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LEXICAL FEATURES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH WHILE TEACHING ENGLISH

Research article

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Abstract

The article is aimed at identifying the main lexical features of Nigerian English while teaching English as the foreign language. English is the official language of Nigeria, but still it is a foreign language for all Nigerians, therefore, teaching English process is based on the language knowledge of Standard British English but adapted to linguistic and cultural peculiarities of Nigerian reality. The specific features of Nigerian education system lie in the diversity of language majorities and minorities used on the level of primary education. The secondary education level comprises the usage of local languages, practically oriented on language majority (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo) and English. Practically the profound knowledge of English is a necessity for all Nigerians, it is the language of economy, politics, education, trade, it dominates due to everyday needs. According to the research work, lack of qualified professional staff is the reason of poor English of many Nigerian state schools. Private schools education is an alternative to state school education, providing the sufficient level of knowledge in English. According to the research work, teaching English as the foreign language in Nigerian educational system should take into consideration the peculiarities of local cultures and languages. Finally, the authors stress while teaching English in Nigeria, exactly lexical training, teachers should pay special attention to words meaning adaptation process which is revealed in the form of expansion and narrowing of the word's meaning.

Keywords: Nigerian English, English language training, lexical training, word meaning change, meaning expansion, meaning narrowing.

ЛЕКСИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ НИГЕРИЙСКОГО ВАРИАНТА АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В ПРОЦЕССЕ
ОБУЧЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ

Научная статья

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Аннотация

Целью исследования является выявление лексических особенностей нигерийского варианта английского языка в процессе обучения английскому языку как иностранному на территории Нигерии. Английский является официальным языком Нигерии, но остается иностранным языком для всех этнолингвистических групп, поэтому процесс преподавания английского языка основан на знании стандартного британского английского, адаптированного к лингвистическим и культурным особенностям нигерийских лингвокультур. Специфика нигерийской системы образования заключается в применении языков большинства и меньшинств, используемых на уровне начального образования. Уровень среднего образования включает использование автохтонных языков, ориентированных на языковое большинство (хауса, йоруба, игбо) и английский язык. Владение английским языком на высоком уровне является необходимостью для всех нигерийцев. Английский язык доминирует во всех ключевых социальных сферах, – это язык экономики, политики, образования, торговли. Выявлено, что низкий уровень получения знаний по английскому языку в нигерийской школьной системе продиктован нехваткой квалифицированных специалистов. Выявлено, что преподавание английского языка как иностранного в нигерийской системе образования должно учитывать особенности местных культур и языков. Особого внимания заслуживает этап обучению лексики. Именно при обучении лексике следует уделять особое внимание процессу адаптации значений слов, которое может подвергаться изменению: расширению и сужению.

Ключевые слова: нигерийский вариант английского языка, обучение английскому языку, обучение лексике, изменение значения слова, расширение значения, сужение значения.

Introduction

English language is given much attention in the process of education of all levels in Nigeria. English is the official language of the country, it is the language of economy, politics, education, jurisprudence. Historically, English was the language of Christian missionaries, who brought to the Nigerians the European culture in the form of Latin script during the XIX century. The process of English training practice was oriented on the Nigerian population of all ages, but school level was of the greatest importance as it was the starting point for future education levels in colleges and institutes [1].

A special memorandum on English-type oriented education was issued on the territory of Nigeria in 1925, since that time the aim of the education was to provide all ethnic groups with equal opportunities to get education on the basis of English and

local languages. Gaining independence for Nigeria in 1960 gave the education system the chance to eliminate illiteracy level among different segments of the population. Still there is a serious problem to reach the goal – to have professional teachers able to combine the suitable knowledge of English and a series of local languages, at least the languages of main ethnic groups, such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo [10].

It turned out to be a problem, mainly connected with the necessity for school teachers not only to know English and main local languages, such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, but to have the profound knowledge in minorities languages as well. The primary education level should be based on the mother tongue ground, but Nigeria has more than 500 local languages, some of which even do not have the written form. In large cities, students are the representatives of more than 20 ethnic groups and they speak only their native language. It can happen that the teacher does not speak any of the native languages of his students, in this case the practical way out is to use one of major Nigerian language which can be the reason of multilingualism and can come to many problems.

This article is based on the systemic approach of basic and auxiliary research methods. The main methods include theoretical analysis of scientific literature on teaching methods and related sciences, generalization of best practices in teaching foreign languages. The auxiliary research methods include testing, instrumental analysis. Due to the cognitive cross-disciplinary approach in the research work the author takes into consideration the anthropocentric factor, linguistic and non-linguistic information, intercultural analyses, especially dealing with the problem of mentality and language correlations which influence on successful teaching process complex while understanding the foreign language by adapting to local culture and language peculiarities.

Main results

The use of English as a tool for creating a unified communication space (for both native and non-native English speakers) in order to ensure international contacts is an undeniable achievement for the international economy, politics, media, business, culture, and education. As a result of English and other language cooperation a large number of English variants have appeared, such as the Irish variant, the Scottish variant, and others. The research work is devoted to the analysis of the linguistic and cultural specifics of teaching English in Nigeria. English, coming to the territory of Africa as a foreign language, was creolized and adapted to the linguistic and cultural specifics of the autochthonous languages. Nigerian English, having an official status, acts as the main means of communication in all spheres of society, it is the language of politics, economy, trade, media and education.

As a result of interaction with autochthonous languages English, functioning on the territory of Nigeria, is a mixed type of language which is hybridized in all language levels. This fact is of great importance while teaching English in Nigerian education process of all levels.

Levels of Education in Nigeria

In Nigeria there is a unified public school system and since 1992 it has free six-year compulsory education. The period of receiving school education is usually divided into three key periods: Primary Education, Junior/Secondary Education, and Senior Education. The initial stage of education takes place on the basis of autochthonous languages or in the language of communities, this process promotes equality of education for all social groups, especially the poor. The further learning process for students of all schools in the middle level period takes place with the use of English. However, among the adult population of Nigeria still there is also a certain number of illiterate residents today [3].

Primary education in Nigeria based on the mother tongue aims to master the simplest and most essential skills of writing, reading and numeracy, and aims to use this language as an educational tool during the first three years of primary education. There is often a low level of English proficiency among students whose primary school education is conducted in indigenous languages, as evidenced by the results of the school final exams and university entrance exams for 2022. One of the reasons for this unsuccessful learning process is the assumption that English language training is conducted in isolation from the teaching of the native language.

After graduating the secondary school level of education students receive professional and academic training by studying compulsory subjects such as English, Mathematics, Indigenous languages of Nigeria, Integrative sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Physics), Social sciences, Art (Music, Drawing), and Religion [2]. As elective subjects students are given the opportunity to study from two to three subjects such as Vocational training, and it is possible to study Carpentry, Blacksmithing, Electronics, Mechanics; Local crafts; Home Economics. At the end of the secondary level of education and successful completion of the Federal Examination Bureau (FEB) exams students receive a certificate of Secondary School Education.

In the process of secondary school education one of the mandatory requirements for students is to speak one of the main autochthonous languages of Nigeria (Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo) at a sufficiently high level. In theory this fact undoubtedly increases the role of indigenous African languages, but in practice Nigerian schools are not able to provide a high-quality process of teaching native languages due to the limited number of qualified specialists. Nigerian teachers who teach autochthonous languages do not have a sufficient level of training partly due to the fact that most of the native African languages of Nigeria do not have a written language, and most of the language material is transmitted from one generation to another in oral form.

The period of high school education lasts three years. Students at this stage of training study and improve their knowledge in English and Mathematics. Students continue intensive study of Tribal languages, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, English Literature, History, Geography. After successfully passing the West African Examination Board examinations, students receive a Certificate of High School Education. Some students (22%) go to universities which is about 8% of the total population of the country [6].

In addition to the State secondary education system, there are also schools for gifted children (5% of all students). About 50% of children have vocational training within the communities, they learn the Nigerian traditions, crafts of their parents, adapt to the occupation of their communities. But to a greater extent children do not know how to read and write. In Nigeria, in addition to the Western and local styles of education a third type of education is developed – on the basis of religious (Islamic) private schools. These schools are taught by mallams, religious teachers. Here they study the meaning of Religious texts,

Grammar, Algebra, Logic, Rhetoric, Law and Theology. During the years of independence, Nigeria has made great strides in the development of the education system.

The highest level of education in Nigeria is divided into two stages: Bachelor's degree and Master's degree. The language of the two stages of education is English. In modern Nigeria, the Government makes control over most universities: of the 128 registered public universities, only 50 private universities are not the subject to control.

The duration of student programs in Nigerian universities depends on the specific course chosen: for example, the duration of the course "Social Sciences" is 4 years; the course "Technology" lasts 5 years; the course "Medicine" lasts 6 years; the period of study of the course "Law" takes 5 years.

Teaching English as the foreign language in Nigeria: lexical training practice

The teaching procedure of different levels in Nigerian system of education is based on the specific methodology which is the mixture of English and local languages. In the research work we pay special attention towards lexical teaching training of English in Nigeria educational system.

In the process of transforming the actual English lexis on the territory of Nigeria, adapting to Nigerian reality, the key importance is the difference in words meaning which is explained by local culture peculiarities. The transformation of words meaning is in the change of the semantics. For Nigerian English, a characteristic feature is such a type of lexical transformation as semantic changes by means of narrowing of the word meaning and expansion of the word meaning [4].

The vocabulary of Nigerian English, like of any other language, undergoes a process of semantic changes in the process of the development. For Nigerian English, a characteristic feature is the processes of the expansion and the narrowing of lexical meaning of a word. This question should be paid much attention while teaching English to Nigerian students.

The expansion of the meaning

In Nigerian English many lexical units are the subject to expansion of the meaning. It should be noted that the considered type of lexical transformation is the most productive among other types of lexical changes in Nigerian English. In addition to the meaning typical for Standard British English while adapting to Nigerian reality (which we call the process of creolization) the lexical composition of the Nigerian English acquires a number of new additional meanings. These new meanings are fixed in dictionaries of Nigerian English by such authors as R. Blench and H. Igboanusi and are not considered as mistakes for Nigerian English teaching practice, for example:

1. *Action:*

In Standard British English the word *action* refers to any type of activity or event. In Nigerian English the meaning of the analyzed lexical unit is expanded and is interpreted as "to find a solution to a specific problem", for example:

The Minister of Education has been directed to take action on the matter with immediate effect [5, P. 93].

2. *Auntie:*

For the lexical structure of Standard British English, the analyzed lexical unit means exclusively *a blood relative*. In Nigerian English the meaning of the noun under consideration is expanded, as a result of which it acquires an additional meaning – "a respected person, a lady of advanced age, who may not be a close relative", for example:

· *Please, auntie, where can I get a bus to Oshodi?* [5, P. 109].

The example describes a situation when a young man addresses an elderly woman with a request – *he wants to know where the bus stop is*.

3. *Uncle:*

Standard British English has the meaning *a blood relative*. In Nigerian English the lexical unit under consideration is expanded in meaning and represents "a way of addressing any adult male, usually used by younger people, even if they address their parents' acquaintances" [5, P. 45].

The analyzed form of address is often used by Nigerians trading in local markets as an expression of respect for the buyer, for example:

"Uncle, what do you want to buy" [6, P. 12].

Teaching English lexis while educating Nigerian students demands deep knowledge of Nigerian culture of different ethnic groups as it plays the important role in giving interpretation to words meaning in Nigerian English. The meaning of lexemes denoting family relations undergo some changing depending on the peculiarities of local cultures' peculiarities.

4. *Cup:*

Standard British English has the meaning "a small container in the shape of a ball, usually with a handle, used for drinking tea or coffee". Nigerian English has another meaning - "a glass", for example:

Can I have a glass of water? [5, P. 78].

The analyzed lexeme is part of the Nigerian phraseology unit "His cup is full", meaning "He has too many sins" for example:

His cup fills up much faster, and there doesn't seem to be any other place for the crook to hide – He's committed so many sins that there doesn't seem to be any place for him to hide [6, P. 22].

5. *English:*

This adjective in Standard British English expresses *the quality or property* of an object, emphasizing its origin-made in England or typical for the Englishmen. In Nigerian English this unit takes on the meaning "foreign" or "European", emphasizing that the item has a foreign origin [6, P. 18].

Examples:

1) *English medicine* – foreign or Orthodox medicine as opposed to traditional medicine [5, P. 101], for example:

English medicine is no longer effective for treating malaria-European medicine is no longer effective for treating malaria;

2) *English music* – European or Western music, for example:

English music is now popular! [6, P. 22].

3) *English names* – European or Western, for example:

All those English names, but what about the native names? [5, P. 34].

The use of the adjective *English* in Nigerian English in the meaning of *foreign* is explained by the influence of the historical and cultural features of the country development since in Nigeria during the colonial period it was customary to call all foreigners *Englishmen*, and then *English*. Then the adjective of Nigerian English meant *high quality*.

Narrowing of the meaning

Due to the fact that a common way of word formation is to change the meaning of a word lexical units of Nigerian English take the form of meaning narrowing. In this case the original units of Standard British English undergo creolization, having gone through semantic specialization due to the local linguistic cultures. Here are examples illustrating meaning narrowing:

1. *Academics – teachers, especially in Universities*, for example:

Academics are poorly paid in Nigeria [6, P. 12].

Standard British English uses this lexeme to describe “a member of the academy”. “Academic people or educated people, especially university teachers or college teachers” – these are the meanings of the word *Academics* in Nigerian English [10]. Therefore, in the example under consideration, we observe a narrowing of the lexical meaning of the lexeme *Academicians*.

The reason for the change in the meaning of the analyzed unit is the different situation in the education system in England and Nigeria: the level of education of the British often exceeds the degree of education of Nigerians. While for England, members of the academy are often representatives of national humanitarian, scientific and technical, educational and other public organizations and necessarily have a doctorate degree, for Nigeria only in exceptional cases university teachers have a doctorate degree. Educated Nigerians represent a low percentage of the entire population of the country (18% of all Nigerians). Moreover, only 20% of them have a scientific degree. The vast majority of Nigerians with a high level of education are university professors, journalists and diplomats who have received high level of education which means that for Nigerian English the rank of academics includes university teachers.

Examples:

These academics are always on strike [6, P. 8].

The phrase of Nigerian English *acada woman* is an elliptical form of *academic woman*. The meaning of the phrase acquires an additional meaning definition, it is used while describing *a young student or graduate who is considered very smart, since she is receiving a higher education*, for example:

She is an acada woman, therefore she is so smart [5, P. 109]

It should be noted that for Nigeria, a very important aspect that affects the quality of a child's future life is the factor of having education. If parents can provide their child with a high education, this literally means his future success.

The lexeme *academic* in Nigerian English (*academic work – the profession of a teacher*) is understood as the *professional activity of a teacher or teacher in general*, for example:

Why I like academics is that it gives me enough time to do other things [5, P. 191].

It should be noted that the university teaching profession is considered very prestigious for Nigeria. For the Nigerian society the teacher of high education is a highly respected and revered person, although the salary of university teachers is not included in the rank of the most prestigious Nigerian professions.

2. *Baby*:

In Standard British English the meaning of the lexeme *baby* is used to refer to *a child from birth to one year old, regardless of gender*. In Nigerian English the analyzed lexeme has the following meaning: “*a female child*”, as opposed to a male child which in Nigerian English is represented by the lexeme – “*a male child*”, for example:

She gave the birth to the baby again! [5, P. 156].

3. *Countryman*:

In Standard British English the word *countryman* refers to a person born in or residing in a particular state – “*a person from one's own country*”. In Nigerian English the meaning of this lexical unit is interpreted as “*a person from one's own town or ethnic group*”, for example:

He is a countryman from Ibadan [6, P. 20].

The reason for the narrowing of the word's meaning of the lexical unit is the peculiarity of the local culture. If for an Englishman, *a countryman* is a person who has a common fatherland, then for a Nigerian, the key factor is ethnicity, namely, he must have ancestral connection with the ethnic group of his ancestors.

Conclusion

Modern methodology pays special attention to the study of communicative processes and the implementation of contacts interaction within cultural and language pragmatic space. Teaching foreign languages successfully is still one of the most discursive questions especially when globalization process influences greatly on all spheres and education is not the exception to this rule.

English in the modern world has become the global mean of communication, it has become the official language for many colonial countries of Great Britain and has to adapt to local languages and cultures peculiarities.

The linguistic variability caused by the contact of the English language with Nigerian culture is the reason of such English language variant as Nigerian English – the language which has to be creolized. English (though being the official language of Nigeria) still remains the foreign language for all ethnic groups' majorities and minorities and is taught in Nigeria schools, colleges and universities.

While teaching English to Nigerian students, the main role of a teacher is in the explanation of words meaning while lexical training process. English on the territory of Nigeria is being creolized and has additional word meanings, which sometimes can be taken as mistakes. While analyzing lexical meaning of the words in the special attention should be given to the possibility of lexical units' transformation meanings. The most productive lexical transformation types for Nigerian English are expansion and narrowing of the lexical units.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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