The varieties and features of Nigerian English today

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Abstract
The domestication and nativization of spoken English in a multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic environment like Nigeria has given rise to the varieties of Nigerian English as affected by mother tongue interference notwithstanding the effort that is being made towards preserving and advancing the Standard English. This paper discusses the extant position of English as a world language and its advent in Nigeria. It goes on to examine the status as well as the constitutional provisions of it in Nigeria. These varieties of Nigerian English and the common features are discussed. Thus, Nigerian English is today one of the Englishes existing as a result of the interaction between the foreign English and the local languages in Nigeria. This paper concludes that these varieties of Nigerian English has come to stay and is now part and parcel of the Nigerian people and so should be integrated into the education and other sectors of the Nigerian society.
Keywords: Englishes, Varieties, Nigerian, Features, Constitution, Local Languages.

1.0 Introduction

One of the most striking features of the English Language today is its spread to all parts of the globe. To Stevenson, "A global economic and political structure needs a common tongue." (Stevenson, 1994). Consequently, our generation has witnessed an unprecedented spread of the English Language to nearly all parts of the world due to the search for a common means of communication. This spread has earlier been

thought to produce homogenous English across the world. However, this has been proved wrong as it is observed that the language is affected by the mother tongue interference of its recipient users. Of course, the interlanguage grammar of English that exists in different parts of the world is a load of peculiar features. (see Eka, 2000, and Udofot, 2007).English is now seen as to refer to a complex of many 'varieties' of language in use in all kinds of situation in many parts of the world. Language experts believe that each variety is definably different from others. According to Eka (2000:52), the English Language is no longer homogeneous: "It is in fact as diversified as there are groups of speakers in the world". These remarks illuminate the ways in which today's varieties of 'Nigerian English' - the crux of this study derived its legitimacy. It has been defined as the 'subset of English spoken and written by Nigerians' (Eka 2000:70).

2.0 The emergence of English as a global language

Before the spread of the English Language, the term was often used to refer to the language of England and people living in the southern parts of Scotland (Eka, 2000: 7).Different Authors have their own reasons for the rise of English as the global language. However, some traits are common among them. Here are just a few examples of what people are saying: "In the 17th and 18th centuries, English was the language of the leading colonial nation - Britain. In the 18th and 19th centuries, it was the language of the leader of the industrial revolution - also Britain. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was the language of the leading economic power - the US." (Guardian, 1997: 21). To Rezendes, "Experts attribute the worldwide spread of English to British colonialism and American culture, rather than to the inherent qualities of the language...English is dominating the globe today because, when the sun finally set on the British Empire at the end of World War II, the United States emerged as a global superpower and cultural giant, leading the way in medical research, technological innovation, motion pictures and rock 'n' roll." (Rezendes, 1994: 82).Campbell noted that, "Experts say the simultaneous rise of the US as a military and technological

superpower and the receding of the British Empire gave many in the world both the desire and option to choose American English." (Campbell, 1996: 10). According to Udofot, as far back as the 5th century, "Britain's Colonial expansion took the English Language from its birth place to many countries around the world" (Udofot 2007: 4). In the view of Udofot (2007:4), "the foundation of American colonies in the 17thcentury can be taken as the beginning of the history of English as a world language". This was further consolidated by the 19thcentury when the British colonialists spread their tentacles around the world through trade and political activities. Today, the status of the English has changed completely, as it is now the language to beat in the contest for the most popular language in the world.

As can be seen above, there are many reasons associated with the rise of English as a global language. Most people agree that it has something to do with the emergence of the United States as a world superpower. The US has worked hard to reach the level of achievement and cultural clout that it has today, but in no way wishes to wipe out all other world cultures. The important thing to remember is: "A language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people - especially their military power." (Guardian, 1997: 21). Today, English has acquired a genuinely global status in that it has developed special role and significance, which is recognized in almost every continent, sub-regions and countries of the world. The British Council in its English Project 2000 discovered among other things that "English is used in over 70 countries as an official or semi-official language. It is this geographical spread of English that gave birth to the "New Englishes", which gave the varieties of "Nigerian English" its legitimacy.

3.0 The status of English in Nigeria

English due to its long stay in Nigeria, has been adopted and appropriated by Nigerians and is used as the language of education and made to fulfill all the roles normally reserved for the mother tongue. This

has made most Nigerian families to force their children to acquire English as their first, second and foreign language. In such families, it is a serious offence for such children to speak any of the indigenous languages.

A perusal of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) further reveals the status of English in Nigeria. It shows that the use of English language is mainly recognized for the conduct of business of both Federal and State Legislatures. Section 55 of the said Constitution provides that: "The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof." Also, section 97 of the same Constitution provides equally that: "The business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English, but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the House may by resolution approve." The foregoing provision of Nigerian Constitution actually made its debut in 1979 (see respectively, sections 51 and 91 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979). Under the 1963 Constitution, it was a different thing altogether. This is because no reference at all was made to any other language apart from English. In fact, section 59 of the Constitution of the Federation, 1963 provides thus: "The business of Parliament shall be conducted in English." This same provision is contained, *mutatis mutandis*, under section 54 of the Constitution of the Federation, 1960.

It is unfortunate that even in the then Regional Constitutions under which each of the regions was supposed to adopt only local languages for the conduct of business of the Regional Legislative Houses, the same English language was still not left out as a language for the conduct of business of the Regional Legislative Houses. For example, section 23 of the Constitution of Northern Nigeria, 1960 provides that: "The business of Legislative Houses of the Region shall be conducted in English and Hausa." Also, section 22 of the Constitution of Western Nigeria, 1960 provides that: "The business of Legislative Houses of the Region shall be conducted in English."

Here, it cannot be over emphasized that the foregoing provisions of Nigerian Constitutions relating to the use of English language in the conduct of business of Legislative Houses were inherited from Nigeria's Colonial Constitutions. This is because, right from 1914, English has been the official language for the conduct of business of Nigerian Legislative Houses. It is only in respect of Northern Nigeria that the strict use of English as the sole language tend to relax. The reason for that may, however, be due to the literacy level in the Northern Nigeria. But even when another language, such as Hausa, is allowed to apply, it is rendered inferior to English. For instance, under section 114 of the Nigeria (Constitution) Order in Council, 1951, it was provided that, the official language of the House of Representatives and the Legislative Houses of the Western and Eastern Regions shall be English, whereas the official languages for the Legislative Houses of the Northern Region shall be English and Hausa, provided, that all Bills introduced in either of such Legislative Houses in the North and all laws enacted by the Legislature of the Northern Region shall be printed in the English language and, if any such Bill or law is also printed in the Hausa language, the English text shall prevail in the case of conflict between the two texts.

With respect to the conduct of business in the Executive and Judicial arms of government in Nigeria, it is not in dispute that English still stands out as the main language. In fact, in respect of the Judiciary in particular, there is a notorious standard and practice that, "English is the language of the Court." This standard has made it imperative that any other language used in the Court must be subjected to interpretation into English for it to be authentic and admissible in Court. This is another instance of making Nigerian local languages subordinate to English. Because of this very fact that the language is that of the Court, it is expected that any party or witness who wishes to communicate or tender a document in Court in a language other than English is meant to use an Interpreter. This procedure is even taken more seriously in criminal trial. Accordingly, section 36(6)(a)(e) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended) is to the effect that, every person

who is charged with a criminal offence shall be entitled to be informed promptly in the language he understands and in detail of the nature of the offence, and shall be entitled to have, without payment, the assistance of an Interpreter if he cannot understand the language used at the trial of the offence (see the case of *Ogidi vs. State* (2005) 5 NWLR [Pt. 918] 286).

While it is not intended in this research to delve deeply into the legal nuances of the use of English in Nigeria, the Researchers have taken this pain to feature these constitutional provisions as well as judicial authority relating to the use of the language in order to show the prevalence and prominence of English in Nigeria to the extent that even our Constitution (which is our highest law) considers it as a very authentic language in Nigeria. The point must, however, be made here that following the prevalence of English language as allowed under the Constitution, these varieties of Nigerian English, as shall be seen below, no doubt, have permeated the Nigerian society because of the interaction between the foreign English and the local languages in Nigeria in the course of their usage in the conduct of government and other businesses in Nigeria.

4.0 The evolution of Nigerian English

England and the southern parts of Scotland are the homes of the oldest and most authentic speakers of English as a first language (Eka, 2007: 7). But as mentioned above, English left its original home since the 5th century to spread to other parts of the world. It came into Nigeria and other West African Countries due to the activities of British traders and later Christian missionaries, amongst them were the colonialists from the 16th through the 19th century. It is noteworthy that the early contact of the Europeans and the Portuguese on the coastal shores of West Africa produced the variety generally known as pidgin and creole (Eka, 2000;Ogu, 1992; Udofot, 2007). But when the colonialists "settled down" they came with the Standard English which became "the language of government, education, commerce and general official (sometimes private) intercourse with the indigenous languages still intact" (Eka, 2000: 14). We have it on good record that the English Language which

came into Nigeria during the colonial era is no longer the same. It has lost a measure of its foreignness which led to the birth of another form of English that is widely acclaimed and popularly called Nigerian English. According to Eka (2000: 15), it is that variety of world Englishes learnt, spoken and/or written by Nigerians who are born and/or brought up within the Nigerian environment.

Adegbija (2004: 20) referred to this process of rebirth of English to suit the Nigerian environment as "domestication of English in Nigeria". In his words, "the term "domestication", in the context of English in Nigeria, connotes "home – grown", "made native", "adapted and tamed" to suit the Nigerian environment". Udofot traced the reason for the Nigerianization of the English Language to its co-existence with over 400 local languages in Nigeria as well as its use for expressing Nigerian experiences and situations (2000: 7). Also Bamgbose (1995: 26) has earlier observed that, "The English Language has been pidginized, nativized, acculturated and twisted to express unaccustomed concepts and modes of interaction".

From the foregoing, we can safely say that Nigerian English has a robust history as there have been many analytical studies to synthesize its phonology, lexis, semantics, syntax and communicative form. This new form of English is widely accepted and has developed features which distinguish it as an identifiable and legitimate subset of world Englishes.

5.0 The varieties of Nigerian English

Due to the many years that the English Language has co-existed with indigenous Nigerian languages and its use for expressing Nigerian experience and situations, it has developed linguistic patterns which have identified it as a distinct variety of world Englishes (Udofot, 2007: 7). We are fully aware that the retention of the English Language is necessitated by the Nigerian multi-lingual reality. So, with an estimated number of over 400 languages spoken in the country, English, which acts as a second language to most Nigerians, is bound to be affected by the cultural peculiarities of the Nigerian social environment. In the words of

Eka (2000:70) "It is an established language and communication truth that whenever a language leaves its original home and settles down in another geographical region, it must acquire the local colour of its new environment". The above view is true about Nigerian English. Due to diverse ethnic and cultural orientation, there are too many varieties of English that have developed in the country. Thus, this paper has identified the varieties that are relevant for the characterization of the problems and prospects of Nigerian English.

On the spoken Nigerian English aspect, many linguists have carried out studies on its features including "Bamgbose (1982, 1995), Eka (1985, 1993, 2000), Udofot (1997, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007), among others. Many of these linguists based their classification on formal education with Banjo's (quoted in Udofot, 2007: 15) classification acclaimed to be very realistic. He classified spoken Nigerian English into four varieties:

(i) Variety one is spoken by people with elementary school education and semi-literate people. It is marked by a high rate of negative transfer from the phonological system of the mother tongue and so it is not acceptable even by Nigerians.

(ii) Variety two is spoken by post primary school leavers. In this variety mother tongue interference is minimal but the speakers do not make vital phonemic distinctions. The brand is largely intelligible and nationally acceptable.

(iii) Variety three is associated with university education. The speakers make vital phonemic distinctions and the variety is accepted and understood nationally and internationally.

(iv) Variety four is described as being identical with standard British English but is ridiculed in Nigeria for being artificial.

In a classification carried out by Udofot (1997, 2002, 2003 and 2004), he grouped the varieties of spoken Nigerian English in three classes with emphasis on identifying the segmental and non-segmental features. Apart from the spoken variety, Nigeria English is used for different purposes as dictated by different social contexts and environments. Furthermore,

different dialects essentially form varieties of a language. For instance, in Nigeria, we can comfortably talk of Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Efik varieties of Nigerian English, to mention just a few.

Examples of the varieties of Nigerian English showing class distinction include the following:

Upper Class	Lower Class
nice	good
procrastinate	defer
sitting room	palour
toilet	latrine
serviette	napkin

English Language in Nigeria has formal and informal varieties of words and expression. For example:

Informal	Formal
He is my boss	He is my employer
Nneka is Ada's buddy	Nneka is Ada's companion
We have a deal	We have an agreement
The man has three kids	The man has three children

There are also the non- standard varieties of Nigerian English identified with all manner of imperfection, and they are not so much recognized. These include slang and Pidgin English expressions. As mentioned earlier, Pidgin English developed from the early contacts of the Portuguese and European traders along the coastal regions of West Africa. It is a mixture of local dialects and English words, decapitation and amalgamation of local dialects with English words. Examples of

pidgin expressions include: come chop, no talk say na me talk oh!, wetin dey worry that man sef, make you comot for road make I pass, etc.

Also, there is a creative variety of Nigerian English known as slang. This is a very informal variety whose meanings and use is among particular groups of people. According to Eka (2000: 7a) "the creative usages are also a testimony to one dimension of enrichment of the English language".

A few examples will illustrate these points.

Slang	**Source of Development**
What's up (wasup)	How is it?
Jambite (jambito)	A fresh undergraduate
Bad boys	Criminals generally in society
To chase a girl	To court a girl
Cool down	Be calm, take it easy
To be broke	To have run out of cash
Fast guy	Smart person
Gist	Story
Groovy	Elegant

There are so many varieties of Nigerian English as scholars researching into the Nigerian varieties of English have identified sub-variety within the major variety which is traceable to extent of mother tongue interference, educational attainment, and social intercourse among other things.

Let us therefore examine the features that are common to variety of Nigerian English which makes it recognizable as an acceptable variety of world Englishes.

6.0 The features of Nigerian English

This section takes a look at some of the features of Nigerian English which are regionally, nationally and perhaps internationally recognized, used and accepted in terms of structure, pronunciation and meaning.

6.1 Lexical features: Nigerian English is full of many innovative words. These new lexical and semantic collocations have come through several ways. The most common of these according to Adegbija are:

(i) Coinages and Neologisms: This is a situation where entirely new terms are created for new experiences. Examples are: been to, bush meat, cash madam, go-slow, junior brother, co-wife.

(ii) Hybridisation: (e.g., kiakia bus, bukateria,).Here, there is a combination of a word or sense of a word in the indigenous language with a word or sense of a word in English.

(iii) Analogisation: This is the formation of words on the basis of the pattern of an existing word or pattern in English. Example of such words formation include: invitee, decampee, arrangee, conferee, etc.

(iv) Direct Translation or Transliteration from Mother Tongue: This is a very significant feature of Nigerian English. This entails the creation of new structures with words that are obviously English lexis but are direct translation from indigenous languages. Examples include: goat head, long leg, cow leg, bush meat.

(v) Transfer: This, according to Adegbija has to do with the transfer "of culture, sense or meaning from the native language into English, or reinterpretation or extension of an existing meaning in English to cover new areas of experience in Nigerian English". See examples of such usages below:

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
Drop	Alight

Other lexical features of Nigerian English including the formation of new words through the process of affixation (e.g., Awoism, Zikism) and acronymization (e.g., NAFDAC, JAMB, NEPA).

6.2 Phonological features: Many scholars have carried out research work on the way in which English in Nigeria has been domesticated in terms of pronunciation. Examples include: Eka, 2000;Udofot, 2002, 2003; among others. Some of the observations revealed the following features: a reduced vowel system, a reduced intonation system, non-differentiation in some aspects of length where native varieties would differentiate, absence of glottalization in some contexts in which it would have been obligatory in native English environments; the voicing of non-voiced consonants endings e.g., thumb; the insertion of vowels in syllabic consonants, the absence of consonant clusters in words like "strength, "trees", "sprite"; the insertion of epenthetic vowels in some consonant clusters; the substitution of alveolar fricatives for interdental fricatives etc. Such features typify Nigerian English and give its accent a unique distinctive flavour and quality.

6.2.1 Illustrations of some of the above claims

(i) reduced vowel system: there is no distinction between vowels /i:/ and /i/ in Nigerian English such that the words beat /bi:t/ and bit /bit/ are both realized as [bit].

(ii) monothongisation of diphthongs and triphthong e.g. away is produced as /əwei /by native speakers but as [əwe] or [e`we] in Nigerian English.

(iii) word final consonants are often devoiced as in was /wəz/ produced as [was]

(vi) the dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are often pronounced as/d/ in such words as thank, smooth, father and mother.

As regards stress, intonation and rhythm, Nigerian English is also different from Standard English. Nigerian English is more of a tone language than intonation patterned; this is because most Nigerian local languages are tonal and while English is a stress timed language, Nigerian local languages are syllable timed.

6.3 Grammatical and syntactic features: The grammar and syntax of Nigerian English still conform to a very large extent to the grammar of native varieties of English aspect for the tendency to pluralize nouns that are singular such as information 's', equipment 's' , staff 's' , advice's', etc. There is also the use of a different tag question e.g., "Dan came here yesterday, isn't it? "He ate all the food, isn't it? There is also the feature of reduplication such as sharp sharp, well well, fine fine, big big, etc.

6.4 Idiomatic features: This is closely related to lexical features and some scholars lump them together. But according to Adegbija (2002:26), "idioms have to be learned in chunks along with the meaning they convey". Examples of such idiomatic usages include:

(i) Modification of verbal particles in one form or another. See examples below:

Nigerian English	**Standard English Version**
Congratulate for	Congratulate on
Cope up with	Cope with
Off head	By heart
Should in case	In case

(ii) Direct transliteration of the sense of an idiom in a native language into English to create a new idiom: Examples include:

Nigerian English Usage	**Standard English Version**
Tight friend	Bosom friend/confidant
Not on seat	To be absent
I am coming	I'll soon be back/with you
He is a big man	He is an affluent man
He ate our money	He embezzled our money

(iii) Coining entirely new idioms: Such as "cash madam", "put in the family way", "put to bed", "big boys", "take in", etc.

6.5 Semantic features: Semantic extension and derivations are major features of Nigerian English. This is because the meanings of some words have been fore-grounded and semantically adjusted. Thus, the standard international meanings of certain lexical items and expressions have been modified to explain certain Nigerian practical concepts and objects which do not obtain in native speakers societies like America and Britain. Examples include expressions like: "to see a woman", "Oga, I am waiting for you to see me", "Park, what are you carrying". Also the exclamation "Ok" has been fully incorporated into Nigerian English to mean several things, such as "acceptable to me", "yes", "everything is fine", etc.

6.6 Pragmatic and cultural features: This is another important feature of Nigerian English which gives this variety of World English cultural

flavour. These features include exhibition of Nigerians love for titles and positions and these are fully infused into Nigerian English. Also, the importance of age and respect are exhibited in the politeness of a subordinate's address to his superior, hence the use of "sir" is highly valued in Nigerian English. Example of such expressions include: (a) Chief Dr. Pastor .... (b)This house belongs to Chief Hon Sir ….

6.7 Code switching and code mixing: This is another feature of Nigeria English which has to do with switching from one language to another in the course of speech making or mixing two different languages in speech. The many years of co-existence of English and the indigenous Nigerian has led to this trend in the speech of Nigerian bilinguals who share a common mother tongue. According to Udofot (2003:130), hardly any educated Nigerian can make two sentences in any Nigerian Language without English words being inserted into them or without switching from the Nigerian Language into English …." In Nigeria, this mixing or switching from the Nigerian Language into English and *vice versa*, is mostly common among the Igbos. Example of such switching or mixing include: (a) The Pastor's sermon last Sunday *"di"* powerful; (b) My roommate *"bu onye aka abuo*"; (c) Obong will not eat *"tutu mkpong"*,

7.0 Conclusion

These varieties of Nigerian English have come to stay in Nigeria. They have developed tap roots due to the roles and functions assigned to them both officially and unofficially. The reason for this is authenticated by the fact that, "language functions determine language esteem and future (Adegbija, 2004: 37). Due to the many years English Language co-existed with Nigerian local languages, it has been identified as a distinct variety which Nigerians have accepted as their own. Many people no longer see these varieties of Nigerian English as completely a foreign language but rather as a second language which enables them interact with people outside their immediate environment. So today,

Nigerians can also lay claim on these varieties of Nigerian English as the owner. As shown above, Nigerian Constitution which is the highest law in Nigeria, supports the use of English language in the conduct of government business and *ipso facto* these varieties of Nigerian English have substantially developed because of the interaction between the foreign English and the local languages in Nigeria in the course of their usage in the conduct of government and other businesses in Nigeria.

Therefore, the following recommendations are considered pertinent for the complete integration of these varieties of Nigerian English: examination bodies like West African Examination Council should modify the form and content of texts to conform to these nativized varieties of Nigerian English, English Language Scholars in Nigeria should intensify efforts in the codification of aspects of these varieties of Nigerian English and produce standard textbooks for use in schools, the government should come out clearly and encourage the development of these varieties of Nigerian English, and Nigerians should be encouraged to develop a positive attitude towards these varieties of Nigerian English and build corresponding vocabulary as to serve the needs of the people such that effective communication and conveying intended meaning should be the goal of the users.

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