

**DOMESTICATION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA: AN
EXAMINATION OF MORPHO-SYNTACTIC TRENDS IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH
(NGE)**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines certain developmental patterns Nigerian English (NgE) 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), is adopted. The first part of the work provides an overview of the place of NgE 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 reveals that the uniqueness of NgE is considerably realized in such linguistic features as conversion, acronym, composition, redundancy, coinage and reduplication. It is, as well, observed that some NgE forms exhibit the same morphological and syntactic patterns as those of Standard English (SE) while some exhibit significant variations.*

KEYWORDS: Domestication, English Language, Examination NgE, Nigeria

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 fulfil the communicative functions of such a linguistic environment, just as Jowitt (1991) 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; that is, 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, representing the geographical areas of ethnic groups such as Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc.

Therefore, this presentation dwells on certain morphological and syntactic attributes like acronyms, conversion and neologisms. Others include compounding, redundancy or repetition of lexical items, reduplication and coinages which have become a fundamental characteristic of NgE as exemplified by the following lexical items: **root causes, anti-third termites, KAROTA, NAPEP, due process, super glue, runs**, etc.

Source of Data

Having lived and interacted with various social and occupational groups in Nigeria, including students, journalists and traders, I was able to, between September 2013 and May, 2015 extract and ascertain from people's speeches, students' scripts, dailies, media advertisements, novels, articles and journals written by Nigerian users of English the meaning of those words

and expressions that have become distinctively Nigerian (alien to Standard English) and their formation processes vis-a-vis their SE equivalents. Therefore, extracts from these sources constitute my source of data and information.

How legitimate is the typology “*nigerian english*”?

The typology 'Nigerian English' has come to stay. This follows that the expression ought not to be a controversial one in the academic terrain, but one that should by now deserve huge scholarly attention. Jibril (2005) avers that the ontological debate this variety of 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 Second Language (L2) of 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 (1964) argues thus: "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 its Standard English (SE) version could be realized thus:

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 in Smith (ed) (1988) that

“... the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But 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 NgE 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 NgE is demonstrably captured by Walsh (1967) while making use of a house-hold cliché in NgE which we always hear on the radio, television, and read in the dailies thus: '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 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 educated 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, NgE 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, again, labels them 'Acceptable Local Variants' (P47), the same way 'Car park' is British, but

'parking lot' American English.

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." By Morpho-syntactic trends in NgE, I mean certain formation of words, combination of words, expressions and constructions that have become distinctively Nigerian in recent times. Given this explanatory background, let us proceed to examine those distinct trends.

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 NgE, but NgE 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.

Root Cause (N + N)

The word formation pattern 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; **bugu** (base form) = to hit, **bugubugu** (reduplicated form = hitting; **Maza** (baseform) = quick, **Mazamaza** (reduplicated form = quickly, (in Hausa Language).

In NgE, 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 (1994) makes a similar observation and describes this morphological trend of NgE as lexico-semantic 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 NgE **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 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*.

Super - Glue (Adj + N)

This derivation has come to stay in NgE probably to corroborate Bamiro (1991) 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 NgE, 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 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 NgE. 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. 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 NgE. Its possible meanings in SE are a part of the body and owned by

more than one person, while in NgE 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 NgE composition is a mixture of lexemes belonging to English and that of MT from any of the languages spoken in the Nigerian environment, but some compounded NgE 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 NgE formation, 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 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.

His hands were full {Pro + N + V + adj}

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

Free - for - all – fight (Adj + Prep + Det + N)

The reason for the existence of the expression and its syntactic trend could be that many of us have forgotten or no longer conscious of its standard form **free for all** (Adj + Prep + Det). It could also be as a result of analogical formations which are formed from the existing English lexical items through the process of affixation and compounding which Bamiro (1995) brands collocational innovation.

Nigerian English Construction 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 NgE constructions depict the uniqueness of this variety in the Nigerian environment. Some of the major newspapers used in this study are *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Trust*, *The News* and *The Vanguard*, all published in Nigeria. The NgE realizations include:

PALM RUBBING (N + V) (*Daily Sun*, September 30, 2004, p.32).

Its SE literal form is bribery. Idiomatically, it means greasing somebody's palm. Its NgE 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 NgE 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 NgE 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**.

Presidential Material (Adj + N)

The phrase is frequently used in the country in the media. In SE, it is **President material**. The variation is in 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 NgE hence **presidential material** (The News July, 31, 2006).

Bus Stop Parliamentarians (N + N + N) (*Vanguard*, Wednesday Dec. 13, 2006). In NgE 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 NgE usage, as found in 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, for this reason, we have such English acronyms as FANZINE, ATM, SWOT, WAEC, NATO, MOTEL, etc. In the same manner, NgE, in parodying 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 was 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 that is so beginning to gain wide currency, especially in the Kano metropolis that once it is mentioned, people know that Kano State Road Traffic Marshalls are around. By 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 NgE 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 NgE 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 NgE vocabulary to replace the old **NEPA**. The acronym stands for Power Holding Company of Nigeria. The morphological process agrees with that of coinage which is also a feature of neologism in the English Language. As it applies to all NgE acronyms, Bamiro (1994) holds a similar view that NgE users contract words or word groups that not only help in collapsing potentially longer expressions and structures.

Even in areas of clothing or fabrics, food, traditional titles and music, domestication of the English Language by NgE is also extant, hence the occurrence of such expressions as **fella trousers, awilo, Pepper soup, egusi, tuwo, babariga**, etc.

CONCLUSION

This paper, I believe, has given credence to the existence of NgE 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 NgE 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 NgE indispensable as in fashion, food, music 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 NgE, given the inevitability of societal dynamisms which encourage emergence of new words, expressions and constructions. Significantly, given this paper, the audience will appreciate the emergence and challenge NgE poses to SE, for some of the words we use and sentence constructions in our use of English are typically Nigerian. Therefore, we should be able to draw a line between NgE and SE forms.

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