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ABSTRACT

This paper sets out to investigate sociolinguistics and language education in Nigeria. It aims at unveiling the social factors that influence language as well as the interaction of language with the social structures with the view of determining its place in the language teaching and learning. The work analyses the unstable education policies in Nigeria and their language components with practical realities of teaching Languages in government public schools especially, the Federal Government College. The choice of Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar is predicated on the fact that it is among the public schools in Nigeria that receives reasonable funding, being owned by the Federal government. Also, it presents a good sociolinguistic environment with several students from different multicultural and multilingual backgrounds. English language is one of the compulsory subjects which every student must offer. In addition to English, one Nigerian Language is offered. Thus, there are teachers of English and Nigerian Languages who teach the students and majority possess one native language or the other. The quantitative research technique, including participant observation and survey was used which captured the teachers of the languages and the challenges encountered in the process of teaching in the different classes. Furthermore, the students were asked questions on the performance of the teachers in various classroom situations. The result of our findings reveals that most of the language teachers lack adequate knowledge of sociolinguistics which complicates their ability to maturely handle the classroom situations though they are certified professional teachers.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Language, Education, Nigeria.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Sociolinguistics and Language Education in Nigeria

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society. It further investigates the social functions of language as opposed to its form and analyses the use of language in society. Through monitoring the language in use, it is able to observe lapses and proffer solutions through effective engineering. The social functions investigated by the sociolinguist covers such areas as politics, administration, education etc. As relevant as sociolinguistics is to education in general and language teaching in particular, it is a neglected component in language teaching and learning in Nigeria. This negligence is fundamentally traceable to the faulty assumption and description of the relationship between sociolinguistics, language and linguistic study. This faulty assumption was pointed out by Hudson (2001) when he said, "This discussion has shown that De-Saussure was wrong in seeing speech as the product of the individual's will, unconstrained by society." De-Saussure was not alone in this school of thought but with other eminent linguists including, Noam Chomsky. Hudson identifies two ways in which society controls speech. First, by providing a set of norms, which we learn to follow more or less skillfully and Secondly, society provides the motivation for adhering to these norms, and for putting effort into speech as in social interaction generally.

The flawed assumption as pointed out above has influenced the curriculum content of the language teacher training institutions many of subscribe to the contentious postulations. The implication of this is that the Nigerian Language teacher training institutions' Curriculum are tailored towards acquiring linguistic knowledge but not performance or communicative competence. The products of such curriculum (The Nigerian Language Teacher) cannot perform miracle of performing differently (teaching and learning) from the curriculum that produces him. The social factors that influence language and how language interacts with social structures are not given a pride of place in the language teaching and learning classrooms, sociocultural conventions in different social contexts in communication, as in teaching and learning are ignored. Sociolinguistics amongst others equips language teacher/ learner with the various social norms that influences language behaviour or performance. Also, it facilitates the understanding of how culture induced communication content can influence language performance and skills. This put him in a vantage position to understand the various normative and cultural traits that characterize the students from various sociolinguistic background, as in Federal Government Colleges in Nigeria. It guarantees effective language teaching/learning in a complex school or classroom environment. For example, being able to understand the norms that govern the quantity of speech that each student produces the norm that controls the number of people who talk at once in a conversation or that refer the information which participants in a conversation give each other. Olaoye (2007) opines that the language teachers should not only known phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics but he/she needs to have a deep knowledge of sociolinguistics.

He/she should be versed for instance, in the sociology of the society in which the school is located in order to know some of the learning problems arising from the student's sociocultural practices and behavior dictated by societal norms.

It can thus be asserted that teaching or learning to teach language without sociolinguistics will lead to the production of teachers or learners with the mastery of language form and not function. This tends to be the current scenario in the language learning in Nigeria.

1.2. The Nigerian Classroom Experience

The Nigerian classroom experience emanates from the Nigerian Education Policy which is the framework upon which the nation educational goals are achieved. Nigeria have had a number of education policies right from independence till date. The 6-5-4 education policy gave birth to the current out-gone policy (6-3-3-4) which also phased out by 2014. It was replaced by the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy (9-3-4) which began to be implemented and completed by 2014. As far as language is concerned, Nigeria do not have yet a full National Language Policy. What she has is the language component of the National Policy on Education. The different changes in the National Policy on Education also resulted to changes in their language components. The 6-5-4 Education Policy, had the straight for English Language component in which English Language served as not only as a school subject, but the medium of teaching from primary one (1) to secondary and university. According to [Olaoye \(2007\)](#) "This straight for English language component was implemented till such a period when there emerged a new socio-political awareness which made people become conscious of their cultural endowment. While embracing the 6-3-3-4 Education Policy, Nigeria opted for the Mother-Tongue Education Language component. This language component prescribed late English medium for the primary education. It recommends the use of indigenous language as a medium of instruction in the first three years of the primary education. English is to be taught in these three lower classes as a subject, while in the last three years of primary education, the roles of the two languages are reserved. This language component is still retained in the last UBE policy (9-3-4). It is supposed to be what is operational in the Nigerian Classroom Experience.

The implementation of this language component of the Education policy in the Nigerian classrooms however, can best be described as epileptic, using the Federal Government Colleges as the reference point. We are constrained to use the Federal Government Colleges for two reasons: Firstly, they have students from different linguistic backgrounds and secondly, the backing of the Federal Government of Nigeria might tends to position them as the centres of excellence in Nigerian Secondary Education system, especially, in respect of the implementation of the nation's nascent Education policies. The states' institutions and private ones will always queue after them as far the implementation of new National Education Policies are concerned. The Sociolinguistic problem created by the language component of the education policy manifests readily in the classroom experience in these schools especially in the first three years. Most of these Federal Government Colleges were not established together with their primary school sections. Such schools could therefore not influence the implementation of the first three years primary education in the indigenous languages in the primary schools. Most primary schools belonged to states and private individuals. The degree of implementation varies from state to state and from private school to the other. In fact [Ohiri-Aniche \(2010\)](#) reported that the implementation of the late English medium in the private schools in Lagos state was almost non-existent. In the Unity Colleges, as they are referred to in the first year (Junior Secondary) or Basic 7, students from the various states primary schools and various private primary schools nationwide are assembled to be taught. This amalgamation of students from different linguistic backgrounds poses a serious challenge to the language teacher both English and the indigenous language which are all to be taught as compulsory subjects as at level. We need to recall that the curriculum for the teaching of these languages had already been prepared on the bases of the policy requirement and expectation of the level. The teacher is in most cases, confused and lacking in methodology to handle such situation.

Table-1. Showing Time of Teaching French, English and Indigenous Languages at Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar.

Language	No. of Times per Week		No. of Times per Month		No. of Times per Term	
	Junior Class	Senior Class	Junior Class	Senior Class	Junior Class	Senior Class
French	3	4	12	16	48	64
English Language	5	5	20	20	60	60
Hausa/Efik/Igbo/Yoruba	3	2	12	8	48	32

Source: Field Work, July, 2015

Table-2. Showing the Distribution of Teachers of the Various Languages Taught at the Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar.

Languages	No. of Teachers	Percentage
French	3	13.63%
English Language	14	63.63%
Efik	1	4.54%
Igbo	1	4.54%
Hausa	1	4.54%
Yoruba	2	9.09%
Total	22	100%

Source: Field Work, July, 2015

Table-3. Showing the Number of Students in the Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar who offer the Indigenous Languages as a Subject in JS2, JS3, SS2 and SS3 Classes.

Class	Total No. of Students in Class	No. of Students Offering Indigenous Languages	Percentage
JS2	100	60	60%
JS3	100	20	20%
SS2	100	10	10%
SS3	100	0	0%

Source: Field Work, July, 2015

Table-4. Showing the Qualification of the Language Teachers at Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar, Nigeria.

Languages	No. of Teachers	No. of Teachers Certified/Qualified	No. of Teachers with Sociolinguistic Knowledge	Percentage
English Language	14	14		100%
French	3	3	NIL	100%
Efik	1	1	NIL	100%
Igbo	1	1	NIL	100%
Hausa	1	1	NIL	100%
Yoruba	2	2	NIL	100%
Total	22	22		

Source: Field Work, July, 2015

Table-5. Showing the Most Frequent/Common Challenges Experienced by the Teachers of Languages in Federal Government Girls' College, Calabar, Nigeria.

Languages	No. of Teachers	Common Challenges
English Language	14	Mother tongue interference among learners.
French	3	No well equipped language laboratory.
Efik	1	Multilingual/multi-cultural classroom environment.
Igbo	1	Lack of instructional materials
Hausa	1	Negative attitude to the study of the indigenous language.
Yoruba	2	Perceived restriction of the vocabulary repertoire of the indigenous languages.

Source: Field Work, July, 2015

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The quantitative research technique, including participant observation and survey was used. Three hundred level (300) students of socio linguistics were coordinated to carry out the survey and administered the research instrument, the questionnaire. The stratified sampling method was adopted to determine 100 students out of the population size of the school.

This was made up of students of the senior secondary three, two and junior secondary two and three. The junior secondary one and senior secondary one were left out because they are at the point of entry to both the junior and senior levels of the schools and at some points have not actually been exposed to some teaching and classroom activities. The instrument was also extended to the teachers as well as the college administrators.

The researcher participated and observed some classroom situations, held interviews with some teachers, students and administrator. For example, the students were asked questions on the programmers of the teachers in various classroom situations, as the teachers were asked the common challenges they encounter in the various classroom teaching environments. Previous first hand experiences were equally brought to bear both the structuring of the questions and the analysis of the work, as the lead researcher taught one of the languages in this particular school for about fifteen years.

3. ANALYSIS OF DATA PRESENTED IN TABLES

Table one reveals an interesting sociolinguistics situation in the Nigeria school system, the dominance, preference and displacement of not only English the second language but also French another foreign language. English enjoys as many as five slots on the time-table per week which translates to twenty (20) periods per month made up of four weeks. Furthermore, in a term with a minimum of three months, this translates to sixty (60) periods. On the other hand, the indigenous languages are left with three (3) per week for the junior and two for the senior school levels. This translates to 12/8 periods (Junior/Senior) per month and 48/32 periods (Junior/Senior) per term of three months.

One of the strongest points of findings of this work is revealed in table four, it is discovered that virtually 100% of the total number of teachers of English, French and the indigeneous languages did not pass through a sociolinguistic course in their various qualification programmes (BA, BA. Ed., NCE.) etc.

This is irrespective of the fact that a significant number of the professional and trained teachers and language education graduates, are certified and qualified. This lacuna increased by the wrong postulation that sociolinguistics should not be treated as part of core linguistics language education curriculum and even linguistics programmes in universities and colleges of education are packaged with this consideration, thus you have English, French and or indigenous Nigerian languages graduates with adequate knowledge of phonetic/phonology, morphology and syntax or semantics with no exposure to sociolinguistics.

This tends to explain why the most significant part of the challenges confronting all the teachers tend to be sociolinguistics in nature, apart from those that have something to do with physical infrastructure. This sociolinguistics illiteracy of a sort complicates the ability to maturely handle the classroom situations, although, they are certified professional teachers.

The English language teacher for example is faced with the task of teaching students who had only three years of being taught in English at the primary school. He also has in the same class or classes those who were taught in English all through their primary school. He may equally have those who were taught in English for four, five years, i.e. they were taught in their mother tongue for only one year or two at the primary school (state or private) since they had different level of implementation. In addition, he may have those who were taught in English but

were not properly taught. It is pertinent to note also that he will still need to grapple with the different natural cognitive abilities or potentials of the various students. Furthermore, he has the challenge of managing students from multicultural backgrounds as well as the influence constraint, norm imposed by those cultures on their linguistic behavior. Prominent among this is the mother tongue influence of a group or class that as a matter of policy, are formed from a representation of at least three from every state of Nigeria, including the Federal Capital Territory (36 states plus Abuja). In some of the schools which are co-educational, (boys and girls) the sociolinguistic discoveries of some languages being distinctively marked on the basis of gender, will be an issue to handle in a language class by the language teacher. The influence of such culture based trait on the performance of a student in an English lesson will be conspicuous. The problem identified here are not only on the part of the teacher, but also on the part of the learner (students). The students on the basis of these complexities, more than the teacher, are confronted with numerous challenges in their learning.

Apart from teaching and learning difficulties posed by these factors, the also significantly pose a problem in the evaluation process. The teacher is at a loss as to what evaluation test to use. [Olaoye \(2007\)](#) identified about eleven kinds of language test which include, retention test, word recognition test, body movement test, drawing test, sound discrimination test, recorded speech test, recorded conversation test etc. On the one hand, adopting a multiple kind of test evaluation strategy in this classroom situation will be a burden too heavy to carry by the teacher to obtain maximum result. On the other hand, adopting a single kind of test evaluation strategy will definitely be faulty and at the end, produces a wrong judgement or assessment. To evaluate a student who was taught in English for three years on same premise with a student who was taught in English for six years can not produce an objective result. This experience no doubt validates the claim that, even the English Language teacher in the Nigerian Classroom requires adequate knowledge of sociolinguistics. This knowledge will empower him/her, when faced with such challenges, to evolve a workable methodology that will harness the observed challenges and turning them into an effective tool to imparting learning language. The situation in the federal colleges may not differ considerably from that in state schools especially, in states with multilingual and multicultural build-ups. In such states, they may have schools such as model schools, whose students are brought from different local government areas and from different primary schools located in different speech communities.

4. LANGUAGE VARIATION AND DIVERSITIES

According [Hudson \(2001\)](#) variety of language is “a set linguistic items with similar social distribution.” He maintained that this definition makes it possible to identify the following as varieties of language; English, French, London English, The English of Football commentaries, the languages used by members of a particular long-house in the North-West Amazon, the language(s) used by a particular person. From the above list, it can be seen that the general notion ‘Variety’ includes examples of what would normally be called languages, dialects and registers.

Language varieties develop from a variety of language used by groups defined by social parameters. Such social parameters or factors include: class, education, age, gender as well as ethnicity.

On the basis of ethnicity for example, differences in speech occur as a result of ethnic backgrounds. In Nigeria, Efik/Ibibio, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa ethnic Nationalities’ speakers of English could easily be recognized to have particular variety. The loyalty of these groups to their languages transfer a large number of features to the English Language a second language. It is such collective features transferred into English Language from the various ethnic backgrounds and its resultant variety usually stigmatized as ‘Bad Speech’ that have given rise to what has been known as ‘Nigerian English.’ This is the same way that in America and Europe, the speech of recent immigrants and their children, contains identifying features. Also the Black English Variety (BEV) is a social

variety motivated by ethnic background. The Black English according to Hudson, emerged as a result of some form of social isolation; such as discrimination and segmentation experienced historically by the African Americans. It is this discrimination that has led many to criticize the Black English Variety (BEV) as being a 'Bad Speech.'

Another factor responsible for language variety is gender and age. Interestingly, in Nigeria the Bete language in Obudu Local Government in Cross River State, has been discovered to have distinct varieties distinguished on the basis of gender. There are also emerging new varieties of English Language in Nigeria as a result of the introducing of computer and information and communication Technology (ICT).

Moyo (2006) work on Language use and gender positioning among the Swazi people had observed that language use and cultural values cannot be said to be equal between men and women. He noted that the use of language differently between men and women is embedded within Swazi cultural tradition and customs. He further observed that this practice is part of the inherent patriarchal practices that obtain in this region, as marriage within customary law, institution rites, family naming etc. In his example, he states that what is clearly notable in Siswati is that morphologically Siswati words are largely derivatives of male-specific references. These include Umfelwa (a widower) Indvodza (a man). The female-specific references are formed by adding Kati to their corresponding male-specific words. According to him, what is to be noted from the two words given above is that there is no Siswati word for a widow presupposing that there are no widows in Swazi society which is obviously not the case. Moyo (2006) argues that:

Language and gender positioning in term of classism are essentially deep-rooted within Swazi sociocultural practices where the expression of the discourse that prevails for females, along with lesser position that are given to them amounts to a denigration of their status and that this discourse is generally informed by a culture of patriarchy, the contention therefore is that these are issues of differential use of language between, men and women, where sexism and classism have become part of society is overall practice where linguisticism is endemic.

There are also emerging new varieties of English Language in Nigeria as a result of the multilingualism

5. MULTILINGUALISM

Wardhaugh (1986) provided case studies of what can be described as normal or natural multilingualism, particularly interesting are the cases of the Tukano of the Northwestern Amazon on the border between Columbia and Brazil and Yimas of Papua, New Guinea. The multilingualism is described to be natural or normal not only because it is rooted in the tradition and custom of the people but also like every other culture, it is transmitted or perpetuated almost hereditarily from one generation to the other. Furthermore, the speakers of these languages tend to find it difficult to take cognizance of the fact that they speak or make use of several languages. Multilingualism is taken for granted or is a room in these communities as moving from one language to the other in the course of a single conversation is very common and the shift from one language to the other is easy. In Tukano for example, Wardhaugh (1986) maintains that:

The Tukano are a multilingual people because men must marry outside their language group; that is no man may have a wife who speaks his language for that kind of marriage relationship is not permitted and would be viewed as a kind of incest. Men choose the

women they marry from the various neighbouring tribes who speaks other languages, consequently in the village, several languages are used: the language of the men, the various languages spoken by women who originate from different neighbouring tribes and wide spread regional trade, children are born into this multilingual environment; the child's father speaks one language, the child's mother another, and other women with whom the child has daily contact, perhaps still others.

In Papua New Guinea out of the many languages used, Tokpisia serves as a lingua franca, the Yimas of Papua New Guinea used their own language traditionally and Tokpisia for interaction with the outside world.

Multilingualism in Nigeria as described by [Iwuchukwu \(2007\)](#) as the consequence of the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates by Sir Lord Lugard in 1914 which was not only of the ethnic nationalities in each of the protectorates, but also their languages. He maintained that it was that proclamation that brought Nigeria to her present states of possessing about 38% of the estimated 1,400 languages in Africa and 8% of the estimated 5,000 languages in the world. In most part of Northeastern and Northwestern Nigeria, most people are trilinguals. They speak their mother tongue for domestic purposes, Hausa as a language of wider communication and English for official purposes. In the North-Central States, most of the indigenes speak four languages; their mother tongues, Hausa and Yoruba for wider communication and English Language for official purposes. In South-South states, most dwellers are trilinguals: their Mother tongue for domestic purposes, Pidgin English for wider communication and English language for official purposes. In South-East and South-Western states, most of the indigenes are bilinguals: their mother tongues; Igbo/Yoruba as well as for wider communication and English as the official language. In all the cases, they make conscious effort to learn these languages and are very much aware that they are multilinguals or bilinguals. The shift from one code to the other is deliberate and consciously done unlike in the case of Tukan and some other countries cited by Wardhaugh. Multilingualism in Nigeria could therefore not be said to be 'Natural' or 'Normal' but possibly concatenated. Bilingualism or multilingualism is quite remarkable in Nigeria.

6. INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE TEACHING

The above multilingual background of Nigeria have had its influence in the teaching and learning of languages especially the indigenous languages in the school system. Firstly, the government policy in respect of education and language is designed taking full cognizance of the background. Since everybody is fully conscious that he needs to learn another language for wider communication as well as for official purposes. The policy grants equivalent status/recognition to every language in Nigeria (as long as it has the capacity) to be used for teaching in the junior basic unit of the basic education curriculum in the first three years. The indigenous languages the people need for wider communication in the different geopolitical zones except Pidgin English (South-South) are to be compulsorily taught as a school subject in the rest of the basic education programme. It loses this status to become an optional subject in the senior secondary school curriculum. The official language, English is forced through the throat of every learner not only as a subject but also as a medium of instruction officially after the first three years of basic education. (unofficially, this is not observed as English is the medium of instruction in most cases not just in the early years of basic school, but in the nursery and kindergarten years).

The implementation of this indigeneous language component of the education policy have most abysmally failed in the schools in the South-South geo-political zone of the country. One of the reason for this failure is the fact that most of the languages have not been developed to the point of being taught as a subject let alone being used for pedagogical instruction. Even where you have a developed language, you have a number of other languages to choose from since everybody consciously wants his to be. In the Federal Government Colleges in zone, where the implementation of the policy tend to be mandatory, it has the worst level of implementation compared with other zones. The reason for this is simple, following our earlier analysis of the multilingual background of the country, we saw that the language of wider communication in this zone is Nigerian Pidgin. However, no place is given to Pidgin to be taught and learned in the school curriculum. What is taught and learnt is the indigeneous languages used for wider communication in the other zones; Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba. Teaching any of these approved indigeneous languages, the indigeneous students of that zones who constitute the majority of students in the schools in the zone is like forcing an unwilling horse to the stream to drink water. The language teachers are frustrated and have not been able to achieve their language teaching goals especially, those without sociolinguistic background. A sociolinguistic grounding of such teachers is not only imperative to appreciating the background of this students but also equipping them to devise suitable entry behavior and appropriate methodologies to overcome the challenges. This is situated in the context that if 'A' is to deliver to 'B' what 'B' is not willing to have, understanding the situation, and mode of presentation will tend to override the prescription of the rules contained in the message. It is therefore regrettable that in the recent effort by Universal Basic Education Board in Nigeria to train and re-train Basic Education teachers, Indigeneous Languages teachers tend to be the only ones left behind. Sociolinguistic experts should be invited along side other subject teachers to groom the language teachers for optional productivity. This necessary even in the other zones where the teachers teach the indigeneous languages to a reasonable number of students tend to be in the mood to learn. Apart from the fact that some of the students from the South-South zone are mandatorily there, the language results from the schools in those zones in the Federal Government Colleges at National Examination Council (NECO) and West African Examination Council (WAEC) exams are equally unimpressive. The sociolinguistically untrained language teachers end up frightening the students with only mere grammatic prescriptions and faulty assessment standards. This tends to validate our claim that sociolinguistic competence is indispensable in understanding social meaning of language and ensuring informed language teaching and learning.

7. FINDINGS

Our findings reveal that most of the language teachers lack adequate knowledge of sociolinguistics. This lack of knowledge of sociolinguistics complicates their ability to maturely handle the language classroom situations though they are certified professional teachers.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Our recommendation is that language teacher trainers and linguistic departments in Nigerian Universities must make sociolinguistic courses not only core but compulsory in the curriculum content that her graduates pass through.

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