

The Influence of Mother Tongue on Communication Skills of Media Practitioners in Kano State, Nigeria.

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Abstract. This work provides handful themes on areas where attention should be given in order to curtail the transference of phonological attributes of the broadcaster's mother tongue to that of English language during programmes broadcast in Radio. The population of the study was the ensemble of Radio Broadcasters in Kano state, which were 73. A census of the population served as respondents upon whom the research instrument (questionnaire) was administered. Simple percentages and frequency distribution tables were employed in analysing the data. The studies revealed that majority of the respondents were of the opinion that Nigerian radio broadcasters were affected by mother tongue interference in the course of their programmes. Analysis from the study further revealed that majority of the respondents agree that most Nigerian radio broadcasters are not grounded in the phonological structures of English language, hence cannot pronounce most words properly. The study concluded that this mother tongue interference has hindered many radio broadcasters from external exposure. They should take some extra training in the phonological structures of English language and learn the art of proper pronunciation in order to boost the credibility of the profession.

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Broadcasting, Radio.

1. Introduction/ Background

Language is the most important form of human communication which has served as the most efficient and versatile means of everyday interaction. Moreover, it is mainly a human activity. It is also important to note that language is not just a systematic symbolism but makes use of verbal elements and structures in brief, of what we commonly call words. Language grows as an oral phenomenon before it becomes written and standardized after which it becomes a tool through which we organize our thoughts into meaningful symbols.

Language is complete, not because every human language has a word for everything but because human language is so elaborate that its speakers can make a linguistic response to any experience that they may undergo. It is something that we habitually take for granted even though it is of great importance. It is quite natural to expect that the concern for language will remain central to the study of human nature as it has been in the past. Marshall McLuhan's assertion that the medium is the message is in consonance with the view that any distortion in language during broadcast bred lapses in communication more than written communication. It is pertinent therefore to make use of well-articulated speech sound to attain required standards in broadcasting.

Language has common characteristics and unique differences. These differences in structures often give rise to substitutions of non-existing phonemes and other forms of interferences. Nigeria is a multilingual society with about 250 different languages accompanied by many dialects. Such a situation makes for a comfortable adoption of the English language as the official language of government and as the language of instruction in schools. Internal politics apart, the English language affords Nigerians easy communication among the many linguistic groups in the country and with other English speaking peoples all over the world.

As the bedrock of the broadcast media considering the fact that it is the eye of any society. The relevance of language to radio broadcasting cannot be overemphasized, which is of great interest to any member of the society. According to Sanusi (1996), "Language is a medium of thought" (p. 8). It is a means of expressing of intentions and emotions, reacting to human beings at different times and situation, influencing people at different circumstances and so on through the mass media. In programme radio broadcast, proper manipulation of phonemes of English will purposefully promote excellence. On the other hand improper and inaccurate manipulation of the grammatical structure of English has affected adversely the output of programmes. In the broadcast media messages or information are distorted when there is semantic noise which is as a result of irregularities in the language structure of the radio broadcaster's mother tongue and the second language (English) that is being used.

Nowadays English learning is essential because English is the international communication medium. The language is necessary for different activities, including education, politics, communication and socio-economics (Medgyes, 1994; Mckay, 2002). English language therefore, has stream of sounds (speech sounds) which are produced during speech. The unique phonemes in the structures of English make the acquisition difficult because of the irregularities. With discrepancies in phonetic structures of languages, the broadcaster if not well informed and guided on the demands of job becomes a square peg in a round hole and invariably impedes communication.

Sookchotirat (2005) suggested that reading skill is the most important skill as it is the basis of all the success in one's life. Good readers can gain more knowledge of any kind from reading. Reading makes the reader more knowledgeable, have wider perspectives and vision. Reading helps the reader get new ideas leading to cognitive development. When the readers transfer what they read to apply with their own idea a new perspective or idea is created.

The introduction of sophisticated ideologies such as wire broadcasting also known as "radio distribution service" or radio diffusion was a mind-blowing experience to Nigerians. And as Hiebert and Gibbons put it, "radio and sound recording changed the entire aural of the environment in which we live" (p. 206). After the introduction of radio, television broadcast followed suit.

Communication is a way of sharing information. There are three main types of communication: written, verbal and nonverbal. Each form has its benefits and drawbacks. In radio broadcasting, effective communication is of great importance. However, noise, either in grammatical structure or external interference, hindered effective communication. The effects of mother tongue on English Language cannot be overlooked. It goes further in causing phonetic problems to the second language speaker/learner. In most cases, every second language user tends to bring elements or structures of his/her native language in speaking a second language. Despite efforts made to promote the effective learning of English as the mainstay of communication in Nigeria, many people including radio broadcasters still find difficult to effectively manipulate the phonological features. This is because, English language has some characteristics features such as stress rhythm and intonation which affect the qualities of individual sound segments. They are used differently from the way they are used in most Nigerian Languages and so become problematic to the speaker/learner of English.

2. Literature Review

Every language has peculiar sounds with which the language is produced and communicated. English language as a lingua franca and

mainstay of communication in a multilingual society like Nigeria has its peculiar sounds with which it is identified, produced and communicated. It enhances human communication and serves as an important key to verbal/human communication. The English Language has been very significant segment of the communication network in the Nigerian multilingual society.

Many factors contributed to the acceptance of the English language as Nigeria's national language, one of them being that Nigeria has many languages and different cultures. Anyanwu and Otagburagu (2002) observed that the colonization of Nigeria led to the adoption of the language of the colonial masters. They further explained that the attitude of the colonial masters towards the use of the indigenous language for official purposes was negative. This kind of attitude prevented the colonial masters to use one of the local languages for official functions. These made way for the acceptance of English language as the best and Nigeria's national language and lingua franca.

Today English language is the chief medium of instruction in Nigerian schools. Mgbodile (1999) agreed that the English language is one of the most important subjects both in internal and external communications and for gaining admission into institutions of higher learning. He observed that parents encourage the use of English language and wanted their children to learn and speak the white man's language. This is why the teaching of English language should be given adequate encouragement to make the future Nigerians fluent in both spoken and written English.

The English language is made up of four skills: listening, reading and writing. Reading is a complex skill which is expressive in nature; it plays a very vital role in the educational life of an individual. Thus Ekpunobi (1991) stated that the ability to read is necessary for success in life and it is a sign of literacy. It follows then that as student who cannot read efficiently has failed to acquire the skill that will enable him/her to become a literate person in the society. Therefore, reading is an important activity in a child's education because it is a major process towards success in his/her educational pursuit.

After the child has acquired his first language, he must learn to read the second language under the guidance of the school or other external body. He must learn to develop skills in reading; such as intensive/extensive, critical/pleasure reading. Otagburagu and Igbokwe (2001) agreed that reading is the key to the most advanced stages. In other words, reading is very crucial to learning because reading exposes a child to a wide range of information and knowledge.

Reading, therefore, is an act of decoding printed matter which involved the association of sounds and symbols. Nwadike (2001) suggested that reading is an act of deciphering what is written. It is a receptive form of communication and differs from speaking and writing in being a comprehensive activity. It is a thinking process, which involves making sounds and interpreting symbols. Acquiring reading skills implies not only the ability to recognize and say aloud the printed words on a page but also what they mean. Reading involves a combination of activities of the eye, which is perceives and explores the verbal symbols and sounds, which discovers and interprets the thought that lie beneath them.

Enumerating the use of English as a communication tool in Nigeria, Eyisi (2007) states that, "The English language occupies a pride of position in the Nigerian society. It can be perceived as the most important legacy from the British to Nigeria" (p. 19). Whenever we speak, we consciously produce a chain of speech sounds which are sequentially arranged to form syllables and words that will generate precise meaning to our listeners. Some languages have limited number of phonemes while other appears to possess extremely complete phonologies. English language therefore, has stream of sounds (speech sounds) which are produced during speech. The unique phonemes in the structures of English make the acquisition difficult because of the irregularities. With discrepancies in phonetic structures of languages, the broadcaster if not well informed and guided on the demands of job becomes a square peg in a round hole and invariably impedes communication.

In spite of the status enjoyed by English as a language that occupies a pride of place in Nigeria, and despite the effort put to promote it

effective communication, many radio broadcasters still find it difficult to effectively manipulate the phonological features of the language. This is as a result of the irregularities stemming from both languages- the new and old languages. This has been attributed to the fact that more attention was paid in the past on the written form of language at the expense of the spoken form. This has gone a long way in promoting a negative effect of the influence of the mother tongue (MT) on the target language (TL) or second language (Eyisi ,2007.p. 12). Unfortunately, in ordinary conversation, an interference of any type especially phonological interference goes unnoticed and is particularly ignored because most users in the country use English as their second languages as well as their target language. Though interference may be ignored in ordinary conversation, it is a serious problem in radio broadcasting as it can breed semantic noise and affects communication process. In programme dissemination in the English language, international acceptability of pronunciation called Received Pronunciation (RP) should be used, except otherwise where other varieties of English is to be used. This makes the broadcast media uphold their credibility and excellence. Folarin (2001) is of the opinion that: Everyday language of ordinary discourse and language of the news casting significantly differ due to the differences in expected roles. The language of broadcasting or journalism is to facilitate affective communication between the (encoder) and the listener (audience/decoder (p. 37). The broadcaster is a communicator whose duty is very important in information dissemination. It is possible for any Nigerian bilingual (speaking his mother tongue and English) to speak English as a British national. This is however not necessary because language has been proven to be dynamic.

The use of English language in the Nigerian broadcast media is an indispensable tool for effective communication. Broadcast messages are communicated through the language that is understood by the users. To this end, Okunna (2002, p. 163) states that: The very role of language in broadcasting and consequently the great impact of those two variables to human communication make the study of language and

its relationship to better communication a sine qua non. Both language and broadcasting serve as means to communication end. Language serves as means of broadcasting just as both radio and television serve as a media of mass communication. If communication is the bedrock and mainstay of the broadcast media, the language used in the disseminating programmes, must therefore be used with great proficiency.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is built on a theoretical foundation known as communication process. In communication process, information travels from the speaker/source (encoder) via the channel to the receiver (decoder). Communication does not exist without mutual understanding between the encoder and the decoder. Information is very powerful ammunition the media provide which enables the people to prevent irregular interposition of methods that affect their lives, wants and the environment. In fact no society survives without adequate, constant and up-to-date information. Since language in human communication is necessary for society's survival and growth, Dominick (2005, p. 5) believes that the following events are necessary for the communication process to take place.

The source which is the initiator of the process passes an idea or a thought which he or she wishes to transmit to some other entity.

The process of encoding refers to the activities that the source goes through to translate thoughts and ideas into a form that may be perceived by the senses.

The message is the actual physical product that the source encodes.

Channels are the ways the message travel to the receiver which are the basically through sound waves and light waves depending on what is being transmitted.

The decoding of the message is different from the encoding. It consists of activities that translate or interpret physical messages into a form that has eventual meaning to the receiver.

After the message has been decoded by the receiver, there is a feedback which is the

response of the receiver that shapes and alters the subsequent messages of the source. Dominick also discusses the noise factor as an event that might take place in the communication process. Noise has been defined as anything that interferes with the delivery of the message. This noise could be semantic, environmental and mechanical. The core of communication is the performance and proficiency in the language of communication. Every human relationship is hinged on communication process of exchanging mutually understood symbols of a language. Any fault in the language definitely leads to a breakdown in communication. This theory is relevant to the study under investigation because it established the bases upon which effective communication should flourish. For communication to be effective, it needs to eliminate or minimise to a large extent the prevalence of noise. In the case of this study, noise might be in form of mother tongue interference in communication, which must be addressed carefully.

4. Methodology

The research design for this study is the qualitative method design. The population of this study was the ensemble of radio broadcasters in the five selected radio stations in Kano state. The figure of the broadcasters' as presented was 73 persons. The choice of broadcasters' as the study population is because they are the ones that can really tell how they are been affected by mother- tongue interference in the course of their duties.

The table below shows the contribution of the various media organisations to the population of the study.

Table 1: Population of Study Media Organisations

S/N	Contribution of Population	Figure
1.	Arewa Radio	20
2.	Bello dandago Radio	16
3.	Freedom Radio	18
4.	Pyramid Radio	12
5.	Rahama Radio	7
	Total	73

This study used two instruments namely; questionnaire and document review. The questionnaire was drafted in simple sentences consisting of 15 questions. It made use of close and open ended techniques in order to give the respondents enough room to field in responses to the questions. The document review, on the other hand, was a painstaking act aimed at collecting only relevant information that would help explain the quantitative data. The validity of the instruments was done using face validity technique. The instruments were given to two research experts' for validation. First it was tested if the questions in the questionnaire are related to the topic under consideration and whether they actually provide answer to the questions raised in the study. It was also tested for clarity and ambiguity. In checking for the reliability of the study instrument, a pre-test was conducted to ascertain the reliability of the research instrument (questionnaire). A total of 15 respondents were drawn for this purpose. The reason was to determine whether the responses would be in line with the required result expected from the instrument. The pilot study was done after the questionnaire had been validated by the experts earlier mentioned. To this end, Asika (2006: 73) opined that reliability is "the accuracy on precision of a measuring instrument".

The data generated were analysed qualitatively. By this, data analysis was presented in textual forms separately.

5. Data Analysis: (Qualitative Approach)

Data was analysed using qualitative approach. By this, data were presented in textual forms separately. The study gathered qualitative data by reviewing literature from different sources that would help in explaining the quantitative data collected and analysed above. Although broadcasting in the native tongue is increasingly viewed as a communication right of every individual. Linguistics interference has been a topic of concern in a multilingual country like Nigeria. Linguistics interference is a phenomenon TRANSFER explained by psychologists as the influence of present learning by the past learning. This transfer

occurs in language learning when the learners of the new language designated in this situation rightly or wrongly establish analogy between same elements of the target language (TL) and the elements of an early acquired language known as the source language (TL) and mother tongue (MT). The language of broadcasting is expected to conform to the norms of the Standard English and Received Pronunciation (RP). Phenomenological deviation as Folarin (2001) explains, "... is often a conscious stylistic device and may be contrived in various ways. They include consonant and vowel dropping, tonal manipulation all of which may lead to a creating of unusual words and phrase" (p. 74). This impedes communication and does the media no good. The English Language has its set of sound system which is different from the set used in most Nigerian Languages and any other language.

The English sound system is peculiar just to the English Language and not to any other language. The English makes use of more sounds than some Nigerian indigenous languages. Studies have shown that diligent learning of English sounds that do not exist in one's mother tongue and effective application of the sound will promote communication process. Onuigbo (2001) clearly states that, "efforts made in the teaching and learning of these features are not commensurate with their importance in intelligible communication" (p. 5). In learning new sounds of language, learners tend to be discouraged by the number of strange sounds they have to learn especially in the articulation of homonyms where two words sound alike but with different meanings. Most times the variations in the production of these sounds are not noticed by the speaker but the listener or hearer. For instance in media broadcast, when the broadcaster fails to make a distinction between words like "live and leave," "bird and bed," "hat and heart," "hear and here," "sit and seat," "sheep and ship," "did and deed," and many other homonyms. Sentences like "he lost his hear will be misunderstood to mean "he lost his hat." Same goes for "he sold the sheep" and "he sold the ship." Christopherson (1976) comments that "... even if you do manage to make yourself understood, you will not express yourself well. Justice will not be done without

proper pronunciation" (p. 3). The international acceptability and intelligibility of pronunciation is an essential requirement for broadcast media to upload its credibility and excellence. It is assumed that Nigerians have thicker tongues than the Europeans do. Notwithstanding, this should not affect our pronunciation of English words. With proper learning and adequate manipulations any language can be spoken to a good and acceptable extent. This has been proven in cases of Nigerians who grew in English-speaking environments, who in addition to their mother tongue have a good command of the pronunciation of English Language. Many prodigious writers and living legends such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and many others had no better exposure than many Nigerians of today, yet they managed to excel proficiently in the field of English language despite the presence of their mother tongue. Nigerian broadcasters should learn the proper pronunciation of English words, by the conscious positioning of their organs of speech to avoid slow and laborious process. Ibagere (2001, p.83) explains that "difficulty in acquisition of the target language or second language breeds wrong pronunciation of words". This situation distracts the viewer of a media programme and from the content of such programmes. Ibagere further argues that "wrong meaning will be ascribed to a particular signal which in turn will result in the wrong response being given" (2001, p.149). A distortion in the message content of media programmes is called semantic noise in the broadcast media. Semantic noise is concerned with distortion of meaning: it is more identified with speech and more acute when it comes to broadcasting, because articulatory problems and slurring of sound promote distortion in meaning.

Speech organs remain the same in any speech production, but the manner of articulation, place of articulation and state of the glottis differ. The tongue, teeth and lips used for articulation are not the only organs of speech. The process of speech starts from the lungs which is the power house, from which air is inhaled. The phonological features of sound system are divided into segmental and supra segmental feature. The phonological features of our local languages have some similarities with English

but with unique difference. These differences pose articulation problems of interferences of the first language to the second language. To this end, Eyisi (2007, p.10) states, "as a result of these differences, the Nigerian learner of oral English is bound to encounter almost inseparable Linguistic phenomena in his journey to better English pronunciation." These difficulties occur at different levels.

6. Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the implications of phonological problems and deviations in radio broadcasting as it affects communication effectiveness emanate mostly from the effect of the mother tongue phonological system on the phonology system of English. There are transfers from the native language of most radio broadcasters which affect their pronunciation in the cause of duties. This interference has hindered many broadcasters from external exposure. It becomes imperative, therefore, for broadcasters to follow-up their grammatical and phonological constructions with constant learning for better practice. This practice and constant learning might likely help the radio broadcaster to overcome all forms of irregularities inherent in his/her usage of English Language.

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