AN ANALYSIS OF FLIGHT ANNOUNCERS' LANGUAGE AT THE MURTALA MUHAMMED AIRPORT, LAGOS

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Abstract

Hearing an announcement made over the loud speaker in any Nigerian airport leaves most hearers with the impression that the announcer has an excellent command of English. There are however some listeners, mostly travellers that claim that they barely hear or understand what is being announced. This is a serious challenge since air travel is a global phenomenon that requires the highest level of intelligibility. This study thus aims to investigate the pronunciation pattern in the language of flight announcers at the Murtala Muhammed Airport, Lagos, in line with the Labov's theory of Linguistic Variation. Data was elicited from ten flight announcers, through purposive sampling; using a questionnaire and reading test. Output of the reading test was recorded, phonetically transcribed and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result showed that exposure to native speakers, age of respondents and years of working experience, affects correct pronunciation. It also showed that most flight announcers approximate the English phonemes with what is obtainable in their mother tongue while some others exhibited cases of dialectically influenced personal speech handicap.

Keywords - Flight announcers, intelligibility, linguistic variation, pronunciation pattern.

Introduction

All over the world, it is evidently clear that travellers miss their flights for various reasons (Aliyu, 2017). A study conducted by Kabbee (2014) gives six possible reasons why travellers miss their flights. This includes traffic delays (which accounts for the highest percentage), oversleeping, disorganisation, forgetfulness, approaching the wrong terminal and presentation of expired passports. In addition, Tucker (2016) says that other reasons might be tight connections between flights, timing or a lengthy security check. This seems to be contextual since the reasons are a little different in Nigeria as travellers commonly miss their flights because of lateness, inability to fully process flight announcements (Abati, 2017) and presidential movement (Daily Trust, 2015). Out of the three reasons given, the most disheartening stems from that of flight announcements.

Flight announcers are regarded as being the median in the communication chain in any airport. This is because they provide relevant information pertaining to flights – either arrivals or departure – and by extension, travellers' welfare. Although Nigeria is English as a Second Language (ESL) speaking country, it is expected that flight announcers would exhibit an excellent command of English pronunciation, in order to facilitate effective communication. This seems to not be the case in Nigerian airports as there are several complaints and tales of woe concerning flight announcements (Kperogi, 2016a, 2016b; Abati, 2017). These include travellers' missing their flights while comfortably seated in the waiting lounge and/or boarding the wrong flight seemingly owned by the same carrier. Kperogi (2016b) describes the announcers as speaking through their noses, calling their speech *inaudible babbles* since Westerners and Nigerians alike cannot make sense out of what they are saying.

Howbeit, the vision of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN, 2016), is '*to be amongst the best airport groups in the world.*' To do this effectively, travellers' all round satisfaction which includes what they hear, infrastructural development and personnel management must be looked into and given proper attention. However, this is not the practice in a country like ours which is driven by the economy. Research shows that much attention is rather given to economic returns instead of the welfare of the passengers from whom this income is actually generated. Thus, recent researches in the aviation sector have been to determine the level of financial contribution the industry has made to the Nigerian economy (Anfofum, Zakaree & Iluno, 2015; Aun, 2013; Mobolaji Ikeogu, Omatshola &Ukpere, 2014). Others have examined the operators, operations as well as the infrastructural development of the airport (Mobolaji & Ukpere, 2011; Olukayode, Adebambo & Adewale, 2016; Omisore, Eri & Ojonemi, 2014; Wanke, Barros & Nwaogbo, 2016). Only very few researches have been centered on the passengers' welfare (Ademoh & Anosike, 2015) but still had nothing to do with language, as used in the Nigerian airport community. In another vein, studies on language in the aviation sector has been carried out and symposiums have been held outside the country but these were all based on examining English language as a Language