

# ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE OF THE NILE UNIVERSITY, ABUJA: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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## Abstract

The sociolinguistic profile of the Nile University, Abuja is the type that should raise the curiosity of a researcher who is interested in communication. This researcher developed a hunch that there must be communication failure in the classroom discourse between lecturers and their students when he observed that the university is populated with academic and non-academic staff and students from different parts of the world, including Turkey, Egypt, India, Pakistan, Ghana, and Nigeria. The language of communication and instruction in the university, like all other universities in Nigeria, is English. The various peoples in the university speak the English Language in their distinct accents (the scope of the study is phonological). To analyse the effects of these varying accents in English in the classroom discourse between lecturers and their students, the researcher recorded some lectures which he tested on some selected students of the university in order to establish whether they had problems perceiving their lecturers' accents of English or not. The data generated were presented and analysed using simple statistical methods. The Labovian variationist approach to sociolinguistics was used. The finding was that the various accents affected perception adversely in the lecturer-student discourse. Discussions including policy suggestions were made for stakeholders to implement. It is hoped that in the end, stakeholders including lecturers, students, university managements and administrators will do their bits to improve classroom discourse between lecturers and students in Nigeria.

**Key Words:** accents, accent variation, discourse, sociolinguistics.

## Introduction

Lecturer-student communication is an important phenomenon because it borders on the teaching-learning process which takes place in the classroom or lecture hall, and bears on societal development generally. It is this process that produces professionals who render social and other services in the society. Communication involves the encoding and decoding of information between interlocutors. The lecturer and his students are the interlocutors in the classroom or lecture hall; he (the lecturer) encodes information in the teaching process and the students are to decode his information.

Since communication is a two-way phenomenon, the students may also encode information and their lecturers are expected to decode such information. It may be in their attempts to answer questions, make in-puts in the lecture or to ask some pertinent questions in order to clarify issues in the lecture. In fact, the lecturer and his students are ever in communication in the teaching-learning process.

This review has postulated that the lecturer-student communication in the Faculty of Science and Engineering of the Nile University, Abuja features speakers of English who vary seriously from one another in their English accents, leading to differentiation in perception during communication, particularly in the classroom discourse between lecturers and students.

According to Ile (2013; 2 - 5), the Nile University was established in 2009 as the twenty-sixth (26th) and latest member of the International Association of Universities (IAU), built and controlled by the Turkish government in pursuit of their bi-lateral relationship with other nations in Europe, Asia, the United States of America (USA), and Africa. The Nigerian-Turkish Nile University, which is otherwise referred to as the Nile University, is regulated by the National Universities Commission (NUC) like others in the country. The mission of the university is “to generate knowledge, technology and health-care education at global scale, expanding the

scientific horizon of individuals who will ensure the dominance of contemporary science and technology in the development of society”. In pursuit of their goals, the university has employed lecturers from Europe, Asia and Africa, particularly the host country Nigeria, to teach both science and non-science courses. It is the drive to teach science and technology, "expanding the scientific horizon of individuals" (source), that has motivated the university management to employ expatriate lecturers from India, Turkey, Pakistan and other European countries that are traditionally acclaimed for their interest in science and technology. The common language used in teaching and learning here is English, which is spoken in different dialects and accents of the lecturers and their students. These lecturers, from different backgrounds, speak English in their various accents such as Indian English, Turkish English, Pakistani English, Egyptian, Nigerian and other accents of English, causing pronunciation differences in English in classroom discourse.

The Faculty of Science and Engineering particularly is filled with expatriate lecturers who speak varying accents of English. It was anticipated that the communication between the lecturers and their students in the faculty was experiencing some differentials in perception as a result of the pronunciation differences in the English spoken there. The faculty which consists of the Departments of Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Computer Science is dominated by expatriate lecturers from Turkey, other European countries and the host country, Nigeria. The student population is made of Nigerians, Turks, Egyptians, and others who speak the English language in their various accents. It is anticipated that these various accents would lead to misperception in the communication between the lecturers and their students in the classrooms, lecture halls, laboratories, etc. That is why this study is set to analyse the pronunciation differences in English in the classroom discourse between lecturers and students in that faculty and to present the results for all the stake-holders to consider.

Akmajian, Demers, Farmer and Harnish (2010; 361-415), in an attempt to explain the successful linguistic communication, expound the idea of **message model** of communication, which involves the speaker and the hearer. The speaker acts as the **transmitter**, the hearer as the **receiver**, and the vocal auditory path with the sound wave is the **channel**. The message model is the prevalent method of human communication, which is what goes on between lecturers and their students in the lecture halls, laboratories, etc. According to Katz (1966; 103 - 104), in the message model of communication, the speaker chooses a message which he wants to convey to his listeners. He encodes the message in the form of a phonetic representation of an utterance by means of the system of linguistic rules with which he is equipped. The encoding becomes a signal to the speaker's **articulatory organs**, as he vocalizes an utterance of the proper phonetic shape, which in turn, is picked up by the hearer's **auditory organs**. The speech sounds stimulate the organs and are converted into neural signals from which an equivalent phonetic representation in the speaker's encoded message is obtained. This representation of the speaker's message is decoded by the hearer as a representation through his equivalent system of linguistic rules. Because the hearer employs the same system of linguistic rules to decode what the speaker employs to encode, it is clear that an instance of successful linguistic communication has occurred.

The message model of communication involves speaking and listening, which also implies that the speaker speaks in his accent and the hearer endeavours to understand the message in the accent of the speaker. As stated earlier, it is anticipated that the availability of various accents of English in the Faculty of Science and Engineering of the Nile University, Abuja can hamper a successful communication between the lecturers and their students. Accentual variations, which result from language contact, mean that a speaker may articulate a sound or pronounce a word or use an intonation in a way that is different from the standard or different from what the listener expects or knows. The problem will be how such people can cope with

contrasting pairs of words such as “true” and “through”, “tree” and “three”, “tin” and “thing”, “tick” and “thick”, etc. There might not be a successful communication in the end if the interlocutors are not adequately attuned to each other’s or one another’s accents of English. There is also the problem of acceptability; if the accent is not intelligible, it will not be acceptable, that is with reference to Well’s (1982) theory of **intelligibility versus acceptability**. The rejection of the unintelligible accent is the rejection of the message which it bears or has been used to convey.

The Faculty of Science and Engineering of the Nile University, Abuja with a population of staff and students speaking varying accents of English must be featuring some differentials in perception during pedagogic communication, i.e. classroom discourse between the lecturers and their students, if they are not adequately attuned to one another’s accents. Attah (1989; 118 - 132) explains that the lecturing-learning activity in Nigerian universities and other tertiary institutions is a replica of the encoding-decoding activity of communication in the larger world. Its success depends largely on the ability of the lecturers to encode with adequate clarity and that of the students to decode with sublime interest. Since communication is a two-way phenomenon, the students are also expected to attain a good level of the ability to encode information in a way that their lecturers will be able to decode their oral responses to assessment enquiries. Of course, some of the science courses which involve practical activities would require oral communication between the lecturers and their students, who are most often seen in laboratories explaining concepts, passing instructions, asking questions for clarifications and carrying out instructions. The students also make oral reports of their findings and the lecturers are expected to decode (decipher) the students’ oral presentations.

On the whole, there is a situation of **interpersonal communication** in the classrooms, lecture halls or laboratories, where the lecturers make communicative inputs and the students are expected to derive meanings from the inputs. Conversely, the students

make their inputs from which the lecturers are expected to derive meanings and respond accordingly. The interlocutors, that is, the lecturers and the students, are involved in speaking and giving active and conscious attention so that meanings can be made and gained appropriately.

**The Problem** is that like the Nile University, Abuja, the communication exercise in lectures, tutorials and talks in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria must have featured differences in perception as a result of the variations in the accents of the speakers of English. The English language, as we know, assumes so many uses in the world. It enjoys the statuses of the official language in Nigeria; one of the state languages in Zambia; a major language of government, the legal system and education in Singapore; and an associate language, one of the required languages in the three-language formula implemented in the 1960s in India.

As a result of its sojourn and contact with many other languages in the world, English has developed into a lot of dialects and accents which tend to cause differences in pronunciation and perception during communication in many sectors. These dialects and accents vary to a great extent from the Standard English dialect and accent, that is, the Received Pronunciation (RP) or the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) English. It is believed that one of the sectors experiencing differences in perception during communication as a result of pronunciation differences in English is the education sector with particular focus on the faculty of science in Nigerian universities, where the lecture method of imparting knowledge is predominant and expatriate lecturers with varying accents of English abound. Since English is the language of communication in this sector, some of the expatriate lecturers and the indigenous ones, all with their varying accents, make the classroom discourse, which is part of the message model of communication, feature differentials in perception. Their Nigerian students perceive their ideas differently, thereby missing the essence of the lectures. In effect and as a hunch, it was anticipated that the students' lecture

notes would be sketchy, with a number of unfilled gaps and omissions, which makes the lecture notes rather inaccurate and meaningless. The end result would be poor performance in examinations and tests, imperfect learning, climaxed with quackery in the chosen profession. This study was therefore **set to analyse the pronunciation differences in English** in the classroom discourse between lecturers and students in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, the Nile University, Abuja with **the intention to relate the situation to other universities in Nigeria and to make necessary recommendations and suggestions** to the stake-holders and other individuals.

The study aims at analysing the pronunciation differences in English in the classroom discourse between lecturers and students in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nile University, Abuja, presenting the effects of such differences on the teaching-learning process and the far-reaching effects on the larger Nigerian society. It should be noted that the English Language is used here to serve the Nile University community and the larger Nigerian society. It should be noted also that in the classroom discourse, the language use is firstly phonological (oral); phonology is anchored on the three domains of articulation (pronunciation), transmission (in the acoustic air) and perception (hearing) of the articulated sounds, and if the articulation of phonemes is not accurate, the perception would be inaccurate too. The objectives therefore are:

- a) to find out the extent to which the students of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nile University, perceive their lecturers differently as a result of pronunciation differences in English;
- b) to find out the extent to which the lecturers in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nile University perceive the English speech of their students differently as a result of pronunciation differences in English;
- c) to attempt a general analysis of the pronunciation differences in English as noticed in the differences in perception during the classroom discourse between lecturers and students of the Nile University.

Freeborn, et al. (1986; 64 -84) have identified some factors that distinguish one speaker from another. Such factors include natural boundaries like rivers and mountain ranges, markets and trading patterns, and socio-political boundaries. If the difference caused by these boundaries is on account of accent differentiation, the result is isophone, a dividing line between one accent feature and another; but if the difference is lexical and grammatical which are the components of a dialect, the result is isoglosses. An isogloss is a line separating one region from another region which differ in a particular feature of dialect. Bundles of isophones make up accent boundaries while bundles of isoglosses make up dialect boundaries. The idea of accent boundaries suggests accentual variations which is the subject of this study.

Language is a unit wider in scope than dialect but which, like dialect, is used to identify a people. According to Ferguson and Gumpez cited in Lyons (2011), language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates. Trudgill (1974) argues that though there is no inherent link between language and race (group), it remains true however that in many cases language may be an important concomitant of ethnic group membership. He illustrates with the fact that 'it is less accurate to say that Greeks speak Greek than to say that people who are native speakers of Greek are generally considered to be Greek ...'. According to him, in some cases, the separate identity of an ethnic group is signalled 'not by different languages, but by different varieties of the same language'. The common language in our focus is English, but the way the various nationalities speak the language has given them away, making it easy for one to identify or distinguish one speaker from another.

English Language has developed into many varieties and according to Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas (1997), these varieties can be referred to as "New Englishes" Like Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas, Melchers and Shaw (2011) also present the concept of "World Englishes". While Bamgbose et al. (1997) look at the new Englishes from the West African perspective, Melchers and Shaw consider the



language globally, exploring its sojourn round the world and the consequences of such a sojourn right from the British Isles extending to the uttermost parts of the world. They talk of the "inner circle Englishes" of the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), the Caribbean Island, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; the "outer circle Englishes" of India, Anglophone Africa, Philippines, Singapore; and the "expanding circle Englishes" of most European and East Asian countries. By their scheme, the "inner circle Englishes" refer to the accents of those who have English as first language; the "outer circle" refers to the accents of people who need English for secondary education, politics, law, business inside their countries; and the "expanding circle" refers to the accents of people who need English for communication in business, politics, education, etc. primarily with speakers of other languages from outside their countries. The various regions of the world are identified according to their accents and dialects of the English that they speak or use. We thus hear of Nigerian English, Ghanaian English, Singaporean English, Indian English, Turkish English and a host of other Englishes.

A language variety, according to Jowitt (1992; 37), can be considered as "... one of many general and complete language systems, each used by a substantial number of people and each possessing characteristics that distinguish it from other systems without requiring it to be classified as a different language". It is in this sense that one talks of varieties of the English Language such as Nigerian English, Indian English, American English, British English, Canadian English, or Singaporean English. Exploring the parameters for the classification of varieties, Quirk and Greenbaum (1973; 1-9), also Crystal and Davy (1969; 95-217) say that varieties can be classified by parameters that are national, regional or social. Lending credence to this, Jowitt (37) says "Dialect has usually had the same meaning as regional variety ...." This means that all the varieties of English spoken in regions like Britain, Nigeria, India, Turkey, and Egypt are dialects

of English and the peoples are known by the dialects or varieties of English that they speak or use.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) classify English varieties according to regional, educational and social standing, subject matter, medium, attitude and interference. Of these, English variety according regional parameter is most relevant to this study. According to Quirk et al. (1973), the well-established label for this type of variety is dialect. Geographical dispersion is the basic factor for linguistic variation. The situation is made worse with poor communications and relative remoteness, a dispersion that results in dialects becoming so distinct that they are regarded as different languages. Dutch, English, German, Swedish, and others were of Germanic family before but later became different languages as a result of variations. English Language has dialects that are distinct but have not become different languages like the Germanic Languages. According to Quirk and Greenbaum, their distinctness is more in the system of pronunciation than in vocabulary (lexicon) and grammar (structure).

It is mainly by the system of pronunciation known as accent that one can distinguish the speakers of English from the British Isles from the speakers of English from Americas, Canada, Australia, and others. Further still by accent is the distinction between the British English and the Englishes of India, Nigeria, Ghana, Turkey and other places where English had formerly colonized or is used as a medium of communication. According to Melchers and Shaw (2011), another set of English dialects is known as the "expanding circle Englishes" which include most European and East Asian countries who need English for business, politics, education, etc. with speakers of other languages from outside their countries.

Dialects can fail to convey the intended meaning if they are unfamiliar to the listener. This happens when the interlocutors vary in their dialects and dialectal exposures. This problem of variation results from differential change (Francis, 1983). Each change that occurs is likely to increase the amount of variation in the language. The differential process may degenerate slowly to a point where the

speakers of the varieties do not understand each other again. According to Ianna cited in Omachonu (2011; 22 - 35) English, German, Dutch, Swedish, which are Germanic languages, have become mutually unintelligible because of serious cases of variation. The same problem abounds in English where Nigerian English, Indian English, Turkish English tend to vary seriously to the point of communication failure.

Bamgbose, Banjo and Thomas (1997: 203 - 300) present discussions in which these various varieties are referred to as Englishes. They exemplify with the situation where the Nigerian English varies from the Cameroonian English to the point of the interlocutors misunderstanding one another. Jibril (1986; 47 - 75), also cited in Bamgbose et. al (1997; 248 - 268) presents minimal pairs where the two Englishes differ from one another. His examples include:

word	RP	CamE	NigE
scarce	/skeəs/	/skes/	/skas/
gear	/giə/	/gie/	/dʒia/
target	/ta:git/	/taget/	/tadʒet/

From these examples, it is possible for the interlocutors to misperceive one another. The variations noticed in the two Englishes in pronouncing the above words have the capability of causing a communication breakdown. Dialects and accents can fail in communication.

In collecting data for this research, the English accents of three lecturers, one of Nigerian English accent, one of Indian English accent and one of Turkish English accent in the Faculty of Science and Engineering of the Nile University, Abuja, were recorded on an audio tape, and sixty (60) students randomly selected out of the one hundred and fifty-seven (157) in the faculty were required to listen to the recording and answer some questions aimed at interpreting the contents. Each recorded accent was transcribed into a passage and two questionnaires constructed on it, one on specialized words (like

register test) and the other a general comprehension test. In the register test, the selected students were required to listen to the tape and to fill the numbered gaps with the words they heard in the playback. They were also required to answer the simple comprehension questions according to what they understood from the playback.

Conversely, ten students of the faculty were also recorded and their speech tested on their lecturers to find out whether they also had problems with their students' accents of English. The recording of the three lecturers was done surreptitiously in their lecture sessions to make for natural speech articulation. It should be noted that the process encountered some setback as some of the respondents showed some level of unwillingness. In spite of the researcher's passionate appeal, some of the respondents were not quite willing to give their notes for observation by the researcher. However, the few that cooperated yielded some important data.

The data collected from the field work in the Faculty of Science and Engineering of the Nile University are presented in tables using appropriate criteria. The data in the tables are analysed in accordance with the objectives of the study, which have been converted to research questions as follows:

1. To what extent do the students of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nigerian-Turkish Nile University differently perceive the speech of their lecturers as a result of pronunciation differences in English?
2. To what extent do the lecturers of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nigerian-Turkish Nile University differently perceive the spoken and written English of their students as a result of pronunciation differences in English?
3. What is the contextual analysis of the pronunciation differences in English as noticed in the differentials in perception during the pedagogic communication between the lecturers and the students of the Nile University, Abuja?

The data which have been generated with the use of the recorded lectures and discussions have been summarized in the following tables.

**Table 1: Summary of Students' Misperceptions of Words and Phrases in the Three Accents**

Accents	No. of students' misperceptions	Percentage of students' misperceptions
Nigerian	61	15.06
Turkish	166	40.99
Indian	178	43.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the summary of the students' misperceptions of words and phrases in the three accents under study. There were a total of 405 misperceptions. The Nigerian accent has 61 misperceptions of words and phrases which is 15.06% of the total students' misperceptions. The Turkish recorded 166 misperceptions out of the total of 405, amounting to 40.99%. The Indian had the highest of 178 misperceptions, amounting to 43.95%. It then follows that the Nigerian accent was the most perceived, while the Indian posed the least perceived. The Turkish was in between. It should be noted however that the Nigerian accent with only 15.06% misperceptions had performed far above the other two with misperceptions ranging in the percentage of 40s, that is, Turkish accent of English recorded 40.99% misperceptions of words and phrases while the Indian accent had a record of 43.95% misperceptions of words and phrases. The wide gap of 25.93% between the Nigerian accent and the Turkish accent is significant, not to talk of the 27.89% between the same Nigerian accent and the Indian accent. It is therefore obvious that the students are so much more at home with the Nigerian accent of English than they are with any other.

**Table 2: Summary of Respondents' Correct Answers to the Comprehension Questions in the Three Accents**

Accents	No. of correct answers	Percentage of correct answers
Nigerian	149	41.05
Turkish	111	30.58
Indian	103	28.38
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows the summary of the respondents' correct answers to the comprehension questions in the three accents. There was a total of 363 correct answers generated from the three accents. The Nigerian accent had 149 which is 41.05% of the total of 363 correct answers. The Turkish had 111 which is 30.58% of the 363 correct answers; the Indian had 103 correct answers which is 28.38% of the total, meaning that the Nigerian accent was the most understood of the three accents under study, while the Indian accent was the least understood. Worthy of note also is the level of the difference among the comprehension rating of the three accents. By number and percentage, the Nigerian accent had 38 (10.47%) more correct answers than the Turkish accent and 46 (18.67%) more correct answers than the Indian. These differences are serious in terms of the comprehension rating.

**Table 3: Lecturers' Perceptions of the Students' Words and Phrases (N = 3)**

Words and phrases	No. of wrong interpretations	Percentage of wrong interpretations	Some Examples and transcriptions of wrong interpretations
virus /vairəs/	1	7.14	Viral /vairəl
transmitted /trænsmitid/	1	7.14	Transmitting /trænsmitiŋ/
disease /dizi:z/	1	7.14	Decease /disi:z/
infection /infɛʃən/	2	14.29	Infusion /infuʃən/; in fashion /in fæʃən/
cure /kjʊ:/	2	14.29	Chaos /keiəs/; choir /kwaið/
deep cut /dip kʊt/	1	7.14	Deep core /di:p kɔ:/
kiss her /kis ha:/	1	7.14	Kisser /kisð/
anal intercourse /æənəl intəkɔs/	2	14.29	An intercom /ən intəkɔm/; anal tackle /einðl tækl/
blood donor /blʊdəunɔ/	1	7.14	Blue doughnut /blju: dðunɔt/
infected needle /infeted nuɪdl/	2	14.29	Infant needle /infænt ni:dl/; in fat needle /in fæt ni:dl/
<b>Total</b>	14	100	

Table 3 shows the lecturers' perceptions of the words and phrases which their students articulated in the HIV/AIDS discussion. The discussion questions under the Appendices include:

- a) What is the full meaning of AIDS?
- b) Give the brief history of AIDS in Nigeria.
- c) What is HIV?
- d) What is the difference between HIV and AIDS?

- e) Is it possible for a partner of an AIDS patient to go without the virus? How?
- f) How does one avoid contacting the virus?

These questions elicited a discussion among the students/respondents and words from the discussion were tested on three of their lecturers, as shown in the table. Out of the expected 30 correct perceptions, 14 words and phrases were misperceived. The following words and phrases were misperceived:

“virus” /vairəs/ was perceived as “viral” /vairəl/;  
 “infection” /infekʃən/ was perceived as “infusion” /infuʃən/;  
 “deep cut” /di:p kʌt/ was perceived as “deep core” /di:p kɔ:/;  
 “anal intercourse” /einəl intəkɔ:s/ was perceived as “an intercom” /æn intəkɒm/; etc.

Fourteen (14 i.e. 46.7%) misperceptions out of the expected 30 (thirty) correct perceptions is about half loss of perception. This (53.3%) cannot be overlooked where we expect 100% success. The lecturer should be able to record 100% perception of his student's articulation in order for his marking scheme to attain the required credibility.

**Table 4: Lecturers' General Comprehension of the Students' Discussion (N = 3)**

Accents	No. of correct answers	Percentage of correct answers
Nigerian	08	47.06
Turkish	05	29.41
Indian	04	23.53
<b>Total</b>	17	100

Table 4 shows the lecturers' comprehension of the students' discussion of HIV/AIDS. There were 17 correct answers out of the expected 30, with the Nigerian lecturers scoring the highest of 8 (47.06%) correct answers and the Indian lecturers scoring the lowest of 4(23.53%) correct answers. The four comprehension questions in



this test were to generate a possible total of 10 marks for each lecturer and 30 marks for all the three lecturers. The four questions and the marks allotted to them are presented in Test 4B in the appendices. The percentage of each score is worked over the total correct score of 17, multiplied by 100%; for example, the 8 correct answers by the Nigerian lecturer is divided by the total correct scores of 17 and multiplied by 100% to give 47.06%. All the others were worked like that and added up to give 100%.

### Data Analysis

To what extent do the students of the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nigerian Turkish Nile University, Abuja perceive the speech of their lecturers differently as a result of accentual variations in English?

To be able to answer this question, we need to consider the performances of the accents in the various tests. At the levels of words and phrases, the following data were presented:

Nigerian accent recorded 61 (15.06%) wrong perceptions;

Turkish accent recorded 166 (40.99%) wrong perceptions;

Indian accent recorded 178 (43.95%) wrong perceptions.

The extent of the respondents' misperception of the lecturers' speech as a result of accentual variations in English are clear from the above statistics. They understood the Nigerian accent best of the three, and the Indian accent worst of the three. It is however to be noted that the difference between the Indian accent and the Turkish is only 2.96% which may be of serious consequences in communication or significance test.

The extent of the students' misperception as a result of accentual variations is clearer with the kinds of interpretations they gave to some expressions in the tests. In the Nigerian accent (table 3), the expression "spongy air-filled organs" /spɒndʒi eəfild ɔ:gənz/ was perceived as "spending air free organs" /spendiŋ eə fi:ld ɔ:gənz/, which is very far from what the lecturer said in his lecture. Far still is the misperception "sponge air field organs" /spɒŋdʒ eə fi:ld ɔ:gənz/.

In that same table, even the simplest word “veins” was misperceived as “vains” and “vanes”; though they are articulated as /veinz/, they are not used in the same context.

The word "spongy" was perceived as "spending" /spendiŋ/ and "sponge" /spɒndʒ/. These are as a result of the possibility of minimal pairing of the words. It is possible to pair the words on the basis of their rhyming though certain differences should be established, as in: spongy /spɒndʒi/ versus spending /spendiŋ/ (the difference being in [i] vs. [iŋ] in the word-final)

filled /fild/ versus field /fi:ld/ (the difference being in [i] vs. [i:] in the word-medial)

veins /veinz/ versus vanes /veinz/ (no difference)

In the case of "spongy" and "spending", the common element is the initial consonant cluster /sp-/; the medial and the final syllables /ɒn-dʒi/ and /-en-diŋ/ are not quite synonymous and should not pose any problem of misperception. It is possible to think that one heard /fi:ld/ instead of /fild/, but what with /fri:/, which bears no near semblance in sound with /fild/.

These misperceptions show loss of context, meaning that lack of attunement equals loss of context. It could also be argued that the students lost the context because of their poor backgrounds in English Language. This leaves a message for stakeholders in secondary school English Language teaching and learning. It also calls for the attention of lecturers of the General Studies Series in English known as "The Use of English" in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The situation where a student finds it difficult to decipher a usage contextually can only be remedied by solid secondary school education in English Language and the normal General Studies in English taught in the early years in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

In the Turkish accent, the expression “Britain’s electricity generating and distribution system” was interpreted as “Britain’s electricity generation and distribution system”, and this is different from what was given. “A generating system” is different from “a generation system” semantically speaking. Phonologically, the words

"generation" /dʒenəreɪʃən/ and "generating" /dʒenəreɪtɪŋ/ are distinguishable. Though the two words are of equal number of syllables /dʒe-nə-rei-ʃən/ and /dʒe-nə-rei-tɪŋ/ (six syllables), the last syllable in one is not the same with the last syllable in the other. Morphologically "-tion" /-ʃən/ is a noun-forming or derivational morpheme while "-ting" /-tɪŋ/ is participial or an inflectional morpheme. The two morphemes are not the same, so are "generation" and "generating" not the same.

At variance still are expressions such as "British generation and electricity distribution system" and "Britain's distribution and electricity agency". Though the words "British" and "Britain's" are of the same root and adjectival, they are phonologically different; one is /brɪtɪʃ/ while the other is /brɪtənz/. To have heard one instead of the other or the other instead of the one is misperception as a result of accentual variations.

The least misperceived word "transformer" /trænsfɔ:mə/ in the Turkish accent is still different from the interpretations "transformat" /trænsfɔ:məl/ and "transforming" /trænsfɔ:mɪŋ/. Though the words "transformer", "transforming" and "transformat" are derived from "transform", they are not the same.: "transformer" is a noun; "transforming" is participial and "transformat" is an error or non-English. Phonologically /trænsfɔ:mə/ "transformer" and /trænsfɔ:mɪŋ/ "transforming" are different; they have differing final syllables, /-mə/ against /-mɪŋ/. Inadequate attunement to different accents would make one hear the other for the one or one for the other.

In the Indian accent, "the production of heat and light" /ðə prəʊdʌkʃən əv hi:t ən laɪt/ was misperceived as "the producing hit and light" /ðə prəʊdju:sɪŋ hi:t ən laɪt/ and "the production hit and light" /ðə prəʊdʌkʃən hi:t ən laɪt/. The word "hit" /hi:t/ cannot stand for "heat" hi:t/. Replacing 'heat' with 'hit' is an indication of the speaker's ignorance of the minimal pair theory, which is even taught in early contact with English Language. Clark, Yallop and Fletcher (92) explain that phonemes are used to differentiate words that tend

to sound alike. It is expected of the speaker to observe this difference and the hearer to hear the distinctive sounds, as in 'red' versus 'led' or 'wed', where the consonants /r/, /l/ and /w/ are the distinctive phonemes. In the case of 'heat' and 'hit', the vowels /i:/ and /i/ are the distinctive phonemes. While one is long, the other is short in beat. The observation of the difference in sound quality will help communication instead of marring it. In the same accent, the expression "temperature" /temprəʃə/ was perceived as "temperator", "temperate hall" and "temperating" which are far from the meant.

As observed earlier, the problem of misperception has been worsened by the respondents' poor background knowledge of English Language. That accounts for the strange words such as "temperator" and "temperating". Is there any hall known as "temperate hall"? All these are as a result of poor background knowledge of English on the part of the students.

At the level of general comprehension of the lectures, the accents scored a total of 363 correct answers. The breakdown is in this order:

Nigerian accent recorded 149 (41.05%) correct answers;

Turkish accent recorded 111 (30.58%) correct answers;

Indian accent recorded 103 (28.38%) correct answers.

These statistics show that the three accents posed some problems of understanding to the students-respondents. The Nigerian accent however was the most understood or posed the least difficult to understand; the Indian accent was the least understood or posed the most difficult to understand. The difference between the 28.38% of the Indian accent and the 30.58% of the Turkish accent is just 2.2%, meaning that one is not much better nor much worse than the other in the intelligibility rating. It is necessary to note here that the percentages shown in the above figures are worked on the total number of correct answers put together (Nigerian + Turkish + Indian).

## **Summary, Conclusion and Suggestions**

### **Summary**

The Faculty of Science and Engineering, Nigerian-Turkish Nile University is peopled, among others, with expatriate lecturers from Turkey and other European countries and India. The university also has students' population which is made of Nigerians and other nationals like Turks, Egyptians, Indians, Algerians, Nigeriens and so on. The lecturers and the students speak English in various accents. The speakers of the various accents in the faculty are not so adequately attuned to one another, that is, the students versus the lecturers and the students among themselves vary in their English accents. As a result of the accent variations, students' performances in lectures and laboratory experiments have not been so up to expectation. Students' lecture notes feature unfilled gaps which indicate loss of vital information in the course of the lectures. This situation makes students fail their examinations or perform poorly.

### **Conclusion**

The research has shown that the Nigerian accent of English is the most understood accent among students in Nigerian universities. Other lecturers of other accents such as the Indian, Turkish, American, etc. do not have the comprehensibility rating of the Nigerian accent in lecturing in the Nigerian tertiary institutions. The data in this study have shown that the other accents have scored far lower than the Nigerian accent of English in this context. The general effects of this situation cannot be overlooked as they go far into the main society which the tertiary education is supposed to serve effectively. To state clearly and concisely, the problem of pronunciation differences in English in classroom discourse between lecturers and their students' manifests in poor perception of thoughts and ideas and sometimes a total loss of communication. As stated earlier, the general observation reveals that the students' notes feature gaps that they find difficult to fill up even after their own personal

research or reading up. Quackery is the ultimate result of such a situation where students find it difficult to understand their lecturers.

Another finding of the study is that the students had the kind of the problem of wrong perception because they were not adequately attuned to the accents of their lecturers. This inadequacy in attunement can be attributed to poor educational foundation in which English language had not been adequately taught, that is, there had not been good English language teaching and learning in the secondary schools. The students lacked the proper language skills (of listening, reading, writing and speaking) to perceive their lecturers appropriately. This means that vocabulary range in English is not up to the capacity required of a learner in a tertiary institution which is expected to produce professionals. As a result of poor vocabulary range, they find it difficult to flow in certain contexts where the registers are above the ordinary, where the terminologies become very strange jargons. It is because of this poor background in English language learning that the lecturers sounded strange to the students in some cases; that is why they found some of the words and expressions in the lectures difficult to perceive correctly.

### **Suggestions**

The problems identified above and others which are related to them have their solutions. Both the federal and state governments, the ministry of education and other stakeholders in secondary and tertiary levels of education should wade into the situation to proffer the required solution(s) to the problems. Qualified and experienced English language teachers should be employed to teach all the language skills in secondary schools. Secondary school students should be taught preparatory to the academic challenges that they would face in tertiary institutions. This means that justice should be done to all the aspects of English language teaching in secondary schools. The tradition of teaching mere reading comprehension should be avoided; teachers should extend their teaching of English language to cover comprehension, summary, vocabulary (lexis and registers), structure

(grammar), speech (oral English), and essay and letter writing. When this is done, there would not be the kind of appalling results noticed in this research because the students' proficiency in the language would have been adequately developed to facilitate attunement to other people's accents of English.

In respect of the above findings, the study therefore suggests the following recommendations. Firstly, the lecturers should make efforts to conquer the problem of being too typical of their regional or national accents of English. Since science and technology are very essential for national development, accuracy is required in the faculty so that it will graduate people with adequate knowledge; only then will our safety in the society be guaranteed, that there will be no quackery.

Secondly the lecturers and the students should do so much to be attuned to one another. There should be a conscious effort to recognize and understand other people's accents of English. Exposure to other varieties of English apart from ours is required. This can only be attained when the students have early exposure to courses like dialectology, sociolinguistics, stylistics and others. These courses of study should be incorporated in the General Studies Series, particularly the Use of English. As mentioned earlier, the teaching of the aspects of English language in our secondary schools should be elaborate for that level. It has been observed that the aspect known as 'speech' has not been handled adequately in our secondary schools. This is because most of the English language teachers at that level do not have adequate knowledge of that aspect of the language. Some of them have specialised in literature from the universities and have unfortunately found themselves teaching English language in secondary schools; they gloss over the language aspects in which they do not have adequate knowledge. The appropriate authorities should intervene in order to salvage the situation.

There are a lot of other things that the governments should do to help the situation. The National Universities Commission (N U C) in conjunction with the various universities administrations should

organise workshops and in-service courses or study fellowships for lecturers. This will help expose them to more resources and knowledge, thereby enhancing their performance in the lecturing profession. But it is appalling today to notice that the government agencies which should facilitate lecturers' attendance to conferences and workshops are not doing enough. Some applications for conference attendance and sponsorship have suffered setbacks. Some have either been turned down completely or are granted when the conferences have been held and done with. The bottle-neck in securing permission and sponsorship to attend conferences and workshops should be reduced by university authorities and TETFund (Tertiary Education Trust Fund) officers. This will help to give our lecturers and teachers necessary exposure to do their work better.

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