

**PERSPECTIVES FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING
IN NIGERIA IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL ENGLISH**

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ABSTRACT

The real problem with the increasing use of English as a global language, particularly the spread of American influence in former British colonies, is the acceptable variety to be used in teaching and examination, between British English and American English. The problem becomes even greater with the emergence of indigenised varieties of English in such countries. However, with the rapidly expanding role of English as a means of communication among non-native speakers of English, the question arises as to whether it is still possible to recommend a single model or standard for teaching and examination. The present paper explores this question within the context of English language teaching and intercultural communication in Nigeria.

ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

The increasing use of English as a global language may be seen in the context of the new global framework (Alexander, 1999) in which the US has 'dethroned' the British as hegemonic power from many areas, such as Africa and the Middle East where they once held sway as a major constituent of the framework (Curtis, 1995). In this framework, the 'internationalization' of English has been identified as a key factor in the dynamics of global politics (Alexander, 1999, p. 26). The changing roles of English as a world-wide language has led Crystal (1997) to propose that English be maintained and used for international and some intranational functions while local languages be put to local uses as this will sustain 'international intelligibility' and 'historical identity.' But this form of global spread of English may lead to 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson, 1992) and increase the likelihood of cultural alienation

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(Igboanusi & Ohia, 2001, p. 139). As a tool of power, domination and elitist identity (Kachru, 1986; Pennycook, 1994) backed by socioeconomic factors, Crystal's suggestion may spell doom for local languages (Dua, 1994; Igboanusi & Peter, 2005).

As Gnutzmann (1999) has rightly noted, the use of such terms as "English as a global language" or "global English" might suggest that either some kind of new language or, at least, a new variety of English has come into being (p. 157). But this is far from it. And stating clearly how the terms are to be understood, Gnutzmann explains:

"Global" essentially refers to the world-wide, i.e. the global use(s) of English. What this means is that English is used as a medium of communication in all sorts of communication contexts and for many different purposes. ... Thus, the two extreme points of the linguistic-communicative spectrum of global English can be defined by native speaker competence at one end and an extreme basic, rudimentary type of competence at the other. Because of the very wide range of uses for which global English is employed and because of its concomitant linguistic variability and instability, global English cannot be classified as a variety of English. It has no distinct phonological inventory, no specific lexis and no specific grammar (p. 158).

A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country (Crystal, 1997; Wolf & Igboanusi, 2004). This is the situation of English today. Similarly, describing the new roles of English as a world-wide lingua franca, House (1999) states as follows:

English has gained a dominant role in the world in politics, business negotiations, cultural and scientific congresses, workshops and symposia, international student meetings, and wherever members of smaller, 'exotic', 'less commonly taught' languages have occasion to talk to members of larger language communities, who see no reason to acquire, and converse in, the 'smaller language' (p. 73).

It is in line with Gnutzmann's, Crystal's and House's premises that this paper examines issues that relate to the present system of English language teaching and examining in Nigeria, the kind of English that

should be taught and the role of intercultural competence in English language learning.

THE STATE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND EXAMINATION IN NIGERIA

English language teaching is today in the hands of English language graduates of Colleges of Education and Universities, particularly in Nigerian secondary schools. Before now, non-English graduates taught English in secondary schools. But this is rapidly changing with the rising production of English language graduates from tertiary institutions.

Before and shortly after the attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria had a good number of native English teachers. Then the standard of English language teaching and learning was said to be high. Holders of primary six certificates could speak and write 'good' English. With worsening economy, the Nigerian school system could no longer attract teachers of native English countries, except perhaps a few privately owned schools. This situation was further aggravated by the suspension from 1993 of the Peace Corps by the US government following the annulment of June 12 presidential election by the military. It is important to observe here that before its suspension, the Peace Corps provided a good number of English teachers and were in part responsible for the emergence of American English (AmE) influence in Nigeria (see Bamgbose, 1995; Igboanusi, 2003). The dearth of mother tongue English teachers is often blamed for the falling standard of English language performance among students. Since English is also used as a medium of instruction (apart from being taught as a subject), a fall in the standard of English language performance also affects general performance.

Closely related to the above problem is the issue of acceptable variety/varieties for teaching and examination. As a former British colony, English language teaching in Nigeria has always been modeled after British English (BE). Teachers and examiners of major examination bodies in Nigeria were strict on this. In fact, Awonusi (1994, p. 6) reports that until recently, teachers and examiners were reluctant to accept the AmE variety. In recent times, however, English language use in Nigeria has shown a growing influence of AmE (see Igboanusi, 2003, for a detailed discussion on this).

The real problem with the acceptability of AmE in Nigeria is that of exposure to it. A teacher has to be adequately familiar with AmE variety

to be able to know the differences between the American variety and its British counterpart. Learning is facilitated if the teacher and students know, for instance, that *center* and *centre*, *color* and *colour*, *transportation* and *transport*, *flashlight* and *torch*, *gas* and *petrol*, *generator* and *dynamo*, are all features of American and British varieties. Where the teacher/examiner is familiar only with one variety and the student is familiar with both varieties, the student stands the risk of being unjustly penalized for using a variety unknown to the examiner.

This fear has been stressed by Simo Bobda (1998, p. 16) who reports that an informal survey recently carried out among teachers of English who had been working for long, and had marked several sessions of the General Certificate of Education showed that, although they declared that they readily accepted AmE, all they know of AmE is *-or* for *-our* (e.g. *color*), *-ize* for *-ise* (e.g. *realize*), *center* for *centre* and similar minor and common differences. But they would consider as incorrect such AmE usages as ‘good accommodations’ (for BE ‘good accommodation’), ‘broadcasted’ (for BE ‘broadcast’), ‘snuck out’ (for BE ‘sneaked out’), ‘I visited with my friends’ (for BE ‘I visited my friends’). Again, as Bamgbose (1995) has rightly pointed out, most manuals on English teaching in Nigeria insist on the infinitive with *to* in such expressions as *help to train*, *enable someone to achieve*, and state that it is wrong to say *help train*, and *enable someone achieve*, even though these forms are acceptable AmE forms.

The problem of multiple standards becomes even greater with the emergence of Nigerian English (NE). Authentic NE usage includes thousands of loanwords from Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and minority languages, which may not easily be expressed in English. They also include words formed by the following linguistic processes of innovation: loanwords, coinages, intralingual compounding, semantic extension, semantic shift, translation equivalent, analogical derivation, ellipsis, acronyms, collocational extension and reduplication. These processes have been extensively discussed in Adegbija (1989), Bamiro (1994), and Igboanusi (1998 & 2002a). Most of the words created in NE through these linguistic processes are absent in both BE and AmE. Acceptability of NE usage is made more difficult with the absence of standard grammar books and reference materials, on which to turn to for what constitutes correct and acceptable usages in NE, and what does not. Bamgbose (1995) observes that “examiners are even more conservative, for they reject even widespread usages as long as these cannot be found

in standard grammars or dictionaries” (p. 26).

CHALLENGES OF GLOBAL ENGLISH: THE WAY FORWARD

The challenges of global English are enormous. The future speaker of global English should enjoy the freedom of being able to bend and shape the English language in order to reflect correctly his life experiences. This freedom does not advocate that teachers of English be more liberal in their acceptance of what constitutes correct usage, nor does this liberty aim to encourage laxity or incompetence in the use of English. Instead, the proposal aims to ‘bring newness into the world’ (Link, 1999, p. 128) by infusing linguistic creativity through various linguistic and cultural experiences.

The ideal Nigerian speaker of global English should not normally be someone to whom an English man could say: “I never realized you were a Nigerian.” Asked the question if an African could ever learn to use English as an English man, Chinua Achebe (1975) responded in the following way: “I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to do so” (p. 101). Achebe is completely right. A non-native speaker of English desires to be able to achieve international intelligibility and national acceptability in his use of English. But aiming to learn to use English as an English man should be far from part of his goals.

It used to be the fact that teachers who taught English by imitating the accent of native speakers were applauded by their students who saw their attitude as a measure of their teachers’ proficiency in the language. This method of teaching is fast changing with the realisation that “native speaker competence is an unrealistic and for that reason perhaps even counterproductive goal for non-native speakers” (Gnutzmann, 1999, p. 160). The use of English as a global language demands that English be taught not by imitating native speakers, but by reflecting the physical realities of each environment. It requires that English be taught well to be able to cope both with the simple communication of information and abstract and complex exchange of ideas. In fact, the use of English as a global lingua franca requires intelligibility and the setting and maintaining of standards (Graddol, 1997).

The challenges of teaching English as a global language make it essential for teachers of ESL in Nigeria to be retrained. Within the new global framework, well-trained local teachers may be better placed to

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teach English as a second language — taking advantage of some linguistic, cultural and learning experiences. When a teacher's competence in English is low because of insufficient training, his performances as a teacher will also be affected. The mutual dependence of English language teaching and teaching of other subjects makes it necessary for English language teachers to adapt their courses to the needs of the subject teachers and for these in turn to adapt their language to the pupils' level (Schmied, 1991, p. 108).

ANGLO-AMERICAN STANDARD

The English language today has native and non-native users. The native users are those users for whom English is the first language in almost all functions. Such users are found in countries such as Britain, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The non-native users of English refer to those who use English either as a foreign language or as a second language. Of all the native user English countries, British and American varieties of English are the two most important mother tongue varieties.

As the home of mother tongue variety, Britain made English an international language in the nineteenth century with its expansionist policy. But as the most important home of transplanted variety of English and with enormous resources and political influence, Americans have been the driving force behind the globalisation of English in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (see Simo Bobda, 1998, p. 14). What is also obvious in the trend and development of varieties of English world-wide is the overwhelming influence of the British and the American varieties in both native and non-native Englishes.

With the global dimension of English language use, it has often been suggested that teachers of EFL/ESL be exposed essentially to as many major English standards as possible. However, it is not realistic to expect that learners of English all over the world can be exposed to all the varieties of Standard English that are available. "What understanding English as a global language means is taking a perspective on English as a world possession rather than a possession of those countries where it is an ancestral language" (Gupta, 1999, p. 71).

Realising the difficulties inherent in getting learners exposed to all the major varieties of Standard English, Gnutzmann (1999) recommends as follows:

Since communication with native speakers will undoubtedly continue to be a major linguistic and cultural challenge for foreign learners of English, some kind of Anglo-American lexical and grammatical standard should remain the linguistic basis of English language teacher education (p. 167).

However, the Anglo-American standard, as recommended by Gnutzmann may be ideal for EFL countries but will certainly be insufficient for ESL nations where nativised varieties have also emerged. For the lingua franca situation of English today, a “multilingual model” (Alexander 1999, p. 35), which includes teaching of the local variety of English alongside the Anglo-American standard, will be more appropriate. This is because “educational systems have to guarantee that students can get in touch with the cultural and linguistic diversity of their environment and of their world” (Konigs, 1999, p. 249). The implication of this position is that the retraining of English language teachers in Nigeria should be able to adequately expose them to both BE and AmE (i.e. the Anglo-American standard) as well as NE.

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Over the years, teachers have realised that “linguistic competence” (i.e. producing well-formed sentences) and “communicative competence” (i.e. the ability to use such sentences in communication) are no longer sufficient aims of foreign or second language teaching. Language teachers are beginning to realise that communication is always embedded in the context of particular culture and cannot be separated from it (Doye, 1999, p. 95). So, the guiding concept for English language education in Nigeria should be “intercultural communicative competence” (Doye, 1999) as it has been in most advanced countries since the beginning of the 1990s. Intercultural communicative competence is simply the ability to communicate with people of other cultural backgrounds.

Exclusive focus on BE or/and AmE is no longer adequate, and as a result, learners should be equipped with the local linguistic and cultural tools needed to cope with the problems of intercultural communication. Global English requires that teaching curriculum incorporate contextual, cultural and intercultural contents, all of which lead to competence and enhance performance (Igboanusi, 2002b). The teaching of English in

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Nigeria should be primarily located in the setting and culture of Nigeria, although not at the expense of exposing students to a wider cultural range of expression of English. An envisaged problem here relates to the issues of international intelligibility and how to be intelligible to foreigners visiting Nigeria. It should be noted that familiarity with any regional or national variety demands some sacrifice on the part of the visitor. For example, many Nigerian speakers of English (who were already familiar with BE) have had to confess their difficulties with understanding some American and Canadian English usages while on visit to such countries. But they were soon to overcome such difficulties through their personal effort. It is in this respect that dictionaries such as *A Dictionary of Nigerian English Usage* (Igboanusi, 2002a) and Roger Blench's forthcoming *Nigerian English Dictionary* are highly valuable, as reference materials.

CONCLUSION

So far, English in Nigeria is learnt for occupational and communication needs. As difficult as it may appear, Meyer et al.'s (1989) suggestion that "teachers and learners should strive for an equilibrium of language, culture, literature and occupations" should also apply to Nigerian English language teaching context. It is true that Nigerian culture is already being projected through the use of English. But since the English language, as a key player, is shaping globalisation as much as it is being shaped by it, the global dimension of English demands that some aspects of the cultures of major native English countries be learnt along with their varieties. Exposure to such cultures may place English language teachers in advantaged positions because it is important that teachers learn to teach their students diversity of English and culture-motivated differences. It will certainly be helpful to design and include courses in contrastive analysis of Nigerian English, British English and American English in ESL classes and for teacher-training syllabuses.

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