

THE USE OF ENGLISH IN THE MARKETPLACE: THEORITICAL ISSUES IN COMMUNICATION STYLES AND COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION

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Abstract

This paper is an exposition on the use of English in informal settings like the market square. A market is identified as an institution, system, infrastructure, social relation or procedure in which the act of exchange of goods or services are carried out. The market serves as a platform for business transactions between people of diverse social cultural and political economic backgrounds. Sellers and buyers in the marketplace use language to communicate. The focus of this paper is on the three varieties of English being used in the market place in Nigeria which is patterned along the variety of the people that are involved in selling and buying. The paper is in four parts which include, introduction, literature review, theoretical discourse, analysis and conclusion. Primary and secondary data were collected and analysed in themes. This paper argued that the multilingual nature of language users in Nigeria's markets is responsible for the use of three types of English and that communication styles are influenced by the level of education of language users in the market.

Keywords: communication styles, multilingualism, standard English, pidgin, broken English

Introduction

Language is a medium of communication through which message is passed from one individual to the other. There is the verbal and nonverbal communication. Human beings use verbal communication mostly when interacting to pass across a message. There are quite a number of languages being spoken around the world. English language is prominently the language being used for communication in Nigeria although the language is not indigenous to Nigeria but introduced as a contact language to the country by colonial powers. It is used for instruction in schools, for commercial activities and deliberation formulation and implementation of policies during the period of colonization. The trend in the use of English language as an official language continued after Nigeria's independence in 1960.

English language is a second language to Nigerians. Many speakers are fond of code switching and code mixing. They are involved in these speech acts either due to low capacity in their command of the language or in an attempt when making private conversation (in the public space) to prevent others listening in especially where there could be a third-party listening to the conversation. English is used in both formal and informal settings in Nigeria. The market place is one of these informal settings where varieties of English language are used in the process of business transactions or when exchanging pleasantries.

Research objectives

- a. To identify the group of people using English Language for interaction in the market.
- b. To find out the communication styles used most in the market
- c. To assess the variety of English used in transacting business in the market

Research questions

- a. Who are the identifiable groups using English Language for interaction in the market?
- b. What are the communication styles used by English language users in the market?
- c. What are the varieties of English used in transacting business in the market?

Literature Review And Theoretical Discourse

After independence the English language has been used as language of instruction in schools,, legislation, for public policy formulation, business, commercial transactions, dissemination of information through a media, preaching and religious worships as well as for interaction within the family. The fact that English language is a second language to Nigeria, many speakers are fond of code switching and the code mixing because of level of competence or capacity in command of the language or localisation of the language to create privacy in public where there is a third-party listening to the conversation of a particular group of people involved in a conversation (Rotimi, 2009)

A market place is an informal setting where varieties of English are used for communication between sellers and buyers. A market is identified as an institution, system, infrastructure, social relation or procedure in which artists exchange goods or services. Sellers and buyers interact by offering goods or

services in exchange for other goods and services or cash (physical or electronic transfer to account of seller by the buyer). The market serves as a platform for business transaction between people of diverse social cultural and political economic backgrounds. Sellers and buyers in the marketplace use language to communicate (Sikiru and Olufolake, 2015)

A number of works have been carried out on the use of English in informal settings. (Chiluwa, 2010:49), carried out a study on the "Features and Manifestation of Nigerian English in Computer Mediated Communication". The researchers argued that there are varieties of English usage in computer-mediated communication as regional level and that English language is a "cultural medium for expressing language habits and socio-cultural practice". The writer argued further that pidgin English is the most prominent variety being used in the course of transactions in informal settings. Code switching between English language and the first language of speakers is very prominent in conversations. This phenomenon was noticed among younger users in addition Nigeria a grandma and lexical borrowing from languages of the environment are usually used by the elderly. Most because we are found of expressing themselves in concepts that are cloned from their local languages.

Ifeanyi (2016:14) posited that multilingual settings facilitate free interaction between sellers and buyers in the market place. The writer argued further that,

The understanding of many languages by a seller or buyer places such an individual above whoever is a monolingual. In addition, the ability of a buyer to speak more than one language makes it easy for him to transact business and possibly curry the favour and confidence of the seller. Also, a seller's ability to speak more than one language will enable him or her to attract more customers and sell more. This bring us to the concept of code mixing, code switching using Nigerian pidgin Standard English and Broken English.

The submission of Ifeanyi shows that speakers of the Nigerian language are in multilingual societies that influenced their use of English in either formal or informal settings regarding the use of language in commercial transaction. The writer argued further that

Traders code switching and code mixing in order to gain customers attention and to satisfy a particular interest. It can be conscious where is deliberate

choice of language is not made but various elements of the environment that allowed to dictate the language used also when an individual is used to switching from one language to another without much thought or deliberation this means that the individual is fluent in both languages (Ifeanyi, 2016:16).

Sellers and buyers usually engage in the process of the commercial or business transaction in the marketplace using different communication styles consciously or unconsciously. In the process of transactions buyers would want to protect their interest in order not to be shortchanged so also the seller. Emotion could set in at times thereby creating unconscious psychological disposition in the process of haggling. This forms the focus of discussion in the next section.

Strands of communication styles

There are different strands of communication styles. (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller and Keitner (1993) in Yahaya (2008), The first strand discussed in this paper, identified four styles of communication. The styles include are clear and direct, clear and indirect, masked and direct and masked and indirect communication styles. The first one is clear and direct communication style which involves exchange of verbal message in very plain and straight expression language. There is no twist or metaphorical meaning attached to the expression. For instance, a teacher commands a student to walk out of the class. The second one is clear and indirect communication style which is all about sending a verbal message in a plain language but not directed at the receiver. But the implied meaning of the message is actually directed at the receiver. For instance, if a teacher tells a student who came late to the class that “those who come to school late should walk out of the class as soon as they meet a teacher in the class”. The third one is masked and direct communication style which has to do with a message directed at the receiver but it is wrapped in its content away from the attention of the receiver. An example of this is a teacher when a teacher tells a lazy student that “Student some of you do not study hard as they ought to”. The last one is masked and indirect communication style which involves sending message to a receiver without being clear or directed at the receiver. For instance, the crop of students in our schools are unserious lot. (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller and Keitner (1993) in Yahaya (2008). This styles are ordinary and to general in their exposition.

Another category of communication style or passive aggressive passive-aggressive and assertive communication style. These styles are deeply rooted in the psychological disposition of the language users (UK Violence intervention and Prevention Center, ND). In line with the psycho linguistic model of communication style explained above. Another categorisation identified are submissive and manipulative language style to assertive aggressive and assertive aggressive styles mentioned above.

Aggressive communication style – Involves the following attributes, a poor listener, close minded, does not accept other people's views tries to monopolize and interrupt others, during conversation. Other attributes the person portrays are the know it all attitude; being bossy, does not admit mistakes committed by him or her. Passive communication style on the other hand as communicator categorised as people who are indecisive, not in control of situations, easily lose self-esteem and always motivated from without. Assertive communication style is associated with communicators who have a sense of has self-confidence, who develop self-esteem and are self-motivated. They communicate their feelings freely, take prompt action, are very consistent, they respect the rights of others and they are just fair and firm (Sherman, 1999 in Bocar, 2018) Bocar (2018:3), asserts that that “good communication underpinned long-term successful relationship. Verbal communication is an imperative tool for people to get to know each other. To feel a connection of friendship or intimacy through communication is highly enjoyable in order to work out problems and misunderstanding”.

The Princeton University seminar paper on how to choose communication style explains more on the three attributes highlighted above and then had two other styles to them making five attributes. Those associated with passive communication styles a found of ignoring their own personal fundamental rights, they usually deliberately refuse to express their needs and feeling, they make effort not to differ from others in order to avoid conflicts, resentment or misunderstanding. The merit of this communication style is that it is likely to serve as communication option for the purpose of safety in an escalated violence prone situation. Their body language is depicted in the way they do not want eye contact while in a conversation. They usually look down and accept whatever decision is taken on their behalf. In case of aggressive communication style these set of communicators are usually hostile, defensive when in confrontation. They express their ideas, needs, feeling at the expense of others ignore other people's

rights. The merit of this communication style is that communicator may be willing to help others and take prompt action. Their body language portrays them as individuals who like to finger point finger, roll their eyes and crosses arms while in a conversation.

People associated with passive-aggressive communication style appear passive in appearance, but act out of anger in in a very subtle manner, their consideration for needs, feelings and right of others is minimal. They use indirect communication and sarcasm to communicate or even avoid conversation in some instance. They could (in some instances) sabotages efforts of other and even spread rumour. On the other hand, communicators in assertive category could often be misinterpreted as aggressive. The aggressive communicator relates using gestures, eye contact and keep straight posture while standing or sitting.

Viller (2018: 6) explains that

Although a passive aggressive style can border on manipulative, the two standards differ in that someone using a manipulative style will actively do things in a planned and unscrupulous way to make sure their needs gets met. Maybe they selectively withhold information from one party that they provide to another one because they can anticipate the conflicts that will cause and how it will result in things going the way they wanted them to go. it is a controlling style in which the manipulator places themselves above everyone else like a puppet master pulling the strings that make all the puppets move according to their master plan.

This last categorisation will be used to explain the most prominent language style being used in the marketplace along with the variety of English in usage in the same setting.

Varieties of English in Nigeria

The marketplace is not a very formal setting as such, communication in this setting is very informal. People of diverse linguistic backgrounds interact for the purpose of transaction thus varieties of English are used. Those who are educated in the western education usually have the capacity to speak Standard English, others speak Broken English while there are those speak Pidgin English.

Ifeanyi (2016:18) discussed the features associated with Standard English

“Standard is associated with the language of the learned profession such as the press media and other institutes and employed when we want to express ourselves beyond local or immediate community”. This writer opined that Standard English also differ in accordance in some ways. The American English has different standard from British English or Queens or Oxford English. Again the writer argued that Nigeria has no pure Standard English. It rather has popular Nigerian English. This means the Nigeria user uses a mixture of popular and standard forms.

Broken English is not the same as pidgin English. It is the English spoken by those who have no deep formal education who are forced to communicate in English in order to interact or transact business in informal setting. Pidgin English is a contact language that evolved through interactions with colonial administration and later through Nigerians who went through formal education. It has vocabulary that is restricted and grammar that is rudimental. It is a prominent feature in multilingual societies. Pidgin English is a variety of English spoken not only in Nigeria but also in most countries that were colonized by the British Empire. It is a “marginal language used among Nigerians to facilitate communication needs in certain interaction context’ (Balogun, 2013:91). English language emerged as pidgin as a result of the need for communication between people of different linguistic background who want to use a common language to communicate. Rockford (1998) in (Balogun, 2013:91) posit that “A pidgin usually combines elements of the native language of its users and its typically simpler than those native languages in so far it has fewer words, less morphology, and a more restricted range of phonological and syntactic options”.

From the foregoing discussion, there are three varieties of English spoken in Nigeria. The standard or popular English is an official language spoken by professionals, government officials and in schools as medium of instruction. But the other two varieties are spoken in informal settings like the market, home and leisure and entertainment places. The usage of these three varieties are discussed along with the communication styles associated with them in the course of transactions in the market place in a section of this paper.

In the next section the three varieties of English being used in the market place in Nigeria which are patterned along the class of the people that are involved in selling and buying are discussed.

Language, Communication Styles and Class Of Users

This segment employed the submissive, manipulative, assertive, aggressive and assertive-aggressive styles to discuss the use of three prominent varieties of English language used in Nigeria identified with social groups. The command or lack of it in the usage of English language is a symbol of social identity in contemporary Nigeria. Taiwo (2009:7), argues that the Nigerian society could be categorized

into social groups based on profession, wealth, education, political status and so forth...proficiency levels in English can be speculated for members of different professional groups like lawyers, lecturers, doctors, accountants, and so forth. There are schools and clubs for the elites and proficiency in English is one of the symbols of such groups.

The educated elites who go to the market to transact business normally speak the standard Nigerian English if they come in contact with those who share the same background with through familiarity and frequent interaction. They prefer to buy items that they need from those they feel at home with due to their perception of solidarity in their use of language. The communication style that is usually employed between this class of language users is the assertive style. They are assert themselves in the course of transactions. The respect that this group of sellers and buyers have for one another makes their language use memorable. However, the educated elites who like to speak Standard English in the market during transact usually switch to Pidgin or Broken English when they haggle on price of commodities they intend to purchase with those who do not have formal education or those who have little formal education. The elite usually respond to the manipulative communication style of sellers in the market by displaying assertive style of communication.

The group of buyers and sellers who use Broken English usually try to employ manipulative communication style and in some instance use aggressive or passive aggressive communication style due to their inability to express themselves as they ought to do. These group of sellers and buyers usually fall out when they experience strainers relationship in the course of interaction. However, some of them revert to the use of passive communication style whenever their attitude is rebuked by the other party (buyer or seller).

The group of buyers and sellers who use Pidgin English usually have memorable experience like that of those who speak standard English. However due to code

switching and code mixing they have problem interpreting some messages in the process of language usage for business transaction. The communication styles used by this group of language users are in between assertive and manipulative styles. They usually feel free expressing themselves but could be manipulative when trying to take advantage over one another in the process of transaction. In other instances, those who use this style usually revert to passive communication styles in the event of tension between them in the course of transactions.

Conclusion

The standard of education of language users in the markets place influences their communication style in the market place. Those who speak Standard English to transact in the market places use more of assertive communication styles, while those who use Pidgin or Broken English use aggressive and manipulative communication styles respectively. The multilingual nature of Nigeria is also responsible for the use of varieties of English in the market place. People have the command of different languages as well as at least two varieties of English. As such, they switch to the English that is convenient for them in the course of carrying out transactions in the market place. Long-term successful relationship between buyers and sellers in market place is a product of good assertive communication style. Both parties usually speak their mind and express their feeling without hurting one another. Through assertive communication style, problems and misunderstandings between buyers and sellers in the market place usually resolved.

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