TOWARDS A FUNCTINONAL PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH TO LANGUAGE:
A CRITICAL ARGUMENT

Olohy Ejembi

PhD Candidate in English Phonology

This paper argues on the centrality of indigenous variety in language pedagogy. It follows the Descriptive Theory of linguistics, which "is aimed at descripting [sic] the facts of linguistic usage as they are" (Omachonu, 2011: 152) – i.e. as they occur in the linguistic environment -, to explain that such approach could serve as a better tool for teaching and learning of language theories. It instances Nigeria English (NE), presenting its uniqueness and adequacy for describing language theories. Without adulation, it contends that the variety exists, and goes further to explicate that theory should walk side-by-side with practice. An aspect of phonology (sounds) as well as an aspect of supraphonology (primary stress pattern) are used as the basis for the argument, which are also used to contrast Received Pronunciation (RP) with General American English (GA) and Nigerian English (NE) to expound that (NE) is sufficient enough to be used as a pedagogical tool in its context.

Introduction

In a guideline for teachers, realizing the role using familiar object, name, principle, or theory could play in learning, it is said that learners should be taught from familiar to unfamiliar, or from known to unknown. However, in the area of language teaching, in the same learning environment where this guideline is issued, learners are taught the unfamiliar or unknown with little or no reference to the familiar or known and used variety. This paper argues that using a familiar variety as a pedagogical model will enhance easy learning and better understanding of the subject. The paper instances Nigerian English (NE), contrasting it with the Received Pronunciation (RP) to demonstrate its uniqueness and adequacy to describe any linguistic theory available in the language – i.e. to expound that it can be used as a teaching model in Nigeria where it is the variety used even amongst educated users of English.

The Argument

It is not a new story to say that all languages have varieties. Holmes says that "local varieties of English, with distinctive linguistic features have developed in many….countries" (78). It is also true that because of the variations that exist in every language, each language has a variety which is given 'overt' or 'covert' prestige to set the standard for the other varieties. However, this is not to say that the other varieties must adhere strictly to the grammar and phonology of the 'prestige' variety. Every linguistic community has its own unique linguistic pattern of communication, which is interestingly different from other varieties of the same language. The Nigerian English (NE), a popular variety of English spoken amongst educated Nigerians, is one of such varieties.

However, many people do not want to accept that NE exists simply because, according to them, it is not codified; however, to say that NE does not exist is not an opinion based on linguistic reality – it is an opinion based on an 'ideological' perspective. Nigerian variety of English is a linguistic reality that cannot be denied. It is difficult to deny that, in practice many features exist that are peculiar to Nigerian users of English. Thus Jowitt quotes Walsh to say that

> …. it is suggested that the varieties of English spoken by educated Nigerians no matter what their first language, have enough features in common to mark off a general type, which may be called Nigerian English (30)

Those who argue that NE is not codified force us to ask: "What is codification?" Much research has been done by scholars and research students on NE usage (see Jowitt (1991), Banjo (1995), Adesina (2011), etc) in various language fields and are documented, which provide vivid descriptions of the variety. With all the well documented research made on NE by many language experts some people still say that it is not codified! The structure, phonology, etc. of NE are described in various books and articles already. Well, there are people who have myopic view about codification that a variety is only codified when it has its own dictionary, but codification is not so limited to that extend in linguistics, especially in the direction of our argument in this paper. Where there are many publications that we can reach which have clearly described a variety such variety cannot be denied of being codified or serving as a teaching model. Hence, we can say that NE is codified and should be accepted amongst the recognized varieties of English and used as a teaching model in its context.

It is not out of place to say that generally Nigerian English (NE) is a unique variety in its right. It is the variety used amongst educated Nigerians, as stated in the about quote by Jowitt; however, the same educated elites refuse to recognize it as a variety worthy of use as a model for teaching and learning in Nigerian schools. The Received Pronunciation (RP) is seen as the standard model and, therefore, recommended for teaching and learning. Nevertheless, researchers have demonstrated severally that though RP is the model recommended for teaching and learning in Nigeria, it hardly occurs in the speech of Nigerian users of English, including those that have studied English Language as their educational area of specialization at the university level. Then, it becomes pertinent to argue that NE should be used, because it seems teachers themselves cannot clearly define the RP they claim to teach from the NE – an etymological fallacy. A teacher may actually say *modi'fy* as he teaches learners primary stress, for instance, but mark the word as *'modify* in writing.

Conceptual Argument

The so called 'standard' variety itself is not naturally endowed with more features than the other varieties to set out models for them. According to sociolinguists, every standard variety of language is made so as "the result of a direct and deliberate intervention by society", and variety which is usually privileged with such prestige is "the one used in an important political or commercial centre" (Hudson, 32 & 33). After all, the original English no longer exists; in fact there is no such thing as original language not to talk of standard. Concerning the consideration of the Received Pronunciation (RP) by some linguists as the standard accent, O'Donnell and Todd argue that "It is important to realize that RP is not a standard pronunciation: there is, in fact, no such standard"; and they went further to add that no accent is linguistically superior to other accents (39-40).

Therefore, that a variety acquires standard prestige does not satisfactorily entail that all linguistic theories should be analyzed based on it. The acquisition of prestige by a variety, in fact, is on the basis of what Holmes calls "ideological–instrumental dimension" (100) – it is based on users' ideology, not a linguistic reality -, because the other varieties are themselves not deficient. Holmes quotes Sapir, who argued that "all language varieties are equal" (200). In addition, Cruttenden as well says that "no one pronunciation of an individual word is inherently more beautiful or 'better' than another" (75). In the same vein, no linguistic theory is inherent to a particular dialect of a language talk more of crowning it as the must-used model for teaching. Any theory developed in any language ought to be eclectic – i.e. it should be taught or analyzed in the direction of the patterns used in any linguistic environment where it finds itself. This without doubt is what Descriptive Theory advocates for. Hence any linguistic theory developed from any variety of a language should only serve as a module for the study of that language, but not as a model for usage by other varieties of that language.

This brings us to a theoretical argument based on systemic functional theory, which maintains that a bridge should be built to link linguistic theory and its practice (Manfredi, 50). According to Steiner, "the central axiom in Systemic Functional Linguistics [is] that theory and practices have a mutually activating and guiding influence on each other" (482). The value of every theory can be best described in its practice. Theory which does not influence practice in

an environment is a redundant one which must be abandoned for one which is congruous with the reality in that environment.
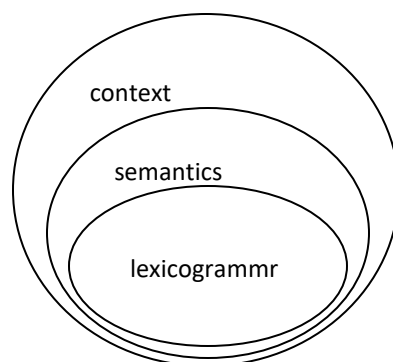
Theory provides an important ground for describing phenomena, but theory itself is an abstract concept whose tangibility can only manifest itself in the practice of it. Steiner argues that "theoretical development and modeling need guiding applications" (482). Therefore, a theory of language which is far from the generally established usage (the popular practice) in a linguistic environment, may generate confusion to learners of the language, and can also be considered ungrounded and arbitrary. Clark, Yallop and Fletcher say that "scientific knowledge and analysis (which are mostly theoretical in nature) are always provisional", but what counts is that the usage must have "the ultimate function of being meaningful" and grammatical (5). Therefore, provided a usage does not constitute error or ungrammaticality, but manifest feature(s) that signals variety, such a usage is interestingly functional – i.e. considered as having characteristic(s) of variety worthy of use as a teaching model.

The Bases of the Argument

Many linguists are in agreement that the characteristics which determine language variations are more noticeably phonological. Adesina says that "of all the levels of linguistic analysis, it is at the phonological level that differences in the dialects of a language are more easily noticed" (43). This means that an attempt by all users of a language to model their phonological realization after a particular variety of the language is an attempt to reduce the most significant characteristics of that language, the varieties, into one. It is a difficult task to reduce English, for instance, into one and only variety, therefore, setting a variety as a model of usage by other varieties is a problem. For instance, it is said that "the stress system of English is extremely complex" (Katamba, 234). It will be difficult to deny that teaching the theory of stress to an English user using the stress patterns of another variety that he/she is not familiar with greatly increases the complexity. This then may be the foundation that leads phonologists to describe stress as a problem to learners of English. Learners are not taught the phonological system of stress from how they stress words in their linguistic environment, but are presented with foreign stress patterns. Roach considers, in agreement with other phonologists, that "stress placement [should be treated] as a property of the individual word to be learned when the word itself is learned" (97). In the same vein, learners should be taught the linguistic patterns that they have acquired in their varieties which they are already used to – the patterns they have 'learned when the variety itself is learned'.

It is true that whenever we speak we do so to make meaning. Although the way some words are pronounced in some dialects of a language may impede meaning. However, the meaning of a word is not determined in isolation. According to Lyons "The value of a word can only be determined by defining it in relation to the value of neighbouring and contrasting words…..for it is only in this field (the environment the word occurs) that there is meaning" (251). Therefore, a word when pronounced differently by two speakers of a language may only demonstrate varieties, but not an error. Consider the following examples: an American who says /mɜːrsɪ/ or *'rotate* when the man from London says /mɜːsɪ/ or *ro'tate* does not say it in error, rather it is his own variety. So also a Nigerian who says /bɒmb/ or *civi'lize* in contrast to British /bɒm/ or *'civilize* should not be looked down with prejudice or cynicism. Therefore, Nigerians should be taught stress theory from the angle of the stress patterns common to their variety. This we hope will reduce the problem of stress to the learner, and may as well reduce gaps between theory and practice. In the same vein other linguistic theories can be easily comprehend by learners if they are analyzed and taught with the variety which the learners are very well familiar with.

Although we limit the scope of this argument to phonology, however we will briefly sketch through a linguistic theory that touches syntax and semantics in order to prove further that the study of language cannot be a smooth adventure without being modeled on a familiar context. Every variety is a contextual language; therefore we cannot separate language varieties from context. A quote in Manfredi says, "[….] language provides a theory of human experience, and certain of the resources of the lexicogrammar of every language are developed to that function" (52). Hence English in Nigeria must develop set of lexis and patterns to represent the experiences of Nigerians. For instance, how can we use the RP variety to describe an experience about a lovely meal served with Edikang-ikong soup without borrowing the word? Context plays an indispensible role in all aspects of language theory. Manfredi borrows Halliday's to expatiate that all levels of language are embedded in context:

There are so many things and ideals that are peculiar to Nigerian immediate environment that are not there in the UK where RP variety is used, NE either developed or borrowed words to represent them in speech. How the people in the UK view the world may differ from how Nigerians view it – i.e. context determines world view and meaning. Hence, language theory is better understood if studied with an immediate variety of the language.

As it were, NE is not the first variety to borrow lexises into English, neither is it the only dialect whose accentual patterns and realizations differ from RP. Some of NE sounds realizations are though considered as error by some writers. For example, Jowitt (59) considers the articulation of *–b* in word ending in *–mb* in NE as an error. But Jowitt made this observation out of sentiment not out of linguistic verification. In RP, the *–r* in *mercy, lord, bier, etc.* is not articulate but it is articulated in GA and Standard Scottish English (SSE), and it is not seen as an error; it is considered as a unique variational feature which gives the name Rhotic English to these varieties. In the same way, it is not out place to say that the articulation of *–b* in NE demonstrates uniqueness not error. Well, if the articulation of *–r* in GA and SSE brought about the name Rhotic English, we then propose the name TROBIW ENGLISH for all the varieties of English that articulate *–b* in words ending in *-mb*. Describing NE as a *Trombiw English* contrasts it with Rhotic English and the RP. TROBIW is an abbreviation for: ***The Realization Of -B In Words.***

Supporting Instances for the Argument

In this section, we are going to use some sounds and primary stress patterns to demonstrate the adequacy and uniqueness of NE in its own right to be used in describing the language to learners within its context, Nigeria. We said earlier that all language varieties are equal and that there is no language without variations, we are going to show further that even the so called Standard English is not stable and fixed to be set as a model for other varieties.

Languages change in time and place. There is no language that does not change if taken abroad and established there. Most of the languages that have large population of speakers in the world are very dynamic and eclectic. The saying, "When in Rome behave like the Romans" is honored greatly by languages than anything one can think of: the English in the Scotland behaves like the Scottish; the one spoken in London behaves like a Londoner; in America it behaves like an American; and likewise in Nigeria it goes like a Nigerian. Languages are like the African men, they like having many children. English came to Nigeria and gave birth to a child (a variety) as it does everywhere. However, some people see this child born into English in Nigeria as a bastard one, but that is a sheer ignorance. What they don't know or forgot is that the English spoken in the Great Britain today is not the same with the one spoken by the early native speakers of English. This is why we have old and modern English with many other types of English between them like the Elizabethan or renaissance English, for example.

As we have said repeatedly, it is hard to come across a language that does not have variations; even in the so called Standard English there are variations. For instance, it is said that "the accentual pattern of English words is fixed" (Cruttenden, 235), but it is not completely true even in the context of native-speaker usage. Consider the words below:

      'controversy vs. con'troversy
      'accolade vs. acco'lade
      'acumen vs. a'cumen
      'constitutive vs. consti'tutive

The stress pattern of the above words is unstable even amongst native speakers. Sometimes the first syllable is stressed, and other times it could be unstressed. Also, some words are there in Standard English whose vowel sounds (their pronunciations) are not fixed or stable. Some examples:

Issue	/ɪsju:/ vs. /ɪʃu:/
Helical	/hɛlɪkl/ vs. /hɪːlɪkl/
Elite	/eɪlɪːt/ vs. /ɪlɪːt/
Evil	/ɪːvl/ vs. /ɪːvɪl/
Fecund	/fɪːkənd/ vs. /fɛkənd/
Patriot	/peɪtrɪət/ vs. /pætrɪət/

As the examples above demonstrate, RP stress patterns and sounds realization are not completely fixed. How sounds are realized as well as the stress pattern are features that signal differences amongst varieties of English. One of the common words that are used to describe variation in language is accent, and accent is in most cases used synonymously with stress (see Cruttenden, 2008). Stress pattern is one of the language variational features which manifest the various ways the varieties of a language pronounce words. Therefore, below some pronunciations and stress patterns which clearly distinguish three English varieties will be presented –namely Received Pronunciation (RP), General American English (GA) and Popular Nigerian English (PNE). First, RP and GA will be presented side by side, then some of those identified by phonologists as a peculiar usage among Nigerian users of English and the RP patterns will be presented as well.

Variations in RP and GA:

WORDS	RP	GA
Status	/steɪtəs/	/stætəs/
Burn	/bɜ:n/	/bɜ:rn/
God	/gɒd/	/gɑ:d/
Note	/nəʊt/	/nəot/
Past	/pɑ:st/	/pæst/
Furious /fjʊərɪəs/		/fjʊrɪəs/
Chair	/tʃeə/	/tʃer/
Bier	/bɪə/	/bɪr/

The above examples are few ones out of hundreds of words which RP and GA differ in their pronunciation. Nearly all the words, especially monosyllabic words, that have /ɑ:/ in RP are realized as /æ/ in GA. GA does not have /ɒ/ in its vowel system therefore where a word has /ɒ/ in RP, it is realized as /ɑ:/ in GA.

Stress patterns in RP and GA:

WORDS	RP	GA
Fixate	[fɪk'seɪt]	['fɪkseɪt]
Donate	[dəʊ'neɪt]	['dəʊneɪt]
Rotate	[rəʊ'teɪt]	['rəʊteɪt]
Elongate	['ɪlɒŋgeɪt]	[ɪ'lɒŋgeɪt]
Remonstrate	['rɛmənstreɪt]	[rɪ'mɒnstreɪt]
Tergiversate	['tɜdʒɪvəseɪt]	[ter'dʒɪvərseɪt]
Militarily	['mɪlɪtərəli]	[mɪlɪ'tɛrəli]
Momentarily	['məʊməntrəli]	[məʊmən'tɜrəli]

These few examples show that the stress pattern of English words is not fixed; it allows dialectal variations. In the same vein, Nigerian users of English pronounce and stress some English words differently from that of RP just as GA does.

In fact, there are many RP sounds that do not exist in NE: /ə/, /ʌ/, /æ/, /ʊ/, /ɪ/, /ɜ:/, /əʊ/, /eɪ/, /eə/, /ŋ/, /θ/, and /ð/. These sounds are realized differently in NE, and they are "apparently therefore identified with…neighbouring mother tongue" sounds (Jowitt, 73). Here are examples of some words whose pronunciation among Nigerian users of English differ from the RP pronunciation:

WORDS	RP	NE	
Doctor	/dɒktə/	/dɒktɒ/	(words ending *–or as /ɒ/* & *–er* as /a/)
Man	/mæn/	/man/	
Good	/gʊd/	/gud/	

Kiss	/kɪs/	/kis/
Learn	/lɜ:n/	/lɛn/ (/ɜ:/ is also realizes as /a/ and /ɒ/)
Made	/meɪd/	/med/
Go	/gəʊ/	/go/
Fare	/feə/	/fɛ/
Through	/θru:/	/tru:/
Weather	/wɛðə/	/wɛda/
Singing	/sɪŋɪŋ/	/singin/

Below also are examples of some words with the stress patterns common among Nigerian users of English in contrast to the RP stress pattern:

RP	PNE	RP	PNE
'Challenge	Chal'lenge	'Madam	Ma'dam
In'domitable	Indo'mitable	'firewood	Fire'wood
'Water proof	Water 'proof	'Eligible	E'ligible
'Intimacy	In'timacy	'Recognize	Recog'nize
'Capitalism	Capi'talism	'Narrative	Nar'rative
'Sitting-room	Sitting-'room	'Spearhead	Spear'head
Complicate	Complicate	Advertise	Advertise
'Modify	Modi'fy	'Perfume	Per'fume
'Nationalism	Natio'nalism	'Develop	Deve'lop

(See more examples in Jowitt (1991), and Adesina (2011))

There is a characteristic peculiar to the stress pattern in PNE usage; the stress pattern is right-handed whenever it differs from RP. Hence, in some disyllabic words whose first syllable is given prominence by RP speakers, NE speakers realize their first syllable with less prominence, shifting the stress to their second syllable.

This common practice of stressing the last syllable of some words by Nigerian users of English, while stress is assigned elsewhere in RP, may be hard to explain from a theoretical point of view. Theoretically, it is said that Nigerian languages are syllable-timed or tonal, which do not stress their words. In their mother tongues words are not stressed like French, for instance, whose words are stressed on the final syllable (Cruttenden, 235); therefore, this practice cannot be said to be mother tongue interference. What makes Nigerian users of English stress these words on the final syllable, while those who brought English to them may stress them otherwise, should be an issue of great interest to linguists and language researchers. The fact that this practice is difficult to explain by theoretical viewpoint demonstrates further that the practice is not an error, but an independent feature developed unconsciously to signal variety.

Since stress pattern is also labeled as 'accentual pattern' and how sounds are articulated in a speech community is also labeled as accent, and it is also said above that accent is also used to label variety in many cases, all English words in all the varieties of the language cannot have the same pronunciation and stress pattern. Roach acknowledges this where he says that "stress position may vary …… because not all squeakers agree on the placement of stress in some words" (109). The assertion is true because we do not have only one variety (accent) of English in the world; all speakers of English do not belong to the same linguistic community. Nigerian users of English cannot be pushed out of this disagreement on the pronunciation of sounds because English has come to stay in Nigeria. Therefore, NE phonology should be used as the teaching model to learners in Nigeria.

The Conclusion of the argument

As observed earlier, though RP is the model used for teaching, NE is the popular variety spoken amongst educated Nigerian users of English. Getting acquainted to the RP model they are taught is difficult for them because language is innate; language is creative not imitative. Radford says that "language can't simply be learned by imitation:…learning a language doesn't simply involve rote-learning" (18). A well-formed variety of English has, without doubt, already been established in Nigeria, and it controls the language faculty of Nigerian English learners; therefore this variety should be the model used in teaching the language theories or principles, especially to those

that are studying the language as an area of specialization in schools. Doing so will enhance good understanding of the language, and also bleach gaps between theory and practice.

Varieties do not manifest in phonology and supraphonology alone, neither do we say the examples given are exhaustive. There are other language areas that display variational features like syntax, for example, and NE is not deficient in such areas as well. However, we believe that the examples employed in this paper have proven that NE has resources which can be used to teach any principle and theory in the language if used as teaching model, we also that, since it is the popular variety used, language theories and principles can be easily understood by learners if used as a teaching model.

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