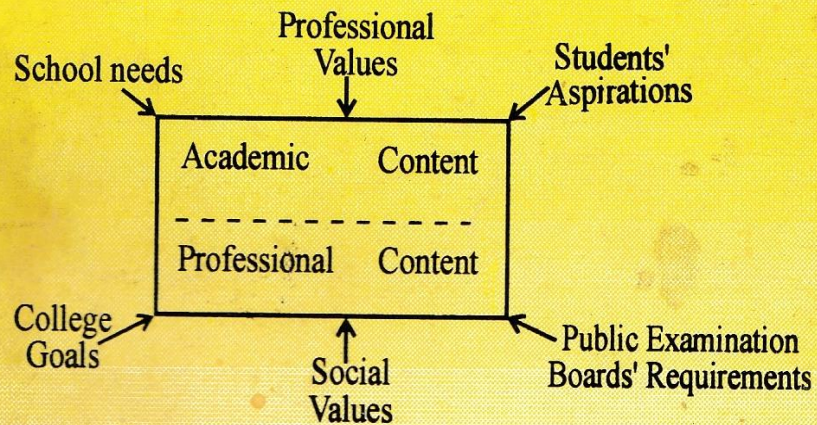


# CURRENT TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES



*MBONG A. UDOFOT - Editor*

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## CHAPTER TEN

### CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS AND THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

DAVID U. EKA

#### Introduction

##### Oral Competence

Efficiency in the use of a language may be determined through an assessment of oral or written performance. Of these two, there is an apparent general agreement that while oral performance is undoubtedly more important, an assessment of the degree of proficiency in speech is clearly more difficult than a determination of the nature of adequacy of writing.

For the following reasons however, we cannot, in this chapter, devote more than just a few lines to the importance of speech. First, the history of every natural language recognises a consistent pattern of growth from speech to writing. A child born into a community acquires the language of his environment by speaking it in the first instance and writing it (if necessary) later on. This is the basis of the concept of the "primacy of speech" and of the explication of language itself as a system of "vocal symbols" (Banjo, 1976:5).

Secondly, in a world such as ours, with numerous opportunities and freedom of intercourse, infinite occasions call for speech. This is understandable from the point of view of language itself: a dynamic system nurtured through association with other people. Only the formal and comparatively restricted occasions call for writing. However, we have no intention of suggesting the nonexistence of a link between the spoken and the written media of communication. Rather, our purpose is to demonstrate the predominance of the spoken over the written medium in every natural language. Given such a preminence of speech, there is the subtle suggestion that efficiency in speech performance is a very important determinant of success in communication generally.

##### Oral Competence in English

If we think about Chinese as one language, then English would come

as the second of the world's top ten languages. But if we see Chinese in its reality of being an amalgam of languages, then English would occupy the first position. In that sense and in view of its spread to virtually all parts of the world, English deserves its present position of being a world language. It would be evident then that oral competence in English would be some measure of guarantee of ability to participate in numerous world affairs.

Coupled with the above global importance is the fact of nativization of nonnative varieties of English and of the theory of linguistic tolerance. Put briefly, the concept of nativization recognises the reality that when a language moves from its original abode to another place, it must go through some kind of local colouring with the result that while it would not lose its identity altogether, it would acquire identifiable features in relation to where it is spoken. When English therefore moves from its original "home" in England to practically all parts of the world, it inescapably acquires features - a measure of its richness - that would link it to the particular place where it is spoken. It is to be understood that the greatest of the influences on the "visiting" language will be the language (or languages) spoken in the particular locality.

What we have sketched here is a reminder of the situation of English in Nigeria as in all other parts of the world in which English features as a second or foreign language. However, the situation in Nigeria seems to be of particular interest in the sense that English comes in to be spoken amidst an estimated 513 Nigerian languages and clusters (Bangbose, 1978:65). Given the general conception that a speaker's first language normally exercises considerable influence on the learning of a second, third or nth language, then the English language will have been so exposed to influences of Nigerian languages that one would hardly be right to think about a Nigerian variety of English since there would be bound to be very many varieties of Nigerian English, each depending on the ethnic background of the speaker.

There is also another dimension: Nigeria today can be said to be going through a period of reawakening of interest in the development of indigenous languages. The activities of the National Educational Research Council, Language Committees, Nigerian Universities, Publishers and individual linguists can be cited in support of this contention (Eka, 1988:30-40). Such a renewal of interest would, other things being equal, strengthen the tyrannical

position of Nigerian languages in relation to English, for it is a well known linguistic fact that first languages normally exert a tyrannical influence on second or foreign languages.

Apart from the natural desire to be a bona fide part of the English speaking world, most Nigerians know that efficiency in English guarantees numerous good things: employment, admission to higher studies, acceptance into many national circles and even promotion to positions of responsibility. So it is important for Nigerians to speak the English Language in a manner that satisfies at least the minimum requirements of national and international intelligibility and acceptability. In one study (Eka, 1985), it was revealed that educated Nigerian English speech assessed on a scale of five<sup>1</sup> is nationally and internationally intelligible and acceptable. It was also shown that the higher the level of competence (accounted for by the level of motivation and training) the less the influence of the first language of the speaker.

What these amount to is that oral competence in English can be achieved and has been demonstrated at the university level. As linguists and language specialists, we have a duty of ensuring even greater oral efficiency in English in Nigeria. Besides, the theory of linguistic tolerance, (Kachru, 1982:34), demonstrates that we cannot any longer depend on only one standard of English speech, for instance. More importantly, the theory dismisses as untenable the belief (in the past), of the superiority of one dialect of English over another. Performance as shown in different world Englishes is bound to differ from one region to another and such differences are to be understood in the softer light of greater awareness of the largely inevitable mutual influences.

#### **Oral Competence and the Senior Secondary School Situation in Nigeria**

The West African Examinations Council (WAEC) had stipulated that with effect from June 1988 an assessment of competence in oral English had become a compulsory part of the examination in English Language for final year Senior Secondary School (SSS) students. Hitherto, this aspect of English had been optional in the West African School Certificate (WASC) examination and its teaching had been either nonexistent or understandably haphazard. With this new trend, and given the facts of the immense importance of the

subject to SSS students in terms of employment or admission for further studies in the universities, it is important for language teachers to consider a few questions:

1. What variety of English shall we teach to this category of students?
2. What approach shall we adopt to ensure the best results?
3. What aspects of speech performance do we need to pay particular attention to?

This chapter attempts to provide at least parts of the answers to these questions, emphasizing from here the SSS classes.

#### **The Variety of English to Teach to SSS Students in Nigerian Schools**

As far back as 1970, the WAEC had stipulated the standard expected of candidates offering its English Language Examinations (Broughton, 1970:39). According to that earlier stipulation, secondary school students' English is expected to be that "currently used by educated West African Writers and Speakers in Commonwealth West Africa."<sup>2</sup> This view of the WAEC's which fortunately has not changed, is supported by all who are capable of appreciating the realities of the English language in West Africa. Put differently, the WAEC expects us to teach the Educated Variety of West African English.

Justification for this stipulation is not difficult to find: for instance, a consideration of the stages of intellectual development shows that children in the SSS stage of learning will normally be 11 years and above and as shown in Table 1, they are characterized by fully developed inner speech and logical reasoning.

**Table 1: STAGES OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT (by Vygotsky)**

Vygotsky 4 Stages	Characteristics
1. Primitive or Natural (0-2 years)	Pre-Verbal Thought Pre-intellectual Speech Immature Behaviour Patterns
2. Naive Psychology (2-4 years)	Budding Practical Intelligence Correct use of grammar
3. Object Manipulation and Association collection (4-7 years)	Ability to manipulate visible and tangible objects.
4. In-Growth and Concept Manipulation (i) (7-11 years) (ii) (11 + and above)	Formation of Pseudo-concepts Formation of Genuine Concepts Fully Developed Inner Speech and Logical Reasoning

(Unoh, 1982:7)

Since the SSS children have the above characteristics at 11 years and above and these characteristics have been shown to be “true of all children regardless of their cultural backgrounds” (Unoh, 1982:8), then Nigerians or West African children are bound to have the learning readiness which is essential for success in the classroom.

Secondly, if we consider the stages of development classified by level of education, as shown in Table 2 taken from Unoh (1982:11), we find that children at the SSS stage, (i.e. 11 to 17 years) are characterised by development of more sophisticated learning skills and strategies and are capable of making more effective use of language in communication and in learning.

**Table 2: STAGES OF INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT CLASSIFIED BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION**

Educational Stages	Characteristics
1. Pre-Primary Education Stage (from birth to 6 years)	Progressive Acquisition of Basic Language Skills. Development of Reading/ Learning Readiness and Cognitive Awareness.
2. Primary Education Stage (From 6-11 years)	Consolidation of Basic Language Skills; Achievement of Greater Learning Readiness and Greater Cognitive Awareness.
3. Secondary Education Stage (from 11 to 17 years)	Development of more Sophisticated Learning Skills and strategies. More effective use of language in communication and Learning.
4. Tertiary Education Stage (18/20 Till End of Higher Education Stage)	Mature Learning and Communication Skills and Strategies. Superior Cognitive Awareness.
5. Extended/Life-Long Education Stage (from end of Certificate Centred Education till senility or Death)	Consolidation and Application Mature Learning and more Superior Cognitive styles and Abilities.

(Unoh, 1982:11)

Put differently, our SSS children will be in a position to appreciate the fact that they are capable of speaking nationally and internationally intelligible and acceptable English and can pass their Oral English examinations creditable without having to sound foreign or affected.

Finally, a formal teaching of a West African or Nigerian English to our SSS students is justified from the viewpoint of a consideration of "Transitional Grammar Stage" in learning. As Odumuh (1981:93) points out, this is the stage immediately below natively-like proficiency in speech performance.<sup>4</sup> It could be argued however, that given the often grossly inadequate teaching and learning facilities in our schools, children at the SSS stage may not approximate the transitional grammar stage. For this reason, it may be more appropriate to see our SSS students as coming just immediately below the transitional grammar stage. This view is supported by the fact that Odumuh (1981), for instance, used it in relation to the tertiary education level.

Having thus justified the choice of the variety to teach, we come to the issue of how the teaching could best be done.

### The Approach

As pointed out earlier, linguists, language teachers and specialists in Nigeria now tend to favour the development of both the English Language and the various Nigerian languages. Given the much discussed tyranny of a learner's first language on his second language, it would appear that an approach that takes account of the learner's first language in relation to his target language should prove satisfactory. This is the Contrastive Analysis (CA) Method.<sup>5</sup> This method, (also often seen in terms of a Theory) is based on the conception that in learning an  $L_2$ , the learner often exhibits a tendency to transfer to the sound system of that  $L_2$  the features present in the sound system of the  $L_1$ . If a feature is present in both the  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  there is said to be facilitation in learning the  $L_2$ . But if a feature present in  $L_2$  is non-existent in  $L_1$ , there is said to be a tendency for the learner to substitute from  $L_1$  the nearest equivalent of such a feature - a situation that is expected to result in interference.

Lado (1976:2) puts the position thus:

... individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture - both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the

culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced (sic) by natives.

Smith (1969:53) sees the situation thus:

Languages differ in the contrasts they make and the ways in which they differ constitute the learning problems for a nonnative, who will tend to transfer to the new language the habits he has acquired in speaking his mother tongue.

Politzer (1970:10) is even more specific on the issue:

In no area of language is the interference coming from the native language more obvious than in the sound system.

Bright and McGregor (1971:179) considers the approach as almost indispensable:

If we mean to be even mildly scientific about speech work, the first thing to do is to list the phonemes of English and compare them with those of our pupils' first language.

These are only a few of the numerous comments which tend to commend CA as a legitimate, (sometimes the only legitimate), approach to a study of the pronunciation of a second language.

Although nobody denies the possibility of a transfer from  $L_1$  to  $L_2$  in the process of learning on  $L_2$ , it would appear that the Nigerian situation, given its multilingual setting, would make it practically impossible to benefit from the advantages offered by CA. First, almost every secondary school in Nigeria has children from different ethnic groups. This is particularly the case with Federal Government Schools. To benefit from CA, the teacher of English would have to analyze, for example, the sound system of English and also of the various languages spoken by the various children in the classes he teaches. Even the possession of the orthographies of the languages cannot be said to be adequate. This is so because to know *about a language* is not the same thing as to *know a language*.

Besides, the facilities available in our schools are often so inadequate as to make analysis and comparison quite difficult. Perhaps most importantly, it is now easily appreciated that learners' problems are often quite complex and include those of poor models, inadequate motivation and training and those which are purely intralingual, (Jibril, 1982; Eka, 1985 and Adeyanju, 1977), for instance.

Where schools are homogeneous or largely so in terms of ethnic and linguistic grouping, the CA approach may prove useful but even so, there is still

the likelihood of problems arising from the nonavailability of teachers who can understand and apply the concept. It is important, therefore for those who teach pronunciation of English to SSS students in Nigeria to consider a flexible and an adequate alternative to CA. The Direct Intensive Drill (DID) Method proposed and discussed next, promises to be a reliable alternative in this regard.

### The Direct Intensive Drill (DID) Method

Put briefly, the Direct Intensive Drill (DID) Method is a combination of such useful approaches like the Direct Method which aims at teaching the pronunciation of a language without referring to the mother tongue of the child; the Audio-lingual method which emphasizes a gradual approach from listening to speaking and reading; the Substitution Technique which emphasizes drills through the choice of appropriate alternatives; the 1.2.3 Drill which embodies an active teacher - student participation and the Miscellaneous Activity Drill which encourages the creation of situations which will make students to engage in organized and directed speech activities.

The starting point in this approach is a brief introduction to the substance for intensive drill. Since the SSS students need to understand both the segments and the nonsegments in English, it is important to introduce them to both without bothering about their L<sub>1</sub>. But in introducing the segments, there is the need to indicate alternatives which will ensure international intelligibility and acceptability. For instances, with regard to vowel segments in particular, items in slanting lines can be shown to represent the goal of pronunciation while those in square brackets show alternative, and equally acceptable realization.

We would then have a list of vowel phonemes thus:

*i:*, *I*, [*i*], *e*, *æ*, [*ɛ*], *a:*, *ɒ*, *ɔ:*, *ʊ*, [*u*], *u:*, *ʌ*, *ɜ:*, *ə*; /*ɛɪ*, *aɪ*, *ɔɪ*, *əʊ*, *əʊ*, *ɪə*, *eə*, *ʊə* /.

The following would be the consonant phonemes:

*p*, *b*, *t*, *d*, *k*, *g*; *m*, *n*, *ŋ*; *f*, *v*, *θ*, *ð*, *z*, *ʃ*, *ʒ*, *h*; /*tʃ*, *dʒ*; *l*, *r*; *w*, *j* /.

With regard to the sounds, the method encourages an introduction to the goals; then an appropriate use of accentuation/prominence, phrasing (system of pausing) as well as intonation and rhythm. Once the students have shown even a fair mastery of the introduction, drills of various types then begin. For instance, the method expects the students to produce individual words (word lists) such as:

### A. Vowels

- (i) been, seem, fit did, bed, head, man, pan, past, cared, cot, dot, part, fall, put, full, fool, pool, come, love, bird, girl, father, again.
- (ii) may, say, temple, go, buy; sigh, cow, how; oil, buy.
- (iii) year, fear; bare, hair; poor, tour.

### B. Consonants

pan, people; buy, barb; take, tank; doll, during; king, call; game, gave; many, more; nose, name; sing, bring; five, fifty; voice, vie; thought, thigh; those, this; sing, rice; zeal, reason; roll, realm; shoe, polish; measure, treasure; may, week; your, young.

In addition, the students are to be trained to produce utterances (of sentence, clause or phrase status) aimed at intensifying the practice. For example, utterances like:

- (a) In keen competitions, lean boys are not expected to be seen seated doing nothing.
- (b) Philip engaged in a thrilling drill to fill his time.

Similar exercises could be devised and used for drilling in respect of all sounds. In this regard, Mackenzie (1980) will come in particularly handy.

With regard to nonsegments the entire rhythmic pattern of an utterance is best taken together. For instance, the utterances below could be practised:

'Writing it 'now; 'send him a 'way; 'reading a 'loud; 'give him a 'boon; 'what is the 'time? This, however, assumes for example, that syllable prominence in relation to individual words has been handled and that the students are already fairly familiar with patterns like: 'biscuits, contribute 'madam, e'xhibit; 'calendar; 'mischievous, 'maintenance and 'telephone, for instance.

Here it is crucial to emphasize to the students that ability to pause at the right places and to place appropriate prominence is even more important than the ability to realise the sounds (if meanings are to be preserved).

Regarding intonation patterns, it is very important to create situations which will encourage or elicit relevant intonation patterns. However, the candidates will still benefit from the examples given by the teacher. For example, enumerations tend to have the pattern: falls throughout or rises and

a final fall. For example: "Peter bought a book, a pen, a pencil and a ruler" can have rising intonation on **book, pen, pencil** and a falling intonation on **ruler** or it could have falls throughout. On the other hand, utterances like:

- (i) "Double up before I get angry!" the soldier ordered could have a falling intonation followed by a low level tag.
- (ii) "Could you pass the salt, please?" the lady asked softly could have a rising intonation followed by a rising tag.<sup>6</sup>

As already stated, this approach is intended to provide examples with which students can practise but in general the teacher must devise situations which will encourage the use of various intonation patterns.

### The Crucial Phase of the DID Method

After being introduced to the various issues which the SSS students are expected to master, we enter the crucial phase: that of drills. Here elaborate and varied exercises are required, each time with the teacher providing the model. For example, in respect of the Substitution Technique or the 1.2.3 Drill, the teacher says the item and the group follows. For example, consider an exercise such as:

A	B	C
1. When it's her turn,	don't let her	hurt herself.
2. When it's Arit's turn	I'd prefer her not to	pass her purse to anyone.
3. When Mary starts	tell her firmly not to	work without a clerk.

(Modified from Bright and McGregor 1971:182). This will be very useful for an aspect of English pronunciation for SSS students.

In addition, the students should be encouraged to organize debates (which aim at winning not only by points but also by appropriate pronunciation); oral investigations in which students report to class on issues they have found out such as "The busiest street in the town"; substitution dialogues in which students engage in talks indicating alternatives which may show annoyance, appreciation or sympathy as the case may be. Also, drills could involve participation in drama, prose or poetry reading.

The ultimate goal of the DID Method is to make the student so entirely familiar with the pronunciation of English that he can adopt to whatever changes of situation, or to changes occasioned by variation in his examination syllabus. All these call for versatility on the part of the teacher and interest/alertness on the part of the students.

### Conclusion

We have shown in this chapter that SSS students in Nigeria need appropriate training in English pronunciation because:

- i) this requirement is now compulsory for them;
- ii) they (the SSS students) constitute a group that must sooner or later emerge into the larger society where intelligible English is still considered important and will most probably remain so for a long time. We have also shown that the Direct Intensive Drill (DID) Method can guarantee the envisaged attainment of excellence in this enterprise.

It remains to add however, that although CA is a legitimate and reliable second language learning theory, it is largely irrelevant and impracticable in any multilingual nation like Nigeria.

### Endnotes

1. The scale is shown thus:
  - (a) Easy to understand
  - (b) Acceptable to me
  - (c) Good enough to be taught in schools
  - (d) Capable of being understood by any educated English speaking audience.
  - (e) Possibility that the speaker has received training in spoken English.
2. This is the variety of English which satisfies national as well as international intelligibility and acceptability without sounding strange or foreign.
3. This Table is taken from Unoh (1982:7). Vygotsky is particularly relevant in this chapter.
4. This stage was initially investigated by M.B. Frith in 1977.
5. This key notion in linguistic description is gradually losing popularity on account of inadequate facilities and personnel required for its operation.
6. See Ayodele et al (1986:30) for other possibilities.

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