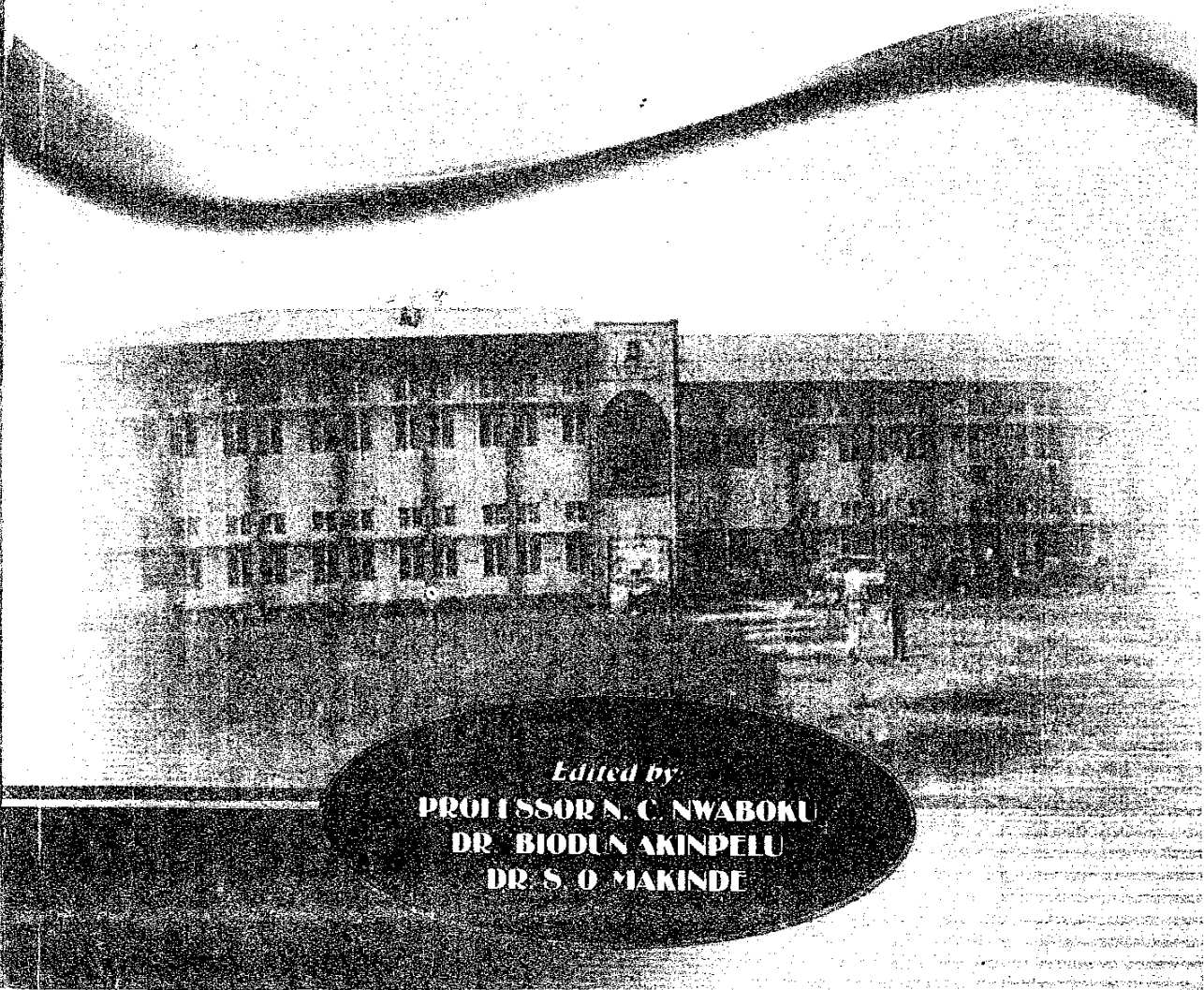


# **EDUCATION: A SOCIALIZING AGENT**

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**FESTUS AWOSIKA AKINLAYE (Ph.D)**

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## CONTENTS

Social Studies Education and National Development .....	1
An Examination of Social' Gains and Subsequent Poor Enrolment in Geography and History at Senior Secondary School Level and Tertiary Level ...	10
Aural - Oral Perceptions: Pronunciation Defects in the Socio - Linguistic Milieu of Nigeria .....	14
The Methodics of Nursery/ Primary School Language Teaching .....	26
Enriching Studies' Writing Ability Through Literary Models: Implications for Self- Actualisation and Sustainability .....	42
Field Trip in Indigenous Second Language Teaching Major Considerations .....	58
Teachers' Perception on the use of Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools in Ogun State .....	66
Mathematics Curriculum for Social Transformation .....	77
Social Interactions in Science Classroom .....	85
Cultural Consideration of Mathematics Curriculum: Implication for the Learner .....	93
Science Teachers' Instructional Practices as Antidotes for Inculcating Scientific Attitudes and Values Education .....	103
Exponenting A Scientifically Literate Nigerian Society from Schools .....	113
ICT Access and Application in Tertiary Education in Lagos State: Watching the Gender Balance .....	120
Teachers' Perception of the Welfare Packages for Teaching Staff in the Lagos State Secondary Schools: Implication for Teacher Productivity .....	134
Teachers' Perception of the Effective Implementation of Continuous Assessment in Lagos State Secondary Schools .....	142
Determinants of Job Satisfaction Among Nurses in Lagos State General Hospitals ...	150
Perceived Influence of Job Satisfaction Factors on Performance of Coaches in Lagos State Tertiary Institutions .....	159
Ensuring the Political Rights of the Child Through Social Studies Education .....	169
Library and Society: Meeting the Information needs of the Rural Dwellers of Nigeria .	179
Religious Education: A Tool for Inculcating Moral Values .....	187
The Menace of Campus Cultism: Causes, Consequences and Possible Solution ...	197
The Impact of Child Neglect on Children's Academics Performance in Lagos .....	208
Perception of Parents and Teachers on the Enforcement of School Discipline in Lagos State .....	218
Socialization as an Antidote for Juvenile Delinquency .....	229
An Appraisal of Female Educational Enrolment in Nigeria .....	240
Beyala's Feminitude' - A Critique of the Woman Liberation Struggle as Depicted in 'C' est le Soleil Quin'a Brulee' .....	254
Teachers' Areas of Specialisation, Qualification and Experience as Correlates of Students' Academic Achievement in Social Studies .....	264
ICT Needs Assessment of Higher Education Women: A Case Study of Lagos State University (LASU) Women Academics, Ojo Campus, Nigeria. ....	272
Scientific and Technology Development in Emergent Societies .....	282
Arabic Language and the UBE Scheme for National Development: Hiatus and Panacea .....	287
Correlates of Some Motivational Factors on the Performance of Adult French Learners .....	294
Leadership and Result Achievement .....	302

## **AURAL – ORAL PERCEPTIONS: PRONUNCIATION DEFECTS IN THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC MILIEU OF NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the dynamics of interference phenomenon on students' pronunciation in English. It appraises English contact with indigenous languages and discusses the pronunciation defects of students in the socio-linguistic milieu of Nigeria. The implications of the linguistic influences for the teaching of oral English are discussed.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The history of the importation of English Language to Nigeria is common knowledge. It was introduced in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the British slave traders and later perpetuated by missionaries, colonial administrators and post – independent governments.

In spite of its dominance as the official language and medium of instruction in the educational system, evidence abound that students' performance remain largely unsatisfactory. The decline has been attributed among other things to students' lack of competence in the communicative skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Okebukola, 2000; Soneye, 2002; Adelola, 2002 and Maduekwe, 2002).

These skills enhance the quality of students' academic and intellectual activities. It is natural that aural perceptions (listening and hearing) precede oracy (speaking). However, they both form the starting point towards the acquisition of language. Learners must listen to enable them to discriminate between sounds, make meaning from the sounds, interpret words and sentences and evaluate what they have heard with a view to accepting or rejecting before they can begin to pronounce adequately.

There is general agreement that the variety of English we adopt in the teaching of oral English in Nigeria should be the Received Pronunciation (RP). This as noted by Awonusi (1999) will make for uniformity and will enable Nigerians to communicate with other users of the language in and outside the country since it is regarded as the model in English speaking countries that are British norm – dependent. RP may be described as the accent of educated Londoners, the English public schools, those of Ox-Bridge education and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Besides, it is said to be free of regionalisms or provincialism as well as vulgarisms. So, it is intelligible to most local accents. This explains why it is the accent most English phoneticians recommend to the foreign learners of English.

The curriculum content as set out in the primary and secondary school curricula is based on the teaching of this standard English pronunciation. In these curricula, provision is made for aspects of speech that the teacher should know very well if he/she is to serve as a good model for the students to imitate. These include English sounds pronunciation, stress, intonation patterns and speech rhythm.

Sometimes the teacher of phonetics and phonology is so engrossed with the description of the organs of production and processes involved in sound articulation as well as the phonological patterning of such sounds that he relegates pronunciation to the background as the raw data (Awonusi, 1999).

The issue becomes compounded when a teacher is in a second language (L2) situation, as in the case of the Nigerian teacher who has to teach students the pronunciation of a foreign or second language while at the same time he provides the linguistic basis for pronunciation in a multi-linguistic environment. This may explain why considerable attention has been given to the match or lack thereof between ethnic values of students, their teachers and the materials used for teaching them. Similarities or differences in linguistic experiences must be analyzed for the impact they may have upon learning.

Research and classroom observations have shown that the English used in Nigeria reveals in varying degrees of vernacular influences at the morphological, syntactic, semantic and phonological levels (Idowu, 1998; Essien; 1995).

Phonologically, the linguistic background of a learner brings about modifications in pronunciation in second language situations because whenever two languages come in contact, they resolve into mutual interference to the emergence of a third hybrid language. (Idowu 1998). This is the case of English language in Nigeria. Its close contact with the Nigerian indigenous languages has resulted in the emergence of Nigerian English – a local dialect of English in Nigeria, which has adopted

characteristics that are different from the British norm to be able to serve its Nigerian socio-linguistic milieu. In spite of the aspersions cast on its acceptability by critics predicated on the unidentified norm of reference by way of the structural description of its characteristics, reality stares us in the face that local variations of the language abound in the written and spoken English of Nigerians. Lending credence to the linguistic virility of Nigerian English, Braj Kachru (1995) in his foreword to the book 'New Englishes' wrote:

West Africans have over a period of time given English a Nigerian identity. African canon of the English language has been established and recognized. On the whole it is a decolonized and demythologized canon. It is indeed a vital component of world Englishes!

The speakers of this variety of English in Nigeria speak at least one indigenous language – their mother tongue in addition to the English language. Consequently, the tendency is for a mutual interaction to take place between all or some of the linguistic patterns of both languages. These by-products of linguistic co-existence are important to the identification of varieties of English and a study of the intra-linguistic influences, which may prevent intelligibility.

The theme of this study derives from the latter. It attempts to examine the phonological relics which are both indicative of the influence of contact situations and also socio-linguistically, informative variables and how they impinge on students' pronunciation in English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba accents are considered because they are the major indigenous languages recognized by the National Policy on Education (NPE 2001).

The study is significant to the extent that it documents the indicators of influence of the various accents of Nigerian English (Hausa, English and Igbo) on students' pronunciation and intelligibility of the Received Pronunciation (RP).

### **Sample**

Fifty secondary school students randomly selected from five schools in two local government areas of Lagos state participated in the study. The schools were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure based on the heterogeneous nature of the schools. All schools that had students from the three major ethnic groups in the country qualified for inclusion.

### **Instrumentation**

An oral Reading Passage was used to assess students' pronunciation in English. It was extracted from a novel 'Mother's Choice, by Agbo Areo. It was adjudged suitable for the study based on validity checks by three experts in Language Education. The reliability of the instrument was established at 0.72 using the Crombach Alpha statistical method

### **Research Questions**

1. What pronunciation defects are observable in Hausa learners of English
2. What pronunciation defects are observable in Igbo learners of English
3. What pronunciation defects are observable in Yoruba learners of English.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The researcher gave model reading of the passage after which students were asked to read silently. This was followed by a read aloud session during which students' pronunciation of each word was carefully observed – Students were given prompts to encourage their pronunciation of the words they found difficult.

### **Findings**

*The table below (4.1) shows the similarities and analogical deviations in the pronunciation of sounds.*

Word	R.P.	Hausa	Igbo	Yoruba
Profession	/p/	/p/	/p/	/p/
Pupils	/p/	/p/	/p/	/p/
Various	/v/	/b/	/f/	/f/
Peculiar	/p/	/b/	/p/	/p/
Picked	/p/	/f/	/p/	/p/
Jiving	/v/	/b/	/v/	/f/
Captivating	/v/	/b/	/v/	/f/

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First	/ə:/	/œ/	/e/	/ /
The	/ð/	/œ/	/œ/	/i/
Was	Weak form //	/œ/	/e/	/ə/
And	Weak form //	/a/	/e/	/œ/
Courier	/ð/	/œ/	/e/	/œ/
their	/œ/	/a:/	/ie/	/œ/
Supported	/id/	/ed/	/ed/	/ed/
Delighted	/id/	/ed/	/ed/	/ed/
Picked	/t/	/d/	/d/	/d/
Attempted	/id/	/ed/	/ed/	/ed/
looked	/t/	/d/	/d/	/d/
tunic	/j/	/u/	/u/	/u/
music	/j/	/u/	/u/	/u/
children	/tʃ/	/ʃ/	/ʃ/	/ʃ/
chinese	/tʃ/	/ʃ/	/ʃ/	/ʃ/
singer	/sɪŋə/	/sɪŋə/	/sɪŋə/	/sɪŋə/
culture	/kʌltʃə/	/kʌltʃ/	/kʌltʃ/	/kʌltʃ/
does	/dʌz/	/dʌz/	/dʌz/	/dʌz/
country	/kʌntri/	/kʌntri/	/kʌntri/	/kʌntri/
boys	/z/	/s/	/s/	/s/
girls	/z/	/s/	/s/	/s/
plays	/z/	/s/	/s/	/s/
Kilt	/kilt/	/kilit/	/kilit/	/kilit/
wealthy	/tʃ/	/ʃ/	/d/	/d/
when	/w/	/m/	/m/	/w/
which	/w/	/m/	/m/	/w/

*Transcription model – Daniel Jones (1992)*

The table reveals some variations in the pronunciation of English sounds across the homogeneous group of speakers of the different accents of English in Nigeria. A diachrony of these variations and their linguistic influence on RP deserve some consideration.

***The Influence of Hausa English on 'RP'***

- The substitution of the labiodental fricative /v/ for the Bilabial stop /b/ in the words *various*, *jiving* and *captivating*.

b. The substitution of the pure vowels:

/a:/ for /ə/ in the word *first*

/æ/ for /ə/ in *and*

/æ/ for /ə/ in *the*

/æ/ for the diphthong /ə/ in *courier*

long vowel /a:/ for the diphthong /eə/ in *their*

c. The substitution of /m/ for semivowel /w/ in *which* and *when*

**The Influence of Igbo English on 'RP'**

a. The substitution of short or lax vowel /e/ for long or tense vowel /ə:/ in the word *first*

b. The substitution of the voiced alveolar stop /d/ for the voiced dental fricative /ð/ in *wealthy*

c. The substitution of vowel /e/ for the short vowel /ɜ/ in *was*

d. The substitution of /ie/ for the diphthong /iə/ in the word *courier*

e. The substitution of vowel /e/ for the diphthong /eə/ in *their*

f. The substitution of vowel /ɔ/ for /ʌ/ in *does* and *country*

**The Influence of Yoruba English on 'RP'**

a. The substitution of the labiodental fricatives /f/ for /v/ in the words *various*, *living* and *captivating*.

b. The substitution of short vowel /ɔ/ for long vowel /ə:/ in the word *first*.

c. The substitution of the voiced alveolar stop /d/ for the voiced dental fricative /ð/ in *wealthy* and *then*

d. The substitution of short vowel /i/ for /ə/ in *the*.

e. The substitution of short vowel /ɔ/ for vowel /ə/ in *was*.

f. The substitution of vowel /æ/ for vowel /ə/ in *and*.

g. The substitution of the vowel /ɔ/ for /ʌ/ in the words *does* and *country*

h. The dropping of the glottal fricative /h/ in the words *house*, *rehearsals*, *head*, *hair*, *hand* and the pronunciation of /h/ in h-less words: (phonological hypercorrection) – *applause*, *audience*, *ambassador*.

i. The substitution of /ŋ/ for semi-vowel /w/ in *which* and *when*



***The Influence of all (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) on 'RP'***

- a. The substitution of / ed / for / id / in the words *supported, delighted, at tempted, associated, decided, wanted, started, contacted, beaded, treated.*
- b. The substitution of the alveolar stops / d / for / f / in the words *picked, looked.*
- c. The substitution of the vowel / u / for the yod / j / in *tunic* and *music.*
- d. The substitution of the palato alveolar fricative / ʃ / for the palato – alveolar affricate / tʃ / in *children* and *chinese*
- e. The insertion of the velar stop / g / to the velar nasal / ŋ / in the word *singer* leading to the mis pronunciation of / ʃŋð / as / ʃŋgð /
- f. The substitution of the palato alveolar fricative / ʃ / for the palato alveolar affricative / tʃ / in the word *culture.*
- g. The substitution of the voiced alveolar fricatives / z / for the voiceless / s / in the words *days, boys, and girls.*
- h. The insertion of the vowel / i / in the pronunciation of the word [kilt] pronounced as [kilit].

The foregoing findings support the emerging corpus of knowledge of mother tongue interference on English language learning (Awonusi, 1999; Iroghuma, 2002; Jibril, 2000; Adetugbo, 1987 and Bobda, 1995). The heterogeneity of Nigerian English as revealed by the study had been attributed to the vast surface area of Nigeria (923,768 Dcm<sup>2</sup>) and its large population (89 million in 1991 speculated to be about 120 million in the recent times) which give it an unquestionable propensity for diversity (Bobda, 1995).

Adetugbo (1987) noted the dichotomy between the Received Pronunciation (RP) and the Nigerian English accents. While RP has twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs, most dialects of Nigerian English on the other hand have seven simple vowels and six diphthongs. In other words, Nigerian English phonology makes use of seven vowel distinctions than RP. The RP distinction between tense and lax vowels is almost completely lost in Nigerian English. He further stated that the Hausa operate with two diphthongs - / ai / and / au / and that the opposition between tense and lax vowels is operative in Igbo and Hausa while Yoruba lacks the opposition tense / lax in the vowel series. Bobda (1995) also noted that the Hausa have a vowel very close to RP. / ʌ /

Adelola (2002) informed that in all the Nigerian accents as in most west African languages one sound is usually used in almost one-to-one correspondence. In

other words a letter of the alphabet has a constant sound representing it in speech. This is reflected in their phonologically based orthographies. However, English differs in this respect because it violates the phoneme – grapheme correspondence principle. This he noted has given rise to lots of illogical phono-orthographic relationships in English resulting in Nigerian students mispronunciation of English words.

Iroghuma (2002) confirmed the inadequacy of the Igbo alphabet to represent all the phonemes in English giving the examples of the representation of the /ae/ sound in words such as:

- ara – breast
- ara – madness
- iba – to be rich
- ibya – to come
- a tu – chewing stick
- a thu – buffalo

In the same vein Jibril (2000) noticed the same phenomenon in Hausa English in which /a:/ is generally used whenever RP has / / or / / regardless of the spelling, so that *work*, *first* and *person* all have /a:/.

Awonusi (1999) also informed that Yoruba English speakers have the tendency to substitute /ae/ for /a:/ and / / in such words as *part far* and *farm*, *water*, *above heater*.

The phonology of these languages may explain the differences in the pronunciation of the words *first*, *the*, *was*, *and*, *courier*, *their*, *does* and *country* in this study.

In spite of this diversity, there is the evidence that some features cut across ethnic lines. For example, the three groups of speakers pronounced the words supported, looked, delighted, picked, attempted, tunic, music, children, Chinese, singer and culture the same way. This is in line with existing literature and findings of previous researchers. For instance Awonusi (1986) cited in Bobda (1995) believed that there is a typical Nigerian accent tending in the direction of Yoruba English. This he attributed to the influence of Lagos – in Yoruba land as a port, and industrial city, the economic and for a long time administrative capital which encouraged an influx from all parts of the country, thereby favouring the spread of the Yoruba accent. This may explain why the Hausa subjects in the sample pronounced /p/ in pupils and not /f/ as reported by Awonusi (1999). They might have stayed long enough in Lagos that the problem has been surmounted by the Yoruba influence.

Attesting to the evolution of a national standard accent of English transcending ethnic boundaries, Adetugbo (1987) noted that Hausa and Igbo languages have contrastive vowels similar to RP /i/ and /i:/ yet Hausa and Igbo speakers do not make this distinction saying for example [bit] for both [beat] and [bit] like the Yoruba speakers.

It is instructive to note that the divergence noticeable in the sound-to-letter correspondence in English is much more complex in vowels. For example letter "a" is represented as: /     /

1. Emphasize its central quality
2. It is reduced in terms of the degree of openness and loudness in     articulation.
3. Never occurs in a stressed syllable.

    / æ / in *bad, cat, rag*

    / ɑ: / in *father, pass march*

    /     / in *tall, fall*

    / e / in *any, Thames*

    / ei / in *wait, play, date*

Similarly, the vowel /     / can be represented by a number of letters of the English alphabet e.g. *o* in *victor* and *doctor*, *u* in *China, above*, and *sota* or *er* in *baker, gentlemen, user* and *counter*.

In some cases, letters are not pronounced at all that is, they are said to be silent e.g. letter *b* in *comb, tomb, lamb* and *plumber*. The letter *k* is not pronounced in *reign* and *sign*. Whereas letter *h* is pronounced in *house, home* and *hammer*, it is not pronounced in *hour, heir* and *honest*. It may or may not be pronounced in *him, her* and *hotel* and interestingly while it is not pronounced in *vehicle*, it is pronounced in *vehicular*. / t / may or may not be pronounced in *often*.

The divergence between English spelling and pronunciation as in the examples given above, implies that the learner needs to be conscious of such sound to letter mismatches while the teacher of pronunciation must be familiar with phonetic symbols which are used to capture pronunciation consequently consulting pronouncing dictionaries must be usual practice.

### **Conclusion Implications and Recommendations**

This study investigated the interference patterns of students and linguistic phonological relics which are indicative of contact situations and capable of preventing intelligibility.

Data emerging from the study indicate that the students in the sample exhibit enough proof that the English language has made some adaptation to the Nigerian sociolinguistic milieu since its implantation in the country many years ago.

To avoid running the risk of overgeneralization, it must be stressed that conclusions reached cannot be extended beyond the sample. It is however note worthy that efforts still need to be put in towards improving the oracy skills of our students.

Teachers need to take cognizance of learners' linguistic background and pay particular attention to problematic areas as discussed earlier. It is also important to note that orthography or spelling should not be relied on in pronouncing English sounds and as such all sounds should be taught individually with ample examples of individual words and minimal pairs.

It should be noted that some English vowels are difficult because they do not exist in the students' mother-tongue. Examples of such difficult vowels can be obtained from Gimson, 1975; Akere, 1987; Jones, 1992; Adetugbo, 1993 and Awonusi, 1999). These authors also provide useful hints on how learners of English in second language situations can be helped to improve their oral language and overcome pronunciation difficulties generally. The various techniques of teaching and assessing oral language skills are also provided in the reference materials.

Teachers and examiners should note the fact that Nigerian English is a reality in Nigeria. Whether or not it has acquired sufficient characteristics to mark it off from other dialects should no longer be an issue for contention. As Attah (1995) rightly noted what we should be concerned with is establishing the distinction between what experts describe and classify as varieties of English in Nigeria. Banjo echoed in Attah (1995) gave different descriptions of the varieties of spoken English in Nigeria, which can be classified into deviant forms and viable Nigerian variations. He regarded the English speech of Nigerians who never went to school and that characteristic of Nigerians educated only up to the primary school as deviant forms marked with very heavy imprint from the mother tongues, resulting in intelligibility problems. This he called variety I. Variety II is characterized by high performances in phonological, syntactic and lexical features but with imprints from the speakers' ethnic background. Variety III, he described as the speech of non-native English speaking Nigerians, which bears enough 'Nigerianess' in spite of its nearness to the RP. Varieties II and III seem to be acceptable variants since intelligibility is not hampered.

The onus therefore rests on teachers to help learners speak the language in such a way that their speech forms adhere to the principle of intelligibility so that they are able to communicate effectively with other speakers outside Nigeria since the

objective as noted by Awonusi (1999) is not to make Englishmen and English-women of Nigerians but to ensure that they are presented with and exposed to an accent that is internationally prestigious, acceptable and intelligible. The truth is that no matter how close to RP the Nigerian English accent is, it will retain its vibrant local colour.

Teachers should pay attention to those elements in the students' native language, which could cause interference problems in English. Although a teacher of English may not be able to speak and understand the student's native language to be able to bring out these elements. Correcting inaccuracies and insisting that students speak the correct form of the language all the time can achieve a lot.

The teachers of the indigenous languages can also be helpful in this area, since they must also have passed English language to be qualified as teachers, they could help students by drawing inferences from the two languages especially in the areas of phonological interference that hamper intelligibility.

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***Education: A Socializing Agent***

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