COURSEWARE

Course: 301: CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH USAGE
(3 credits/Compulsory)

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Consultation Hours: 10:00a.m – 12:00noon (Tuesdays and Thursdays)

Course content

The focus of this course will be English in use in English speaking communities, attitudes to usage, the notion of correctness versus grammaticalness, variation in use and uses, and the problem of defining “standard English” world wide.

Course Description

This course is to acquaint students with the differences in the use of English in different, English speaking communities. It is designed to show in practical terms, the heterogeneous nature of English and the factors responsible for this. It is a course in which demonstrations of flexibility in English usage expected from a proficient user of English are to be carried out through acquainting students with different roles an individual is expected to play from day to day and the linguistic requirements for each role.

To achieve this, the students are exposed to the different contexts of English usage and the features of the kind of language use characteristic of each context. Thus, geographical contextual, stylistic
and linguistic variation and varieties are taught. For instance such features that are peculiar to varieties of English as regional, occupational, religious, social, varieties of English are examined.

In the same vein, students are also made acquainted with regional/geographical variation and varieties and the need for standardization. A brief history of the process of standardizing the English language is included to give the students an idea that the English language has come a long way and also to make students aware of the problems of standardization.

**Course Justification**

There is growing emphasis on communicative competence in language use, as the world becomes increasingly globalised resulting in the mobility and fluidity required of human resources. The flexibility required for real-life language usage and for communicative competence can be acquired through an exposure to this course. Thus, a student of English who does not use literary English (i.e. the “book English”) but who is capable of varying his linguistic performance from context to context and from role to role is a better user of English than one whose use of English is characterized by rigidity and monotony which make communication, not only uninteresting but also ineffective.

**Objectives**

At the end of the course, it is expected that students exposed to this course will be able to:

1. identify the various varieties of English available (regional social, stylistic and contextual.)
2. distinguish the varieties from one another by being able to identify the features that characterise each.
3. become flexible in their use of English, i.e. being able to change their usage to adapt to different roles, contexts, etc; thereby attaining communicative competence.
4. evaluate the correctness of their usages as well as that of other English language users
5. analyse any discourse in order to judge the correctness or incorrectness of its sentences.
6. use standard English and observe all its norms.
7. use language that is error free, having become aware of what constitutes errors.

**Course Requirement**

In this course, there will be both theoretical and practical sessions. There will be lectures to familiarize students with the major concepts of the course. Students will also required to do group practical work which entails carrying out research on allocated topics, embarking on group discussion of research findings, presenting findings orally in the class, writing and submitting a term paper based on the researched topic. The term paper and other class work will constitute the 30% continuous assessment requirement for the course.

Method of scoring

a. Class Assignment/tests – 15%

b. Class Presentation 15%

c. Final Examination 70%

Total 100%

**Course Delivery Strategies**

The lecture method to furnish students with relevant information will be used. In addition, discussion sessions which will enable students to learn to express themselves orally, will be held from time to time. The seminar method will also be used to encourage students to use the
library, the internet, etc to gather information, collate it, write fluently, on it and master its content to the point of being able to impart knowledge so gained to others.

LECTURES

WEEK 1

A general introduction begins with a very short historical development of English language. The introduction continues with the definition of ‘variation’ and ‘varieties’

Objective

The students are expected to be able to:
1. define the two terms, ‘variation’ and ‘varieties’
2. differentiate the terms from one another.

Study Questions

1. What is variation?
2. What are varieties?
3. Distinguish between these two terms.
4. Give examples of variation and varieties

Reading list


WEEK 2: Regional Varieties of English: Native Varieties of English
Objectives:

1. to help students to realize that even native English varies
2. students should be able to list the various varieties of native English and where each is found.

Description:

Native English is defined and all the geographical areas where native English is used for communication are listed. The sub-varieties of each regional variety are identified as national varieties. The varieties found in each nation are listed as local varieties.

Study Questions:

1. What is regional variation?
2. What are the regional varieties of English and where are they found?
3. Identify all sub-varieties (national varieties) of each regional variety.
4. Can each of the national varieties be further divided into local varieties?
5. What are these local varieties?

Reading list:


WEEK 3: Features of Regional Varieties of English
**Objective:**

At the end of this lecture, students should be able to:

1. identify some of the features of two chosen regional varieties of English
2. distinguish their peculiarities.

**Description:**

The British and American varieties of English are closely examined with the aim of distinguishing their features from each other and to clear the confusion of the two varieties by students. Thus, the features of each variety of English are identified and discussed.

**Study Questions**

1. What is British English?
2. What are its features?
3. What is American English?
4. What are its features?
5. How are both varieties different from one another?
6. Which one is appropriate for use in Nigeria? Give reasons.

**Reading List**


**WEEK 4:** Non-native varieties of English: Emphasis on African Regional Varieties and Nigerian English as an Example of Non-native English.
**Objectives**

Students are expected to be able to:

1. list/identify most of the non-native varieties of English, usually referred to as “Englishes”.
2. give reasons for referring to them as “Englishes”
3. identify the various non-native varieties of English found in Africa.
4. define the concept Nigeria English.

**Description**

The students are made aware of the existence of an indeterminate number of non-native varieties of English all over the world to give them an idea of the diversity of English language in use. Examples of non-native varieties are given by undertaking a geographic-linguistic survey of the African sub-regions to identify the various national and local varieties of English across Africa. Nigeria English is defined and its local varieties are identified and discussed.

**Study Questions**

1. What are the various non-native varieties of English found in Africa?
2. What is Nigerian English?
3. What are the local varieties of English in Nigeria?
4. Justify or refute the arbitrary choice of only three local varieties of English in Nigeria as representatives of the many existing varieties of Nigerian English.

**Reading list**


**WEEK 5**

The Features of Nigerian English

**Objectives**

Students should be able to:

1) distinguish between “Nigerianisms” in the use of English and systematic deviations from standard usage (errors).

2) list and exemplify the features of Nigerian English at the levels of phonology, lexis, syntax and semantics.

**Description**

A phonological, Lexico-semantic and syntactic study of Nigerian English is undertaken to acquaint students with the differences between Nigerian English and standard English. At the phonological level we will highlight the ways in which spoken Nigerian English deviates from spoken standard English. Areas showing this deviation (sound articulation/enunciation, differentiation, stress pattern, pitch, rhythm, etc) will be discussed. At the lexico-semantic level, English lexical items that have been invested with new meanings and new lexical items that have been imported into English through Nigerian English will be identified. At the syntactic level, issues of word order which show deviation from the norm will also be pointed out.

**Study Questions**

1. What are the syntactic features of Nigerian English?
2. What are its phonological features?
3. Identify and discuss the lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English.

4. List as many deviant sentences as you can from Nigerian English.

5. Is there any appreciable or thographic difference between Nigerian English and standard English?

Reading list


WEEK 6

Social variation, factors responsible for this and the resultant social varieties.

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. account (give reasons) for social variation

2. identify as many social varieties of English as possible

3. identify the social variables responsible for variation.

Description

This is a direct lecture situation aimed at giving information such as what social variation is, how it is related to change, what causes variation and the resultant varieties. Variables such as occupation, status, age, sex, education etc and how they cause variation in language use will be discusses.

Study Questions

1. What is social variation?

2. What are the factors responsible for this?

3. Identify as many social varieties of English as possible.
Reading list


WEEK 7: A practical analysis of some selected social varieties of English.

Objectives

Students are expected to be able to:

1. identify the varieties associated with each variable.
2. identify and discuss coherently the features of each social variety.
3. differentiate each variety by its features.

Description

Students are acquainted with the varieties associated with each variable. They also become acquainted with their features. A few of these varieties are selected as groups and practically analysed. The list of such varieties include language of: men, women, adults, youths, law, the educated, the uneducated, sports, Christianity, Islam, journalism, etc. As many of these varieties as possible will be practically analysed.

Reading list

3. Holmes, Janet *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Longman

**Study Questions**

1. Select any two social varieties and identify its peculiar features.
2. Compare the two along the lines of orthography, phonology, lexis, syntax and semantics.

**WEEK 8:** A practical analysis of some selected social varieties of English continued.

**WEEK 9:** The concept of standard English and varieties of standard English

**Objectives**

1. Students should be able to:
2. define standard English
3. discuss the reasons/rational for standard English
4. compare the two standard varieties of English: British and American English.

**Description**

This topic will be taught using the direct lecture method. Attention will be focused on its definition, varieties, features and the justification for its imposition on English users.

**Reading list**

Study Questions

1. Is the imposition of standard on English usage justified?
2. Choose any two standard varieties of English and compare and contrast them along the following lines; orthography, phonology, lexis, syntax and semantics.

WEEK 10: Individual Contextual Variation in English

Objectives

Students are expected to be able to:
1. point out the different ways in which a language user is required to vary his style of using language to suit different contexts/situations.
2. identify the various contextual styles in English
3. use and vary language in the appropriate styles or modes to suit particular contexts/situations.

Description

‘Context' and ‘contextual variation’ are defined, explained and discussed. The different modes of language, that is, individual contextual styles: Frozen, formal, informal, consultative, casual and intimate are taught with appropriate examples and illustrations to the students. Practical situations are cited to drive the point home. Students are then led and encouraged to practise the use of these modes in different contexts.

Reading list

1. Liles, Bruce, L. An Introduction to Linguistics. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. pg 306 – 311
Study Question

1. Explain as much as possible what you understand by contextual variation in the use of English. Illustrate your discussion with appropriate examples.

2. Select a short conversation between two people and identify as much contextual information in it as possible.

3. Use the contextual information gathered in 2 above to classify, in a tabular form, the various contextual styles used by the speakers along the lines of: formal (i.e. frozen/formal); informal (i.e. consultative, causal or intimate).

4. How rigidly can we adhere to the use of these contextual styles? Give reasons to support your argument.

WEEK 11: Grammaticalness/correctness in the use of English.

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. define grammaticalness and discuss
2. define correctness
3. distinguish between grammatical and correct usages in English
4. achieve communicative competence.

Description

Through the lecture method, these terms will be exhaustively defined, explained, discussed and illustrated with appropriate sentences from actual contemporary usages. There will also be a practical perspective in which real-life usages will be analysed for grammaticalness and correctness. The point will be stressed that utterances which are grammatical, that is conforming only to syntactic
rules of English, may not necessarily be correct, though all correct utterances have to be grammatical.

**Study Questions**
1. Define the terms ‘grammatical’ and ‘correct’
2. What is the relationship between grammaticalness and correctness in language use.
3. What are the features of grammatical utterances
4. What is the relationship between ‘correctness’ and ‘standard’?
5. Analyse a student’s composition and select utterances from it which are grammatical but not correct and offer reasons for their incorrectness.

**Reading list**

**WEEK 12**: Matters Arising from the issues of grammaticalness and correctness: Common Errors in English.

**Objectives**
Students should be able to:
1. identify deviant forms to be avoided in English usage.
2. use English without errors
3. attain communicative competence.

**Description**
Students are acquainted with common, deviant forms that they need to avoid in English usage. An exhaustive list of such errors will be made available to the students and discussions of why these are deviant will be undertaken through a thorough analysis of each error type. The
students are then made to write essays with a view to correcting errors in their written English usage. They are also encouraged to discuss orally, while being required to avoid common errors and even idiosyncratic features that may result into incorrectness in their speech.

**Reading list**


**Study Questions**

1) Take any student essay of your choice, identify and correct the common errors found in it

2) Collect as many conversations of undergraduate students as you can and analyse them for common errors. Attempt to correct these errors.

3) In the light of your new knowledge of common errors, take an essay you have written before your knowledge of common errors, pick out any errors encountered and re-write the essay, correcting these errors.

**WEEK 13**: Presentation and discussion of term papers by students.

**Objectives**

Students are expected to be able to

1. carry out their own research on the topics studied so far.

2. come up with new, additional information to enrich the topics taught so far.

3. discuss coherently and convincingly all topics taught in the course.

4. pass to others information gathered both from the lectures on this course and from their personal research.

5. critically examine other students’ and even their lecturer’s contributions to the discussion of issues in this course.

6. to contribute a new dimension to the discussion.
7. use the English language without errors.

**Description**

Students are organized into groups. Each group should not contain more than ten students. A research topic is allocated to each group. Group members are required to search for materials relevant to their topic in the library, on net, etc. Each student is then expected to use information gathered to write his own individual essay on the research topic. It is the individual essays of the students that will then be presented to the group, outside the classroom. The members of the group are therefore required to collate relevant points from all papers presented to come up with one well researched, indept and exhaustive discussion of the topic. This is the term paper that each group will present to the entire class. Students listen to each group’s presentation and raise issues to be discussed debated, etc. observations and suggestion raised on each paper presented by every group are supposed to form the basis for a thorough revision of the paper. A final copy of this paper is then submitted as part of the continuous assessment for the students.

**Reading list**

Students are expected to search relevant materials out on their own from all possible information sources.

**Study Questions/research topics**

1. Choose any book on the history of the English language and review it paying particular attention to the various linguistic influences on the development of English.
2. Identify and discuss the various stages in the development of the English language, identifying the most important issues in each stage for contemporary English usage.
3. The issue of standard in the English language; A diachronic approach.
4. Contemporary variation – Regional, variation
5. Contemporary variation – Contextual and stylistic variation.
6. Contemporary variation – Contextual and stylistic variation.
7. Grammaticalness/correctness
10. Communicative competence in English usage.

WEEK 14: Presentation continued
WEEK 15: Revision

References


