Domestication of the English Language in Nigeria: An Examination of Morpho-Syntactic Trends in Nigerian English (NigE)

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This paper examined certain developmental patterns Nigerian English (NigE) demonstrates in recent times, particularly at the linguistic levels of morphology and syntax. While studying these current trends, a sociolinguistic approach, as enunciated and popularized by Labov (1966), was adopted. The principal source of data for the corpus was the use of 100 questionnaires containing 11 objective tests administered to the respondents. The first part of the work provided an overview of the place of NigE as one of the World Englishes, today, while the second part which is the core of the work is an examination of the nature of foray the typology has made on the construction and use of English by Nigerians of a broad social spectrum. The study established that the uniqueness of NigE is considerably realized in such linguistic features as conversion, acronym, composition, redundancy, coinage and reduplication. It was, as well, observed that some NigE forms exhibit the same morphological and syntactic patterns as those of Standard English (SE) while some exhibit significant variations.

Key Words: Nigerian English, Standard English, Mutual intelligibility, Morpho-Syntax, Lexemes

INTRODUCTION

A language or its variety keeps accommodating new lexical items that graduate to form new and distinct phrases, clauses and sentences which reflect the socio-political, economic and cultural situations of a society and such constructions generate new meanings that fulfill the communicative functions of such a linguistic environment, just as Jowitt (1991:26) enunciates that "language and society develop side by side, social changes bring linguistic changes." This implies that from time to time, there will be emergence of new words and new patterns of expressions that at the same time generate mutual intelligibility, possibly because such constructions enjoy the tacit knowledge of the members of the speech community or a substantial group of the members of the society of a broad social spectrum. According to Kujore (1985), Jowitt (1991) and Salami (1968), such words and expressions are used by a considerable number of Nigerians, representing a fairly large social group and the geographical areas of ethnic groups such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc..Therefore, this paper dwells on certain recent morphological and syntactic attributes identified in Nigerian English such as acronyms, conversion and neologisms. Others include compounding, redundancy or repetition of lexical items, reduplication and coinages which have become a fundamental characteristic of NigE, as exemplified by the following lexical items: root causes, anti-third termites, KAROTA, NAPEP, due process, super glue, runs, etc.

Morpho - Syntactic Trends in Nigerian English

Morphology and syntax are related sub fields of grammar. While morphology deals with various patterns of forming words out of smaller units, syntax is a progression of morphology by graduating to various ways in which words can be combined to form phrases, clauses and sentences, as in: "He is a hardworking student", not "He is a working student hard." In morpho-syntax, variant forms of words collocate to form words, phrases, clauses as well as sentences. By morpho-
syntactic trends in NigE, it means certain formation of words, combination of words, phrases, clauses and sentence constructions that have become distinctively Nigerian in recent times. Given this explanatory background, let us proceed to examine those distinct trends.

**METHODOLOGY**

Library based and fieldwork approaches constitute the methodology of this research work. In respect of the library based approach, documented evidence of the newly emerging words and their usage are presented, and this proves that people do use them. With regard to fieldwork approach whose major instrument is the questionnaire, the reason, among others, is to determine the rate of variation in the choice of NigE constructions among the respondents, using some social variables. Each questionnaire has 11 objective questions. The options are provided in such a way that in each question, some of the options are SE and NigE constructions respectively. Over hundred and fifty-five questionnaires were given to the respondents, expecting them to return not less than 100 in the end for analysis. Sources of data collection through library-based approach include texts such as dailies, literary texts, scholarly works, book chapters, articles and journals which are analysed. The research population and subjects are a cross section of Nigerians made up of students, teachers, lecturers, business men and women. This choice was informed by the fact that these people constitute different social classes and are likely to respond and exhibit different social variables and communicative adequacy or competence in their choices. Importantly, in order to avoid a lopsided analysis, frequency of usage is worked out by using average and simple percentage methods thus:

\[
Av = \frac{\text{Number of respondents in favour of choice of lexical item}}{\text{Total number of respondents}}
\]

\[
\% \text{ of morpho-syntactic choice} = \frac{\text{Total no. of choice of respondents in favour of a variety}}{100 \times 100}
\]

**Literature Review**

Jibril (2005) avers that the ontological debate the legitimacy and existence of Nigerian English generated between 1960s and 1970s has now been settled in the affirmative, given an extensive description of its semantics, phonology and lexis made by such erudite linguists as Banjo (1996), Awonusi (1985), Jowitt (1991), Bamiro (1994) and Patridge (1961). Interestingly, a trailblazing feat has been achieved by Igboanusi (2002) in respect of the formal code and lexicon of this variety of English. Domestication of the English Language in the environments where it is used as a Second Language (L2) or Foreign Language (EFL) is no more a bizarre phenomenon, but a welcome development because the language has today, emerged as a global one, therefore no longer an exclusive preserve of the British or its ancestral home. For this reason, the user can no more be subjected to the English assumptions of correctness and this accounts for the emergence of such expressions today as ‘New Englishes or “World Englishes’. While acknowledging the emergence of new Englishes in Africa, Grieve in Emezue (1998:4) argues: “If English is to be an effective means of communication in Africa ... it is essential that it adapt itself so as to be able to express African concepts.”

To prove to Grieve that this domestication to express African concepts is already in progress, our kinsman, a towering literary icon, Chinua Achebe (of blessed memory), in his *Arrow of God,* aptly demonstrates nativization of the English Language by making a wholesale Mother Tongue (MT) transfer to the language thus:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there’s nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a mask dancing... my spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow (pp.45-46).

Kachru (1988) labels this type of construction “Africanized version of English”, whose Standard English (SE) version, according to Emezue (1998:8), could be realized: “I send one of my sons to be my representative among those people. One has to move with the times, otherwise, one is left behind. I have an inkling or a suspicion that those who fail to come to terms with the Westerners may later regret their lack of foresight.”

The celebrated literary giant demonstrates this form of nativization of English in his novel after he had already declared, according to Kachru (1988) that the English language will be able to carry the weight of his African experience, but that it will be a new English, still in full communication with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surrounding. Much as there are clear demonstrations of the existence of NigE and the fact that it has begun to gain currency, one may not wish away some negative aversions to it and its intelligibility, coming from some scholars. The meaning of NigE is demonstrably captured by Walsh (1967) while making use of a house-hold cliche in NigE which we always hear on the Nigerian radio, television, and read in the dailies : ‘The escaper fled into the bush for his dear life’. According to him, intelligibility is not what is at issue because any user of English, whether as English as Native Language (ENL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) will no doubt understand the meaning of the sentence and will also know that it is not the World Standard English (WSE) generally adopted by
educed users throughout the world, which its standard and correct version is: 'The escaper ran for dear life into the bush.' In the light of this, NigE means those words and expressions that have been so fossilized in Nigeria that they have ceased to be merely imperfectly learned British English and have now become part and parcel of the English Language used in Nigeria. Walsh (1967:47), again, labels them 'Acceptable Local Variants,' the same way 'Car park' is British, but 'parking lot' American English.

RESULTS

The table below sums up the responses of the 100 respondents to the eleven questions. The result of each test item is obtained using the simple percentage method and average.

Table 1. Summary of Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEST</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>(NigE) %</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>472</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>361</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion and Findings

In this section, the formation processes of the NigE lexemes and constructions selected in this study are examined.

RUNS (N)

The morphological process here is the same as those of conversion and neologism because its SE usage where it is derived does not conform to that of NigE, but NigE has appropriated and converted it to mean the SE equivalent of examination malpractice. The word is more commonly heard among students or people that belong to such social groups where slangs are largely used. This sociolinguistic characteristic may have accounted for low choice of the word by the respondents, with only 15% opting for it.

Root Cause (N + N)

The formation pattern of the expression is reduplication as well as redundancy which according to Pei (1966) is common in the grammar of Nigerian languages, and he further says that reduplication occurs when a part of a word or a whole word or phrase is repeated to form new words and generate new meanings as in; buga (base form) = to hit, bugabuga (reduplicated form = hitting; Maza (baseform) = quick, Mazamaza (reduplicated form = quickly, (in Hausa Language). In NigE, however, reduplication assumes a different dimension, giving rise to redundancy: a situation where two different words or phrases that are synonymous and in complementary distribution are joined together and repeated.

Bamiro (1995) makes a similar observation and describes this morphological trend of NigE as lexicosemantic duplication and redundancy. On page 40 of Daily Sun Thur. March 31, 2004, evidence of this feature is found thus: “But why the MTN recharge card scarcity? It is yet unclear what the root cause of the problem is?” Even on Tuesday 14th May, 2013, former President Goodluck Jonathan, in his nation-wide broadcast said “... to unravel the root cause of the problem”. In SE, either one should say root or cause, not to coalesce the two words as if they collocate with each other.

Third Term Agenda (Det + N + N)

The word formation process of this expression is composition or compounding where free morphemes are merged to form a compound, as in SE blackbird, dining room, water bottle, dove tail, etc. Small wonder this SE word formation process has resulted in the NigE Third Term Agenda, a coinage that was invented a little after 2004 by the political class. It has become a household expression to date. It stands for an idea of tenure elongation or tenure extension of former President Olusegun Obasanjo. The phrase is so well known now that it is heard in every circle, including academic, without recourse to its SE form, extension of tenure. It is not surprising that the majority of the respondents made it their choice, as shown in the table above.

Super - Glue (Adj + N)

This derivation has come to stay in NigE probably to corroborate Bamiro (1994) who contends that such neologisms emerge so as to suit new realities, social norms and ecological needs as well as to adapt to the socio-cultural logic and imperatives of the West African geolinguistic environment. The process of realizing this phrase is conversion: where an item moves to another lexical category as in affixation (Quick, Randolph and Greebaum, 1987). English words undergo this process to acquire new meaning. The SE equivalent of this expression is tight fisted, meaning not to be generous or spendthrift.

The Due Process (Det + Adj + N)

Although this is an SE expression with an unmarked English syntax, its meaning is converted in NigE, referring to a government parastatal known as the...
Bureau for Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit which is a unit responsible for monitoring contract awards and their execution to ensure that the procedures followed, prior and during the award and its execution conform to the approved guidelines, hence no favouritism and nepotism. It has so become a phrase appropriated in the nation's geolinguistic context that many of us in Nigeria have almost forgotten its real and full meaning to the extent that the first head of the parastatal, Oby Ezekwesili, earned the sobriquet, ‘Madam Due Process.’

SHOW-BOY (N + N)

This refers to the outer layer of meat that covers its flesh which was formerly known as kpomo in NigE. Despite that kpomo is still in use, currently showboy has overtaken and substituted for it as this is what so many people order in eateries or restaurants, with 34% of the population in favour of it. What is interesting in the formation process is that it agrees to SE compounding feature.

JOINT

The use of this word in the Nigerian context demonstrates the principle of conversion which is popular in the English Language (Atchison, 1989). Joint in SE means quite different things from its meaning in NigE. Its possible meanings in SE are a part of the body and owned by more than one person, while in NigE it means a hidden place of relaxation or a hidden place where one relaxes with a member of the opposite sex. Cannon (1985) makes a prognosis of the activeness of such converted words in the future. Little wonder joint has now gained currency, especially in the social circles in Nigerian English.

ROLL LEATHER (V + N)

The SE form is to play football. Roll leather is more widely used by footballers and their fans in Nigeria. The formation trend is akin to composition. One of the attributes of NigE composition is a mixture of lexemes belonging to English and those of Mother Tongue from any of the languages spoken in the Nigerian environment, but some compounded NigE forms are known and pure English lexemes, as in sugar-daddy, cash-madam, quota-system, bottom-power, chicken-change, bush-meat, etc. and when such compounds come together in NigE formations, they make completely new impressions that may no longer be seen as Nigerian. This demonstrates the level of potentiality and ingenuity inherent in this variety of English.

Super - Private (Adj + Adj)

This is another NgE expression that demonstrates the level of creativity this type of English exhibits. The expression is almost in use now by all and sundry, with the advent of Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) in the country, today, just like all neologisms which have to do with invented trade names for any invention of a product like Xerox, e-mail, nylon, aspirin, etc. The expression in NigE means a telephone line that is not shared with every member of the public, but with only the few one takes into one's confidence.

His hands are full (Pro + N + V + adj)

This expression is a syntactic aspect of NigE. The SE syntactic structure is pro + v + det + n + adj, giving rise to He had his hand full, meaning one is so busy that one cannot offer any help to somebody else. This practice is synonymous with the principle of syncope of SE words in NigE.

Nigerian English Constructions in the Dailies

It is a common knowledge that newspapers are one of the channels for disseminating information. Although when words and expressions appear in the dailies, they conform to its style which includes informality and chattiness of language, lexical repetition, coining of new and outlandish adjectival formations (Crystal and Davy, 1969). The NigE constructions depict the uniqueness of this variety in the Nigerian environment. The NigE realizations include:


Its SE literal form is bribery. Idiomatically, it means greasing somebody's palm. Its NigE form today is informed by the grievousness of calling the act bribery, hence it is euphemistically called palm rubbing or palm oiling.

To Show One Pepper (Prep + V + Art + N)

It means to defeat or to have an advantage over one's opponent. In Vanguard, December, 2002, former President Obasanjo used the NigE expression when he was encouraging the National Football team on the telephone to go ahead and defeat their opponents.

Media Practitioner (N + N)

The formation process, no doubt, is the same as that of SE. Its use in NigE is possibly as a result of wrong analogy to some SE words that follow such a pattern as in medical practitioners, legal practitioners, etc. The adjective before the noun shows what these professionals practise. According to Oguntase in the Daily Sun of June 16, 2005, the analogy is wrong because media cannot be practised, rather journalism is what can be practised. Therefore, the SE form is media professional.
the realization of the allomorph ‘-ial’ which is functionally adjectival as in such standard English expressions as presidential aspirant or presidential hopeful. In other words, the English rule that informs most of the English words ending in ‘-ial’ to belong to the adjectival class is over generalized in NigE hence presidential material (The News July, 31, 2006). The phrase stands for the people’s popular choice in a presidential election.

Bus Stop Parliamentarians (N + N + N) (Vanguard, Wednesday Dec. 13, 2006). In NigE parlance, this refers to politically conscious Nigerians who meet at bus stops to discuss political matters of interest. This type of discussion is highly argumentative, the way it is done on the floor of the National Assembly or State Houses of Assembly.

Electioneering Campaign (Adj + N) (Daily Sun July, 2006) This is a feature of lexical repetition. SE has it as either electioneering or campaign, not the two together or one modifying the other. In NigE usage, as found in Nigerian newspapers, electioneering undergoes conversion from the nominal class to the adjectival class.

A level playing ground (Art + N + Adj + N) SE realizes it as a level playing field (the News 31 July, 2006).

Nigerian English Acronyms in Use

An acronym could be a word formed from the initial letters of a name or part of a series of words This accounts for such English acronyms as FANZINE, ATM, SWOT, WAEC, NATO, MOTEL, etc. In the same manner, NigE, in parroting SE, also utilizes acronyms as its own word formation process as in the following:

NAPEP (ADJ + N + PREP + N + N + N)

This stands for National Agency for Poverty Eradication Programme. Although its formation process is the same as that of SE, its uniqueness is realized in its use which sounds derogatory in the social circle, especially at the inception of the programme. The reason is that people were using it in the pejorative sense for somebody who was poor and lived below poverty level. In other words, the acronym is highly associated with poverty and to demonstrate that, special tricycles were exclusively reserved for the poor and low income earners who were thought not to be able to afford fares for the usual modes of transportation. People hardly remember or care to reproduce its original and full meaning, hence, it has become a popular coinage associated with poverty in Nigeria.

KAROTA (N + N + N + N)

KAROTA, whose full form is Kano Road Traffic Agency, is one of the metropolitan acronyms in Kano city that is so beginning to gain wide currency, especially in Kano metropolis that once it is mentioned, people know that Kano State Road Traffic Marshalls are around. To football fans, the meaning is now being extended to football teams in yellow jerseys, as Borussia Dortmund Football Club in Germany is referred to as Yan KAROTA. It should be observed that one interesting thing about NigE acronyms is that once in use, the users hardly remember the full form. Its use is increasingly spreading among all the members and segments of the population in the city, even in jocular situations.

EFCC (Adj + Adj + N + N)

This is an acronym for Economic and Financial Crimes Commission which is an agency that handles financial and economic related cases. The ellipted form is mostly in use as one usually hears people talk about inviting or calling in EFCC, and once it is mentioned, it sends some shocking waves to the culprit who may have committed a financial or economic crime, even non related ones like examination malpractices. Like other NigE acronyms, the full form of EFCC is hardly heard among Nigerians.

PHCN (N + N + N + N)

The morphological process is the same as that of EFCC. It is a lexical formation recently imported into the NigE vocabulary to replace the old NEPA. The acronym stands for Power Holding Company of Nigeria. The morphological process agrees with that of neologism in the English Language. As it applies to all NigE acronyms, Bamiro (1994) holds a similar view that NigE users contract words or word groups that not only help in collapsing potentially longer expressions and structures.

CONCLUSION

This paper, I believe, has given credence to the existence of NigE as found in the speeches and scholarly literatures of Nigerian users of English. It is equally a proof that there are some levels of variation between SE and NigE in respect of morphology and syntax, while at some linguistic levels, there are points of convergence. Very interestingly, it is observed that geo-linguistic situations make the use of NigE indispensable as in fashion: fellas trousers; food: tuwo, egusi, pepper soup; music: awilo and other aspects of life where mutual intelligibility between interlocutors requires its use.

It is equally imperative to state that this work could spur other researchers to engage in future studies on NigE, given the inevitability of societal dynamisms which encourage emergence of new words, expressions and constructions. Significantly, given this paper, the audience may appreciate the emergence and challenge NigE poses to SE, for some of the words and sentence constructions in our use of English in Nigeria are
typically Nigerian. Therefore, we should be able to draw a line between NigE and SE forms, especially in pedagogical settings.

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DAILIES


Vanguard: Thurs, November, 2006

APPENDIX

THE TESTS

A respondent is required to fill in the blank space with one of the four lexical items or expressions.

Q.1. Jerry told his classmate that he was good at examination…

(a) cheating (b) malpractice (c) runs (d) activities

Q.2. It is yet not clear what the … of fuel scarcity are.

(a) root causes (b) roots (c) causes (d) matters

Q.3. The legislator was accused of supporting …

(a) extension of tenure (b) elongation of tenure (c) politics (d) third term agenda

Q.4. The local government chairman has --- hands, hence he lost out in the subsequent election.

(a) tight fistled (b) tight (c) gummy (d) super glue

Q.5. … checks abuses of the process of award and execution of public contrasts. (a) ICPC (b) ASUU (c) COEAUSU (d) The due process.

Q.6. The boy told the food vendor that his choice of meat was…

(a) kpomo (b) show boy (c) the skinny part (d) Kanda

Q.7. After having a busy day, John likes to relax his nerves in a …

(a) joint(b) relaxation centre (c) hotel (d) restaurant

Q.8. Arsenal and Manchester United are going to …

(a) play soccer (b) roll leather (c) dine (d) wine

Q.9. Lizzy has two GSM lines. One is general, the other one is …

(a) super private (b) best (c) good (d) better

Q.10. Ugo was told by the legislator representing his constituency that he could not help him because (a) his hands were tied (b) his hands were full (c) he had his hands tied (d) his hands were fully

Q.11. Sharing of the money after the party's meeting resulted in a …

(a) free-for-all fight (b) free for all (c) nagging (d) separation

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