



## Standard English And The Officialese

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### ABSTRACT

The Officialese and the Standard English have been wrongly used interchangeably. Many scholars have asked questions trying to establish whether the Officialese has the same characteristics as the Standard English. It is a common knowledge that both of them are tools of information dissemination or interaction in high magnitude of language use, especially in high places like Government, Commerce, Education Instructions, Media, and Politics. Both styles are varieties of the English language. This paper investigates the linguistic features of both, establishes the differences between them and tags the right status to each of them. The Standard English and the Officialese in English have been found to have glaring distinctions. These glaring distinctions are mostly found in their dictions, tone, structure and audience. While the officialese is termed a style of writing peculiar to Civil Service and therefore is restricted to officialdom, the Standard English is termed a model in language use and therefore is widely taught and used. The paper recommends, among others, that there should be a creation of Standard English training centres to train and retrain users, especially the officials whose duty it is to write in the officialese. Schools should be encouraged to take the teaching of the English Language seriously and make it compulsory for learners regardless of area of specialization. The teaching of "Use of English" to non-undergraduates of the English Language should be carried out in indepth.

**Keywords:** Standard, Standard English, Officialese and English Language.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper aims at establishing the differences between the Officialese and the Standard English. The study is based on the premise that language is used in different ways to achieve a set goal. The achievement of a set goal is not a one- man business; rather, it is of a collective effort by individuals within a given environment who interact to achieve a common goal. The achievement of this set goal of a society results to growth and development of that given society. The rate at which each given society uses language to achieve a common goal makes for developed, developing and underdeveloped societies. The society is made up of people of different categories /classes and backgrounds, who require a good knowledge of the interacting tool without much difficulty. This is because a good knowledge of the language of interaction brings about harmony, unity, love, progress, growth, and development.

The key words on which expressions flow in this paper are "Officialese" and the "Standard English". Since both key words are of the English language, there is need also to emphasize the English language as an integral part of the work. The paper defines these key words, discusses their characteristics and brings out the linguistic features that differentiate them. The paper at the end tags the right status to the two main items, "Officialese" and the "Standard English".

### Definitions and Features

The Officialese in English is a style of writing in English which has to do with officialdom. This style of writing is found in all official documents otherwise called official correspondences. Every official document is an officialese. It is peculiar to documents from government, establishments, such as; the civil service, public service, institutions and well established firms or organizations which dwell on all forms of official correspondence, Anyanwu (1999). The Officialese has diction depending on the

motivation. It has audience who, most times, find it difficult to interpret the language due to its difficult linguistic features. Those linguistic features are found in the use of sms, (short message services), abbreviations, truncated words, acronyms, clipping, blending, phrases, etc. These are as against what it takes to address the people in a simple form of the English language. Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary defines the officialese as documents full of confusing officialese. The features mentioned above contribute to the confusion caused by the Officialese.

Taking these aspects of the officialese one after the other, we can discover that they are no where close to the Standard English. For instance; the "SMS" (short message services) is an abridged style of written information, examples; Pls for please, Vlg for village, Shl for shall, Degov for Deputy Governor, Milgov for military governor, etc. The abbreviation is a situation whereby the writer extracts the first letter of each word in a group to represent a whole. Example; Kiv---keep in view, pm---post meridian, UNN---University of Nigeria Nsukka, a.f.c---at front cover, b.u.f--- bring up file, d.a.v---department adjustment voucher, d.d.--- deputy director, d.g.--- director general etc. Acronym refers to the use of first letters in a group of words to form a word, example, JAMB, UNICEF, UNESCO, NECO etc. In word truncation, the officialese is found to be in regular use of truncated words, especially in minutes during meetings.. The abbreviation is known to be first letters but word truncation has no guide in the use. It is more like the "SMS" earlier explained. There is no grammatical rule that says take the first letter, the middle letter or last letter of a word. It depends on the user. Examples of truncated words include: ppl for people, vlg for village, pls for please, letrs for letters etc. In Clipping, a part of a word is removed and one part used, for examples: Mil for Military, Rel for Religion, tele for television, tele for telephone etc. The last letters are commonly removed in this style.

The Officialese has tone. This is why there is a high level of politeness even as very serious issues are treated. Politeness is a linguistic behaviour very common with the use of officialese, Peter, (2008). It makes for civility, different from the military language variety. There is a greater interaction on pre-suppositions, that is, there is always a known issue or policy on which this style of language depends. Previous knowledge of an issue by interlocutors is the set premise, Peter, (2008). Renkema (1977) describes the characteristics of the Officialese as: dry as dust, impersonal, complicated and traditional. The Officialese is seen as "register". The dictionary or literary meaning of register as found in the New Webster's Dictionary of the English language, International Edition (2004 p839), defines the word "register" as an official or formal list, an official record of births, deaths, marriages, a book in which a record is kept, an official document issued to the owner of a ship as evidence of nationality, to express or show feelings, to have one's name entered on the voter's list following a due procedure prescribed. Okafor, (2011) defines the term "register" as vocabulary peculiar to a given human activity. Nwokedi (2003) says that "register" is the use of words according to the nature of human activities as naturally sorted in terms of occupation, discipline, subject matters, social circumstances etc. Nwokedi recognizes two types of register, namely:

1. Literary register
2. Technical register

The literary register is said to be the type of words we come across in the course of reading common materials, such as; newspapers, magazines, novels and other materials of public interest. The words we come across in the literary register are easily understood and they are denotative in meaning. On the other hand, the technical register, according to Nwokedi (2003), refers to the use of words peculiar to professions or specific fields, social activities and events. For example, words associated with "school" include; Teaching, teacher, learning, leaner, pencil, pen, exercise book, text book, test, script, question paper, student, subject, school block, class-room, desks, chalk board, duster, time-table, examination, hostel, porter, principal, vice principal etc. Words associated with christianity include; righteousness, repentance, forgiveness, sin, pastor, bible, catechism, synod, bishop, hymn, parish, station, section, clergy, communion, baptism, vestry, sermon, gospel, etc. These words are lexical associates but in expression common words come in use.

It is also common to find one word existing in more than one activity, field or event. For instance, the word "registrar" can be used in the Church, School, Court or Club to mean the same thing in them, which is the person in charge of register or registration. These words that have dual purposes can only be explained or disambiguated considering the existing words in the passage or in the context. The

clutch is a system in a vehicle which must be expressed or explained using other ordinary or common words in addition to words associated with the clutch. This brief passage below explains what is meant here.

The Clutch, is a special gear selection mechanism which is installed between the engine and the gear box. The clutch is always foot operated and the pedal is by either a direct mechanical linkage or very often, by a hydraulic system similar to that of the brakes. The operational principles of a common clutch shows that at the centre is the clutch plate which is a steel disk whose sides are attracted with ranges of special friction material similar to that used for brake lining. The depression of the clutch pedal interrupts the drive between the engine and the gearbox but when the pedal is released, the drive is restored” (Culled from Egbulonu, 2012). This paper looks at the linguistic distinction between the Officialese in English and the Standard English. So the purpose is not to stake the Officialese to its difficult aspects. From what we have seen so far, the Officialese could be seen or regarded as a “style of writing peculiar to officers in official establishments”.

The Officialese is a variety of the English language. That is the relationship between it and the Standard English. The English language is a world language. It is the most popular language in the world due to its international repute. The use of the English language as a second language is as a result of colonialism, Nwachukwu et al (2007). As a world unifying language, emphasis has been strongly laid on the teaching of its standard uses even in the primary school. The English language is used in different varieties but the varieties of concern here are the Officialese and the Standard English varieties.

The Standard English, also known as Standard Written English (SWE), is the form of English most widely accepted as being clear and proper. Publishers, writers, educators and others have over the years developed a consensus of what the Standard English consists of: *it includes word choice, pattern and mechanical accuracy, (punctuation and spelling). The Standard English maintains a fairly uniform standard of communication which can be* understood by all speakers and users of the English language regardless of differences in dialect, pronunciation and usage, Trudgill, Richard (1999). The quest for Standard English did not start today. Information from Net search says that King Charles II came to the throne of England in 1649 after the tumult of English Revolution. Britain was a society composed of several competing language varieties of which the Scots was one. As at then, the idea of Standard English was at its infancy. The emergency of Standard English came as a result of the struggle for supremacy of dialect. The struggle between Scots and English witnessed a victory for English over Scots,(Net search information).

The emphasis on Standard English made Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-1984), an author of a two-volume Dictionary containing definitions of 40,000 words. Also the industrial Revolution in Britain led to many new words for new technologies. Again Julia Keller, Chicago Tribune, 2005, complains about how the planet is imperiled by the galloping inability of people to know the difference between “its” and “it’s” and says “it is a crime”. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the suggestion that there was a “right” way of speaking seemed strange to most people. The uneven spelling of words shows that a “right” way of spelling was foreign to most writers and publishers. The Standard English replaced Latin as the language of scholarship and spread to new world where it took on new words and new meanings. David Crystal asked “If there is a world Standard English” He said that the Standards of English is a desirable educational target. There are various world Standard English as found in (Net –Search); they are; Australian, New Zealand, South Pacific Standard English etc. There are also the British and Irish Standard English, American Standard English, Canadian Standard English and Caribbean Standard English. West, East and South Africa are still standardizing, that is, learning to perfect in the use of the Standard English. South Asian and East Asian are standardizing too.

There is no contradiction to say that across the English speaking world, there is variation in spelling, grammar and vocabulary in those forms which would be regarded by its users as standard. The particular standard of English, whether written, spoken or both which applies in a given country, may be an indigenous development. It is also recognized that there is standardization struggle between Britain and United States over whose grammatical usage is standard. This situation is historically the result of colonialism by which forms of English were carried to various parts of the world, (Hickey, 2004). What keeps Standard English in its high place include; schools, the media, organized religion, the economy, dictionaries, the military and style manuals. *This paper looks at “Standard English” as a single form of language which has been a popular conception.* Considering the above discussion,

the Standard English is an aspect of the English language that must be used as a model of language. It is established by custom and consent with a degree of quality. It is regarded as desirable and necessary.

**Characteristics Of The Standard English**

The Standard English is descriptive. It demands the use of a set rules in spoken and written system. It has rules on word formation, word recognition and patterns of sentence structure. A sentence in the Standard English has two popular divisions;

- (1) Subject
- (2) Predicate

The subject of a sentence is that which is discussed about in a sentence. It could be a noun, pronoun, noun phrase or clause. It is the doer of action in a sentence. The predicate discusses the subject of a sentence. It contains a finite verb which must agree in number with the subject of the sentence. The grammatical convention in Standard English depends on the parts of speech which give a name to every functional word. There is the use of punctuations also. These are grammatical symbols which are used to mark off units and boundaries around and within sentences. The Standard English maintains functional sentences which are; to state a fact- (declarative) to make a request, demand and instruct (imperative) to ask question (interrogative) to express suddenness (exclamatory) to express desire (optative). Basically the Standard English forms every word of it from the 26 letters of the English alphabets. Structurally sentence patterns vary. Stylistically sentences choose where to place their points.

In Standard English, there is a set criteria by which words are recognized. A word is defined as a minimum independent linguistic unit having an identifiable meaning and grammatical function with a fairly consistent phonological shape” Ndimele (1993) as quoted in Nwokedi (2003). A word belongs to the vocabulary of a language. When we speak, we combine phonological sounds to produce a word and we write to put our thoughts and feelings into words too. A word has a space on either sides of it when it is written. Nwokedi (2003) identifies three criteria for the identification of words;

1. Minimum free form criterion. This means that the words of the Standard English are the smallest grammatical units that can stand in isolation and still remain meaningful. For example; come, go, eat, pray, dance, write etc can stand alone and make meaning.
2. Cohesiveness or uninterruptibility: A word is cohesive and consistent in its internal structure and cannot be interrupted or some part of it deleted or rearranged without altering its meanings. For example, “boy” cannot be rearranged for “yob”.
3. Isolability: in the written form process, words are separated from one another by spaces. For example; Obi---is --a --boy, and not “Obiisaboy”.

The two varieties of the English language this paper discusses are not the only varieties of the English language. There are others not mentioned in the paper. This is simply because this paper investigates the linguistic features of only the Officialese and the Standard English and their distinctions. Some of the linguistic characteristics of the Officialese and the Standard English are as follows:

<b>OFFICIALESE</b>	<b>STANDARD ENGLISH</b>
Restricted	Generally used
Not accepted by many	Generally accepted
structurally unstable	Structurally stable
Prescriptive	Descriptive
Not easily understood	Easily understood
Learned at work places	Taught consciously in schools
‘U’ses truncated words	Uses full words
uses sms	Word based
Does not explain abbreviations	Explains abbreviations
Does not develop	Undergoes development
Uses indirect expressions, example; “I am directed”	Applies active and passive voices where necessary
No expertise	Expert consensus certified

It is not progressive	It is progressive
It does not have authority	It has authority
It is not sought for	It is highly sought for
It is fought against by plain language variety	Has dominion over other language varieties
It is not popular	It is popular
It does not have guiding principles	It has theories guiding its uses
It has time constraint	No time constraint
Causes confusion to readers at times.	Has dominion over other standards
No printed text on the officialese	Rich in printed materials for study
Described as dry as dust and impersonal	Develops and is generous

### **CONCLUSION**

The Standard English is the most highly accepted among all other varieties of the English language. On the other hand, the Officialese is discovered to be a coinage from the Standard English. The population desirous of using the Standard English is greater than the population that uses the Officialese. This is because the number of people in the work force are few comprising workers in the government establishments, public and civil servants. Out of the total population of a society, greater number is in schools desirous of learning to use the English language at its standard level. The Officialese operates at a limited level while the Standard English operates at high frequency determining progress in technology and leadership. The paper therefore concludes that the Officialese is substandard compared to the Standard English.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since the Standard English is accepted as a model variety of the English language, people should be encouraged to learn and use it. Teaching of the Standard English should be emphasized. Students should be encouraged to take English language seriously in their studies. This is because the greater majority of this world uses it as the instructional language. People should be encouraged to read English language books in order to acquire proper knowledge of it. There is need also to have or create training centres to train and retrain users. There should be a welcome back of the former standard of education as was introduced by Britain. The use of other varieties of English should be minimized in order to avoid language porosity.

On the other hand, the use of the Officialese should be improved to an understandable level. We should adhere to the style of the Standard English in order to encourage uniformity in the understanding of information. We must recognize each word of the Standard English before we can apply styles in writing. The administrators whose duty it is to use the Officialese should first of all understand the English language at its standard status. This is the only reason administrators and officers apply the use of truncated words, phrases, SMS and abbreviations in order to meet up with time and space. The writer must be a master of the Standard English before he can coin words. A dancer must learn and master the regular dance steps of a music before his personal dance steps, as side attractions, can be added.

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