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APPROACHES TO ORAL ENGLISH

AND

ORAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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An Evaluation of the Effective English Course Book as a Source for Learning Oral Skills in English as a Second Language

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Introduction

The learning of English as a second language in Nigeria dates back to 1842 with the arrival of the white missionaries. According to Omolewa (1975:104) the Education Ordinance and Codes (1882, 1896, 1916 and 1926) emphasized the act of *speaking* and writing English correctly, mandatory for all the users of the language.

Several studies have been carried out by scholars on the art of speaking English. The results of such studies show that the Nigerian speakers of English have problems in speaking English with appropriate fluency. What are the possible causes of these problems? There are several causes traceable to the textbooks as well as the interference of the mother tongues on the learning of English. Adetugbo (1987:64) observes that the many primary languages spoken in Nigeria influence the type of English spoken by most learners. In this study, an evaluation of the `Effective English' textbook is used to illustrate the problems arising from the use of texts as a major source for the teaching and learning of oral communication in English. Effective English textbook has been chosen because it is the recommended textbook for most secondary schools within the Federation, both in the Federal and State secondary schools.

Oral communication involves listening and speaking skills. For any textbook to be considered as an adequate source for learning the skills, it ought to provide copious materials to cover the skills. As an initial approach to the evaluation of the texts, the sounds of English are listed for explication. They can be divided into two main groups viz: the segmental comprising the vowels, diphthongs and the consonants. The second group consists of the supra-segmentals, namely: rhythm, stress, pitch and intonation.

The segmentals consist of twelve pure vowels or monophthongs, eight diphthongs and twenty-four consonant sounds.

VOWEL SOUNDS: /iː/ /ɪ/ /e/ /æ/ /aː/ /ɒ/ /ɔː/ /ʊ/ /uː/ /ʌ/ /ɜː/ and /ə/.

DIPHTHONGS: /eɪ/ /əʊ/ /aɪ/ /aʊ/ /ɔɪ/ /ɪə/ /eə/ /ʊə/

CONSONANTS: /p/ /b/ /t/ /d/ /k/ /g/ /t/ /d/ /f/ /v/ /θ/ /ð/ /s/ /z/ /ʃ/ /ʒ/ /ʒ/ /h/ /m/ /n/ /ŋ/ /l/ /r/ /j/ /w/.

Not all these sounds are found in the learner's L1, therefore a good presentation of the sounds in the textbook will eliminate some of the problems.

Report Parameters

The determining feature in this study is carried out under two phases. The first

phase will illustrate the segmental features while the second phase will show the supra-segmental features. The evaluation of both sections will make an observation on the amount of exposure of the raw data of the English Language to the students.

The yardstick for measurement in this paper is the comparison of the objectives of learning speech in *Effective English* textbook with the objectives of the National *Curriculum for Junior Secondary School*. The curriculum has as its main objective for spoken English - the 'systematic training towards the acquisition of speech skills.' This acquisition would enable the learner to speak and communicate effectively. The textbook per se has not stated categorically the main aim of the aspect of speech. In spite of this lacuna, it has been discovered that, the textbook deals with the basic aspects of spoken English though not systematically arranged. A look at Table I below shows the disparity between the *Effective English* textbook and the school curriculum in terms of the number of units.

TABLE 1

TEXTS	NO. OF UNITS ON ORAL ENGLISH			
	JSS 1	JSS 2	JSS 3	TOTAL
Effective English I	16	-	-	16
Effective English II	-	16	-	16
Effective English III	-	-	15	15
JSS Syllabus I	20	-	-	20
JSS Syllabus II	-	20	-	20
JSS Syllabus III	-	-	14	14

Table I clearly shows that there are basic items in the syllabus which are not taught through the textbook.

Findings

An analysis of JSS 1 textbook has revealed that the different areas of oral English are expected to be learnt. These areas include the segmental and some of the supra-segmental features at the early stages of learning. The problem is that some of these features are not identified and some of the symbols are not shown. An illustration can be shown in Unit I - section A. The aim of the textbook is to learn the vowel sound in 'ship'. The symbol for the vowel sound is not shown. This pattern does not augur well for the student who would like to study the sounds home.

Since section A starts with the /i/ short vowel sounds, I would expect section 'B' to introduce the long /i:/ vowel sound. The advantage in this process, is for the contrast in the pronunciation of the sounds to be shown. Secondly, it would make for easy recognition by the learner.

A close study of the textbook shows a level of uniquences in that some of the consonant sounds which are problematic are identified. For example: /ð/ and /θ/.

These two sounds are contrasted later in the unit though not immediately after the first sound /ə/. The immediate follow-up of the contrast would provide clear distinction of the two sounds.

There is the introduction of the stress pattern at the early stage of learning. An observation need to be made that the poems which form part of the speech work in the text must emphasize the sounds already taught. Furthermore, the sounds are not properly arranged, for instance the back and the front vowels are introduced in a non-cohesive manner. This pattern prevents the learners from knowing that the manner of articulation and production of the sounds are different hence the sounds are grouped differently.

It is commendable that the sounds have examples given on them but the number of words are not enough for the required exposure.

Similarly, *Effective English* Book 2, like Book I, has sixteen units divided into sections 'A' - 'F' comprising speech, reading, vocabulary, structure, listening, writing, etcetera.

This textbook with its different sections has its inadequacies. Such inadequacies include non-identification of sounds in some cases. For instance in Unit I - section A, the aim is to revise the vowel sounds in 'men' and 'main'. The symbols for these two words belong to the monophthong and diphthong respectively. The process of properly identifying some of the sounds in English is highly commended. These symbols are tested in the words given in the examples in words in isolation as well as in sentences. The main problem is that examples are two few for adequate exposure. The words in isolation are just six in number while there are two sentences. How would these expose the learners to the language for effective communication.

The last text in the series, Book 3, is made up of fifteen units. The textbook deals with speech work comprising the sounds namely the vowels, consonants, consonant clusters, stress among others.

This paper would like to note the major problem with the series. The problem lies in the non-identification of the symbols particularly for the teacher. Secondly, the practice exercises are not enough for constant drilling.

To show the contrast between the textbook series and the curriculum, a brief summary of the syllabus is given below. Unlike the textbook 1, the *National Curriculum* for JSS 1 has twenty units. The units are systematically arranged starting with the front vowels. Consequently, the vowels are taken in pairs. The examples are many and varied to give enough practice. Even the consonantal sounds are also given in pairs.

The advantage in pairing the sounds makes for comparison and it is easier fo the students to differentiate the symbols and the sounds. As observed by Nwosu an Amakiri (1989:10) the use of minimal pairs aids the learners to make clear distinc tions of the sounds. The curriculum inculcates the use of the technical terms as th sounds are differently illustrated with their nomenclature such as Fricatives, Affricates, etcetera. This pattern would enable the teacher to know the sounds by their technical terms.

The curriculum makes provision for the use of materials like word game, tape recorder and recorded passages.

JSS 2 curriculum, like that of JSS I, has twenty units. The schwa /ə/ sound starts this unit and it is shown in an unstressed position. With the introduction of the diphthongs, the sounds as already observed are taken in pairs for continuity and reinforcement in the learning of English. Furthermore, the study of the diphthongs

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gives a systematic movement in the learning process which involves starting from the known to the unknown.

The curriculum introduces the act of making casual introduction, formal introduction, among others. This particular aspect is missing in *Effective English* Book 2. The non-inclusion of this aspect in the textbook does not give the learners adequate exposure to the raw data of the English language in everyday practice.

Effective English Book 3 has fifteen units with unit 15 on examination. The National curriculum has sixteen units. The last unit in the curriculum recalls revision of the topics in years one and two. This particular revision of previous work is advantageous because for some of the learners, JSS 3 is the end of their formal education. Evidently, the revision reinforces what they had earlier learnt.

The spoken English in the curriculum for JSS 3 includes guided conversation using the falling and the rising intonation tunes in answering questions. There are examples given to show the people involved in the conversational process. Similarly, the consonantal features are also identified and always shown in pairs for easy identification and recognition.

Conclusions on Adequacy

In most cases, the textbook is usually a means to an end and some of the teachers without specialized knowledge depend solely on the text, therefore, the authors of textbooks need to apply all the required expertise in writing the text.

Tables 2 and 3 below show the differences in the illustration of the segmental and supra-segmental features of English.

TABLE 2

NO OF FEATURES PRESENTED

SEGMENTALS	EFFECTIVE ENGLISH			NATIONAL CURRICULUM		
	EE I	EE 2	EE 3	JSS 1	JSS 2	JSS 3
Vowels	9	¹0	10	11	9	-
Diphthongs	1	1	3	-	8	-
Triphthong	-	-		-	-	
Consonants	8	12	5	16	22	18
Consonant Clusters	3	2	3	-	-	-

Table 2 shows the agreement in content on the study of segmental features but the number of times in which they are presented differ. *Effective English* Book 111 does not make room for the revision of units in text books 1 and 2 while JSS 111 syllabus makes provision for that before the end of one period of study. On the other hand, the textbook has included the study of consonant clusters which is a problem for some of the learners. This inclusion gives credit to the text as a useful source of learning.

TABLE 3

FREQUENCY OF PRESENTATION

| SUPRA-SEGMENTALS | EFFECTIVE ENGLISH | | | NATIONAL CURRICULUM | | |
	EE 1	EE 2	EE 3	JSS 1	JSS 2	JSS 3
Stress: Primary	16	16	14	2	1	1
Secondary	-	-	-	-	-	-
Weak (or no stress)	-	-	-	-	-	-
International:						
Rising tune			Rhythm	-	1	1
Falling tune	16	16	14	2	1	1
Fall-Rise	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rise-Fall	-	-	-	-	-	-
Politeness	-	-	-	-	-	1
Public Speaking	-	-	-	-	-	1
Casual introduction	-	-	-	-	1	1
Formal introduction	-	-	-	-	1	1
Guided conversation	-	-	-	-		1

Based on Table 3, the textbook and the syllabus have included some of the supra-segmentals in their prescriptions. The problem with the two is that both fail to clearly differentiate between the primary and the secondary stress. Both stress words using first, second and third syllables without explaining what syllables are.

Another observation is that the syllabus illustrates the shifting stress pattern which the textbook does not identify. Other items like conversation, introduction using the correct tunes are illustrated in the syllabus but are not included in the textbook. The non-inclusion of these items may fail to expose the learners ad equately to the raw data of the English language. For those whose formal education terminate at the end of JSS III, they may not be equipped with skills to communicate effectively with others using the oral medium.

It has been observed that this textbook has partially exposed the learners to the raw data of the English language. There is partial exposure because not all the units have sentences for the learners to use in practicing everyday activities. As stated by the mentalist, adequate exposure in all forms will make it possible for the learners to know the language. Secondly, some of the examples are too few to make the required impact. As further observed by Adetugbo (1987:74) the learner of English tends to say the words based on the number of syllables. This observation is the effect of the mother tongue, as such the proper stress and intonation are not produced.

When the performance objectives of the textbook and the curriculum are compared, there is an agreement in terms of the objectives but the method of learning does not give the learners sufficient exposure. The textbook only makes use of listen and say with a few drills, while there is the need for word games, sentence production by students, use of dialogues, tape recorders and recorded speeches, short passages among others.

For the textbook to give adequate exposure, the authors need to be current in the developments in language theory and practice. Williams (1981:22) quoting Omojuwa (1976) has observed that this framework is either lacking or is inconsistent. This writer agrees with Williams because the areas of consistency in this textbook series are sections B, C and D which deal with stress pattern, poem reading and rhythm respectively.

There is the problem of inadequate exposure as provision is not made in the text for using teaching aids like tape - recorded passages which would expose the learners to the pronunciation patterns of native and non-native speakers of English. The use of teaching aids, more drill exercises in word and sentence contexts, word games, etcetera, would provide the learners with enough exposure to the raw data of the language. Once the learners are adequately exposed, the in-built mechanism 'LAD' would facilitate the learning of English. The exposure would help the learners to speak the type of English which would be intelligible to all speakers of English. It would also develop the oral communicative skills in the learners.

Recommendation

It is hoped that the following recommendations if applied would fill the missing areas in the text.

There is the need for the teachers copies to be written in which the different symbols for the different sounds are identified. The teachers copies coupled with the teachers role as models would effect the corrections in the spoken English of learners. Teachers of English should up-date their knowledge through attending seminars, conferences, and workshops. Such up-date would provide the teachers with the knowledge of how to prepare word-games and drills for the learners. Constant drill exercises would teach stress, rhythm and intonation at the same time.

Government should assist in providing schools with tape recorders and cassette reels. Furthermore, the government should subsidize the production of textbooks. The subsidy would make the textbook price affordable for all parents.

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