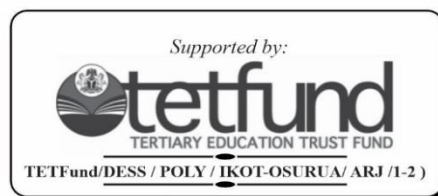


The Role of Multilingualism in the Emergence of Nigerian English



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Abstract

This research explores the impact of multilingualism on the English language in Nigeria. With approximately 400 local languages present in Nigeria, the use of English has been influenced by a vast array of cultures, regions, and other factors. This trend is also evident in Akwa Ibom, where approximately 20 local languages and dialects are spoken. Speakers exhibit deviations and colourations in lexical, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic features of Standard English. At the lexical level, coinage, hybridization, analogization, transliteration, and transfer are observed. At the phonological level, local languages result in a reduced vowel system, a reduced intonation system, non-differentiation in some aspects of length, absence of glottalization, voicing of non-voiced consonant endings, absence of consonant clusters, insertion of epenthetic vowels in some consonant clusters, and substitution of alveolar fricatives for interdental fricatives. Plural morpheme generalization, word reduplication, and deviated tag question formation are found at the syntactic level. At the semantic and pragmatic level, new meanings are attached to words and expressions based on culture. The pragmatic features of Nigerian English emphasize politeness. Code-switching and code-mixing are regular and unavoidable features of Nigerian English. The research recommends that language teachers in Nigeria should be familiar with the features of Nigerian English to teach both Standard Nigerian English and Standard English effectively. The use of Nigerian English should be encouraged as it reflects Nigerian culture.

Keywords: *Multilingualism, English Language, Nigerian English, Pragmatics, code-switching*

Introduction

Language use by speakers is not arbitrary but influenced by several sociocultural factors. These factors include the speaker's identity, the identity of the listener, the topic of discussion, and the context in which the speech occurs (Fishman, 1972; Udom, 2017).

Numerous studies have explored language use in multilingual communities, revealing that migrations, colonialism, globalization, and indigenous languages with regional variations have led to complex language use. Moreover, the development of media, mobility, and globalization play significant roles in language discourse. Nigeria is a diverse society, with multiple languages and cultures. English is the predominant language used in schools and workplaces, while local languages are also taught (Aronin & David, 2008; Udom, 2013). English is the primary medium of instruction in Nigerian schools, with students required to learn both English and their mother tongue. In multilingual societies such as Nigeria, individuals often speak more than one language. This study examines the characteristics of Nigerian English resulting from multilingualism and language use in Nigeria, with a focus on Ikwa Ibom State.

Literature Review

The Concept of Multilingualism

Multilingualism is the practice of using more than two languages for communication, whether by individuals, groups, or countries. In societies where multilingualism is prevalent, people regularly employ multiple languages to meet their needs. In the context of a country, multilingualism can refer to the use of more than one language by speakers, or to the promotion of such use by multiple individuals. This global phenomenon is driven in part by the demands of globalization and cultural exchange, as Holmes (2008) notes. To accommodate the various types of languages used in bilingual or multilingual societies, there is now a functional classification system. According to Akindele and Adegbite (2005), these categories include First Language or Mother Tongue, Second Language, Foreign Language, National Language, Lingua Franca, Official Language, Regional Language, Pidgins, and Creoles. (Cf: Udom, 2016; Ekanem et.al, 2023) In Nigeria, for instance, a rich array of languages has given rise to a bilingual speaking community. This diversity has helped shape the various ways in which English is spoken and understood in the country.

Nigerian English

English has spread to other parts of the world since the fifth century. British traders and Christian preachers were sent to Nigeria and other West African

countries to spread the language. During the period from the 1600s to the 1800s, colonialists were also involved in this process. When Europeans and Portuguese first met on the coasts of West Africa, Pidgin and Creole languages were created (Eka, 2000; Ogu, 1992; Udofot, 2007; Udom, 2016).

Once the colonialists settled down, Standard English became the language of government, education, commerce, and general official and sometimes private interaction with the indigenous languages still intact. (Eka, 2000, p. 14).

The English brought to Nigeria during the colonial era differs from what it used to be. There is now a type of English generally praised and known as Nigerian English.

Nigerians have a wide array of terms and phrases to describe themselves, so they have created new ones to suit different situations. Nigerian culture cannot be precisely conveyed in English, which has led to the use of imported words and phrases from Nigerian English and local creativity to express what it means to be Nigerian. According to Raji-Oyelade (2012), Nigerians enjoy inventing new words and utilizing technology to alter how they write, speak, teach, read and recreate. Adegbija (2004) refers to this process of adapting English to fit the Nigerian context as the "Domestication of English in Nigeria".

In his words, "domestication" in Nigerian English means "home-grown," "made native," "adapted and tamed," or "tamed to fit the Nigerian environment." Many people in Nigeria speak more than 400 different languages, and Udofot said that the Nigerianization of English was caused by people using it to talk about their own experiences and situations (2000). Bamgbose (1995) also said, "The English Language has been pidginized, nativized, acculturated, and twisted to express unfamiliar ideas and ways of interacting." We can confidently say Nigerian English has a long past because many studies have tried to put together its pronunciation, lexis, semantics, syntax, and communicative form. This new form of English is generally accepted and has developed traits that make it stand out as a distinct and valid subset of world Englishes.

The State of Languages in Nigeria

Nigeria has over 250 to 400 local languages spoken by its people. According to UNESCO, Africa hosts 30% of the world's languages, with over 2,000 languages spoken. In contrast, only 18% of the world's languages are spoken in Europe and the Americas. Nigeria is home to many ethnic groups that speak about 400 local languages. Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are the three main languages spoken in Nigeria. However, other languages are spoken by people

living on the geographic border or by those whose native tongue is not one of the three main languages. Only a few individuals speak Indigenous languages. Individuals who know each of the main ethnic languages are thought to number between 2 and 8 million. Nigeria is known to be the only African country where three of the continent's four main language groups are most common. About 385 minor languages are spoken by up to 2 million people, such as Birom, Jarawa, Angas, Mada, Ankwa, Amo, Kaje, Jaba, Kataf, Gbagyi, and Koro. The local languages spoken in Nigeria have legal status at the state level, a standard alphabet, and much writing. Societal multilingualism exists where two or more languages are spoken in the same culture, and some experts have suggested a Progressive Trilingual Approach to enable every Nigerian to learn a language other than their own over time. This could help identify the most widely spoken language to serve as a lingua franca, while English would be used for official national and international communication. Nigeria has over 250 to 400 local languages spoken by its people. According to UNESCO, Africa hosts 30% of the world's languages, with over 2,000 languages spoken. In contrast, only 18% of the world's languages are spoken in Europe and the Americas. Nigeria is home to many ethnic groups that speak about 400 local languages.

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The tables below capture the multilingual situation, although not all the minority languages are mentioned.

Main Indigenous Languages

S/N	Languages	Region	Users Percentage
1	Hausa	North	56%
2	Igbo	East	32%
3	Yoruba	West	41%

Majority-Minority Indigenous Languages

S/N	Languages	Region	Users Percentage
1	Fulde or Fulani	North	9%
2	Kanuri	North	11%
3	Tiv	North	8%
4	Nupe	North	15%
5	Idoma	North	9%
6	Ebira	North	6%
7	Jukun	North	8%
8	Efik	South	9%
9	Ibibio	South	10%
10	Edo	South	10%
11	Ijaw	South	7%
12	Urhobo	South	8%

Some Minor-Minority Indigenous Languages

S/N	Languages	Region	Users Percentage
1	Birum	North	2%
2	Jarawa	North	2%
3	Angas	North	1%
4	Mada	North	1%
5	Ankwa	North	2%
6	Kaje	North	1%
7	Amo	North	1%
8	Kataf	North	2%
9	Jaba	North	4%
10	Gbagyi	North	3%
11	Koro	North	5%

12	Ekid	South	1%
13	Oron	South	3%
14	Ibeno	South	2%
15	Ikwere	South	3%
16	Itsekiri	South	3%
17	Eleme	South	2%
18	Isoko	South	2%
19	Kana	South	1%
20	Gokana	South	2%
21	Okrika	South	5%
22	Annang	South	4%
23	Bekwarra	South	5%
24	Yala	South	4%
25	Ejagham	South	5%
26	Esan	South	6%

(Source: Eka – Issues in Nigerian English Usage, 2000)

The tables above are used just to show the multiplicity of Nigeria's indigenous languages. As explained earlier, these are in addition to foreign languages like Arabic, French and even German as taught in some schools across the country, not leaving out Pidgin that has taken a status of its own.

Indigenous languages in Nigerian English

In 2009, a study was conducted by Theophilus, Amase, and Aondover on the semantics of Nigerian English. The study identified a distinct feature of the Nigerian English dialect that has been shaped to reflect the culture and customs of its people. Numerous aspects of Nigerian English have been analyzed, highlighting its unique characteristics compared to other varieties of English.

The study suggests that establishing a standard Nigerian English could address issues related to comprehensibility and acceptance. Furthermore, the paper observes that Nigerian English shares similarities with World English, which could facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Recently, Amachaghi (2021) also examined the meanings and usage of words in Nigerian English, specifically to assess how learners of English in Nigeria are influenced by their first language. Through a survey, participants were asked to identify phrases with "Nigerian" meanings and explain Akan English phrases. The study found that Nigerian English is shaped by its speakers' social and cultural context, which is why it is unique.

Despite some potential misunderstandings, the study concludes that most expressions in Nigerian English have semantic and functional value. Notably, Nigerian languages have influenced all levels of Nigerian English. In 2009, a study was conducted by Theophilus, Amase, and Aondover on the semantics of Nigerian English. The study identified a distinct feature of the Nigerian English dialect that has been shaped to reflect the culture and customs of its people. Numerous aspects of Nigerian English have been analyzed, highlighting its unique characteristics compared to other varieties of English. The study suggests that establishing a standard Nigerian English could address issues related to comprehensibility and acceptance.

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Lexical features

There are a lot of new words in Nigerian English. These new word and meaning combinations got here in a few different ways. Based on Adegbija, the most popular of these are:

1. Coinages and neologisms: This is when completely new words are made up to describe new things. These words show this: been to, bush meat, cash madam, go-slow, junior brother, co-wife.
2. Hybridization: Examples include the Kiakia bus and the bukateria. There is a word or meaning of a word from the native language mixed in with an English word or meaning.
3. Analogization: This is the process of making new words based on an English word or pattern. Some examples of this type of word creation are invitee, decampee, arrangee, conferee, etc.

This is a significant part of Nigerian English: direct translation or transliteration from the mother tongue. This means making new structures with words that look like they

are from English but is straight translations from native languages. Some examples are goat head, long leg, cow leg, and bush meat.

(v) Transfer: Adebija says this is when "culture, sense, or meaning from the native language into English is transferred, or an existing meaning in English is reinterpreted or extended to cover new areas of experience in Nigerian English."

Check out these examples of how to use it:

Expression	Nigerian Meaning/Usage
Mother/father	Used to refer to someone that is not a biological mother or father.
Sorry	Used to express sympathy
Take in	Become pregnant
Go-slow	Traffic jam

Phonological Features

Many researchers have looked into how the accent of English in Nigeria has become more standard. Some examples are Eka (2000) and Udofot (2002) and (2003). The following things were seen in some of the observations: The vowel system and intonation system were both weakened, there was not any differentiation in length where native varieties would have, and there was not any glottalization when it would have been necessary in native English settings, non-voiced consonants endings (like "thumb") were given voice, vowels were added to syllabic consonants, and words like "strength," "trees," and "sprite" didn't have consonant clusters. Epenthetic vowels were added. These traits make Nigerian English unique and give the accent its flavour and quality. Some examples of the above are given below:

In Nigerian English, there is no difference between the sounds /i:/ and /i/, so the words beat (pronounced bi:t) and bit (pronounced bit) are both pronounced [bit]. There is also monophthongization of diphthongs and triphthongs. For example, local speakers say "away" as "dwei," but Nigerian English users say it as "dwe" or "e'we."

1. Finally, consonants at the end of words are often devoiced, like in was /wdz/, which sounds like [was].
2. The dental fricatives /θ/ and d/ are often said as /d/ in words like: Thank you, smooth, father, and mother.
3. Nigerian English also differs from Standard English in stress, pronunciation, and flow.

Nigerian English is more of a tone language than an intonation language. This is because most Nigerian languages are tonal, and while English is timed for stress, Nigerian languages are timed for syllables.

Features of Grammar and Syntax

Nigerian English still has a lot in common with native English speakers regarding language and syntax. For example, Nigerian English pluralizes singular words like knowledge, tools, staff, advice, etc. You can also use a different tag question, like "Didn't Dan come here yesterday?" "Didn't he eat everything? It's also possible to copy things, like sharp sharp, well well, fine fine, big big, etc.

Semantic features

Semantic expansion and derivations are a big part of Nigerian English (Ekpenyong, 2000). This is because some words' meanings have been brought to the forefront and changed semantically. So, the standard international meanings of some words and phrases have been changed to fit Nigerian valuable ideas and things that do not exist in places where English is the first language, like the United States and Great Britain. Some examples are "to see a woman," "Oga, I'm waiting for you to see me," and "Park what you're carrying." Also, "Ok" has become an entirely accepted part of Nigerian English and can mean many things, such as "yes", "acceptable to me", "everything is fine", "how was your night?" which means "how are you? ", and so on.

Language And Cultural Traits

Nigerian English is distinct from other forms of World English, primarily due to its unique traits that showcase the country's love for names and places. The language has several fascinating, deeply rooted traits. Additionally, using honorifics such as "Professor Sir" and "Honorable Sir" displays the respect and deference shown to superiors.

Code flipping and code-mixing are standard features of Nigerian English due to the coexistence of English and native languages. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among bilingual speakers of English and Nigerian languages. Research suggests that the Igbo people are more likely to switch between languages during conversations.

Conclusion

The use of Nigerian English should be celebrated as it reflects the country's rich and diverse culture. With over 400 languages spoken in Nigeria, English has been adopted as the official language for cross-cultural communication and government activities. Therefore, language teachers in Nigeria must be aware of the unique characteristics of Nigerian English to teach both Standard Nigerian English and Standard English effectively. Promoting the use of Nigerian English highlights the country's cultural diversity and ensures that the language is preserved for future generations.

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