# The Lexico-Semantic and Syntactic Variations in the Outer-Circle Englishes: A Study of Nigerian English

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#### Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which the Englishes spoken by the speakers of English as a native language (inner-circle Englishes) vary from that spoken by the speakers of English as a second language (outer-circle Englishes). Kachru's 'three circle model' theory was adopted in the explanation of the sociolinguistic phenomenon known as World Englishes. Emphasis was, however, laid on the distinction between the Standard British English (native speakers' English) and Nigerian English (non-native speakers' English). The link between the lexis and semantics of both Englishes was examined. The syntactic structure was also investigated to ascertain the similarities and difference between Nigerian English and British English. There was a brief examination of the advent and domestication of English in Nigeria, and it was concluded that the rough and narrow road trekked by the English Language from its native land (inner-circle) to the new land it occupies (outer-circle) has left it disjointed. It was established that in Nigeria, as an outer-circle country, the ethnolinguistic issues that are in existence have restricted the English language from attaining the minimum requirements of national and international intelligibility. The implication is that it will be difficult, if not impossible, for a standard Nigerian English, which will be good enough to stand as an independent variety in its own right to emerge. Efforts should, therefore, be made to teach and learn the rudiments of the English that has the required standard - the "parent" English (British English) instead of the "offspring" English (Nigerian English).

**Key words:** World Englishes, Variation, Lexico-semantics, Syntactic structure and Nigerian English.

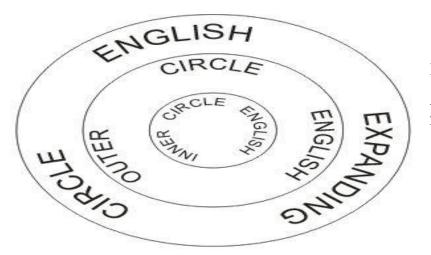
# Introduction

The spread of the English language all over the world has attracted the attention of so many scholars in the past, at present and will still attract more attentions in the future, since it has become a global phenomenon. Investigations carried out by scholars (Samida and Takashi n.d, Crystal 1997 and Okoh 2006) have revealed that varieties of English exist in the world, apart from that of the native speakers. It has been noted that these varieties are the Englishes of the countries where English serves as a second, and a foreign language respectively. All these varieties make up the sociolinguistics phenomenon known as world Englishes.

In most countries where English is a second language, it is spoken as a natural outgrowth of colonial era during which such countries, now independent, were part of the British and American Empires. In other countries, individuals have been encouraged to learn English due to its widespread use as a language of global communication.

Whether these varieties of English emerged through colonisation or socio-economic influence, they, and the Englishes of the native speakers form what we know today as world Englishes. This is represented in 'circles' theory by some scholars. McArthur calls his circle

theory "wheel model", while Kachru's is called 'three circle model of Englishes". Adopting Kachru's theory, therefore, there is a demonstration of the spread of Englishes in "three concentric circles" labelled: inner-circle, outer-circle and expanding circle respectively, which is illustrated as follows:



Kachru's 'three circle model' Adapted from (Oxford & Jain, 2008).

Kachru's 'three circle model of Englishes', as Ayuba (2014,p.102) puts it encompasses what could be termed a general or most common classification of Englishes; English as a native language (ENL), English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). The inner-circle represents the speakers of English as a native language and we have such countries as; America, Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, etc, where English is the primary or first language of the great majority of the people; the outer circle represents the speakers of English as a second language which includes countries such as Nigeria, India, Malaysia, Kenya, Singapore, Pakistan, etc, while the expanding circle is made up of countries that speak English as a foreign language. Examples of such countries are china, Japan, Poland, Hungary, Indonesia, etc.

However, Britain and America are considered the real owners of English. Perhaps this is the reason behind the two major varieties of English that parade themselves within the outer-circle. Supporting this is Ayuba's (2014) assertion that British and American Englishes have been considered the two main varieties of English known as 'roots' or 'parents' for the other varieties of English in the world. They are therefore, the independent varieties in their own rights on which the varieties in the outer-circle depend on for growth and functionality in the new environment.

Borrowing the words of Samida and Takahashi (n.d.), the spread of English (from inner to outer, and expanding circles) has created many varieties of regional Englishes, which is what we, today, call world Englishes. Such journey mentioned above gave rise to the variations in lexical, semantic, syntactic structure and even the phonological structure of this Englishes. It is therefore, pertinent to consider the level of dislocation caused by the movement from one circle to another.

# **Variation in the Outer-Circle Englishes**

There is no point ignoring the fact that the entrance of an entirely foreign language into a particularly new environment brings about a change in form. Having been imported from the inner-cycle (native land) into the outer-cycle (non-native land), English has come face to face with several specialized communicative contexts that irrevocably changed the structure of the language. It has indeed become more dynamic, flexible and much less standardized with greater focus on transmitting messages rather than standard form (Graddel, 2001). The change being discussed here is evident in the following; interlarding nature of the language,

that is, the new English or the variety of English in the new Environment, transliteration and some other forms of lexical borrowing inherent in bilingualism and multilingualism. These affect the linguistic features of these Englishes in the outer-circle lexically, syntactically, phonologically and other wise.

A brief examination of the Indian English, for instance, shows that there is variation in the meaning of most lexis. According to Samida and Takahashi (n.d.), "face-cut" means "profile", "tempo" means "3-wheeled vehicle", "chaste" means "pure", etc. There is also a variation in tag questions as illustrated in the following sentences:

- \* You know it, isn't it?
- \* He is coming, isn't it?
- \* You went to Lagos yesterday, isn't it?
- \* You did not write the examination, isn't it?

Both Nigerian and Indian Englishes depict such wrong formation of tag questions by the use of fixed tags. The appropriate forms of these are as follows:

- You know it, don't you?
- He is coming, isn't he?
- You went to Lagos yesterday, didn't you?
- You did not write examination, did you?

There is also variation in the 'distinctive use and omission of articles', 'reduplication of words', and 'yes-no confusion' that permeates Indian, Nigerian and Japanese Englishes, as accounted by Samida and Takahashi (n.d.). These and more variations (Phonological inclusive) are identifiable in the varieties of English in the outer-cycle, that is, the non-native land where English is spoken as a second language.

# The Triumphant Entry and Nigerianisation of English in Nigeria

The inalienability of English in Nigeria and history of the coming of the early European missionaries cum traders into West Africa cannot be overemphasized. Whether this victorious entry of English into Nigeria is linked with the Portuguese sailors and traders that invaded the West African Coast in the fifteenth century and built factory as trading station known as Gwto; the arrival of British missionaries and administrators or even the part played by the freed slaves from Sierra Leone and Liberia (Crowder, 1962, and Okoh, 2006), it is pertinent to note that the advent of English in Nigeria is connected to Colonisation.

Interaction would not have been possible between the early Europeans and the native Africans at the West African Coast since Africans knew only their own indigenous languages which were also alien to the Europeans, but they (Europeans) came up with a mixture of the indigenous African Languages and theirs ((Portuguese), which brought about the pidgin (broken English). The British missionaries (colonialists) brought a more refined variety of English (native speakers English) which existed alongside the Pidgin English and the various indigenous African languages. English, then, became the language of the elite group in the society, whosoever learns it becomes important and highly placed. It started serving the purpose of identity construction by indicating the particular social class to which the user belongs.

Gradually, English started featuring more prominently than every other language in Nigeria. It became the language of education, commerce, industry, religion, politics and in fact, a dominant language in the country. Considering the multilingual nature of Nigeria; considering the fact that the adoption of a particular indigenous language could cause ethnic war, English takes over; or is being taken over as the national language in Nigeria.

The predominant role of English on the linguistic landscape of the country leaves one with no other option than to concur with Bamgbose (1971) that the English language is the most important heritage left behind in Nigeria by the colonial masters. This colonial legacy,

which only a minority of the population could be said to be proficient in its use, serves as a unifying factor in Nigeria. As such, a majority of the population struggle to speak and write it, thus, it becomes domesticated.

The adoption of an entirely new language into a new linguistic environment and its adoptability to that new context is what domestication is all about. Domestication is synonymous with Nigerianisation and Oyelele (2005) is correct in his assertion that the adaptability of English to the Nigerian context makes it not only a vehicle for the regional cultures, but also the communities' means of access to a culture that is already global. Quoting Moag (1992, p.235), Ayuba (2014) elucidates this assertion by stating that domestication is a process of language change where a new variety of English which is distinct from the parent imported variety emerges. Although the distinctiveness of the variety of English in Nigeria is still a controversial phenomenon, one thing is certain and it is that the Nigerianisation of English in Nigeria affected the linguistic structure of the language.

# Linking Lexis and Semantics of Standard British English and Nigerian English

In an attempt to establish the link between the lexis and semantics of the Standard British English and the Nigerian English, it is revealed that various categories of lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English have been identified by scholars. Citing Adeybija (1989), and Bamiro (1994), Adedimeji (2007) asserts that fifteen classes of lexico-semantic variation are identifiable in Nigerian English. However, twelve classes are considered in the present study and they are listed and examined as follows: transfer, anology, acronyms, semantic shift or extension, coinages or neologism, loan shift, semantic under-differentiation, lexico-semantic reduplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, clipping and translation equivalent:

**Transfer:** Linguistically, this is an aspect of interference (L1) where features of a particular language is taken over to another language. This is usually evident in the speech repertoire of a bilingual or multilingual individual (Wiki.org). Adedimeji (2007) identifies these types of transfer:

- Transfer of meaning (Bush meat, outing...)
- Transfer of culture (introduction, our wife...)
- Transfer of context (sorry, toast...)
- Transfer of pidgin features (kola, dash...) (p.10).

All these types of transfer are classifiable under a heading such as socio-cultural transfer of meaning since the adopted lexis and the meaning derives from the social context and cultural value of the people. The lexis listed above are further examined and illustrated below:

NE: Bush meant is scarce in the market recently.

SBE: *Meat from the bush* is scarce in the market recently.

NE: I want to go for an *outing* SBE: I want to go for a *stroll* 

NE: Today is her *introduction* 

SBE: Her would-be husband's family is *visiting* today.

NE: She is our wife

SBE: She is our brothers/cousins wife

NE: Sorry for the death of your dear husband

SBE: Accept my condolence/sympathy for the death of your husband.

NE: Our course representative is *toasting* me SBE: our course representative is *asking me out* 

NE: Please kola our guest.

SBE: please *entertain* our guest.

NE: He gave me a wrist watch as *dash*. SBE: he gave me a wrist watch as a *gift*.

**Analogy:** This has to do with the formation of words based on partial likeness or agreement with the existing words in either the  $L_1$  (first language) or  $L_2$  (second language) (Adedimeji, 2007). This means that a particular situation or what a thing does informs the naming of a similar thing or situation. Sentential illustrations of words formed through analogy are given below:

NE: Her *battery charger* has arrived SBE: Her *sexual partner* has arrived

NE: That man is a *gossiper* SBE: that man is a *gossip* 

NE: I prefer taking *hot drink* before meal to after meal.

SBE: I prefer taking *spirit or strong drink* before meal to after meal.

NE: Men are scared of getting married to acada woman.

SBE: Men are scared of getting married to a woman who is an Academic.

**Acronyms:** These are words derived through the combination of letters of other words. Examples are given below:

- WAEC: West African Examination Council.
- ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States.
- ASUP: Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics.
- ASUU: Academic Staff Union of Universities.

**Semantics Shift and Extension:** This is a form of, shift, extension or generalization that permeates the Nigerian English. The shift in meaning brings about the existence of a new word in the language. The following are examples.

NE: Could you please *escort* me to the market.

SBE: Could you please *accompany* me to the market.

NE: I bought a *motor* yesterday. SBE: I bought a *car* yesterday.

NE: He is my husband's *brother*. SBE: he is my husband's *kinsman*.

**Coinages or Neologism:** These have to do with inventing new words or phrases from the exiting lexical stock of English, in one of the indigenous languages or from the combination of both (English and indigenous language lexis) (Adedimeji, 2007). The following sentential examples will educate the above assertion respectively:

NE: My friend is now a cash madam.

SBE: My friend is now a rich female trader.

NE: There is *half current*. SBE: There is *low voltage*.

NE: I bought a *tokunbo* car. SBE: I bought a *fairly used* car.

NE: Behold my astonishing *asoebi*!

SBE: Behold my astonishing bridesmaids!

NE: I prepared *egusi* soup today

SBE: I prepared *sauce with melon* today.

**Loanshift:** Loan shift and semantic shift behave alike. Both are forms of meaning extension and generalization in Nigerian English. Loan shift is an extension of meaning of words from the target language to cover a new concept. Such words as; "stick" is, therefore derived from "cigarette", "eat money" from "embezzlement" "sort" from "bribe" etc. the initial meaning of these words (cigarette, embezzlement and bribe) has shifted to accommodate what they look like.

**Semantic under-differentiation:** In the words of Adedimeji (2007), this arises when the emotive distinctions in the meaning of words are neutralized or under-differentiated; such words as; little/small, big/huge and few/a few are therefore created to be used in place of the other. Where "few" for instance fits in, "a few" can as well be used only to generate a slight difference in meaning. For instance:

- Uche has a few friends.
- Uche has few friends.

The first sentence is an indication that Uche has more than one friend, it could be two, three or more, certainly, and he has several friends. But the second sentence shows that Uche has close to no friend, either one or none.

**Lexico-semantic duplication and redudancy:** This involves repetitions that lead to tautology. Examples of such are illustrated bellow:

- \* It comprises of milk and sugar
- \* I will reverse back.

In the sentences above, either of the two italicized words could be used. The use of both amounts to tautology.

**Ellipsis**: This is a form of lexico-semantic variation where some words that are supposed to complete the meaning of utterances are omitted. Examples are given below:

NE: I need bread.

SBE: I need a loaf of a slice of bread.

NE: Go and get *chalk* for me.

SBE: Go and get a piece of /some chalk for me.

NE: I saw *lions* in the zoo yesterday.

SBE: I saw *a pride of lions* in the zoo yesterday.

**Conversion**: This is a change in the word class category that leads to variation in the lexicosemantic structure of the Nigeria English. This change is, how caused by the various individual level of judgment. For instance:

NE: I will *relax* your hair for you.

SBE: I will help you apply relaxer to your hair.

NE: Go and *powder* your face please.

SEB: Go and apply powder to your face please.

**Clipping**: This is a way of shortening words without effecting any change to the original meaning of such words and it is different from abbreviation. Examples are:

NE: I am the *fin sec* of the association.

SBE: I am the *financial secretary* of the Association.

NE: All exco members are expected to meet by 4 p.m.

SBE: All *members of the executive* are expected to meet by 4 p.m today.

**Translation equivalent**: This can also be called transliteration, which means the representation of a word or group of words in the closest corresponding words of a different language. Adedimeji (2007) calls it the manifestation of mother tongue interference by which lexical terms are substituted literally from Nigerian language to English. This is illustrated in the following sentence:

NE: Go and wash your body.

SBE: Go and bathe.

NE: I am *hearing* what you are saying.

SBE: I can hear you.

NE: Are you perceiving the *smell* of the soup? SBE: Can you perceive the *aroma* of the sauce?

NE: *Small girl* is worrying you. SBE: You are being *childish*.

What is examined above under "NE" is what we call transliteration, which is the literal transcription of the Nigerian indigenous language into English.

### The Syntactic Structure of Nigerian English

It is obvious that the major thematic concern here is the examination of the grammaticality and acceptability of sentences in Nigerian English. Subsequently, some level of syntactic variation has been identified in similar studies (Adedimeji 2007, and Adetugbo 1986). The present study, therefore, examines the syntactic relations of words and phrases in sentences and the rules of their concatenation to ascertain the distinction between the "parent" and the "offspring" languages syntactically. This is done through the analysis of the identified classes of syntactic variations and they are listed as follows: Lack of word class distinction, inability to distinguish between count and non-count nouns, Distinctive use and omission of

articles, misuse of prepositions, poor knowledge of rules of concord, wrong conjugation of the progressive form and collocational violations in sentence constructions.

### Lack of word class distinction

It is assumed that every language user should be acquainted with the classification of the parts of speech in terms of meaning and function. The ability to differentiate one word class from the other, no doubt, saves one from the embarrassment of ungrammatical and unacceptable utterances that permeate the Nigeria English. Supporting this claim, Adedimeji(2007), notes: "Nigerian English do not [sic] allot words to their distinctive categories". We often times come across where an adjective, noun and even preposition is used as a verb in sentences. Examplse of such are seen in these sentence constructions below:

NE: She *senior* me in work.

SBE: She is a senior colleague of mine.

NE: He pregnant two sister.

SEB: He got two sister pregnant.

NE: He *naked* himself in public.

SEB: He *stripped* himself *naked* in public.

NE: Off the handset please.

SBE: Switch of the handset please.

In the first sentence above, an adjective senior is assigned the role of a verb. Noun 'pregnant' functions as a verb too in the second sentence. Likewise "naked" in sentence number three and lastly adverb "off" in the last sentence plays the role of a verb as well. It is, therefore, pertinent to note that the sole determinant of the part of speech to which a word belongs is 'function' and not necessarily meaning.

### **Inability to Distinguish between Count and Non-Count Nouns**

Number is the main idea behind count nouns, as Nwala (2013, p.17) puts it. In other words, count nouns can be determined numerically, unlike non-count nouns. Based on this, count nouns undergo the process of affixation in plural formation while the non-count nouns do not. In Nigerian English, the following misusages are common:

NE: I need two chalks.

SBE: I need two pieces of chalk.

NE: May we rise as the *couples* comes in.

SBE: May we rise as the *couple* comes or come in.

NE: Get two *bottle of beers* for me. SBE: Get two *bottles of beer* for me.

NE: Are these *staffs* of Imo state university? SBE: Are these *staff* of Imo state university?

#### **Distinctive Use and Omission of Articles**

It is indeed not uncommon to identify wrong use or non-use of articles among Nigeria English speakers, even among the so-called educated ones. The following sentences permeate the Nigeria Linguistic parlance:

NE: It is *slip of* tongue.

SBE: It is a *slip of the* tongue. NE: I need *a beer* or I need *beer*. SBE: I need *a glass of bottle of beer*.

NE: I wish to buy bread.

SBE: I wish to buy a loaf of or some bread.

# **Misuse of Preposition**

This could mean either the use of preposition where it is not required or omission of it where it is required. Some examples given by Adedimeji (2007) will be explained below: 'discuss about', 'emphasize on', 'vanish away'...'enable him do \_ it', 'reply \_ her letter'... (p.9). The underlined are unnecessarily co-occurring with the first ones (those that are not underlined), The possible explanation to this may be that the users are influenced by the noun form of the verb's that precede the preposition which accommodation the underlined, for instance, "discussion about "emphasis on". "To" is omitted in the last two and a (-) dash is used to indicate the omission.

# Poor Knowledge of Rule of Concord

Three sub-headings under which such misuse is carried out are identified in Nigeria English. They are: subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement and the law of proximately (Nwala, 2013).

# Subject-verb agreement

NE: Every man and woman are to pay the money.

SBE: Every man and woman is to pay the money.

NE: Economics *are* usually studied in the morning.

SBE: Economics is usually studied in the morning.

"Every" precedes noun therefore singular verb is taken while "Economics" which is a common noun also takes a singular verb.

### • Pronoun-antecedent agreement

NE: The mother has instructed the children.

SBE: The mother has instructed her children.

NE: One has to be careful in everything she does.

SBE: One has to be careful in everything one does.

# • The Law of proximity

NE: Either Maris or *I has* to clean the chair.

SBE: Either Maris or *I have* to clean the chair.

NE: Neither the man nor the wives is coming today.

SBE: Neither the man nor the wives are coming today.

The law that applies above is that correlatives 'neither-nor' and 'either or' agree with the subject closer to it.

# **Wrong Conjugation of Progressive Form**

The claim here is that the misuse is dependent on the mother tongue interference and the outcome is evident in the following sentence:

NE: Are you *hearing* the sound SBE: Can you *hear* the sound

NE: I am not *understanding* the lecture SBE: I do not *understand* the lecture

It is noteworthy that static verbs are not supposed to be used in the progressive form as indicated above.

### **Collocational Violations in Sentence Constructions**

The idea of collocation is that certain words naturally co-occur with other words (Agba, 2005). It is a form of word association which the Nigerian variety of English speakers tend to disregard a great deal. These are examples of such violation:

NE: I wish to *round up* the work this morning. SBE: I wish to *round off* the work this morning.

NE: The *illegal* child of Mr. Boko is dead.

SBE: The *illegitimate* child of Mr. Boko is dead.

NE: You have *initiated* my interest in the game. SBE: You have *aroused* my interest in the game.

#### Conclusion

It has been established that there is a glaring departure from a standard from in the variety of Englishes spoken within the outer-circle countries (non-native speakers of English) where Nigeria falls into. The variation is, rather, not unusual in the sense that the ethno-linguistic factors that greeted English at the West African Coast and the domestication process are enough to dislocate it.

Having been hosted by several other local Languages, as already pointed out by Ndimele (1996), the English language in Nigeria has no other option than to yield to adaptations occasioned by the contact and the linguistic realities of the contact, which amounts to the variant form that is the Nigeria English. Several categories of variation, say, in lexis, semantics and syntactic structure of the Nigerian English has been identified which is contact-oriented.

This has, indeed, left the Nigerian English internationally unintelligible in this era of globalization.

Yet, English will not be discarded easily. It remains the country's best option as a lingua franca. It is, rather, unfortunate but factually the fact that one of the indigenous Nigerian language could not possibly emerge as the national language. An attempt towards the selection of an indigenous language as a lingua franca could only mean conferring political domination on the ethnic group that owns the language, which will spontaneously lead to ethnic war and tribalism.

Since no one has clearly profoundly argued convincingly against the ascendancy of the English language in Nigeria based on the lack of unity that arises from the choice of an indigenous Nigerian language as a lingua franca, what stops the improvement and encouragement of the growth and ascendancy of English in Nigeria? We concur, like Okoh (2006), that the door should be shut firmly against it (Nigerian English) as a medium of teaching in our institutions of learning, while the standard British English (inner-circle English) should be, is, and will still be the best option for academic purposes. All hands should, therefore, be on deck in the fight to restore or effect qualitative teaching at all levels of education in Nigeria instead of wasting time and financial resource in the struggle over the standardization of the Nigerian English.

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