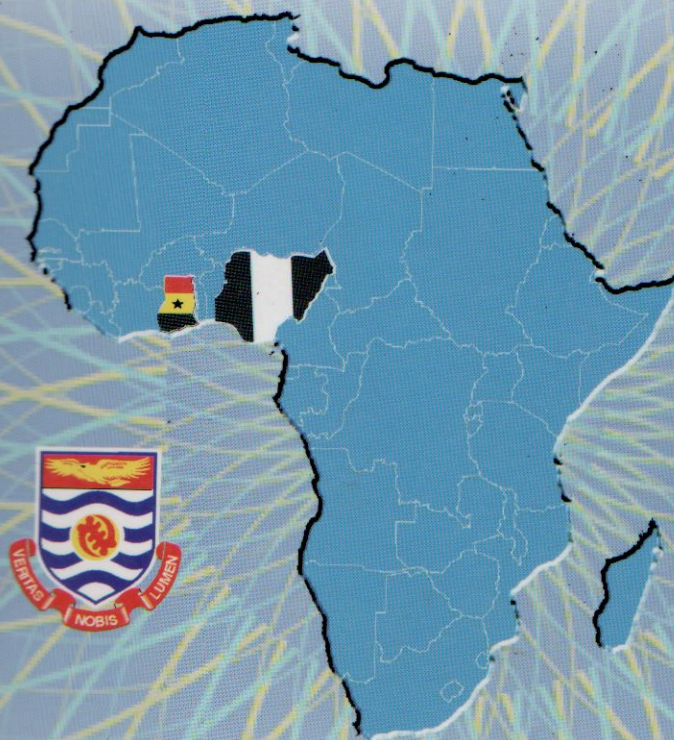


**CULTURE, SCIENCE
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TOWARDS A PRAGMA-INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF 'USE OF ENGLISH' IN NIGERIA: A CASE FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Different language teaching methods have evolved over the years with a view to enhancing communicative competence especially in English. But despite the merits of these methods, there has been a noticeable decline in the linguistic competence of Nigerian students in recent years, especially at the University level. The introduction of the Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) and the emphasis on the Use of English programme for all fresh undergraduates seem not to have succeeded in addressing the situation. One major reason for this trend is the lack of appropriate methodology in English language pedagogy. This paper makes a case for the adoption of the pragma-integrative approach for English language teaching in Nigeria. This method fuses the merits of the existing teaching methods with the application of ICT. Beyond literacy, it is argued, functional computeracy, which the pragma-integrative approach engenders, is crucial to the enhancement of Nigerians' communicative competence in English and the promotion of human development imperative that accrues from functional communication in a global medium.

Introduction

Of the thousands of languages (estimated between four thousand and five thousand) in the world, English is the most prominent, the most important, and indeed, the world's most widely used language (Obi-Okoye 2002, p. 46). The emergence of English as the bride of the world is predicated on a number of factors which are political, social, commercial, religious, technological and educational in nature. Education, which Good (cited in Lawal 2004, p. 34) defines as "the art of making available to each generation the organized knowledge of the past, the process by which the tradition and culture of a society are passed on from one generation to another, from the old ones to the young ones," certainly plays a crucial role in the globalisation of English. The English language is so pervasive that the continued survival of Nigeria as a nation depends on it as the sole language of vertical integration, national unity and nationalism/ nationalism (Adedimeji, 2004).

The quest for improved communicative competence in Use of English in Nigeria, especially at the higher education level, had led to the emergence of the Communicative Skills Project (COMSKIP/COMSKIPTECH) for universities, polytechnics and colleges of education in the 1980s. Indeed, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the programme under which COMSKIP operates, evolved in Europe in the 1960s to address the immediate communicative needs of students of English as a Second Language (ESL) (Oluikpe, 1993, p. 4; Adedimeji, 1999, p. 16). In the university system especially COMSKIP or ESP programme consists of the Use of English courses which are implemented on freshmen for two semesters.

But despite the lofty goals of ESP/COMSKIP or Use of English regarding the enhancement of communicative competence and its features as a "goal-oriented" (Ajileye, 2007, p. 135) and "learner-centred" (Babatunde, 2001, p. 67) programme, concerns have been expressed on students' receding communicative competence and their concomitant poor performance in English language generally and Use of English courses specifically. Scholars like Olajide (1991; 2003) Enuesike (1993), Joshua (2000), Odebunmi (2001), among others have decried students' poor performance in the Use of English in Nigerian universities. Ihebuzor (1991, p. 12) especially notes that despite the "very prominent and special role the ESL plays in the Nigerian tertiary institutions, most Nigerian undergraduates have problems contending with the language at all linguistic levels." Though there are several factors attributable to the noted 'poor performance' among the triad of teacher, material and learner, this paper is intended to address the teacher-component, which constitutes the core in the triangle of the Use of English programme.

As fine feathers make fine birds, it is observed that when teachers fine-tune themselves and their methods, good results will be achieved in English Language Teaching (ELT). In other words, we contend that teachers also have problems and that they contribute their quota to the noticeable diminishing returns in students' Use of English. This paper thus argues for a pragma-integrative approach which embraces the deployment of many methods as required and deemed appropriate for any aspect of language study. The approach also includes the application of Internet and Computer Technology (ICT), involving the Computer-Assisted Language Instruction (CALI) and Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), considered necessary for the 'Use of English' teaching in the 21st century in which rapid changes are manifest in all strata of life. The focus of the paper is on the Use of English teachers

mastering their art (as a major component of ESP) so that ELT would "create the right atmosphere and provide the right motivation for learning to take place" (Jimoh, 2004, p. 6). The mastery of language is ultimately viewed as a decisive step towards the development of the enormous human capital that Nigeria has, which will galvanise the country to greater heights of development.

Teaching and Language Teaching

Teaching is the process by which trained individuals transmit education to individuals or groups. It is a dynamic activity that is associated with a medley of responsibilities, which according to Daramola (1994, p. 2) include imparting appropriate knowledge so as to prepare individuals to acquire skills necessary for certain careers; developing individuals to cultivate the habit of good human relationship; creating awareness so as to bring about national consciousness and goals; and developing individuals to appreciate the benefits derivable from adequate health-care. To Jimoh (2004, p. 4), to teach is to show how to do something, to give lessons to a student or a group of students, to hold classes, to provide with knowledge and insight. The aim of teaching, Jimoh (2004, p. 7) maintains further, is to "equip students to learn how to learn and to teach them how to think". In essence, the goal of teaching is learning.

From the primordial times, teaching had been found as a veritable means of attaining sustainable human development as well as a process of transmitting skills and social values to the members of every society. Teachers are the piston in any educational system; they are the builders and developers without whose role the society literally collapses. A society without teachers only exists on a fetid foundation and it is bound to be wiped into oblivion. Life itself is said to be the best teacher because teaching is an integral part of life, be it formal or informal.

Teaching methods have thus emerged over the years to achieve functional learning. The most common of these methods are the lecture method, the discussion method, the demonstration method, the laboratory use method, and questioning techniques. Others include field trip method, project method and question mapping techniques used especially in tertiary institutions (Daramola, 2004, p. 48).

Language teaching, on the other hand, especially in a non-native context like Nigeria, is by far one of the most complex and the most arduous tasks for teachers to undertake. It is an applied linguistic phenomenon, or the application of linguistic knowledge to some object (Corder, 1973, p. 10). In other words, language teaching is a component of applied linguistics, which concerns the

application of the principles, insights and findings from pure linguistics (i.e. descriptive and theoretical linguistics) to solve language-related problems in the areas of education, commerce, science and other fields of human endeavour (Ayodabo, 2007, p. 96). Teaching a language is largely a multi-dimensional and interdisciplinary activity which includes organisational dimension, technological dimension, psychological dimension, sociological dimension, pedagogical dimension and indeed, linguistic dimension (Obi-Okoye, 2001, p. 47-48). A language teacher is therefore inexorably expected to be well-organised, technologically trendy, psychologically stable, sociologically oriented, pedagogically savvy and linguistically competent.

As language plays "a unique role in capturing the breadth of human thought and endeavour" (Crystal, 1997, p. 1), language teaching can be said to be the cornerstone of education. This is because the knowledge of language is fundamental to the grasp of all learning, indeed "the most powerful tool of learning" (Adegoke, 1979, p. 15). A lot is often expected of language teachers, especially in the case of English. They are supposed to be "conversant with the different modern techniques of teaching English for effectiveness" and are expected to deploy those techniques to achieving the set goals and objectives of ESP or EST (Azikiwe, 1998, p. 60).

Good Teachers and Teaching: Qualities and Requirements

Due to the importance of teachers, especially those of language, Brumfit (cited in Azikiwe, 1998) says they "should be terrifyingly perfect". He provides seven qualities that language teachers must have. These are:

1. They should be professionally trained and well-informed.
2. Their approach to teaching should be founded on principles, but they should not be dogmatic.
3. They should be constantly trying to improve themselves and update their knowledge in the subject.
4. They should be humble without being weak, firm without being autocratic.
5. They should like their students, but if they do not, it should be disguised so that the students and others will not know.
6. They should know in very clear terms why their students are learning English.
7. They should be convinced within themselves about their beliefs on the nature of language teaching and learning.

On his part, Morrison (cited in Azikiwe, 1998) identifies the qualities that a good language teacher must have, as being a good model of speech; being thoroughly conversant with modern English usage; being aware of potential areas of difficulty of the learners; being familiar with a variety of approaches and methods for teaching; being able to modify and supplement instructional materials; being familiar and keeping abreast with current knowledge in the theories of teaching and learning language; and having sufficient knowledge of the culture of the speakers of the language (p. 61).

Richard Leblanc of York University, who won a Seymour Schulich Award for Teaching Excellence, has also provided "the top ten requirements" of "good teaching" all of which are deemed insightful and instructive. Internalising Professor Leblanc's submission is considered an urgent desideratum for every ELT practitioner and ESP professional. Though relatively long, his submission is fully 'downloaded' because of their merit and vitality which include its breezy and refreshing style:

One. Good teaching is as much about passion as it is about reason. It's about not only motivating students to learn, but teaching them how to learn, and doing so in a manner that is relevant, meaningful and memorable. It's about caring for your craft, having a passion for it and conveying that passion to everyone, most importantly your students.

Two. Good teaching is about substance and treating students as consumers of knowledge. It's about doing your best to keep on top of your field, reading sources, inside and outside of your areas of expertise, and being at the leading edge as often as possible. But knowledge is not confined to scholarly journals. Good teaching is also about bridging the gap between theory and practice. It's about learning the ivory tower and immersing oneself in the field, talking to, consulting with, and assisting practitioners, and liaising with their communities.

Three. Good teaching is about listening, questioning, being responsive, and remembering that each student and class is different. It's about eliciting responses and developing the oral

communication skills of the quiet students. It's about pushing students to excel at the same time, it's about being human, respecting others, and being professional at all times.

Four. Good teaching is about not always having a fixed agenda and being rigid, but being flexible, fluid, experimenting, and having the confidence to react and adjust to changing circumstances. It's about getting 10 percent of what you wanted to do in a class done and still feeling good. It's about deviating from the course syllabus or lecture schedule easily when there is more and better learning elsewhere. Good teaching is about the creative balance between being an authoritarian dictator on the one hand and a pushover on the other.

Five. Good teaching is also about style. Should good teaching be entertaining? You bet! Does this mean that it lacks in substance? Not a chance! Effective teaching is not about being locked with both hands glued to a podium or having your eyes fixated on a slide projector while you drone on. Good teachers work the room and every student in it. They realize that they are the conductors and the class is the orchestra. All students play different instruments and at varying proficiencies.

Six. This is very important... good teaching is about humour. It's about being self-deprecating and not taking yourself too seriously. It's often about making innocuous jokes, mostly at your own expense, so that the ice breaks and students learn in a more relaxed atmosphere where you, like them, are human with your own share of faults and shortcomings.

Seven. Good teaching is about caring, nurturing and developing minds and talents. It's about devoting time, often invisible to every student. It's also about the thankless hours of grading, designing or redesigning courses, and preparing materials to still further enhance instruction.

Eight. Good teaching is supported by strong and visionary leadership, and very tangible institutional support resources, personnel, and funds. Good teaching is continually

reinforced by an overreaching vision that transcends the entire organization – from full professors to part-time instructors – and is reflected in what is said, but more importantly by what is done.

Nine. Good teaching is about mentoring between senior and junior faculty, teamwork, and being recognized and promoted by one's peers. Effective teaching needs to be remediated through training and development programmes.

Ten. At the end of the day, good teaching is about having fun, experiencing pleasure and intrinsic rewards... like locking eyes with a student in the back row and seeing the synapses and neurons connecting, thoughts being formed, the person becoming better, and a smile cracking across a face as learning all of a sudden happens.

Good teachers practice their craft not for the money or because they have to, but because they truly enjoy it and because they want to. Good teachers couldn't imagine doing anything else. (Shabani and Okebukola, 2001).

When 'Use of English' teachers, especially make the above checklist inform their teaching delivery, there is no doubt that the fortunes of English language teaching in Nigeria will change for better. For when Omodiagbe (1992) bemoans the falling standards and crisis in English usage in Nigeria and lists the contributing problems, the top on the list borders on "a lack of qualified teachers" (i.e. good teachers).

Language Teaching Methods

Methods are a set of teaching procedures to be followed in presenting lectures or lessons. Different ELT methods have been advanced and all of them have their merits and demerits – since a single method cannot be used in the teaching of all aspects of a language.

Components of methods are selection (every aspect of language cannot be taught at the same time), gradation (materials are graded as a teacher may not be able to teach all that he has selected, thus one comes before the other), presentation (this has to do with the effective way of making the students to

understand and retain knowledge easily) repetition (drills and practices are crucial in language teaching) and evaluation (the means by which teachers obtain feed-back on the success of teaching-learning process) (Azikiwe, 1998, p. 68-69).

Language teaching methods are varied and related. They include: the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Reading Method, the Audio-lingual Method, the Communicative Method, the Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, the Community Language Learning, the Whole Language, the Multiple Intelligence, the Lexical Approach and Competency-Based Language Teaching. Current communicative approaches are Communicative Language Teaching, the Natural Approach, Cooperative Language Learning, Functional-Notional Approach, Strategopedia, Full-Frontal Communicativity (Azikiwe, 1998). Only a brief discussion of all these will be allowed in the scope of the present paper. Highlights of the methods are thus briefly presented as follows: The Grammar-Translation Approach is historically connected to the teaching of Greek and Latin. Learners are taught in their mother tongue with little attention given to the target language itself. Vocabulary is taught by identifying words and explaining them while grammar provides rules for words combination.

The Direct Method is developed as a reaction to the Grammar Translation Method. It is an attempt to teach the target language directly. There is no translation and there is no mother tongue used. Conversations and dialogue in the target language are presented with actions and pictures. The grammar and culture associated with the target language are inductively taught.

The Reading Approach emphasises reading ability in the target language and the current/historical knowledge of the native speakers. Vocabulary is controlled to forestall boredom and only the aspects of grammar pertinent to reading comprehension and fluency are taught. Translation features here as a way of making the given passage easily accessible to the learners. High premium is placed on reading within and outside the classroom while pronunciation (or skills of oracy) is given marginal attention.

The Audio-lingual method adopts the principles and procedures of the Direct Method. It is also a reaction to the Reading Approach which de-emphasises speaking skills. The method is fostered on mimicry and memorisation of selected phrases as they are pronounced, which results in lop-sided listening. This method makes an abundant use of language laboratories, tapes and visual aids. The learners are drilled to achieve native-like control of English/target language. The skills of oracy (listening and speaking) and literacy (reading and writing) are sequentially introduced.

The Total Physical Response Method, otherwise known as 'The Comprehension Approach', emphasises listening skills. It combines information and skills through the use of the kinaesthetic sensory system. It arose from the observation of a child's language acquisition developed substantially by listening to people for some time before uttering a word. The teacher gives commands, for instance, and also performs the action.

Like Total Physical Response, the Total Function Response adopts listening to learning. It is a subsidiary of Communicative Language Teaching and it emphasises functions rather than forms. In the Silent Way method, the basic principle is that teaching should be subordinate to learning. The approach is to allow learners to think by passing to them the responsibility for the descriptions of objects shown to them or actions performed.

Community Language Learning adopts counselling techniques to the teaching of target language. The learner is construed as a client and the aim of the language Counsellor is to communicate empathy for the client's state of mind and aid him linguistically. For suggestopedia, it is based on a modern understanding of how human brain works and how learning is effectively achieved. Suggestopedia is a blend of suggestion and pedagogy by its proponent, Georgi Lozanov. It is used to refer to accelerated learning approaches.

While Whole Language Method concerns the incorporation of wide engagement with language, which includes literary study, process writing, authentic content and learner collaboration, the Lexical Approach concentrates on developing learners' proficiency with lexis or words and their combinations, assuming that language learning is essentially hinged on the ability to understand and produce lexical choices.

Multiple Intelligence Approach is an adaptation of the Multiple Intelligence view of human talents and the application of such to teaching. Competency-Based Instruction is a learner-focused development and delivery of curriculum, the idea of which is rooted in the idea that students' competence is achieved only in practice and assessment.

The Communicative Method has been found to be very useful and it has many approaches. Some of the approaches in this method are Communicative Language Teaching Approach (the adoption of computer network in teaching, or Computer-Assisted Language Learning, which is a component of our pragma-integrative Approach), Natural Approach (delaying speech production until students' listening comprehension is developed, just as it occurs in first language

acquisition), Cooperative Language Learning (which emphasises quantitative and verbal knowledge based on competition and an individualistic goal structure), Content-based Teaching Approach (concerned with the idea that language learning is a by-product of focus on meaning, that content topics to support language learning should be chosen to best match learners' needs and interests).

Other Communicative Method approaches are the Task-Based Approach (an approach to syllabus design that entails, in all its forms, a more flexible approach in which "content and tasks are developed in tandem" to achieve learning). The Functional-National Approach (emphasises breaking down the global concept of language into units of analysis on the basis of the appropriate communicative contexts). Strategopedia (thematizes "learning to learn" in an instructional focus on language learning strategies, which include memory tricks, thinking, planning and self-monitoring) and Full-Frontal Communicativity (provides instructional focus on the non-linguistic aspects of communication, including rhythm, speed, pitch, intonation, tone, facial expression, posture, etc. based on the premise that the linguistic part of communication, which language teaching still largely restricts itself to, is insufficient).

Towards a Pragmatic-Integrative Approach to the 'Use of English' Teaching

Wilkins (1978) observes that "language teaching has always been subject to change" (209) and change is said to be natural, "change is not new; change is important" (Friedman, 2005, p. 20). The quest to bring about the necessary change in the 'Use of English' programme so that it fully achieves what it is aimed at achieving informs the pragma-integrative approach within the broad Communicative Method of language teaching.

By pragma-integrative, we mean that language teaching should be essentially pragmatic, with pragmatics meaning 'action' or 'performance'. "This performance requires that the teacher does not limit himself to "chalking and talking" upon the learners' (Adedimeji, 2008, p. 106) and by integrative, we agree that no method or "no methodologist has the whole answer." This approach is justified by its constituting the second and the fourth slogans of the 'ten new slogans' advanced by Professor Clifford H. Prator of the University of California, Los Angeles, where the teaching of ESL is a major academic concern. The "Ten New Slogans" are, as cited in Ubahakwe and Obi (1979, p. 12):

query.

Though Grice was not talking of teaching when formulating his maxims

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The maxim of Quality requires that you say what you know to be true. Teaching a language is negotiating meaning and a language teacher should teach what is right and correct. There are many "teacher-induced errors", constituting objects of study to error analysts, which could have been avoided by a teacher doing his home-work well before appearing to pontificate before the students. Observing this maxim requires that teachers are competent in the English language they are teaching so that they would not be tempted to flout the maxim through what they do not know or providing answers to questions they are not able to answer correctly in the class.

The third maxim of Relation appertains to saying what is relevant to the issue at hand. There is always a disconnect between a language teacher and the class when the teacher digresses to irrelevant details and analogies. Some 'Use of English' classes can be so boring and uninspiring as a result of the irrelevance of the teachers' submissions. Rather than use the classroom as a forum of narrating travel experiences, condemning government policies and criticising the increasing external debt, so long as such does not have any relevance to the topic under discussion, the teacher should make his teaching relevant to the learners needs and the curriculum requirement.

The fourth maxim of Manner requires that you say what you need to say clearly and unambiguously. In this wise, teaching should be logical and clear so as not to create confusion in the learners. Some of the features that flout the maxim of manner are egocentricity, the use of strange and difficult vocabulary, which detracts from learning or "retreating into obscurity in the hope that incomprehensibility will be equated with wisdom" (Brown, 1978, p. 42).

The teaching of 'Use of English' should also be integrative in the sense of combining the salient methods as each method has its merits. It also involves the deployment of technology to ELT and the promotion of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Computer-Assisted Language Instruction (CALI), where the teacher serves as a guide. This includes exposing students to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), especially the Internet; with the vast opportunities it offers, seeking and conveying information. There is no doubt that an eclectic approach that uses the right method for the right subject area would be more result-oriented than a single method for all areas of language study.

The idea of integrative Use of English teaching also engenders the integration of the five skills essential to effective communication. These five skills, as identified by Berlo (1960) are speaking, writing, listening, reading and

reasoning. The teaching of the Use of English should be geared towards the development of these skills, which are inter-connected. "The encoding skills relate to speaking and writing while the decoding skills relate to listening and reading. The ability of an individual to encode and decode enables him/her to reason" (Akinyemi, 1991, p. 4). In other words, reasoning skills automatically develop from the mastery of the encoding and decoding skills or the skills of literacy and the skills of oracy.

To achieve the goal of teaching the 'Use of English', a language teacher should devote considerable time to the teaching and cultivating of students' communication skills altogether. Testing should also involve all the skills so that the students are considerably proficient in the four main skills of language. A standard test like the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for some years now has focused on testing all the skills of language through which the four skills are tested with the reasoning. When Francis Bacon said that "reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man and writing an exact man," with conference involving the activation of listening and speaking skills, he foregrounded the significance of effective communication. In the Information Age, developing effective communication and linguistic competence in a language like English is developing the human resources and teaching effective communication is developing the nation.

Concluding Remarks

Human beings constitute the purposive agents that bring about development. The abundance of capital, land and materials without the human agent that would coordinate and transform the factors of production to practical utility is futile. According to Awolowo (1976), "man is the sole creative and purposive dynamic in nature: everything else by comparison is in a state of inertia." This is why human capital is the most important resource of any country and Nigeria has abundant human resource base, being the most populous country in Africa. But this resource has not been fully utilised as a result of a number of factors among which education is prominent. One powerful way of converting this human capital base to development is by educating Nigerians and enhancing their skills. In the Information Age and era of globalisation, communicative competence is fundamental to the development of human resources and effective teaching and learning of English will go a long way in addressing some of the educational challenges facing Nigeria.

While noting that the problems associated with the Use of English pedagogy in Nigeria is varied and multi-dimensional, this paper has posited that a sure way of addressing the situation and achieving a better result lies in the effective teaching of the course. It suggests that a pragma-integrative, or pragmatic as well as integrative approach which emphasises a performance-based ESL pedagogy, adopts flexible, eclectic methodology and involves the appropriate use of ICT will be ideal in achieving good results. It is believed that when language teaching is effectively done and Nigerians are developed in the five communication skills of listening, reading, speaking, writing and reasoning, the human development level of the people will be enhanced and through that, other components of development will be added. But when linguistic competence with its subsuming language education is relegated, the thought process becomes impaired. In that situation, if it lingers, the nation can only be taking a step forward and four steps backwards as a result of the defective thought process, a consequence of poor communicative incompetence.

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