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ROLES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH VARIETIES IN NATIONAL INTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT
This paper examined the Nigerian English varieties and their roles in integrating the country. The English language has come to stay in Nigeria and looking at its long history, it has grown beyond a target language to a unity language – lingua Franca. The domestication of English in Nigeria has given birth to Nigerian varieties of English. The varieties are spoken by all Strata of the Nigerian society in daily transactions. This paper relies on Dell Hymes' Ethnography of Communication theory as an analytical tool. The findings of the study reveals that the varieties of English spoken in Nigeria have united the social strata, closed all border lines between tribes or speech communities thus serve as password for all official transactions from local to national levels. Also, it is the passport for inter and intra city movements and trades. This paper proposes that more publications be made in the Nigerian English varieties to create wider awareness of its acceptability and that the Pidgin English and Creole which are part of the Nigerian varieties of English should not be waved aside as unacceptable English varieties in Nigeria. It also recommends creation of research centres with equipped language laboratories to develop, harmonize and strengthen Nigerian English varieties and that more deliberate study be carried out to standardize the Pidgin variety.

Keywords: Roles; English; Variety; Nation; Integration

Introduction

Language anywhere and everywhere is a vital means of communication. It is an exclusive characteristic of human beings considering its unique properties of displacement, arbitrariness and duality (Yule 2003, p.20-25). By sources and acquisition, languages have common origin. "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech… Behold, the people are one, they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (Genesis 11:1, 6 the old King James version). From the Babel experience, where God scattered men and gave them diverse languages, each language has its family tree from which proto-European was established as the great-grand mother of English language (Yule 2003, p.214) and (Hudson 2001, p.37). Language from the beginning has binding force that unifies people for existence and functionality.

Every language user in a bi-lingual or multi-lingual environment has his\her own mother tongue, yet for obvious needs acquire a second language. It goes to show

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that everybody living there understands and speaks the same language. This marks those people as a family and many times such people are from the same decent. Whereas there are some nations that have national language, lots more are multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural. Nigeria as a nation falls within the latter group. As multilingual, multiethnic, multicultural nation, Nigerian is held together by the English language. Language indeed is the only sustainable binding force that wields multilingual nation together.

English language, since its introduction decades ago in Nigeria, has functioned as primary medium of communication. It has grown over years to become a lingua franca by usage. Yusuf (2012, p.898) affirms this when he noted that English has emerged as that privileged language without which the unity of Nigeria as a nation is most improbable if not out-rightly impossible. Yusuf (2012, p.898) quoting Isayev posits that "language is a nation's most important asset. There is no such thing as a nation without a common linguistic basis". This affirms that for national integration, cohesion and development to thrive, there must be language capable and acceptable by all in the administration of a nation's affairs.

This paper attempts to highlight how the English language and its varieties spoken in Nigeria functions in uniting every strata in the country. The unifying function of English in Nigeria is discussed in this paper as composite since all other varieties of English spoken in the country are all inclusive. Nigeria is a multilingual nation with about 500 estimated different languages spoken having Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are the major languages. Other ethnic groups have their languages which are spoken by thousands of people. The arrival of the British introduced English in Nigeria through trade contact resulting in the formation of pidgin which probably led to the present day Nigeria Pidgin English. This Nigerian Pidgin English is mainly used for inter-ethnic communication. This inter-ethnic language has over the years grown in leaps and bounds galvanizing all facets of the country ranging from the highly educated elites, the non-educated, the security agents, the artisans to the traders even the market women. In addition, the Pidgin English complements the standard Nigeria English variety in unifying the nation and bringing the people together.

The Concept of Varieties of English

Variety according to Hudson (2001) is a different manifestation of a language or a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution, Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics (2007) sees variety as any form of a language seen as systematically distinct from others.

Varieties of English as posit here is different forms the English. It is the different forms of English spoken at different regions by different groups of people in different lands and clime.It results from the contacts English has made as it travelled through different lands and clime where the British had influence. Thus, we have American variety of English, Australian variety of English, Ghanaian variety of English, Nigerian variety of English, among others.

Nigerian English Varieties

Admittedly, the English language is the major *Lingua Franca* in Nigeria and the world today. It is spoken in all the continents of the world. The status of English as a world language makes it perform a number of first, second and foreign language functions. Being a world language, it has developed a number of varieties in different parts of the world. Among the notable varieties are British, American, Canadian, and New Zealand on one hand as native speakers and Indian, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Singapore, etc on the other hand as non-native speakers (NOUN).

The English language was introduced in Nigeria by the British about nineteenth century AD through trade contact and colonization. By 1914, it gained acceptance by the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Nigeria. As English Language found a new abode in Nigeria, its structure has to undergo some changes in line with its new environment. By this, the English language which was once foreign has to be home-grown, nativized, domesticated and adopted to suit our environment (NOUN). Since its introduction, the English language grew side by side with several indigenous languages. This gave birth to Nigeria variety of English which has various - pronunciation pattern with no consensus pattern for pronunciation (Okafor and Ugwu 2007, p.54). Citing Jibril, Jowitt, Bamgbose and Banjo, Okafor and Ugwu affirm that Nigerian English varieties actually exist and that there are many varieties of Nigeria English which range from something near Standard English to the Patois of the market place. It is a conglomeration of many varieties which relate to one another in sufficient respect to quality for a common cover term – Nigeria English.

Nigerian English is that variety of English used by Nigerians to communicate across socio-cultural boundaries. It is different from the native speaker's variety in terms of its use of some culture-specific transformation as well as its non-observance of certain global and surface structure constraints. Adetugbo in (NOUN) unequivocally states that Nigerian English like British and American English should be regarded as a dialect or a group of distinct form of a language devoid of any perforate connotation of inferiority.

The Nigerian English (NE) as a product of its social context play significant role as a medium of social interaction considering the vast population of Nigeria with estimated population of about 200 million and estimated over 400 local languages and three of these languages (Hausa, 15,000,000 speakers, Yoruba 10,000,000 speakers, Igbo 6,000,000 speakers) are regarded as the major languages but only a few person can speak more than one of these three languages (NOUN). This in essence makes it clear that the only effective medium of communication between Nigerian from different linguistic backgrounds is English.

In Nigeria, there are varieties of English that are learnt in a formal setting (classroom) and others that are learnt outside the classroom,(broken or pidgin English) in an attempt to communicate. In Nigeria, there are many varieties of English as there are local languages. Without mincing words, Nigerian English may be defined as the speech form that embraces all

the speakers of English in Nigeria. This makes it difficult to decide on the types of English that exist in Nigeria. This obvious challenge made scholars to attempt to classify English types as used in Nigeria.

Classifications of Varieties of Nigerian English

Brosnaham (1958) as quoted (NOUN, p.50) classified English varieties used in Nigeria by using education criterion. He classified it based on four levels:

Level I: the variety called Pidgin English used mainly by illiterates. This variety is spoken by a large number of speakers, mostly market women, artisans, labourers and at times the educated Nigerians lapse into it when they are in informal environments and they need to communicate across socio-cultural boundaries.

Level II: The variety of English as used by high school graduates. It is characterized by some degree of communicative fluently and with a wide range of lexical items.

Level III: This is the primary school English. It is the English as used by people with primary school education, and it has the greatest number of users.

Level IV: This is the university English. This is the English used by the university graduates and it is characterized by linguistic features close to Standard English.

Banjo's classification of Nigerian English quoted in NOUN and Okafor and Ugwu (2007) used the criteria of local acceptability to classify it into four varieties:

I. Variety used by people with an imperfect knowledge of the language. Here transliteration is obtained.
II. It is the variety that is highly accepted socially and used by 75% of Nigerian speakers. Linguistically, the variety is syntactically close to Standard British English (SBE**)** but differ at phonological and lexical levels.
   For example:
   1. My change is not complete
   2. Driver balance me
   3. I want to drop here.
   4. Take the other road, there is no go slow on the road.
III. It is another variety marketed by low social acceptability and high international intelligibility. It is used by only 10% of Nigerians. He described such variety as having RP deep structure and Nigerian surface structure.
IV. Another variety is the variety that is characterized by low social and high international intelligibility. This variety is used by a handful of Nigerians who are privileged to have English as their L_1 through birth by native speaker parent or were brought up in native speaker environment. This he equates with Standard British English (SBE).

There is yet another classification by Bamgbose (quoted in NOUN). Bamgbose classifies Nigerian English into three varieties. The first variety he calls the contact English (CE) which is the type found in Antera Duke's diary of events in Calabar between 1785 and 1788.

Example*:*

"... I see my men was liv with him to Canow com up and tell me ... I Run and Go Down for landing I find no Canow ..."

Same kind of English was found in King Jaja of Opobo's (1824) diary and it reads, *"suppose my fader, or my fader fader come up from ground and peak me why English man do dat, I no sabby tell why".*

These are examples of broken English and Nigeria Pidgin English. Similar examples of this variety can be found in "New masquerade" by Chief Zebrudaya and Ken Saro-Wiwa's "Sozaboy."

Bamgbose's second variety is the Victorian English associated with the so called cosmopolitan 19th century Lagos Negro English which is spoken to "impress rather than express."

Bamgbose's third variety is the School English (SE): A summary of Bamgbose's description of Nigerian English (NE) is based on evolution of varieties of English in Nigeria - Contact English (CE) with its varieties as Nigerian pidgin (NP) and Broken English (BE); Victorian English (VE) and School English (SE). The above combine together to form what is called standard Nigerian English.

From the classifications above, it is crystal clear that we have Nigerian English varieties. These varieties include among others Pidgin English. The origin of Nigerian Pidgin English lie historically in trade contact between the British and local people in the seventeenth century. A Manchester working group on language contact noted that Nigerian pidgin is part of a continuum of English pidgin and Creoles spoken in other West African countries such as Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cameroun. They noted that Nigerian Pidgin English development has been evident in big cities and ports in the south of Nigeria where it is used among people belonging to different ethnic groups. Thus, Pidgin in Nigeria is linked to the urbanization process. The Manchester group observed that in the past, the use of Nigerian Pidgin English was linked to non-educated people and perceived by educated ones with negative attitude. Nowadays the use of Nigerian Pidgin English is more widespread even among educated people and perceived as more Nigerian than English. Truly, Nigerian Pidgin is gaining popularity among young people, many writers, politicians and musicians. This stems from the fact that it is not attached to any ethnic group. The use of Nigeria Pidgin English can also function in some contexts as an act of identity when speakers need to stress their 'Nigerianness', as opposed to their ethnic group identity. This "belongingness" to Nigeria could not be achieved by ex-colonial power in English Language. By this role, Pidgin English could have been a good candidate for national language in Nigeria since it retained the characteristics of solidarity and neutrality. But unfortunately, it has not yet been sufficiently well developed to fulfill all the duties of a national language. At present there is no standard orthography for Pidgin English. It has little or no written use and above all no active movement favouring its development and propagation. One of the major challenges affecting its standardization is argument that it is a variety of English and not a separate language.

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Theoretical Underpinning

This study is hinged on Dell Hymes' (1967) Ethnography of Communication. The theory was a stimulus for the development of "interactional sociolinguistics" and as Malmkjar (2002) observes, it contributes strongly in the argument that for a person to attain communicative competence, such a person must transcend linguistic knowledge to knowing the social and cultural rules for using a language. In addition, Stubbs (1989) sees ethnography of communication as the art of using a specific speech type in a specific social setting. In Stubbs' view, the speech in question should not be a general one but particular and specific speech events relevant to the social setting. According to him, ethnography of communication has to do with the use of observed or recorded pattern of communicative behaviour with a view to understanding spoken interaction. Thus, it is of importance to understand the act of communication in order to have perfect and clear understanding of any discourse. Further, Goddard (1998, p.342) submits that "Ethnography of communication is concerned with how speech is organized socially and has been adjudged the most influential approach to discourse and cultural studies." This view places emphasis on the social background of the speech event and this makes it most appropriate for the present study which is based on the fact that the societies that the English language is used in Nigeria determine the form that it takes in order to accommodate the linguistic needs of each society using it.

Impacts of Varieties of Nigeria English in National Integration

English and its varieties in Nigeria are unifying tools for National Integration in Nigeria. In Nigeria, English is the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature and much more of internal as well as external communication (Okafor and Ugwu, 2007). Unarguably, it is the most important language of the world being the first language of the United Nations. It is spoken in all nations of the world. Yusuf (2012) posits that English helps in promoting, nurturing and uniting the Nigerian nations. He further said that the English language is the language of integration in Nigeria because it is the only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness. This can be seen as it transverses regional barriers as political parties are named in English right from the first Republic till date. Names of some of the political parties include the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC), All Progressive Congress (APC), and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). All the national political parties form slogans and campaign slangs using English and its Nigerian varieties.

English and its varieties in Nigeria are void of suspicions in any formal, literate or social context as everyone understands them. In this, no one speaking them is suspected of having a skeleton in his cupboard or "hidden agenda" in inter-ethnic transactions or relationships. Yusuf (2012) further said that the English language bring all the supposed 'nations' of Nigeria to function as one. Each ethnic group is often mentioned as a nation thus Hausa nation, Igbo nation, Yoruba nation, Edo nation, Tiv

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land, Ijaw nation, Ebira land, etc are cohabiting under the Nigerian nation through English. In other words, without English and the Nigerian Pidgin English, the violent ethnic groups like Oodua People Congress (OPC), Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC), Ijaw Youth Solidarity (IYS), and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) would have found more justification to secede from the Nigerian federation. Each of these social (linguistic) groups uses English in both intra and inter communication to solve linguistic issues that are peculiar to them. Hence, Ethnography of Communication theory submits that to attain communicative competence, a person must transcend linguistic knowledge to knowing the social and cultural rules for using a language. In other words, speaking Nigerian varieties of English requires knowledge of the social and cultural rules of the different social groups and communities that they serve.

More so, the English language and its varieties in Nigeria are used as language of nationalism. The intelligibility of the different varieties of English in Nigeria manifest through their usage in the specific social setting. Nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Herbert Macaulay and current national figures express their views in English and for wider coverage often use Pidgin English in their addresses. By implication, English is a Language of Wider for Communication (LWC) as such is used for Phatic Communion, ceremonial purpose and instrument for keeping records, information dissemination, self experiment and embodiment of thoughts among the various linguistic groups of Nigeria. Therefore, with English as a common tongue to all the ethnic groups, the unification of individuals and ethnic differences is guaranteed.

Consequently, the collective identity of Nigeria and co-operate existence in safeguarding the territorial integrity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria is done through the English and the Pidgin English as can be attested by its use by all security agencies - Army, police, and all paramilitary in their interactions. Trading and travelling to all corners of the country are made free and swift if one is fluent either in standard Nigeria English or the Pidgin English variety. It is important to know that for anyone to rise or live in any place in Nigeria, the knowledge of English (irrespective of the variety) is paramount. The knowledge so acquired helps one to have communication with people from other ethnic groups and create the sense of unity, oneness, and loyalty.

In Nigeria, the most common medium of communication is Pidgin English especially in an inter-tribal gathering. The use of it is a vital instrument that can be used in grass root mobilization for political and socio-economic activities. As a result of its wide acceptance, Pidgin English is referred to as our "Naija" language. Pidgin helps in achieving freedom of speech and freedom of movement which are two basic fundamental human rights.

Language is dynamic, so it lives and grows. The tones and pronunciation of native speakers differ resulting in dialects. Nigeria – Nigerian English varieties are domesticated and nativized varieties with peculiarities according to the socio-cultural and political environment. However, they serve the functions of communication and social identity.

Nigeria Varieties of English and the Way Forward

In order for the English language to bring the supposed 'nations' of Nigeria to function better as one, the utilities of Nigeria English varieties should not be undermined. The highly educated, the undergraduates, the youths, the business class, the market women, the artisans

should use it so as to enhance its communicative roles of uniting Nigerians. The same feat publishing the Standard English variety achieved in the world of science and technology can be replicated by giving Nigeria variety of English the required publicity in order to enhance its general acceptance.

Pidgin English being the "country man" language can be developed and standard orthographies developed for its writing. Its pattern of spelling, and lexicon should be harmonized in other to have uniform and acceptable registers for it. A standard dictionary should be developed to make for harmonization to resolve different colorations of pidgin from different language groups where the Pidgin origin.

Furthermore, language laboratories should be built across the geo-political zones of the country with Tetfund assistance as that will help the development of the Nigeria English variety to meet the challenges of integrating the country more.

Conclusion

In summary, this paper examined the Nigeria English varieties and their roles in integrating the country. It examined the varieties of English in Nigeria and how they help in unifying all strata of the society. It noted that English is accepted by all and that the Pidgin English has gained more ground as it is growing in leaps and bounds to galvanize all language groups.

For the unity and integrity in Nigeria to be sustained this paper suggested that more deliberate study be carried out to standardize the pidgin variety and that more publicity be made with it in prints and media for its acceptance. That more deliberate action should be geared towards making Nigeria English varieties a uniting force.

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