

Varieties of the English Language in Nigeria: The Socio-Linguistic Implication on Communication.

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Abstract

The debate over the existence and non-existence of a variety of English known as Nigerian English (N.E) has continued to be a subject of increasing research in Nigeria. Some scholars are completely opposed to the concept. This group, following the perspective of error analysis, holds the view that N.E is a deviation in the use of English from British norms. Others insist that N.E is among the developing varieties of world Englishes. This paper examines the different varieties of the Nigerian English and the sociolinguistic implications it has on communication. The study used questionnaires as instruments of data collection which were analysed using the Statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data analysis. The study shows that varieties of the English language in Nigeria create barriers in communication among categories of people in the societies. Finally, the paper recommends that the standard variety (variety III) should be standardized and institutionalized to aid effective communication. Also, Nigerian English should assume a status with features that will aid its national and international identity.

Key words: Nigerian English, sociolinguistics, communication, identity, standard variety.

Introduction

Language is an interesting phenomenon that has been bestowed on man. It is a means by which man expresses his ideas and gives meaning to his existence. The survival of the human society has been made possible mainly through the vehicle of language Uzoечи, (2020). According to Daramola (2004), "Language does not exist like an organism, but occurs" (23). This implies that language occurs, functions and is put to work with the whole existence of man. Babatunde (2002) explicates that language is the expression of culture, the depository of culture and crucial mode of culture transmission (1). Similarly, Osisanwo, (2003) describes language as an instrument of communication among human beings. In any human society, language performs transactional, interactional, and educational functions (5).

One important feature of language is its dynamism. Thus, language adapts to situational constraints as its users vary across regional/geographical, social, educational, occupational, domains. English is such a typical language that, because of vast geographical distribution, has often assumed the peculiarities of different societies that use it, informing the notion of variety.

According to Banjo (1979) one of the most

fascinating things about language is that it manifests variation that is induced by space, time, and situation. This implies that language is not static. It changes irrespective of its status, in its home base; and when it meets any other language. There are bound to be deviations from the norm, and many varieties of it will emerge. There is therefore no limit to the structural diversity of languages. English is no exception; it has undergone several changes. These changes create in people, even the native speakers of the language, various attitudes. Its use, either as a second language or foreign language, creates different attitudes; positive or negative towards the varieties (Olaoye, 2013).

Even within a geographical region or a community, the individuals vary in their speech patterns. According to Eka (1993), variation in speech is a consistent linguistic variety. There are no two geographical regions or communities which speak a particular language in exactly the same way at all times. At the extreme, there is the issue of the idiolect. The individual himself does not speak a language in exactly the same way at all times. With regards to English, we tend to hear of British English, American English, Canadian English, and Australian English. Outside the areas where English is spoken as a first language (L1),

we are aware of English as a second language (L2) in areas such as Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra-Leone and Gambia and the resultant new Englishes like Nigerian English, Ghanaian English, Sierra Leonean English and Gambian English.

Certain factors have tended to account for this phenomenon. First, language involves cultural and social issues, since cultural patterns and social behavior differ from region to region, speech patterns are bound to be different too.

Secondly, as a reflection of the dynamic nature of language, a speaker generally tends to “shape” his speech to reflect among others, his personality, his knowledge of the word, his relationship with the people he is talking to and even the quality of the audience.

Thirdly, variation may also be accounted for by the speaker’s level of education in the language. Some people show more interest in a particular language than others, such people accordingly put in a lot of effort to master it. However, the level of education in the language does not necessarily correspond to general levels of formal education. For instance, it is quite possible that a holder of West African School Certificate (WASC) who undergoes various forms of training in spoken English may be able to master English speech better than a fresh graduate of computer science whose main concern is with computer language (Eka, 1993).

This study examines the variety of Nigerian English and problems Nigerians encounter in the process of learning English as a second language. It aims to achieve these objectives: To ascertain the nature of Nigeria’s varieties of the English language. To find out the factors that influence the varieties of the English Language. To ascertain the sociolinguistic implication of Nigerian English on communication.

VARIETIES OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH

Nigerian English is a product of language contact. It is a variety of the world Englishes available for use by its speech community. According to Egwuogu (2004), varieties of Nigerian English arise from the interaction of English language with the local languages and from the different ways speakers of a second language try to approximate the sounds of the language. It also occurs as a result of interference from the mother tongue (MT) (103).

Adeniyi (2006), cited in Adedemi’s (2007) describes N.E as a variety of English spoken and used by Nigerians. It is an emerging variety of world Englishes because it has identifiable features and varieties which mark it out as a legitimate variety within the varieties of world Englishes. Some of these features are:

- a. Deviation: It does not suggest error; rather, it suggests difference or differences in usage, for example, **not on seat, escort the person, the book is titled.**
- b. Creativity: Here, dictions that are uncommon and meaningful are brought into existence in educated communication in English. These words are highly productive. The implication is that the creative usage will depart from standard or educated usage but will stimulate interest and even respect for the originator. Examples are: **go slow to mean traffic jam, off head to mean off hand, cash madam** and so on.
- c. Loan transfer: **Ankara** and **asoebi, abi, shea** are loan words from indigenous Nigerian languages.
- d. Interference.

Thus, we can conveniently talk about Nigerian English just as we can talk about other new Englishes that evolved from the English language. Nigerian English is a legitimate variety used by the Nigerian people in various spheres of communication.

Scholars have identified different varieties of Nigerian English. Brosnahan (1958) was the first to produce a schema based on levels. He spoke of four levels of usage corresponding to stages in education. According to Brosnahan (1958) four varieties of Nigerian English exist:

1. Pidgin, which is used by people with no formal education.
2. The variety used by those with only primary education.
3. The variety used by those with secondary education.

4. The variety used by those with university education.

The classification of the varieties of the Nigerian English was also done by Banjo (1971), who classified the varieties according to models. For him, the choice of an appropriate model for identifying varieties should be based on the criteria of social acceptability and international intelligibility on the assumption that such a model given the second language situation should possess a high prestige at home and a reasonable intelligibility abroad. His classification of the varieties of Nigerian English was purely linguistic. Groups of linguistic features are distinguished according to the degree of deviation which they manifest from exoglossic standard (Jowitt, 1991). He stipulated the following varieties:

1. THE NON-STANDARD (VARIETY I)

The non-standard variety of spoken Nigerian English is described as that spoken by Nigerians who are barely educated in the language and have had a minimum exposure to it both in school and outside. Variety I describes the variety by Nigerians who have picked out the language as a result of exigencies of their occupation. Their spoken outcome is replete with evidence of interference from the speaker's first language, unacceptable choice of words and structural patterns, a general departure from both national and international standards of acceptability and intelligibility. Phonologically, when it comes to monophthongs, those under non-standard and basic variety tend to substitute long vowel sounds with the short sounds. This substitution leads to confusion between "beat and bit", "part and pat", "port and pot", "pool and pull". In terms of grammar, the exponents of this group have a peculiar use of words e.g **I buy it yesterday** instead of **I bought it yesterday**. There is also frequent lack of concord e.g **the books on the table is mine**. There is generalization of the number system e.g **baggages advices, equipments**. Lastly, omission of the determiner e.g **I want to see doctor** rather than **I want to see a doctor**.

2. THE BASIC OR THE GENERAL VARIETY (VARIETY II)

The basic or general variety may be said to be

close to standard British English in syntax and semantics, but with strongly marked phonological and lexical characteristics (Jowitt, 1991). Exponents of this group show evidence of a fair mastery of the segmental and non-segmental distinctions in English and can be understood easily in spite of certain clearly identifiable deviant forms of usage. From the viewpoint of school education, those in secondary schools and those who are brought up by inadequately informed models can be said to be exponents of this variety. Variety II represents the speech of most Nigerians. Features used in VI are also found in VII but at a lesser degree.

3. THE STANDARD OR EDUCATED VARIETY (VARIETY III)

The standard or educated variety is close to standard British English in syntax and semantics, similar in phonology, different in phonetic features and with some lexical peculiarities. Exponents can be understood and accepted both nationally and internationally. This variety is often associated with usage by university men and women. Phonologically, there is a noticeable shortening of nearly all long vowels, sometimes. Provenance is more difficult to detect, there is less syntactic error, vocabulary is very strong, this set of people have developed strong vocabulary due to reading and exposure to the language and there is a conscious deviation, but the phonetic features are still Nigerian.

4. THE AMBILINGUAL OR NEAR NATIVE VARIETY (VARIETY IV)

The ambi-lingual or near native variety is spoken by people who are highly educated in the language and specifically have received specialist training in spoken English. Exponents of this variety may also be people who have been influenced by native speakers. However, they can still be identified as non-native speakers despite their high level of competence. Those in this variety have features of monophthongal representative of near native and sometimes even native usage.

Methodology:

The study adopted the quantitative survey design while respondents were randomly selected. Structured questionnaires were used to gather data which were analysed using SPSS. The researcher interacted with the respondents in formal and

informal settings like lecture halls, marketplaces, and shops. Groups and individual discussions were carried out.

Presentation and Discussions of Findings

This section presents the result of SPSS output generated from the data collected using structured

questionnaire and the discussion of the findings thereof. The data was separated into demographic attributes of the respondents, summary of the responses to other questions and evaluation of the research objectives.

Table 1: Demographic attributes of the respondents

Table 1 represents the demographic attributes of the respondents. It shows that about 55.0% of the respondents are male and 45.0% were female. Based on age distribution about 58.3% of the respondents are between 18-30 years of age, 31-43 years old form about 33.3% of the respondents and only 8.3% constitute 44 years and above. The survey also revealed that about 53.3% of the total respondents have first degree qualification which implies that most of our respondents are educated.

	Frequency		Percentage
		Gender	
Male	33		55.0
Female	27		45.0
		Age	
18-30 years	35		58.3
31-43 years	20		33.3
44 and above	5		8.3
		Education	
No formal education	2		3.3
Primary education	4		6.3
Secondary education	20		33.3
Tertiary education	32		53.3
Others	2		3.3

Akujobi & Umoh 2021

Table 2: Summary of the responses to other questions

From table 2 above, in ascertaining the awareness level of the existence of varieties of the English language in Nigeria, about 80.0% of the total respondents are aware of the various varieties of the English language in Nigeria while fewer respondents representing 20.0% were not aware. This denotes that a wide range of our respondents are familiar with the varieties of the English language in Nigeria. In the same vein, 83% of the respondents agreed that the varieties of the English language spoken in Nigeria are due to varieties in ethnic groups in Nigeria while only 3.3% disagreed. To ascertain the confidence level of the respondents with the varieties of the English language in Nigeria about 71.7% are confident in

communicating with nonstandard variety of English (Pidgin) while 11.7% and 5.0% are confident in communicating with Basic English, Standard English and near native variety of English, respectively. This means that a wide range of NigeAkujobirians are confident in communicating with Pidgin English. This does not deviate from the happenings in the society as peers tend to communicate in nonstandard variety of English often.

The survey also attempted to find out what influences the varieties of English language in our society, and it revealed that 75.0% are caused by educational factors, 61% caused by social class, 83% are caused by religious factors and only 58.0% is attributed to the age factor that influences the varieties of the English language. Owing to this

fact, it denotes that educational, social status, religious and age are major factors that influence the varieties of the English language used in Nigeria. On the other hand, about 80.0% of the total respondents claimed that varieties of the English language in Nigeria constitute a communication barrier among the people. This communication gap is mostly triggered by the youth category. This is because they tend to speak more in Pidgin than the elderly and this leads to

non-comprehension of what is said. Furthermore, 83.7% of the respondents admitted that the cultural norm of the society is at risk due to the wide acceptance of varieties of the English language in communication. While 91.7% of the respondents were of the view that varieties of the English language may seriously endanger the sustainability of the indigenous language in communication.

	Frequency	Percentage
Are you aware of the varieties of the English language in Nigeria?		
Yes	48	80.0
No	12	20.0
Varieties of the English language in Nigeria is due to the varieties of ethnic groups.		
Agreed	50	83.3
Strongly Agreed	8	13.3
Disagreed	2	3.3
Strongly Disagreed	0	0
Which varieties of the English language are you conversant with?		
Nonstandard Variety (Pidgin)	43	71.7
Basic Variety	7	11.7
Standard Variety	7	11.7
Near Native Variety	2	5.0
Educational level influences the varieties of the English language in Nigeria		
Agreed	45	75.0
Disagreed	15	25.0
Social class does not influence the varieties of the English language in Nigeria		
Agreed	23	38.3
Disagreed	37	61.7
Religion does not influence the varieties of the English language in Nigeria		
Agreed	10	16.7
Disagreed	50	83.3
Age does not influence the varieties of the English language in Nigeria		
Agreed	32	53.3
Disagreed	28	46.7
Varieties of the English language create barriers in communication between categories of people in the society.		
Agreed	48	80.0
Disagreed	12	20.0
Among which categories of people in the society?		
	52	
Youth	8	86.7
Middle age	-	13.3
Elderly	0	0
Cultural norms of the society are endangered by the English language		

	varieties.	
	49	
Agreed	11	81.7
Disagreed	Do you think varieties of the English language may affect the sustainability of indigenous language?	18.3
	55	91.7
Agreed	5	8.3
Disagreed		

Evaluation of Research Objectives

This study intends to achieve three objectives which are stated above. However, these objectives will be evaluated based on the study findings.

Objective one: To ascertain the nature of Nigeria’s varieties of the English language.

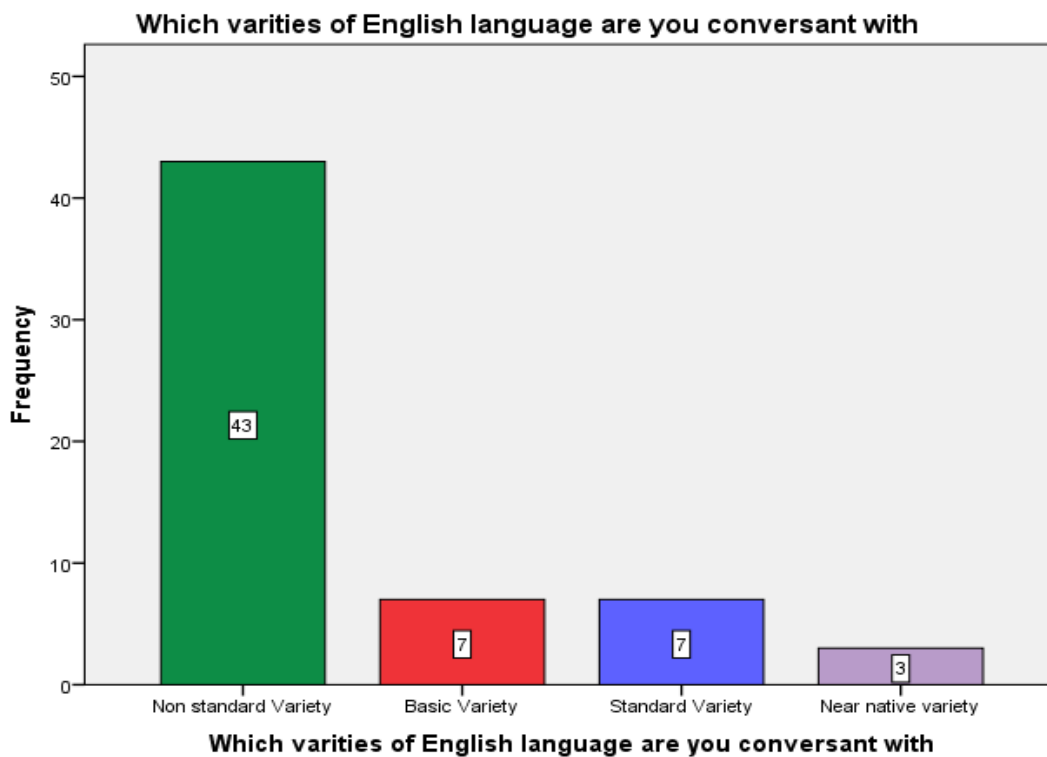


Fig1.

From Fig 1 above, it is evident that 43 respondents representing 71.7% of the respondents are conversant and confident in communicating in nonstandard variety of English (Pidgin). This implies that Pidgin English is widely used by Nigerians and thus exhibits the nature of varieties of the English language in Nigeria.

Objective two: To find out the factors that influence the varieties of the English language in Nigeria.

Fig2.

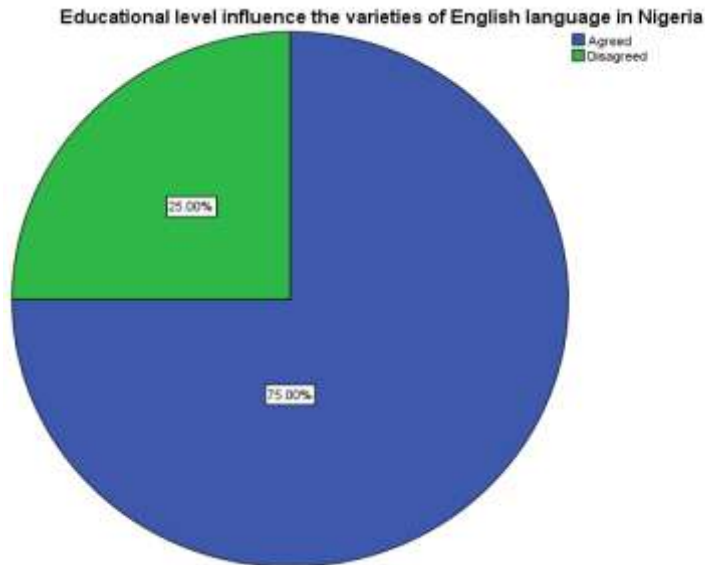
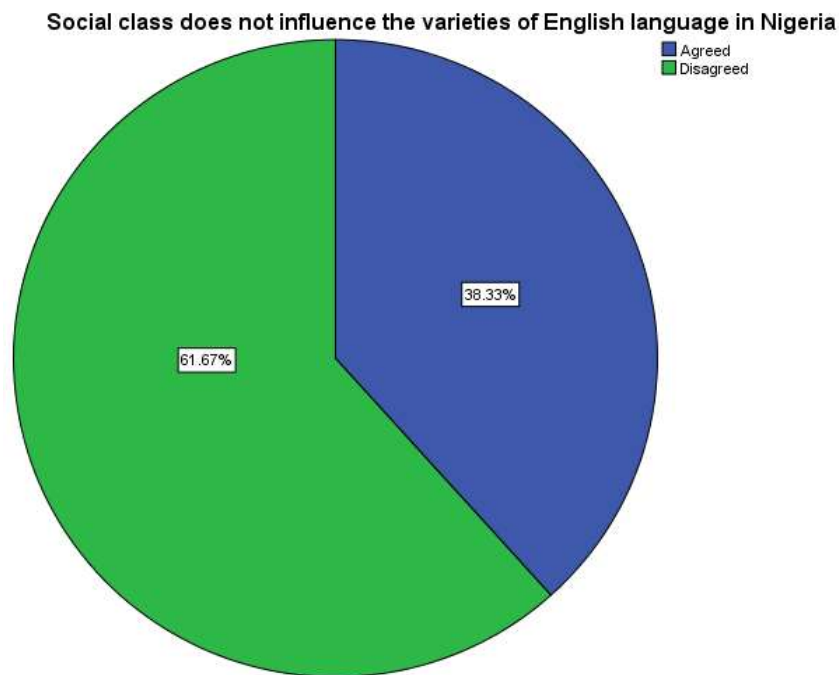


Fig3. Social class does not influence the varieties of English language in Nigeria



As shown in Fig2 and Fig3, in trying to ascertain the factors that may influence the varieties of the English language in Nigeria, about 75% and 61% of the respondents put educational qualifications and social classes as significant factors that influence the varieties of the English language in Nigeria. This implies that people with low educational qualifications and low social class may tend to be more conversant and confident in communicating with any variety of English language that is commonly used in their environment.

Objective three: To ascertain varieties of the English language and its sociolinguistic implications on communication in Nigeria.

Fig4.

Varieties of English language create barriers in communication between categories of people in the society

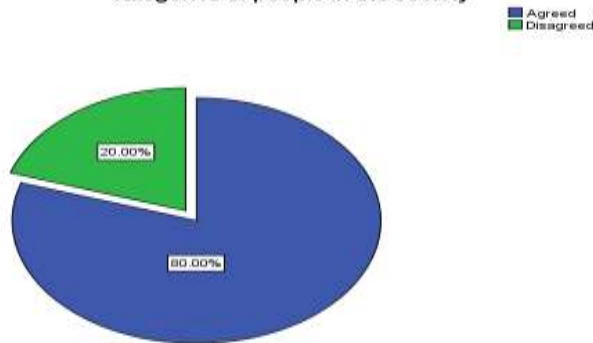
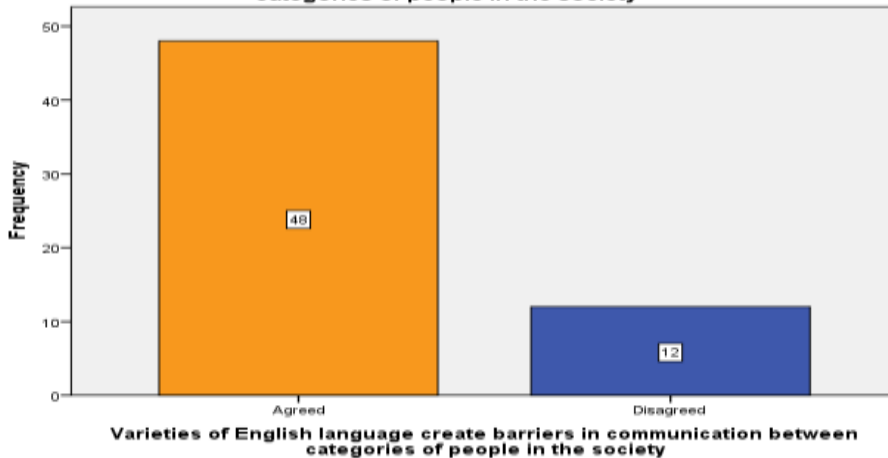


Fig5.

Varieties of English language create barriers in communication between categories of people in the society



To ascertain the varieties of the English language and its sociolinguistic implications on communication in Nigeria. The study shows that varieties of the English language in Nigeria create barriers in communication among categories of people in the society. This is evidence based on the responses of the respondents as denoted in Fig4 and Fig5 above which shows that 48 of the respondents representing 80% of the respondents opined that varieties of the English language create barriers in communication.

Discussion

Nigerian English is a product of language contact. Language contact according to Thomason (2001) occurs when one or more languages or varieties interact. When speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical for their languages to influence each other (342). This is typical of the language situation in Nigeria where the English language encountered the indigenous languages and a variant known as Nigerian English was born. Bamgbose (1971) cited in Oko (2017), states that the major differences between Nigerian English

and other varieties of English occur mostly in the spoken form of the language. To him, the sound system of the vernacular languages exerts the greatest influence on the English pronunciation of Nigerians. Bamgbose's view on Nigerian English is in line with Thomason's input on language in contact. This is because when two languages come in contact, there is bound to be instances of transfer of elements from one language into another. This transfer of elements leads to the claim by many that they can tell a speaker's region from the way they speak. This claim is the reason why an Ibibio

man will likely substitute /r/ for /l/ and a Hausa man will likely substitute /p/ for /f/. Similarly, since most Nigerian languages do not have consonant clusters, in the bid to pronounce a clustered word, most Nigerians tend to insert vowel sounds in other to de-cluster the clusters. A word like school will therefore be realized as **sukulu**.

Bamgbose's opinion on the English language in Nigeria is that "there are several varieties in Nigeria which range from something near standard to the patois of the marketplace. This view correlates with Brosnaham, Banjo, and Udofot's classification of the varieties of Nigerian English. Variety 1 is said to be used by the uneducated Nigerians and variety IV is that of the educated and near native speakers. Bamgbose went further to state that he is of the opinion that Nigerian English should be characterized as an English as a Second Language (ESL) variety and for it to be seen as such, it has to be nativized in such a way that its standard features can accommodate not only features but descriptions that are adjudged correct by all standards.

Jowitt (1991) sees Nigerian English as "the variety of English that has English as its first mother and Nigeria as its second and has defied nature by undergoing reprocessing. What he means by "gynecological reprocessing" are the various features that set Nigerian English as a variety apart from all other varieties.

Nigerian English should be a model of English based on the twin criteria of social acceptability and international intelligibility, which given the second language situation, should possess a high prestige at home and reasonable easy intelligibility abroad (Banjo, 1995). This view however will only be possible through the standardization and codification of any of the educated varieties. The codified variety would be used in schools, for administration and literature. Only when this is done that the variety will possess a high prestige and intelligibility both at home and abroad.

From the different views and opinions, the researcher is of the opinion that Nigerian English even as it is yet to be standardized still tries to keep certain rules in order to maintain international communication and intelligibility in cross cultural communication without necessarily sounding like

the native speaker. The domestication, Nigerianization, nativisation and pidginization has given birth to a variety of English which is unique and different from other Englishes of the world, and the differences can be observed morphologically, phonologically, semantically, syntactically and so on and so forth.

A close look at the findings, shows an evidence of a high awareness level of the existence of varieties of the English language in Nigeria, a higher percentage is aware of the various varieties of the English language in Nigeria while fewer respondents were not aware. This denotes that a wide range of our respondents are familiar with the varieties of the English language in Nigeria. These varieties are noticed in both the written and spoken speeches of Nigerians. To ascertain the confidence level of the respondents with the varieties of the English language in Nigeria, a higher no of respondents are confident in communicating with nonstandard variety of English (Pidgin) while a lower percentage are confident in communicating with Basic English, Standard English and near native variety of English, respectively. This means that a wide range of Nigerians are confident in communicating with Pidgin English. However, some believed although they are confident in using pidgin, their use of Pidgin English is based on the context of the discourse.

The survey also attempts to find out what influences the varieties of the English language in our society, and it revealed that educational, social status, religious and age are major factors that influence the varieties of the English language used in Nigeria. On the other hand, about 80.0% of the total respondents claimed that varieties of the English language in Nigeria constitutes a communication barrier among the people. This communication gap is mostly triggered by the youth category. This is because they tend to speak more in Pidgin than the elderly which will lead to no comprehension of what is discussed. Furthermore, 83.7% of the respondents observed that the cultural norm of the society is at risk due to the wide acceptance of varieties of the English language in communication. While 91.7% of the respondents were of the view that varieties of the English language may seriously endanger the sustainability of the indigenous language in

communication.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The primary function of a language is that it should be a means of communication. From the research, it is quite clear that there are different varieties of the Nigerian English and efforts should be made on the codification, standardization and institutionalizing of its various forms. The standard Nigerian English has the potential for sustaining the needs of the Nigerian people for educational, transactional, interactional, and administrative purposes. It is a variety that is

socially and internationally intelligible and accepted. The standard variety should be acceptable for use as a medium of communication and instruction in schools for teaching and administrative purposes. This will facilitate the students' competence and performance in the language as they will be learning in a form they are well acquainted with. Also, since Nigeria is a multilingual nation, the standard variety will facilitate good rapport among the people and bring about unity.

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