Chapter 39

Traditional and Virtual in Nigerian Oral English Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the emerging phenomena in Nigerian oral English pedagogy in the light of recent developments in Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) worldwide. It compares learners’ sensitivity to the long established traditional classroom learning and the recently established internet-based (virtual) learning through a questionnaire methodology. Findings reveal that the influence of internet browsing and electronic dictionary-sourcing on oral English learners in Nigeria is becoming pronounced and the learning methodology preferred. The widespread American spelling pattern acquired through the aforementioned means is impacting learners’ performance as sound-spelling compliant English words enjoyed 75% patronage despite previous traditional classroom culture. The study suggests that oral English teachers embrace new and integrative teaching methodologies for the teaching and assessment of learners in line with recent technological developments.

INTRODUCTION

Oral English Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

The English language has become greatly valued and adorned in Nigeria’s Educational system. As remarked by Bamgbose, Banjo & Thomas (1995), “the dominance of English in formal and transactional communication is unchallengeable”. In view of the multilingual nature of Nigeria, with more than 400 indigenous languages (Ufomata 1995), English is regarded as the only feasible and realistic choice for the nation now and in the foreseeable future. The greatest efforts expended on English language in Nigeria have been in the area of the Educational system, particularly in relation to Nigerian indigenous languages. Issues regarding model choice, examination assessment criteria, intelligibility and acceptability of the Nigerian variety etc. continue
to attract heated debates on regular basis. In Nigerian educational system, English is both a medium of instruction for other subjects in all secondary schools as well as a subject from the first year in primary schools. In addition, a credit at O’ levels in English is a prerequisite for admission into any higher institution in the country. The National Policy on Educational (NPE) has been constantly criticized and critiqued for its lack of clarity on issues relating to the teaching of English language in Nigeria (Bamgbose and Akere 1996; Jibril 1986). It is against this background that the teaching of Oral English was introduced into the curriculum about two and half decades ago.

Oral English is an important part of the language curriculum in Nigeria. The efficiency of the English language in the wider Nigerian society depends largely on the English Curriculum and the competence of the teacher. Little wonder therefore that what goes on in the classroom eventually shapes students outlook and output. However, emerging phenomena in the present age of computer mediated communication (CMC) (in which teaching and learning from both the internet and the traditional classroom is encouraged), are beginning to carve a niche for especially Oral English pedagogy in Nigeria.

On the global scale, Crook and Light (2002) have demonstrated the complexity involved in developing the cultural practices of learning and teaching with the support of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at the university level. According to them, these practices of formal study are closely interrelated to practices that students are familiar with and which are well rehearsed as part of their everyday life. They find that developing new practices with computer mediated communication (CMC) is very difficult, something which is not due to students’ lack of familiarity with the technology. On the contrary, they argue that the tools and their associated practices are not particularly well attuned to already existing practices. A range of studies have demonstrated positive effects of CMC tools on students’ reasoning (Mercer et al. 2002; Arnseth 2004). On the other hand, studies which have focused on the relationship between talk in front of and through the computer do not provide any detailed examination of how computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) interplay with existing institutional practices on a more detailed level, hence the relevance of this study. Lipponen (2001) also collaborating the importance of studies such as this, states that:

attempt to promote educational use of CSCL technology, and at the same time implement new pedagogical and cognitive practices of learning and instruction, appears to demand the utmost of both teachers and students. Many of the technical, theoretical, and pedagogical insights have not been transformed into widely adopted practices of teachers and students. (p. 11)

Teachers of oral English in Nigeria follow the pattern of teaching enunciated by Hewitt (2001, p. 14), where students are encouraged through teaching methodology to use ‘knowledge-telling’ strategies, meaning that they reiterate what they already know without analysing any new information (see also Soneye 2008). Collins (2001, p. 43), discusses how that students employ ‘copy-delete’ strategies when completing an assignment. Basically, this means that students copy the source material, (removing only the contextually irrelevant aspect) not being able themselves to pronounce such words or use the accent they have retained. It is to these various inadequacies that several linguists in Nigeria are responding; some of whose works we will be examining in the next section.
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