

Uglish Vs. Standard English: Features and Discrepancies Unlocked A Case Study

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Abstract

Understanding English from non-natives with confidence is a matter of great concern for both native and non-native speakers. Since understanding English correctly requires a multidimensional mastery of language skills, students always regard it as an open question. This paper investigates the features and characteristics of Ugandan English (Uglish) with delving into similarities and differences from Standard English. The purpose of the paper was to describe the Ugandan English in terms of grammar, pronunciation, meaning of certain lexis and comparing it with Standard English. To answer the paper questions, the researcher adopted the Case Study Descriptive approach to describe and observe the aforementioned phenomena. The study subjects were the Ugandan everyday citizens and school students. The study indicated that not all native speakers of English and learners of English can easily understand Ugandan people unless they take into consideration the following features and aspects. Based on the aforesaid statement, the paper recommended taking care of specific vocabulary and items when visiting or working in Uganda to smoothly understand its people. It also was suggested that further research should be conducted concerning other language features such as register and style.

Keyword: Uglish; Standard English; Differences; Ugandan English; Nature

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of reasoning and conveying cultures among generations and nations. It is also a way of communication among individuals. Hence, many countries engaged in teaching other languages in their syllabi to their students. Certainly, language cannot exist in a vacuum and there is an inevitable kind of “transfusion” at work between language and culture (Fairclough, 1989). The objective of language is to communicate meaning. When we begin to develop our language abilities, the main purpose is to communicate or interact with others (Kuo & Lai 2006). English has become an international language and teaching it has increasingly become globally demanding. A clear manifestation is that English is extensively used in studying medicine all over the world and it is the dominant language in technological stuff. For this reason, the English language is called "the language of science". According to English-speaking countries (Para. 2), English is widely spoken and it is the official and semi-official language of 67 countries including but not limited to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Jamaica, etc.

Uganda is a country that is located in the southeast of Africa. It was a colony that was formed by joining the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro in 1894 when Uganda became a part of the British Empire and was thereby under the control and rule of the British till its independence in 1962 (Uganda Under Colonial Rule, n. d.). Equator passes by it and it has a tropical climate and wooded green highlands. That is why it is called the "Pearl of Africa". English is the formal language of Uganda and is widely spoken by educated people and state employees while aged and illiterate people use local languages such as Luganda and Swahili.

Lexicon and Lexical Creation

The nature of English language spoken in Uganda is a bit different from Standard English. Even if it is not anomalous from being understood, it has specific features that others may not understand at first glance. The term Uglish like Japaglish or Japanglish, Japanese English, is the one coined for English as spoken and written by Ugandan or Japanese people, with clear grammatical mistakes or nonsensical expressions contained, and is a result of Ugandan speakers' difficulty pronouncing certain English phonemes. Looking at the English lexis in Uganda, you will hear the word "speak BIG" (instead of too much) and speak SMALL (too little) when they complain someone talking too much not loudly. Likewise, if you wanted to purchase something and you started to bargain, Ugandans say "The money you are offering is SMALL (the intended word is little). The word "Mechanic" has a special consideration there. Every technician is considered a mechanic in his field such as a MECHANIC in electricity (for electrician). If the weather is hot, someone may order you to "OPEN" the air conditioner (instead of switch on/off for electric devices). You will hear the word "EXTEND" if someone wants you to scoot over and make space for him. BORE HOLE is widely used as an alternative to water taps due to the nature of the resources they take water from. In Ugandan local languages such as Luganda, they add "U" or "I" to the nouns, so you can hear them adding the letter u to a word such as education to become "EDUCATIONU" and GOODU for good. They coined the word boda boda for meaning motorbikes as the main transport means in their borders with their neighbours was motorbikes and their drivers used to call for those who want to go to borders, they call "border border" from which the term has been coined. Ugandans adopted the phrase "first come first served" with its shortened form "first come" to mean hurry up or come fast and "first wait" to mean please wait until we see the next step. When you buy something and give the salesperson a banknote and they do not have a change for you, they will ask you, "Do you have a BALANCE". Do not panic, they ask about change or smaller amount of money. If you work or visit Uganda, you may hear Arabic-originated words such as Askari (Janitor) and Baitul-Khalaa (Toilet). Barbecuing chicken is "SMOKING" chicken there. If someone wants you to lend him/her a thing, he/she says "borrow me a pen". They use the word "cut" to mean kill or slaughter an animal.

Pronunciation

Ugandans use their own way of pronouncing words and tend to have a clear pronunciation with less reduction in British English pronunciation. They cannot pronounce the /l/ sound properly and consequently say mirk instead of milk, probrem instead of problem and likewise onry instead of only. They say /lubə/ for rubber. They say /ei/ sound as /I/ such as saying /snik/ for snake. They sometimes replace /tʃ/ with /ʃ/ such as in pronouncing the word "which" as "wish". They always use the sound /i:/ instead of /i/ as in saying "sick (pronounced as seek), big (pronounced as beeg), fill (pronounced as feel), ill (pronounced as eel) and digging (pronounced as deeging). They say fifty for 50. You have to

clearly pronounce the second “t” in twenty to understand you as they do not understand American pronunciation of “flap T”.

Grammar Usage

In grammar, they tend to use some tenses such as using present progressive for future tense and they rarely use will/ shall + bare infinitive or present simple for fixed schedules. Furthermore, they often use present perfect tense for past events and use past simple or past perfect less frequently. They add “you” in imperatives such as “You go with me”, or “You take this device”. They use teach me in conversations to mean show me how to do something by demonstration. The verb “bring” has a special position there and every short talk is not likely to be void of the verb “bring”. In addition, the verb “fix” is widely used and other synonyms are not frequently used such as “repair” or “mend”.

Functional Language

Ugandans stick to formal greetings such as “ Good morning”, “Good afternoon”, “ Good evening” and “Good night” and they do not use other informal phrases such as “ see you” or “ hi” or even the shortened form of greeting such as good morning (morning only). They only say “How are you” exclusively and do not use alternatives such as “How is it going?”, “How are things?” or “ How is life?”. Formal and polite requests are rarely uttered in Uganda. Instead, they say “Assist me in” Or “Help me in.....”.

METHODS

The researcher adopted the Case Study Descriptive approach to describe and observe the aforementioned phenomena.

Subjects of the Study

The participants of the study were randomly selected amongst the Ugandan people. The researcher has been teaching English there and used to meet students, ordinary people, officials and citizens. He noted down his remarks and designed his case study from the data collected every day.

Ethical Consideration

The researcher explained very well to the participants that some of their responses will be noted down. After they verbally concurred, the informed consent form was given to each of the participants where they needed to affix their signature, signifying understanding of their consent of participation. The selection of the participants was based solely on the eligibility criteria and not according to affinity or congeniality. The researchers secured the personal information and data of the participants through password encryptions in the digital space of the drive and it will be deleted after two years.

Data Collection

There are many different methods you can use to collect data on your subject. Case studies tend to focus on qualitative information using methods such as in-person interviews, observations, and analysing primary and secondary sources (for example newspaper articles, pictures, governmental records).

Conclusion and Recommendation

Uganda is a country whose nationals are not native speakers of English but are considered proficient users of English. Even though Uganda's official language is English, its people have special features in speaking English using their own terms and find it difficult to pronounce some phonemes. Yet, they can understand each other well and also can understand others' English. This leads us to a substantial point that using English in communication does not depend primarily on accent but other aspects such as common vocabulary, known inaccuracies in pronunciation, everyday expressions and cross-cultural awareness are of a great importance. Ugandans are not all C1 level or advanced speakers but they know how to use English and learn it in schools.

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