

The English Language of the Nigeria Police

Udo Victoria Chinwe

General Studies Unit, Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Abstract

In the present day Nigeria, the quality of the English language spoken by Nigerians, is perceived to have been deteriorating and needs urgent attention. The proliferation of books and articles in the recent years can be seen as the native outcrop of its received attention and recognition as a matter of discourse. Evidently, every profession, occupation or trade has its own variety of language for effective communication. In view of this, the Nigeria police force a law enforcement agency under the Federal Republic of Nigeria adopts the English Language as its official language, the degree of their proficiency is dependent on the level of education of each police officer. This work tries to evaluate their use of the English language; how effectively it is been used in the light if the analysis conclusion were made on the English language usage of the Nigerian Police Force. Also this community would be looked at as a speech community because it has its own language apart from the English Language which is intelligible to its members.

Keywords: English Language, Nigeria, Police and Occupation.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings use language as a means of communication, and communication becomes meaningful and effective especially when it comes from the same speech community. In fact, language is very significant because it is a tool for identifying people, their origin, culture or even social status.

Thompson (2008) defines language as a system of communication using sounds or symbols that enables us to express our feelings, thoughts, ideas and experiences". Language is a method of human communication that is either spoken or written. It is the system of communication used by a particular community or country. As a medium of communication, language does not exist in a vacuum, but operates in a context of situation. These contexts determine the variation of language.

Language is very crucial for human survival, because it is the most important and most effective instrument for communication. It is the bond that holds societies together. Consequently, a society must afford shared cognitive experience and orientation; hence Nwakobi (2012:13) emphasizes the need for a society to develop a corpus of cognitive orientation which will provide meaningfulness to social situation as well as a sense of stability derived from identity of experiences. On the other hand, for motivation to be sustained, in individual and group activity a society must provide a means of communication for its members. One of the essential elements of living in a society or in a community with others is the means of communication and this can be achieved through language. One can invariably say that language is the principal, means of communication. The primacy of language cuts across every sphere of life: law, politics, technology, law enforcement, science, religion as well as other interpersonal spheres. For the Nigeria Police Force to carry out their duties, they use language just as every other establishment does. They use language in the enforcement of law and order, prevention and detection of crime, protection of life and property and other numerous activities. This work is a linguistic inquiry into the language of the Nigerian Police Force, specifically, the Nigeria Police Force, Onitsha, Anambra state. This selected group is just like every other Police Force in Nigeria. What is obtainable amongst them is also obtainable in the whole of the Nigeria Police Force. Because of the multilingual nature of the country members of the Police Force are drawn from different ethnic groups and all these people use the English language as their official language as their official language for mutual intelligibility.

This work will discuss

- The concept of language and communication
- The English Language in Nigeria and also its use in the Nigeria police Force, Onitsha.
- The Nigeria Police Force as a speech community.

❖ LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

We speak and use language but seldom do we pause to think about language. According to Naldman and Brooks, as quoted in Ikendu (2009:26), language is "a learned systematic symbolic vocal behaviour, which is culturally acquired as an exclusive mark of man, by means of which is social group co-operates". Language permeates all parts of society and does more than simply describes reality. Ifensor (1996:32) defines language as a symbol by means of which people within a social group interact. Language provides society with a means of socializing its members and a mechanism for role taking.

Meed in Morish (2007:89) stresses the importance of language in the understanding and taking the role of others. In the development of the consciousness or those around us. Mead postulates that:

“Language in its significance sense is that vocal gestured which tends to arouse
In the individual, the attitude which it arouses in others and it is this perfecting
of self by gesture which mediates the social activities that gives rise to the
Possession of taking the roles of others”.

Languages is used in all human spheres of life, politics, government, commerce, mass media and education. The functions of language are inexhaustible. It helps to preserve the culture and history of a community. it is the vehicle used for impacting knowledge and information. It enables one to conduct oneself socially and even influence the behaviour of people.

Language is a means of communication. Language and communication are interdependent. One cannot be divorced from the other. Communication is a process of interaction between persons, groups or states. Communication relies so much on language for effectiveness and language is the common tool with which human beings communicate in both formal and informal situation. Language signifies a human system of communication used in speech and writing involving vocabulary and sentence structure.

To this end, the Nigeria Police Force uses language as every other field does in the performance of their variety of activities which includes prevention and detection of crimes, parades and drills and numerous other activities. The Nigerian Police Force uses the English language which is the nations official language. The question now is : To what extent do they use this language effectively? Are they competent in the use of this language? These questions will be discussed elaborately in the next sub heading.

❖ **THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA: ITS USE IN THE NIGERIA POLICE FORCE, ONITSHA**

The English language is Nigeria’s official language and serves as the second language to most of its Nigerian users. As a second language, its acquisition makes its Nigerian users either bilingual or multi lingual. As the official language, the English Language has come to be seen as probably the most important language because it is the language of government, business, commerce, banking, mass media and most of inter-ethnic communication.

In all these, the major function of this language is personal or social, directive, referential and imaginative and these functions are performed in varying degrees by the use of the language in Nigeria. In the Nigeria settintiong, the competence of its users depends solely on their level of education. As a result of this, there are many levels of English Language in Nigeria. According to Jowith (1991:28) “there is a correlation between level of proficiency in the English Language.

Also, apart from the level of educational attainment the mother tongue is another factor that interferes or influences competency in the use of the English language. It is assumed that anybody that has at least a senior school certificate should certificate should speak the English Language fluently. In the Nigerian Police Force, (Onitsha) most officers have their posts-primary school education. Only a handful of them are graduates. Their qualification not withstanding they still find it very difficult to speak the English language fluently.

Their competence in English language is quite not encouraging. Most of them are greatly affected by mother tongue interference. They tend to substitute one phoneme with another as a result of the absence of the phonemes in their indigenous languages. Some vowels and consonants occur in the English language but are not in their indigenous languages and as such what is the replacement of one sound for another.

Furthermore, in the articulation of some English words, they tend to omit certain phonemes. This is also as a result of mother tongue interference. Most police officers from Edo and Yoruba, omit the glottal fricative /h/ when they occur at the initial positions. Thus, the pronounce the following words as follows.

- Helicopter is pronounced/ elikpɪtə/ (e)/
- Happy is pronounced /æpi/ instead of /hæpi/
- Heat is pronounced / T:t instead of /hi:t/

Not all errors come from mother tongue interference. Most of them occur also as a result of low level of education, lack of interest in acquiring the correct skill and the environment they operate in.

THE NIGERIAN POLICE FORCE AS A SPEECH COMMUNITY

According to Yule (2008:23) A speech community is a group of people who share a set of norms and expectation regarding the use of language. Speech community is a group of people sharing characteristic patterns of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

Speech community may consist of small group, bound together by face to face interaction like the Nigeria Police Force (Onitsha). Social communication within a speech community may be seen in terms of functionally related roles which are allotted to individuals within a community. viewed from this point, the Nigeria Police Force, (Onitsha) makes up a speech community with the use of police jargons. They use jargons in their day to day activities. These jargons form an important part of their communication matrix. This is a language which is intelligible to all of them.

These jargons are used by these police officers to perform their day-to-day activities and through its use; they can be referred to as a speech community because it is simply intelligible to all the members of the community. Here are some of these jargons.

Olokpa	Policeman
Damkadede	Sir (Master)
Damsada	Police Newspaper
Shun	Standing at an attention
Bade/P'rade	a group of police officers
Reading	to set to fire
Retire	to move backwards

CONCLUSION

The Nigeria Police Force (Onitsha) is a multi lingual community, with officers drawn from different ethnic groups and languages. This not with standing, they use the English Language as their official language. Their competence in the use of this language is influenced by factors like mother tongue interference, low level of education, lack of interest in acquiring proficiency in the language. The Nigerian Police Force, (Onitsha) is a speech community. this is as a result of the fact that they have a language in this community which is intelligible to all the members of this community. This need arises because the English Language is not intelligible to all the members of this community. Also in addition to the jargon, they also use various sign and drum languages which they use to convey information and messages which only the members of the group can understand.

It is recommended that a language school should be established in the Police college. Also they should be exposed to in – service training in order to help them to be proficient in the use of English language. They serve the public and because of the multi-lingual nature of the country, the incompetence in the use of the language of communication constitutes a problem to the citizens of this country.

Atilwhobbel (1991:10) states that “ Police should be versed with the language of communication which is the English language. He postulates that the mastery of this language is very important because their usage of the language affects report writing and the giving of evidence. But above all, it affects their relationship with the masses”.

Finally, the government should take strict measures to uplift the standard of the force by employing only graduates.

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