

# Corrupt Influences on the English Language of Young Second-Language Learners

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## ABSTRACT

In language development of a second-language learner, many factors can influence a learner positively or negatively. This paper focuses on the various corrupt influences on the English language of most young second-language users. This is established using a simple inference from a comparison between character development and language development in an individual and to illustrate the similar way in which both developments can negatively affect individuals/learners through the influence of certain factors. Such factors include society, social media, printed material, electronic media and other miscellaneous factors that contaminate the language of the people, especially, that of young second-language users. Observed actual instances of language corruption are rampant in the spoken and written expressions of these users, business names, mottos written on vehicles, etc. The paper goes further to discuss the implications of these negative influences as well as the roles expected of teachers of English, parents and the government concerning these stated corrupt influences.

**Keywords:** Second-language learners, English language, language development, society, social media.

## INTRODUCTION

An interesting comparison can be made between language and human character. Certain features are common to both language and character development in an individual. There are various means through which the character of a growing child can be contaminated or corrupted. Wary parents make it a point of duty to prevent their children and wards from keeping bad peer groups, watching immoral movies, reading morally debased books, listening to impure talks, etc. All these have a tremendous negative impact on the character development of a child. People who underrated these factors had many courses to regret because of the negative impacts later observed in the lives of their children.

Similarly, certain factors tend to negate the development of the language ability of young second-language learners. These negative/corrupt influences on the language of such second-language learners include but are not limited to the following: (i) society, (ii) social media (iii) printed material, (iv) electronic media, and (v) other miscellaneous sources. The negative effects of these factors on the use of the English language by young second-language learners are highlighted one after the other in this paper.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Not much has been directly done on this topic of research, hence the little attempt to examine few related to the research. Sa'ad and Usman (2014) in their study investigated the causes of poor performance in English language among senior secondary school students. They identified such causes as dominance of mother tongue, inadequate qualified teachers of the English language, using the right approach to teaching of the English language, provision of language laboratory and so on while this paper dwells specifically on negative/corrupt influences on the English language of young second users. It focuses on society, social

media, printed material, electronic media and other miscellaneous factors that contaminate the language of the people, especially, that of young second-language users.

Malu and Nnamdi-Eze (2023) in slightly related development examined the influence of social media on the performance of secondary school students in English language in Enugu education. The paper focused on dominance and addiction of social media as the major causes of poor performance in English language both in internal and external examinations among secondary school students of Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State. This paper's focus is on corrupt influences of young second-language users in which case social media is a major aspect not just by way of addiction or dominance. It should be noted that further analysis on the different negative influences on the English language of young second-language users are categorized in different sub-headings.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This study is anchored on the regularity theory of causation found in (Hume 1978) on the basis that effects regularly follow causes. Cause, in this case, is seen as an object precedent and contiguous to another for a cause. Three conditions are incorporated in the definition: a cause temporally precedes its effect; a cause is contiguous to its effect; all objects similar to the cause are in 'like relation' to objects similar to the effect (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2021, Jul 27). It follows that these numerous sources of corrupt influences are object precedents contiguous to the corrupt practices in the use of the English language by most learners of the language.

### Social media influence on the language of young learners

There is no doubt that social media activities have come to stay with their fast-growing influence on many facets of life. The influencing waves on the English language cannot be overlooked. In the words of Reuben Abati of The Guardian Newspaper, the situation is frightening thus:

The kind of new English being written by Twitter and Whats App users, particularly young people are however so frightening and lamentable because it is beginning to creep into regular writing. Texting and tweeting are producing a generation of users of English, (it is worse that they are using English as a second-language), who cannot write grammatically successful sentences. I was privileged to go through some applications that some young graduates submitted for job openings recently and I was scared (2016).

According to him, most of these users do not have regard for punctuation and do not know the differences between one punctuation and the other. In their texting or tweeting, there is a mix-up of pronouns, abuse of verbs and adverbs, and violation of almost all rules of lexis and syntax. Similarly, it is affirmed that the negative impact on the use English language is the improper use of grammar, informal speech used in wrong contexts, and misspellings (Social Media Impacts on The English Language, 2022, February 9). This, which is prevalent in Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp goes a long way to reveal the lack of capacity to write and communicate meaningfully by young users who are dominant in the use of social media.

Misspelling, compression, and abbreviations are dominant in the perverse situation trending in different social media networks in the hands of young second-language users. This has grown to the point that it takes a painstaking effort to understand some appearances of written English with misspellings, compression, and innovative abbreviations. Abati (2016) describes this as a meta-English which is English in sound but in appearance, it has been subjected to the punishment of excessive abbreviation, compression, and modification. The following are a few examples: the single letter 'c' represents 'see', the single letter 'u' stands for 'you', '4' becomes 'for', '4eva' means 'forever', '4get' represents 'forget', 'str8' means 'straight', 'haus' stands for 'house', etc. In this case, you can see something as 'cu' to mean 'see you', and 'hawayu' to mean 'how are you', etc. In some cases, some of these compressions or abbreviations are

combined to make sentences giving out an expression that needs some meditation before one can decipher the meaning. Sometimes the combination turns out to be pidgin. Consider these examples that are frequently encountered in social media platforms:

“B/c wed p’ple thought #fuels carcity was temp. no pers’n tok”; instead of – Because people thought the fuel scarcity was temporal people did not complain

‘it kent happun pass dat’. Instead of – it will not go beyond that

lol instead of – laughing out loud

‘*lwkmd*’ (“laughter wan kill man die”), laughter at the highest point

These are expressions that are not ordinarily comprehensive except for young learners who are masters in this lingo.

The worst is that most of these young learners who have become socialized in this new mode of communication are not always able to differentiate between correct and incorrect English. Hence, the infiltration of these new ways of communication in their formal writing. This calls for the attention of all stakeholders: parents/guardians, and teachers, especially with the fact that the strictness in the use of correct English grammar in school is dying down gradually. It should be noted that the ability to write strengthens one’s ability to think clearly and communicate effectively (Abati, 2016).

### **Society/Peer Group Codes as a Factor of Negative Influence on the English Language**

Society and language are interrelated. Language is an invaluable means of interaction among people in any society. The status and the level of development any language enjoys depend on the society in which it is used. A language derives its vitality from its users in society. Society, on the other hand, can negatively influence the language of a young learner in many ways. Peer group interaction among the youth, for instance, provides a fertile ground for language corruption. The youth make vigorous use of slang and other kinds of informal expressions in English. Students in secondary and tertiary institutions in this country, for example, use these words frequently in their interactions ‘buses’ to refer to girlfriends, ‘wads’ to refer to money/naira, ‘copper’ to refer to corps member, ‘*apiam* way’ to refer to track route, ‘*tokunbo*’ to mean imported fairly used products like vehicles, ‘after five’ to refer to a young unmarried lady with a child, ‘jack’ to refer to study hard, especially during an examination, ‘*gbosa*’ to mean punch or slap someone, etc. The proliferation of these terms socially and among peer groups, no doubt has negatively influenced young language learners of English in their acquisition of language.

While the place of slang and other informal expressions in the language is not denied, the problem with the youth is that they are often ignorant of how to use them appropriately. In some formal expository compositions written in English by these young learners of English, one often comes across informal or colloquial expressions which can only be appropriately used in informal writing. Such terms including those listed above are often seen in formal essays written by such learners. Thus, most young speakers of English as a second-language are fond of mixing formal and informal expressions because of what they learnt through peer group interactions.

Market as a social institution is another major source of corrupt influences on the English language. In most parts of Nigeria, market transactions are carried out in English. Varieties of English ranging from standard to Pidgin English are used in these transactions. It is undoubtedly nonstandard, archaic, and illiterate words and expressions that are predominant in Nigerian market English. The use of Pidgin English is in vogue among market men and women. Most times the youth are involved in one business or the other directly or indirectly since they sometimes assist their parents or relatives in business or are directly involved in

business to support their education. The English of young learners who often engage in these market transactions gets easily contaminated. At the level of their use of English, these young learners are not able to differentiate between standard and nonstandard English. The nonstandard words and expressions they acquire through market transactions make inroads into their daily speeches and even essays they write in school. The popularity of non-standard and anyhow English on the lips of most young learners debars the privileged few from using correct expressions or Standard English. Invariably, they are the ones who do not know the correct usage of the language and could be made a laughing stock just for sticking to the standard rule.

Most speakers at political rallies, religious gatherings, and other public functions also unwittingly corrupt the English of young ones. In many political rallies, especially during campaigns, highly placed persons in a bid to impress their audience manipulate the language arbitrarily to actualise their political ambition, thereby using unacceptable expressions as well as forming new expressions. For young learners, the expressions from these important personalities are models. Hence, the perpetration of corrupt usages of young learners' language. In these days of religious resurgence in the country, marketplaces, streets, public buildings, buses, etc, are used as venues for marathon religious preaching. English is invariably the core language used in these preachings. With the revered positions of these preachers, their expressions are imitated as models by young language learners. The same applies to some other public events where comedians are used as masters of ceremonies. The focus of comedians is to highly engage the audience as well as increase the liveliness of occasions with little or no concern about acceptable grammatical words, sentences, or expressions. It is an obvious fact that most speakers at such rallies or public events are not well-trained in the use of English. Nevertheless, to the undiscerning young learners, the English used by such speakers is often taken as a model. In their speeches and writing, they make use of such expressions acquired through listening to these speakers.

Similarly, nonstandard expressions in English are frequently picked by young learners from other public places in our towns and cities. In admission offices of our higher institutions, for example, one often hears such a faulty expression as: 'You must credit English'. Through what they acquire from these sources, the development of the English of young learners can negatively be affected.

### **Corrupt Influences from Printed Materials**

This is an age remarkably flooded with printed material of various types. Information and knowledge are now disseminated in such written forms as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, bulletins, letters, telegrams, almanacs, and other forms. These different written forms are produced for different purposes. Generally, books and journals are written for serious academic purposes while other types of printed material are mainly produced for information and entertainment. The form of English in which these various types of written materials are produced differs accordingly. While those meant for academic purposes are in most cases written in formal Standard English, others are usually written in English that is below standard. Textbooks belong to the category of printed material which many young learners value and revere because of the vital role it plays in individual and national development. Sincerely, books have no doubt been accepted as an indispensable foundation upon which any sound educational development is built. However, not all societies take the issue of the quality of books for education seriously. Nigeria is one of such societies identified with negative impacts on its educational development because of the quality of books especially when it has to do with language (Israel, 2014:77). The role of many Nigerian authors of textbooks is part of the potential reasons for the falling standard of English usage in Nigeria. This is because many Nigerians have been known to believe that whatever is in print must be the correct usage. This has brought about negative influences on the learning and usage of English by many young ones. Israel (2014) supports this in his belief that anything written in a book must be correct to the extent some young and inexperienced learners even consult textbooks rather than dictionaries for spelling and correct usage. For this reason, there

is an obvious manifestation of lexical errors, syntactic errors, morphological errors, etc. in the writing of these young learners. A study carried out on Effects of Lexico-syntactic Errors on Teaching Materials: A Study of Textbooks Written by Nigerians reveals numerous errors like lexical errors, errors in the use of function words, errors in sentence structure, errors in concord relations, inclusion of redundant elements/reduplication, omission of determiners or superfluous insertion of preposition, superfluous insertion of preposition or its omission, frequent pluralization of non-plural form; independent coinages, etc.

There are also some newspapers and magazines that are purposely written in pidgin. Among them are IKEBE of old and BBC News pidgin which also influences the English of these learners. Another glaring example is *The Lonely Londoners* by Samuel Selvon sometime used as one of the prescribed texts in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination in Literature. They are produced for entertainment purposes and it seems that writing these newspapers, magazines and novels in debased English adds to their entertainment value. Some students and teachers had expressed their fear of polluting their English through reading these texts.

It is important to note that a trained and experienced speaker of English can consume all the written forms in the above-mentioned texts without allowing his English to get corrupted because such a speaker is in a position to distinguish between standard and non-standard English and also between formal and informal English. It is not the same story for young learners of the language. Speakers of the language in this category are not capable of making this distinction. They regard anything printed as an unquestionable standard and a model too. In their written essays, one comes across errors traceable to what they have absorbed from some of the written types mentioned above. The errors are likewise manifested in their speeches. It is precisely for this reason that printed material should be regarded as an enormous potential source of corrupt influence on the English language.

### **Corrupt Influence of Electronic Media**

Just like other corrupt influences mentioned, electronic media can be used either to enhance or mar one's ability to use English. Dedicated and imaginative teachers of English have indeed used electronic media as invaluable aids in teaching the language; it is also an incontrovertible fact that many learners of English have had their English corrupted through exposure to these media. Of all the electronic media, the radio and T.V. are the most popular among Nigerians: An average home in the country can easily afford to have the two items now. Accordingly, these two electronic media have a great impact on the use of English in the country. Many programmes of radio stations in Nigeria are carried out in substandard English. The popular Zebudaya programmes of old, BB Naija and programmes featuring Nigerian folk plays are glaring examples. Some radio stations in Nigeria deliberately broadcast news in pidgin English. Some news broadcasts of Radio Nigeria, Enugu are in pidgin English. Even when running programmes in normal English errors are still frequently committed. For example, very often announcements are made in the following words: the burial ceremony of His Royal Highness Igwe Mark Eze *hold* at his palace instead of ... *will take place* at his palace or ... *will be held* at his palace. The story is the same with most other radio stations in the country.

The T.V. stations in Nigeria engage in similar programmes. The impact of the T.V. programmes on young viewers deserves some special attention. As T.V. appeals to both the senses of sight and hearing simultaneously, its effect on such viewers is tremendous. Captivated by motion pictures that often accompany the sounds, these viewers very quickly memorise and internalize expressions they hear from such electronic gadgets. As already mentioned above, some of these expressions are in nonstandard English. The use of video is also becoming very popular in Nigeria. Its impact on the use of English, particularly among the youth, should not be ignored.

## Other Sources of Corrupt Influences

There are still other sources of corrupt influences on the English language in Nigeria. The English of young learners in the country is often contaminated by what they observe and absorb from such sources as business names written on signposts and inscriptions written on motor vehicles. These sources are more pronounced in cities and big towns. More often than not, the writers of such business names and inscriptions are semi-literate businessmen who are not effective users of the language and have little or no regard at all for standard expressions in English. Prominent among faults associated with business names and mottos are spelling errors. A few examples are necessary here. The following business names with spelling errors were identified during a recent survey carried out within Nsukka town.

1. Klin Laundry (in this name 'Clean' is incorrectly spelt).
2. Cement and Zink Depot (Here 'Zinc' is spelt as 'Zink')
3. Thessy Fashion and Desyning (The spelling of 'designing' is wrong).

In some business names, certain words are purposely spelt strangely. This is probably done to attract more attention to the businesses. Examples:

1. Kampus Photo Studio
2. Zenith Klass (Nig).

In these two business names, the words 'Campus' and Class are strangely spelt.

Many of the business names surveyed have syntactic errors as can be illustrated by the following two examples:

1. Felix Ihatu and Bros. dealers on all types of Building Materials.
2. Nazarene Enterp. Dealers on all poultry feeds.
3. (In these two business names the use of the preposition 'on' is wrong. The preposition 'in' should be used instead).
4. Among the business names surveyed, some have punctuation errors.
5. The following two business names exemplify this fact:
6. Top-Most Hair Designer
7. If Hospital Fails, Habal Clinic

(The punctuation marks used in these names are superfluous. A hyphen is not required between 'top' and 'most'. Similarly, the comma used after the word 'fails' in the second example is unnecessary. The spelling of the word 'Habal' should be 'Herbal'. Moreover, the same business name is not semantically clear owing to poor wording. The word 'herbal' is incorrectly spelt). The following three business names observed within the Nsukka main market during the survey are also semantically deficient:

1. Morris Masterclass International Barbing Salon ('Masterclass' is not an English word).
2. Chinedu Doctor of all Watches (This expression is not English and does not convey much meaning)
3. Chitex Traditional Designer (The meaning of this business name is not clear. What the business man designs is not stated. He probably means that he designs traditional wear).

Similar faulty English can also be observed in inscriptions on motor vehicles, especially lorries. For instance, expressions in nonstandard English such as 'TOMORROW IS PREGNANT', 'PEACE MOVEMENT', 'NOTHING PASS GOD' are often seen on some lorries within the Nsukka area. Young learners of English are constantly exposed to these business names and inscriptions. Consequently, the writings constitute a serious source of corrupt influences on their English.

## CONCLUSION

The major sources of corrupt influences on the English language have been highlighted in this paper. The purpose is to arouse the consciousness of the readers over the reality of these influences. Being aware of the presence of a problem is the first step towards solving it. It is necessary, therefore, that parents, teachers and students alike should be made to be conscious of these contaminating influences, hence the purpose of this article. With an awareness of their presence, these categories of people will be in a strong position to guard against the inroads of these influences upon young learners' use of English.

The implication of these corrupt influences on an imaginative and dedicated teacher of English is far-reaching. These days the importance of bringing the real outside world into the four walls of the classroom is very much stressed. A teacher who pays attention in his English lesson to these outside influences on the language is in the right direction.

Moreover, as English is still the official language of this country, it is not out of place for the government to initiate measures to check the spread of these influences. Placing a ban on the circulation of those entertainment magazines written in 'murdered' English is one of the possible effective steps that can be taken in this direction. The radio and T.V. stations which propagate corrupt English through some of their programmes should also be called to order. Or they may also be made to add warning write-up at conspicuous points for viewer

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