



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program

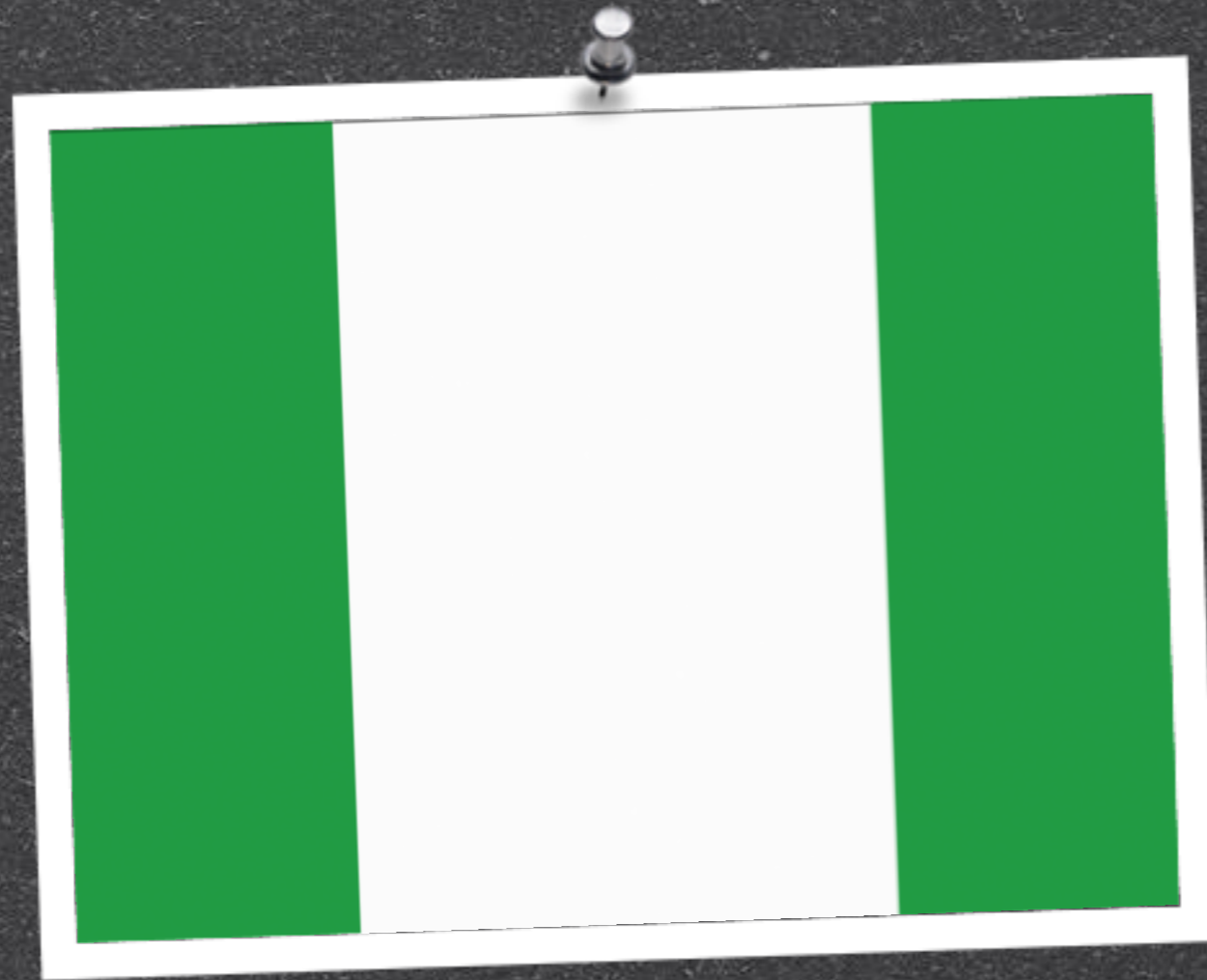
Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
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(Google image)

Nigerian English

Language Group Specific
Informational Report

TESL 539

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Nigeria and Rhode Island

- Nigeria is located in Western Africa bordering the Gulf of Guinea between Benin and Cameroon.
- Nigeria is a Federal Constitutional Republic of 36 states with a population of 120 million and over 300 languages.
- Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, the eight most populated country in the world and the most populous country in the world in which the majority of the population is black.
- The United States has the world's third largest Nigerian community, only behind Nigeria itself and the United Kingdom, where up to 3 million Nigerians reside. Like other successful immigrant populations in the United States, Nigerian Americans reside in virtually all 50 states. Rhode Island is the 11th largest concentrated Nigerian Community in the United States -- living predominately in Providence and Pawtucket.
- In 2006 the Nigerians in Rhode Island established the first Nigerian Community of Rhode Island (NCRI) - a group with elected officers who meet to discuss social-political interests of Nigerians living in Rhode Island



(<http://www.countriesfactbook.com>, 2012)

Nigerian English

- Nigerian English is the variety of English that has been used in the region of the Niger, West Africa, for purposes of trade since at least the 18th century, at missions since the 19th century, and increasingly in education, administration, the media, and the workplace, especially since the formation of a unified Nigeria in 1914.
- Nigerian English is a pidgin spoken across Nigeria. It is often considered a creole since most speakers are not native speakers although many children do learn it early. Its superstrate is English with Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as the main substrate languages.
- Environmental influences, deriving from linguistics, social, cultural, political and economic factors have combined to produce the variety of English that is found in West Africa.
- The English language may only be used sporadically depending on a Nigerian's education level, even the highly educated may not speak it in the home and may only read and write English in the workplace.

Linguistic differences between Nigerian and American English

- Nigerian English tends to have fewer vowel sounds than English, and fewer final consonants and consonant clusters. Thus many English vowels are not differentiated by Nigerians and many mid and final consonants sound indistinct. For example Nigerians do not produce the r sound in such words as door, worker or art.
- There is often no distinction between words like chip and cheap and ones like caught, cot, and court.
- Nigerians speaking English often speak tonal and syllable-timed, giving Nigerians speaking American English a jerkiness, both in timing and intonation.
- Nigerian English is rich in proverbs and colorful sayings. Nigerians speaking American English tend to be attracted to English proverbs and overuse the phrases as idioms.
- There are many differences in Nigerian and American English in written grammar. There is a tendency toward pluralizing nouns that are singular in American English (as in I gave them some advices) and the pronoun themselves is often used instead of one another (as in That couple really love themselves)

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Phonology

- In addition to an overall jerkiness of timing when speaking American English - Nigerian learners tend to have difficulties with Spelling and Pronunciation, Stress and Intonation.
- Pronunciation faults give Nigerian learners many difficulties with spelling words like stomach, tongue and touch.
- Rhythm and stress difficulties make it hard for Nigerian learners to understand sarcasm in American English. Learners also have trouble stressing words for questioning, (Do you want the chocolate one or the vanilla one?)
- Nigerian languages are tonal- each word has a fixed tone regardless of context. The intonation of Nigerian English is limited to the rise in a question for a yes/no answer and a final fall for a statement.

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Syntax

- The use of subjectless sentences, - “Is because she is a freshman.”
- double subjects, - “Me I don’t have money”
- Verbless sentences, - “How family?” instead of “How is your family”
- Omission of function words, “you say truth” instead of “you say the truth”

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Vowel Sounds

- /i:/ and /i/ are both pronounced [i] so that bead and bid are [bid].
- /u:/ and /ʊ/ are pronounced [u], so that full and fool are [ful].
- /ɑ:/ and /æ/ are pronounced [a], so that bard and bad are [bad].
- /æ/, /ɑ:/, and /ʌ/ are confused, so that cat, cart and cut are all [cat].

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Consonant Sounds

- /θ/ and /ð/ are usually pronounced /d/ and /t/ day is confused with they, tin for thin, and tree for three.
- /ŋ/ is commonly pronounced /n/ or /ŋg/ singing is pronounced as sinjin.
- /l/ and /r/ pronunciations are often confused, grass and glass, play and pray.
- Consonant Clusters cause difficulties for Nigerians learning American English --for example: film, months, asked, helps.

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Semantics

- Common errors for Nigerians in regards to Semantics(language meaning):
- Use of modal forms to express concepts outside the domain of such modals. (can for necessity / obligation).
- Use of modal forms of express non-modal notions. Use of non-modal items where modals are required. Hypothetical reference and modal forms. Avoidance of use of certain modal forms.
- Modals are expressions associated with notions of possibility and necessity.
- Some Lexical items have had their standard meanings shifted or extended. Ex. Station - the place where one works “I am back to my station on Monday morning. Long-legs - corruption involving nepotism “Your father should use his long legs to get you a job”.

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Lexis

- Lexis-the total bank of words and phrases of a particular language.
- Morphological inconsistencies - American English is bound with many lexical inconsistencies. For example, the suffix -er means “the person who performs the action indicated by the verb.” So, writer/producer/teacher means “somebody who writes/produces/teaches,” but brother/sister does not mean “somebody who brothes/sists” If someone who sings or writes is a singer or writer respectively; why shouldn't somebody who cooks, gossips, or sponsors be a cooker, gossiper, sponsorer? These inconsistencies produce many errors for Nigerians learning American English.

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Lexis

- Loanwords : At the lexical level, Nigerians have difficulties with vocabulary and tend to transfer many words from the local languages (especially the three major, regional languages – Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) and mostly from the following areas: music, clothing, indigenous foods, traditional religious beliefs, local institutions, etc.
- The transfer words from Nigerian language - these words do not have a direct transfer into English - Nigerians tend to just bring the words into English. Ex: agbada - a dress for a man, akara - type of bean cake. These cultural expressions are borrowed and Nigerians use them frequently when speaking American English.
- Coinages :Nigerians often will coin new meanings to American English words, Ex. Backyard - used with original English meaning, grass yard outside one's house -- yet Nigerians also coin the word to mean buttock, "look at that lady's backyard". Scale through- to easily solve a problem, " I scaled through all my exams".

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Communication Style

- Just as there are many language variations of Nigerian English, communication styles vary. In the southwest, where the people are from the Yoruba tribe, people's communication uses proverbs, sayings and even songs to enrich the meaning of what they say. The Yoruba often use humor to prevent boredom during long meetings or serious discussions. They believe that embedding humor in their message guarantees that what they say is not easily forgotten.
- Nigerians living in the south of the country tend to speak more directly. You may also find their tone slightly louder. They may raise their voices even more and become emotionally excited when they feel passionately about a topic.

Linguistic Features of American English that present Difficulty for Nigerians: Communication Style

- Nigerians are outgoing and friendly. Communication commences with polite inquiries into the welfare of the person and his family. Therefore, Nigerians learning English tend to want to learn communication phrases and greetings that allow for them to make friends.
- Nigerian communication can also be indirect and may rely on non-verbal cues. Many use gestures when communicating. They may smile to mask their true feelings. Very direct eye contact may be interpreted as being intrusive unless there is a longstanding personal relationship. These differences from American culture may be confusing for Nigerians as they interact with Americans.

Nigerian learners of American English

After studying the language of Nigerian English I have found that as an ESL teacher there are several specifics that you should focus on to help Nigerian Learners:

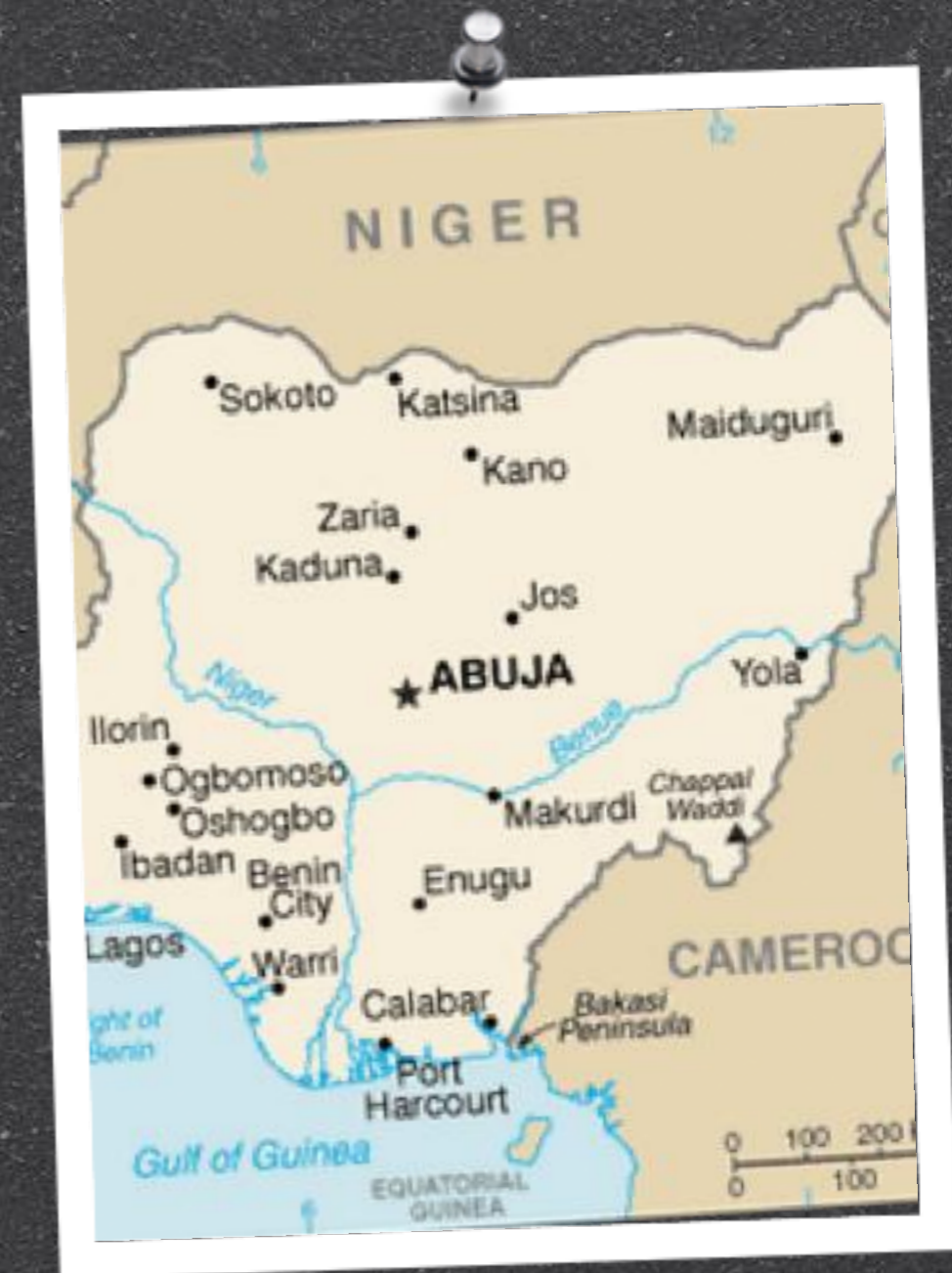
Vowel Sounds

Consonant Sounds

Sounds in Combination

Stress and Intonation

Being patient and specifically training learners on the new sounds will help Nigerians succeed!



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