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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Impact of Krio Language on the Use of English as a Foreign Language: A Case Study of Senior Secondary Schools Pupils in Sierra Leone**

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**| ABSTRACT**

Krio, like other pidgin languages, borrows lexical items from other languages to a greater extent from the English Language. These words “borrowing” and “usage” have resulted in some similarities in the phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of both Languages. These two languages are so linguistically related that the usage differences between them can hardly be realized. As a result, users of both languages unconsciously use Krio lexemes and structures in place of English. This interlanguage phonological, lexical, and syntactic transfer has an enormous impact on the correct use of written and spoken English by senior secondary school pupils. This research is therefore intended to investigate the impact of Krio on the written and spoken English Language of senior secondary school pupils and will also provide recommendations to remedy the situation. This study is of immense relevance to teachers of English, curriculum planners, government, and other education stakeholders as it helps them to identify the extent to which Krio impacts the use of English among pupils. It, therefore, guides them to plan and provide appropriate strategies as solutions to remedy the situation. The study investigates the ways in which Krio impacts the teaching and learning of English in senior secondary school and the extent to which it is being used in schools by pupils and teachers. The study further provides strategies for assessment of the English Language teaching methods used by the teachers of English, and thus gives relevant conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the study an assessment of the English Language teaching methods used by the teachers of English, and thus gives the relevant conclusion and recommendations based on the findings of the study with the help of well-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews and personal observations. Forty pupils and eight teachers of English were selected for the study, and the findings showed that pupils’ written and spoken English are marred by incorrect and substandard usage principally as a result of the impact of Krio on the use of the English Language.

**| KEYWORDS**

Krio, vowel sounds, consonant sounds, lexemes, phonological transfer, substandard English.

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### **1. Introduction**

English is used as the official Language in Sierra Leone. It is taught as a core subject at all levels in primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions. The main aim of the curriculum in educational institutions is to have all Sierra Leoneans become literate in the language for academic, social, and professional purposes. In Sierra Leone, for example, Krio is regarded as a substandard form of English. Krio (Sierra Leonean Krio), which is the Lingua Franca of Sierra Leone, is most commonly used alongside the English Language in the rural and urban communities and even among literate communities. This interlanguage phonological, lexical, and syntactic transfer has an enormous impact on the correct use of written and spoken English by senior secondary school pupils. Being the Lingua Franca, Krio is the most widely spoken language that bridges the linguistic gap between people of various ethnic backgrounds; that is why the Krio language has been introduced as one of the indigenous languages in the teaching curriculum of junior secondary school resulting in the teaching and learning of Krio as a subject at that level. Hence,

pupils are assessed in both spoken and written forms at internal and external examinations.

However, the use of Krio by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) generally confuses usage. Consequently, the pupils tend to intersperse the two languages in normal communication resulting in the use of substandard spoken and written English. This abnormal situation has also resulted in pupils' poor performance in the English Language at internal and external examinations, which further results in the massive failures in the English Language at the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE), a phenomenon that might not be unconnected with substandard usage. This study is therefore intended to investigate the impact of Krio on the learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) by pupils of the senior secondary school (SSS).

### **1.1 Statement of Problem**

It is clear that most pupils are exempted from studying higher programmes in tertiary institutions because they lack the full requirement, including the English Language at the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Also, Krio is most frequently spoken by pupils and teachers in the senior secondary schools in Sierra Leone. Since the two languages are similar in several ways, pupils tend to make mistakes in using Krio utterances for the English Language, thereby coming up with substandard usage in their written and spoken English Language. This mixture in language use has a tremendous impact on the pupils' learning of English as a foreign language, as exhibited in their unsatisfactory performance at internal and external examinations in the English Language.

### **1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of Krio on the learning of English as a foreign language in senior secondary school, whereas the objectives include to;

- investigate the ways in which Krio affects the learning of English in senior secondary school.
- Investigate the extent to which Krio is being used in schools by pupils and teachers.
- Investigate the English Language teaching methods used by the teachers of English.
- Proffer relevant suggestions and recommendations based on the findings of the study.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The research has immense relevance as a result of the following:

The study will help teachers of English and curriculum designers to identify the impact of Krio on the learning of the English Language. It will also help them to plan and implement appropriate teaching strategies to improve the existing situations.

Finally, it will serve as useful material for future researchers interested in carrying out research in a similar field as well as in foreign language teaching and learning.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Selinker (1972) asserts that interlanguage transfer is one of the major sources of pronunciation "error". According to him, pronunciation errors have long been thought to be caused by the transfer of phonological aspects from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2). In his view, a significant portion of errors may be attributed to interlanguage transfer. Dauda, J. & Bockarie, S.S (2021) also note that,

" When learners attempt to produce an L2 sound, their relative success at approaching the target language is reliant on their ability to disassociate their L2 utterance from their repertoire of L1 phonemes and allophones. ( Dauda, J. & Bockarie, S.S. 2021)

Crystal (1987:368) also suggests that:

" Properties of L1 are thought to exercise an influence on the course of L2 learning: learners 'transfer' sounds structures and usages from one language to another".

In such situations, one could note that dissociation is often necessary because two languages that contain speech sounds that seem to be the same ( like in the case of Krio and English) but are produced by differing articulatory motions; acoustically different may be perceived to be divergent from the target language by listeners although this might differ from one speaker to another.

In the same way, Crystal (1987) highlights some of the factors that govern success or failure in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language; including:

- The soundness of the teaching method.
- The attitude and motivation of the learner.
- The availability of the time and opportunities to learn.
- The adequacy of resources.
- The chance to put the language to active use.

Phillipson (1992), in his famous work, *'Linguistics Imperialism'*, states that the English Language is best taught monolingually; he refers to this act as 'the monolingual tenet'. According to him, the monolingual tenet holds that the teaching and learning of English as a foreign or second language should be done entirely through the medium of the English Language. He explains that the only language permitted in the English teaching classroom is the English Language. It is thought that the use of the English Language exclusively helps maximize the learning of the language in spite of the learners' varying first languages. The implication here is that most teachers use the learners' mother-tongue and/or the Lingua Franca in teaching the English Language.

It is worthy to note that Phillipson's monolingual approach helps the learners, as well as the teachers of English, to improve their written and spoken English. It also provides an opportunity for everyone in the classroom to speak some English daily. As Bright, J.A. 1999:4 explains,

" In language learning, a good language teacher keeps steadily in mind that when people learn a foreign language, they do not learn from their mistakes; they learn from their mistakes. This means that the teacher should give learners as many opportunities as possible for the correct practice of the language skills, and a little opportunity to make mistakes."

Freeborn et al. (1991) assert that the range of the situation in which language is used, the many kinds of people with whom we communicate, and the different purposes for which we talk or write; the task of describing all the varieties of English usage proves very daunting. Freeborn et al. (1999:126) also say that

" Our sentences must obey the rules which everyone who speaks or writes English follows; our vocabulary and grammar must be in the right style or appropriate to the context, as well as be grammatically correct; the words must be in the right order in order to be grammatical, but again, there is enough flexibility to allow a lot of choices."

In this regard, vocabulary development proves to be essential for learners of English. This, to a larger extent, helps them make a varying choice of words in specific contexts and situations, and the construction of sentences (written and spoken) depends largely on the learner's choice of words. As McGregor, 1999 puts it:

"Native speakers and foreign language learners alike recognize and understand more words than they actually use. The words they recognize but do not use are items by which their receptive vocabularies exceed their productive ones. The foreign or second language learner however, wishes to reach general fluency as rapidly as possible, and if he or she can, he or she can do so within a limited vocabulary."  
(McGregor, G.P., 1999:19).

Tucker (2000) reveals that the teaching and learning of English as a second language is affected greatly by the Krio language background of the learners. According to her, it affects learners' use of English in both written and spoken forms and consequently results in the production of an incorrect and/or substandard English Language. In her view, performance in the English Language is hindered by spelling errors, vocabulary errors, grammatical errors, and pronunciation errors. It has been observed by most teachers that pupils do not observe conventions in writing and speech, which was evident in the focus group discussions. The inability of pupils to communicate well in the English Language is of great concern; where they attempt to communicate, their written and spoken English languages are most often marred by errors. Tamba (2006) supports that "most teachers are aware of the important role that speech plays in our lives, even when some familiar forms of oral communication follow the conventional writing". The notion of communicative competence is one of the theories that underlie the communicative approach to foreign

language teaching and learning. Savignon (1997) reports that communicative competence in second and foreign language teaching and learning is quite challenging. According to him, communicative competence refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately.

### 3. Methodology

This study took both the descriptive and the sample field survey approaches.

#### 3.1 Population

Eight teachers of English Language and forty pupils of the senior secondary school were selected for the study from the Government Senior Secondary school, Holy Rosary Senior Secondary school, College Senior Secondary school, and The Door International Senior Secondary school in Kenema city Sierra Leone. Each school was represented by two male teachers of English for the study since there were no female teachers of English in the selected schools. Also, forty pupils were selected for the study. This number accounts for twenty boys and twenty girls across the classes in the senior secondary schools with ages between 16 and 19 years. The teacher and pupil respondents are of varying ethnic backgrounds but use Krio as the general language of communication.

#### 3.2 Sample and sampling Technique

Eight teachers of English Language and forty pupils of the senior secondary school were selected for the study.

#### 3.3 Instruments of Data Collection

Two sets of questionnaires, each containing objective and open-ended questions, were designed. The first set of questionnaires was administered to pupils and the other sets to teachers of English Language in the selected schools.

#### 3.4 Method of Data Collection

In order to collect data for the study, the researcher used sets of well-structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews, and personal observations.

#### 3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were presented and analyzed, taking into cognizance the following perspectives:

- Varying written essay topics were given to the pupils to write on in the English Language.
- Focus group discussions with pupils on selected topics.
- Informal interviews with pupils.
- Interviews and discussions with teachers of English Language on the impact of Krio Language on the use of English Language by pupils.
- The extent to which the English Language is used by staff and pupils.
- The English Language teaching and learning methods used.

### 4. Results / Findings

Following the presentation and analysis of the data, it was evident that Krio has a serious impact on the use of English by senior secondary school pupils. It impacts both their written and spoken English.

#### 4.1 Impacts of Krio on pupils' written forms of English.

In an investigation of the impact of Krio on pupils' use of the English Language, essay topics were given to pupils to write on. The findings showed that pupils' written works were full of errors and that these errors could be attributed to the influence of Krio. They were categorized as follows:

##### 4.1.1 Grammatical Errors

###### i. Verb Tense Error

The use of verb tense forms is one of the major ways in which the Krio Language impacts the use of English among pupils. Krio Language does not have many verb tense forms such as the present, past, and future. They rather have tense form markers. In Krio, for example, the present tense form is used to talk about the past and future times. Pupils, therefore, extensively construct English Language sentences with a lot of interference from the Krio Language transfer the Krio usages in constructing English sentences. For example:

- a. **Krio:** A de kam.

**English:** I am coming. ( Present continuous )

**b. Krio:** A don kam.

**English:** I have come. ( Past participle)

**c. Krio:** A kam

**English:** I came. ( Simple past)

**d. Krio:** A go kam.

**English:** I will come. (Future)

In the above Krio sentences, the verb **kam (come)** appears in the same form in the varying sentence structures (present, past, and future). This phenomenon often leads Krio-speaking learners to misuse English tense forms. The study showed that sentences written by pupils are in error, as shown in the following:

- I write the letter yesterday --- Instead of; I wrote the letter yesterday.
- My father buy all my books last term ---- Instead of, My father bought all my books last term.

#### ii. **Subject-Verb Agreement Error.**

The study proved that Krio impacts English usage considerably in connection with subject-verb agreement. While English follows strict subject-verb agreement rules, Krio does not have any rule of such agreement. In Krio, the verb form remains the same in the first, second, and third persons irrespective of the singular or plural subject. Let's examine the following Krio sentences:

- A go ( I go)
- James go ( James goes)
- Hawa go (Hawa goes)
- I go ( He or She goes)
- Den go (They go)

In the Krio sentences above, the verb **go (go)** remains the same in all forms. This usage affects pupils written and spoken English considerably. The study found out that when pupils speak or write English sentences, they do base their writings and speech on Krio structures, thereby producing wrong sentences, such as in the following examples:

- Musa **come** to school every day. Instead of, Musa **comes** to school every day.
- My mother **sell** foodstuff in the market. Instead of, my sister **sells** foodstuff.

The errors in the above sentences are associated with the transfer of Krio structures into English usages. Pupils do not follow these agreement rules, which have been evident in their written and spoken English.

#### 4.1.2 **Lexical Error.**

Lexical error is another major error shown in pupils' written work during the research. This seems to occur largely because of vocabulary confusion between the Sierra Leone Krio and English lexemes. Apparently, certain words in English produce similar sounds to those of Sierra Leone Krio words. However, these sound similarities do require them to have the same spellings in most cases. Pupils rather spell many English words wrongly due to their lack of recognition or realization of the differences between Krio and English lexemes. Although pupils could use or attempt to use English words, they sometimes end up producing substandard forms.

Consequently, when they write such words, they tend to base their spellings on the Krio system instead of the correct English spellings and sounds systems

i. The lack of final consonant sounds in certain words used in Krio leads pupils to write such words in English without noting their final consonants; they most often confuse these words with other words. For example, the word "and" /ænd/ is most often

pronounced with less articulation on the final consonant /d/. This makes the word sound like “an” /æn/. Similarly, the word “hand” /hænd/ is most often pronounced as “han” /hæn/. As a result, pupils make errors in their written works, such as the following:

- I have a pen **an** a book; instead of, I have a pen **and** a book.  
In the sentence above, “**and**” is confused with “**an**”.
- Raise your right **han**; instead of, Raise your right **hand**.

ii., The use of the voiced dental fricative sound /ð/ represents voiced “th” sound, and the voiceless dental fricative sound /θ/ also represents the voiceless “th” sound; these two consonant sounds cause some confusion in usage among pupils. They use the voiced sounds in place of the voiceless sounds. This phenomenon does not only lead to incorrect pronunciation but also the incorrect spelling of words. For example

- Tin /tin/ used in place of thin /θin/.
- Tink /tink/ used in place of think /θink/.
- Tank /tank/ used in place of thank /θank/.
- Helt /helt/ used in place of health /helθ/.

Most pupils present the above errors in their written works as a result of their realization of the differences in the use of the voiced and voiceless “th” sounds. The following sentences were seen in their written work:

- Fatmata is a **tin** girl. Instead of, Fatmata is a **thin** girl.
- We **tank** you very much for the gift. Instead of, We **thank** you very much for the gift.
- I **tink** our teacher is correct; instead of, I **think** our teacher is correct.

#### 4.2. Speech Errors

The study showed that most errors in pupils’ spoken English are a result of the influence of Krio Language usage. Some of these errors have been discussed in terms of vocabulary errors, and the articulation of similar speech sounds in Krio and English. These poor articulatory errors could be responsible for their unsatisfactory performance in oral English examinations due to their inability to identify and associate appropriate speech sounds.

During the personal interview and focus group discussions, pupils’ utterances were marred by the incorrect pronunciation of most English words due to the following errors:

##### 4.2.1 Errors in the use of some English vowel sounds.

Krio speakers generally use short vowel sounds in place of long vowel sounds. The study showed how such cases were evident in pupils’ pronunciations of certain words. In most cases, their pronunciations were based on the Krio language.

- The use of short vowel sounds in place of long vowel sounds.** Krio speakers generally use short vowel sounds in place of long vowel sounds. Pupils find it extremely difficult to distinguish between these two forms of vowel sounds as a result of their Krio speaking background. They tend to transfer the Krio vowel sound system when they speak English. This inability hinders their performance in the English Language at internal and external examinations, as proven by the study. Some examples included the following:

- Seed /si:d/ pronounced as sid /sɪd/
- Leave /li:v/ pronounced as live /lɪv/
- Beat /bi:t/ pronounced as bit /bɪt/
- Seat /si:t/ pronounced as sit /sɪt/
- Heat /hi:t/ pronounced as hit /hɪt/

The inability to distinguish between short and long vowel sounds has created some difficulty for pupils in attempting oral English examinations. They most often consider the wrong answers to be the correct options.

- The use of open vowel sounds and closed vowel sounds.**

- Sister /sɪstə(r)/ pronounced as sista /sɪstæ/
- Doctor /dɒktə(r)/ pronounced as Dokta /dɒktæ/
- Butter /bʌtə(r)/ pronounced as bɒta /bɒtæ/

- iii. Also, the “th” sounds are articulated as “t” or “d” sounds in most cases. Krio language is traditionally known for the absence of the “th” sounds in speech. Speakers normally use “t” or “d” sounds in place of these sounds, as the case may be. For example:
- a. Initial “th” sounds: They refer to sounds produced at the beginning of words. For example,
- That /θæt/ is pronounced as dat /dat/.
  - Thank /θæŋk/ is pronounced as tank /tank/
  - Thirsty /θɜːsti/ is pronounced as tɔsti /tɔsti/
  - Then /θen/ is pronounced as den /den/
  - Think /θɪŋk/ is pronounced as tink /tink/
- b. Final “th” sounds: They refer to sounds produced at the end of words. For example,
- Bath /bɑːθ/ is pronounced as bat/bæt/
  - Path /pɑːθ/ is pronounced as pat/pæt
  - Month /mʌnθ/ is pronounced as mont /mɔnt/

In cases of error usage, speakers produce the wrong or substandard pronunciations in place of the correct or standard ones. Unfortunately, they remain convinced that they have spoken well.

## **5. Conclusion**

The findings of the research showed that the Krio language, which is the Lingua Franca in Sierra Leone, impacts the use of English among pupils in senior secondary school. That is, the written and spoken English showed incorrect or substandard usage. These errors are generally attributed to the interference of the Krio language with the correct use of English by pupils.

Mechanical errors, including spelling, grammatical errors, and vocabulary errors, were identified in the study. These errors have to do largely with pupils’ inability to distinguish between Krio pronunciation, vocabulary, and language structures as distinct from those of English. Words are spelled as they are pronounced in Krio. Also, and also inappropriate use of other Krio words with similar sounds in English lead to a lot of confusion.

Speech errors by pupils were also identified, showing that pupils’ utterances are as well characterized by pronunciation errors and other forms of usage errors as a result of their Krio language background.

Pupils, as well as teachers, use Krio in school more often than English. As a result, pupils do not have the opportunity to practice speaking and writing English.

Despite the fact that Krio contains practically several English words and expressions, Krio has its own linguistic characteristics that are quite distinct from English. These distinct features include differences in phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics in comparison with English. Pupils find it difficult to grasp these distinctions.

### **5.1 Recommendations**

The following are recommended based on the findings of the study:

There should be an enactment of a compulsory English language speaking policy in schools at all levels. This policy should be accompanied by strict penalties on defaulters. It is proven that students, as well as teachers, use Krio more often than English.

Also, learners should be made aware of the linguistics boundary between Krio and English, especially in their usage, so that they can come up with standard English usage.

In addition, regular oral English practices, as well as written exercises, should be done in schools. Pupils need adequate practice during all their interactions in school since they hardly come in contact with the standard form of the language outside the school situation.

Finally, school authorities should ensure that persons who specialize in English in colleges should be the only permitted teachers to teach the English Language.

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