

## **HINDERING IMPACT OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH AND PIDGIN ON THE LEARNING AND STANDARD ENGLISH IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES**

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**ABSTRACT:** *English is the language of instruction, study, and testing in all institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. Despite the fact that Nigerian English and Pidgin are means of communication in Nigeria, they pose many problems in learning English in the universities. They are sources of errors and non-standard expressions in English. The two varieties are non-standard and constitute impediment to the learning of accepted official usage. They are widely spoken and understood by many Nigerians. Quite often, a great number of students prefer to express themselves in Pidgin English and Nigerian English rather than go through the mental rigours of speaking simple correct English. Students sometimes use them interchangeably in speech and writing in the course of their studies and assignments. The use of these nonstandard varieties discourages the learning of the accepted standard usage and orthography. This paper discusses the learning problems created by Nigerian English and Pidgin English in our university and recommends strategies for discouraging the negative effects these nonstandard varieties have on sound learning of English as a second language in Nigeria.*

**KEYWORDS:** Nigerian English, pidgin, learning standard, English, Nigerian universities

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria is a multiethnic and multi-lingual nation where the English language was adopted as the lingua franca. English therefore serves as the language of governance and business as well as the language of instruction and study in all institutions of formal education in the country. Jourit (1919) notes that "it is not surprising (though not inevitable) that some languages have greater prominence in national life than others in a situation of such multiplicity. As it is in other parts of the world, varieties of the language have evolved-Nigerian English and Pidgin English. These two varieties pose learning problems to Nigerian university students. According to Jourit (1991) Nigerian English has to some extent grown out of common errors in which numerous items, especially of lexis, which could not be accounted for by an existing dictionary but could hardly be classified as errors.

Nigerian English is 'nativised' variety of the English language. It is one of the new Englishes in the world. On the emergence of new Englishes, Udifot (2002) notes: Students in the New Englishes revealed that deviations from native-speaker norms and setting new norms to meet the socio-cultural conditions of the environment where English is used are responsible for the emergence of the New Englishes (p.1).

According to Owusu-Ansah (1997:23) ... nativisation inevitably involves breaking native-speaking norms which define standard varieties. Nativisation in the context of Nigerian English is the process by which a language external to a community is adapted to the culture and languages of the community which uses it as an additional language but retains many features of the source language as it is used by its native speakers.

This paper discusses Nigerian English in line with Bamgbose (1999:160) as a non-native variety of English which consists in innovation which are deviations considered as institutionalized errors". Nigerian English is a variety which is characterized by deviations (errors) which are neither present nor permitted in the language as used by the native speakers. This is the variety of English that Achebe (1975:61) advocates as what would be able to carry the weight of his African experience 'a new English still in communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surrounds:

The innovations that constituted Nigerian affects the form of the language at all levels of linguistics analysis; phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics. Nigerian English is different from both the native standard and other varieties. Many of the distinguishing characteristics result from the influence of Nigerian languages and culture on the English language. Certain invented peculiarities in pronunciation, new words, structures and expressions characteristics Nigerian English and borrowings.

However, the deliberate deviations and that characterize Nigerian English are not acceptable in formal and standard usage. The use of this variety therefore discourages the learning and use of Standard English in Nigerian universities, and in Ebonyi State University in particular. Pidgin is defined as a mixed language originally developed for the purpose of trade, incorporating the vocabulary of one or more languages with a very simplified form of the grammatical system of the languages involved. Pidgin spoken in Nigeria is mainly English-based. Nigerian pidgin English is also referred to as broken (pronounced broking) it is a corruption of some sounds and forms of the languages mixed to form it. It is therefore a nonstandard variety or usage, (Hudson, 1982:20) Pidgin covers a wide range of regional hybrids which evolved through historical events. Pidgin English is a simplified bridge language that evolved from necessity after a long contact among groups without a common language Nigerian Pidgin English. English is of significant value to its numerous users. This is why various attempts to eradicate it by different factors were not successful. Once a second language and used for communication among people who speak it. According to Jowit (1981) Nigeria pidgin has come to stay as a major means by communication among its many different speakers in Nigeria. In view of this, Elugbe observes that "it is certain that no other language, be it indigenous or foreign has the number of speakers that Nigeria pidgin has (it is clearly the most widely spoken language in Nigeria today (p.288). Experiences and observations have shown that Pidgin English has gained a wider audience in all sectors of the Nigerian economy and even in the education sector. Nigerian Pidgin English has been developed to the extent that it is even used in some literary works in Nigeria to depict realistic setting and characterization.

However it has low and subordinate status in the country, it is never used in official communication, oral or written. One does not need to go to school to learn Pidgin English because it is not taught at school. Unfortunately, very often students of our universities converse and discuss even serious issues in Pidgin English instead of doing so in Standard English which they are taught and in which they are instructed. Standard English is what Otagburuagu (1999) aptly explain as “the variety of as the medium of instruction and scholarly presentations. It is that variety of the language use for serious business in government, by the judiciary, the press and in international affairs (p.56).

Sadly, it is has been observed that the use of Nigerian English and Pidgin English by our university students discourages their learning of Standard English. This may be so in other universities in Nigeria. It has been observed in their discussions that most students of Ebonyi State University use Nigerian English and Pidgin English to the extent that they hardly know when they are using Standard English, Nigerian English and Pidgin English. Though the use of Nigerian English and Pidgin facilitate communication, the remain deviations from the accepted norms of Standard English.

In our university most of the students often resort to the use of Nigerian English and Pidgin English instead of using Standard English in their communication with their colleagues.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The use of Nigerian English and Pidgin English has had tremendous adverse effects on students’ communication and learning of Standard English in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Apart from the negative impact of Nigerian English and Pidgin English on the use of Standard English in Nigerian universities, most students find it difficult to use Standard English without code-switching and code mixing with these on-standard varieties.

The use of Nigerian English and Pidgin English among the students of our university has had negative influence on students’ speaking and writing skills to the extent that most students of our university cannot spell words accurately or write accurate sentences in Standard English (Okereke, 2011; Azubuike, 2015, and Okorie, 2016). Azubike further notes that the use of Pidgin English has no doubt negatively influenced the use of Standard English and that this act of not speaking Standard English would impede effective communication. To a large extent, the use of Nigerian English and Pidgin English discourages and diminishes our students’ efforts at studying and mastering of Standard English in our university. This is why this paper examines the ways these varieties discourage or even impede the learning of Standard English.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this paper is to examine and highlight the ways Nigerian English and Pidgin English discourage the learning of Standard English in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. It is also intended to reflect what happens on other campus of Nigerian universities. The paper equally aims at drawing the attention of the students of our university to the necessity of studying and using Standard English in their communication and resisting the distracting and discouraging effects of indulging in Nigerian English and Pidgin English in their academic career.

### **Significance of the Study**

Most of our students do not know the difference between Nigerian English and Standard English required for formal communication. This paper will arouse the consciousness and interest of such students in studying the English language to learn the differences between Standard English and Nigerian English. The content of paper will also encourage English lecturers to emphasize the difference between standard and Nigerian English and Pidgin.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on the theory of language interference in a multilingual sociolinguistic setting.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Every language exists to facilitate social interaction. In a situation where English is in contact with many local languages, and where English is 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. With this, Nigerian English is quite different from British or American English. Thus, Nigerian English has special features its vocabulary contains a large number of words which are either not found in British English or are used in ways peculiar to the Nigerian situation. As more and more Nigerians from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds now write and speak English, it becomes necessary to reflect in a reasonably organized manner as much as possible the richness of standard Nigerian English. Thus, Nigerian English is more effective for our local communication than the international varieties; consequently, it is high time we; realized that it is a functional variety. So, the use of English in Nigeria should be reworked to reflect our social context.

Standard Nigerian English is a set of grammatical, phonological and lexical forms used by educated Nigerians either in speech or writing. It is a form, which native speakers of the language will fully understand and appreciate. Also, it is usually associated with the form used by the educated members of the society for formal national and international communication.

The use of certain words, expressions structures and certain peculiarities of pronunciation have been identified as characterising Nigerian English. Kujore (1985) and Jowitt (1991) are whole books devoted to codification of these Nigerianisms. Bamgose (1995) and Banjo (1996) have also identified some of these features. Generally, nativisation takes the following forms:

- borrowing of words from Nigerian languages into English e. g. Oba, Emir, agbada, danfo, eba, tuwo, edikan ikon, ekpan nkukwo;
- localisation of pronunciation as in the substitution the indigenous language phonemes for instance the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ which do not exist in Nigerian languages and the central vowels /ə/, ɜ:/ with the closest phonemes from the sound inventory of the mother tongue of the speaker. Many Nigerians tend to replace / θ / with /t/, /ð/ with /d/ and /ə/, ɜ:/ with /e/ There is also the tendency to introduce epenthetic vowels into clusters to capture CV-CV syllable structure of Nigerian languages as well as the following features:

- monothongisation of diphthongs and triphthongs as in away /ə wei/ and power/paʊ ə/ being realised as [pawa].
- devoicing of final consonants as in was /w ə z/ being produced as /wɔz/ and alive / ə laiv/ being realised as [əlaif]
- simplification of word final consonant clusters as in child / tʃɪld / and brilliant / brɪljənt / being produced as / tʃɪld / and / brɪljənt / (Udofot, 2002:70-71)

At the non-segmental level, there is a general tendency to impose the syllable-timed rhythm of Nigerian languages on English which stress-timed: the tendency to speak reduced vowels as full vowels resulting in a proliferation of accented syllables. Certain stress placements. An example is the forward shift of stress in certain other words like 'madam pronounced ma'dam; 'calendar pronounced calendar and 'salary pronounced salary while the stress in other words like suc'cess and em'barrass are shifted backwards to 'success and 'embarrass. There is also the preference for unidirectional intonation patterns and a preference for the falling tune (Udofot 2002:78-79). Some of the peculiarities get fossilised and emerge as a national form which transcends mother tongue differences. For example, the Igbo and Hausa languages have both the tense /i:/ and the lax /ɪ/ yet speakers from these language backgrounds often pronounce (fɪt/ as /fit / where both /i / and /i:/ tend to be pronounced as /i/(cf Jowitt 1991).

Nigerianisms in syntax are fewer but nonetheless present. Prominent ones include pluralisation not non-count and invariable nouns as in equipments and furnitures; non- native amalgamations as in after all, moreso, infact, the use of reflexive pronouns like themselves in place of reciprocal ones( each other, and one another); the omission the article before singular nouns as in: "He went to market' and the use of transitive verbs intransitively. We went to the party are enjoyed.

It is at the morpho-semantic level that Nigerian English is most productive and noticeable. Aside from the incorporation of lexical items from Nigerian languages into English are the following:

- creative coining of words and expressions to suit the Nigerian environment as in the words : go-slow, been-to, buharigate, nairacracy, ecomogging, modakekisation;
- semantic shifts in words and expressions as in long legs, four-one- nine, marginalisation, to branch, to travel, stranger, to settle someone;
- Non-native use of idioms such as : to eat ones cake and have it, to declare surplus, to put sand in someone's garri, to take in ( become pregnant);
- Semantic shifts as in the extension of meaning of a verb of perception like hear to include the meanings of understand, smell and even feel as in:

ca n hear a nasty smell (perceive).

I can hear water running down my back (feel)

I can hear lbibio ( understand).( Udofot 1999: 106)

Such extensions have equivalent translations in the local languages.

- Reference of kinship terms are also extended to reflect the structure of the Nigerian society and the size of families. This gives rise to words like brother, sister, cousin, aunt, and even mother and father being extended to include not only family relations but also anyone for whom the user feels respect or intimacy. They are also often used to refer to refer to people of the same tribe or

religious denominations.

- There is in Nigerian English also the non-native use of adjectives like senior and junior (brother or sister) in place of elder or younger. With regard to pragmatics, there are certain peculiar usages which characterise Nigerian English. Prominent among these are the use of sorry (when one is not the cause) as a way of expressing concern, sympathy or condolences instead of what a shame or ...be more careful as well as weldone (when greeting a person at work); fine as a reply to how do you do and I'm coming when one is actually going away, these expressions are actually translations from Nigerian languages (Udofot, 2002).

## CONCLUSION

- The co-existence of the English language with other Nigerian languages and other nativised Englishes exerts much negative impact on sound learning and use of Standard English by the students of our universities. Students of our universities are exposed to frequent and extended use of Nigerian English and Pidgin English. This hinders or discourages our students from paying the required attention and time to learning of Standard English which school take place in schools and in their private studies. Nevertheless, deliberate approval or adoption of the so-called Nigerian English means deliberate deviation from the standard and glorification of errors in trying to 'nativise' what is not ours.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Lecturers should encourage students to learn standard English and use in their formal communication.
2. Students should resist the temptation of using Nigerian English in their academic discussion and writing.

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