

# Linguistic Change, Growth and Development: Implications for English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*This review traces the origin, growth and development of language in its diachronic and synchronic dimensions with the aim of identifying the various causes of linguistic variations. It also discusses the implications and possible remediations of the impact of linguistics change on teaching in terms of the model to teach, language material development, methodology, curriculum planning and language policy in Nigeria. This work observes that linguistic change, although inevitable, nonetheless, is frowned at, criticized and condemned by many enlightened minds. The impact of language change has far-reaching consequences in the social setting and especially in the teaching and learning of the English language in Nigerian schools. Consequently, the study recommends that prescriptive laws should be played down. The grammar of the language should be taught in line with the changing lexicons and in its cultural contexts.*  
**Keywords:** *Linguistic change, language development, language growth, English Language*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is alive; it is living because its speakers live. Language is a means of expression (verbal or non-verbal) of its communities' ideas, values, culture and beliefs. Olowoyeye (2004) asserts that the end of language is basically communication, and is peculiarly human and hence specie-specific. Consequent upon this, language is bound to change from time to time in relation to the prevailing circumstances of its users. Thus, it changes in order to adapt to the needs of the contemporary society. For instance, the absence of complicated word endings in English could be due to streamlining and sophistication. Hence, language change is the phenomenon whereby phonetic, morphological, semantic, syntactic, lexicon and other features of language vary over time. Aitchson (1981) quoting Otto Jespersen, stated that:

*“In the evaluation of language, the discarding of old flexions goes hand in hand with the development of simpler and more regular expedients that are rather less liable than old ones to produce misunderstandings (p.18)”*

Language change has been observed to be old as language itself. Aitchson (1981) also cited the ancient Greek philosopher, Heraclitus, as affirming that “everything rolls by, nothing stop still”. He also referred to Edmund Spencer as speaking for, “the ever-whirling wheel of changes, language itself must bow to the swaying law of change, to be left out will be quite unnatural. Aitchson (1981) also quoted the Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure as saying that “time changes all things there is no reason why language should escape this universal law”. The aforementioned statements confirm the reality of language change. Hence, this review is on Linguistic Change, Growth and Development: Implications for English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria. The main aim is to identify the various causes of linguistic variations.

### **LINGUISTIC CHANGE, GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

Lyons (1987) posits that linguistics is the scientific study of language. For further clarification, Osuala (1987) defines science as the organized body of knowledge as well as a method and system of deriving the truth, while the Encyclopedia Americana (1988) defines language as:

*... the faculty and ability possessed by normal human beings and by no other species, of using a spoken or written utterance to represent phenomena or events (p.727).*

Language is the expression (vocal) or feelings, emotions, and ideas among individuals or communities. Language is speech, the speech of its users; it is human, living and hence could change. Change implies alteration, mutilation, mutation or metamorphosis from one to another. Therefore, language change is the focus of historical linguistics, justifiable and inevitable. Abiodun (2004) posits that researchers in the field of study seek among other things to:

- (i) Explain the various linguistic changes in the history of a language by studying its various dialects or languages that are its direct descendants.
- (ii) Use the explanation of the historical changes to understand and explain the synchronic structural system of the various dialect or languages (p.56)

This is because Language is living; it is human- a human product; it has variations and each language is unique and cultural based, that is language has to be studied in its appropriate culture.

Language change is inevitable, things change, what is permanent is change itself. In writings of great men and mind corroborate this:

- (i) Heraclitus, the Greek Philosopher of 6 B.C in (Aitcheson 1981) asserts that “everything rolls by, nothing stop still”.
- (ii) Wilhelrn Vom Hombolt (Aitcheson, 1981) asserts that “there can never be a moment of standstill in language.”
- (iii) Therefore language change is a reality and a necessity

***Language Birth:*** The origin of language has been shrouded in mystery and thus subjected to various conjectures, conceptions and theories. The earliest theory sees the origin of language as a divine fiat. Plato in Robertson (1954) was the first to postulate this theory by

asserting that:

*“Names belong to things and hence the artisan of words must be only he who keeps in view the name which belongs by nature to each particular thing.”*

Another theory closely aligned to this is the orthodox Hebrew (Christian) theory that conceives language origin as a divine act. It holds that Adam was given a developed language and that the confusion of tongues in Babel was the resultant cause of language variation. Other theories emerged with an attempt to unravel the mystery of language origin. These theories include the “bow-wow” theory which asserts that primitive language was basically onomatopoeic. Likewise is the ‘pooh-pooh’ theory that sees language as derivative of instinctive ejaculatory responses to feelings and emotions for example pain, joy many others. This etymological study of language is further pursued by the Analogists and Anomalists. These Analogists believe that language is natural, logical and regular. For example the word – meaning of language could be traced to their roots or shapes e.g. Blackbird. But the Anomalists counter this opinion stressing the irregularities for example as in mushroom, breakfast, manly, and a host of others.

### **ORIGIN OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

English was not the language of England but evolved through invasion and settlement (Baugh, 1954). The first settlers were the Celts. Julius Ceasar made an unsuccessful invasion of Britain in 55 B.C. Britain was later conquered by Emporor Claudius in 43 A.D. The Roman conquest heralded the establishment of latin language in Britain. The Teutonic conquest of 449 A.D. introduced the Anglo- Saxon which influenced the history of Britain. This brought about the terms ‘Anglia’ and Saxionia with emergence of their language called “Englisc”. The land and the people were called Angelayn (race of Angles). According to Baugh (1954) in the year 1000A.D. England (land of Angles) began to take place which is now refined England. Robertson and Cassidy (1954) classify the development of English into three distinct periods namely:

Old English	-	450 – 1100 AD
Middle English	-	1100 – 1500 AD
Modern English	-	1500 – the present

### **LANGUAGE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

The study of language growth at a point in time is seen as horizontal or synchronic linguistics. And the study of language growth of some selected items over a course of years is seen as vertical or diachronic linguistic (Aitchson, 1981). The synchronic linguistics studies the language change at a particular period in time, whereas the diachronic linguistic studies the growth of a language over a longer period and geographical coverage. Language is reflected by the two fields of study. It was wrought by political, social and cultural influences, evolved at a point and metamorphosised as well as spread abroad over a period of centuries. Baugh (1954) traces the development in a chronological order. In 597 A.D. Britain was Christianized and Latin added into the English vocabulary, the Scandinavian invasion resulted into a mixture of two races and their languages. The Norman Conquest (1066 – 1200

A.D) introduces French. This accounted for English word with Latin, and French roots for example in *Corpus* Latin means body as in corpse-dead body, Louvre (French) implies glass blade for window. The Renaissance period (1500 – 1650 AD) marked a period of literary awakenings and social consciousness.

### **LANGUAGE MURDER, DEATH AND SUICIDE**

When a language is ‘slaughtered’ (replaced) by a new one, language murder occurs. For example, when an Ekiti native speaker of the dialect travels outside his home-town. If the new dialect or language he encountered is more socially prestigious he might be more inclined to speak the new language. In the course of time, the new language overshadows the old one to the extent of loss of mastery of the previous language, we say that language murder has occurred. Language Death arises when a language ceases to change (Baugh, 1954). When a language goes into silence over a longer period, extinction and consequent language suicide results. An example of this is the Latin language.

**Linguistic Variations:** Language has been discovered to vary in terms of space, time, levels and situations. Many factors and reasons have been adduced to linguistic variation and different forms of levels have been identified. Many linguistics have identified various levels or types of linguistic variation such as variation in time, space, level, form, intention and situation. Aitchson (1981) in addition identifies geographical, social and progressive variation as well as language fuzziness.

**Variation in Time:** As time passes, languages change. This is well attested to by old English of 450 A.D. which is hardly understandable today. This is noticeable especially in lexicon. We notice such archaic renderings like – whence, thither, rainmet, betaloe, gladsome, pleasance. Such renderings though archaic are still found in religious services and ceremonies for instance in a marriage ceremony, one often hear such marriage oaths “.....with this ring, I thee wed.....” such archaic renderings are permissible when used in the right context. When we compare Chaucer’s writing of the 14th century and Shakespeare’s writing of the 16th century we would discover the variation both in lexicon and spelling. The implication for teaching is that teachers need to know the modern rendering of such obsolete forms.

**Linguistic Variation in Space:** This is also referred to as geographical change. People from different geographical areas are likely to speak differently the same language. For example, we have variations of the Igbo language according to their geographical state. For instance, to say “it is good”, Onitsha (Anambra State) will say “*Odinma*”. Owerri (Imo State) will say “*Orinna*” and Bendel Ibo will say “*Odinkanma*”. Likewise we have variation of Yoruba language. There are different versions from different regions for example, Oyo, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ondo, Akoko and Kwara. To say the word “I will soon be back” in Yoruba, a speaker from Oyo area will say, “*Mo nbo*”, Ondo area will say, “*me wa*”, Ekiti will say, “*me bo*” and so on. The grammatical rules guiding these languages in their variations might alter slightly especially in spelling and pronunciation for example in

British English there is “u” in the word “Colour” but American English omits the “u” to become color. Teachers must specify these alterations when teaching.

**Variation in level:** There are different occasions or situations and languages reflect this. For example, the form of language differs for formal, informal as well as from ages. This variation regarded as variation in style by Aitchson (1981) mainly exists within the speech of an individual. He posits that almost all speakers of a language is likely to alter his speech unconsciously to fit the casualness or the formality of the occasion. These are often in terms of age, situation (formal or informal) figures of speech, choice of vocabulary and pronunciation. In case of age, for example, a mother might ask the toddler. If he wants to ‘pooh-pooh’ implying to defecate. A father might instruct his children at table to ‘shut up’ and ‘sit down’. But to colleagues, he would say ‘gentlemen, please be seated’.

**Social variation:** This is very similar to variation in style or level. This is reflected in contexts like informal and formal, both in speech and written form as well as in pronunciation. For example such variations could be in syntax or vocabulary as in such contractions like:

I wanna, I’d, we’ve, I a’int – (informal)

I want to, I would, we have, I havent (formal)

Also in the usage of figures of speech, for example, euphemism, wherein in one occasion, a speaker might say “David has gone to the ‘boy’s room” and “David has gone to the toilet” in another context. In pronunciation, it is discovered that language varies from social class to the other coexisting within a single region. And from one situation or context to another.

**Linguistic Variation in Form:** this is manifest in oral and written context. There are differences between the spoken form of a language and its written form. Oral make use of facial forms, gestures, mime, pantomimariation me, dumb shows and so on. even gestures have been discovered to vary. For example:

English – “bye bye – wave his hand with the palm upward

Neopolitan – “bye bye – wave his hands with the back outward

Speech is unidirectional and usually cannot be re-listened to.

**Linguistic Variation in Intention:** This is manifested in straight forward language, basic communication artistic language. For example, the choice of words and language defers when writing essay, such as descriptive, expository, argumentative, narrative and explanation of a process. For example, while the language in narrative essay are simple chronological and directional, descriptive essay makes use of language that is evocative and with vivid imagery.

Artistic language commonly used in literature is designed to impress, amuse and convince. Some words are acceptable in literature which will be termed colloquial or even denounce in formal English. (i) “This is the man who delivered me”. (ii) “The man who delivered me is the last one is wrong in English according to grammatical rules but quite correct in literature.

***Sociolinguistic Causes of Change:*** Changes in language arise as a result of many factors. These could be external sociolinguistic factors such as fashion, foreign influence, social use and language contact. Others include internal psycholinguistic factors in terms of the structure of the language and the minds of its speakers such as generations gap, sexes among others.

***Fashion:*** Aitchson (1981) quotes Paul Postal that the cases of sound without language contact lie in the general tendency of human cultural products to undergo non-functional changes. But Aitchson contends against this that if fashion could influence change, then language would soon be in chaos.

***Foreign Element:*** Change infiltration of foreign element has been majorly responsible for the majority of change. This is well evinced in the mutation of English language and others. Also, when a population adopts the language of her newly conquerors, the adopted language are imperfectly learnt. Aitchson cites the example of the Mandingo who were in American learnt English and carried the features of their own language into the adapted one

***Social need:*** The important of the word within a particular sub-culture has an influence on language change. Social happenings could lead to generating a new word and dropping old ones. For example, during the increase in oil production in Nigeria such words like ‘oil-boom’, National-cake, ‘Udoji’ came into established usage; likewise terms like ‘Ramatism’, ‘go slow ‘. ‘Kola’, ‘cash-madam’, ‘we shall wash it’, became acceptable in Nigerian English. This is what is referred to as Lexical diffusion (Aitchson 1981).

***Language contact:*** This is mostly felt along the national borders. Likewise bilinguals often feel the impact of language contact. Yoruba speakers often transfer the respect pronoun in Yoruba unconsciously while speaking. For example, a Yoruba says “they are calling you” meaning that an elder is calling the person. But in English there is no respect pronoun; an elderly sister is ‘she’, daddy is ‘he’.

***Sexes:*** Sex has been psychologically attributed to as one of the causes of changes in language. Women have been discovered to be more conscious of status and are aware of social significance of different speech forms. But men are associated with roughness and toughness which is considered desirable masculine attributes.

***Generation gap:*** The imperfect learning of the speech forms of older generation by their children has been attributed to some language change. Children form wrong sentence construction e.g. “Tobby hitted me, “Polly caught me” this childhood linguistic aberration might survive into adulthood and become adopted by the speech community as a linguistic norm. Even dialect could change over a period of time as a result of civilization and language contact.

### **Language Change: Implication for Teaching and Learning**

Since language variation is a reality and a continuous process, it constitutes a constraint

and menace to the teaching of language. But the problem is not insurmountable.

- i. Since language is not static, hence its teaching should brace up and keep pace with new development. This demands that the teacher should be current and up-to-date in his knowledge of new renderings and adaptation.
- ii. He also needs to get the students grounded in the basic fundamental principles for example the grammatical rules.
- iii. Since change poses problem of choice of model to teach, standardization becomes imperative. The teacher becomes a dependable resource person. He is forced to the position of the prescriptist.
- iv. Since linguistic and communication competence in any situation is the goal of English language teaching in Nigeria, teachers have to be knowledgeable of the modern use of some items, He must also strive to teach for National and international intelligibility.
- v. Curriculum: The curriculum has to be adapted, revised and up-dated regularly to keep in pace with the developments in the target language.
- vi. Appropriate learning materials are also necessary to be produced. This implies that textbooks have to be written and reviewed bearing in mind the incidence of language change.
- vii. National Language Policy: The policy has to be specific on the role English Language has to play in the Nigerian context. Likewise the issue of *lingua franca* should be addressed and well spelt out.
- viii. The issue of the mother tongue in the educational language policy should be viewed critically. The incidences of language change will keep the contrastive analyst on their toes.
- ix. It will also create job for the task analysts to know the best way of solving language learners' problems.
- x. English language teachers should ensure that the students are knowledgeable in the basic differences in the language of English and that of literature. Language in literature is more dynamic and mutant.
- xi. The teacher should encourage structural simplicity where it does not conflict with basic patterns of English.
- xii. The teacher needs to have a set of test materials that incorporates this knowledge into meaningful and appropriate situations.
- xiii. He also needs a set of pedagogical guidelines that will help interpret and present these materials to the students.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Language change is inevitable, natural and continuous. However, when change disrupts mutual intelligibility, it becomes socially and politically inconvenient. Hence, standardization becomes imperative. In conclusion, the following fundamental principles should be critically viewed by the linguists, language planners and teachers.

***All living languages change:*** Therefore, in functional usage, prescriptive law, for example, never ending a sentence with preposition is not to be taken seriously sometimes.

***Language is a product of human being:*** Since man develops and changes, hence, language rules are arbitrary for instance, earlier grammarians forbade double negatives, many languages have two or three negatives.

***Each language is unique:*** Therefore, it should be taught under its cultural influence and settings. This accounts for the acculturation method adopted by students of a particular language going to stay for a while in the native land of the language under study.

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