

## Features of Nigerianisms in Selected Nigerian Video Films

**Julianah Akindele**

Osun State University,  
Osogbo (Ikire Campus)  
Nigeria  
julianaajoke@yahoo.com

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### **Abstract**

*This investigation explores aspects of the features of Nigerianisms in selected Nigerian video films. Human beings explore, discover and extend knowledge through the use of language. From the Nigerian home videos sampled, it was discovered that the use of English in the films reflect elements of Nigerianisms and Nigerian English usage which further reflect variation in language use as necessitated by cultural background of the users of the language. This makes the use of English in the Nigerian video films distinct from other varieties of 'World Englishes' found in the movies of the World. The research was anchored on William Labov's variability concept where relationship of language use to social context is inevitable. This social linguistic theory is relevant to this discourse as features of Nigerianisms and Nigerian English usage observed in the selected home videos revealed variation of geographical factor which is one of Labov's sociolinguistic variables. The study is a humble contribution to knowledge as it explores features of Nigerianisms in the use of English in Nigerian video films, in a non-native context such as Nigeria to project Nigerian culture to the international community.*

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**Keywords:** Nigerianisms, Nigerian English, Variation, Use of English, Nigerian Video Films

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### **Introduction**

The crucial need to produce feature films gave rise to an intellectual movement which was initiated by a handful of writers, private films, and performing arts graduates. This was not only in reaction to and rejection of alien cultural domination but also reinstates our own cultural heritage, and re-orientates our own people suffering from colonial mentality. The battle between Nollywood and indigenous, intellectual films makers for the minds and pockets of Nigerians was on the increase. In the mid'70s, Ola Balogun's box office hit *Ajani Ogun*, which opened the gates and gave much needed impetus to local film production, and this as well led a new career for travelling theatre troupes. The verve of the 80's could not sustain itself beyond the decade, though an auspicious era for production could not translate its gains into laying a solid foundation for the yearning of film makers. In the same vein, scholars have also noted that amongst the earlier films in Nigeria include, "Moral Disarmament", "Bound of Lagos" produced by the government in 1962 while in 1963, Shell B.P. sponsored the production of " Culture in Transition". Within 1990-1996, the film industry featured films such as "Oselu" by Bankole Bello, "Amadi", by Afro- Cult Foundation among others. Thus, parallel to the demise of feature film production was the emergence of 'movies' that featured films shot on video. The number of video films censored by the Nigerian Film/Video Censors Board increased since the 90's till date. The indigenous language home video production tries to meet the insatiable appetite of the working class for home entertainment and relaxation. In addition, Nigerian video films production have helped to improve the social status and life style of many Nigerian artists, home video producers and directors ( see Afolabi, 1997; Haynes & Onookome, 1997).

Relatedly, the video films in recent time have helped to relate past or ancient experiences to the society. It has provided a source of information, education, and entertainment for its viewers as it has helped to unite families together by sitting in the living room as a common family to watch movies to gain experiences about life issues as represented in an entertaining manner.. The movie industry has been ascribed several names in different countries of the world. In America, it is called Hollywood, in India (Bollywood) in Ghana, Gollywood while in Nigeria it is referred to as Nollywood – a name given by Nick Moran, a British Journalist and actor. Nollywood ranks third in the world movie industry after Hollywood (USA) and Bollywood (India) in terms of earning estimated at 9200million ( see, Akande, 2011). Nigerian video films have assumed an important position among the genres of mass communication and this has attracted the attention of scholars and researchers. The multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic nature of Nigeria as well as the significant of the English language in Nigeria has brought about the use of the English language in the so called Nigerian movies, apart from the ones produced in the Nigerian local dialects for specific geographical entity. The quest for an improved standard in the use of English in these films has been the concern of many linguists. Scholars have observed that the use of English in these films are sub standard and full of errors while some have also viewed it as a mere variation of the use of language from the local and cultural background to reflect Nigerian sensibilities..

In addition it has been observed that the English language has continued to spread across the globe and since language adapts to its new environment and sensitive to its context of culture, its various realizations at different levels of linguistics are inevitable. This simple fact has lead to varieties such as British English, Nigeria English, Canadian English, Australian English, and American English among others Ogunsiji (2006:10). Therefore, it is obvious that Nigerian English is a variety of other forms of English. However, this study is interested in exploring features of Nigerianisms in the use of English in Nigeria video films as different from other varieties across the globe in terms of having features of Nigerian English usage.

### **Background Information**

Knowledge extension and information are pre-requisite for social development. It should be noted that language does not exist in vacuum. It is a vehicle of culture, and functions as an instrument of human development.

(Sapir 1921) remarks:

Language is the only creative property unique to human beings. As individuals it is only road to thinking which makes human living possible and also make the pooling together of individual capacity (of human beings) for school development become inevitable.

In the opinion of Crystal (1997:5)

There is the closest of links between language dominance and cultural power, and this relationship will become increasingly clear as the history of English is told ... Language has no independent existence, living in some sorts of mystical space apart from the people who speak it. Language exists only in the brains and mouths and ears and hands and eyes of its users. When they succeed, on the international stage, their language succeeds. When they fail, their language fails.

The spread of the English language across the globe has brought about what is termed the ‘New Englishes’. Achebe ( 1964) comments that the price a world language must

be prepared to pay is submission to different kinds of use. In the same vein, Crystal ( 1997) and Achebe ( 1964) submit to Malinowski and Sapir –Whorfs’ hypothesis of linguistic determinism and linguistic relativity that our social and cultural background deeply condition the way we use language. This claim explains apparently the bending of the English language in almost every sphere of its use in a second language context such as Nigeria. This made Akindele and Adegbit (2005) to assert that in Nigeria, English has become a veritable tool for projecting the people’s culture to the international world, thereby dispelling the notion that Africans/Nigerians are people without culture and civilization. Hence, the focus of this research - Features of Nigerianisms in the use of English in Nigerian home videos.

Scholars such as Adesanoye (1976), Bamigbose (1982), Jowiti (1991), Adegbija (1989), Banjo (1995)) to mention a few have commented on the classification of Nigerian English. Adesanoye (1976) represented three varieties of Nigerian English based on syntactic features. Jowitt (1991) classified NE on a broad spectrum which he called ‘Popular Nigerian English’. To him, Nigerian English is a combination of standard forms which are made up of errors and variants.

Brosnahan’s (1958) classification of NE was based on the Southern part of the country:

- (i) Nigerian Pidgin variety used by people with no formal education
- (ii) Varieties used by those with only primary education
- (iii) Varieties used by those with only secondary education
- (iv) Varieties with university education

Furthermore, Egwuogu (2004) classifies Banjo’s (1971) varieties of Nigerian English as:

- (i) Varieties marked by the wholesale transfer of MT features to English
- (ii) Varieties close to SBE in syntax but with strongly marked phonological and lexical characteristics
- (iii) Varieties close to SBE in syntax and semantics, similar in phonology, different in phonetic features and with some lexical peculiarities
- (iv) Varieties identical to SBE in syntax, semantics, phonology and phonetics

The term Nigerian English is, no doubt, different from other varieties across the globe. This is informed by the fact that English as a second language (ESL) differs considerably from English as a native language (ENL). The term NE has to do with the transfer of features of indigenous languages to the target language (TL) Egwuogu (2004:98) while the features of language use emanating from the use of English in Nigeria are termed Nigerianisms (Adegbija 2004:20. Akindele Adegbite, 2005).

Furthermore, linguists have coined various terms for Nigerian English. There are terms such as: Nigerianised, Domesticated, Nativised, (Lamidi, 2013: 87), Indigenised, Pidginised, Acculturated, Localised etc. Adegbija (2004:20) further notes that the term ‘domestication’, in the context of English in Nigeria connotes “home-grown”, “made native”, “adapted and tamed to suit the Nigerian environment. Egwuogu (2004:98) shares this view:

The peculiar and polarized linguocultural typology of the Nigerian English notion necessitates a manipulation and usage of the language according to particular needs of the people.

Moreover, scholars have observed that the reason why the use of English is localized in Nigeria is because of the fact that the language cannot be a linguistic island and so has to react and adapt to its new social and linguistic environment (Adegbija, 2004). Also, Bamiro (1991) attributes the growth of the Nigerian English to obedience of principles of “least effort and economy of expression”. He cited “too know” (a knowledgeable person), “been-to” (one

who has been to countries where English serves as a mother tongue) and “senior service” (a senior civil servant)” as features of NE.

### **Features of Nigerianisms**

Features of Nigerianisms as used in this investigation reflect features of Nigerian English that separate the English use in Nigeria from other varieties of ‘Englishes in the world. Features of Nigerianisms occur at different levels of language use in Nigeria (phonological, syntactic, lexico-semantic, discourse and pragmatic). At the phonological level, Nigerianisms occur in the use of English of many Nigerians as a result of mother tongue influence. Phonological interference has been observed to be an inevitable phenomenon as a result of the fact that many Nigerians come in contact with the English language in a classroom setting as the English language is a second language in Nigeria. Banjo ( 1975) is of the opinion that an attempt to speak like LI users of the English language is locally not acceptable. He further explains that if an Hausa speaker of the English language pronounces /b/ instead of /v/ in the words ‘government and village’ as “gobermment and billage”, he should not be seen as making blunders but as varieties arising from indigenous language contact. On the other hand, at the suprasegmental level, if Nigerian English users use tone in place of stress, it should be seen as an effect of syllable time Nigerian languages on English.

More so, features of Nigerianisms at the lexico-semantic levels include expressions such as “bush meat, bride price, garri, palm-wine, cash madam, take in, pounded yam, uncle (referring to someone who is not related biologically) Oba, Emirs, timber and calibre etc.” These features have different semantic interpretation in Standard English. Moreover, at the pragmatic and discourse level, mode of greetings like ‘hope all is well’, ‘sorry’, ‘how are your family members,’ ‘I hope you are in good health’ have been observed to be expressions of cultural practices of the Nigerian people.

### **Theoretical frame work**

This study anchors on William Labov variability concept. Language analysis cannot be made valid without relating it to a linguistic theory. Language variation and change is an important tool in sociolinguistics. William Labov variability concept was preferred for this research because it deals with linguistic differentiations and description of variations in speech of members of a social class and in the speech of members of a speech community. The theory attempts to explain linguistic differentiation caused by intervention of social parameters and of their correlations. Labov variability concept examines the extent to which language systems interfere with one another on the lexical, phonological, syntactic and semantic levels, how they are acquired, conserved and modified ... (Ditmar, 1976). In a linguistic system, no language or dialect is superior to the other in functional terms. When languages come in contact, there are usually, modifications and influences from the target language. This can be said to be the situation with Nigerian English which has its root from Standard British English but has been influenced by features of Nigerianisms as can be observed from different levels of linguistics. Based on the facts highlighted above, William Labov’s variability concept becomes most appropriate and the most relevant sociolinguistic theory on which linguistic analysis of this study can be based.

### **Methodology**

The Data for this investigation was recorded directly from the television with an audio cassette clear voice recorder TCM-150. The sampled films (The Forgotten Ones, and My Mrs). The recording was done directly from the cable network television cite (Cinema Africa.). In this site, the bulk of programmes are usually Nigerian video films. Elements of

Nigerianisms in the use of English in the video films sampled were then analysed as explicated below. The preference for these films was as a result of the themes of the films which attempt to expose the ills in the society. The films are satirical in nature, they are educative, informative and also attempt to correct the ills in the society.

### **Data Analysis I**

“ The Forgotten Ones” by Mike Bamiloye,. This is one of his series. The theme of the film is on “Mission Field”. It belongs to the Christian religious genre. It satirises the Christian fold where attention is no longer paid to evangelism in the rural areas but concentration on building of cathedrals, launching and celebration. Also, it was discovered in the film that in the Christian fold, attention is less given to those who volunteer to be on mission fields. Teniola Wagbade and Dele Wagbade are both graduates of Medicine and Engineering with distinct grades but as a result of God’s calling upon their lives, they as husband and wife abandoned their career and went on a mission field work. The couple lost all they had on the mission field as they were faced with obstacles from the indigenous people who believed they were bringing in an alien religion into their community (Odooje).

In view of this, it was revealed in the film that Bamiloye, foregrounded the conflict between God’s forces and Satan’s forces in the affairs of human beings. “The Forgotten Ones” as a Christian movie is seen as an instrument of evangelisation. It shapes attitudes in a social context of fear, uncertainty, helplessness and hopelessness. The film has also alerted the Christian fold of the need for strong evangelism to rural areas, since Christ is for all. It has re-awakened the Christian fold not to only give their financial support to those on mission field but to also give them spiritual support in form of prayers .

Furthermore, the film revealed how the death of the Oba’s son in (Odooje) made Dele to be imprisoned. Though, he was later released for him to go with his father in the lord. (Aperire) to Lafiade but we saw the efficacy of prayer in the lines below:  
Lord receive it not his soul, send it back to finish his unfinished task (Baba Aperire).

After this prayer the Holy Spirit woke Dele up and he became full of life again, and they set out for the journey home. At Lafiade, Dele and Baba Aperire met their son Marvellous in sound health, and the new converts who have decided to adapt the Christian religion because of the efficacy of Teniola’s prayer in healing the lady with epileptic spirit, and sending the Holy Ghost fire which consumes “igba ifa” to ashes. The crisis in the film was resolved as Dele and Teniola were able to meet again as a happy family. At the city also, voluntary organizations met with Teniola’s parents to link them up with Dele and Teniola in the rural area where they were on mission field. Thus, they promised to give material, financial, and spiritual support to them which they actually need.

The frequent use of religious lexis in the film reveals that it is a Christian religious film. We have words like Jesus, father, Lord, Holy Ghost, Water of Life, Church, evangelist etc.

### **Nigerianisms Features in “The Forgotten Ones”**

We have utterances like:

- He is going to quench our thirst
- He is going to wet our dry bones
- We have not been receiving help
- Many times we live in hunger
- I can hear the holy spirit telling me
- Myself and Teniola were there
- The village people
- The villagers

There were frequent use of indigenous lexical forms such as: Odoje ( the deity worshipped in the community), ironmole, Iwure, Baba (for an elderly one in Yoruba language) Igba Ifa etc.

Furthermore, since it is a conversational discourse we also have utterances like

Speaker A: (Baba Aperire) .... “Dele you are back from death.....”

Speaker B: (Dele).....“Baba you didn’t see one man that gave me water to drink and Bread to eat....”

Speaker A .... “He has sent his angel to give you bread of life and living water....”

There were also instances of code mixing in the film as seen when Dele was imprisoned. Pa enu re mo ti n ba tun gbo ariwo lenu re meaning Keep quiet E rora semi o Means do not manhandle me. Instances of code mixing is also seen in Teniola’s speech Jesus Christ is the only Son of God that can save, O nikan lomo Olorun ti o le gbani....., Baba you did not see the man? O lo bayi etc.

A close look at many of the utterances in the film revealed that they were designed from indigenous language transliteration. For instance, ‘the villagers’ could imply the less privileged in SBE. ‘Holy Spirit telling me’ could be implied as being inspired in SBE. ‘To quench our thirst’ ( NE) could imply to derive satisfaction in SBE, the village people ( NE) implies the people who make up a particular community in SBE while ‘the precious egg has broken’ ( NE) in SBE means to die etc.

## Data Analysis II

The title of this home video is “My Mrs” produced by Obi Callys Obinna. This is a film that opens with a conversation between Titus and a neighbour friend BBC. The predominant language used in the film was the Nigerian pidgin. The scene opened with BBC asking Titus in the Nigerian Pidgin:

BBC: Titus una de house,

BBC: ‘you never ready?

BBC: you no wan go’ work?

BBC :Do this thing quick

Titus: Wetin concern you?

BBC: Na you sabi

“My Mrs” is also a satirical movie that exposes some ills in the society. Titus was retrenched from the bank where he was formerly working but instead of seeking for another job, he decided to live a deceitful life through begging on the streets. Meanwhile, the wife was not aware of Titus illicit acts because his begging attitude aggravated into telling lies to people just to extol money from them and later resulted to picking people’s pockets. He was actually earning a living with this immoral life style until he greedily picked up a bag with a human head along the road on a particular day that he went out for pocket picking. Titus initially thought the bag was full of money until he discovered that it was a human head that was in the bag. In an attempt to return the bag through an innocent bike rider, the police caught up with him. However, Titus smartly flees while the bike man was picked up for the crime he knew nothing about. Through investigations, the police were able to trace Titus to his residence but he cunningly disguised like a pregnant woman and escaped. The wife was also saved from the police arrest through the help of BBC who actually wanted to use the opportunity to marry her but she refused bluntly.

Titus greed, deceit and immorality acts led him into the hands of a chief security consultant who showed love and over protection to him thinking he was a woman. All attempts made by Titus to escape from the chief security consultant proved abortive until a particular day that she was taken out for shopping, Titus deceitfully asked the sales girl in the

boutique to take her to the toilet while the so-called husband waited in the shop. Although, the husband to be never wanted her to use the public toilet but she insisted. This provided her the opportunity to escape.

### **Features of Nigerianisms in the use of English in the film “My Mrs”**

Two tongues were used in the play predominantly. There is in use popular Nigerian spoken English and the Nigerian pidgin:

The conversation between BBC’s boss and BBC was in the popular Nigerian spoken English and the Nigerian pidgin. BBC’s boss, in order to show class distinction was communicating in Nigerian English:

Madam: What are you doing here?

BBC: madam I say make I clean your office

Madam: Is that why you brought out my beverages?

Madam: You mean every day you sip from my cup of tea before giving it to me

BBC: madam I just taste am small

BBC: What kind of a man is this for crying out loud

BBC: No, madam I say make I clean the cup.

Madam: I pour this thing in here so that I will stop sharing my cup with you

BBC: Madam, as you see me so, I like to dey help.

Madam: Okay I will equally help you

BBC: (pleads) madam I beg

You are fired for walking into my office without my consent BBC. I am through with you (opens the wardrobe to give BBC the balance of his salary)

BBC: Balance of my salary

Madam: BBC, do you want me to force you out of this place or call in the security man?

BBC: Madam abeg make I talk the truth

Madam: You are a thief. A common criminal

Madam: Just get out of my office

In addition, Nigerian Pidgin was paramount in the film:

You no know

If they sack am

Na you sabi

E good make you quit

Bros make I reach my room

I dey craze

We dey give them levels and swaga

I no dey feel sleep for night

I don see am

I go pursue this girl so tey

Na you dey disturb my friend

Which one be your own business

Na you sabi that one

Una don de chop now

You money

You en

If you fit package yourself anywhere , people go respect you

If to say I know say e go like this na me for first

But as I .come see you so I know say the love go they glow

I no go fit

We go they do am secretly  
Titus no go know  
See! See! body  
You no dey work anywhere  
Na me dey make tea for my madam  
SO na the thing wey you dey do be this  
You go dress commot for house like say you dey go office  
Na professional begging etc.

The predominant use of Nigerian pidgin in the selected Nigerian video films could be as a result of what Adegbija (2004) recognises as the need for social identification, informal bonding and solidarity.

Furthermore, instances of lexical borrowing were also noticeable in the film. There were utterances like ‘mba’ meaning “no”, “o di kwa nma”, meaning it is good, “biko/bikonu”, meaning please etc.

### **Conclusion**

From the Nigeria video films sampled - “The Forgotten Ones” and “My Mrs”. It was indeed evident that features of Nigerianisms are used in these films as variation in the use of English in the Nigerian home videos. Several scholars have argued on whether Nigerian English usage/Nigerianisms should be seen as errors or variations in language use when compared with Standard British English. However, arising from the socio-cultural necessities of the second language context, Nigerianisms features in this film could be viewed as variation. This is not to say there are no errors in Nigerian English usage. More so, the data analysed foregrounded other aspects of the use of English in the movies as the focus of the research was to analyse aspects of the features of Nigerianisms in the use of English in Nigerian home video’s compared to other world Englishes used in world movies. From the data gathered, it was indeed evident that features of Nigerianisms occur in Nigerian home videos and these features can be anchored on Sapir (1921) and Halliday et al (1985) widely held belief in socio-linguistics, that language varies in some kind of contexts “in place and time” Features of Nigerianisms in the use of English in the Nigerian home video sampled could be viewed as “a veritable phenomenon observable along spatio-temporal dimensions (Alo, 2004:7).

The widely acclaimed variation in language use brings about varieties of the English language world-wide. Thus, there is Ghanaian English, American English, Cameroonian English, Nigerian English as varieties of the world Englishes, as these variations express the local experiences of its speakers (Akindele, 2015).

Finally, the fact that the English language used in Nigeria has been domesticated and acculturated to express our socio-cultural realities as different from the realities of other environment where the English language is used as either first (L1) or second language (L2) were revealed in the use of English, in the home video sampled. Features of Nigerianisms used were made to conform to our world views and social cultural realities. Thus, this gives Nigerian movies a place in the movie industry because it makes Nigerian movies to be “markedly” different from other movies in the world. However, The Nigeria Censors board will further need to swift errors from variation in Nigerian English usage in Nigerian home videos.

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