

## ENGLISH STUDIES AND THE FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING IN ISLAMIC MODEL SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRACT

English, an ex-colonial language, holds an eminent place in Nigeria owing to the traditional relationship maintained with the English-speaking world. There are extensive commercial, cultural and other interdependent activities with the United Kingdom and the United States. This results in a favourable attitude towards the language and consequently a strong drive to learn it in the contemporary Nigerian situation and this status has recently been enhanced and facilitated by the rapid growth of science and technology.

**KEYWORDS:** English language, Islamic Schools, Hausa, Yoruba

### INTRODUCTION

Why Nigeria is still saddled with English in the conduct of most of its affairs in spite of its nearly 500 languages? There may be many reasons for that but the most obvious could be the problem of how to choose between the many indigenous languages each of which represents an ethnic background to which the adherents are strongly loyal. For example, Nigeria will have to choose between Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Fulfulde and other languages belonging to different ethnic groups. The number of speakers will not decide the matter—there are about as many speakers of Hausa as there are of Yoruba, for instance. And even if one language did have a clear majority, its selection could be opposed by the combined weight of the other speakers, who would otherwise find themselves seriously disadvantaged, socially, economically, educationally and of course politically. Inter-ethnic tension, leading to unrest and violence, would be a likely consequence. By giving official status to an outside language, such as English, all internal languages are placed on the same footing. Everyone is now equally disadvantaged. The choice of a local language to serve as an official one is a complex decision for Nigeria to implement.

English language serves many functions in Nigeria. It is used to carry on the affairs of government, education, commerce, the media, and the legal system. It is the language that promises more status, advancement and better paid jobs, to mention but a few. As a result, people have to learn English if they want to get on in life. They have their mother tongue to begin with—one or other of the languages—and they start learning English, in school or in the street, at an early age. For these Nigerians, in due course, English will become a language to fall back on, when their mother tongue proves to be inadequate for communication—talking to people from a different tribal background, for example, or to people outside the country. For them, English becomes their second language.

Why in spite of all the above mentioned benefits that could be derived from proficiency in English, some schools, particularly the Islamic Model types are still reticent towards the proper teaching and learning of the language? Are these schools of the view that English is foreign, pagan and even evil? No, perhaps this may not be the answer. But what could

be responsible for this seeming negative attitude towards the teaching and learning the language?

It is commonly known, in the words of Crystal (2010) that when children arrive in school, they experience a different linguistic world. They meet for the first time children from unfamiliar, regional, social and ethnic backgrounds whose linguistic norms may differ greatly from their own. They encounter a social situation in which levels of formal and informal speech are carefully distinguished and the educational setting presents them with a variety of unfamiliar, subject-related styles of language. They have to learn a new range of linguistic skills – reading, writing and spelling. And they find themselves having to talk about what they are doing, which requires that they learn a special technical vocabulary—a language for talking about language, or metalanguage.

In recent years, educationists have begun to recognize the complexity of the language demands being made on the young school child, and to recognize that progress in many areas of the curriculum is greatly dependent on a satisfactory foundation of linguistic skills. The traditional emphasis on literacy, the ability to read and write, has been supplemented by an emphasis on oracy, the ability to speak and listen. Teachers now pay increasing attention to a child's pre-school linguistic experience, seeing this as a foundation in which they can build. Special efforts are made to relate different kinds of linguistic learning: the task of writing is being brought closer to child's experience of reading; reading in turn, is being brought into contact with the ability to use spoken language; and oral skills are being supplemented by work on listening comprehension. Above all, teachers have begun to stress that childrens' linguistic ability is a major factor influencing their success in the learning of other subject areas, such as physics, chemistry, biology, economics, mathematics and history. This is perhaps why the organizers of this workshop expect me to present a paper on the topic titled: The English Studies and the Foundation for Learning in Islamic Model Schools. I have tried to do that but the question that worries me much is, which variety of English is to be taught to the students?

## VARIETIES OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

Varieties of Nigerian English have been categorised and described in various ways by scholars. In this lecture, we will a brief look at some of those scholars and their attempts at such categorisations and descriptions. Thus:

### **Brosnahan** (1958) (Educational Parameter)

- Level 1: Pidgin, spoken by those without formal education
- Level 2: This is spoken by those who have primary school education. Most speakers belong to this level.
- Level 3: This is spoken by those who have secondary school education.
- Level 4: This level is close to SBE but retaining some features of levels 2 & 3. It is spoken by those with university education.

### **Banjo** (1971) (L1 transfer and Approximation to SBE Parameter)

- Variety 1: spoken by semi-literate people and those with elementary education. It is marked by heavy and wholesale L1 transfer at the phonological, syntactic and lexical levels. This variety is unacceptable nationally and unintelligible internationally.
- Variety 11: spoken by post primary school leavers. Its Syntax is close to SBE though marked by LI transfer at

phonological and lexical levels. It does not make vital phonemic distinctions. It is largely intelligible and nationally acceptable. It is spoken by up to 75% of the people who speak English in Nigeria.

- Variety 111: this variety is common with university education. Close to SBE both in syntax and semantics. It makes vital phonemic distinctions, accepted and understood nationally and internationally. It is spoken by less than 10% of the population.
- Variety 1V: The same with Standard British English in syntax, semantics, phonology and phonetics. It is internationally intelligible but socially stigmatized.

**Adesanoye** (1973) (Written English Parameter)

- Variety 1: Identified with average school leaver and low grade workers
- Variety 2: It is written by secondary school leavers, many university students, most magistrates and many journalists.
- Variety 3: Associated with most university lecturers, administrators, superior judges, editors and the more sophisticated authors.

**Adekunle** (1979) (Written and/Spoken Parameter)

- Variety 1: The Near Native Speaker.
- Variety 2: The Local Colour (type)
- Variety 3: The Incipient Bilingual (type)

**Jibril** (1986) (Regional and Linguistic Parameters)

Here Jibril adopts a multi dimensional approach which first distinguishes between Hausa English and Southern English and then (within each of these) between Basic Hausa English (BHE) and Sophisticated Hausa English (SHE), on the one hand, and Basic Southern English (SSE), on the other. He also recognizes the emergence of Southern Influenced Hausa English (SIHE).

## TEACHING READING

The followings are some definitions of reading offered by experts in the field:

- Reading is identification of linguistic forms from the strings of written configurations that represent them (Reed: 1965)
- Reading is the decoding of letters and phonemes (Durkins: 1966)
- Reading is the recognition of printed symbols which serve as stimuli for a recall of meanings built up through the reader's past experience (Bond and Tinker: 1967)
- Reading is a cognitive learning activity that consists of perceiving, processing, interpreting, comprehending and synthesizing information that is conveyed by written or printed language (Unoh: 1972)

## PURPOSE OF TEACHING READING

The purpose of teaching reading is to enable students engage in various readings. For example:

- To obtain main information and supporting ideas
- To acquire new ideas, knowledge and skills
- To grasp meanings of words in various contexts
- To follow direction in written communication
- To understand the writer's mood and purpose
- To recognize repeated information
- For maximum retention and recall
- For speed and accuracy
- To derive pleasure
- To be critical of other people's ideas

## TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS

The following are the most important skills which the students will need for developing listening comprehension.

- The ability to distinguish English phonemes as /p/ and /b/, /p/ and /f/, /s/ and /θ/
- The ability to understand stress and intonation of English.
- The ability to understand grammatical signals indicating:
  - Plural of nouns: books, mosques,
  - Possessive of nouns: man's, men's,
  - Third person singular (present tense) of verbs: sleeps, eats
  - Past tense of verbs: walked, washed
  - Past participle of verbs: eaten, seen, taken
  - Present continuous: reading, listening
  - Comparative of adjectives and adverbs: prettier, slower
  - Superlative of adjectives and adverbs: fastest, strongest
  - Concord or agreement: she cries, they cry
- The ability to understand the meaning of the lexical items from the context or the situation being discussed (e.g., head of an organization, head of a table, head of a person, etc.)

- The ability to understand collocations of words (words that have the semantic relationships).
  - Car collocates with words such as driver, driving, windshield, wiper, etc.
  - Articles (definite or non-definite) are followed by nouns.
- The ability to differentiate between written and spoken language.
- The ability to distinguish between formal and informal language.
  - Strategies for Listening Comprehension
    - Listening for stress, rhythm and intonation
    - Games and competition
    - Identification of key words
    - Listening for Dictation
    - Listening for drawing
    - Listening to short interviews
    - Listening to dialogues
    - Making phone calls to native speakers of English
    - Listening to radios, CD/video tapes and films
    - Listening for gist

## TEACHING SPEAKING

Learning to speak is a lengthy, complex process. Many foreign language teachers realize that fluency in speaking is the most difficult skill to develop. In addition to linguistic and cultural knowledge, there are other requirements that should be available in order to develop this skill. They include the following:

- A competent teacher who is fluent in conversation.
- Appropriate classroom atmosphere, which is conducive to oral communicative acts, and where students feel at ease and relaxed.
- Ample opportunity for students' participation.
- Clear objectives in speaking so that students can think of the ideas they wish to express.
- Knowledge of the appropriate functional expressions.
- A variety of learning activities including manipulative drills, guided conversation, communicative practice and free oral work such as discussion groups, debates, panel discussions, skills competitions etc.
- Contextualized language in terms of who is speaking to whom, where and why.

It is important to note here that learning to speak English is more effectively achieved by speaking than by listening or reading. Students therefore must have the opportunity to express their likes or dislikes, to talk about their interests, etc., in living natural English. Without this training in productive skill of speech, students' ability to communicate in spoken English will be meager despite all knowledge of rules of pronunciation, of grammar and of sentence formation.

For pedagogical purposes, we shall review in this section the sounds of English which include: (a) segmental phonemes vowels and (consonants), (b) suprasegmentals including stress (c) English consonant clusters that do not exist in Nigerian languages and finally (d) some spoken English drills and activities are suggested with a view to overcoming the influence of the first language interference.

## THE SOUNDS OF ENGLISH

Every language has a definite number of sounds that it employs for communication by speech. Some of these sounds are peculiar to it, others it shares with other languages. Below is a sample of some English speech sounds and examples of where they normally occur.

**Table 1**

	Front	Central	Back
High	ɪ i:		ʊ u:
Mid	e	ə ɜ:	ɔ:
Low	æ	ʌ	ɒ ɑ:

### Vowels

A general observation on the realisations of English vowels among Nigerian Speakers of English:

- A tendency to shorten vowel sounds.
- A lack of distinction between long and short vowels.
- A tendency to replace central vowels by either front or back vowels.
- A tendency to shorten diphthongs and to leave out the second sound element in a diphthong.

### Consonants

Some specific examples of English consonants problematic to most Nigerians.

Hausa realisations of some consonants

/p/ > [p], [f], [ɸ]

/p/ > [f], [p], [ɸ]

/b/ > [b], [v]

/v/ > [v], [b]

/ð/ > [ð], [z]

/θ/ > [θ], [s]

## Yoruba realisations of some consonants

/v/	>	[v], [f]
/θ/	>	[θ], [t], [t̥]
/ð/	>	[ð], [d], [d̥]
/dʒ/	>	[dʒ], [ʒ]
/tʃ/	>	[tʃ], [ʃ]
/h/	>	[h], deleted
/z/	>	[z], [s]

## Igbo realisations of consonants

/θ/	>	[θ], [t], [t̥]
/ð/	>	[ð], [d], [d̥]
/hj/ (human)		[h]
/pj/ (pupil)		[p]

**SPELLING PRONUNCIATION**

One general feature of the English spoken in Nigeria is spelling pronunciation of many words. This applies to the words ending in orthographic *-mb*, *-ng*, and those with *-st* and *-bt* as in: *bomb*, *plumber*, *climb*, *comb*, *thumb*, *tomb*, *lamb*, *sing*, *castle*, *wrestle*, *nestle*, *hustle*, *bustle*, *pestle*, *listen*, *debt*. Furthermore, words such as: *vitae*, *architect*, *mosquito*, *Southern*, *sword*, *Wednesday*, *elite* and *Renault* are often not pronounced the way they are spelt.

**SYLLABLE STRUCTURE**

Syllable in English can have an onset made up of no consonant at all or up to three consonants, an obligatory vowel as a peak, and a coda made up of no consonant at all or up to three consonants. This linguistic phenomenon is quite different from that of Nigerian languages where vowels follow consonants and consonants follow vowels in a VCVC arrangement. This perhaps explains why Nigerian learners of English tend to insert vowel sounds in between consonant clusters to make the pronunciation easier as in the examples that follow:

## Epenthetic /i/

Praise	>	[praiz]	>	[pireis]
Scratch	>	[skraʃ]	>	[sikiraʃ]
Pray	>	[prei]	>	[pirei]
Green	>	[gri:n]	>	[giri:n]
Plate	>	[pleit]	>	[pileit]

Epenthetic /u/

Floor	>	[flo:]	>	[fulo:]
From	>	[frəm]	>	[furom]
Black	>	[blæk]	>	[bulæk]
School	>	[sku:l]	>	[sukul]
Broom	>	[bru:m]	>	[buru:m]

## DIPHTHONGS

Of the eight English diphthongs (/ei/, /əu/, /ai/, /ɔi/, /au/, /iə/, /eə/, /uə/) two constitute the greatest problem to the Nigerian learner of English. These are: /ei/ and /əu/. They are often mispronounced owing to interference from the mother tongue.

The diphthong /ei/ is often replaced by the pure vowel /e/. Thus, /breik/, /rein/, /greit/, /meik/, /weik/, /keik/ and /dei/ are pronounced by most Nigerian learners of English as /bre/, /ren/, /gret/, /mek/, /wek/, /kek/ and /de/.

Oral Tests for the /ei/ diphthong

**Table 2**

Sail	Sell
Wait	Wet
Fail	Fell
Late	Let
Later	Letter
Pain	Pen

Oral Tests for the /əu/ diphthong

**Table 3**

Sail	Sell
Wait	Wet
Fail	Fell
Late	Let
Later	Letter
Pain	Pen

## STRESS

English is not phonetic. That means there is no one to one correspondence between its pronunciation and its spelling. The secret key to understanding of the pronunciation of English is the word stress. Many languages especially the syllable-timed ones do not use the word stress but English does and so must the speaker of the language. It must also be said that using English words with the right stress is as important as using the right consonants and vowels. In the great majority of Nigerian languages, every syllable receives a stress. However, Fulfulde (the language of Fulbe) appears to be the only exception to this category. Thus we say Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, for example, are syllable-timed. On the other hand, English and Fulfulde are stress-timed languages. This is the one important reason why most broadcasters and

announcers in Nigeria find it difficult to come to terms with the stress structures of English, and the same reason why Fulbe speakers tend to find English easier to speak particularly at the supra-segmental level (stress, intonation, rhythm) than most other Nigerians do.

To the ears of the native speaker of English, a word said with the wrong stress is as shocking and to some extent embarrassing as pronouncing a Hausa word, for example, with a wrong tone pattern. It must be pointed out here though; in the great majority of cases Nigerian speakers tend to switch the stress from the first to the second syllable. This tendency may not be unconnected with the fact that most Nigerians place equal emphasis or force on all English syllables. Let us quickly revise the pronunciation of the following words.

**Table 4**

'madam	'formidable	'calculator
'notify	'justifiable	'satisfy
'bathroom	'challenge	'hospitable
'telephone	'interesting	'water heater
'herald	'nepotism	'civilize
'footballer	'applicable	'controversy

## SENTENCE STRESS IN ENGLISH

Like word stress, sentence stress is a fundamental part of English language. Normally, in speaking or reading an ordinary sentence, (i.e. without an attempt to emphasize a particular word) each word would be pronounced with the normal stress. In addition, all unstressed words will remain unstressed. These change when the speaker wants to convey a specific meaning.

Apart from the normal stress, however, it is usual to stress a normally unstressed word and thus convey a specific meaning. For instance, it is not normal to stress the word 'in', in the following expression: The 'bag is in the car. However if the listener were to ask, Do you say the bag is beside the car? The speaker may then say: The bag is in the car, with a stress on the word 'in'. All of these requirements are essential in developing spoken English.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper followed the traditional sequence of listening, speaking, reading and writing in its approach. It is the position of the paper that all these skills are interrelated and are by no means separate. In fact they are aspects of the unified system through which language operates. Knowledge of them, therefore, is essential for interpreting and transmitting the English language appropriately in Islamic Model Schools thereby laying a solid foundation in the learning of other disciplines such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Economics, Geography and History.

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