

IGBO AUTOMOBILE TERMINOLOGY: A PANACEA FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN MECHANIC WORKSHOPS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: Effective communication between all stakeholders holds the key to smooth operations, qualitative service delivery and customer satisfaction at automobile mechanic workshops. It enhances team collaboration. It increases efficiency and productivity, leads to improved customer satisfaction, better conflict resolution and improved safety and quality control, among other benefits. Communication at automobile mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria has been anything but effective, due mainly to the deficiency of many Igbo mechanic youths in the use of English. This study adopted a mixed method approach- relying on written literature sources, observations and responses from oral interviews, to reflect and report on the barriers to effective communication in the aforementioned region. The study reveals lack of standardized communication practices and misinterpretation of customers' needs, as well as a correlation between communication challenges and workshop performance, identifying as causes, the inability of many, including mechanics of Igbo origin, deficient in English, to express themselves in Igbo, due to lack or paucity of equivalent terms for the expression of many automobile concepts in Igbo. It concludes that effective communication is essential for the smooth operation of automobile mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria, and recommends the development of a bilingual (English-Igbo) glossary of comprehensive automobile terminology.

KEYWORDS: Automobile Terminology, Automobile Mechanics, Communication Barriers, Mechanic Workshops, Automobile Concepts, Bilingual Glossary

INTRODUCTION: GENERAL BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem: Effective communication is a crucial and fundamental aspect of successful interactions in any workplace, and this holds particularly true in the context of automobile mechanic workshops. In the South-East region of Nigeria, dominated by Igbo-speaking communities, unique challenges arise when it comes to communication in the automotive repair industry. Despite the rich linguistic and cultural heritage of the Igbo people that make up the South-Eastern region of Nigeria, there exist significant barriers to effective communication in automobile mechanic workshops in the five states that make up the region. The constant and dominant use of English automobile terminology presents a distinctive set of barriers that can impact the efficiency, accuracy, and overall quality of communication within mechanic workshops South-East of Nigeria. These barriers hinder seamless communication among mechanics and customers, impacting service delivery, customer satisfaction, and overall efficiency. The communication barriers needed to be addressed to enhance communication practices and promote a more inclusive and productive work environment in the automotive sector in the region.

Objectives of the Study: Through a comprehensive analysis of the related language barriers, this study thus sought to identify potential strategies and solutions to enhance communication effectiveness at mechanic workshops in the South-East region of Nigeria. By addressing these challenges proactively, workshops were estimated to be able to improve customer satisfaction, streamline workflow processes,

and foster a more collaborative and productive work environment for the aforementioned category of mechanics and customers alike. The Study had a multifaceted purpose, aiming to achieve several key objectives, viz:

1. **Identifying Communication Challenges:** The study sought to identify and analyze the specific communication challenges that arise from the constant use of English automobile terminology in the area of the study. By understanding these barriers, researchers can pinpoint areas where communication breakdowns occur and explore the underlying factors contributing to ineffective communication practices.
2. **Documenting Igbo Equivalents of English Automobile Terminology:** The study was aimed at highlighting a crucial aspect-its advocacy of the documentation and document cataloguing of the unique English automobile terminology used in mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria and replicating it in Igbo. This documentation can help preserve indigenous knowledge systems, promote linguistic diversity, and serve as a valuable resource for mechanics, linguists, and other stakeholders in the automotive industry.
3. **Exploring Cultural Implications:** The study aimed to delve into the cultural implications of language use and communication styles within automobile mechanic workshops in the Igbo-speaking regions of Nigeria, with a view to gaining insights into how to navigate cultural differences and promote effective cross-cultural communication.
4. **Developing Solutions for Improved Communication:** Building on the findings of the study, the ultimate goal was to develop practical solutions and recommendations to enhance communication practices in mechanic workshops. This may involve standardizing Igbo automobile terminology, providing language training for mechanics, implementing cross-cultural communication strategies, or integrating technology tools to facilitate clearer communication among stakeholders, as time goes on.
5. **Contributing to Knowledge and Practice:** Through this study, we aimed to contribute new knowledge to the fields of linguistics, cultural studies, and automotive industry practices. By shedding light on the complexities of language use at mechanic workshops and proposing innovative solutions, the study sought to advance best practices in communication, cultural preservation, and service delivery within the automotive sector in the South-East of Nigeria.

Significance of the Study: The study delves into a complex intersection of language, culture, and technical knowledge within a specific regional context, featuring in parts, the following: **Historical and Cultural Context, Technical Language and Terminology, Challenges and Barriers**, as well as **Implications for practice and Policy**. It thus contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language, culture, and technical knowledge in the automotive repair industry. Ultimately, the findings of this study have the potential to inform practical interventions and best practices that can optimize communication practices and drive positive outcomes at mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria. The study holds significant importance for various stakeholders within the automotive industry and academic communities as highlighted below:

1. **Cultural Preservation:** By exploring how language and culture intersect at mechanic workshops, the study contributes to the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural heritage. Implementing the recommendation of documenting unique Igbo terms related to automotive repair and maintenance will help maintain linguistic diversity and promote cultural identity.
2. **Improved Communication Practices:** Identifying and addressing barriers to effective communication at mechanic workshops can lead to enhanced communication practices among mechanics, customers, and other stakeholders. Clearer communication can result in better service delivery, increased customer satisfaction, and improved efficiency within the automotive sector.
3. **Enhanced Customer Experience:** Understanding the impact of language barriers and cultural nuances on communication at mechanic workshops can help improve the overall customer experience. By fostering clearer communication through standardized terminology and cross-

cultural strategies, customers are more likely to feel valued, understood, and satisfied with the services provided.

4. **Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration:** The study can facilitate knowledge sharing and collaboration among mechanics, technicians, and industry professionals by establishing common language frameworks and communication protocols. This can lead to a more cohesive working environment, where information is exchanged effectively and expertise is shared across diverse teams.
5. **Policy Implications:** Findings from the study hold implications for language policy development within the automotive industry, particularly in regions with linguistic diversity like the South-East of Nigeria. Recommendations for standardizing Igbo automobile terminology or implementing language training programs could influence industry practices and regulatory frameworks.
6. **Academic Contribution:** The study adds to the body of knowledge in fields such as linguistics, cultural studies, and communication studies by examining the specific challenges faced in cross-cultural communication within mechanic workshops. It offers insights into how language, culture, and technical knowledge intersect in a real-world setting, contributing valuable data for further research and academic discourse.
7. **Industry Best Practices:** Practical recommendations resulting from the study can inform industry best practices for effective communication at mechanic workshops not only in Nigeria but also in other multi-lingual contexts globally. Lessons learned from addressing communication barriers can be applied to promote inclusivity, diversity, and efficiency in automotive service settings.

Scope of the Study: The scope of the study encompasses several key aspects that define the boundaries and objectives of the research. Here is an outline of the scope of the study:

1. **Geographical Focus:** The study specifically concentrates on automobile mechanic workshops located in the South-East region of Nigeria, considering the unique linguistic and cultural context of this area, particularly within Igbo-speaking communities.
2. **Participants:** The primary participants in the study include mechanics, technicians, customers, and other stakeholders involved in automotive repair and maintenance services within the South-East region. Their perspectives on communication challenges and language are central to the research.
3. **Language Focus:** The study centers on the use of English automobile terminology within mechanic workshops, exposing the communication barriers it entails, the aforementioned category of mechanics in perspective, and exploring how language barriers, technical vocabulary, and cultural nuances impact communication effectiveness among individuals with varying levels of language proficiency.
4. **Communication Dynamics:** The study investigates communication dynamics within mechanic workshops, examining how language, culture, and technical knowledge intersect to create barriers or facilitate effective communication practices among diverse stakeholders.
5. **Cultural Implications:** Cultural factors influencing communication, such as hierarchical relationships, communication styles, and cultural norms prevalent in Igbo-speaking regions, were analyzed to understand their impact on communication patterns and behaviors in mechanic workshops.
6. **Documentation and Analysis:** The study highlights the call for the development of the comprehensive English-Igbo Glossary of Automobile Terms in view. This would involve documenting unique Igbo automobile terminology used in mechanic workshops, analyzing linguistic challenges, exploring technical complexities, and assessing the implications of these factors on service delivery and customer satisfaction.
7. **Recommendations and Solutions:** As in 6 above, based on the findings, the study proposes practical recommendations and solutions to address barriers to effective communication, enhance

language understanding, promote cultural sensitivity, and improve communication practices within mechanic workshops in the South-East region.

8. **Limitations:** The study is limited by factors such as time constraints, access to interviewees, language barriers during data collection, and the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context of the South-East region of Nigeria.

Limitations of the Study: Here are some limitations in this study to be mindful of:

1. **Limited Generalizability:** The findings of the study are specific to the South-East region of Nigeria and may not be directly applicable to mechanic workshops in other regions or countries with different linguistic and cultural contexts.
2. **Language Proficiency:** During oral interviews involving participants with varying levels of proficiency in English or Igbo, actually manifested, leading to misunderstandings or misinterpretations in communication at some instances, but our proficiency in the two languages and cultures in contact-English and Igbo, guided us to positive reviews for useful outcomes.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity:** At some instances, sensitivity to cultural norms and practices within Igbo-speaking communities was crucial and presented some challenges in navigating communication dynamics and interpreting responses from participants accurately, yet our being fairly rooted in the Igbo culture proved a useful asset.
4. **Access to Participants:** Admittedly, limited access to mechanic workshops, especially in remote or less accessible areas within the South-East region, occasioned the dominance of urban areas and apparently restricted the diversity of perspectives gathered for the study.
5. **Resource Constraints:** Constraints in terms of financial resources, technological tools, and research support played out in the study. Its potential to also limit the implementation of recommended solutions is in view.
6. **External Factors:** External factors such as political instability, insecurity, economic conditions, and unforeseen events in the region influenced the research process, introducing additional complexities or biases.
7. **Ethical Considerations:** Ethical considerations related to data privacy, informed consent, and participant confidentiality were carefully managed throughout the research process to ensure the integrity and ethical standards of the study.

Research Questions: The following research questions guided the study as they helped to generate valuable insights for improving communication strategies and practices within the industry, through the oral interview sessions, observations, and, of course, the process of reviewing the related literature.

1. How does lack of standardized Igbo automobile terminology impact communication effectiveness among mechanics, customers, and other stakeholders in the automotive industry?
2. What are the specific communication challenges that arise from the regular use of English automobile terminology in mechanic workshops at the South-East of Nigeria?
3. What strategies can currently be implemented to address barriers to effective communication at mechanic workshops and promote clearer communication among diverse stakeholders?
4. How do cultural norms and values within Igbo-speaking regions of Nigeria impact communication practices at mechanic workshops, and what adaptations can be made to foster better cross-cultural communication?
5. What are the potential implications of improving communication practices and addressing language barriers for customer satisfaction, service quality, and overall efficiency in mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY: The study adopted a descriptive approach- relying on and a mixed- method involving a review of related written literature sources, observations and oral interview, to comprehensively expose the barriers to effective communication at automobile mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria and their causes. The interviewees were drawn from three Local Government Areas from each of the five states that make up the region, namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo.

The following diverse range of participants from the areas visited were targeted to gather comprehensive insights into the communication dynamics and barriers present in the context of the imperative of a comprehensive English-Igbo automobile terminology in the South-east region of Nigeria.

1. **Automobile Mechanics:** Mechanics working in automobile workshops in the South-east region of Nigeria who were seen to be able to communicate effectively in the automobile industry, only if they could exclusively use Igbo automobile terminology.
2. **Customers:** Individuals who bring their vehicles to these workshops for repairs or maintenance, who were disposed to speaking English, yet in dire need of Igbo automobile terminology to effectively communicate with the aforementioned category of mechanics.
3. **Workshop Owners/Managers:** Those in charge of overseeing the operations of the mechanic workshops and who also interacted with the said mechanics and customers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE: Communication plays a crucial role in the efficient operation of automobile mechanic workshops, where technical knowledge, language proficiency, and cultural understanding intersect. In the context of the South-East region of Nigeria, several studies and scholarly works shed light on the barriers to effective communication within mechanic workshops. References to those works include those that relate to the keywords in the study as already indicated. Thus, the review of such works was effected on a framework of the following key concepts.

Conceptual Framework: Automobile Terminology: Johnson, A.K. & Smith, P.T.(2017) define this as ‘specialized vocabulary consisting of technical terms used in the automotive industry to describe vehicle components, functions, and repair processes’.

Automobile Mechanics: This term refers to Professionals or skilled workers trained in diagnosing, repairing and maintaining automobiles, using both technical knowledge and hands-on experience. O’Connell, J.R & Martinez, L.E.(2018)

Communication Barriers: These are obstacles that hinder effective communication, including language differences, lack of common terminology, cultural differences, or technical jargon unfamiliar to the audience.(Nguyen, T.H & Patel, R.C.(2016)

Mechanic Workshops: These are facilities where automobiles are diagnosed, repaired and maintained by mechanics using specialized tools and equipments.(Baker, D.H & Lin, S.Y.(2019)

Automobile Concepts: These refer to fundamental ideas and principles related to the design, function and operation of vehicles, including aerodynamics, propulsion systems, and safety features.(Choi, M.K. & Davies, J.T.(2022)

Bilingual Glossaries: These are reference tools that provide terms and their meanings in 2 languages often used to bridge communication gaps in specialized fields like automotive repair.(Lopez, R.V & Wang, X.H.(2017)

A summarized review of other key literature related to the subject of this study follows, thus:

Adeoye, T. O., & Oladele, S. O. (2018). Language and Communication in Nigerian Automobile Workshops: This study explores the role of language and communication in Nigerian automobile workshops, emphasizing the importance of clear communication for effective service delivery. It highlights challenges related to language diversity and technical terminology, offering insights into how language barriers can impact customer satisfaction and workshop efficiency.

Nwosu, K. C. (2016). The Impact of Cultural Differences on Communication in Nigerian Workplaces: Nwosu's research delves into the influence of cultural differences on communication dynamics within Nigerian workplaces, including mechanic workshops. The study examines how cultural norms and values shape communication practices, emphasizing the need for cross-cultural understanding to overcome communication barriers.

Okafor, C. E. (2020). Language Use and Technical Knowledge Transfer in Igbo-Speaking Mechanic Workshops: Okafor's work focuses on the intersection of language use and technical knowledge transfer in Igbo-speaking mechanic workshops. The study investigates how Igbo automobile terminology is utilized in conveying complex technical information, highlighting the importance of language proficiency for effective communication.

Udeh, A., & Okoli, C. (2019). Challenges of Language Translation in the Nigerian Automotive Industry: This study addresses the challenges of language translation within the Nigerian automotive industry, examining how linguistic differences, including Igbo automobile terminology, can pose obstacles to seamless communication among mechanics and customers. It underscores the need for standardized terminology and language training programs.

Ezeani, E. & Nwankwo, U. (2017). Enhancing Communication Practices in Nigerian Mechanic Workshops: Ezeani and Nwankwo's research focuses on strategies to enhance communication practices in Nigerian mechanic workshops, drawing attention to the significance of clear language use, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative communication frameworks. The study offers practical recommendations for improving communication effectiveness.

Okoye, I. C., & Nnamani, J. (2018). Language Diversity and Customer Satisfaction in South-Eastern Nigerian Mechanic Workshops: This study examines the impact of language diversity on customer satisfaction in South-Eastern Nigerian mechanic workshops, highlighting how linguistic barriers can influence service quality and customer perceptions. It emphasizes the role of effective communication in fostering positive customer experiences.

Iwunze E. I. et al.(2024). The Null Horizons of Word-for-Word in Sci-Tech Translation: A Study of Bilingual Glossaries of Automobile Terms: This study focuses on the English-Igbo translation of texts in the automobile industry, identifying the limits of the literal translation technique in the English-Igbo translation of some scientific and technological texts, on one hand, and the paucity of Igbo equivalent terms for the expression of many automobile terms that exist in English, on the other hand. The study further highlights the need to bridge the barriers to effective communication between and among all stakeholders in the automobile industry in the South- East of Nigeria, including mechanics who are only proficient in the use of Igbo and their customers who would rather use English.

SYNTHESIS: Analyzing barriers to effective communication at automobile mechanic workshops in the south-east of Nigeria, has yielded several key insights, having exposed common themes such as language barriers, lack of standardized communication practices, and misinterpretation of customer needs, among others. Qualitative analysis of data reviewed from the three sources- review of related literature, oral interviews and observations commonly revealed correlations between communication challenges and workshop performance, on one hand, and specific areas where communication breakdowns occur, such as in job orders and repair reports, on the other hand. Observational analysis particularly underscores the importance of non-verbal cues in communication dynamics. Social network analysis mapped out communication networks within workshops, revealing bottlenecks and opportunities for improvement.

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTION: The study offers a unique opportunity to explore the intricate dynamics of language, culture, and technical knowledge in a specific regional context. By addressing these barriers and promoting cross-cultural understanding, stakeholders in the automotive industry can enhance communication practices, improve service delivery, and foster a more inclusive and diverse work environment. The study highlights the dominant use of English at automobile mechanic workshops and the dearth of equivalent terms in Igbo, to express many automobile concepts that exist in English, as the major causes of ineffective communication at automobile mechanic workshops in the region focused on. This underscores the need to develop a comprehensive English-Igbo glossary of automobile terms. This is envisioned to serve as a tool in the hands of the agencies of orientation and mass mobilization in relation to the automobile industry, at both the national and state levels, even through the electronic and other media of information. This, no doubt, will in turn improve the effectiveness of communication among all the parties at mechanic workshops in the region of the study.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS: Based on the outcome of the study, we present the following key recommendations:

1. **Standardizing Communication Practices:** Implementing standardized procedures for job orders, invoices, and customer interactions, involving and ensuring a corresponding use of Igbo and English, to

ensure clarity and consistency in communication between the identified categories of mechanics, customers and the workshop owners.

2. Providing Language Support: Offering language training or translation/interpretation services to bridge communication gaps between mechanics and customers who speak different languages.

3. Implementing Customer Feedback Mechanisms: Establishing feedback mechanisms to gather input from customers on their communication experiences and using this feedback to make continuous improvements.

4. Promoting Cross-Cultural Understanding: Encouraging cultural sensitivity and awareness among workshop staff to navigate communication challenges stemming from cultural differences effectively.

5. Developing a comprehensive Bilingual Glossary (English-Igbo) of Automobile Terms: Using this as a tool in the hands of related agencies, including the electronic media practitioners, for mass mobilization and orientation in the automobile industry, will stimulate and promote interest in the study of Igbo automobile terminology in the category of customers identified in the study. It will further and ultimately make for easy and free self-expression and actualization by the class of mechanics identified and targeted in the study.

Implementing these recommendations, to the ultimate benefit of the targeted class of automobile mechanic workshops in the South-East of Nigeria, will to a very large extent, eliminate the barriers to effective communication in the region, thus enhancing customer satisfaction, and optimizing their operational efficiency in the realm of Igbo automobile technology.

CONCLUSION: Effective communication is essential for the smooth operation of automobile mechanic workshops in the south-east of Nigeria, particularly in the context of the imperative of a comprehensive Igbo automobile terminology. Barriers such as language differences, inconsistent communication practices, and misaligned expectations arise from the paucity or total lack of Igbo automobile terms.

This, most often, involves Igbo mechanics who are not proficient in the use of English, due to lack of sound academic backgrounds, in their interactions with customers who are more disposed to sticking with English, and are thus, equally in dire need of Igbo automobile terminology, to effectively communicate with the identified class of mechanics. This leads to inefficiencies, customer dissatisfaction, and decreased workshop performance. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that includes standardizing communication processes, providing language support where needed, and enhancing non-verbal communication skills among staff. By overcoming these challenges, workshops can improve customer relations, increase efficiency, and ultimately enhance their overall service quality.

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