

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE: ITS IMPLANTATION AND USE IN NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

The English Language which is a second language based on our linguistic situation in Nigeria. Nigeria is multilingual/'multicultural and this, to a large extent, has made the acquisition and use of English to pose some salient problems. However, in spite of these problems, English as a second language plays a lot of important and notable roles with a view to uniting the different linguistic and cultural environments of our people in Nigeria. Because of this, we cannot do away with language. As a foreign language, the English language has to be properly learnt by Nigerians who want to be properly equipped in the understanding and use of the language for many purposes. This is why this paper, from the position of the writer, attempts to touch on some of the problems that are inherent in the acquisition and use of the language in Nigeria. However, it is the contention of this paper that the problems that arise have not created expressive barriers to the users of the language. This is because English cannot be divorced from our linguistic and other cultural settings despite the fact that it has to perform the role of lingua franca in Nigeria. Being an implanted language, a lot of variables have already linked up with the use of the language in our society. The paper looks into some of these plantation factors on the language and the effects of hybridization produced in our linguistic setting.

**Key words:** bilingualism, multilingualism, language, linguistics, culture, hybridization.

## Introduction

The fact that the present Nigeria is a conglomerate of different groups, regions and cultures cannot be contested. The people are of different settings, cultures, languages and other communal variables;

they live and were being governed in their various communities at that time. Later, as a result of the amalgamation of the various regions by the colonizers, the regions were 'forcefully' joined together in a marriage of inconvenience and we now have Nigeria as a nation. With our linguistic situation, we know that the country will have to face a lot of problems because no group of people will like to jettison his or her mother tongue or local language and pick another local language since there is the belief that no language is inferior to the other. This is why the concept of bilingualism and multilingualism entered into our system. Nigeria is a complex conglomerate where many languages are in use. Quite a good number of Nigerians are able to use more than one language and as such, we have Nigerian monolingual, bilingual as well as multilingual. Perhaps, it is these types of conglomerates, as far as our cultures are concerned, that are compounding our linguistic frame in the country.

The fact that English language is essential cannot be contested. In the same vein, the importance of our mother tongues cannot be thrown overboard since they are the languages that are guiding our day-to-day activities as well as our cultures. Since a great percentage of our people are not educated in the western sense, they are making use of our local languages for all aspects of their activities. This means that there are many of our peoples that are monolingual, just as we have peoples who are bilingual as well as multilingual. We can now see the complex nature of our linguistic problems in the Nigerian situation. Before going further in our linguistic labyrinth, it is proper to look into some of the theoretical guides that will marshal this work appropriately.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The implantation and use of English in Nigeria can be examined through various theoretical frameworks. However, in this work, we shall be limited to two and these are Language Contact Theory and Language Policy and Planning Theory. These two theories are very germane as far as the implantation and use of English in Nigeria are concerned. Language Contact Theory examines the interaction

between English and indigenous languages in societies like Nigeria. It includes language convergence, borrowing as well as interlarding where we have code-switching and code-mixing. While English and indigenous languages influence each other's structures as well as vocabularies; language borrowing deals with the adoption of words and phrases from local languages and vice versa. In the areas of language interlarding, speakers are noted for alternation between English and local languages in communication. Scholars like Uriel Weinrich, Einer Haugen, Joshua Fishman, Carol Myers-Scotton and Pieter Muysken are noted in this theory. Weinrich is a linguist known for his work on language contact and convergence; Haugen is also a linguist who developed the concept of 'language contact'. Fishman is a sociolinguist who has worked on language contact and language maintenance while Myers-Scotton has been known for her work on language contact and code-switching. There are still other scholars who had worked extensively on these related concepts.

In the area of Language Policy and Planning Theory, this framework analyses the role of English in Nigeria's language policy, including its impact on education and other vital areas. A language like English is taken as the official language while local languages are marginalized. In a multilingual/multicultural setting like Nigeria, this theory of Language planning usually takes one language ahead of others and that is why English is promoted in many areas like education, commerce, government, administration and media in Nigeria. There are also scholars who are noted in this theory and they include Bernard Spolsky and Joshua Fishman who are noted for language policy and language education; Charles Ferguson, Joan Rubin and Joseph Bianco, among others, are also noted for this theory.

According to Weinreich (1974), bilingualism is the practice of alternately using two languages. By extension, multilingualism is the practice of alternately using more than two languages. This also goes with idea of culture because a society will be multicultural in as much as we have more than two cultures operating there. Nigeria is a good example of the latter case. In any human setting, a language is seen as a

system of conventional, arbitrary symbols by which members of the community communicate with one another. All speech communities are linguistically and socially diverse with many ecological features. A speech community may be very large in terms of geographical environment and some may be small but there is a relationship between the size of a community and its ecological characteristics. However, all speech communities tend to have four elements.

- a. Speech situation which is the situation associated with or marked by speech i.e. occasion where language is used;
- b. Speech event which refers to activities or aspects of activities that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech e.g. as conversation is involved during a wedding ceremony;
- c. Speech style which refers to ways of speaking depending on the appropriateness or other wise to the situation.

These elements cannot be divorced from speech communities and in a multilingual setting like Nigeria, situation may demand how and when a particular speech is made. Again, speech events, speech acts and speech style will determine the appropriateness, intelligibility, acceptability, roles, norms and other patterns which will ascertain the social, cultural and linguistic parameters that uphold a speech community. So, in a speech community, the use of language can be determined by many other variables. One of such variables in the Nigerian setting is how English comes into the community.

### **The Implantation of English in Nigeria**

The English language was introduced into Nigeria during colonialism (1861-1960) as a language of administration, education as well as commerce and it was imposed as a lingua franca to facilitate communication among diverse ethnic groups. This then answers the question that may be asked: how has a language like English become our target language? Oyeleye (1990) further explains that, the English language became implanted in Nigeria through some crucial aspects of European contact. These aspects, with solid impacts, are commercial activities, missionary activities and colonial rule. These are the primary

causes of the historical implantation of English in Nigeria. To be able to communicate to a reasonable extent with the Nigerian populace living on the shores, the British people tried to teach some rudiments of English language. A good number of them were sent to schools so as to acquire a working knowledge of the English language. If they had the knowledge, they would be able to communicate to a reasonable extent with the whites in commercial activities on the shore.

The effects of missionary activities also helped in entrenching English in Nigeria. The British people were interested in exterminating many traditional religions and English was being used to teach the earliest converts. English was then seen as the language of salvation, civilisation and worldly success.

With colonisation, English was seen as a very necessary language. The white people tried to provide a lot of incentive for education. Again, many Nigerians desired the ability to communicate effectively with their new masters without the need for the intermediaries. Apart from this, in administration, there were plenty of posts to be filled where educated Nigerians were greatly needed. With these in mind, the indigenous Nigerians saw education as leading to a lot of unlimited advantages and as such, they squarely faced the western education which would lead them to proper acquisition of the English language which would serve as a vehicle for communication across linguistic barriers.

All these served as the genesis for the acquisition of English in Nigeria. But even at present, the *National Policy on Education* (NPE), that emphasises the three major local languages, still maintains that even in primary schools, English shall be adopted at a 'later stage' (section 3(4)). The truth is that in many private primary schools, English is used right from the beginning of the programme and not at a 'later stage'.

In many situations however, with the urgent need to acquire a reasonable knowledge of English, some problems keep on arising. One does not need to be trained for long before he/she can communicate well in the mother tongue. For English as a second language (L2), one has to start with the primer and then begin to learn in stages. If the

teacher is also using English as a second language, we now have L2 teacher teaching L2 students. But again if the teacher is an L1 speaker, the problem of acquisition is compounded because a lot of educated L2 speakers of English find it difficult to effectively grasp the message of the native speakers of English very well because of their manner of pronunciation. Even when the language is acquired, it is prone to varieties. Thus, there are different versions of English e.g. Yoruba English, Igbo English, Hausa English, Efik English and so forth.

When Nigerian students were being taught in the past, the problem of translation was very paramount. That time, it was difficult to get good translators. This was because according to Halliday et al (1964) 'the task of translation requires a degree of literary and historical sensibility to say nothing of the stylistic feeling for English' (267). They further opine that 'translation is in fact, an extremely complicated and difficult task. It is far from being simple' (268). So, for proper acquisition then, translation was a problem.

The acquisition of English in our multilingual/multicultural setting also led to 'a new linguistic acculturation or re-culturation of the people'. According to Adeniran (1979): "The English language literally travelled overseas, came onshore and settled quickly and fairly comfortably in the coastal areas where the initial trade interest of its native speakers, importers lay (57-64)." This new settlement of English which initially was for commercial purpose, as said earlier, gave the coastal people on shore the privilege of early contact with English. When religious and administrative activities came in, the inland people, especially the Northerners, did not see any relevance or usefulness in acquiring such a language like English. Adeniran (1979) further observes that the bulk of the Nigerian speakers of English were then Southerners. Between the north and the south, there was a dichotomy in the acquisition of English, the belief then was: 'Europeans were Christians', 'Europeans spoke English', 'Therefore, Christians spoke English'. Thus, there was the issue of religious (especially Christian religion) propagation of English to some sections of the country before

it was later realised that Christians should not be the only people to acquire the language.

Because language and culture are intricately related, Beach and Tsotso (1981) are of the view that multicultural approach recognises the way an individual learns. This is because the extent to which somebody learns can depend, to a large extent, on his/her cultural background. As such, the way a poor child learns will necessarily be different from the way a child from a wealthy background learns; so the rate of acquisition will not be the same.

### **The Use and Implications of English in the Nigerian Setting**

Acquisition and use of language go hand in hand. This is because the degree of proficiency will determine, to a large extent, the use of language. This same degree of proficiency will determine efficiency and functionality of such language use. This is because how a language is used will relatively show its functions and the purpose served. This is why Halliday (1973) talks of the functionality in the use of language:

A functional approach to Language means first of all investigating how language is used; trying to find out what are the purposes that language serves for us and how we are able to achieve those purposes through speaking, listening, reading and writing. (7)

This shows that in every community when language is used, certain functions are being performed. In the Nigerian setting as well, English as a second language is being used to perform a lot of functions. In every speech community, language is being used and it is the principal means of cultural transmission. This is why Bloomfield (1933:42) observes that a group of people who interact by means of speech is a speech community. All these boil down to the fact that in a multilingual/multicultural setting like Nigeria, the use of English as our lingua franca, is primary if we want to communicate across cultures and at the same time, it is playing a unifying role in our multicultural/multilingual setting.

English is not our indigenous language. When we talk of indigenous language, we have in mind as well, indigenous cultures. So, for English, (which is not our indigenous language) to function in the Nigerian environment, aspects of English cultures would also be present. This is because language and culture cannot be separated. It therefore stands to reason that we use English in our setting to express our indigenous cultures. However, this can have some problems because in most cases each language caters for its own culture and if we use a foreign language to express our indigenous cultures, there are bound to be found in interference, borrowing and others.

Again, when English is functioning as a second language, in the educational sector, there will be problems of what to teach and how to handle the teaching. The teaching, to a large extent, seems to be done from the perspective of the native speakers. However, we need a curriculum and methods suitable for the new environment in which the language operates. We need to look at the historical reasons for initiating bi/multilingualism together with the motivation for retaining English even after independence. Also, we need to look at the ecological nature of the country - by this we mean the diversity of local languages, sociolinguistic profile of the language in society as well as the linguistic factors for the emergence of Nigerian English and its varieties. We also need to look at the linguistic and contextual parameters for the nativisation of English and the anglicisation of the indigenous mother tongues. This leads us to the link between language and culture. Lader (1966) cannot believe that both are causally related. To him, culture deals with what a society does and thinks whereas language is a particular 'how' of thought. It has been convincingly discussed that both language and culture are intricately related. Harmen (1988:228) believes that 'our language and identity have a solid connection'. Finocchiaro (1969), Lyons (1968) and Adeniran (1986) all agree that language is an integral part of culture and that it is an index of its associated culture. This follows that a particular Nigerian language is an index of its culture and when there is a collapse between the two in a multilingual society like Nigeria, there is a convergence of language and



that of culture. This is why in use, there are mixing and switching of codes when cultural contexts are added. Across cultures, such a mixing and switching can hamper the smooth flow of communication especially between or among people of different linguistic backgrounds.

The problem of incipient bilingualism also crops up when the speaker is yet to achieve a sufficient proficiency in his /her second language. However, as soon as proficiency is attained, the problem disappears. The different varieties being used do not make the language substandard. In a multilingual/multicultural setting, the use of English can be contextual. Smith (1981:221) believes that 'there are many acceptable native and non-native varieties of the English language'. So, the fact that Nigerians are not using native like English should not be taken as lack of competence. Once the use is grammatical, appropriate and intelligible in the setting, competence has been achieved. Again, the use of a language can be contextual and since a fellow interlocutor is able to decode it and give the appropriate feedback, felicity is achieved. Words of such contextual categories are what Kachru (1981) call 'hybridized lexical items' which are used in non-native varieties. Such items used can be in form of loan translation.

Examples are:

- 'Chewing stick'
- 'Shoulder coverlet' (a blouse)
- 'destool' or 'enstool' (depose or instal)
- "hot drink' (hard drink)
- Sleeping cloth'
- 'tight friend' etc.

In use, semantic changes are also common e. g. I will branch at Sola's house. Here 'branch' implies 'call'. The one that is more pronounced is the semantic interference in kinship terms. In the Nigerian settings 'father' will mean + BLOOD RELATION, + PATERNAL, + NUCLEAR, + EXTENDED FAMILY and even - BLOOD RELATION. This is so because of the way our culture perceives the existence of human phenomenon. In the British context,'

father will mean + BLOOD RELATION, + PATERNAL, + NUCLEAR. The use of other kinship terms like Uncle, Cousin, Aunt, Nephew etc. is lacking in the African context. We have only 'my father, 'my mother', 'my sister, my brother', father's sisters, fathers, brother and so on and so forth. However, through borrowing, Nigerians can bring in concepts from English and attach them to our culture. That is why we can now use words like Uncle, Aunt, Cousin, Niece, Nephew which may not have the exact English blood relationship. Among the African culture, the word 'father' is not limited to biological father, it has extended meanings. So, language, culture and social identity cannot be divorced.

There are some feature signs of interference in expressions like 'she put to bed', 'He is not on seat, 'He is a big man', 'He has long leg' etc. These are acceptable in the Nigerian context. Again, creativity is involved in the use of English by L2 users of the language. In some literary work, the followings are examples; 'May we live to see tomorrow'; 'He has no chest'; 'He has no shadow'. These examples are taken from one of the creative works of Okara *The Voice* (1964). 'How a person without a chest in the physical sense can only mean a human that does not exist... A person who does not cast a shadow, of course does not exist' (Okara 1963). The English here is creative and partly related to the worldview of the writer.

Interference, which Weinreich (1974) calls an instance of deviation from the norm, no doubt, can constitute some problems in language use. Interference can be phonological, intonational and grammatical. English is a stress-timed language whereas most Nigerian languages are syllable-timed. So, there is every tendency for some users of English as L2 to stress all the syllables found in a word (in English). Some schools of thought believe that some so-called non-standard usages found in Nigerian newspapers, conversations, essays and so on are in fact, mistakes and that it should be improper to label these mistakes as Nigerian English. The fact here is that, Nigerian English, like other non-native English as L2, is not totally different from the British English. It is neither an international dialect nor a corrupted

form of English. It is a product of British influence coupled with ever present Nigerian English and cultures. It consists of basic elements or constituents from the various stages of political, social and economic developments beginning from the colonial days and greatly spreading through the proliferation of Western education. Nigerian English can therefore be considered as a type of English that is transported into the Nigerian soil and which has undergone several changes in direct proportion to the degree of psychological and sociological separation from its native speakers. Kujore (1990:8) is of the view that 'there cannot be much quarrel with the Nigerian expressions because the use of Nigerian English is perfectly understood even among the learned colleagues. Some may have the tendency of saying it is idea that we need'. He concludes that we should not allow the idea to rule tyrannically over us because it may include complacency or laziness. This means correctness of Nigerian English matters a lot and not only the idea. However, correctness at times may depend on cultural contexts.

What is noted is that apart from some implications in the implantation of English already identified, we can still talk of *language shift*. This relates to the fact that English is increasingly shifting from a second language to first language for a great number of people especially, younger generation. This is because a good number of youths cannot speak their mother tongues again but principally English. This is a great problem because language and culture are woven together and by the time one forgets his language, automatically, he has forgotten his culture and this will have a great implication for such a person. Another issue is *language maintenance* which has to do with the effort to preserve ones indigenous culture as well as promotion of multilingualism. *Interlarding* of language is another factor that is commonly found among bi/multilinguals. This is the mixing and shifting of codes when communicating and it also has its positive and negative implications for the users. *Cultural identity* which is linked with one's language identity is another important factor since it has been noted that English is trying to influence the local cultures of many Nigerians who cannot use his or

her local language except English. It has to be noted that our local cultures and languages should be vibrant in our societies such that they will not be extinct.

## Challenges

There are some challenges which Nigeria is facing as far as first language and second language are concerned especially in a bilingual/multilingual situation. The issue of policy making as far as language choice or language planning is concerned has become a major challenge in the country. *Language Policy* is a paramount factor that is needed to be promoted in Nigeria. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, we are experts in making policies but when it comes to implementation, we have a major problem. We are experts in policy making and when we make good policies, there is the need to implement such policies effectively so as to make us realize our goals.

Another issue is that of *Language Education* which is also very vital because there is the need to focus on language teaching, especially, English as a second language and at the same time, the maintenance of local language proficiency. We should also continue to see that our local languages are properly maintained because it will be something degrading if one forgets his own language and cling to a foreign language. At least, we can see the beauties that even the developed countries accord their local languages. Those who had travelled for further studies in countries like Russia, Spain, Japan, China and so forth will discover that they will first of have to learn their local languages before proceeding for their primary assignment. If that is happening in developed countries, we too should not shy away from our own local languages since it does not prevent us from the use of a foreign language like English.

We need to have respects for *Language rights* since such rights will promote the languages we are using. The popular saying is that no language is inferior and as such, there is the need to accord each language the needed respects and rights. For non-English speakers, there is the need to ensure access to information as well as services

bearing in mind the language that will be used to disseminate the message. Information should be made available in the appropriate settings through the English language and the local languages of the people in that environment.

## Conclusion

With our knowledge in the acquisition and use of English in the Nigerian setting, the fact is that the language has come to stay. It is now seen as the only language that can 'unify; us, hence, we see it as a lingua franca in our cultural setting. According to Mazrui (1975) 'English is not merely a medium for political exchange in the narrow sense.... We regard English language as a unifying force' (188). Nigeria is a country whose inhabitants use hundreds of independent and separable languages among which English is a foreign element. Consequently, English acquires certain peculiarities within the community in which it is learnt and used (see also Okwudilichukwu 2020).

All that has been said boils down to the fact that in every human existence, language plays a prominent role. When a completely neutral language is brought into a different setting, problems will arise. In the Nigerian setting, the problems which accompany the implantation and use of English have been virtually solved to the extent that the country will not be complete without such a language. It is the national language of the country now, it has been adopted and it falls in line with what Halliday et al (1970) say that "One language comes to be adopted on the medium of some activities... It may be a common language for commerce, learning, administration, religion or any or all of a variety of purposes... (145)".

English is used as a language of governance in Nigeria. Samara (1970) supports the use of such language in a setting like Nigeria.

Multilingualism has always set the stage for development of lingua franca... It is a language which is used habitually by people whose MT(S) are different in order to facilitate communication between them (660-661).

Without doubt, it is the effective learning of English in its adaptive role to the Nigerian situation that has made it function as L2 and a lingua franca in Nigeria. Such functional learning presupposes popular acceptance of the language together with the commitments to it.

The Nigerian example has shown us the complexities of implanting and the use of English in a multilingual/multicultural setting. However, no matter the roles and functions that English is performing in our setting, it still remains vital and essential that our local languages should be promoted and be given their necessary recognition. Therefore, the various local languages that have not been codified should be given the necessary codification needed and the teaching of our various local languages should be promoted. We should always promote the values of indigenous language and cultures since a foreign language cannot capture our cultures effectively; it will rather erode it.

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