# SOCIOLINGUISTIC FEATURES IN THE USE OF ENGLISH BY SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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**Abstract**

This work focused attention on the sociolinguistic features in the use of English of Senior Secondary School Students of Uyo Local Government Area. The aim was to identify, describe and analyze these features appropriately. In order to achieve this purpose, 160 students were selected by simple random sampling technique from 4 Secondary Schools 2 of which were from Urban and the other 2 from rural areas. The instruments used were both written and oral essay questions. It was revealed that first language (MT) greatly influenced the use of English of the subjects used for the research. Other factors were discovered to have contributed to the poor performance in the subjects, use of English. Conclusions were drawn based on the findings with which generalization was made and recommendations were made accordingly.

Language is a symbolic representation of culture and it is the primary means of maintaining interaction between individuals. Muellar (1998) observes that culture could probably not have originated without language and language would be nearly empty without culture. Therefore, an individual successfully acquiring a second language gradually adopts various aspects of behaviour, which characterize members of that linguistic cultural group. Giles and St. Clair (1979: 143) observed that in learning a second language, a student is faced with the task of not only learning new information (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc), which is part of his own linguistic culture but also of acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethno linguistic community. They stated thus: The new words are not new words for old concepts, the new grammar is not simply a new way of ordering words, and the new pronunciations are not merely different ways of saying things. They are characteristics of another ethno-linguistic community. Furthermore, the student is not being asked to learn about them, he is being asked to acquire them, to make them part of this own language reservoir.

The above observation involves the imposing of elements of another culture into ones own life space. As a result, the students' harmony with his own cultural community and his willingness or ability to identify with the other cultural community becomes an important consideration in the process of second Language Acquisition. Halliday (1993:34) equates meaning in a language with culture of the people. He observes that the linguistic system of an adult has a culturally specific and situationally sensitive range of meaning potential. He defines language as the ability to 'mean' in the situation types, or social contexts that are generated by culture.Nigeria is a multi-lingual state with its plurality of indigenous languages put at 513 (Eka, 2000:18). This language situation makes it imperative that English be used as a major medium of inter ethnic communication. Akindele and Adegbite (1992:20) describe the nation as: A 'coordinate bilingual' whereby all the indigenous languages stand on one hand, and English language on the other hand.

Since language is seen as part of the culture of the people, English language seems to maintain a dominant position as the medium of propagating the Nigeria culture. However, this function can only be performed adequately through the domestication of the Nigerian variety of English (Adekunde, 1995:83). The idea of domesticated English is based on the fact that English is a second language in the Nigerian environment and is bound to be influenced by the indigenous languages. Orisawayi (1985:76) observes that the English language in Nigeria is caught between two mutually compelling socio-cultural forces that

tend to constrain its use and usage potentiality. Akere had earlier made the same observation stating by that:

> The English language in Nigeria exists within a Milieu of social, ethnic and linguistic diversity, hence, it is bound to the affected by, and also, to respond to the socio-linguistic as well as the socio-political factors and considerations which influence or constrain language use and language policy in Nigeria. (cf. Orisawayi 1985:76)

Adejare (1995:165) sees English as a second language (ESL) used in Nigeria as being essentially multi-cultural variables: English as a Second language (ESL), English as a Mother Tongue (EMT) culture; and English as a second language in an indigenous language culture.
Adekunle quoted in Ogu (1992:79) summarizes the effects of this as follows:

> First, English as used by the Nigerian bilingual constitutes a dilectal variety of English, which is different as it has its own distinct characteristics. Second, these characteristics lie in the fact that a Nigeria user of English is not only being bilingual (to some degree) but by implication, also bicultural (to some degree) and that the peculiarities of his performance in English are therefore a reflection of the convergence in him of the system of two languages and two cultures.

In line with this, Odumosu (2000:42) is of the view that English as used in Nigeria can now be viewed as receiving its meaning in accordance with objects, concepts, philosophy or activities which exists within the Nigerian community. Therefore, it is the Nigerian environment that determines the kind of expectations of commemorative competence and proficiency required.

The paradox however, is that while the position of English in the country's national life is perhaps, stronger than ever before, the quality of the English spoken and written, by students as perceived by most Nigerians qualified to judge it, has been deteriorating over a long period despite the governments' long standing attempt at enhancing better teaching and learning of the language. The emphasis on "correct" usage brings to play the socio-linguistic theory of competence. Hence, the students' proficiency in English should be such that will enable him/her use the language effectively as it reflects the socio-cultural background of Nigeria, but at the same time, should meet international intelligibility.

Affirming this, Udozie quoting Kachru (1992:31) advised that didactic approach should not be adopted in the evaluation of non-native users of English, rather non-native users should be assessed from the point of view of relevant factors such as; appropriateness, acceptability and intelligibility.

In the Nigerian context therefore, the choice of native speakers pedagogical model is not meant to replicate the owners of the language but simply a target variety. Thus, it becomes pertinent that socio-linguistic features evident in the use of English as a second language in our Secondary Schools be identified and studied.

## Background to the Problem
The indispensability, of the English language for educational development and for the general communication among the people of Nigeria is incontestable, considering the ethno-linguistic nature of our society. Several researches have been carried out to identify the problem areas of usage of the language by the learners. Yet, evidence and facts show that there is a progressive and rapid decline in proficiency in the English language usage by Nigerian students. The fact is that there are certain factors

responsible for students poor performance in English which cannot necessarily be classified as 'problems' but are characteristics of the students' socio-linguistic environment.

Hence, the study of the socio-linguistic features in the use of English will to a large extent, show the interactions of the social, cultural and linguistic variables as they affect the students' linguistic/communicative competence and limit their performance in English. It intends also to define the characteristics of what is known as a domestication of the Nigerian English, which upon discovery could tend to improve the proficiency/performance of the said speakers.

**The Aim and Scope of the Research**
The purpose of this paper was to examine the socio-linguistic features in the use of English by Secondary School students in Uyo Local Government Area, to identify and locate such features as potential and real sources of performance problems for the learner-users of English as a second language.

The paper will expose the learner-users and the English language teachers to these factors, which may lead to a systematic and rich account of the learning process, thus resulting in optimal performance. This work will also expose the teachers and the students to the difficulties in the use of English by the students as going beyond the teaching method, teaching materials, curriculum planning, among others, but also traceable to the learner's socio-cultural milieu.

For an effective treatment of the topic under reference, the study was restricted from Senior Secondary one (SSI) to Senior Secondary Three (SS 3) students of selected Secondary Schools in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Schools from both urban and rural setting were used to ascertain if the features are the same or differ as a result of urbanization and biculturalism.

**Research Questions**
The study addresses the following questions:
1. To what extent does a students' Mother Tongue (MT) or first language (LI) in the Nigerian situation influence the effective use of English?
2. How does parental educational background influence acquisition and use of English?
3. How is the students' cultural background reflected in his usage of English?
4. To what extent do the English language performance features of the students reflect the school location where they find themselves?

**Data Analysis/Results**
For purposes of easy investigation and clarity of discussion, the analysis is divided into three sections. The first section examines the sociolinguistic features exhibited by the subjects in both written and oral text. The second section deals with the analysis of the syntactic features and the third section is the analysis of the oral interview.

**Table 1: This Table Shows the Frequency of the Sociolinguistic Features**

| S/No. | Sociolinguistic Features | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. | Code-mixing | 147 | 91.8 |
| 2. | Code-switching | 123 | 76.8 |
| 3 | Transliteration | 90 | 56.2 |
| 4. | Proverbs | 28 | 17.5 |
| 5. | Coinages | 17 | 10.6 |
| 6. | Lexical transfers/loanwords | 2 | 13.7 |

| 7. | Conceptual world view | 14 | 8.75 |
|----|----------------------|----|------|

**Interpretation of Table 1**

From the table above, it is clear that at the level of sociolinguistic feature, code mixing has the frequency of occurrence of 147 out of 441 total giving 91.8% while code switching has the occurring frequency of 103 or 96.8%. Transliteration has a frequency of 90 at 56.2%. Proverbs and Coinages have the frequency of 28 and 17 each or 17.5% and 10.6% respectively. Lexical transfers / loan words and conceptual world view on the other hand has 22 and 14 frequency of occurrence with 13.7% and 8.75% respectively.

**Table 2: This Table Shows the Frequency of Occurrence of the Features in the Written Essays**

| S/No. | Sociolinguistic Features | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. | Code-mixing | 90 | 56.2 |
| 2. | Code-switching | 20 | 12.5 |
| 3 | Transliteration | 46 | 28.7 |
| 4. | Proverbs | 3 | 1.8.7 |
| 5. | Coinages | 14 | 38.75 |
| 6. | Lexical transfers/loan words | 18 | 11.2 |
| 7. | Conceptual world view | 8 | 5.0 |

**Interpretation of Table 2**

This table shows the frequency of occurrence of the features in the written Essays of the subjects. Code-mixing registers 90 occurrences giving a percentage of 56.2% while code-switching occurs 20 times giving 12.2%. Transliteration from the background language has the frequency of 46 times at 28.7%. Proverbs and Coinages occur 3 and 14 times each while the percentage of these occurrences stand at 1.87% and 38.75% accordingly. Lexical Transfers / Loan words and Conceptual World View have 18 and 8 times of occurrences and with 11.2% and 5.0% respectively.

**Table 3: Frequency of Occurrences of Sociolinguistic Features in the oral/essay Conversation**

| S/No. | Sociolinguistic Features | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|--------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. | Code-mixing | 57 | 35.6 |
| 2. | Code-switching | 103 | 64.3 |
| 3 | Transliteration | 44 | 27.5 |
| 4. | Proverbs | 25 | 15.6 |
| 5. | Coinages | 3 | 1.87 |
| 6. | Lexical transfers/loan words | 4 | 2.50 |
| 7. | Conceptual world view | 6 | 3.75 |

**Table 4: Combination of Language in Code-Mixing, Code-Switching and Proverbs**

| S/No. | Sociolinguistics Features | Combination | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------|---------------------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1. | Code-switching | English Mother Tongue, Nigerian Pidgin | 46 | 28.7 |
| | | Mother Tongue | 77 | 48.1 |
| 2. | Code-mixing | English-mother Tongue | 117 | 73.1 |
| | | English –Nigeria Pidgin | 30 | 18.7 |
| 3. | Proverbs | Mother Tongue | 13 | 8.16 |
| | | Nigerian Pidgin | 6 | 3.7 |
| | | English | 9 | 5.6 |

The tables above summarize the frequency of the features as identified in the data. They also give information on the languages code-mixed or code-switched by the students. Proverbs were not just said in English but also in the Mother Tongue (MT) and Nigerian Pidgin (a common variety spoken amongst the subjects). Some examples of there features are stated below:

A.      **Code-Mixing**
The data showed that a total of one hundred and forty-seven texts represent 82.2% of the subjects code-mixed either in the oral essay, conversation or essay writing.

Code mixing of English and Mother Tongue; all the code-mixed phrases/sentences are underlined.
1.  Mbok ňňo your biro ise (21)
2.  Just listen  ke aya kop  the  gist
    Ku mbup mbime (23)
3.  Give me rovers (Snack) and change this one ke this one asak  (160).
4.  Se owo adiéhé ko ofon ke nyá udoko nkpo don't let her know that your are looking at her, ku se aye now (5)
5.  There are so many potholes, abédéŋ ehm, ubéh, udu dioŋŋo ke dié asanga akpé ubén owo ukité aba if you don't belief me just ask any villager (13)

**Code-mixing of Mother Tongue and Nigerian Pidgin**
It is only the Mother Tongue that is underlined, the Nigeria English phrases  and sentences are not underlined.
6.  Nso ke afo asa sat udionnke what to choose? Mbok no choose that one o (158).
7.  Wetin de do you self, useme nkpo mmo nse nsua owo ado dull ke ňkpo  (127).
8.  Nna how far for that runs, ku ňyaňga  I dey very interested. (128).
9.  Ndaka iso,  you no de bring light now, mfin ke odioŋo (138).
10. Monday, shine your eye, shine your eye ke uyo town ke aba mi, no be  inside (116).
11. David, di, di,di, ise,  how far now? (154).
12. Make we de go class now, mma ibat aya duk, adi? (37).

B.      **Code- Switching**
Code-switching from English to Nigerian Pidgin
The code switched words and phrases in Nigerian pidgin are underlined:
13. The rain is heavy and we cannot enter the rain. Please don't be in a hurry, make we find place sidon. Ima what did you say about the maths questions? (145).
14. And my father says if him see me with bad friends him go kill me. So I do not disobey him at all (16).
15. When I asked my friend to loan me his dress he said I no send o! no be me carry you come school.  That ended the relationship (18).
16. So when she was caught she could not deny the whole thing, she come hide face for shame that was the end of the story (3).
17. So I love Samuel as my best friend because he knows what I like and what I hate because problem no dey finish (42).
18. My sister, I leave everything in God's hands, you, you wayo, wayo, I think them don buy you finish (146).

Code-switching from mother Tongue to English language and Nigerian Pidgin; only the Mother Tongue is underlined.
19. Se aye Nko, owo mboho ke Imaobong obo ke Maureen (breaks)  you  don see your book?  (159).
20. Nkpong nsuk ndi. I will come with them (118).

21.  <u>Mmaha mbre uto do.</u> Ehn, I think you see, you don make them write my name for vernacular speaking, na you go pay the money. <u>Mme nsi da uto nduk ado idi</u> (144).
22.  <u>Da, mma government ado ifot, ata ifot ke odo.</u> You know say she been suspect something but no no, I put am for confusion (130).

C.  **Transliteration**
     The preferred forms are given in parenthesis.
23.  I like my friend because she <u>put herself in the church strongly</u> (he is a devout Christian) (64).
24.  He is not old a person in age (he is a young man) (1).
25.  The other one of my sister is schooling at Uyo High School (99).
26.  My mother's neck is chain-chain (she has a ring-like neck) (9).
27.  He thought that with the knowledge he carried from primary school to JSS I he can make it (18).
28.  My best friends' name is Nseobong, which means I look God (33)
29.  Lastly, I can say there is <u>energy</u> in my village which people use to destroy other people. (talking here about spiritual power) (34).
30.  The mother of my friend is the friend of my mother (27).
31.  When Nepa <u>collect light</u> the village is always dark (power failure) (16).
32.  The pig <u>branch</u> tortoise, house on his way back from the market (stop by) (55).
33.  When the tortoise <u>hear</u> the smell of the porridge yam he moved from the high table to the kitchen (perceive) (58).
34.  All right, now, go to come (166).
35.  Ekpo, if you don't drop that ball, this school will <u>not contain</u> the two of us (47).
36.  If Ikwo come, speak Eket because she don't <u>hear</u> Eket, I will interpret to Mma after (understand) (127).
37.  Mfon abeg check my back, quick, fast, I dey <u>hear</u> something dey waka for my body (feel) (134).
38.  Please don't <u>put your mouth in this talk:</u> just mind yourself (128).
39.  My mother said that I am the <u>lightness</u> of the family, when I finish my education (3)
D.  **Coinages**
40.  I don't like him because his father is a <u>419ner.</u> (fraudster)
42.  You have not eaten his <u>bush meat</u> before? It is very sweet (122).
43.  They hold my <u>okadaman</u> he did not roger the Mobil (141).
44.  Many people do <u>timbo timbo in</u> the objective (gamble) (147).
45.  I just play the man <u>abracadabra</u> the more him look, the less him see (to deceive someone) (155).
46.  My father is a <u>Christian man</u> he does not like too much wahala (Goodman) (44).
47.  The road to my village stream is far with many hills to climb when you finish climbing the hill, you pass the <u>poto-poto</u> place where children play to go and fetch water for drinking in front (dirty) (47).
48.  You are <u>cash madam</u> now. Please tell her to repair your glass for you, why did she spoil it? (wealthy woman) (15).

E.  **Loan Words**
49.  When school close let us pass through the <u>motor park</u> so that I can buy that sandals (90).
50.  By religion he is a Muslim and he practice everything about his religion for that matter he is also an <u>Alhaji</u> due to the fact that he traveled to Mecca (22)
51.  My best food is <u>moi-moi</u> and it is very easy to prepare (72).

F.  **Conceptual Worldview**
52.  Our Clan Head employs powerful <u>JuJu</u> men but they do not shed innocent blood (10).
53.  For seven days, those to be imitated into the Ekpe society live in the graveyard and eat nothing but what is cooked for them by the <u>native doctor</u> (68).
54.  When a woman is too beautiful in my village, they say she is <u>mammy water</u> (23).

G. **Proverbs**

55.  Then when my mother still in argumentation I told her that I will tell you because <u>a toad cannot jump in a day time for nothing</u> (19).

56.  Even though I have many friends, there is one in which I love best. There is a wise saying that <u>a friend in need is a friend in deed</u> (27).

57.  You are <u>a pot calling a kettle black</u> (133).

58.  My mother when I disturb her too much does not beat me, she only look and say <u>pickin weh no let him mama sleep, him too no go sleep.</u> (50).

59.  <u>Mbok nsuk ke utaten,</u> I no wear pant (111).

60.  Allow me die before you bury me (109).


H. **Localization of Pronunciation**

The candidates exhibited peculiarity in their pronunciation. This was mainly in the form of phone substitution (22%). Listed below are same of the instances.

61.  Glory dem want start test o (136). Glory /gℓ/∂:ri/ pronounced as /krori/-a total mispronunciation of the word starting with the consonant cluster /gl/realized as /krori/- a possible reason for this could be the fact in some Nigerian Languages /ℓ/ and /r/are used interchangeably.

62.  The snake is alive o. Hit it again well (145).
Alive/ə/əiv/ pronounced as/ə/əif/-the voiced labio dental fricative/v/ at the end of the word "alive" is replaced by /f/ a voice-less labio dental fricative.

63.  I talk true to God (103).
God /gəd/ pronounced as /k∂d/-/g/a voiced velar plosive in "God" is pronounced as /k/ a voiceless velar plosive

64.  Please remember to bring that thing for me (148). Substitution of /t/for/ɵ/in thing/ ɵiŋ/

65.  Himm amekop that fine scent-/s/ substituted for /t/ in scent /scent/realized as /sens/ (101).


1. **Analysis of the letter Writing**

The culture – based form of addressing people was evident particularly in the salutation and closing of the letters. Fifteen students used the following salutation in their letters to either dear mother or their father; "Dear mother' 'Dear father'; 'Dear Mummy' or 'Dear Daddy'; 'Dear father' 'Dear Mummy' or 'Dear Daddy', Twenty (20) of the subjects opened their letters with 'Dear Aunty, 'Dear mummy; 'Dear uncle' 'Dear my Mother's friend, and Dear Sir in their letters to either their mother's friend or their father's friend.

This indicates the culture of referring to an adult male, or female acquaintance of one's family as. 'Aunty' 'Uncle', 'sir'; or 'Mma'. In the same vein, the letter's for both parents and parents' friends were closed with either 'your loving daughter/son', 'yours sincerely' or 'yours faithfully'. Below are excerpts from the letters.

66.  I hope I will find my holiday at Abuja as interesting as I'll find my stay at home. I trust you <u>bro's</u> (letter to father's friend) (99).

67.  So the purpose why I write to you this letter is please <u>sir</u> I want to come to spend the Christmas holiday in your place (102).

68.  I am very happy anytime (remember I have a mother like you in the Lord. <u>Mummy,</u> thank you for the opportunity to spend…. (Letter to mother's friend) (85).

69.  I hope to see my <u>sisters</u> Eno, Emem, and Nsikan when I come. <u>Mma</u> greet them for me and tell them I am coming (letter to mother's friend) (105).

### 1.3 Analysis of the Syntactic Features
**Table 5-Shows The Position of the Code – Mixed and Code – Switched Words/Phrases in the Clausal Element**

| S/NO | S | P | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | My father | is | a Christian man (44) |
| 2. | He | does | Not like too much Wahala (44) |
| 3. | She | has | a fallen breast, a big tommy, a lame waist and a fabulous Ikebe (38) |
| 4. | The villagers | named | her amua'mu osa aru (12) (you were born beautiful) rank shifted clause |
| 5. | His friends | call | him c oyibo <sup>CE</sup> (5) |

| S/NO | S | P | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6. | Ebe mma teacher | sit down | here (134) |

| S/NO | S | P | C |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. | You | don't dress ntementeme (shabbily) | for marching |

| S/NO | S | A | P | C |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. | My | best food | is | Oto mboro |

As can be seen on table 5, more of the sociolinguistic features tend to occur in the complement position of the clause or sentence structure. A few others occur in other positions such as the subject position and the adjunct position.

What is given in table 5 is a reflection of the general tendency of all the text analysed.

### 1.4. Analysis of the Oral Interview
The subjects responded well to the questions they were asked. The information gathered from the study includes domains of language use and parents' educational qualification.

**Table 6: Showing the Distribution of Subjects in Terms of Language Use in the Family/Home.**

| Language | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Mother tongue (MT) | 80 | 66.7 |
| English | 25 | 20.8 |
| Nigerian pidgin | 15 | 12.5 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

The table above summarizes the different languages used by the subjects for communication at home. It shows that the main language of communication and interaction in the family is the mother tongue (80%). 20.8% for English shows that because of the functional load placed on English in Nigeria, some Nigerians prefer to use English in the home, probably to indicate their level of education or their socio-economic status.

Another 12.5% speak Nigeria pidgin at home. This could be as a result of their parents' educational background and the environment where they find themselves.

**Table 6: Distribution of Subjects In Terms of Proficiency in the Indigenous Languages/Mother Tongue**

| Language | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Fair | 10 | 8.3 |
| Good | 20 | 16.7 |

| Very good | 50 | 41.7 |
|-----------|-----|------|
| Excellent | 40 | 33.3 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

  The percentage of students presented above shows that most of the students are proficient in their mother tongue. This is evident by the 33.3% and 41.7% recorded under excellent and very good respectively.

  The data also show that only a minute 8.3% do not have competence in their mother tongue. It is probable that this group and the 16.7% recorded under good, use other codes for communication at home other than their mother tongue. These other languages are the English language and the Nigeria pidgin.

**Table 7: Distribution of Subjects in Terms of Language use in the Neighbourhood**

| Language | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------|-----------|----------------|
| Mother tongue (MT) | 70 | 58.3 |
| English | 20 | 16.7 |
| Nigerian pidgin | 30 | 25.0 |
| Total | 120 | 100 |

  Table 7: Summarizes language use for communication in the neighbourhood. Language choice among neighbours in Uyo Local Government Area is determined by the environment. For instance, students of upper and middle class parents who reside in highbrow housing estates tend to speak or use standard English in communication with peers and neighbours, while those form poor parents who reside in high density areas employ the use of the mother tongue and Nigerian pidgin. This is represented by 41.5% and 24.9% respectively.

**Table 8: Distribution of Subjects in terms of Parents' Educational Qualification**

| Educational Qualification | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Standard 6/FSLC | 10 | 8.3 |
| WASC/SSCE | 40 | 33.3 |
| Diploma | 20 | 16.7 |
| Degree | 30 | 25.0 |
| Post Graduate Qualification | 20 | 16.7 |
| Total | 120 | 120 |

  The parents' level of education to a large extent, has a dual effect on their children. Some parents speak the English language at home to the detriment of their mother tongue. Most parents who are well learned are not mindful of their medium of expression (it could be their mother tongue or English or both). There is however, the third category of parents, those without formal education and whose language code has hitherto affected their wards.

  The educational background of the parents also determine their type of employment, hence their socio-economic standard, which also affect their students' level of interaction and subsequently, their use of English.

**Discussion of Findings**
  The study reveals the influence of mother tongue on the L2 production of the subjects which could be inferred from the extent of transliterations, localization of pronunciation.

  In terms of transliteration 56.2% of the subjects employed transliteration particularly in the essay writing. About 27.5% occurred in oral conversation. The transfer stems from the fact that most of the words in the students' mother tongue have multiple meanings (polysemic). For instance, 'ifiok' (Ibibo language) translated 'sense' has the following meaning in the mother tongue of an Ibibio student.

(+ learn), (+ experience), (+ cunning), hence the following sentences.

70.   I just want help you because I have some sense in it (experience) (158).
71.   You must share the money now, you think say na only you get sense? (cunning) (144)
72.   Even me I get sense from it (to learn from)
      Another example as used by students is 'hear', as shown below:
73.   When the tortoise hears the smell of the porridge yam, he moved from the high table to the kitchen (perceive) (53).
74.   Mfon please check my back, I hear something crawling, on me (feel) (134).
75.   If Ikwo come speak Eket because she don't hear Eket, I will interprete to Mma after (understand) (127).

A possible explanation of the extent of mother tongue (MT) influence on the English language could be the fact that majority of students have acquired their L1 before the acquisition and learning of English.

The study also revealed that most of the students who exhibited less socio-linguistic features in their use of English have parents who are fairly educated. This further confirms the position of Chijioke (1991:99) that educated parents help their children (students) to acquire knowledge of English at home.

This does not necessarily mean that these parents speak only English at home with their wards. On the contrary, the environment (home and school), which these parents provide, create a positive impact on the students and enhances their performance in English.

On the ether hand, students of parents with minimal educational qualification primary (8.3%) and secondary (33.3%) school qualification particularly those from rural schools could not write nor speak English fluently. This is not unconnected with lack of exposure enjoyed by their mates from educated homes.

This work also gave credence to the assertion that cultural background more often than not exerts huge influence on the subjects' use of English. The subjects also employed conceptual worldview (8.75%), proverbs (17.5%) and coinages (10.6%). Some of the idiomatic expressions were wrongly applied portraying the students' cultural environment. An example is 'you cannot eat your cake and have it'.

The proverbs were drawn from English and the mother tongue. The conceptual worldview reflects the cultural beliefs of the subjects. This was seen in the use of words like 'mammy water', and 'native doctor'. The same cultural effect also displayed in the subjects' politeness in their addresses/greetings.

In the letter writing, 35 of the 40 students representing 87.5% who participated addressed their fathers'/mothers' friend as 'aunty' or 'uncle'.

The argument however, is that most students from the urban schools who have the exposure and have the opportunity to use the language frequently, quite often develop competence better and faster than their mates in the rural schools. Hence, there is a prevalence of slang words and Nigerian pidgin amongst few of the students from the rural schools who bother to use any other language for communication other than their mother tongue.

## Conclusions

In view of this findings, it can be deduced that the students' cultural background largely affected their English language usage as determined by some of the sociolinguistic features such as: code-mixing, code-switching, transliteration, idiomatic expression, proverbs among others. Secondly, the students' mother tongue and L1 just like the cultural background had adverse influence on the performance of the subjects in the target language.

Similarly, the school environment being the major domain for the acquisition and learning of English determines to a very large extent, the students' competence and performance. Furthermore, their parents' educational background also played a pivotal role in the overall output of the students in question.

## Recommendations

As a way of addressing some of the problems discovered in this work, teachers should introduce activities that will enhance communicative interaction rather than the teacher dominated method of teaching. English language teachers in the rural schools should avoid laxity, and also meet the challenges of helping their students compete favourably with their counterparts in the urban schools. Most importantly, they should improvise tools that will help the students improve upon their use of English.

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