



AN ENQUIRY INTO THE NIGERIANISM IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT: *This study seeks to examine the Nigerianism in Nigerian English in order to gain a better understanding of the English language in Nigeria. Specifically, it will investigate how Nigerian English has developed and what aspects of Nigerian language and culture have influenced it. In doing so, it will provide insight on the role of Nigerian English in the larger Nigerian context, as well as the broader international context. It will also review the sociolinguistic features of the Nigerian varieties of English in the area of phonology. The findings of this research are expected to provide a deeper understanding of the English language in Nigeria and its functionality within the Nigerian context. It is hoped that the results of this study can be used to inform and guide the development of future language policies in Nigeria. This study will also provide a valuable contribution to the existing body of research into the development of English and language in general.*



INTRODUCTION

Nigerian English (also known as Nigerian pidgin) is a unique version of English language which is prevalent in Nigeria and is often used as a 'second language' in the country. It has become increasingly popular due to the rich culture of Nigeria and the various influences that have shaped the development of the language over time.

Nigerian English is distinct from British English in many ways; first, it has a much more relaxed pronunciation, where words are often pronounced phonetically and without regard to grammar or spelling. Secondly, Nigerian English also tends to favor a more informal structure, which is quite different from British English. Lastly, the vocabulary of Nigerian English is heavily influenced by its diverse cultures and languages, with words borrowed from many Nigerian languages as well as foreign languages, such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese.

One of the most important aspects of Nigerian English is its incorporation of Nigerian expressions and proverbs into the language. Nigerian English often borrows heavily from local proverbs and idioms, which give it an unmistakable flavor and a unique character.

In addition to its distinctive vocabulary, Nigerian English has developed its own syntax and grammar over time. For example, some phrases may be structured differently in Nigerian English than in British English, due to the lack of use of articles, plurals, and the presence of certain verb forms.

Overall, Nigerian English is an interesting and unique dialect which is continuously evolving and becoming increasingly popular in many parts of the world. It is a good example of the diversity of languages and cultures which can be found in the world today.

The Problem

According to Ekpe et al. (2020), English is a second language in Nigeria. It is a second language because Nigerians already had their first language or mother tongue (L1) before the spread of this foreign language (English). In this instance, a foreign language (English) left its native environment and met with another language or languages (Nigerian indigenous languages). The variation between English vowels which is approximately twenty-five (25) and Nigerian languages which are seven (7) in numbers already pose a challenge for interference and transference of items from native language into target language thereby resulting in various varieties of English spoken in the Nigerian speech communities. This reduced number of vowels gives room for the absence of English central vowels, non-differentiation of short vowels from their long counterparts and poor mastery of new diphthongs. Also considered a problem is the use of syllable-timed-rhythm rather than stress-timed-rhythm or the difficulty in the pronunciation of dental fricatives. All these and many more are interference features.



REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Osakwe (2005) gives an account of the advent of the English language in Nigeria. She states that on arrival, the first English ship to the Nigerian coast, initiated a commercial and cultural contact between the two countries. Of all the items of trade that sailed in within the cultural cargo, the most important was English language. Ironically she maintained, it was neither consciously bargained for nor traded by barter. Nevertheless, English has come to stay as it has become the language of education, administration, law, mass media, and literature, among others (Osakwe, 1997). Collins Dictionary (2023) defines a language as a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing. Again, language is the use of a set of sounds or written symbols. As Nicholas, Evans and Stephen Levins (2007) put it, language is a structured system of communication consisting of grammar and vocabulary. It is the primary means by which humans convey meaning in both spoken and written forms, and may also be conveyed through sign languages.

Language and Society

Language is a means of communication and a part of culture. These two can provide additional insight into each other. The relationship between languages and society can be viewed in three dimensions:

1. Language influences society and people
2. People and society influence language
3. There is interaction as language influences people and society influences language (Linda, 2000). Members of the languages and society research area explore the intersection of language and social factors in a range of real-world contexts. These factors include geographical location, social group, age, gender, identity and the organization of everyday conversation. They also work on how language use has changed and continues to change over time (Fitzmaurice et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the distinctive feature theory of Generative Phonology (GP) which was founded by Chomsky and Halle towards the end of the 1950s. This theory is built on Trubetzkoy's idea of phonemic opposition and R. Jakobson's (1941) work on distinctive features. The theory was inspired by the tenets of Generative Grammar which stipulates a set of rules capable of producing all and only the surface forms of natural language focusing on its speech sounds. The theory of distinctive features developed by Jakobson (1941) later became the standard model in Chomsky and Halle's (1968) Sound Patterns of English (Jensen 2004; 79-80). According to them, speech sounds are portrayed as bundles of plus-or-minus values.

**Table 1: The Distinctive Features of /s/ and /z/; and /i/ and /e/**

S/N	S	Z
1	+ consonantal	+ consonantal
2	+ continuant	+ continuant
3	+ strident	+ strident
4	+ coronal	+ coronal
5	+ voiced	- voiceless

The aim of distinctive features is the ability to show differences in sounds that are similar to each other. From the table, the dissimilar feature between /s/ and /z/ is +voiced for /s/ and –voiced for /z/.

Languages in Contact

When speech communities come in contact, each of them has a powerful influence on one another. As a result, changes occur significantly in the language behavior of each group. A common feature that occurs is language modification in terms of transference and interference of the features of one language into another. The results of languages in contact are usually the linguistic interference, transference, and language modification as learners carry over what they already know about their first language to their performance in their new language. The tendency may be an advantage if the two languages have features in correspondence as there will be positive transfer or ‘facilitation’. More noticeable however, are cases of ‘negative transfer’ or interference where the patterns of the two languages do not coincide. This is the case with English and many Nigerian languages.

Multilingual Situation

Nigeria as Osakwe (op cit.) puts it is very difficult to define in linguistic terms. She states that if the rural communities are said to be typically monolingual and the urban, bilingual; it will be discovered soon that some villages are bilingual in two Nigerian languages. And some parts of the north are trilingual since Hausa is acquired as lingua franca after the mother tongue. Pidgin, she explains, adds another dimension to the complexity in the urban areas. It cannot be guaranteed that an isolated geo-political entity within the nation can even be less complex e.g Delta State is near as complex as Nigeria. Not every Delta village can guarantee a single shared speech code. The multilingual situation then is very complex. Not only because of linguistic heterogeneity but more so as distinct types of multilingualism are hardly identifiable. Instead there are gradations of similarities or differences in between which the definition becomes complicated.

There are yet other degrees of complexity involved in discussing the Nigerian speech community: those arising from inter-ethnic marriages. As the number of people getting involved in these mixed marriages is on the increase daily, even the family as a speech community has to be defined in bilingual terms. As these families look for a common language, English or the Nigerian pidgin may become the home language. Such socio-cultural complexities are responsible for the status of the Nigerian Pidgin in some coastal cities today (where the only language some Nigerian can speak is pidgin (Osakwe Opcit).



Nigerian English

According to Wikipedia (2010), Nigerian English, also known as Nigerian Standard English is a dialect of English, spoken in Nigeria. Based on British English, the dialect contains various loanwords and collocations from the native languages of Nigeria, due to the need to express concepts specific to the culture of the nation (e.g. senior wife). A pidgin derived from English, is mostly used in informal conversations, but the Nigerian standard English is used in politics, formal education, the media, and other official uses. As noted by Ugwuanyi (2020), "...in practice English is used as the sole official language in almost all official contexts, including governance, education, mass media, law courts etc." Even though the vast majority of English speakers in Nigeria use it as a second language, there is now a growing number of young Nigerians who speak Nigerian English as a first language. Adichie, acclaimed Nigerian writer has this to say:

My English – speaking is rooted in a Nigerian experience and not in British or American or Australian one. I have taken ownership of English. (Vanguardngr.com, January, 2020)

This is how she portrayed and described her relationship with English, the language which she uses in her writing and which millions of her fellow Nigerians use in their daily communication. By taking ownership of English and using it as their own medium of expression, Nigerians have made, and are continuing to make, unique and distinctive contributions. In the January 2020 update of the Oxford English Dictionary, a number of Nigerian English words make it into the dictionary for the first time. The majority of these additions are either borrowings from Nigerian languages, or unique Nigerian coinages that have only begun to be used in English in the second half of the twentieth century, mostly in the 1970s and 1980s (Danica, 2023).

Phonology

Currently, most phonological studies have analyzed a plethora of Nigerian English speakers from a wide range of backgrounds, such as region, current profession, social class or status, level of education, and so on. There has been special focus on such regions as those pertaining to the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba respectively. Nigerian English can be thought of in a similar way to American English in this approach; just as in American English, Nigerian English varies from region to region, and as such, phonology variables are realized in different ways in different regions. Some common features across Nigerian English include:

- Voiced – z sounds in which the ‘s’ is present in spelling become voiceless, i.e. “boy” is pronounced /bois/
- Fronting of /i/ vowels into /e/, exhibited in words such as “expect”, pronounced /ekspekt/ in NE.
- Characteristic and typical stress patterns for Nigerian English.

Because voiced palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ is not present in most Nigerian varieties, any of the words including this phoneme are converted into the – sh/kɔ̃nklu:çɔ̃n/ in Nigerian English (Wikipedia, 2020).



Research Hypotheses

Null hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between words having the voiced – z in received pronunciation and Nigerian standard English.

Alternate Hypothesis

2. There is the fronting of /I/ vowels into /e/

Null hypothesis

3. There are no typical patterns of stress for Nigerian English received pronunciation.

RESEARCH METHODS

The respondents for this study are the 300 level students of Delta State University of Science and Technology, Ozoro. A total of twenty students were investigated.

Instrumentation

The researcher circulated 10 words to investigate hypothetical statements 1; 25 for 2; and 10 for 3. They received pronunciations of twenty (20) students. While students pronounced the words, their individual articulations of the words were recorded.

RESULT

From our findings, it is evident that there is a gap between the 25 vowel sounds in the English language and the maximum of 7 for the Nigerian language which is responsible for the absence of English central vowels. Respondents were not able to differentiate between words with long vowels and those with short vowels since this is not present in Nigerian languages. It was also observed that respondents used syllable-time rhythm instead of stress-timed-rhythm. These actually give the Nigeria English a non-native flavor.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Hypothetical statement 1

There is no significant difference between words having the voiced dental fricative. From table 2 below, it is evident that ‘rice’ was not articulated correctly by any student. Correct articulation for ‘cards’ got 11 representing 25.5%. cats got 15, representing 37.5%. The correct score for the rice is 19 representing 47.5%. The correct articulation for ‘lice’ is 22 representing 55%. Articulation for ‘boy’ and ‘price’ got 25 scores, these are represented by 62.5% each. The number of students who were able to articulate prizes and bats scored 26 representing 65.2% each.



Table 2: Performance of students in the articulation of the voiced dental fricative /s/ and the voiceless dental fricative /z/:

S/N	Words	Expected Pronunciation	Actual Pronunciation	Expected score	Actual score	Percentage
1	Boy	/biz/	/bis/	40	25	62.5
2	Rice	/rais/	/raiz/	40	0	0
3	Price	/prais/	/praiz/	40	25	62.5
4	Lice	/lais/	Laiz/	40	22	65
5	Mice	/mais/	/Maiz/	40	25	62.5
6	Thrice	/trais/	/traiz/	40	19	47.5
7	Cats	/kæts/	/kætz/	40	15	37.5
8	Cards	/ka:dz/	/kai:ds/	40	11	27.5
9	Bats	/bæts/	/bætz/	40	26	65

Source: *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English.*

Hypothetical Statement 2: There is the fronting of /I/ vowel into /e/

From table 3 below, expected score for expect, examination, 'eerie', 'efface', 'effective', 'effeminate', 'effrontery', 'effusion', 'ego', 'egregious' and 'egret' is 40 marks but actual scores is 0. No student was able to pronounce these words correctly, therefore representing 0%. This is a result of mother tongue interfering with the English spoken by the Nigerian user of English. The expected score for 'economics', 'economist', 'ecumenical', 'edict', 'effectual', 'efficient' and 'economize' is 40 marks but actual score is 10 representing 25% of the total score. Also, the expected score for the ecosystem is 40 but the actual score is 25 which is 62.5%. expect score ecstatic, e-fit, and egoism is 40 but actual score is 22 which is 55%. Expected score for egalitarian is 40 actual score is 11 which is 27.5%.

Table 3: Performance of Student in the fronting of Vowel /i/ for /e/

S/N	Words	Expected Pronunciation	Actual Pronunciation	Expected score	Actual score	Percentage
1	expect	/ikspekt/	/espet/	40	0	0
2	examination	/i:gzæmineiən/	/examinaɪ/		0	0
3	economics	/i:ənDmiks/	/ekɔnɔmiks/	40	10	25
4	economist	/i:dnəmɪst/	/ekɔnɔmɪst/	40	10	25
5	eco-system	/i:kəʊsɪstəm/	/ekosistem/	40	25	62.5
6	ecstatic	/ɪkstætɪk/	/estatɪk/	40	22	55
7	ecumenical	/i:kjumenɪkl/	/ekumenɪkəl/	40	10	65
8	eden	/i:dn/	/i:den/	40	26	25
9	edict	/i:dɪkt/	/edit/	40	10	25
10	eel	/i:l/	/eel/	40	10	0
11	eerie	/iəri/	/eeri/	40	0	0
12	effective	/ɪfeɪs/	/efas/	40	0	0
13	effective	/ɪfektɪv//	/Efetɪv/	40	0	25
14	effectual	/ɪfektʃuəl/	/efeʃuəl/	40	10	0
15	effeminate	/ɪfemɪnət/	/efemɪnət/	40	0	25
16	effront	/ɪfɪfnt/	/efɪfɪent/	40	10	0
17	effrontery	/ɪfrʌntəri/	/efontri/	40	0	0



18	effusion	/ɪfjuːʒn/	/ɛfʊʃən/	40	0	55
19	e-fit	/iːfɪt/	/ɛfɪt/	40	22	27.5
20	egalitarian	/ɪgæliteəriən/	/ɛgalɪtəriən/	40	11	0
21	ego	/iːgəʊ/	/ɛgəʊ/	40	0	55
22	egoism	/ɛgəʊɪzəm/	/ɛgəʊɪzɪm/	40	22	0
23	egregious	/ɪgrɪːdʒiəs/	/ɛgrɪːdʒiəs/	40	0	0
24	egret	/iːgrɛt/	/ɛgrɛt/	40	0	0
25	economize	/ɪˈkʌnəmaɪz/	/ɛkənəmaɪz/	40	0	25

Source: *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*.

Hypothetical Statement 3: There are no typical patterns of stress for Nigerian English and Received Pronunciation

From table 4 below, students were not able to place the stress appropriately where necessary. Expected score for articulation and appropriate placement of stress on the words listed in table 4 is 40 marks, however the actual score is 0 which represents 0%. It is clear from our analysis that a lot still needs to be done in the acquisition of English as a second language if English must continue to play its role as an official language. Another observation here is that the stress pattern also makes it difficult for students to use contrastive stress where necessary as seen in permit, increase, export, insert and project.

Table 4: Performance of Students Typical Stress Patterns

S/N	Words	Received Pronunciation (RP)	Nigerian English Pronunciation (N.E.P)	Expected score	Actual score	Percentage
1	Madam	[ˈmædəm]	[Mada:m]	40	0	0
2	Permit	[ˈpɜːmɪt]	[pɜː mi:t]	40	0	0
3	Maintenance	[meɪntɪnəns]	[mentˈtenəns]	40	0	0
4	Category	[kætɪgəri]	[kati:gori]	40	0	0
5	Tribalism	[ˈtraɪbəlɪzəm]	[traɪˈba:lɪzɪm]	40	0	0
6	Mechanism	[ˈmɛkə,nɪzəm]	[meˈka:nɪzɪm]	40	0	0
7	Tolerate	[ˈtɒləreɪt]	[tɒlə lreɪt]	40	0	0
8	Saturate	[ˈsætʃəreɪt]	[satʃuˈreɪt]	40	0	0
9	Groundnut	[ˈgraʊndnʌt]	[gra:nɒt]	40	0	0
10	Transfer	[ˈtrænsfəː]	[esˈpɜːt]	40	0	0
11	Export	[ˈɛkspɔːt]	[esˈpɜːt/]	40	0	0
12	Increase	[ˈɪnkriːs]	[ɪnˈkriːz]	40	0	0
13	Insert	[ɪnsɜːt]	[ɪnˈsa:t]	40	0	0
14	Project	[prɒdʒɛkt]	[ɪnsa:t]	40	0	0
15	Project	[prɒdʒɛkt]	[prɒjɛkt]	40	0	0



CONCLUSION

It can be asserted based on evidence available that Nigerian English contains phonological interference. This is so because the sound system of the indigenous language influences English as can be seen in our findings. Features of the L1 are transferred to L2. Irrespective of specific L1 patterns, some typical features which cut across different ethnic groups are also noticeable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The utility value of the English language in Nigeria and national policy on education should be revisited.
2. Government should install language laboratories in all tertiary institutions to encourage proper articulation of speech sounds.

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