

**ASPECTS OF NIGERIANISMS IN NEWS ITEMS OF A SELECTED INTERNET
MEDIATED FORUM: *NAIJ.COM***

Simeon Olufunso Sonde,
Department of English,

Tai Solarin University of Education,

Ijebu Ode, Nigeria

[\(sosonde@tasued.edu.ng\)](mailto:sosonde@tasued.edu.ng)

Abstract

Nigerianisms are the transfer of characteristics of Nigerian Indigenous languages (NIL), the source languages, to Target Language (TL), English. Many studies have been carried out on English language in Nigeria and the need for Nigerian English, but enough scholarly attention has not been drawn to identifying aspects of *Nigerianisms* in *Naij.com*, an internet mediated forum, which is the concern of this work. The Cross Association Theory (CAT) and Ignorance Hypothesis (IH) served as our theoretical framework. One hundred online news items randomly selected from *Naij.com forum* were critically examined and analysed. Nigerians are well disposed to English language for the roles it plays as a source of “power” to users of the language against those who rely solely on the NIL for their interactions. The presence of lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic features in the use of English Language in Nigeria points to English language as a by-product of language contact and English as a second language (ESL) in Nigeria. Among aspects of lexico-semantic features that characterize *Nigerianisms* are coinages, lexical transfers, semantic extensions, lexical duplications and abbreviations. The morpho-syntactic features that are also present include redundancy, compounding and lexical/syntactic parallelisms. The Nigerian variety of English language has come to stay; the major obstacle that stands against its standardization is that of codification.

Key words: Nigerianisms, lexico-semantic features, morpho-syntactic features, Internet mediated forum

Background to the study

The English language is older than Nigeria as a nation. It was formally introduced in 1842 by the first batch of Christian missionaries who arrived in Badagry to evangelize as well as educate Nigerians (Tomori, 1981). The English language has become so much adapted that it has been domesticated, nativised and acculturated (Adegbija, 2004). Achebe, in a conference on African Literature and University Curriculum, opines on the issue of the choice of language for literary expression, that if the white man is not ashamed to colonize (Africa), then (Africa) should not be ashamed to colonize his language. What should be opposed to should be the use of imaginary purity of the English language ... (Achebe, 1963). In a different context, Banjo (1995:126) quotes Achebe, "I feel that English language will be able

to carry the weight of my African Experience. But it will have to be a new English still in communion with its ancestral home but attend to its new African surroundings”. Aloba (2012) opines that English as a second language (ESL) in Nigeria is used in such a way that the meanings of some lexical items [are] often changed, thereby bringing about misconceptions and misinterpretations, especially with regards to acceptability of the usage to other English users outside the Nigeria environment.

Language contact is a linguistic situation in which two or more languages, one foreign and the other indigenous, co-exist. The internet is a collection of different computer networks across the globe: private, commercial, academic or government. Computer mediated communication (CMC) is also known as computer-mediated discourse written in group interactions, online chats or written communication (Jones 1995:3).

Naij.com was founded in Lagos state in year 2012 by Genesis Technology Partners with the slogan, ‘Proudly Nigerian’. It is a predominantly entertainment and political motivated website. As at year 2015, the site has had more than 13 million monthly readers and it was ranked as the 16th overall most visited websites in Nigeria by Alexa. The bloggers and columnists of the website are Japheth J Omojuwa, Tolu Ogunlesi, Bayo Olulphwunda, Ibraheem Dooba and Mawuna Kountonin. The website also generates its content based on user submitted stories. (naij.com site info, Alexa internet. Retrieved 2015-07-24)

Purpose of the study

1. To make a lexico-semantic study of Nigerian English in internet mediated forum
2. To examine morpho-syntactic features in the use of English Language in Nigeria and
3. To see English language as a by product of language contact and English as a second language (ESL) in Nigeria.

Method of analysis

Ignorance Hypothesis and the Cross Association Theories serve as the theoretical framework for the study. The data for the study were derived from comments on 100 news items selected from Naij.com internet forum. The selected data are subjected to descriptive analysis.

Literature review

Scholars have confirmed that English has developed some Nigerian features which distinguish it from other varieties of English worldwide known as Nigerian English. Bamiro (1991:1) tags it 'Nigerianisation' and its features are tagged 'Nigerianisms'. Bamgbose (1995:11-63) calls it 'indigenized or nativied English' and Adegbija (2004:20) terms it 'Home Grown', 'Made Native', 'acculturated', domesticated English' adopted and tamed in line with the Nigerian culture. Dadzie and Awonusi (2004:21) disagree with the existence of Nigerian English. They opine that what exists is a bundle of errors that does not befit the title, Nigerian English. Adegbija (2004) supports the existence of English language in Nigeria. He uses face-to face interaction as his data base. He discusses the level at which domestication has occurred : idiomatic, lexical, phonological and semantic levels. Jowitt's (1991) elaborates on variations in Nigerian English which include errors. He classifies the errors into two types: peculiar (i.e. idiosyncratic) which he calls 'vulgar' errors that should be avoided and general (i.e. common) in usage which he also called institutionalized' errors. They include errors of pluralizing uncountable nouns and misuse of articles) which are mainly frowned at by highly competent users. Ogunsiji (2007) contends that NE is a legitimate variety of the SBE. He discusses extensively to illustrate that the English language has been nativized and confirms that hybridization has taken place as a result of its contact with the indigenous languages and cultures Nigeria.

Apart of the earlier roles that English language played in Nigeria as language of education, commerce, government publications, law, politics, mass media, and others, most recently English has become the language of computer mediated forum (CMF), global system of mobile (GSM) communication and short messaging system (SMS). According to Mgbemena (2007:110), the introduction of Global System of Mobile Communication network GSM has provided a contemporary challenge to language of global communication. Chiluya (2004:51) observes that in Nigeria since 2001, new linguistic style has been associated with the Global system for Mobile Communication (GSM) revolution. Awonusi (2004) traces the history of GSM in Nigeria. Chiluya (2007), apart from tracing the history, categorizes and presents the functions of GSM in Nigeria. He identifies abbreviations, language contractions and sensational spelling as characteristics of SMS text managers in Nigeria.(p. 9). He also studied the Nigerianism and grammatical units/categories of text messaging.

Christal and Dary (1969: 12-116) lists general features of informal conversation to include: inexplicitness (there is reliance on extra linguistic context of conversation), randomness of subject matter and general lack of planning (there are relatively brief and domestic

exchanges), normal non-fluency, loosely coordinated clauses, regular use of assimilation and elision and avoidance of specialized terms/phraseology.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical perspectives for this work are Cross Association Theory and Ignorance Hypothesis. The Ignorance Hypothesis, proposed by Newmark & Reibel (1968) to explain L2 learners' errors, postulates that a second language user uses whatever is at their disposal in the L1 as if they do not know how to say what they want to say in the L2. This leads to the interference that results from the ignorance of the user of the language. The adult may want to say what he does not yet know how to say in L2 and he uses whatever means he has at his disposal ...” ignorance is not an alternative to interference, but at best a precondition for it. * Ignorance – without – interference - avoidance strategy → to paraphrase or use near - equivalent * Interference – without - ignorance - drilling to become error free/self-correct.

On the other hand, Cross – Association theory opines that direct interference from the mother tongue is not a useful assumption. George (1972) reconstructs the mental process of induction & generalization which the L1 German learner of English seems to be subject to. James (1980:220) explains this further. He says that ignorance and interference should not be seen as synonymous. Ignorance is just a pre-condition for interference. He identifies two possibilities: 1. a situation where there are identical formal devices in L1 and L2.ii) a situation of opposing structures of L1 and L2.

Analysis

Lexico-semantic features

Features of English in a non-native context are indicative of acculturation of English in the new socio-cultural and linguistic contexts. Non-English contexts and the need to use contextually appropriate words justify the occurrence of innovations in language use (Igboanusi 2002). Many of the items of the texts exhibit some lexico-semantic properties of Nigerian English as will be revealed subsequently.

Lexical Duplication occurs when lexical items are repeated in near proximity within a sentence. Arogundade (2011:46) states that it, sometimes, takes the form of a complete

repetition of the preceding words in the subsequent one or a repetition of a lexical item in close succession.

1. *Story story story*, which amount did INEC return in Lagos which was given to them by Tinubu and Fashola.
2. *Lie lie government*.

In the examples above story and lie are used to show emphasis so that attention will be given to the issues being addressed.

Lexical Transfer could be described as the direct transfer of lexical items from the source language (L1) to the target language (L2). Examples are:

1. Everyone calls '*Baba*. Say Buhari, Say '*Baba*'.

Baba in the two expressions above means father or a male parent in British English but in Nigeria English informal setting, it is used to refer to anyone who is respected in the society. In the second expression, President Muhammad Buhari is so called for the qualities the people believed he possesses to resolve the social, political and economic problems of the entire nation.

2. His *agbada* needs to be adjusted. I saw him in his flowing *Agbada* stepping on the podium.

Agbada is a typical flowing top cloth among the Yoruba people of Nigeria which is now worn by all tribes throughout the country for the prestige accorded to the person that wears it.

3. Everybody is trying to give the sick economy *agbo* instead of antibiotics.

Agbo is an African traditional medicine given to a sick person. It is a product from boiled herbs and leaves. In terms of the economy of Nigeria that is in recession, it is believed that the appropriate remedy in terms of economic measures should be applied to solve the problems. In this expression, the use of *agbo* or drug has been extended to include cure for human sickness as well as recession or failure in a nation's economy.

Semantic Contrast involves the use of English lexical items to express entirely different meanings or concepts from the original meaning For instance:

1. Saka's *big mouth* won him a space in the house.

The literal meaning of ‘*big*’ in that sentence is large. But in the context of use in the sentence, it means to talk too much. His ability to talk at times when it is not necessary won him the prize.

2. I met a *celestial* prophet who gave a clue.

Celestial in standard British English means that relates to heaven. As a result, we have celestial bodies- sun, moon, stars, etc., while the angels remain the celestial beings. In the context of Nigerian English *celestial prophet*, is a prophet that pastors in the celestial church. This is a denomination of Christian religion in Nigeria. Members of this Christian denomination are identified by their white garment they wear and their bare footed mode of worship.

Semantic extension: In this case the original meaning of a lexical item is retained and extended Examples are:

1. She has a hundred *daughters and mothers*.

Daughter and mother in the context Yoruba, a daughter refers to more than one’s own biological daughter. It includes cousins, nieces, children of friends, relations and colleagues, while mothers are more than the biological mother but all elderly women that are old enough to be mothers in the extended family. It also includes female friends of biological mother, grandmothers and aunties to the individual in question.

Semantic shift: This gives a rough equivalent of an indigenous concept that does not exist in English. 1. She met her *co-wife* there.

a *co-wife* is not meaningful in the British English where monogamy is practiced. In Nigeria, where Islam religion is one of the major religions that dominate the society, a man can marry more than one wife, there could be second or third wife in a family. A wife can have another woman with whom she is sharing her husband as a *co-wife*.

Coinages: newly created words resulting from the prevailing socio-linguistic factors in a culture. Examples are:

1. She maintains herself with the help of her *aristos*. They will pay baby factory operators to get baby for them after they might have *wasted* their active time to *aristo* activities. Now they tagged it as single mother.

aristo is not found in an English dictionary. The word ‘aristo’ is coined from the term aristocracy meaning noble, lord, etc. A woman who carries ‘aristo’ is a young lady who has sexual affairs with noble or rich men for the purpose of financial gain. This practice is common among university undergraduates in Nigeria. This also be applies to young men who also engage in sexual affairs with rich and influential women.

2. He uses a *chinco* phone, yet he parades himself a big boy.

A phone produced or imported from China.

3. You can imagine him dating a *hot* girl yet...

Literarily, hot means to have a high temperature, in Nigerian English as used above, it means a girl that can reveal a large part of her thigh. On the other hand, it could mean a girl that is sexually exposed or active.

4. When she was asked, she said *juju* was used on him.

The *juju* is not an English expression, it means charm or spell. It could also mean a form of spiritual or supernatural power which is used to influence him either positively or negatively

5. She complained about her *hubby's* dislike for big *boobs*.

Hubby is a Nigerian youth's name for husband while *boob* is informally used for breast

Morpho-syntactic features

Morphological Processes morphology is a branch of language study that deals mainly with internal structures of words and the rules governing the formation of new words in a language or any of its varieties.

Inflectional Morphemes are added to lexical items without change in their word class. The use of inflectional morphemes shows a high level of linguistic innovation in Nigerian English discourse. Examples are:

1. The *one-eyed-man* claimed he can see beyond the physical

There is a use of an inflectional morpheme “-d” in *one-eyed-man* turning the word ‘eye’, a noun to an adjective qualifying ‘man’.

2. The commissioner has been *four-one-nined* online many times before he realized...
‘*four-one-nined*’ is a compound word that used to be a noun is turned to a verb with the addition of inflectional morpheme ‘-d’. The inflection turns the word to the main verb of the expression.

Compounding: This is a combination of two or more base words to form a new word In this case, we have two root or base words combined together to form them,

1. The members of the house declared that the issue of budget padding is a *no-go-area*. Despite the act that the act of padding the budget (which involves addition of some extra budgetary allocation in favour of some members of the house) is a crime to the state, the speaker of the house of assembly, Honorable Dogara declared the case a *no-go-area* that is it is not an issue to be faulted, instead, the complaint becomes the prosecuted.

2. For their failure to get any profitable job doing, they became *area boys*.
area-boys in Nigerian English are jobless boys who stay in a place and commit crimes of different types such as miscreants and extortionists.

Acronyms and Clipping: Acronyms are initials which are pronounced as single words without any punctuation. Examples are: UI(University of Ibadan), UNILORIN(University of Ilorin), U(You), etc. Clipping happens when a part of a word is cut off to express it as a whole. Clipping comes in two ways. In the first category, part of the word is cut off and the other is retained or kept to represent the whole with the part kept as the first syllable or the median (e.g. Demo). On the other hand, elements from one part of the word is used for the whole (e.g. Maths, Dat(that), urself(yourself), etc (Bolaji Fowowe, (Adeyemo and Mafiakingorim 2012.)

1. *Pls* (Please) Mama Iweala, kindly *cum* (come) to rescue us from the economy *buah*
2. *Hmmm!!* All of u have spoken well, *pls* (please) correct *dat* (*that*) mistake now like Fela said, “teacher don’t teach me nonsense” to me this is chain not change, the change I see is this.

3. Betrayals, no comment for *u(you), ur(your) days rI(are) numbered very soon...*

Redundancy is the ‘unnecessary’ repetition of certain lexical items that could easily be done away with in a given discourse.

1. If Cynthia had made it you’ll see other girls from her *wagon*. But now she got into trouble her friends will be careful...it will not stop them, they will try their luck ***again and again***. No wonder he did it *again and again*.
2. The general manager is a *superior superior* to the head of production
3. The meeting holds 6:00 p.m. *in the evening*.

In the three sentences above, ‘*again*’ ‘*superior*’ and ‘*in the evening*’ need not be added to the sentences as the sentences are already grammatical without their inclusion. There is a feature that marks out most Nigerian language use of duplication that is transferred to English language. Whereas

Conclusion

Nigerians are well disposed to English language for the roles it plays as a source of “power” to users of the language against those who rely solely on the NIL for their interactions. The Nigerian variety of English language has come to stay; the major obstacle that stands against its standardization is that of codification. Another fact is that NE is a product of language in contact, which should be appreciated by teachers of English in L2 setting like Nigeria.

References

Adegbija, E. (2004) *The domestication of English language in Nigeria*. Lagos: University press:

pp 20-44.

Alobo, J O. (2012) “Semantic change in Nigeria English Lexis” in *Journal of Nigeria English Studies Association* (JNESA) vol.15 No.2, September 2015:pp.55-64.

Arogundade, M.S.(2011) “Sociolinguistic Investigation of Nigerianism on The Nairaland Forum”, a Master of Arts Project Submitted to the Department of English, University of Ibadan

Awonusi, V.O(2004) ‘Little’ English and the law of energetics: A sociolinguistic study of SMS

text messaging as register and discourse in Nigeria English” in Segun Awonusi and E.A

Babalola (eds) *The Domestic of English in Nigeria*. Lagos: University of Lagos press. Pp.45-62.

Banjo,A. (1995) “English in the Nigerian Environment” in A Bangbose Banjo and Thomas (ed)

New Englishes.A West African Perspective. Ibadan, Musoro.

Bamgbose, A, et al (eds) (1995) *New Englishes: A West African Perspective*. Mosuro: Ibadan.

Bamiro, E. (1991) “The Social and Functional Power of Nigerian English”. *World Englishes*, Great Britain, Pergamon Press

Bolaji E.T., Fowowe, S.S., Adeyemo J.A. and Mafikuyomi J.A. (2012). “Text Messaging as a Lect of Informal Nigerian English” in *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association* (JNESA) Vol. 15 No. 2 Sept. 2012:pp 65-84.

Chiluwa, I. C (2008) SMSText-messaging and the Nigerian Christian Context: constructing values and sentiments <http://www.edu.au/users/He/JOURNAL/issues/2008/24-2.pdf>

------(2007) The ‘Nigerianess’ of SMS text messages in *Journal of English Studies Association* (JNESA) vol. 12. No 1 pp.95-99.

Crystal, D. and Dary, D.(1969) *Investigating English Style*. London: Longman

Dadzie, A. B. K. AND Awonusi , S (eds) (2004) *Nigerian English: Influences and Characteristics*. Concepts Publications, Palm Groove , Somolu, Lagos.

George, H. V. (1972) “Common Errors in Language Learning” in James C. *Contrastive Analysis*, UCNW, Bangor.

Igboanusi, H. (2002) *Igbo English in the Nigerian novel*. Ibadan. Enicrownft Publishers.

Jowitt, D. (1991) *Nigerian English Usage: An Introduction*, Longman Nigeria PLC Oba Akran
Ikeja Lagos.

Mbgemena, J. (2007) “The languages of GSM/SMS: Some Pedagogical implications” *Journal of the Nigerian English Studies Association* vol.12 N012, pp.110-120

Naij.com site info, Alexa internet. Retrieved 2015-07-24).

Newmak and Reibel (1968) *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*:

<http://book.google.com/book?isbn=0194371891>

Ogunsiji A. (2005) “Teaching English as Communication in an EL2 Context: An Overview”

Paper in English and Linguistics (PEL) 1.5:40

Tomori, A (1981) *Missionaries Activities and English in Nigeria*. Lagos: Evans