Introduction

Discourse markers are speech accompaniments which prove the psychological limitations of humans as language producers and processors. Middelman (1988) explains that "a verbal form of mentation is necessary in choosing the words needed in speech". About fifteen years ago, the use of like was never as preponderant in the English expressions of educated Nigerians as it is today. It is not on the list of discourse markers identified by Wallwork (1985), and Schiffrin (1987). Martin (2004) explains that the acquisition of particular communicative practices may be through association with a local community or social group, and as McCarthy (1991) puts it, "a close observation of such behaviour in natural data" can be embarked upon. This paper reports the communicative imports of the discourse marker – like, and how it operates in the spoken English of educated Nigerians, especially in relation to prepositions, and to content words.

Justification of the Study

This study is significant to English language Teaching (ELT) as it reveals the ungrammatically resulting from substituting like for prepositions and for content words. Stakeholders become aware of this speech behaviour and can consciously create avenues for correction in the classroom teaching of English grammar.

Theoretical frame work: This is in accordance with Labov’s Variability Theory and Bernstein’s Deficit Hypothesis

Methodology

Speech samples from talk shows on selected radio and television stations provided excerpts which served as data for this study along with scripts of candidates for the post Unified Tertiary Matriculation. Examination (UTME) on the use of like. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis are adopted. Speech samples such as we’ve been here like twice, and we were like we knew how to dance are presented and analysed. A set of questionnaire was also distributed to university lecturers to investigate their attitude to this usage.

Results

Discussion and Conclusion: The use of like as a replacement for prepositions and content words is evident in the speech samples of educated Nigerians. The result is a kind of insipid, ungrammatical English usage and low word power. Timed written tasks become slow in formal writing. The responses of lecturers to the questionnaires reveal that they condemn this kind of speech usage. Exercises in vocabulary development is therefore needful as we campaign against the was like waah trend.

References


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