



EFFECT OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH USAGE ON THE WRITTEN ENGLISH OF NIGERIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of Nigerian English on the writings of Nigerian students. It specifically investigates the frequency of usage of Nigerian English by Nigerian students and the extent the usage affected their writings. The subjects of the study comprise sixty (60) university undergraduates who were randomly selected from the faculties of Management Sciences and Engineering of the Enugu State University of Science Technology. Data were collected through essay writing which was administered on the students as part of their in-course assessment. The generated data were analysed using frequencies and percentages which were also represented in bar graphs. The results of the study showed that Nigerian students frequently used Nigerian English in their writings. It also showed that the students' writings were highly affected by their use of Nigerian English. Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that Nigerian English has negative effect on the written English of Nigerian students. A proper exposure of Nigerian students to the Nigerian variety of English by teachers of 'Communication in English' in all Nigerian universities was thus recommended.

Keywords: Nigerian English, learners of English as a second language, written English, British standard, language skill.

1. Introduction

The functions of the English language in every sphere of the Nigerian society cannot be over-emphasised. The English language is known to serve as a *lingua franca*, a language of inter/intra communication, a language of politics and education as well as an official language in Nigeria. To effectively carry out these functions, the status of English in the Nigerian education system is well entrenched in the Nigerian National Policy on Education. The policy stipulates that English shall be a language of instruction as well as a language in the curriculum (FGN, 2013). With this in practice, it is expected that an average Nigerian student would have mastered the English language at the completion of secondary education.

However, reports abound of failures in English language in Senior Secondary School Examinations taken by Nigerians at the end of their secondary education. This could be the reason for the introduction of 'Communication in English' as a compulsory course for all the first-year students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. As noted by Amadi, (2021) 'Communication in English' was introduced as a compulsory course for all the first-year



students in all Nigerian higher institutions probably to make up for the lapses in the teaching and learning of English during secondary education. She further notes that the course is a prerequisite for graduation for all students.

The expected standard for the teaching and learning of English language at different educational cadre in Nigeria is the British /native speaker standard. This also means that the British /native speaker standard is the yardstick for measurement as observed by Amadi, (2021) and Mahboob, (2018). However, by virtue of the contact of English with the multicultural and multilingual Nigerian society, a lot of variations are seen at the lexical, phonological, and syntactic structure of the English spoken and written by Nigerian users of English.

This situation which brought into focus the Nigerian variety of English language has been an area of interest to linguists and language educators in Nigeria. Nigerian variety of English also referred to as Nigeria English is the domesticated and ‘nigerianised’ variety of English. Amadi (2021) asserts that the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of Nigeria brought about the intermingling of English with different Nigerian languages which led to its localization and domestication. Little wonder Omoroillion (n.d.) describes Nigerian English as the variety of English with distinctive phonological features and culturally based items which are peculiar to Nigerian users. The peculiarity of this variety of English to Nigerians portrays its ‘Nigerianness’.

However, everything spoken and written by Nigerian users of English cannot be referred to as Nigerian English. Some are outright errors in usage. Nigerian English has been referred to as that variety of English spoken and written by the Nigerian educated class (Amadi, 2019; 2021). Kperogi (2010) defines it as the variety spoken and written by Nigeria’s literary, intellectual political and media elite across the regional and ethnic spectrums of Nigeria. Nigerian English is that variety that has been ‘nigerianised’, nativised and domesticated to reflect the diverse sociocultural and multi-lingual experience of Nigerian users of English as a second language.

Nigerian English differs from standard British English at various levels of linguistic description (Amadi, 2019; Ape, 2017). These differences often show up in the language classroom and are most often reflected in students’ written and spoken English. Amuseghan and Tunde-Awe (2016) decried this situation. They described learning in English in the Nigerian context as problematic because teachers are trained in the variety of English characterised by some forms of Nigerian standard. This reechoes Babatunde’s (2002) observation of nonconformity with the accepted norm of English usage which has been the concern of linguists and language teachers since the beginning of proper English



language teaching in Nigeria. One way of reflecting what is learnt in the language classroom is through writing.

Writing is one of the language skills that is used to measure the competence and proficiency of any language user. It is one of the four basic language skills a learner is expected to acquire in English language. According to Deng (2021), English writing is an important means to measure the English learning level of learners. He notes that writing is the most important language output in language learning which can reflect the comprehensive application ability of language learners. As a productive skill, writing is a reflection of what the learners have learnt or acquired in the target language in terms of vocabulary and grammar. A person who is unable to write cannot be adjudged literate. Hence, writing is also a literacy skill.

Despite the importance of writing in language learning, learners make mistakes and errors in the course of their writing which contribute to their poor performance in English. Parents, teachers, educators and the general public have decried the poor performance of students in English language. According to Amuseghan, (2007), studies still indicate the poor performance of students in English language. Some of these studies attribute the reasons for students' failure on errors in usage while some see it through the window of language varieties. Ojetunde, (2013) reports that Nigerian examiners/educators and teachers of English are particularly disturbed by the poor performance of students in English language in the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination organized by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) which is borne out of the fact that students use the dialect of English (Nigerian English), which is not acceptable to the examiners. Such usages are also observed among Nigerian university students.

In a study of the use of Nigerian English in an international academic setting, Cunningham (2012) examined the English pronunciation of a group of Nigerian students at a university in Sweden based on their intelligibility to two groups of listeners. The author reported that at an initial Needs Analysis conducted before the students took up their studies, they were found to have inadequate level of English proficiency on both oral skills and their mastery of English grammar. Cunningham thus posits that the students presumably had Nigerian English as a model and target for their English learning. Her study revealed that the students' pronunciation lacked international intelligibility. She therefore suggests the need for teaching English for international communication alongside the teaching of standard Nigerian English so that Nigerians do not cut themselves off from international discourse and the wider international community.



A sociolinguistic survey of Nigerian English spoken in Nigerian public sector using Wukari Local Government Secretariat as a case study was conducted by Dangana, (2014). The study identified a number of Nigerian English usages in the speech repertoire of Nigerian public sector. The author recommends the standardization of Nigerian English and its inclusion in the educational and public domain. He further suggests that Nigerian English should have agreed norms and conventions that should serve as models in these domains. Nwachukwu (2018) also carried out a sociolinguistic description of the English usage of Igbo-English bilinguals. The study examined the spread and consistency of the use of Nigerian English lexical and syntactic forms among Igbo-English bilinguals from different socio-educational strata. The findings of the study revealed that there were convergences in the use of English by the highly educated and the less educated Nigerian speakers of English which attest to their status as L2 speakers of English, operating within the same sociolinguistic and cultural contexts. According to Nwachukwu the findings also provide evidence of the tendency for Nigerians to deviate from the native speakers' norm in their use of English.

The hindering impact of Nigerian English and Pidgin English on the learning of standard English was examined by Ogayi (2020). He observed that Nigerian English and Pidgin English exert much negative impact on sound learning and use of standard English by Nigerian university students. The study of the effects of Nigerian English on the writings of some selected Nigerian students conducted by Ape, (2017) showed that Nigerian English had adverse effect on the writings of Nigerian students though with an insignificant percentage of 11.2% when compared to normal errors of the students.

From the foregoing, it could be observed that not much has been done on the effect of Nigerian English on students' written English. The studies of Cunningham, Dangana and Nwachukwu focused on the impact of Nigerian English on the spoken English of the study subjects though with different populations. These studies therefore differ from the present one. Ogayi's study differs from the present one since it was an opinionated study while the current one is empirical. Apes' study differs from the present one in terms of population and subject of study. Hence, the need for the present study on the effect of Nigerian English on the written English of Nigerian learners of English as a second language.

2. Statement of Problem

The problem of poor performance in the English language irrespective of its prominent status and role in the Nigerian educational system has been the concern of parents, language educators, teachers, linguists and the public. From the number of researches on language variation and varieties of English where Nigerian English has its foundation, the non-conformity of Nigerian users of English to the native speaker standard, which is the measuring rod for assessment, has been observed. This could be a contributory factor to



the poor performance of students in English language. Studies have been carried out on the impact of Nigerian English on the spoken English of Nigerians. However, not much has been done on the effect of Nigerian English on the writings of Nigerian university students. This creates a research gap to be filled by this study.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are the Nigerian English expressions used by Nigerian university students in their writing?
2. How often do Nigerian students use Nigerian English in their writing?
3. To what extent do Nigerian English affect students' writing?

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Selinker's (1969) interlanguage theory of second language acquisition. The theory x-rays the different linguistic stages second language learners undergo in the course of mastering the target language. Selinker (1972) posits that interlanguage is a temporary grammar which is systematic and made up of rules. The rules according to him may be the outcome of five major cognitive processes which include, overgeneralisation, transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and language transfer.

Gitsaki (n.d.) reiterates that Selinker's interlanguage description has a cognitive emphasis and a focus on the strategies that learners employ when learning a second language. Adjemian (1976) in his description of interlanguage differentiates between the learning strategies that learners employ and the linguistic rules that are basic in the actual form of the language system. According to him, the description of such linguistic rules that will expose the learner's grammar should be the primary concern of linguistic research.

Methodology

The data for this study were generated from the written essay of students of Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Agbani. Sixty first year students from the faculties of Engineering and Management Sciences who were the subjects of the study were administered an English essay titled: "The sit-at-home order in South East Nigeria". This exercise was part of their in-course assessment for the university wide course, 'Communication in English', coded GST 111. The essay was written under strict examination conditions. The students were chosen as a representative sample of all the year one students who gained admission after their secondary school through the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME). All the students involved in the study were Igbo-English bilinguals who learnt English as a second language. The researchers marked the written essay scripts and identified the Nigerian English expressions used by the



students. Data generated were analysed using percentages and frequencies. The data were also represented in a bar graph.

4. Results

4.1 Research Question One

What are the Nigerian English expressions used by Nigerian university students in their writing?

Table 1: Nigerian English expressions in the written English of students.

Departments	No of Students	No of Nigerian English	%	Some Examples of Nigerian English	British English Version
Public Administration	15	63	27.63	i. This order is killing the economy of south East.... ii. In conclusion, the government should put an eye on this order.... iii. Citizens do not have gathering on Monday.	i. This order is adversely affecting the economy of the South East ii. In conclusion, the government should look into this order.... iii. The people of the South East no longer converge in public places on Mondays.
Business Administration	15	58	25.44	i. Like we all know Mondays are the first day of work of every week ii. ...and every other important activities jam packed for people on Tuesdays. iii. This means that no one should be seen outside every Monday therefore drawing the school and students back on their academic programs.	i. As we all know, Monday is the first day of the work week. ii. ...and other important activities are crowded on Tuesdays. iii. This means that no one should be seen outside every Monday which slows down students' academic programs.
Mechanical Engineering	15	57	25	i. But in the second hand it has been a great damage to Igbos. ii. It is a big loss to him because he has mouth to feed and fees to pay. iii. The sit at home has become normal thing in the east.	i. But on the other hand, it has done a great damage to the Igbos. ii. It is a big loss to him because he has his family to feed and fees to pay. iii. The sit-at-home order has become a norm in the east.
Chemical Engineering	15	50	21.93	i. Sit at home can be said that it is now official because if you come out anything you see, you will take it. ii. The sit at home is a draw back for the south east kids. iii. Students lack in their studies;	i. The sit-at-home order can now be said to be official and those who flout it will be held liable for whatever happens to them. ii. The sit-at-home order poses a serious setback to students in the South East. iii. Students lag behind in their studies;
Total	60	228	100		



Table 1 shows some examples of the Nigerian English expressions used by students in their essay writing. The table indicates that out of the 228 Nigerian English expressions identified in the students’ essay, 63 and 58 expressions representing 27.63% and 25.44% were used by students in Public Administration and Business Administration while 57 and 50 expressions representing 25% and 21.93% were used by Mechanical Engineering and Chemical Engineering students respectively.

4.2 Research Question Two

How often do Nigerian students use Nigerian English in their writing?

Table 2: Frequency table of Nigerian English used by students.

Range	Frequency	Percentage	Rating
1.00 -2.00	11	18.4	Rarely
3.00-5.00	43	71.7	Frequently
Above 5.00	6	10	Most Frequently
Total	60	100.0	

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of the use of Nigerian English by students. The study reveals that 18.4% of the students rarely used Nigerian English, 71.1% frequently used it while 10% most frequently used Nigerian English in their writing. This indicates that Nigerian students frequently use Nigerian English in their writing. This is also represented in the bar chart below:

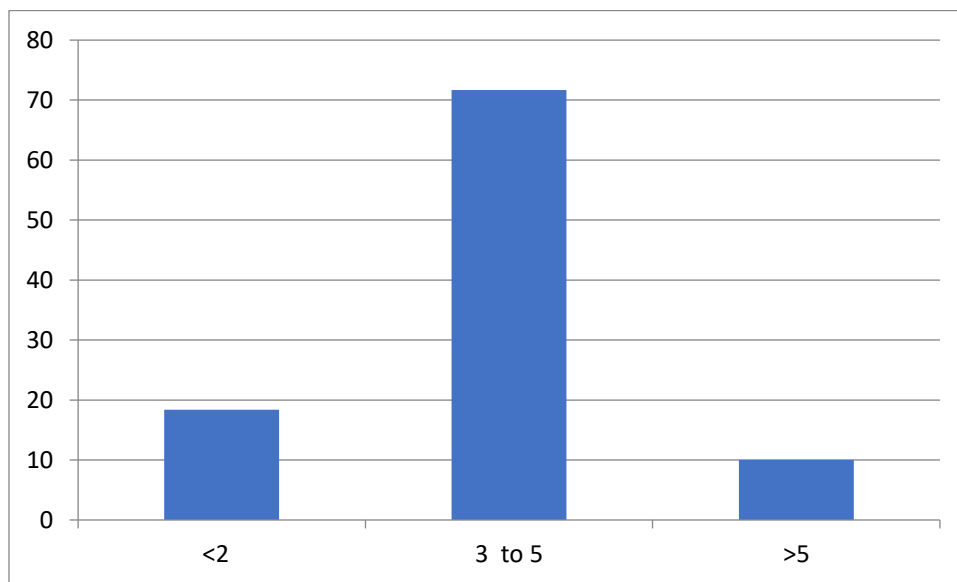


Figure 1: Frequency Distribution of Nigerian English Usage



4.3 Research Question Two

To what extent does Nigerian English affect students' writing?

Table 3: Rating of the effect of Nigerian English on Students' Writing

Range	Frequency	Percentage	Rating
1.00	1	1.6	Low
2.00	10	16.7	Moderate
3.00-4.00	30	50	High
Above 5.00	19	31.7	Very high
Total	60	100.0	

Table 3 shows the extent to which Nigerian English affects students' writing. The study reveals that 1.6% of students' writing were not very much affected by Nigerian English usage, 16.7% were moderately affected, 50% were highly affected while 31.7% were very highly affected. This indicates that Nigerian English highly affects students' writing which implies that Nigerian English usage has a negative effect on students' written English. The above result is represented in the bar chart below:

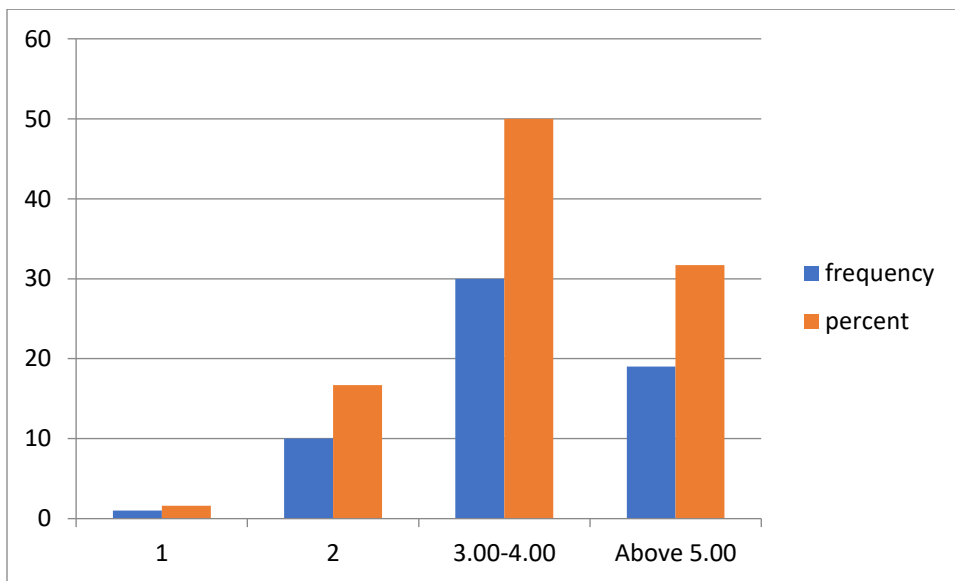


Figure 2: The Extent of the Effect of Nigerian English on Students' Writing



5. Discussion

The results of the study shown in Table 1 revealed that Nigerian students used quite a number of Nigerian English expressions in their writing. The findings align with the study of Dangana, (2014) which identified a number of Nigerian English usages in the speech repertoire of Nigerian public sector. Expressions such as ‘This order is **killing** the economy of south East’, ‘**But in the second hand** it has been a great damage to Igbos’, ‘It is a big loss to him because **he has mouth to feed** and fees to pay’ and ‘In conclusion, the government **should put an eye on this order** to stop the killings of innocent lives’ revealed in the study can be attributed to the processes of second language acquisition which Selinker (1972) refers to as language transfer, overgeneralisation and direct translation of first language.

From the sociolinguistic point of view, it can also be seen as elements of the localization and domestication of English which reflects the diverse sociocultural and multi-lingual experience of Nigerian users of English as a second language. This agrees with the findings of Nwachukwu, (2018) which revealed that there were convergences in the use of English by the highly educated and the less educated speakers of Nigerian English which attest to their status as L2 speakers of English, operating within the same sociolinguistic and cultural contexts. The number of Nigerian English expressions identified in the students’ writing also proves that students do not conform to the native speakers’ standard in their written English. This further aligns with Nwachukwu’s findings which also provide evidence of the tendency for Nigerians to deviate from the native speakers’ norm in their spoken English.

The results of the study in table 2 revealed that Nigerian English was used frequently by the students in their writing. This corroborates Amadi’s (2021) assertion that the Nigerian variety of English has reached the level of acceptability where students and people at different levels of the society unconsciously use it irrespective of their social status and educational attainment. The frequency of usage can also be attributed to the influence of transfer of training since students are like vessels which give out what have been put in them. This is in tandem with Amuseghan and Tunde-Awes’ (2016) view which describes learning in English in the Nigerian context as a problematic one owing to the fact that teachers are trained in the variety of English characterised by some forms of Nigerian standard, which they seemingly transfer to their students.

The findings shown in table 3 indicated that Nigerian English had negative effect on students’ written English. This is in agreement with the findings of Cunningham (2012) which revealed that Nigerian students had inadequate level of English proficiency on both oral skills and mastery of English grammar presumably because they had Nigerian English



as a model and target for their English learning. The finding also corroborates Ogayi (2020) who observed that Nigerian English exert much negative impact on sound learning and use of standard English by Nigerian university students. It is also in tandem with the study of Ape, (2017) which revealed that Nigerian English had adverse effect on the writings of Nigerian students. The negative effect of Nigerian English on students' writing revealed in the study challenges the pedagogical practices used in the teaching and learning of 'Communication in English' in Nigerian universities. The frequent use of Nigerian English by Nigerian students as revealed in the study denotes its wide acceptance among Nigerian users of English as a second language. This also raises a lot of questions about the possibility of students attaining the expected proficiency in the target language.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that Nigerian English has negative effect on the written English of Nigerian students. This is supported by the findings that quite a number of students frequently use Nigerian English in their writing. This attests to their non-conformity to the native speaker standard which is the benchmark for assessment. To remedy this situation, it is recommended that teachers of 'Communication in English' in Nigerian universities should lay more emphasis on the teaching of varieties of English to properly expose students to the differences between Nigerian English and British English. Most times the emphasis is always on British and American English. Curriculum planners can also make 'Communication in English' a compulsory two-year course for Nigerian undergraduates. With this, a greater part of the curriculum can be devoted to the teaching of the Nigerian English variety. This will enable students to have indepth exposure to the two varieties (Nigerian and British) and that will subsequently help them to write proficiently in the target language.



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