

English Language Variation: Creation of **Zambian English (ZamEnglish)**

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Abstract

In the present chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the need to create **Zambian English** to address English language variations in Zambia. No language in the world can remain the same after interacting with other languages. The present chapter intends to propose and support the idea of using ‘**Zambian English**’ for both formal and informal business. Such a measure would create the communicative competence that the majority of the **Zambians** have always longed for. In Zambia, the purpose of using English language office is to deliberate day to day’s business. On the contrary, this has been found to be an obstacle to those who lack principles of command in the language usage, but are able to construct sentences for communicative purposes yet are deprived in international interactions. The views expressed in this chapter are those of the language experts who were engaged in a conversation with regard to the possibility of creating what would be known as **Zambian English (ZamEnglish)**.

Keywords: **Zambian English**, language variation, speech community.

Background

When we talk of English, we are normally referring to the language of England; the English language variety we refer to in recipient countries as received pronunciation (RP) variety of the English language. This is the kind of English as used by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in England. Historically, Britain colonised a lot of nations and so wherever people were colonised by Britain, the English language was learnt and used for communication purposes in writing and speech, in both formal and informal circles of life. It was also used in education both as a subject and as a medium of instruction at all levels of education; Primary, Secondary and University. The colonial Government from Britain made it a point that the English language had a policy that assisted in spreading of this selected language; starting in Ireland in the late 12th century and continuing well into the 19th century in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). Geographically, the English language is currently spoken

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in all the five continents due to the British policy which allowed it to be deliberately engineered in all British colonies. This originates from a strong saying that says ‘The sun never sets in the British Empire’ (Bald et al, 2013).

English, thus, is widely used in many varieties throughout the world in its spoken and written forms. For this reason, it is considered to be a global language that has gained currency internationally. English is treated as a means of communication in the areas of the economy, technology, science, arts, tourism, and sports. In their study of English as an Economic language, Zhao and Zhao (2019) established that the relationship of language learning and language application is just like investment and benefit. People use language to transact business and even make a living globally.

The English language functions as an “international” or “world language,” and it serves as ‘lingua-franca’ for facilitating communication between people who do not share the same first (or even second) language (Harmer, 2007). Being a world language, English has been influenced by the many languages that have come in contact with it. The influence from the different languages is normally very prominent phonologically, semantically and even orthographically. Since English is considered to be the most important tool for communication globally, the understanding of its varieties that includes accent also becomes necessary. Aeni, et al (2021:1) explains,

Accent has different fields: phrase, sentence and sentence.
The term accent is part of the characteristic way that
a language is pronounced (also called word stress or
lexical stress). Different accents have characterised
the varieties of English spoken in the various areas of the
world.

This chapter intends to propose and support the idea of using ‘Zambian English’ for both formal and informal business. Such a measure would create the communicative competence that the majority of the Zambians have always longed for.

English Language Variation in Zambia

Language Variations in Zambia

Zambia is a landlocked country with a total of about seventy-two recognised languages and dialects segmented in different regions. Apart from numerous languages and dialects that have been identified in Zambia, there are seven official vernacular languages: Bemba, Nyanja, Lozi, Tonga, Luvale, Lunda, and Kaonde, the latter three being languages of North-Western Province. In the 19th century the British government colonized central Africa including Zambia and English became the official language of government and is used for education, commerce and law. English became a second language prior to indigenous languages spoken in Zambia. Therefore, principles of English language were taught and learnt officially suppressing the familiar languages which remained as local communicative languages in their original regions. With these remarks it is therefore, important to define what language is and its purpose to human life (encyclopedia Britannica).

What is Language?

The word language has been defined by many scholars, Moeller and Catalano (2015) defined the term language as “the vehicle required for effective human-to-human interactions and yields a better understanding of one’s own language and culture.” According to Hakim, (2018) Language is a system of conventional, spoken, or written symbols utilized when human beings are communicating. Further, Chomsky (2018) said “the language is the inherent capability of native speakers to understand and form grammatical sentences.” Chomsky (2018) also pointed out that a language is a set of (finite or infinite) sentences; each finite length constructed out of a limited set of elements. Hence this definition of language considers sentences as the basis of a language. Sentences may be limited or unlimited and are made up of only minor components.

Additionally, Hakim (2018) showed different definitions included the following; Derbyshire’s who said “the language is undoubtedly a kind of communication among human beings. It consists primarily of vocal sounds, articulatory, systematic, symbolic, and are arbitrary.”

This definition of Derbyshire clearly indicates that language is the best source of communication, and it also portrays how human language and the fundamental principles of language are formed. According to Lyons, languages are the principal communication systems used by particular groups of human beings within the specific society of which they are members (Hakim, 2018). Lyons specifically points out that language is the best communicative system of human beings by particular social groups. From the few definitions of language given above, it is worth noting that language exists for communicative purpose.

All the above definitions point to the fact that among human beings language is a system of conventional arbitrary symbols, written and spoken in both words and sentences, which are used for communication. The central purpose for having language is for it to facilitate communication among people. The other point to note is that language must be accepted among its users as it must be continually and consistently used the same way among the people that use it.

Language Variations

Cummins (2017) asserted that linguistic variation is central to the study of language use. In fact, it is impossible to study the language forms used in natural texts without being confronted with the issue of linguistic variability. Cummins (2017) postulated that “Variability is inherent in human language: a single speaker will use different linguistic forms on different occasions, and different speakers of a language will express the same meanings using different forms.”

He, further, explains that most of this variation is highly systematic. Therefore, speakers of a language make choices in pronunciation, morphology, word choice, and grammar depending on a number of non-linguistic factors. According to Cummins, (2017) “...these factors include the speaker’s purpose in communication, the relationship between speaker and hearer, the production circumstances, and various demographic affiliations that a

speaker can have.” In Zambian context language, variations is experienced more in local languages. One language may be spoken slightly differently and yet maintaining mutual intelligibility. Such variations are referred to dialects. The pronunciations in syllables differ from one language to another.

In Chewa, for instance, the word that means ‘with nothing’ is *cabe* (Katete dialect) but *Caje* (Lundazi Mwase Mphangwe dialect). Because of this, some language groups fail to interpret words from certain varieties of the same language. Similarly, some tribes in Zambia fail to grasp the English syllables and cannot give original meaning and pronunciations of certain words. This is particularly the case where a certain variety of English is used rather than the one people already are used to. English, being the second language, some Zambian tribes find it difficult to bring out the originality of the language.

As a matter of fact, certain pronunciations which are difficult to make are Zambianised, including certain words too. This makes English native speakers, including other non-Zambians who speak English, also find it difficult to fully understand some Zambians. The changes that occur to English cause Zambia to drift away from the English variety as spoken by RP native speakers to what we may call ‘Zambian English’ which had certain additions or subtractions to both English words and sentences phonologically, morphologically as well as syntactically. The causes are these changes that are happening to the English language of the Received Pronunciation. The English variety of English should be promoted alongside the RP currently used in Zambia. It manages to make people communicate, except it is not allowed officially. Hence, this chapter advocates for less measures to be taken in usage of rule-governed English for communicative purposes locally and internationally (Bloomfield, 1914).

English as an official Language in Zambia

Studying a language provides the learner with an opportunity to gain linguistic and social knowledge, and to know when, how, and why to say what to whom (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project-NSFLEP, 2014). English language, like any other language or skill, is learnt through language learning and acquisition. Language scholars distinguish between the terms acquisition and learning. Canale and Swain (2019) refer to ‘acquisition’ as the process of learning first and second languages naturally, without formal instruction, whereas ‘learning’ is reserved for the formal study of second or foreign languages in classroom settings.

In Zambia, foreign language education is mostly done in schools through formal instruction. It mostly follows the learning approach or deliberate instruction. However, like any other language, it can also be learnt informally through acquisition.

Whether English is learnt formally or informally, there is a chance that this foreign language can drift away from RP to a Zambian variety (Zambian English) through pronunciation and borrowing which includes localization of both phonological and morphological aspects of the foreign or second languages to the indigenous ones. Currently, the Zambian English variety is not recognised in public as well as education circles. To state it clearly, the Zambian English variety is not allowed everywhere in Zambia. This is the case because the

current language policy on the learning and use of English is that all Zambians should learn the British Received Pronunciation (RP) kind of English.

This chapter intends to state that the role of language is to facilitate communication, the role the Zambian variety of English plays among the Zambian users. This study is advocating for the promotion and legalisation of Zambian English alongside RP for effective communication among both the educated and the not-so-educated. What is required is to deliberately promote it. It is believed the political will, through the language policy can make this dream come true.

Foreign language education does not refer to the teaching of a modern language that is neither an official language nor the mother tongue of a significant part of the population. In case of Zambia, English and the seven distinguished indigenous languages are taught and examined at national level and are used professionally. Whereas French, Portuguese and Chinese are considered foreign languages, English is a second and official language in Zambia.

English as Foreign Language in Zambia

According to Moeller and Catalano (2015) foreign language learning and teaching refer to the teaching or learning of a non-native language outside of the environment where it is commonly spoken. A language is considered foreign if it is learned largely in the classroom, and is not spoken in the society where the teaching occurs. In the Zambian context, the English language is taught in school and pupils hardly speak it correctly. Therefore, it seems to be a continuous learning process. As such, English is relevant for communication purposes in terms of school, commerce and law. Chapelle (2010) observed that “learning another language provides access into a perspective other than one’s own, increases the ability to see connections across content areas, and promotes an interdisciplinary perspective while gaining intercultural understandings.” Therefore, study of another language allows the individual to communicate effectively and creatively and to participate in real life situations through the language of the authentic culture itself.

In Zambia, the purpose of using English language officially is to deliberate the day-to-day’s business. On the contrary, this has been found to be an obstacle to those who lack principles of command in the language usage but are able to construct sentences for communicative purposes. At the same time, they are also deprived of international interactions.

Error Analysis

A number of studies have been carried out on the analysis of errors especially in the English Language. Scholars like Moonga (2012) defined an error, quoting Brown (1980: 166) as “...a process carried out to observe, analyse and classify the deviations of the second language...in order to reveal the systems operated by the learners.”

Most of the errors are in form of spelling, morphology, syntax (grammar), punctuation, lexical and semantic choice, style and typography. However, in terms of the Zambian

situation, and indeed, many other countries, mother tongue (L1) influence cannot be overlooked as it characterises second language learners' speech and orthography. Since L1 is well known by most users, it could be a stepping stone to the needed proficiency in the second language acquisition.

Zambian English: Experts' Opinions in Zambia

A number of language experts were engaged in a conversation via a WhatsApp platform on the need to create what would be called Zambian English. Different views and opinions were brought forward in an attempt to consider coming up with Zambian English. Some participants made reference to how America devised their own English which is known as American English. In the Zambian situation, examples such as "sheet bed" for "bed sheet", "switch off the lights" for "turn off the lights", "last of last week, next of next week" for "last week, but one, next week but one or after next week," and the statement "I went to a restaurant and I had to buy drinks" instead of "I went to a restaurant and bought drinks" would constitute Zambian English. The argument brought forward was that although the English is wrongly followed the conventional way of sentence construction, what matters is to communicate. One of the participants remarked thus:

If you look at the American vs English words, it is the same word or term spelt and said differently. Can we try that, e.g. "bed sheet vs sheet bed" as a good example of Zambianising English.

For example, the expression 'Yotam is movious' to mean either 'Yotam likes wandering' or 'Yotam does not like staying at home' is understood by Zambians. It just needs to be popularized in the world to be accepted as part of the English language. Secondly, all translated nouns, like Yohan from John, Yosefe from Joseph could be used as they occur in Zambian languages. In this case, we are referring to a modern language that is neither an official language nor the mother tongue, but caters for a significant part of the Zambian population.

Further, justification for the formation of Zambian English (ZamEnglish) was based on how the Americans simplified English Orthography and phonetics. A word should be pronounced the way it is written. For example, where do the British see the 'f' in lieutenant? That is why, American pronounce it as [lutenant] instead of British [lefutnant]. Although some participants questioned this view as they considered it as a result of the influence of the French, since English borrowed most of the words from French and to some extent Latin, the call to focus on Zam English was louder. One participant argued that:

I feel Zambian English can be constituted by our social cultural context directly translated to English like Nigerian. For example, I know of one village old man who uses 'cry' in the place of 'mourning' and 'drink medicine' instead of 'take medicine'. Correctness of language is determined by acceptability by the speech community. In Nigeria for instance, most speech domains have done away with 'lend' as they use 'borrow' for both giving and getting. The subject and object determines whether one is giving or getting.

Moonga (2012) used the following social cultural as well as translation errors that she analysed during her study:

1. Please teacher, may I be allowed to go home and enter someone's clay pot (Literal Tonga translation for undergoing steaming-treatment due to sickness)
2. When I was in Grade 10, I was suffering a phone so that I could be communicating with other people (Meaning: I needed a phone for communication with other people)

The sentences above are literal translations that are meeting the criteria for communicative competence within the cultural and social contexts. If such Zam English was formalised, communication would be made easy across social cultural groupings.

Furthermore, based on the above argument, there should be no need to worry about the correctness of English, and therefore, broken English would qualify as Zambian English. It is only broken when you compare it with British or American. One participant submitted that:

There should be a level of self-esteem in us. That makes those we call powerful in most of the things. If others will see it as local or broken English but accept it and use it as Zambian, then let us start it. It is okay and Zambian English could be a reference too. Why not?

Another participant added that Zambian English words can be coined based on the pronunciation such as 'ch' of British to be written as 'c.' Hence, 'chocolate' becomes 'cokolate', 'church' becomes 'cece' while 'shoes' becomes 'shuzi'. Further, words like 'geo' becomes 'jo' and get 'jofuri' instead of 'Geoffrey.' Such an approach would make it easy for Zambians to pronounce words and communicate without difficulty.

However, some views were contrary to the idea of creating ZamEnglish as the approach was perceived to be neo-colonialistic, and therefore, there was the need to innovate. This can only be done by adopting an African or Zambian language that can be used for communication. In Zambia, a lingua-franca 'Nyanja' can be adopted just as Tanzania has adopted Swahili in their communication. Zambia can then aspire to improve Nyanja so that it is not misconstrued as a regional language since it is not derived from any particular tribe in Zambia.

Proposed Future Research

It would be good to undertake research regarding ZamEnglish among all the different ethnic groups in Zambia so that the results would be generalised to the whole country, thus, promoting unity. Participants would be sourced among English and Zambian Language academicians from Secondary schools, colleges and Universities. Another study on how teachers can engage learners in identifying ways of how L1 can be used to enhance proficiency and competence in L2 could be carried out.

Conclusion

ZamEnglish would improve the interaction and cooperation levels between the educated and those that may not have had a chance of attaining formal education in Zambia. It is a well known fact in Zambia that, though not openly pronounced, there are social classes between the elite that speak standard English, (RP) and those that use English communicatively. ZamEnglish would bridge this gap. Furthermore, ZamEnglish, could be a uniting factor among the various ethnic groups in the multilingual society of Zambia. As a result, all the workers would be motivated to develop a sense of belongingness, national identity and ownership since they would already hold a shared vision through the common language. With the dawn of globalisation, ZamEnglish may just be a stepping stone to attain unity in diversity through the liberal minds that are more likely to embrace change for sustainable communication skills.

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