

QUEEN'S ENGLISH AND THE MARCH OF HISTORY: REFLECTIONS ON THE NIGERIAN CASE

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All members of FUNAAB Family,
Members of My Family and Friends,
Gentlemen of the Press,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Great FUNAABITES.

1.0 PRELIMINARY

I appreciate the opportunity that I have had to make my little contribution to the teaching and learning of English language in this University. Needless to say, the knowledge and perspectives to be expressed in this Lecture derived mainly from that opportunity. I have taught English for 23 years, I have been a member of different associations of teachers of English as a second and foreign language, both at home and abroad, evaluating how well we have been doing. I have played very active parts in the Communication Skills Project for Universities of Agriculture and Technology (COSKIPTECH) and the National Association of Teachers and Researchers in English as a Second Language (NATRESL). I had kept my ears and eyes opened on questions regarding how well our students are doing. Furthermore, I have conducted studies on how the home environment affects English language acquisition.

The COMSKIPTECH workshops and other such meetings, in which I have participated, have examined in great detail questions relating to the impact of several factors on proficiency in the acquisition and use of English language. Foremost among such factors are learner's motivation, pedagogy, learning environment, teaching aids and competence and training of teachers of English language, etc.

Thus, my exposure and my experience have prepared me for this occasion and empowered me to express the views presented in this Lecture. However, I must

observe at this juncture the limitations that most academics in Nigeria currently experience when it comes to their access to research funds. The implication of the inadequacy of funds available for research is that one's source of inspiration and of knowledge is not as rich as one would have wished. While it is a good habit to be thankful for whatever benefits and support one has received from one's employers, it also seems to me appropriate to draw the employer's attention to any shortcoming in provisions which may undermine the employee's capacity to perform optimally.

I am sure that my colleagues in this and other universities nationwide would agree with me that it is of utmost importance that their access to research funds be enhanced substantially in the interest of more outstanding performance.

Now, let me get on to the main Lecture.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The most striking thing about the English language today is not the fact that it is the mother tongue of over 320 million people, but the fact that it is used as an additional language by so many more people all around the world. Non-native speakers outnumbered native speakers which is a very special and remarkable situation in language history. According to Ethnologue, there are about 6,800 distinct languages in the world. However, only five - English, Chinese, Hindi, Russian and Spanish - are spoken by more than half of the world's population. And English cannot claim the highest number of native speakers since Chinese has about thrice that number. What gives English its unique status is its unrivalled position as a means of international communication. Many of the other languages are basically communicative channels within, rather than across, national borders. Presently, English is real big business and the most commonly taught foreign language all over the world (Svartvik and Leech, 2006:1).

English did not become a world language on its linguistic merits. Far from it. The pronunciation of English words is irritatingly often at odds with their spelling, the vocabulary is enormous and the grammar less learner-friendly than is generally believed. Why then is English the world language? Behind its success story there are several factors: foremost is the expansion and influence of British colonial power. By the late nineteenth century, the British Empire had covered a considerable part of the earth's land surface and subjects of the British monarch totalled almost a fourth of the world's population. Secondly is the status of the United States of America as the leading economic, military and scientific power of the twentieth century. Thirdly is the growing need for international communication as a result of modern technological innovations such as the telephone, radio, television, computers, etc. For instance, air traffic controllers all over the world use English when communicating with pilots, whether Japanese, Russian or German,

and whether at Kennedy or Heathrow airport. Another contributing factor is the fact that in some countries or groups of countries such as ours, Nigeria, where people have several or many different first languages or mother tongues, English is always a preferred *lingua franca* because it is felt to be neutral ground (Svartvik and Leech, 2006:6-7).

However, the once-revered code known as Queen's English has lost much of its sway and even its relevance, both as a code in use and as a code against which other codes are judged (a standard code), especially, as the way to judge any code now is to find out how effective and efficient it is proving as a means of communication within particular communities of users. The aspect of English highly to succeed in transformation-in-use the most, is the vocabulary, while the aspects that are most at risk are grammar/syntax, phonology and semantics, in that order.

3.0 THE CONCEPT OF 'STANDARD ENGLISH'/ 'QUEEN'S ENGLISH'

Linguists and lay people talk about 'correctness' in different respects. Lay people talk about correct and incorrect use of language with regard to dialects, grammatical structures, pronunciation and spelling, whereas linguists talk about different varieties of language. For linguists, there is no such thing as incorrect use of language, merely non-standard use of language. Linguists are known to be of the opinion that there is nothing inherently better about a standard language than any other varieties (Prøysen 2009:7).

The standard language came about through selection over many years, and the variety that was most widely used survived. Hudson (1980 cited in Prøysen 2009:7) says that a typical standard language will have passed through four processes. These are as follows:

- i. Selection
- ii. Codification
- iii. Elaboration of function
- iv. Acceptance

With this in mind, the standard English is the variety or dialect which is regarded as correct and is generally used by southern British, educated speakers of the language, and in writing and in public usage such as on radio and television. It is sometimes known as the "Queen's English" or "King's English" depending on who is on the throne.

For us to understand what is happening to the English language today, it is important for us to know that the standardization of the English language did not come about easily or quickly. It was a long haul!

For example, the works of Chaucer, William Caxton, Shakespeare, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Johnson, Webster etc, spanning some four to five centuries, contributed significantly in their different ways, to the process of standardizing the English language.

And even though the standard code has been formulated to a reasonably high level of consistency, it is still undergoing changes and reforms, perhaps the best example of the most current work on such continuing development of the English language is the book, *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (1992), which reports the most exhaustive survey to date of what it describes as “contemporary” English. It entails a sophisticated analysis of many millions of English words as they are being used today. Of course, whether this constitutes standardisation in the strict sense is another matter. I would say it does and that the standardisation process is continuing even now.

4.0 THE CAREER OF QUEEN’S ENGLISH IN NIGERIA

Even though the beginnings of the English language in Nigeria are not clear, research has shown that the English language entered the area now known as Nigeria a long time ago, well before British Christian Missionaries and colonial administrators did. In fact, some scholars have dated Nigerian’s first contact with English back to the sixteenth century (Adetugbo, 1977; Banjo, 1996), the first contact points identified being coastal settlements like Warri, Brass, Calabar, etc. The language was imported by English sailors who had come to displace the Portuguese as the dominant traders on the West coast of Africa. From this, English-based pidgin resulted and it was not until 300 years later, in the middle of the nineteenth century, that the standard English of the metropolis began to be taught institutionally to Nigerians (Kassal, 2000:5-6; Akeredolu-Ale, 2007a: 232).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, following the amalgamation of Nigeria into one political entity, English became the country’s official language. The period from about 1950 to about 1980, in particular, witnessed a remarkable growth in the importance that Nigerians attributed to the English language and efforts made to acquire adequate competence in the use of the language. Such growth in efforts, which stemmed from a positive evaluation of the language, in terms of its utility function, was also matched, to a large extent, by improvement in the proficiency displayed by the generality of Nigerian students, for example, in terms of their performance in examinations in English and the quality of their spoken and written English. And this was true not only of the use of English within the educational system but also its use in the conduct of government business, in the mass media and in the society at large, especially, as the *lingua franca* of an

expanding middle class (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007a: 232).

However, the period since about 1980 (the last 30 years or so) has witnessed a significant decline in the following aspects of Nigeria's English language performance profile:

- i. the level of competence that Nigerians display with regard to both spoken and written English;
- ii. performance of Nigerian students in English language examinations; and
- iii. the importance which Nigerians attach to 'Good English' and to the acquisition of adequate competence in the use of English (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007a: 232).

Until about 1980, Good English was something that most Nigerians considered important to acquire. While there may be other explanations, the most important reasons for the growing status of English in Nigeria has been that it fulfilled some very vital linguistic and social functions such as the following:

- i. access to training and employment as priests, teachers, clerks, messengers, etc.;
- ii. access to training abroad (especially in Sierra Leone Fourah Bay College and in Britain) for would-be secondary school teachers, many of whom also usually functioned as priests; and
- iii. access to employment in the colonial civil service, limited at first to the lowest grades but later made open to admit Nigerians to 'Senior Service' posts.

And in the more contemporary setting, serving as the following:

- i. language of official transactions;
- ii. language of commerce;
- iii. language of socio-political integration; and
- iv. language of social mobility .

Correlating with this high status of the English language was a high level of motivation to learn and become proficient in English in the society at large but, particularly, on the part of students at all levels, the younger segment of the population.

But things have changed very remarkably over the last 30 years or so and the situation is now quite different as regards both the status of English and the motivation to learn the language on the part of younger people, in particular, and society in general (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007a: 234).

Historical developments influenced the entry of the English language into Nigeria.

They have affected significantly the status of the language since its entry. The historical developments which have proved influential in this regard and which, in particular, have contributed much to the decline in the status of English in Nigeria, include the following:

- i. introduction of new policies and laws tightening immigration and restricting entry into Britain, other European countries and the United States of America;
- ii. a substantial increase in the cost of studying abroad, especially in Britain and the United States, the most popular destinations among Nigerians;
- iii. shrinking of the technical cooperation/assistance activities of the British Government in Nigeria, especially as far as resource support for the strengthening of English-language education is concerned.
- iv. poor performance of the Nigerian economy over a long period, especially since about 1982;
- v. economic reforms, dating back to about 1986, which have shrunk and continue to shrink even more drastically the public sector, thereby reducing employment opportunities in the mainstream civil service, as well as in other sectors of the public service;
- vi. increased prevalence of corruption and the reduced emphasis on merit (especially passion for a prescribed level of proficiency in English among other requirements) as a condition for assessing opportunities in higher education and for securing employment, be it in the university system, the public service, the Organised Private Sector or even in international organisations in Nigeria;
- vii. the prominent and increasing presence of persons who cannot and do not speak or write Good English but who are thriving in politics, government at all levels, in the civil service, in the Organised Private Sector and even in the academic and other departments of universities, polytechnics, etc; and
- viii. the youth culture and inter-generational conflict/protest. The global 'freedom' campaign, where everyone is free to do their own thing. Nigeria is a dependent and open country and Nigerian youth are, therefore, very much exposed to the external stimuli to exercise their freedom. With this is the fact that the 'permissive' society is here; the situation where the non-youth population (the older generation) has largely compromised itself and finds it difficult to demand or enforce discipline in any sphere.

One thing which these various historical developments have in common is that, separately and jointly, they have tended to undermine the status of English in Nigeria and, particularly among young learners of the language, by diminishing its function and its relevance as a link with educational, economic and other livelihood-related opportunities, both at home and abroad (see Table 1). Table 1

roughly indicates changes which had occurred in the status of the English language and in the priority to be accorded the acquisition of high proficiency in English.

Table 1: Effect of Britain’s tighter immigration laws on the status of English language in Nigeria

	Era of free entry			Early control period			Era of tight control		
	Up to c. 1980			c. 1981–c. 1990			Since c. 1991		
	HPL	MPL	LPL	HPL	MPL	LPL	HPL	MPL	LPL
Upper class	X			X					X
Middle class	X				X				X
Lower class	X				X				X
Nigerian youth in General	X			X					X

Notes: HPL = High Priority Language; MPL = Medium Priority Language; LPL = Low Priority Language.

Source: Akeredolu-Ale (2007a: 236)

What Table 1 describes is a decline in the status of the English language across three periods. It shows that whereas in the period up to about 1980, when Nigerians still obtained their Entry Visa (to the United Kingdom) at the point of entry, that is, after arriving in the United Kingdom, Nigerians, in general (of all social classes), regarded English as a high-priority language. During the early phase of tighter immigration control, only the upper class (the rich people) and Nigerian youth in general (thanks to the continuing emphasis on English in the educational system) regarded English as a high-priority language. And in the period since about 1991, by which time the immigration controls had settled in and were being felt concretely by all Nigerians, all classes had come to regard English as a low-priority language. The widely-held view seems to be that only a good working knowledge of the language is required.

Certainly, though English remains an important language in Nigeria, high proficiency in the language, that is ‘Good English’, has lost much of its potency and relevance as a necessary condition for securing an adequate livelihood or social mobility. Most students (learners of English) in Nigeria now believe that what they need to ‘get on’ is a working knowledge of the language, not Good English as such. And that has become a major disincentive and one of the fundamental causes of declining efforts and performance among learners (see Table 2).

Table 2
GNS (English) Examinations at UNAAB
Percentage of Candidates in Different Score-Categories in One of the Groups:
Cohorts A, B, C and D

Score	Cohort A N = 150			Cohort B N = 103			Cohort C N = 118			Cohort D N = 115		
	Entry Point	End Yr 1	End Yr 2	Entry Point	End Yr 1	End Yr 2	Entry Point	End Yr 1	End Yr 2	Entry Point	End Yr 1	End Yr 2
Less than 50	42.0	54.6	55.4	40.7	62.9	76.0	38.2	62.2	70.2	36.5	39.9	65.9
50 and above	58.0	45.5	44.6	59.3	37.1	24.0	61.8	37.8	29.8	63.5	60.1	34.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Akeredolu-Ale (2006a:34); Akeredolu-Ale (2007a:237) and Akeredolu-Ale and Sotiloye (2007:151); and Bodunde and Akeredolu-Ale (2010)

For example, in Table 2, the results of the pre- and post- tests for the General Studies English (Use-of-English - GNS 101) at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, often show no significant difference in the performance of the students who have gone through this course, such that it attracts comments such as ‘it would have been better if they had not gone through the course’ because some students who had pass marks in the pre-test sometimes do not perform well when they are subjected to the same test after the course. Even in the examination at the end of the semester they always only manage to have marginal passes. For four cohorts whose pre-exposure and post-exposure performance was analysed, in all cohorts, the proportion of students scoring below 50% in the post-exposure examinations (End-Year 1 and End-Year 2) was much higher than the proportion in that score-category at the pre-exposure (Entry-point) examination (Akeredolu-Ale (2006a); Akeredolu-Ale (2007a: 237); Akeredolu-Ale and Sotiloye (2007:151)).

To be honest, one is perplexed and even embarrassed as a teacher of English language by this performance profile. Indeed, some of the errors which people who have been exposed to continuous instructions to improve their use of the language continue to make are astonishing, to say the least. The errors are in all aspects of the language use, grammatical, semantics and phonological. Consider, for example the following:

- *The people who knows.*
- Using the conjunctions **so** and **therefore** together in the expression **so therefore.**

- Sounding the **h** when it does not exist in a word, such as
- pronouncing the word **egg** as *^hegg*,
- Pronouncing the pronoun **I** as *i*.
- Sounding the **h** where it should not be sounded even though it appears in the spelling as in the words *honour* and *honest*.
- Mixing a figure with an alphabet in speech such as when a telephone number *0808* is called *o8o8*.

Every conscientious teacher of English in Nigeria must feel embarrassed, scandalized, confused, exasperated and deeply worried that errors of this kind are not only so widespread but are also proving irremovable, as if the persons concerned have simply decided to live with them. Of course, many would argue that it is the fault of the teachers. But is it, really?

The poor performance of Nigerian students in English language examinations and, more generally, in the use of English (written and spoken) has been attributed to many factors, the following being the ones invoked most often:

- i. inadequacies of Nigeria's English-language education at all levels;
- ii. explosion in school enrolment which has made it impossible to give adequate attention to each learner at any level of the educational system;
- iii. weak foundation in English, attributable to the social-background factor;
- iv. sheer laziness on the part of the learners.

Certainly, each of these is a contributory factor. For example, it is true that there are some problems with the English curriculum and with the competence of most of those teaching English at all levels. In any case, many of those teachers are themselves products of an era when English had already started to lose status and English-language education was no longer taken seriously enough. Similarly, it is true that a large and rapid increase in enrolment at all levels has reduced the attention that could be devoted to each learner, as well as the frequency with which questions could be set for the learners and answers assessed carefully by the teacher.

There is, however, another explanation that is much closer to the root and is usually unexplored. And under this explanation are factors that concern the learners' response and motivation, as well as their fundamental determinants. Elsewhere, we (Alimi and Akeredolu-Ale, 2003; Akeredolu-Ale, 2007a) had argued that there is a strong link between learners' motivation to pursue Good English

(that is, high-level proficiency in English), on the one hand, and their objective assessment of the extent to which Good English does or does not assure them effective access to economic and other livelihood-related opportunities, on the other.

As Figure 1 shows, whatever facilities may be provided for the teaching and learning of English, however appropriate the curriculum, teaching methods, etc., may be and no matter how highly competent and motivated the teachers are, it is the learners' attitudes and motivation that contributed most decisively to the language acquisition performance of the learners. It is they, more than anything else, which determine the quality of learners' response and participation in any learning programme (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007a: 238).

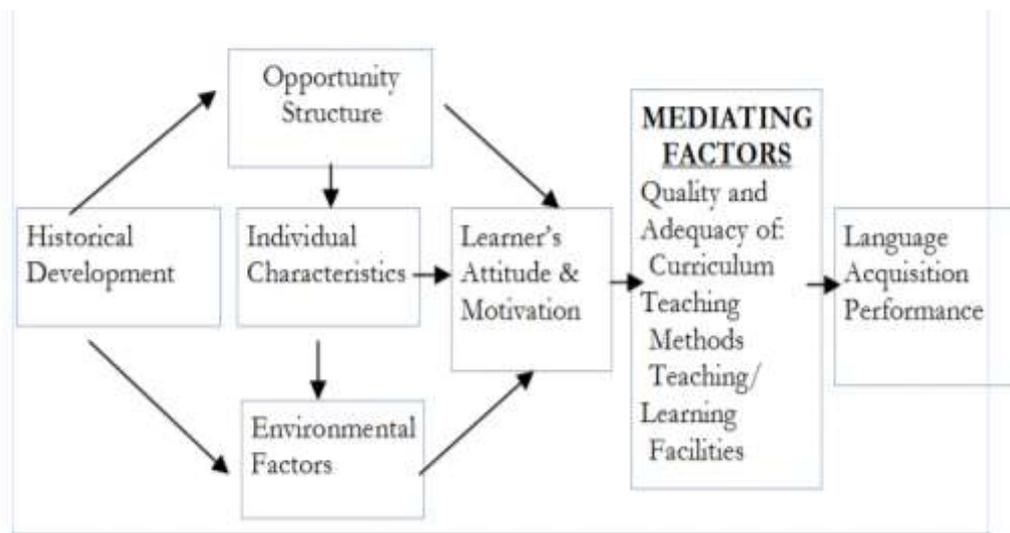


Figure 1. Historical developments, learners' motivation and language-acquisition performance: A dynamic model (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007: 238)

5.0 THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF AGRICULTURE, ABEOKUTA EXPERIENCE

The Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, especially since inception in 1988, provides an interesting case-study, an environment in which to explore questions concerning the performance of the GNS English courses. For example, what evidence exists of the alleged shortfall in the GNS English courses' effectiveness and impact? Why is the programme experiencing the shortfall? What corrective measures are needed in order to ensure significant sustainability? What corrective measures are needed in order to ensure such a significant and enduring improvement?

“Use-of-English” is one of the most important subjects in the General Studies Programme of practically all Nigerian Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of

Education. Since the essential objective of the GNS English courses is to improve significantly the proficiency of the learners in the use of English, in both its written and spoken forms, the effectiveness/impact of such courses must be assessed in terms of the extent to which the learners, at least majority of them, actually acquire and demonstrate a significantly higher proficiency as a result of being exposed to, and of participating successfully in, the package of GNS English courses prescribed for them (Akeredolu-Ale, 2006a: 24).

At the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, all the students are required to pass all the General Studies (GNS) courses as a condition for graduation. The GNS English courses of the university currently comprise two courses, namely, Use-of-English (GNS 101) to all first-year students and Writing and Literary Appreciation (GNS 201) to all second-year students.

Over the years, the lecturers involved in the teaching of these two courses have introduced and employed innovative approaches to teaching these courses. For example, the materials that are presently in use for the two courses have undergone a series of changes and trials before being put together in course workbooks form. And new materials are currently being tested.

As regards the effectiveness and impact which the courses at the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta have achieved so far, it can be asserted that considerable progress has been made by the sub-programme since its inception some twenty three (23) years ago. This is particularly true in relation to staff training and development, the successful delivery of the two courses being offered under the sub-programme and the introduction of innovations (methodological, organisational, etc) to ensure continuing relevance of the curricula and teaching methods in use. As many as 12,000 students have been exposed to the two courses since 1988. And since most of such students have completed their degrees successfully, it can be said that the communication inadequacies which would have made it impossible for them to pursue their studies effectively had been removed, principally, through their exposure to the sub-programme (Akeredolu-Ale, 2006a: 25)

However, improving the proficiency of the students in English enough to enable them to meet the Communication-in-English requirements of their undergraduate academic work is only one part of the improvement that the GNS English courses are expected and looked upon to bring about in the English-language proficiency of the students. The other part is concerned with actually raising significantly the quality of their spoken and written English, enhancing their ability to communicate effectively and competently in the English language, to upgrade them into or, at least, lay in them the foundation for upgrading themselves into what Banjo has described as 'model bilinguals' (Banjo, 1996). It is in respect of this broader and

more developmental objective that there seems to be a noticeable gap in the effectiveness, and overall achievement of the sub-programme. And there is much plausible evidence of that shortfall in achievement and impact.

Thus, on the whole, the GNS English courses do not seem to be contributing adequately towards the achievement of the remedial goal (of raising the students' competence to a level adequate for effective university work), the developmental goal (of empowering them, in terms of learning skills, enthusiasm, self-confidence, etc, to continue improving their mastery of the language) or what Banjo (1996) calls the 'sociological' goal (that of making them into model bilinguals, irrespective of their areas of specialisation.) (Akeredolu-Ale, 2006a).

Available explanations can be separated into two broad categories, namely:

- i) those which attribute the gap principally to observed deficiencies in the quality of the students or learners, and
- ii) those which attribute the gap principally to possible deficiencies in the existing teaching/learning structures, processes, and environment.

In the first category are explanations which emphasize sheer laziness and inadequate efforts on the part of students, their lack of interest in the subject, negative attitudes, and so on. More specifically;

- i) Inadequacies in the nation's system of English-language education at both primary-school and secondary-school levels;
- ii) Various admission malpractices;
- iii) Poor reading habits, which, indeed, is widely recognised as a national or even African problem;
- iv) A large motivational deficit on the part of the students, which is reflected in unsatisfactory attitudes, inadequate efforts, resort to malpractices in English-language examinations, etc. (Akeredolu-Ale, 2006a).

Thus, the first category attributes most weight to the enormity of the burden (workload) which an English-language proficiency improvement programme at the tertiary level imposes upon teachers and learners alike.

In the second category are explanations which emphasise possible defects in English-language teaching/learning structures, processes and environment and the probable consequences of such defects on the attitudes and motivations of learners and teachers alike.

Some important lessons emerge from this case study, the most salient being the following:

- (i) The task of raising the English-proficiency level of the generality of Nigerian students currently being admitted into the universities and other tertiary educational institutions has usually been underestimated.
- (ii) The motivation of the students is crucial for bridging the large deficiency that exists in their use of English.
- (iii) The factors which determine the adequacy or otherwise of that motivation as well as the level of learning effectiveness and efficiency that can be achieved are not limited to the personal characteristics of the students but also include the appropriateness and adequacy of teaching/learning structures, processes and environment.

As I stated earlier, in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria, considerable effort has gone into designing suitable GNS English courses to achieve two objectives. There has also been continuous collaboration among institutions towards evolving and, to some extent, standardising, at the national level, the curriculum, organisation and pedagogy of the GNS English courses. And, even though there are variations in the on-the-ground organisation of the courses in different universities (e.g., in the number and titles of courses, curriculum, etc) the GNS English courses in all the universities seem to have one particularly important feature in common, namely, the adoption of the conventional formal university approach for organising, delivering and examining academic undergraduate courses and for reflecting the student's performance in their eventual grading at graduation.

The main elements of that common approach include the following:

- (i) Identification and design of a number of courses to be taken by each student.
- (ii) Delivery of each course by means of formal lectures.
- (iii) Systematic assessment of the student's performance through both periodic written tests and an end-of-course written examination.
- (iv) Factoring the student's GNS English score, as the case may be, into the GPA computation on which is based the class of degree to be awarded.
- (v) Strong emphasis on grammar and related problems.
- (vi) Limited provision and opportunities for deliberate and systematic activities designed to improve the spoken English of the students even

though speech training is usually indicated in the curriculum/work-programme.

- (vii) A pass in the prescribed GNS English courses is usually a requirement for graduation.

The main problem with this highly-formal character of the teaching methods currently being used for the delivery of GNS English courses in many Nigerian universities is that such methods affect adversely the enthusiasm, motivation and quality of participation of the learners. More specifically, the highly-formal pedagogical approach has tended to weaken learners' motivation and to limit both learners' performance and the programme's overall effectiveness and impact for the following reasons:

- (i) It tends to create a gulf between teaching and learning
- (ii) It tends to distance the learner from the teacher even when the teacher is also, ideally, a role-model.
- (iii) It is excessively focused on examinations, to the detriment of an emphasis on actually improving the learner's practical competence in the use of English.
- (iv) It is not sufficiently practical; it does not provide the learner adequate opportunity to learn by doing.
- (v) There is hardly any emphasis on teaching and encouraging the learners to learn on their own.
- (vi) It does not allow the learner enough room or freedom to experiment with the language without the fear of official sanctions. The fear of having their 'failures' recorded tends to hang above the head of most learners and often suffices to make them shut up, even in situations where they could learn much by trying and making mistakes.
- (vii) In effect, it tends to limit the students' efforts at improving their English-language competence to what happens during the GNS English lecture hours, there being hardly any follow-up activities focused on the use of English and entailing less formal interactions among learners and between learners and more competent users of English, including their teachers.

In a previous paper, in order to avoid most of the limitations of the high-formality approach just identified, I had suggested the adoption of a less formal methodology (Akeredolu-Ale, 2006a; Akeredolu-Ale 2007b). The following are the

main elements of the 'Less-Formal' or 'Low-Formality' Approach; presented in the form of what it would take to transform the high-formality approach now in place in most universities into the low-formality approach:

- (i) Substantial reduction in the number of formal lectures prescribed for the entire GNS English courses.
- (ii) Increased emphasis on practical Use-of-English activities, entailing the following:
 - Guest –Speaker Activity Module
 - Students' Debate and Symposia Activity Module
 - Drama Activity Module
 - Reading-for-Pleasure Activity Module
 - Special English-for-Science Activity Module.
 - Writing/Authorship Skills Development Activity Module.
- (iii) Enlarging the scope for learner participation and initiatives in the formulation and organisation of as many as possible of the learning activities, as well as in the implementation of the activities.
- (iv) Limiting formal examination for the GNS English sub-programme to three summary objective-type assessments.
- (v) Replacing examination marks which reflect in the student's GPA with a certification of adequate participation to be awarded and submitted by the GNS Department in respect of each deserving student.

I make bold to say that in the Department of Communication and General Studies, of this University, we have embarked on some of these innovations.

6.0 THE WAY AHEAD

In the course of this presentation, I have identified many factors which have a bearing on the processes of English language acquisition in Nigeria, especially among the student population. I have emphasised two factors in particular above others, these are motivation of learners and pedagogy i.e. the way that the GNS English course is being delivered in tertiary institutions. These two factors, I consider to be extremely important, believing that appropriate changes in them are likely to result in significant improvement in English language performance and

competence among the student population.

The changes required in pedagogy can be introduced far more easily than those required to overcome the motivation problem of learners. For example, there is little that Nigeria alone can do to reverse the stiff immigration policies which the United Kingdom and indeed the whole of Europe is now so firmly resolved to enforce.

And, as we all know the problem posed by the growing irrelevance of good English in the young people's quest for employment and other economic opportunities in our own country is only an aspect of the corruption syndrome afflicting Nigeria at this juncture. This also means that there is no easy solution from that angle.

Again, I make bold to say that if the United Kingdom were to relax its immigration policy today, and if Nigeria were to begin to give all the credit wherever appropriate, to young people, who speak good English, when they seek employment in government, we would in not too distant a date witness considerable improvement in young people's perception of the English language as well as in their motivation to acquire competence in the language.

By my emphasis of the learner's motivation and of pedagogy, I am not in the least suggesting that the many other factors identified in the past are not important or that the problems which they pose are not to be addressed towards improving the situation. Among such other long standing factors are the following:

- (i) teacher education
- (ii) inadequate classrooms
- (iii) new technologies and other teaching materials, etc.

As far as the question of pedagogy is concerned, I would like to see the high-formality strategy in place now, under which students target examinations, replaced with a low formality strategy, which is also essentially participative and under which the student is focused on the improvement of their proficiency in the use of English. We have, through the high-formality strategy, hitherto achieved something in terms of students passing the prescribed examination. But we have achieved little in terms of seeing the students actually improve their competence and performance in English language (Bodunde and Akeredolu-Ale, 2010).

While sharing and understanding the sources of students' motivational problem and its attitudinal implications, my advice to students is that they should strive to be good users of the English language because local 'communication' alone will not do. International/intercultural intelligibility remains important. Also, who says

that they may not in future still find good English more valuable as history marches on! Society is not static; history has not come to an end. For example, immigration law may be relaxed. Good English may come to enjoy appropriate credit again. And as individuals, you may come to positions in which you would wish you spoke better English!

Let me not fail to mention and recognize one other factor to which many previous observers of the problem of English language acquisition in Nigeria have attributed the poor performance of our student population in both spoken and written English. That factor is that Nigerians don't read. Some have even suggested that it is a shortcoming which afflicts most African countries. And let us face it: we Nigerians don't read. And when I say Nigerians don't read, I am not referring to the vast majority who have done very little formal schooling, who are barely literate. Rather I am referring to the so called elite, the people who hold at least the O'Level certificate or its equivalent and above. These are the people who run the affairs of this nation – political leaders, distinguished legislators, the civil service, the banking system, the universities, and the pre-university system, just to name those that occur to one most readily. The reading habit remains very poor even among these extremely important operators of our society. Yet, these are also the so called educated parents from whom younger Nigerians are expected to learn and cultivate the reading habit. From the types of errors that are prevalent among the student population, one can see that they hardly expose themselves adequately, if at all they do, to the kind of books that can build up their capacity and enrich their competence in the use of English, especially their vocabulary, grammar, idiomatic expressions, etc,. Of course being exposed and listening frequently to good speakers of the language would also enhance their own proficiency in spoken English. While there has not been any systematic study of the connection between reading culture and English language acquisition as such, not many would dispute the observation that reading good books has been a habit which practically all proficient users of the English language have in common. The implication of this observation is that a significant improvement in the reading habit in the Nigerian society at large, and in particular, among the educated classes, will impact positively on the English language teaching and learning processes. Together with the other changes already suggested, it will certainly create an environment and a learning context in which the learning of English becomes something that can come about more naturally. The need to cultivate the reading habit and a reading culture among Nigerians, especially, the young who are still being groomed for an effective life, has been identified repeatedly and on countless occasions by the federal government as well as by many state governments. However, it remains a matter

about which hardly anything serious or adequate is being done. That lip-service must stop, if the nation is to derive the tremendous gains in English language acquisition as well as witness the birth of what can truly be regarded as a knowledge and information based leadership in the society. One must therefore, challenge government and other relevant institutions in Nigeria to take more seriously the cultivation among Nigerians in general, and younger Nigerians in particular, the habit of reading for pleasure. Indeed, one suspects that even Nigerian university teachers, at least most of us, neither buy nor read books for pleasure or sheer intellectual edification. At the risk of being provocative, one wonders, how much on the average, each of us had spent on such books during the year ended.

The situation continues to change and needs systematic studying but for the dearth of funding and if more can be done to fund language research more adequately, that would certainly improve on our understanding of the factors at work and enable us monitor, manage and improve the situation on a continuous basis.

7.0 CLOSING REFLECTIONS

What has been emphasized in the foregoing review of the Nigerian experience has been mainly on the language acquisition and proficiency objective. However, the fact that there has been a serious problem or what some would regard as a crisis in English language acquisition especially among the younger generation, would imply that what they have been speaking and writing as English is not quite English but something else. Or, as it has been termed 'Nigerian English'. Thus, the Nigerian experience also raises the question of language change and of whether language change can also be understood as language decay or degeneration. And it is with a comment on these issues in the realm of historical linguistics that I will be ending this Lecture.

Languages do not change autonomously or by virtue of any properties inherent in them. Nor do languages possess a 'will' of their own or any innate tendency or capacity to effect self-transformation. Rather, it is historical factors originating from within and beyond the immediate environment of a given language which determine whether and in what way that language changes over time. Given the developments in the evolution of English all over the world, and the fact that there are in existence now many Englishes, how meaningful is it to continue to speak of Good English as if there were still any criteria of proficiency in the use of the English language that could be applied universally, i.e. in appraising all existing Englishes. In short, one is saying that are there any generic criteria of proficiency that can be considered relevant for the assessment of proficiency in respect of all existing Englishes? Are there criteria that remain applicable regardless of variations in the historical circumstances surrounding the use of English in different

contexts, e.g. the status of the English language, the purposes being served by the English language, the characteristics of the English language community, etc? With regards to the character of the English language community, e.g., how meaningful would it be to continue to apply traditional criteria of proficiency in assessing the quality of English in use in the situation of an isolated society or in the context of a thoroughly “globalized society”, the latter in which English is probably only one of the many foreign languages that are acquired and used for specific limited purposes and where the orientation to the learning of English is largely dictated by the strictly utilitarian approach to the subject. Also how useful is it to continue to speak of good English or bad English even when the English language has been adapted for use in very specialised areas. For example, business practices, computer, medicine, etc.

The doubt surrounding the use of traditional criteria of proficiency in assessing the quality of English in use all over the world is strongly linked to the universalisation of English, the fact that it is probably the most widely spoken language in the world today. Ironically, as the universalisation of English proceeds, the idea of continuing to apply traditional criteria of proficiency in the use of the language universally, tends to be more problematic. In effect, this would imply that the changing status of the language imposes or implies certain costs and perhaps the foremost prize to be paid for the gain in the universal status of English as a language is that the criteria for assessing performances and proficiency cannot remain unchanged. Rather such criteria must be reformed or reconceptualised to accommodate the wide range of circumstances in which the language suitably adapted is being learnt and used and the wide range for which proficiency of the language is being acquired, the wide range of motivation that learners bring into the learning and acquisition of the language, the different degrees to which local languages inevitably influence the learning and acquisition of English, etc.

In effect, the criteria of goodness, if there be any need to retain such criteria, must become more accommodating, more dynamic and more decentralised. Indeed, it may be more meaningful to stop analysing the English in use in particular and different contexts all over the world in terms of whether they are good or bad in relation to any standardised criteria but to only ask whether the English that has evolved in a particular context is or is not sufficiently effective and or efficient as a means of communication in that particular context.

And the developments in the attitudes towards the learning of one particular language, English, which we have examined here, can also be viewed in relation to some more momentous changes occurring in the way that human civilization is evolving. I have listened to very lively discussions on how rapidly the whole centre-periphery paradigm is losing relevance as a tool for understanding or predicting what is happening at the periphery. Whether it is the world economy, the global political order or international cultural relations, each so-called peripheral country,

economy, culture, etc, is engaged on an aggressive effort to transform itself into a 'centre', into a more or less autonomous source of initiatives, creativity and innovations which would impact significantly on the other countries, economies, cultures, etc, including those which have hitherto constituted the centre and the sole source of change impulses. Standard or Queen's English is a property of the old 'centre'. The English Language community in Nigeria, as in other dependent societies, has hitherto been the periphery – struggling to meet standards set by the centre. The strong tendencies to deviation and innovation, including the increasing nonchalance on the part of the learners and the generality of the society are manifestations of the growing irrelevance of the centre-periphery paradigm in this case. The periphery is modifying the standards. They are creating and establishing new codes, setting aside the signals from the old centre. There is an inherent contradiction between globalization and any form of imperialism, on the one hand and human freedom and self expression, on the other. Valid laws of physics and other more exact sciences emanating from the centre will be followed universally by the periphery. For example, a country cannot design its own aeroplanes without complying with principles already established in aeronautics. But, in other spheres of human endeavour, especially in the cultural sphere the contradiction between imposition and freedom will be acted out in the unravelling of imposed standards and rules. That, essentially is what is happening in the language sphere.

Language, any language, is nothing if it is not a means of communication. A language acquires and maintains its identity and its value only in use. No language can grow without scars. And a language such as English, given its history in use, must be covered in scars. English is spoken by over 1.5 billion souls, only 375 million (or 25%) are native speakers. And that testifies to the crucial and dominant role which that language itself has been playing in humanity's unfolding history. But the scars which cover English are scars of progress, evidence of its highly active role in the march of human history, across both time and space. These are not scars that spell degeneration. They are scars that spell change, growth and increasing global relevance. In all these, Nigeria is fashioning out its own version of English, based mainly on the use that it has for the language in its own particular historical circumstance. Young Nigerians are not averse to speaking the Queen's English. But, to them, it has become so remote and their circumstances show that they can get by without it. That should not be a problem for English, any more than multicultural London English, Indian English, etc, are problems. English has taken these modifications in use in its stride, rejoicing in the proliferation of Englishes, many of which bear only a slender resemblance to the mother code. Nor is English the worse for it. In a brave new world whose hallmark is multiculturalism, a language, such as English, which is so adaptable, is assured of immortality for as long as no artificial restrictions are introduced to ensure its immutability. As long as it can continue to change, it will continue to grow in use, though only as an ever-changing language. And the Queen's English, the standard code of the language will, inevitably, remain viable and relevant only among those

with the stiff upper lip and in the British museum.

8.0 GRATITUDE

Mr Vice-Chancellor, sir, let me bring this Inaugural Lecture to a close by acknowledging the support and contributions which I got from my colleagues, teachers, friends, family and a host of others.

The university has provided a congenial environment for me to pursue my career. I will like to acknowledge the goodwill I have received from all the Vice Chancellors of this great university, from the pioneer Vice-Chancellor, Prof Nurudeen Nimbe Adedipe to the current Vice-Chancellor, Prof Olufemi Olaiya Balogun. Very special thanks are due to you all for your encouragement regarding commitment and productivity.

My special appreciation also goes to Omoba Bisi Soboyejo, the first Registrar of this great University. It was through her I got to know about UNAAB.

I appreciate all the Deans and Deputy Deans of former COLAMRUCS and the baby COLAMRUD. In particular, I thank the present Dean of my College, Prof. Segun Apantaku for his encouragement.

I enjoyed my working relationship with all the staff of COLFHEC and COLAMRUD. There won't be enough space here to tell how great you all have been!

I thank my numerous colleagues in the Department of Communication and General Studies, both past and present. Drs Bose Sotiloye, Helen Bodunde, Remi Aduradola, Ade Adebisi and Mrs Tope Olaifa, thank you for being such wonderful members of the English Cult. This is indeed our inaugural lecture. Drs Shopeju, Nwaorgu, Onifade, Okolo-Nwakaeme, Akintona and Imhonopi, Messers Ojukwu and Odozor I appreciate all of you.

And I say thank you to all my friends and students on this campus, especially those who are here today, for making my experience on this campus really worthwhile.

Many friends and family members have contributed to the development of my life, Thank you all for being such good friends and family members. I am particularly grateful to Prof (Mrs) Morenike Dipeolu, Dr (Mrs) Titi Bamgbose, and Mama Bandipo for being there for me always.

I appreciate all the members of the National Association of Teachers and

Researchers of English as a Second Language, in particular members of the COMSKIPTECH family, Professor Sam-Kolo, Drs Bayo Aborisade, Titi Adebayo, Funmi Olubode-Sawe and Bola Adelabu.

I am grateful to members of the Ex-Teresians Association, Abeokuta Branch. Thank you very much for your support all the time. St Teresa, Pray for us.

I appreciate the presence of the proprietor of Elyon College, Mrs Mope Fijabi and her husband. And to my wonderful students from Elyon College, I wish you success in your great quest for knowledge and wisdom.

I recognize the representatives of the Golden Sisters of Albarika Mosque, Abiola Way, Abeokuta. Thank you for coming here today.

A big thank you is due to Dr Adesola Adebowale and Mr Gboyega Alalade for working with me on the PowerPoint presentation.

I thank my Mum, Alhaja Abibatu Awelewa Kassali, for continuing to be an inspiration. You will recall how you used to love calling me Prof Bolanle after Prof Bolanle Awe back in those days! I am happy your dream came true!

And to my siblings, Bra mi, Antimi Ayinke, Antimi Adunni, Abeke, Dupe, Oluwakemi and Sunkanmi, their spouses and families, I cherish you all more than I can say. You are all so wonderful. I couldn't ask for better siblings.

To Biodun, Bimpe, Ireti, Bayo and Peter thank you for letting me be your mummy and being such wonderful and delightful children.

My profound gratitude also goes to my husband, mentor and best friend, Prof Ekundayo Oladehinde Akeredolu-Ale. Thank you for keeping my life finely tuned and giving me direction and stabilization.

To the most adorable daughter, Precious Omorinola Oreoluwa, this time, it is thank you for helping mummy prepare her Inaugural Lecture. You give me enormous faith in the future and I love you with all my heart.

This Inaugural Lecture is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Alhaji Jimoh Keripe Kassali, who laid the foundation for this presentation today.

And, of course, finally and above all, to Almighty Allah for all that He has made possible.

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Sir,

Members of the High Table,
Fellow Scholars,
Members of FUNAAB Family,
Members of My Family and Friends,
Gentlemen of the Press,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Great FUNAABITES.

Thank you for your patience and hearing out. God bless You.