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## Students' Attitude to the Language of Wider Communication in a Multilingual Speech Community

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### **Abstract:**

*Attitude, as part of sociological variables that influence performance of man in every field of activities, really plays a major role when it comes to learning a second language for literacy proficiency. On a typical note, non-native language is perceived to be ridiculous, inferior and gibberish. On the other consideration, a language of utility though not aboriginal remains lofty, cherished, and feverishly admired. This paper investigates the attitude of Nigerians to English language taking into consideration the status of the language and the roles it plays in Nigeria linguistic territory. Two hundred and forty students were selected from the population of 480306 senior secondary school students in Ekiti State. Multi-stage and purposive random sampling techniques were used in the process of the data collection. Achievement test and questionnaire were used to collect data. The descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentage, mean and inferential statistics of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were used to analyze the data collected for the study. Consequently upon the data analyzed, it was discovered that students exposed to different strategies (different methods of teaching) differed significantly in their attitude to learning the second language that serves as the language of the wider communication. Against the normal expectation, students in the control group had a better positive attitude than the students under the activities based methods. This suggests that external motivations in favour of English language are already in place which will supply the needed interest to learn the language. Literacy in the use of English language opens the door of unlimited opportunities in the land.*

**Keywords:** Language, attitude, multilingual, communication, method utility

### **1. Introduction**

Multilingualism generates acute language conflict, the language users in a multilingual society contend with myriad of language problems which reflect in the major sectors of their social system. Social system like education, politics, economy, sports, tourism etc. receive clogs in the wheel of progress because of the language diversities. Linguistic minority group (LMG) in a multilingual society constantly put up an attitude of resentment to the major languages that strive to edge out the minor ones into complete extinction. The minority seeks for liberation, they clamour for recognition. The attitude generates conflicts in general languages policy of a people who has a united political identification. There is a kind of "linguistic paranoia" among the language tribal groups which puts a limit to the level of literacy. This negative development haunts every progressive move for free, fair and a well-fortified society.

In Nigeria situation, each language clan struggles to preserve the cultural essence of its language. No one out of the multitude of local languages (more than 600) is ready to subsume under any other indigenous language not even under the so called three major languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba). This situation creates a good express road for a foreign language of a neutral stand to dominate the channel of communication in the land. In the course of colonization, English language became the acceptable language model of operations. It dictates the prospect and progress of any citizen in the political enclave. It is no more foreign because it is a tool that guarantees free transition in all fields of human activities: education, journalism, politics, religion, law, medicine, tourism, commerce, and a host of others. It has penetrated into the domestic affairs of the people. Most new couples adopt the language in their homes because English is the language of their desires for their children.

The national policy on education (2004) section 15 sub-section 4 states that in the early years of the child's education, the language of the environment must be used for instructions and that English language is to be handled as a subject. But through common observations, the developments in the schools have not followed this trend. Subjects like Mathematics, Elementary Science and other vital school subjects are not being taught in the language of the environment. Many local languages are seriously endangered as the

language of the wider communication (LWC) is waxing stronger and stronger. How these local languages can survive the trend will be another focus in another paper.

Language attitude can have a profound effect on the language users' ability to learn a second language: a second language that is used as a language of wider communication (LWC) and language of unity (LU) in a multi-lingual environment (Finegan, 2004). A sufficient meaningful use of a second language in different domains in learner's environment makes learning of it easy, encouraging, exciting and very close to the process of acquiring the first language (adult learners inclusive in this process). Where multitude of local languages exist like Nigeria, Williams (1991) believes that competitions surface as these languages come in contact with one another. Therefore, the constant source of language conflicts remains the relationship of the major to the non-major (Bamgbose, 1993). In this regard, the non-native language of the international status is embraced by all.

Igboanusi and Ohia's (2001) research into the attitude of linguistic minority groups in the areas of language preference, language most hated, language most commonly used, state official language and possible future lingua franca. The result reveals positive attitude towards the local and English languages and resentment towards the three major languages - Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo.

The following tables state the revelations clearly as carried out by Igboanusi and Ohia at the University of Ibadan in the South - Western part of Nigeria:

Most preferred language	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local language	418	41.8
Yoruba	27	2.7
Hausa	35	3.5
Igbo	24	2.4
English	496	49.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100%

Table 1: Analysis showing the most preferred language

Most Hated language	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local language	105	10.5
Yoruba	205	20.5
Hausa	394	39.4
Igbo	267	26.7
English	29	2.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100%

Table 2: Analysis showing the most hated language

Most commonly used language in the home	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local language	193	1.93
Yoruba	53	5.3
Hausa	61	6.1
Igbo	36	3.6
English	657	65.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100%

Table 3: Analysis showing the most commonly used language in the home

Future lingua franca preference	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Local language	193	1.93
Yoruba	53	5.3
Hausa	61	6.1
Igbo	36	3.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	1000	100%

Table 4: Analysis showing the future lingua franca preference

According to the above revelations, English language is favoured most. In his assessment, Oyetunde (2001) discovers that English dominates the high domains of language use in Nigeria. Its prominent roles and prestige can never be denied. It is preferred by the majority in Nigeria because of its neutrality. It is the language of education, mass communication, politics, modern religion, medicines, science and technology. Proficiency in it changes the speaker's status and generates better and brighter opportunity in the land. An average Nigerian is proud and feels highly elated at the mature manipulations of the tools of the language. Parents watch

feverishly at their nursery school children expressing themselves in English language. They (parents) struggle to see their children enrolled into private schools because of such private schools linguistic cultures. The language of instruction in these elitist schools is English against the language policy on Education, which states that the language of the environment should be used in the early years of the child in primary school.

It is quite an embarrassing development that those who formulated this policy do not send their children to the public schools where the language of the immediate environment is commonly used albeit in polluted and perverted forms. Even teachers who teach in these public schools send their children, not just to any private schools but special ones; some of the leaders in the land have their children educated abroad. It is like Sedar Senghor of Senegal who led the Negritude movement. Negritude movement championed the cause of the black race especially the Africans. Everything of the black is good. His weather is the best, his culture unparalleled. It is the slogan of "I am black and proud" but the water Senghor drank came from France. He divorced his African wife to marry a white woman. What hypocrisy! If English language is all that valued because of its utilities in our linguistic environment, the most vital skills of it in listening, speaking, reading and writing must be sincerely taught in all our schools in order to promote meaningful literacy level.

Akindele and Adegbite (2005) say that English language is cherished in Nigerian language community because it is the Language of Wider Communication (LWC). It has penetrated into all the domain of language use in Nigeria. Couples even at the time of courtship make vow and solid agreement that the domestic language of their new homes will be English because of their children. Through this in many homes, English has become the domestic language. At the other domains like formal education, modern mass communication, commerce and industry, modern religion, modern orthodox medicine, formal social organization and politics, the only language in Nigeria that helps to generate mutual and smooth operation is English. A local language cannot perform the task of networking ideas in multi-lingual society. This is the major reason why individuals in multi-lingual environment passionately desire the knowledge of the language of wider communication.

There will be quite a kind of devastating effect as foreseen by Adeyinka (2001) on a language that is:

1. restricted in use to a few native speakers.
2. a mere vernacular not yet codified.
3. associated only with rurality.
4. irrelevant to the social, economic and political needs of the people.

Local languages are endangered because of the negative attitude of the non-natives who share the same political and economic bearing within a multi-lingual society. Mazrui (1998) believes that the internal power politics of ethnic plurality has not always made it easy for official status of any indigenous language. In many instances there has been concern that the choice of one ethnic language over the other may generate fear of ethnic dominance and propel the countries toward political instability. Efuosibina (2000) discovers that "ethno-linguistic rivalries, misgivings and suspicions make it difficult for these (local) languages to effectively function as national language". From all the facts supplied so far, one can summarize therefore that the common prevailing language attitude in a multi-lingual language territory is 'my local language and the language of wider communication', 'I love my language; your own language is ridiculous to me'.

The derogatory assessment of one language clan by the other characterized the linguistic interactions in the ethno linguistic enclaves. Nigeria cannot have less positive attitude towards English language because of its utility in the society. The reflection of this is glaring from the application to study foreign and Nigerian languages in the Nigerian universities by Nigerian students (see table 5).

Year	European Languages				Nigerian Languages	
	English	French	German	Russian	Igbo	Yoruba
1987	302	23	36	21	2	19
1988	519	14	33	19	7	24
1989	370	12	14	37	7	31
1990	384	20	44	17	8	29
1991	344	34	211	49	8	29
<b>Total</b>	1919	103	368	143	32	132

Table 5: Showing the JAMB computer printout from the admission office, University of Ibadan gives the real picture

The result in table 5 revealed the foreign languages especially English language records high percentage because of the utility within and outside the country. A language that gives access to good jobs, that opens ways for good education and generates social security will be well favoured by the people than the ones that do not.

Language wears different identities. Crystal (1987) identifies about seven types: Physical, psychological, geographical, ethnic or national, social, constituents and stylistics or literature. These various kinds of identities give several variations to a language. The standard version with its use is controlled in the school system. A speaker is subjected to the right and acceptable model through test in various forms (mostly in the formal system) before a user can be admitted to the world of proficient users of the language of wider communication.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The problem of multilingualism is acute in Nigeria and this has created a stage for language melodrama in all the different parts of Nigerian linguistic communities. The super-ordinate power of  $L_1$  (first language of contact popularly describes as mother tongue) and the second language learning in the Nigerian community is prominent at very dynamic linguistic wave strength. The different language backgrounds with the innumerable dialects bring unwholesome linguistic coloration to the Nigerian language village. The negative effects of this on the usage of English language reduce the utility value and in most cases create a kind of linguistic barrier to good language integration. English language is needed by all because it is the language of utility. The experience therefore could be that of fascination or the experience of frustration as the users of it embrace the tool of the language.

## 3. Purpose of the Study

This paper has the focus on the attitude exhibited by the different users of English language in Nigeria. The explanation of this is done against the backdrop of multi-linguistic nature of Nigeria as a country and the role English language plays in the speech community. These attempts are made in order to improve the pedagogy of language so that learning English as a second language in Nigeria peculiar language situation will be made effective and more result oriented. If the English language is the only tool that unites the country together and link the people of the land with the progressive world of technology, medicine and tested political order, people's different attitude, experience and considerations of it must be well investigated. This will help to strengthen the cord of mutual intelligibility within and outside the user's language coverage.

## 4. Significance of the Study

This is a unit on the chain of pedagogical survey. A survey that strives to proffer solutions to the problems commonly experienced by the users of a second language which function as a language of wider communication in a multilingual society.

The study will help committed language teachers and concerned curriculum developers to consider those language traits and variables that affect learners in the process of "acquiring" the tool of the second language. Poor attitude towards the language that opens the door of knowledge to various aspects of human development may reduce the group of people concerned to shadow of their true nature and prevent full development of god-giving potentials. When the right attitude is developed, human world receives fast growth of development. In a multi-lingual society like Nigeria, each aboriginal language village is placed at the correct position: uninformed language conflict is avoided and a healthy atmosphere is created for the teaching and learning of the second language.

## 5. Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the attitude of students instructed with linguistic package using Lecture Method, Discussion Method, Audio-tape Mediated Discussion Method and the Control Group.

## 6. Methodology

The design of the research follows a type of quasi-experiment where three methods of teaching combined with linguistic package which constitute the basic input and the control group were used for the study. The three methods in the experimental group include: Audio-tape mediated Discussion Method, Discussion Method and Lecture Method. The treatment given in the course of the study was limited to the experimental groups. The control group did not receive any treatment.

The number of the target population stood at 48,306 while 240 students were used as the sample. In each group, sixty students were used for each experimental group and the same number of students was also used for the control group. All the samples used were selected from 175 senior secondary schools in Ekiti State of Nigeria through multi-stage and purposive random sampling techniques.

## 7. Research Instrument

Two different items were used as instruments for the work. The two items include achievement test in speech work and questionnaire on students' attitude to oral English. The test used in the work was designed by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). The National Teachers Institute (NTI) developed similar test to examine grade two teachers' competent and proficiency in the use of English language. This notwithstanding, the instruments were given to seasoned experts in Test and Measurement who ascertained the face and content validity of the instruments.

The reliability of the instruments was ensured through a test and re-test technique conducted within two weeks interval using Pearson Correlation Co-efficient to analyse the data. The result yielded a co-efficient of 0.70. This was considered significant at 0.05 level; therefore, the instrument was considered reliable.

In all the eight schools visited, the help of research assistance was secured in the process of administering the instruments. The needed orientation and training were given to them on how the assignment could be carried out. Scheme of work was given to each of them. They followed this to teach the entire subject in the experimental groups for five weeks. The assessment was personally carried out by the researcher in the sixth week through the use of the instruments to collect the relevant data.

Appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied on the data collected. The hypothesis generated was tested with the use of analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance.

## 8. Results and Discussion

Source	SS	DF	MS	F-cal	F-table
Covariate (pretest)	184.399	1	184.399	2.418	3.84
Groups	907.146	3	302.382	3.965	2.60
Error	17923.834	235	76.272		
Corrected Total	18946.933	239			
<b>Total</b>	<b>1288580.000</b>	<b>240</b>			

Table 6: ANCOVA showing student attitude to oral English in the different groups

From table 6, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was rejected ( $F= 3.963$   $p<0.05$ ). This implied that students exposed to different strategies differed significantly in their attitudes when it comes to learning the oral aspect of the language.

	Audio	Discussion	Lecture	Control	X
	1	2	3	4	
Audio-tape		*	*	*	71.32
Discussion			*	*	70.47
Lecture				*	74.42
Control					74.73

Table 7: Scheffe's post-hoc Analysis of Students' Attitude among the Groups

From table 7, the mean difference is significant at 0.05 level. Control Group (CG) recorded the best attitude towards the learning of English language (oral aspect) followed by Lecture Method (LM). Audio-tape mediated Discussion Method (AMDM) was next after Lecture Method while Discussion Method (DM) had the least mean score.

## 9. Conclusion and Recommendations

The method effect was significant as discovered from the students' attitude towards oral English. It was found out that students in the Lecture Group had a better attitude towards learning oral English but the interest of the students in the Control Group was positively higher than any of the students in the experimental groups. This runs against the normal expectation that students exposed to tested methods will develop better attitude towards the learning of oral English (or any aspect of the language as a school subject).

The above discovery may not be unconnected with the utility values of English in Nigeria as a political entity. The country contends with numerous local languages, each with different dialects. English language does not therefore serve as a window to the progressive world alone but also the only available linguistic tool for internal unity. English language has generated to itself a number of motivational values for the citizens: a citizen who desires to occupy an enviable position in the society, must compulsorily be proficient in the different uses of the language. Admission into schools, appointment and promotion are all determined by the users of the language competent literacy level. The already existing high external motivation level for the language has created the needed fertile ground that enhances the positive attitude towards the learning of the language by the people of Nigeria.

In as much as the citizens have no equal alternative communication apparatus and the desire to learn the language by all for breakthrough and brighter opportunity is positively high, learning opportunities should be generated while the learning environments are enriched to sustain the positive attitude. Language teaching must be technically structured. The pragmatic nature of language should be adequately considered in all the activities that constitute the language programme in our schools. Pedagogical paraphernalia for language academic work must be related to the need of the learners in the environment. Teachers and language instructors who can serve as models must be made available for the learners. Language is learned through imitation: imitation through repetition, repetition through recapitulation and recapitulation through reproduction.

Speech aspect must be primarily emphasized as various language skills are been taught in their right orders. Speaking skill is productive and natural. Reading cannot occur without the ability to speak the language. Writing skill comes last in the order of language learning and language acquisition. None of the skills could be brushed aside as each has its unique social value. This notwithstanding, the chronological occurrence of the skills has effect on the language pedagogy. On this note, speaking is make prominent: listen is done to enhance speech as speech also controls the rate of speakers' performance in other language skills.

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