

Emergence of English New Native Speakers in Nigeria: Reclassifying the English Speakers

Babatunde, Samuel Akanbi*

Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State. P.M.B. 230, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author: Samuel Akanbi, E-mail: +2348149911693/babatundesam1@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: January 04, 2022

Accepted: February 24, 2022

Published: March 31, 2022

Volume: 11 Issue: 2

Advance access: March 2022

Conflicts of interest: None

Funding: None

ABSTRACT

This research decolonises the concept of new native speakers to mean “those who are born in the inner circle” and establishes that, there are native speakers of English in Nigeria. More recently, a group of speakers has been identified known as; the English New Native Speakers. These speakers are mostly monolinguals, who have a good command of the English Language. They are without or with the bit of ability to speak or comprehend the local language(s) used around them. The new native speaker is a 21st-century phenomenon because these speakers have not been in existence in Nigeria before this time. This paper establishes the emergence of the New English Native Speakers in Nigeria and calls for the addition of new native speakers of English in the taxonomy of the existing classification of the speakers of English in Nigeria. This paper, therefore, advocates for the re-classification of the English speakers in Nigeria to include these new speakers. I postulate that the new taxonomy of the speakers in Nigeria should be grouped thus: English new native speakers (speakers with little or no indigenous language), English as a second language (those who developed English as a second language, English as the first language (those who speak English as the first language and later developed an indigenous language).

Key words: New Native Speakers, English as Second Language, English as First Language

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, as a multilingual country, uses the English Language as the most endemic channel of communication. The Language is used in court, religious gatherings, educational sectors, politics, administrations, and government arms. Attention has been duly given to the two prominent speakers of the English Language in Nigeria. The English as the First Language (EFL) and English as Second Language (ESL). English as the first language speakers developed English as their first Language while English as the second Language developed English after building an indigenous language. There is a rising of new generation of speakers of English in Nigeria that have not received adequate attention. A few or no work has been written on the subject by Nigerian scholars. Many of these speakers are monolinguals; they do not speak the Pidgin English or any indigenous language(s).

Kachru (1985) classified the non-native speaking countries as the outer circle and extending circle. The implication of this is that the people that developed English as their first language cannot be referred to as native speakers nor have authority over the correctness of the rudiments of grammar. In recent times, scholars have started advocating for the need to change the archaic definition of the native speakers and their authority. According to Davies (2003), the use of the term provides an inferiority complex on the part of non-native speakers of English because they are on

the demand side, depending on the input provided by the supply side.

More recently, a group of speakers has been identified known as; the New Native Speakers of English. These speakers are mostly monolingual and have a good command of the English Language. They are without or with the bit of ability to speak or comprehend the local languages used around them. The new native speaker is a 21st-century phenomenon because these speakers have not been in existence in Nigeria before this time. Traditionally, A native speaker is defined as someone born in any country in the inner circle. However, with the emergence of these speakers, different scholars have been advocating the need to focus on the speakers' competence and not the geographical location in classifying the speakers of English.

Aim and objectives

The study aims to critically review and formulate a new method of classifying the speakers of the English language in Nigeria. The aims therefore include:

1. To objectively present the new native speakers of English in Nigeria.
2. To re-classify the speakers of English in Nigeria.
3. To give some yardsticks for classifying the identified speakers

Research question

1. Are there new native speakers of English in Nigeria?
2. How do we classify these new speakers?
3. What are the yardsticks for classifying these speakers?

An Overview English Language Speakers in Nigeria From 15th to 20th Century

The emergence of the English Language in the 15th century was championed by the Slave trade and missionary activities. The origin of multilingualism could be traced to the business transactions between the Europeans and Nigerians. Before this period, language contact was at the lowest level. These people developed a simplified language for easy communication. This made the Nigerians develop an appetite for a new language. The learning and speaking of standard English started when the slaves taken out of Nigeria started learning English from the different countries the colonial Masters exported them to. This is the beginning of English as the Second Language in Nigeria. The slaves came back to Nigeria and started teaching the people how to speak English. The missionary activities made learning and speaking more productive as the missionaries channeled energy towards making the Nigerians fluent and competent speakers of English. All these (slave trade and missionary activities), could only produce English as Second language speakers (ESL) because many of the people that learned English in this era already had a mother tongue.

The establishment of schools and constitutionalising the English language gave birth to English as First Speakers (EFL). Many children born in the 19th and 20th centuries gradually started developing English as their first language. Many of these speakers, however, use English and an indigenous language interchangeably and competently. This was the time code-mixing and code-switching were at their peak in Nigeria. These people are more proficient at the use of English than the ESL.

The Deconstruction of the Traditional View of Native Speaker

To lay a foundation for the New English Native Speakers, some scholarly works or thoughts on the subject were reviewed and analysed. It must be noted that the paper aims to establish that there are New English Native Speakers in Nigeria. Therefore, there is a need to look at how scholars have been advocating for a need to change the traditional definition of the 'native speaker' due to its linguism, nepotism, and unfavourable injustice on the part of outer and extending circles English Speaking countries.

Braj Kachru identifies native speakers of English as those who have grown up in the "Inner Circle" of countries: Britain, America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The deconstruction of the traditional native speaker is a post-colonial movement that antagonises the attribution of native speakers to those who were born in the inner circle.

Rajagopalan, (1997) states that there is no doubt about the existence of an ethnocentric or racist stance in regards to the notion of "native speaker" for it bestows privileges on certain

speakers and excludes others. For Rajagopalan, the concept of the native speaker notion points to a potentially dangerous ideological agenda", entailing race and gender. Paikeday, (2003) explain in a bid to deconstruct the notion: "We are a mostly academic group of men and women trying to thrash out a basic concept of linguistics, the so-called "native speaker" as the arbiter of grammaticality and acceptability of language".

Bonfiglio (2010) in his view states that "The contemporary images of the native speaker have been well analyzed, and the automatic attribution of authority to the native speaker based on the fact that he or she was born into the specific matrix of culture and language has been well deconstructed"

Another important contribution regarding the questioning of the privilege and power given to the native speaker has made it clear that English is not the private property of one nation or one group of speakers. Gone are the days (I hope!) when there are those "who would claim copyright to communicative competence and mock others who are generally viewed as mere deviant performers" (Singh, 1998).

Cassidy presented a poem in 1962, which some scholars considered to be the genesis of the linguism on the speakers who are not born in the inner circle but are competent at speaking the English language.

"Hail to the Native Speaker,
He never can go wrong!
For by some process mystic,
Subliminal, sublinguistic,
And utterly spectacular,
He knows his own vernacular
To every last detail---
He simply cannot fail!"

The above poem had no negative impact in 1960, until years later when scholars started analysing its effects. The poem reveals the injustice and prejudice against the people tagged 'non-native speakers'. It is erroneous to say that the native speakers do not make a mistake or do not go wrong. This is immunity that can wreck the standard usage of English. A native speaker does make mistakes of slipping tongues and even commits an error. Dialnet, (2017) in his research found out that:

"Regarding grammar, the highest proportion of errors is related to missing or incorrect uses of verbs and determiners, particularly articles. These errors, although present in both groups, are more prominent among non-native speakers. Quantitatively, we have observed not only that native and non-native speakers commit errors at similar error frequencies when they reach high levels of proficiency, as is the case of L2 speakers in an English-speaking university; but, qualitatively, certain aspects are more problematic for certain groups, as is the case with the writing of homophonic words for L1 speakers"

Many speakers who are not born in the inner circle are far more competent than the so call-native speakers. It is, therefore, of no base to use geographical location in clarifying native speakers of English. The notion of native-speakerism presents individuals with an ideological package of supposed inequitable practices believed to have originated in a specific place and exported to the detriment of an unspec-

ified people in an unspecified place. The ideology begins therefore with the premise of a generic “us” imposing upon a generic “them”. The lack of specificity here gives rise to various problems including the reliance upon a universalist one-sized-fits-all template that is unable to consider, explain or account for localized differences within and across contexts in which various languages and perceived and/or actual powers intersect Tephania, (2018).

Establishing New English Native Speakers

More recently, a group of speakers have been identified known as; the New Native Speakers of English. These speakers are traditionally defined to be in the outer and expanding circle but globalisation has made it possible for them to be native speakers. They are traditionally defined as a group of speakers that developed English as their first language (in the outer or extending circle) and use its monopoly without speaking any other indigenous language in most cases. This set of speakers is found in Nigeria and Ghana etc.

The authority of any speaker native or non-native must be based on that speaker’s expertise in the written language in question. The fact that in literate societies, especially in the United States, first language speakers have to be taught how to write properly well into the level of higher education itself calls into question the authority of a given speaker simply based on the fact that he or she was born into the that society’s matrix of language and culture. Bonfiglio, (2010).

Scholars have used different terms in the definition of the new contemporary definition of native speakers. Jowith (1991) proposes “New English Native Speakers” to differentiate the native speakers in the outer and inner circles. Stephanie (2018) uses “Post Speakerism” to describe these speakers. Bonfiglio wrote a book, titled: *MotherTongues and Nations The Invention of the Native Speaker*, to give a new structure to the definition of native speakers. Thomas, in his struggle to contribute to the notion of new native speakers, wrote “the native speaker is dead” All the coined terms used by these scholars are inevitably useful but for this project, New Native Speakers will be adopted.

Paikeday, (2003) defines the contemporary native speakers as: One who is a competent speaker of a specified language and who uses it idiomatically. By “idiomatically” I mean in “the usual way in which the words of a particular language are joined together to express thought” (Webster’s New World, idiom, idiom, idiom, idiom, idiom, 2) or in “the syntactical, grammatical, or structural form peculiar to a language” (Webster’s New Ninth Collegiate, idiom, idiom, idiom, idiom, idiom. By “native speaker” one simply means the person who has the language as his/her first language, and typically such individuals do have greater competence than those for whom it is a second language.

The term “new speaker” and “new speakeriness” constitute an explicit attempt to move away From these older labels. They, therefore, build on the now growing emphasis on multilingual research to understand the new communicative order of the modern era which is characterized by new types of speakers, new forms of language and new modes of com-

munication. In our view, the “new speaker” phenomenon contradicts how both majorities and minorities have historically used language to legitimise claims to nationhood and cultural authenticity.

Jenkins (2005) views the Native speakers of English as the people who belong not only to the “Inner Circle,” but also to the “Outer Circle” Jenkins. Thus, NSEs refer “not only to those who speak English as their mother tongue but also to those who speak the language as an institutionalised language at work or school” According to this view, if you belong to the circle where English is used as a medium of instruction and communication as well as an official language, you are an NSE. This view implies that those who belong to the “Outer Circle” are the ones who develop their standards just like the ones in the “Inner Circle.”

As (O’Rourke, Bernadette and Pujolar 2013) said, ‘Our use of the “new speaker” label also reflects growing critiques in multilingual research of the fundamental epistemologies on which our understanding of language has been based. It prompts us to query how linguistics as a discipline has participated in the reproduction of linguistic ideologies, essentially through abstract notions of “nativeness”, they argue that the nation has shown to have little or no empirical basis.

Paidday uses competence in the classification of native speakers of the world native speaker instead of the archaic geographical location. The “new speaker” concept has thus come to constitute a kind of umbrella term and as a means of linking different multilingual strands across a variety of research sub-disciplines. In doing so, it puts forward an alternative linguistic model to help understand the complex profiles of speakers that were seen to be emerging in the twenty-first-century multilingual society in which we live. A summary of the modern or contemporary definition is summarised below:

- (1) The native speaker acquires the L1 of which s/he is a native speaker in childhood.
- (2) The native speaker has intuitions (in terms of acceptability and productiveness) about his/her idiolectal grammar.
- (3) The native speaker has intuitions about those features of the Standard Language grammar which are distinct from his/her idiolectal grammar.
- (4) The native speaker has a unique capacity to produce fluent spontaneous discourse, which may exhibit pauses mainly at clause boundaries (the ‘one clause at a time’ facility) and which is facilitated by a huge memory stock of complete lexical items (Pawley and Syder 1983). In both production and comprehension, the native speaker exhibits a wide range of communicative competence.
- (5) The native speaker has a unique capacity to write creatively (and this includes, of course, literature at all levels from jokes to epics, metaphor to novels). Davies, (2003).

Discussion and Conclusion

This study establishes that there are new native speakers of English in Nigeria who are monolingual and do not make use of any indigenous language(s). It is a twenty-first-century phenomenon because this group of speakers was

not in existence from the 15th century to the 19th century. Nigeria had always operated on the two levels of speakers of English before this century; the second English language speakers and first English language speakers. Second-language speakers are those who developed or learnt an indigenous language before learning English. This was a phenomenon that was endemic in the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th centuries. Towards the end of the 18th century, we had those who are known as the English as the first speakers. This set of people grew up learning the English language as their first language and picked an indigenous language as their second language. The thin line between the first speakers of English is that they always have interference from the second language while the new native speakers do not have any interference because they are monolingual speakers like the most native speakers of English in the U.K and America.

Scholars who have worked on these sets of two speakers have reported that there is always interference of the mother tongue among the ESL in the process of learning the English language. Babatunde (2017), in research work, discovered that ESL speakers are not competent in the use of the English language. Cook (2003) acknowledges that learning a second language can influence the performance of the first language. We can therefore conclude that the first and second language speakers are bound to have interference in the process of adding another language.

The study, therefore, establishes that there is a new set of English speakers in Nigeria who do not speak a local language. Oladipupo and Onabamiro (2018) looked at these speakers from the phonological aspect. It was discovered that most of these speakers are more competent than the L2 and L1 speakers of English in Nigeria. Also, Adebileje and Babatunde (2020), investigated the new English native speakers and it was discovered that they are more competent than the second speakers of the English language. We cannot benchmark the emergence of these speakers, as they have come to stay. They are located mostly in the urban parts of Nigeria. Further Research works I.e fieldwork can investigate the competence of these speakers to justify their grammatical and phonological competence. I, therefore, establish that these speakers should be given a new taxonomy in the classification of speakers of English in Nigeria. Nigeria could therefore have English as the native speakers' ENS, English as the first language EFL and English as the second language ESL.

In conclusion, we can paraphrase the aim of this study by answering the questions asked in the introductory section:

Are there new native speakers of English in Nigeria?

The existence of these speakers in Nigeria is understandable, as we have them in all the regions in Nigeria. Many of them grew up in urban areas without the ability to speak an indigenous language for so many reasons. In most cases, parents are the advocate non-usage of a local language in the house, while some parents who are not from the same tribe preferred to bring their children up with a neutral language(English). This is an area of study;

why some Nigerian 21st century prefers to have their wards speak English.

How do we classify these new speakers?

The speakers should be given a new taxonomy in classifying the speakers of English in Nigeria. These speakers have distinct features that cannot be found in the EFL and ESL. They speak only the English language, so there is no interference from the mother tongues which makes the EFL and ESL transport one language to another.

What are the yardsticks for classifying these speakers?

Grammatical Competence should be used as a yardstick to classify them. The authority of any speaker—native or non-native—must be based on that speaker's expertise in the written language in question. The fact that in literate societies, especially in the United States, first language speakers have to be taught how to write properly well into the level of higher education itself calls into question the authority of a given speaker simply based on the fact that he or she was born into the that society's matrix of language and culture. Bonfiglio, (2010).

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