language cluster? Then in the Nigerian language dilemma should they be regarded as one language? This problem has made Nigerian languages achieve a lot of prestige and recognition as observed in the index of Nigerian languages prepared by Hansford Brendor Samuel, and Stanford (1976). The same question could be asked of Afikpo (Ehugbo) dialect, Ikwere and the so called Ijekebee. Indigenous languages in Nigeria have evolved and grown and from this growth both pidgin and broken (all English based) have been able to borrow from its rich repertoire of words. These words infiltrate into the target language as PNE (Popular Nigeria English), Jowitt (1991). These words are also called loan words and become part of the new Englishes since they are used in pidgin or broken variants.

Variants

In the use of English language in Nigeria and since the early developmental stage of Nigerian English studies, the implication of distinguishing between errors and variants has always been emphasized. Walsh distinguished between what he called “imperfect English” (errors) and acceptable local variants. However distinguishing between these two is a problem only when the difficulty of interpretation of sentences arises. In this case, we can posit that an error is a non standard English version not acceptable to educated

Nigerians even though a variant may not be unacceptable once its meaning has been ascertained. To be candid there is an important relationship between errors and variants in the sense that a variant was originally a deviant form which is regarded as an error until it became an institutionalized error which was latter accepted widely and given a Nigerian if not a universal endorsement. This is, what happened in broken and pidgin in “new Englishes” and in the “newer Englishes” which has emerged. The usage of these variants has been accepted and endorsed even by foreigners who have lived in Nigeria for a long time and have understood the Nigerian language landscape which is quite unique but may also be a replay of what is obtainable in their homeland. Such variants as “sorry,” “not on seat,” “motor park” are lexical in nature and are understood as specifically Nigerian English—that is a variety of English spoken in Nigeria. This may be contrasted with the SBE (standard British English) version. For example “Go straight on” instead of its Nigerian equivalent “Go Straight”.

Newer Englishes

This new wave of Englishes permeating the entire strata of our higher institutions may be regarded as an entirely different version or varieties of the already existent pidgin, broken, standard Nigerian English (SNE) or ‘popular Nigeria English (PNE). A variety of

language is usually one of many general but complete language systems used by a vast proportion of people who may not classify it as a different language even when they have characteristics that may distinguish it from other systems. This is why and how Nigerian English, British English, American English etc have been aptly referred to as varieties. In most cases the difference between varieties is phonological. There is a widely accepted reason that even if students fail to make use of local variants in their spoken art of English, elements of mother tongue sentences infiltrate into the target language, in English sentences. This is why the use of “English: is taught in higher institutions to make students speak a variety of English that is grammatical. But this assertion may not always be true as students coin sentences without a mother tongue element. When they do a sort of “Newer Englishes” arise. In our institutions of higher learning, we notice the following versions of “newer Englishes” amongst students:

Peter: Did you understand what the lecturer said?

Dave: As in?

Peter: As in the buying of text books

Dave: Well I did.

In the brief dialogue above, “As in” is a confused sentence structure. It could mean “about what?” or “concerning what?”. We do not know

from what mother tongue such a trite term could have been coined from.

Secondly, in our institutions of higher learning students make extensive use of the word “lodge” to mean “hostel”. “I am in my lodge”. Lodge here is used in a different sense other than the true English dictionary meaning of “lodge”, and in the students case “my lodge” denotes ownership and not even a “lodge” or “accommodation” or private “hostel” or “dormitory” that is occupied on rent. The same is true of the use of the term “self contained”. We read local adverts of a “self contained” to let. For the students, a “self contained” could equally mean a “lodge,” but in any case an accommodation or apartment for a single student with a room, kitchen, bath, toilet etc. It contains everything needed in an American “flat” or a British “apartment”. These terms “lodge” or “self contained” were not known to students in the late 80s and 90s and of course “lodge” has an entirely different meaning from the new meaning it has acquired. They are newer versions of English spoken by students to meet communication need and the new pattern of building accommodation for students in higher institutions in Nigeria.

Thirdly in our higher institutions and specifically among the students population words which are onomatopoeic have been contracted into English to express some feelings of ecstasy, especially during

students union election or other students activities. Such words as “Gbosa” “Gbogboo” “Waa-waa” for instance may replace the English version: “Hip! Hip!! Hip!!! Huraay” which may not even be quite onomatopoeic but rather interjectory or complimentary. Our information communication technology too has brought into English new word coinages which form part of the lexicon of “newer Englishes” spoken in higher institutions and students sometimes have the tendency to use “I.C.T” (Information Communication Technology) terms outside its normal setting and to mean something different: “I go browse you” and “don’t paste me,” are some of the usages concocted by students in quite informal situations; not necessarily related to the computers.

How often have you listened to the sentence: “Mummy, Susan wants to poo-poo?” The word “poo-poo” is onomatopoeic indicating that the child is defecating. The word is neither English nor Igbo, it is a sound pattern and does not have the exact meaning of the English word pooh-poohing, meaning to ridicule or criticize. A British native speaker of English may not understand this newer English coinage if he or she has not lived in Nigeria for upwards to five or ten years and depending on his or her social circle or engagements.

Conclusion

English language is the world's most fluid language that has the tendency to accommodate loan or borrowed words from other languages into its system quite easily. The language has therefore grown and expanded into the new varieties spoken across the nations of the world. In Nigerian institutions of higher learning, there is no end in sight to the extent to which "Newer Englishes" may be used as a means of communication. New words are being propagated everyday, and new scientific invention is increasing the register of words not only in English language, but in other languages. One only hopes that students in higher institutions in Nigeria will lean to speak a variety of English that is standard enough to meet not only their immediate education need but world need as well. Newer Englishes thus become a new field of speech pattern that is unfolding in our higher institutions.

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