

Language and Multicultural Contact: An Investigation into the Effect of English on Nigerian Languages

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ABSTRACT

Over the years, previous researches have centred greatly on the effect of the indigenous languages on Standard English. Issues such as interference phenomenon, code switching, code mixing, transliteration and translation have been of great worry to linguists. Little has been done in trying to find out the predominant impact of English on Nigerian indigenous languages especially, the Igbo language. In view of this, the present researcher investigated the effect of English on the Igbo language. The study was anchored on the speech act theory. One hundred and twenty students randomly chosen from three universities formed the case study. Forty were chosen from two Private Universities, forty from two State Universities and forty from two Federal Universities and all are located in the south east of Nigeria. Fifteen lecturers were also studied to find out the extent to which their use of English interacted with their indigenous languages. It was discovered that English impacts greatly on Nigerian Languages. Issues like borrowings from English into Igbo predominantly occur. Again, the use of hybridized local dialect has given rise to a somewhat variety of the indigenous language. A serious case of language neglect was also seen. The researcher observed that some Nigerians are gradually becoming monolinguals in a typical multilingual society and the affected language could become extinct if drastic measures are not taken.

Keywords: Borrowings, Code-Switching, Language Extinction, Multiculturalism and Language Contact

INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that English language has established itself firmly in Nigeria thus, its importance cannot be over emphasized. Apart from being an official language, English language is the cord that binds members of different ethnicities together in continuing interrelationships. It is the common instrument that they draw on for socio-cultural identification.

English language is said to be a human specific mode of expressing our thought through the verbal (i.e spoken and written) and non-verbal means. With this definition, it is necessary to reiterate that English language necessarily serves humans in a multitude of ways: English language is said to have a great impact on the cognitive development of man; man is able to express his thoughts and views.

The majority of the world's English speakers use English either as a second or third language and exists in an environment where in the least, bilingualism is the norm even though English may be the official language. In many countries, including Nigeria, English is the main language of instruction in schools (especially after primary education level) and it is used in business and other official transactions and interactions.

English came into Nigeria through colonization centuries ago and three main groups of people emerged from this contact of English with the indigenous languages of Nigeria. These groups are the British, the new Nigerian elite trained in Britain and the native indigenous population trained in Nigeria. A local

variant of English was coloured by influence from local languages. Borrowing of indigenous words into English is a result of this contact and these borrowed words are referred to as 'loan words'. Today as English is used almost in every facet of life in Nigeria, it still comes in contact with practically all indigenous Nigerian languages and when Nigerians speak English, words from their various from their various indigenous languages occur in their speech.

This research work is therefore an investigation into the effect of English on Nigerian Languages.

Research Objectives

- To find out the extent to which students in Southeast universities use English language

Speech Act Theory

The speech act theory was propounded by J.L. Austin in 1975. The theory considers language as a sort of action rather than a medium to convey and express. The theory notes that all sort of linguistic communication are comprised of linguistic actions. Previously, it was conceived that the very basic unit of communication is words, symbols, sentences or some kind of token of all these, but it was speech act theory which suggested that production or issuances of words, symbols are the basic units of communication. This issuance happens during the process of performance of speech act. The meaning of these basic units was considered as the building blocks of mutual understanding between the people intending to communicate. The theory emphasises that utterances have a different or specific meaning to its user and listener other than its meaning according to the language.

Conceptual Review

Language

Anigbogu, Mba & Eme cited in [1] defined language as "a means which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, and desires, through complex vocal cords or written symbols". Language is a binding force among people. It unites society, preserves

- To ascertain the level to which the use of English language by students in Southeast universities interact with the Igbo language
- To determine the degree to which borrowing from English language into Igbo language occurs.

Research Questions

- To what extent do students in Southeast universities use English language?
- What is the level to which the use of English language by students in Southeast universities interacts with the Igbo language?
- What is the degree of borrowing from English language into Igbo language?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

culture, and is used for identification. Besides its use for communication, language is used for a transaction, education, worship, and virtually every realm of human endeavor. It is a means of forming and storing ideas as reflections of reality and exchanging them in the process of human intercourse. Language is social by nature and thus inseparably connected with people who are its creators and users; it grows and develops together with the development of society. It also dies when the society dies. No society is void of language. What is so remarkable about language is that "it doesn't change all that fast, rather it retains a signal of its ancestry over tens of thousands of years," [2] sees language as central to human expansion across the globe. It is a fact that language is the medium of communication in any given society.

It is important to note that Nigeria, no doubt, is a multilingual nation with over (400) hundred languages and the of English language serves as the lingua franca. The prestige attached to English rob the indigenous languages their place of honor, especially Igbo language. The Igbo language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria with a population of over (20) million people. Igbo speakers prefer speaking English than the language

Igbo. In other words, the Igbo language is relegated to the background by the speakers while English language is promoted. Indeed, languages in contact are often languages in competition and there is no language contact without language conflict [2]; [3]. Moreover, the resolution of the crisis thus generated by the contact may have more far-reaching effects than one might have wished.

Language and Multicultural Contact

Multiculturalism is a system which recognizes, adopts and appreciates the beliefs, behaviors and values of the diverse ethnic groups that make up a country/society in order to encourage continued peaceful co-habitation of the people. Multiculturalism is an attempt to accommodate the socio-cultural differences of the people. [4] [5] describes multiculturalism as being between two forms, the descriptive and the normative. The descriptive use refers to; cultural diversity" while the normative use refers to "a positive endorsement, even celebration of communal diversity, typically based on either the right of different groups to respect and recognition or to alleged benefits to the larger society of moral and cultural diversity". In the words of [6], it is "the coexistence of many cultures in a society, without any one culture dominating the region. It seeks to overcome any form of discrimination such as racism". Multiculturalism thus, indicates plurality of cultures., Culture" here, refers to the totality of a group's way of life and the manner in which the group transmits their patterns of behaviors from one generation to the other. Multiculturalism serves as a bridge towards the reformation of national identity. The needs of the present age, demands that her citizens are culturally sensitive and internationally focused so as to have a better orientation towards the future. Multiculturalism emphasizes that every individual irrespective of the race, ethnic groups/class, gender etc should be treated with equal value. This mentality encourages the expression of the diverse cultures by the various groups in the

society. No preference is given to any dominant group in a country.

Linguistically, Nigeria is the most complex country in Africa because the exact number of indigenous languages is not yet known. [7] puts it at 478, [8] 500. Language contact occurs when two or more languages or varieties interact. When speakers of different languages interact closely, it is normal for such languages to influence each other. Language contact can occur as language acting as either a superstratum i.e. language being looked at as better as or more important than others of the same kind or a substratum i.e. language more superior than others. Language contact can be seen as a situation where two or more languages coexist in a linguistic environment. As a result, some effect like bilingualism, multilingualism, code-mixing, code-switching, interference, and borrowing occurs.

Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages or frequent use of two languages. Multilingualism is the ability to speak and understand several languages, especially with equal fluency. Code mixing is the combination of symbols of the sound system of languages in contact in a process of communication while code-switching is a sudden change from the sound system of one language to another. Interference, in other words, is the disturbing effect of new language learning on the performance of the previously learned language. Borrowing is a common act in all languages, where words or phrases are borrowed from one language to another. The common products of language in contact are pidgins, for example in Benin City where many minority languages are spoken, the only way people can relate to each other is by speaking pidgin. Creoles, in other words, is a language that has evolved from pidgin but serves as the native language of a speech community.

Yusuf cited in [9] is of the view that 'language contact should be seen in the broad sense of contact between two cultures that can be as a result of conquests, wars, migration, colonization,

etc.' Whenever two languages come in contact within an individual or a community, such an individual or host community inevitably becomes bilingual [10]. It should be noted that bilingualism and bilingually are relative terms that accept very loose definitions. This is the ability for one to speak two languages or frequent use of two languages. Among these people are the Igbo who occupy the eastern part of the country and number between 20 and 25 million. Igbo is spoken by 22 million second-language speakers in other countries of the world [11], [12].

The Igbo language has been classified as one of the major languages in Nigeria simply because of the population that speaks it. [13] traced the origin of bilingualism to colonization, trade, annexation, conquest, and borderlines. All these accounted for the introduction and dominance of the English language on the culture and administration of Nigeria. Studies have shown that when bilingual speakers code switch, they switch from language to language with ease and fluidity, following the syntactic and semantic rules of both languages [14].

The Influence of language in Contact on Igbo/English language Speakers

It is assumed that when language is in contact, the learner consciously or unconsciously, brings influences of the first language to bear on the second language, positively or negatively. When the influence is positive, learning is promoted and enhanced, but when the influence is negative, it hinders the effective learning of the second language, by what is called linguistic interference.

Linguistic interference is one of the fundamental difficulties faced by the learners of the second language; here English is referred to as a second language. Dulay et al in (en.wikipedia.org) defines linguistic interference as 'the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language (mother-tongue) to the surface of the second language which is the English language which impacts negatively on the acquisition of the language'. Generally speaking, Linguistic interference can be

viewed as the transfer of elements of one language to another at various grammatical levels which negatively interferes in the language situations of the second language. In this case, the user of English as a second language consciously or unconsciously transfers the linguistic features of his indigenous or first language to the usage/speaking of English.

Interference may be due to the absence of a word in a language to describe a new concept. For example, "table" is called "tebulu" in the Igbo language. In essence, the appropriate word is "borrowed" from the English language. This interference could be positive or negative: a. Positive interference occurs when certain structures and concepts in the learners' mother tongue (MT) are similar to those of the target TL). The learners transfer those structures and concepts to the corresponding elements in the target language (TL) and thus facilitates learning. For example, some sounds like /b/, /d/, /t/ etc. which occur in Igbo and most Nigerian languages help in the acquisition of similar sounds in English phonology. Pronunciation of words like 'bed', 'bet', 'take' etc. are not difficult for Igbo speakers to articulate as in 'duo' (sow), 'daa' (fall) and 'taya' (tyre).

b. Negative interference occurs when the structure and the concepts of the mother tongue (MT) are inappropriately transferred into the target language (TL), leading to the production of incorrect forms in the target language (TL) [15]. It is the negative interference that leads to a variety of English or Nigerian English. This is because English is not our language, therefore, learners/speakers are bound to make mistakes as they are not perfect. This interference includes phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, grammatical and lexical interference.

The Concept of Borrowing

Borrowing according to Nwala cited in [4] "is a morphological process that enables language to increase the membership of words available in their vocabulary, while [13] defines borrowing as a "process

through which words are incorporated into a language from mutually intelligible and nonmutually intelligible languages (dialects and languages) to fill the gap that new and alien ideas create". In line with these definitions by [8] [9], it is pertinent to note that languages all over the world (recipient languages) borrow or incorporate words from other languages they come in contact with (donor languages) to fill gaps created by lack of indigenous/native words for some ideas and also to enrich their language vocabulary. Also, in [10], vocabulary is defined as "the sum total words available in a language, profession or in an individual at a time. It is the word-bank of any language often stored and contained in the dictionary of a language that has undergone codification". In other words, it is the compendium of all the words of a language. There are peculiar needs that give rise to linguistic borrowing that result in vocabulary elaboration. Contact with a prestige language, often results in borrowing by the educated classes. For instance, Latin phrases are still used in scholarly publications in the West, centuries after Latin was no longer anyone's native language. The work on language histories and borrowing resulted in several major dictionaries, such as the Oxford English Dictionary and the Grosse Wörterbuch [6]. Similarly, [9] observes: When different languages come into contact, the language situation witnesses a change. This contact makes the inhabitants bilingual or at least they will have a working knowledge of other language(s) in the area, in addition to their native language. In such a situation, the languages tend to influence one another in various ways; the longer the contact, the deeper the influence. [3] further notes that "the sociolinguistic implications of language contact vary: extreme contact situation leads to language mixture or diffusion. In some rare cases, the syntax of adjacent languages affects one another". [4] in [5] reports the case of Kupwar, a southern Indian village where two dissimilar languages, Indo-European and Dravidian

came into contact. The languages, Urdu, Marahis and Kannada spoken in the village, are fairly different from the standard form of these languages because of the long contact spanning over six centuries. The same goes for Ma'a speakers and their Bantu neighbors, with Ma'a becoming increasingly 'Bantuized' "From the foregoing, it is established that contact between languages result in borrowing of linguistic items to fill the gap and thus elaborate the vocabulary of a language.

Below are cited examples of what happens to Igbo language, which borrows words from all the languages it came in contact with according to [11]. viz:

Igbo	English
Kalasi	class
Mburoda	umbrella
Popo	paw paw

He goes on to state that western technology is alien and new to Igbo culture. However, the words of technology (register) entered Igbo vocabulary through borrowing from the first contact during the slave trade, colonial and post colonial era. Some of the words borrowed are:

Igbo	English
Ugbo ala	Car
Ugbo mmiri	Ship
Igobge anya	Eyeglass
Ekwe nti	Phone
Uzo warawara	Main road

In education, the examples are as follows:

Igbo	English
Kalasi	class
Marahadum	university
Skuul	school
Onye nkuzi	teacher
Sekondiri	secondiri
Choku	chalk
Dosita	duster

Examples of names of food borrowed in English into Igbo

English	Igbo
Kori	curry
Mangoro	mango
Gova	guava
Ginga	ginger

Bons	burger
Baredi	bread
Bota	butter

At this juncture, it is imperative to look at how much the English language impacts on Nigerian indigenous languages, especially the Igbo language.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study is a survey research designed to examine the effect of English on the Igbo language. One hundred and twenty students randomly chosen from three universities formed the case study. Forty were chosen from two Private Universities namely: Madonna and Caritas Universities; forty from two State Universities namely: Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT) and Abia State University; forty from two Federal Universities: Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Akwa and Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ebonyi state. All are located in the south east of Nigeria. Fifteen lecturers were also studied to find out the extent to which their use of English interacted with their indigenous languages.

Instrument for data collection

In order to answer the research questions, a qualitative method was approached.

Data was collected through semi-instructed interview form, where 16 open-ended questions were formulated to cover the data required to answer the research questions. Using test retest reliability method, the alpha coefficient of the test was 0.78.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using simple percentages. Simple percentage is the most widely used descriptive statistic which could yield valuable quantitative and qualitative results. Qualitative results in the sense that it is the basis of graphic illustrations such as pie chart, bar chart and histogram. Simple percentage is relevant in quantitative illustration because it is useful in simple explanation of basic differences or similarities that could exist between or among the variables under observation.

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents

Items	Frequency	Percent
Male	74	54.8 %
Female	61	45.2 %
Total	135	100%

Table 1 indicates that 54.8% of the respondents are male while the remaining 45.2% are female respondents.

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Items	Frequency	Percent
21 - 30	105	77.7 %
31 - 40	19	14.07 %
41 - and above	11	8.1%
Total	135	99.9%

Table 2 shows that 105 respondents constituting 77.7% are within the age bracket of 21-30, while 19 respondents, representing 14.07 % are within the age limit of 31 - 40; however, 11 respondents

within the age bracket of 41 and above constitute 8.1%. From the table, majority of the respondents are within the age bracket of 21 to 30.

Table 3: Marital Status

Items	Frequency	Percent
Single	98	72.6 %
Married	32	23.7 %
Divorced	5	3.7%
Widowed	-	-
Total	135	100%

In Table 3, the majority of the respondents constituting 72.6% are single, 32 respondents representing 23.7 % are

married while 5 respondents constituting 3.7% are divorced. None is however widowed.

Table 4: Educational qualification of respondents

Items	Frequency	Percent
Undergraduate	64	47.4%
B.A./B.Sc	38	28.1%
MA./M.Sc	27	20%
Ph.D	6	4.4%
Professor	-	-
Total	135	99.9%

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the respondents are undergraduate students constituting 47.4%. B.A./B.Sc holders are 34 representing 28.1%, M.A./M.Sc holders

are 27 representing 20% while those with Ph.D are 6 constituting 4.4%. None of the respondents is a professor.

Major Findings

Table 5: Extent to which students in Southeast universities use English language

Items	Frequency	Percent
High	97	71.9%
Mild	32	23.7%
Low	6	4.4%
Total	135	100%

Observation in Table 5 indicates that 97 respondents constituting 71.9% use English language more than the Igbo language, 23.7% representing 32

respondents do so mildly, while the usage of English language by 4.4% of the respondents (6) was low

Table 6: Level of which the use of English language by students in Southeast universities interact with the Igbo language

Items	Frequency	Percent
High	89	66%
Mild	37	27.4%
Low	9	6.6%
Total	135	100%

Table 6 shows the high extent of which students' usage of English language interacts with the Igbo language. Findings indicate that the use of English language by 89 respondents constituting 66%

interacts often with their use of the Igbo language more; 27.4% representing 37 has milder interaction, while 9 respondents (6.6%) indicated lower usage.

Table 7: Degree to which borrowing from English language into Igbo language occurs

Items	Frequency	Percent
High	91	67.4%
Mild	28	20.7%
Low	16	11.9%
Total	135	100%

Observation in Table 7 shows that 67.4% respondents borrowed English language into Igbo more often; 20% did so mildly, 11.9% did so at a lower margin.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From Table 5, critical analysis indicates that majority of the students/lecturers (97) constituting 71.9% use English language more often. Basically, all participants stated that they frequently speak English in both formal and informal contexts. In response to the question related to the average frequency of using English in their daily life, the answers were: often, frequently, all the time . etc. However, the participants stated that it depends on the situation, whether it is formal or informal. Observation made on table 6 shows the high level of interaction between the English language and the Igbo language as 66% of respondents agreed to a higher level of code-switching. The respondents' awareness of the effect that English has on their indigenous language is key in this regard as some of them (59%) acknowledge the negative impact of English on the Igbo language, while others do not. In addition, those

who argue that there is no effect, made it clear that they understand, speak, read, and write English better than the Igbo languages. Furthermore, 74% of respondents are keen to master English language while 26% are not keen. Thus, a little over 80 respondents (61.5%) say they feel comfortable in the midst of friends who speak English Language fluently while 38.5% say they felt indifferent.

Observation in Table 7 shows that 67.4% respondents borrowed English language into Igbo more often; 20% did so mildly, 11.9% did so at a lower margin. The over reliance on English, as the medium of communication, media, and educational instruction, influenced the respondents' level of borrowing. This case represents what [14] categorized as "Dominant Language Bilingualism" where the bilingual master one language rather than the other. Normally, people tend to

master their native languages rather than the languages that they learn or acquire later. However, it is not true for the

Nigerian case. The second language, English is the dominant language over the indigenous languages.

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the collected data, it is obvious that English dominates many aspects of the Nigerian university students' life. It is widely spoken and used as the main medium of communication most of the time. Both formal and informal activities are preferably performed in English, thus, English impacts greatly on Nigerian

Languages. Similarly, borrowings from English into Igbo frequently occur and even though the respondents acknowledge the negative effect on the Igbo language, a serious case of language neglect was observed. The researcher observed that some Nigerians are gradually becoming monolinguals in a typical multilingual society.

RECOMMENDATION

- Igbo speakers should be admonished to speak and teach the language to their children.
- The federal and state governments should give job opportunities to those who study Nigeria indigenous languages and workshop and seminars should be organized to improve the popularity and wider usage of such languages, especially the Igbo language to avoid it going into extinction.
- Language in all its ramifications cannot exist in isolation, just as human beings cannot live without interacting with one another. In the light of this, there should be a special area of English and other Nigerian languages' comparative study. The area should be saddled

with the responsibility of taking care of the problems of the linguistic phenomenon of language interference and any other related linguistic vices.

- The status of English, as the sole official language and the language of instruction, has led to its domination over Nigeria's indigenous language, leading to the gradual decreasing of the peoples exposure to their native languages due to the over reliance on English language as the only official language of the country. It is crucial therefore to provide more institutional support, and to expand the number and type of domains in which these languages are used.

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