

# Essays On Language & Literature

An Introductory Approach to the study of Stylistics  
& Applied Linguistics

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## **CHAPTER 19**

### **MULTILINGUALISM AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN NIGERIA**

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#### **Introduction**

The concept of language has been variously described. Ogunsiji (2002) sees it as a system of conventional, arbitrary, symbols by which members of a community communicate with one another. While Wilson (1972) sees language as an artificial and consciously organized method of control by the use of symbols or conventions, which involves the notion of meaning. Research has proved that no community has been able to exist without a language because language is actually indispensable in the life of man.

#### **Origin of Language**

There has been much speculations about the origin of language. Wardhaugh in Odusina (1989) states that one of the greatest mysteries that have confronted man on earth has been the origin of language. Wardhaugh traced the origin of language to the Hebrew mythologies which explained the origin of language by the Biblical story in which God made man to give names to earthly phenomenon. In the same way, the emergence of the linguistic variations was linked to the incidence in the Biblical tower of Babel story where God made the monolingual society to become multilingual so that they could not communicate to build their tower to reach God to question him. Since then, multilingualism has stuck and man has had to contend with the situation.

There is the universalist theory which claims that thought processes determine language and that different languages represent the world in ways that are analogous or similar, (Otagburuagu, 2002). Otagburuagu argues that were it to be the case, it would then follow that all human languages should be basically similar. But Otagburuagu reiterates that "although there are certain language universals across cultures, similarity of all languages in the strict sense of the word within geographic regions may actually be difficult. This may now explain the wide gap between different languages in Nigeria even though they may be in the same geo-political regions. The presence of multiple ethnic and language groups in the South-South of Nigeria, completely unintelligible to one another, would not have been the case.

The relativist theory of Whorf and Sapir as cited in Otagburuagu (2002:194) argues that *all observers are not led by the same physical evidence in the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic background are similar or are so calibrated.*

The relativist view appears to be the more dominant view (Otagburuagu, 2002:195) and so highlights the challenges posed by multilingualism in the quest for national integration. It equally throws up the constraints to choosing a foreign language and the subsequent challenges to the teaching and learning of English Language which will be addressed in the course of this chapter.

Language is the single most important element that defines man's humanity and raises him higher than other earthly species. Language is the most basic and most valuable possession of man since creation. It enables man to deal with changes or challenges in his environment, to organize his society and face any kind of emergency in his struggle through life. All over the world, people are identified by their

languages. There are some homogenous, mono-ethnic groups, though few, like Northern Ireland and Vietnam. They own and use only one language. Communication is easy and inter-relationships are enhanced. Homogeneity in language situation enhances unity and progress, (Awonisi 1990:30-35). On the other hand, there are heterogeneous societies which are characterized by a diversity of ethnic groups and therefore a multiplicity of languages, a possible fall out from the tower of Babel story. This gives rise to multilingualism.

### **Multilingualism in Nigeria**

Cultural diversity in Nigeria makes it possible for many indigenous languages to thrive. Ashworth (1990:5) defines an indigenous language as the language of the people considered to be the original inhabitants of the area.

The indigenous language groups in Nigeria has been put at about 400 and 500 (Bamgbose, 1971; Odusina, 1989, Azikiwe, 1989). With this, multilingualism is considered a serious issue in this country. If we define multilingualism after Richards cited in Otagburagu (2002:175) as "the use of three or more languages by an individual or group", certainly the multilingualism in Nigeria with about 500 languages is of a serious nature since these languages exist in their hundreds so much so that Nigeria's multilingualism has been re-defined as spiral or extended multilingualism. (Otagburagu, 2002). One wonders why some large communities are monolingual while some comparably small communities are multilingual even with short distances separating them.

Usually, many factors are responsible for the existence of multilingualism in a nation state. It could be geographical/natural where there are mountain chains, water bodies or deserts that force communities to stay apart and sometimes pursue different economic goals, (Awonusi, 1990).

Multilingualism may also be caused by wars, conquests or colonizations. The map of Nigeria reveals the strategic placement of a natural phenomenon being the 'Y' shape of the rivers – Niger and Benue. This river divides the Nigerian nation into three – North, East and West. This division from very early stages in Nigeria's history divides the country into three major parts and this division corresponds to the three major language groups in Nigeria – Hausa in the North, Igbo in the East and Yoruba in the West.

Beyond these three major language groups, there are several hundreds of other indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria and they correspond with the number of indigeneous ethnic groups found in Nigeria. Outside these three dominant languages, there are some other prominent language groups. They include Edo, Efik, Ijaw, Tiv, Kanuri, and Fulfulde which is Fulani. All these prominent language groups are characterized by different ethnic subgroups with different languages and dialects some of which are not mutually intelligible even though they belong to the same linguistic group. An example is the Yoruba ethnic group where an Akoko speaker is not understood by an Ibadan speaker. Itshekiri Yorubas understand standard Yoruba but standard Yoruba speakers do not understand Itshekiri Yoruba. A similar situation obtains in Igboland. The Abakailiki Igbo man understands standard Igbo language but the central Igbo speaker does not understand the Abakiliki Ebonyi Igbo. The same is true of Edo State where numerous minor ethnic groups use a plurality of languages that people living within twenty kilometers radius can not understand. This situation gives rise to complex situations with perplexing linguistic problems. The result is dissociations, discrimination, segregation, cultural and political antagonism and subsequent disintegration. But the presence of a common language gives

room for easy communication and interaction, greater trust, and increased understanding of one another.

This situation resulted in the indigenous language speakers' attempt to create a common but non-indigenous language for communication. The result is the panel-beaten English mixed with local languages within the community known as 'pidgin'. Invariably, with 'pidgin' many people become bilinguals speakers of at least two languages. Many societies also became ambilinguals allowing two languages to exist side by side. Nigeria is one of such societies.

### **The English Language in the Context of Nigeria's Multilingualism**

English Language in Nigeria plays the role of mediation. It started as a contact language between the earliest European traders and their Nigerian middlemen along the coasts. Later the 'pidgin' otherwise broken English developed. Pidgin is a mixture of English and the indigenous languages from various ethnic groups who could not interact and communicate among themselves because of multiplicity of languages. The English language now became important socially, politically, culturally and otherwise. The English language unlike any of the indigenous languages, because of its neutrality, does not engender ethnic hostility. Rather it ensures peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. It is more so now that it has developed the Nigerian texture which is an 'in-group' feeling that makes all users of English in different parts of the world develop a variety for internal communication. There is an 'in-group' feeling among users of English in Nigeria which engenders oneness, unity, and loyalty.

One can summarize the features of multilingualism in Nigeria as follows:

- Diverse ethnic and cultural groups in the diverse cultural areas.
- Diversity of languages and language groups.
- Multilingual and Bilingual individuals.
- Presence of homogenous language groups in the diverse cultural areas.
- Presence of heterogenous language groups.
- Absence of a common indigenous language.
- Use of foreign contact or common language.
- Lack of sufficient commitment to the national or central cause.
- More commitment and loyalty of people to their ethnic languages.

The above situation created room for the position which English Language occupies in Nigeria since independence.

### **National Language and the National Language Policy**

Nigeria's policy on language is not really an explicit material found in a separate document but rather some items gleaned from a number of important national documents. Emenanjo (2002) mentioned such documents as: The National Policy on Education (1977 revised 1981); paragraph 15 (4) Section 18 (4); Government Views and Comments on the Findings of the Recommendations of the Political Bureau, (1987:62-3); The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1989): Sections 19 (4); 21:53 and 95. The National Policy has been revised severally since then (FGN 2004) but it still maintains that 'Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving culture.'

In addition, English is a core subject in primary and secondary schools and as well the language of educational instruction from primary four upwards.

From these documents, available information shows the multi-dimensional, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, policy as regards languages and language use in Nigeria. In summary, the policy provides for:

- (i) Mother-tongue (L1) and/or language of the immediate community (LIC) as the language of initial literacy and of adult and non-formal education;
- (ii) The three major (national) languages-Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as L2 – as the language of national culture and integration.
- (iii) English becomes the official language as well as the language of formal education, the bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the law courts, parliament etc.
- (iv) Selected foreign languages, specifically, French and Arabic and recently among others, as languages of international communication and discourse.

The issue of which language to use for educational instruction has been agitating many scholars and educationists. The National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004; revised:10) states that 'Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. In addition, English is made a core subject in both primary and secondary schools. It is possible for a certificate result without at least a pass in English to become invalidated. Without a credit pass in English Language, nobody can be admitted to read a degree programme in Nigeria. All this is



because; government knows the weight which English Language carries nationally and internationally. There are arguments by some researchers (Jasone, 2010; Emenanjo, 2002) that 'first language should be used first' in the education of multi-linguals. Also a UNESCO (2005) report of a research on Multi-lingual Education in India suggests 'first language' as obtains in Nigeria. No study has opted for educational instruction all through, in indigenous language. It will be foolhardy to ignore English Language in a multi-lingual Nigeria because of the multiple purposes it serves. Oluikpe in Otagburuagu (2002) advises that there is merit in promoting the teaching and learning of English for the enhancement of literacy in Nigeria. Obanya (1979) has hinted that English Language is a vehicle of communication, a unifying agent and an instrument for learning and teaching. This is in agreement with the policy that 'language is vital for promoting social interaction and maintaining national cohesion.' Of course, no other indigenous language has the capacity to do that in multi-lingual Nigeria except English Language. As Ogunsuji (2002) would say, 'a simple language may have its role only at the local level and in initial literacy whereas a major language may have both local and global roles. The truth is that in a multilingual democracy all languages are equal, but some are more equal than others (Ogunsuji, 2002). Therefore there is need to pay serious attention to the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigeria. It is important to discover the factors that enhance or inhibit the effective teaching and learning of the language in Nigeria.

### **English Language Teaching (ELT) and learning in Nigeria as a Multilingual State**

English Language Teaching (ELT) in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of

missionaries who opened schools. Then the curriculum centered around the three 'Rs' of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. English Language teaching was one single requirement for any school to qualify for approval and/or a grant.

English started as a contact language, became a second language and eventually graduated to become both official and national language all in one. Since then, English language has been a blessing to Nigeria since it serves multiple purposes of communication as well as upholding peace in the country. It has become the language of education at the different tiers of education in this country.

Otagbruagu (2002:196) recalls that the English language was the major tool for realizing the objectives of the colonial administration and that based on this, every Colonial Education Ordinance made the formal teaching and learning of the English language compulsory in schools. English started to enjoy the pride of place in Nigeria since then.

From that time till now, English Language has been a core compulsory subject in all our schools and in all our educational programmes. The absence of at least a pass in English Language could invalidate a certificate. Even today, without a credit in English Language, one cannot proceed to the next level in the education ladder. The English Language has become so central in every sphere of life in multi-lingual Nigeria that most people equate literacy and indeed education with the ability to read and write in the English Language (Bamgbose, 1995; Oguniji, 2002:112). It became an elitist language, Azikiwe (1989:20).

Mohammed (1995:132) describes the English Language as a link language to account for the fact that it brings the different ethnic groups together. Jowitt (1995: 53) in his

reaction to the importance of the teaching and the use of the English Language in Nigeria optimistically notes that English is uniquely serviceable for the tasks of generating a healthy national consciousness and raising the country's level of economic and social development.

English Language has a wide reach and serves global functions. English is seen as a language of international communication, co-operation and understanding. In bilateral discussions, agreements, in international summits and conferences and by international bodies like UNO, UNESCO, UNDP, ECOWAS, etc, English language is usually used.

English is used for teaching of science and technology, in the modern world (Ene, 2002:2). It has over taken languages like French, Russia, and Germany. It is the language of business transactions and commerce between people of different.

It is the language of literary production and documentation of literary materials from different countries and cultures. It is the language of information, Communication and Technology, used for information gathering, processing and expression. It is used by VOA, BBC, CNN, AIT, Radio Nigeria, print media, etc. to broadcast to the world because it has the widest reach of all languages.

The spread of English has given rise to bilingualism, trilingualism, ambi-lingualism and multi-lingualism in Nigeria. It has given rise to the emergence of different accents with their own pronunciation peculiarities. The emergences of different dialects of the language have shown considerable variation in the choice of words and grammatical patterns. These may pose problems to the teaching of English.

No doubt, there is a lot to gain by investing in the teaching and learning of English Language. Oluikpe in Otagburuagu (2002:197) states that there is merit in promoting the teaching of English for the enhancement of literacy and understanding in Nigeria.

### **Challenges of Teaching English Language in Nigeria**

There are enormous challenges facing English Language teaching and learning in Nigeria. For one thing, it is obvious that both the teachers and the learners of English in Nigeria are second or even third language users. Teaching is done by people who learnt from second language users who also learnt from second users as well. The gap from the standard variety (RP) continues to widen. This implies that they have been previously exposed to various ethnic or foreign language codes. There is a mix up of the linguistic codes of the native local language, the language of the immediate community, and the adulterated English otherwise known as 'pidgin'. This poses a serious challenge to the teaching and learning of English Language.

Otagbruagu (2002:197) points out that that multi-lingualism and the teaching of English Language as a second language requires the acquisition and use of linguistic codes which vary in their organizational and construction patterns as well as in their phonemic and lexical system.

The challenge demands the identification of the differences between the English Language and the indigenous languages which could pose problems in the English language teaching and learning process. There are differences in the syntactic patterns, lexis and also phonology.

Many indigenous languages have different syntactic patterns and they can be a source of problems in language teaching and learning, (Oluikpe, 1976).

For example:

1. **Stative verbs:** These verbs are a common features of the English language verb family. They don't take the possessive e.g. see- seeing; hear - hearing.

It becomes wrong to say: Are you seeing me?

Are you hearing me?

2. **Plurality:** To mark plurality of regular nouns, English Language adds 's' to the nouns e.g.

boy — boys

girl — girls

But many Nigerian languages don't mark plurals like that. Instead, they may add new words e.g. pot = ite; Pots = otutuite.

nwoke = man; umunwoke = some men

Not only that, Nigerians go on to over-generalize the use of the 's' marker

E.g. British	Nigerian
Property	properties
Load	loads
Luggage	luggages

3. **Lexis:** Nigerians have introduced many indigenous words into English. Sometimes the words even have new meanings. Some writers argue that it demonstrates originality and nationalism, but it can be a problem to teaching and learning the target language.

- E.g. Molue for small motor bus.  
Eba for fufu made from dried cassava.  
Dodo roasted plantain.  
Edikaikong rich vegetable soup originating from Cross.  
River and Akwa-Ibom States.  
Motor park for bus station/taxi rank.  
Head tie for female head gear.

**4. Phonology:** Many Nigerian languages don't have consonant cluster but English language has it and this militates against teaching and learning of English.

- E.g. British            Nigerian  
School -            Sukulu  
Glass -            Gilasi  
Class -            Kilasi

The next challenge is the variety of English to teach. There is no doubt the multilingual nature of the Nigerian society has influenced the type of English language used in the country. Nigerian English is a socio-linguistic fact. Bamgbose in Otagburuagu (2002:196) identified, six possible forms of English that exist in Nigeria with the educated Nigerian variety (NE) at the apex of the variety triangle and Nigeria pidgin and "Broken English" at the base. Chances are that the teacher may fall short of the standard and even if he teaches the standard, the learner practices whatever is immediately available irrespective of the teacher's opinion. Multi-lingualism brings about a lot of code-switching and code-mixing across varieties for intelligibility. Some examples of Nigerian English include:

- E.g. i. He is not on seat.  
i. I saw him last week Monday.  
ii. This is a fine trouser.

- iii. Hi behaviour is very disgracing.
- iv. I was oppertuned to see him.

Nigerian English becomes the escape route for wrong usages which are outright deviations from Standard English. This situation often confuses the unwary teacher. It is advisable that the teachers of English should be professional enough to distinguish between the two and focus on the standard variety.

We may also take a look at some other factors that affect teaching and learning such as the teacher, the learner, the content/Curriculum and the teaching environment = the classroom, the society. An interplay of all these and more results in what we have today as the Nigerian English.

### **The teacher**

It is important to consider the teacher quality and quantity, the teacher's personality and interest in the teaching of the language. His knowledge of the subject matter, his pedagogic skills, motivational level, in-service training, are some important issues that affect his/her disposition to the job.

One does not give what one does not have. The teacher of English as a second language must be proficient enough in the language to be able to teach it effectively. Oyetunji in Azikiwe (1989) put it thus:

It is not claiming too much to say that teaching English as a second language is the most complex and the most arduous task for teachers to undertake. Those who consistently and diligently examine the varying and elusive aspect of the teaching of English in West Africa have come to the unavoidable realization that if there is any subject that requires a scientific and pragmatic approach from teachers, it is the teacher of English.

It is common knowledge that many people come to teach the English language without adequate professional training in some cases, some of those involved in the teaching of the language have had no prior training in ELT at all Otagburuagu (1993). It is worrisome to observe lots of half baked university and polytechnic graduates who could not find employment elsewhere rush into any nearby tertiary institutions and within a year are clutching a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) certificate which supposedly makes them teachers. They have acquired little or no pedagogic skills. The great majority of them have spent little time in a school for teaching practice which should be the teaching clinic (Imogie, 2010). The task of the English teacher especially in a multi-lingual society is to teach effectively for acquisition of English by the learner. Brumfit (1985) provides the following qualities to be possessed by the teacher of English for the enhancement of their teaching activities especially in a multilingual society like Nigeria.

1. They should be professionally trained and well-informed.
2. Their approach to teaching should be founded on principles, but they should not be dogmatic.
3. They should be constantly trying to improve themselves and up-date their knowledge in the subject.
4. They should be humble without being weak, firm without being autocratic.
5. They should like their students, but if they do not, it should be disguised so that the students and others will not know.
6. They should know in very clear terms why their students are learning English Language.
7. They should be convinced within themselves about their beliefs on the nature of language teaching and learning.



Language teaching is dynamic and subject to societal changes. In these days of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), there is need to have teachers of English who are ICT compliant so that they can apply Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) in their teaching. They must be able to deliver the language that will carry local and international currencies of globalization, commerce, science and technology. Our English Language teachers should undertake workshops and conferences on modern methods and techniques in today's ELT style. They should not cling to the old obsolete GTM but rather adjust to modern Communicative Language Teaching techniques. They should be conversant with newer approaches like Direct Method, Play Way Method, Audio-Visual and Audio-Lingual as well as eclecticism. Today, the TKT – (Teaching Language Testing in English and the CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning) is one of the newer approaches.

#### **The TKT-CLIL**

The TKT-CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning is one of the newest approaches introduced by the British Council. It is an approach that makes the language classroom come alive. It lays emphasis on learner participation, interactive class, group work and many more. In our multi-lingual classrooms, TKT-CLIL explores the socio-cultural milieu and uses it to advantage in the teaching and learning process. These latest approaches ensure that both teachers and learner grow and live in the language and thereby be able to think, reason and express their thoughts and views well. Above all they enjoy their lessons.

There are teachers who shy away from the rather intricate aspects of the language skills such as syntax, grammar and phonology. These are people who join the teaching

profession out of necessity rather than from choice. The teacher of English ought to be well versed in ELT methodology. Even with the MDG, British Council and NTI organized programmes, the same reservation which was noticed among non- graduate teachers was still very evident.

Also important is the rapid increase in student population especially when considering the teacher: pupil ratio. According to National Policy on Education, the teacher pupil ratio should be 1: 35 and for a good language classroom with potentials for maximum performance, the teacher pupil ratio should never exceed 1:30. Besides if the teacher is applying the conventional ELT and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, then he cannot cope with large classes. Another common feature of English Language instruction in Nigeria is that graduates of other disciplines posted to schools are assigned to teach English. This is rather unfortunate as they will only end up cheating the learners. They will never appreciate what is involved in language teaching and will only end up making a mockery of the exercise.

### **The Learner**

Both the teacher and learner have been exposed to other linguistic codes of the indigenous language(s), the pidgin or other languages of the immediate community, or the Nigerian English. The learner's age is important as children learn languages faster. Most of the learners of English language in this country are older and they come from poor socio-economic backgrounds. This affects their attitude to the target language, the disposition, preparation, follow-up on class work or even interest may not help the progress of the language learning. Procurement of learning materials which is very essential for learning English Language such as

course books, writing materials, literature books, newspaper and magazines, including exposure to library may all be lacking. Some of the learners suffer low self-esteem and get frustrated and uninterested in learning the right thing. There are cases where learners have asked for 'short cut' to make a credit and get away from all the trouble. They resort to examination malpractice to pass English language examinations and not to learn proper use of the language. Peer groups also influence in a negative way the learning of the language. Learners suffer discouraging taunts and mockeries by friends and peers when they make attempts. The result is that they feel reluctant and shy to make any further attempts.

### **Instructional materials**

Teachers' competence should be matched with the relevant instructional aids. The teaching aids must match the times. We are in a knowledge driven economy and the world is moving at a rapid pace. Both soft and hardware material are vital to the success of the teaching learning process like ours. Government should provide internet and multimedia facilities to enable teachers and learners have access to on-line materials and other digital items. There should be adequate textbooks, varied activities to ensure frequent practice in the target language, field trips and a good degree of acculturation in the target language are all necessary for a thorough understanding of target language.

There are also some administrative constraint that militate against English language Teaching. It could be the nonchalant attitude towards the target language. Instead of giving English sufficient time to ensure that the learners practice the exercises and read enough literary texts. Some administrators present bottlenecks to stifle the language.

Some even argue that English is just like any other language. Sometime, it is the way English Language programmes are planned and executed. Otagbruagu (2002) commented that the content of the programmes do not pay sufficient attention to grammar. Even when the content spells out instructional items to cover aspects of grammar and writing the timetable does not provide sufficient time for instruction. Because of the day school-system, Teachers cannot give the learners extra lessons outside school hours. Even when such teachers are willing getting administrative clearance for such activities may not be easy. Sometimes the fee the teacher would want the learners to pay for his extra-service may not go down well with the parents or the administration. This often demotivates both the teacher and the learners from carrying out activities which will promote the teaching and learning of English to succeed in a multilingual setting (Otagburuagu, 2002).

The use of objective testing procedures does not promote the teaching and learning of English for functional literacy. One often observes that there is absence of diagnostic tests at the onset of English language instruction. The result is that learners are presented with language lessons which they do not need. This makes such learners develop a care-free attitude to English language instruction.

Literature materials are indispensable for teaching and learning of English and therefore the separation of literature from English language course design leaves a serious gap. It is literature that creates the theatre for the actual practice of language structures. According to Williams (1990: 255), the study of literature in a first or second language constraints, the student with the various operations of language and the need to elucidate its meaning. Since literature organizes languages in the most exemplary fashion, the second

language learner must be aware of the importance of applying the language of literature as a model for his own use. The teaching of literature has the practical value of enabling the student to learn about the second language as well as use it in the original platform.

English language teaching in Nigeria ought to embrace that ideal language instruction does not take place in a vacuum. It is a human action in a human society and therefore it is influenced directly or indirectly by the socio-political and socio-cultural climate of the society. In addition, it does not insulate itself from the prevailing economic conditions of its environment.

For the fact that English is learnt as a second language in a multilingual environment, the socio cultural environment must be taken into consideration because people may experience different worldview. In addition, the problem of interference is there to contend with.

Although we had earlier noted in this paper that the English language has extensive literature which makes its instruction for literacy easy, our national culture is one that is rooted on face to face /CON/ interaction. Reading culture which is a dominant aspect of the civil societies is just beginning to emerge. This, to my mind, is another challenge which English language instruction. This aspect of the Nigerian environment does not encourage writing and therefore tends to reduce the speedy development of functional literacy.

Motivation is an important psychological element in the life of every individual. Nigerian English language teachers like all other subject teachers in the country and at all levels of the educational system are denied their basic rights by the government. Salaries and allowances are not paid on time and strikes are rife. The result is that most instructors just

linger on the job as a stop gap measure and leave it as soon as opportunities open elsewhere. Sometimes they feel reluctant to put in their best because of low morale. Many teachers are known to resort to hawking ware in and out of school, petty trading or farming just to make ends meet. Such situations militate against effective English language teaching and learning especially in a multi-lingual environment that places much demands on a second language learner.

### **Tackling the Challenges of English Language Teaching in Nigeria**

There are things that can be done to salvage the deplorable state of teaching and learning of English Language in our multi-lingual nation. To tackle the linguistic dimension, the English language curricula should be reviewed so that grammar and writing could be given better attention. Pedagogic re-orientation has become necessary to make learning experiences relevant to learner-needs. Needs analysis should be made an integral part of language planning and more communicatively oriented teaching methods should be used.

Teachers-preparation for ELT should be thorough and the curriculum should include more linguistic content. English Language instruction should be left in the hands of those who have been trained for the jobs. Here the intervention of the professional bodies of teachers and the Ministry of Education and the Teachers' Regulatory Council is required. In addition, there is the need for teachers to draw from contrastive and error linguistics in making decision on their ELT methodology and course content.

Private sector participation in English language teaching is still very low in the country. The government should

encourage the establishment of bilingual centres and Continuing Education Centres for English language teaching by the private sector. Such programmes should be handled by well-trained personnel.

English language teachers in public institutions should be given encouragement so that they can stay on the job in a dedicated and productive manner. Opportunities should be provided and sponsorship granted to them for retraining and participation in this aspect of English language instruction is both necessary and desirable. Publishing companies (Local and Foreign), non-governmental organizations and individuals can complement efforts in this area either by organizing ELT workshop/seminars or by providing sponsorship for English language teachers who want to attend such programmes. English language instruction should be carried out in a way to include literature.

The Government should strive to prevent frequent industrial action by teachers to avoid undue interruptions in the school calendar, which reduce the contact hours teachers have with their students for English Language teaching and learning.

There is need for the teachers of Nigerian indigenous languages to co-operate with English language teachers as provided for by CLIL package. The National Language Institute (NINLAN) should stimulate research activities that will build on the data from English language studies and Nigerian languages to solve Nigerian's national language problems.

We know that if Nigeria is to move along with the rest of the world, she cannot do without English language. However, we as well recognize the need to have a workable language policy, Ubahakwa (1973) has noted that," the present state structure in Nigeria has all loopholes to encourage divergent

state policies on language practice in the country. He asserts further that a coordinated language policy is functional and economical especially for developing nation with multi-state structure.

At this point, we shall turn attention to pedagogic challenges. Such challenges arise from a number of factors.

Teacher quality refers to the competence of the teacher, his efficiency and effectiveness.

In a few cases, teachers whose specialty is not English neglect professional ethics and arrogate the responsibility of English language teaching to themselves and claim the expertise which they do not have.

This category of English language teachers may not be able to appreciate the integrated nature of language skills and may tie the scope of language teaching to self-made guides and revision notes culled from past examination question papers or the syllable of the examinations their students are preparing for. Consequently, English language teaching becomes a matter of just passing examinations rather than an activity meant to promote the acquisition of language skills that will promote functional literacy, (Otagburuagu, 2002). There is no doubt that such an approach to English language teaching will erode learner creativity in the use of the language and stifle initiative.

The depth or quality of teacher preparation is yet another pedagogical constraint. Teacher preparation for English language instruction in most colleges and Universities is limited to a few hours of instruction on learning theories and methods. The programmes for English language teacher-trainees, often lack adequate linguistic content that will expose them to the structural features of English. The saying that nobody can give what he or she does not have is true



here. Training programme therefore should provide the trainees the linguistic competence they require to be able to impart such competence to the learners.

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The teaching should start adequate teaching coupled with other motivational materials will, no doubt, help to enhance and reinforce pupils' understanding.

There are also political and environmental constraints. For example, the instability which has characterized our national life for several years and the constant incursions of the military on governance make it difficult for literacy or education programmes to be meaningfully implemented. In addition, the value system which makes money "everything" in the society has proved a major challenge in our national literacy drive since the more literate people become so it would appear the closer they tend to get to the poverty line because they are not paid what the Nigerian Labour Congress described as a "living wage" in the face of galloping inflation.

## **Introduction**

The concept of language has been variously described. Ogunsiji (2002) sees it as a system of conventional, arbitrary, symbols by which members of a community communicate with one another. While Wilson (1972) sees language as an artificial and consciously organized method of control by the use of symbols or conventions, which involves the notion of meaning. Research has proved that no community has been able to exist without a language because language is actually indispensable in the life of man.