

## Sociolinguistic Analyses of Naija English Lexicons among Undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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### Abstract

**Problem:** The Nigerian Pidgin English that was seen as a low prestige and corrupted language has regained its strengths among the university students in Nigeria. Precisely, the Nigerian English lexicons differ among users in different regions in Nigeria. The study investigates Naija English lexicons among the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) undergraduates as a world English dialect. The major objective of the study is to identify, examine and exemplify the Naija lexicons used among UNN students. **Method:** This study uses a descriptive survey design and also uses random sampling method to elucidate information from 220 students. Among these sampled population, the study uses 120 female undergraduates and 100 male undergraduates. This study also uses tables, simple percentage and frequency to validate the sampled population. Five variables are used to ascertain the responses for research question one. The study finds out that Nigerian English exists among the UNN undergraduates and its building blocks lies on Naija lexicons.

**Keywords:** World dialect, Nigerian Pidgin English, Naija lexicons, undergraduate, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

### 1. Introduction

Language is the only distinct medium of communication that distinguishes human being from other animals. Agbede (2015) suffices it to say that language is generally seen as a human system of communication that uses arbitrary signals, such as voice sounds, gestures, or written symbols. The above assertion indicates that language is primarily posed by human beings. Hall (1968) in Lyons (2009) states that language is an institution whereby human beings communicate and interact with each other by means of habitually use of oral-auditory arbitrary symbols.

The major functional concepts to be considered on Hall's definition are communicating and interaction which were introduced. This definition by Hall welcomes both oral and auditory arbitrary symbols which brought co-existence between speakers and hearers of a particular language. This is to say that a language is a communication in motion. When interaction abounds among Nigerians who come from different linguistic backgrounds; the common linguistic medium to be used is the English language but can be simplified by the interlocutors.

The type of English the colonial masters left for Nigerians has emerged into different English dialects. It is not only in Nigeria that such English dialects could be found, it is everywhere in the world. This is why Akmajian et al (2010) posit that no human language is fixed, uniform, or unvarying; all languages show internal variations. These variations are what are regarded as dialects of a particular language. It varies from group to another. It can also vary from one speaker to another. This could be seen from linguistic aspect of pronunciation, choice of words and the meaning of those words. It also extends its tentacles towards the use of syntactic constructions. In the same vein, Hudson (2001) describes variety of language to mean different manifestations of a language. Hudson further stated that varieties of a particular language differ from one another in respect to the linguistic items used. A variety of language is a set of linguistic items with similar social distribution. This definition helps people to differentiate among varieties of English. For examples, British English, American English, Australian English, and Nigerian English are distinctive in their linguistic constructions but they are mutually intelligible.

From the foregoing, a tactful distinction could be made between English and Englishes. Taking a cursory look at the word, English, it postulates the Received Pronunciation (RP) from Britain. On the other hand, Englishes determine varieties of RP spoken everywhere in the world. The English language has been accorded a global language but its realizations in different parts of the world brought about the world English dialects. For someone to differentiate varieties of English, an in-depth look should be on linguistic constructions.

A dialect of English could be regional dialect, social dialect and ethnic dialect. Akmajian et al (2010) say that dialect refers to a form of a language that is regarded as substandard, incorrect or corrupt as opposed to the standard, correct, or pure form of a language. The statement above indicates that a dialect has a low prestige while standard language has a high prestige.

The world English dialects exist among different social classes, ethnic groups or regional groups. The University of Nigeria, Nsukka undergraduates have peculiar world English dialect which may differ on its types which is obtained either from Yoruba land or Hausa land. Though, they formed what is called Nigerian English. In Nigeria, every group

or tribe forms their own Nigerian English towards appealing their culture. It means that the target language should be considered based on the grammatical and cultural rules of the users. It is not solely depends on the source language. This study appropriately uses a departing site for a source language and a landing site for a target language. The Nigerian Pidgin English (NE) is the target language for the University of Nigeria, Nsukka undergraduates.

The reason why this variety of English is common in the university is because every student wants to integrate in a social group where English is predominantly used. The students are integrating or socializing without taking a cursory look into the relationship between the Received Pronunciation (RP) and their indigenous linguistic background. Undergraduates simplify the RP in order to blend to the existing social group. The linguistic simplification process is more of sociolinguistics. This sociolinguistic process has reshaped the linguistic structures of the RP and increased Nigerian English lexicons. The Nigerian English lexicons that are derived from Nigerian Pidgin English are regarded as Naija lexicons.

The Naija lexicons are increasing tremendously with the help of Nigerian actors and actresses, students and interlocutors from different linguistic backgrounds. The integrative ideology by the University of Nigerian, Nsukka undergraduates boosts the Naija English Lexicons (NEL). Though, it deviates from rules guiding the RP as the English of the colonial masters.

Meanwhile, Naija lexicons are evolving almost every day and thereby causing problems to the British English which serves as an official language in Nigeria.

Admittedly, the domestication of the English language by undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka paves way to Nigerian English. The Nigerian English is perceived differently by every tribes, social groups and regional groups. The Hausa, the Igbo and the Yoruba people have their regional styles of using Nigerian English. Every social group or speech community allows the English language use in their domain to embrace their own culture and indigenous language in particular. This affects the progress of RP among Nigerians using English. From the foregoing, the English Language (RP) also has some influence on Nigeria indigenous languages. So, it is a bidirectional effect. It is either positive or negative influence that abounds. So, linguistic terms like phonological interference, loan words, lexical transfer and also the semantic interpretations come into play when a new variety of English is formed.

The British came and colonized Nigerians alongside colonizing Nigerian indigenous languages. The colonial masters tag the English language on the necks and tongues of Nigerians especially when they saw Nigeria as a multilingual nation. The British realized the need to have a common language for official duties and thereby ascribed English as an official language in Nigeria. Despite that the English is a second

language in Nigeria; it is used as a medium of teaching and learning in classrooms. The Nigerian indigenous languages accord low prestige irrespective that indigenous languages are first or mother tongues among Nigerians. In the process of speaking the English language by Nigerians especially the undergraduates deems necessary to have linguistic interference. This interference occurs between indigenous languages and the colonial language, English. Sometimes, it is common among the undergraduates to code mix, code switch, transfer and blend, and also deviate from the generative rules as assigned by the native speakers of the English language. Nigerians believe that the English language is very vast, for people to approach it from one direction. You either approach it from the alien side or from the domestic side of the user.

In this research, the following objectives are amenable to the study:

- i. to expatiate the variety of English among the University of Nigeria, Nsukka undergraduates.
- ii. to distinguish the type of world English dialect spoken in other parts of Nigeria.
- iii. to examine the Nigerian English and its sociolinguistic influence on undergraduates in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- iv. to exemplify the Naija lexicons exhibit by the undergraduates in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

This study is very important to students, lecturers, the users of the Naija lexicon and also to the sociolinguists.

The world will realize that students in the South East of Nigeria have conventional rules in using Nigerian English language (NEL). The study, therefore will add to the existing work of literature on evolving world English dialects. It will also consider the schema of communication among the undergraduates in UNN and other institutions or organizations. This study opens way for critique, review and more research on the world English dialects.

## 2. Literature review

Many scholars have written on Nigerian English and classified it the way it suits their studies. This is the reason Brosnaham (1958) has a research on the four varieties of spoken English based on the education parameters. They are:

- i. Pidgin spoken by people that are not exposed in the western education.
- ii. The one spoken by the primary school leavers.
- iii. The Nigeria English spoken by the people who have secondary certificates
- iv. The Nigerian English spoken by the tertiary certificate owners and as well as the undergraduates.

The above classifications could be redressed on the studies of the following scholars (Walsh, 1967; Adesanoye, 1973; Bokamba, 1984a).

Odumuh (1981) identifies Nigerian English as one of the new varieties of the English language as it proliferates in the world. This study postulates that there are theoretical stand for the justification of varieties of English. It goes further to state that it is one super ordinate variety of English exists and then, others spoken in many speech communities of the world including Nigeria is English varieties or the world English dialects. On the aspect of defining Nigerian English, Bamgbose (1982) defines it as a conglomeration of legitimate variants of English in Nigeria which retains intelligibility, reflects a common Nigerian culture or perception of the world and also has a mother tongue influence, as well as a common socio-political environment. Considering the linguistic nomenclature for such sociolinguistic varieties of language, it is a common language that bridges the gap among speakers having linguistic heterogeneous background.

The Nigerian Pidgin English is a speech variety that emerges when speakers from different linguistic background come into contact. Language grows like human beings and also travels like travelers. It is in the process of language travelling that a particular language came into contact with many languages via human beings. Meanwhile, as humans travel; their languages also travel with them. So, language and human beings are two inseparable phenomena. The English language travelled to Nigeria and was weakened by Nigerian cultures and languages.

In the words of Nnabuike (2013), varieties of the English language in Britain and that of Nigeria came into contact during colonization. This study investigates the sociolinguistic roles of varieties of English as seen in Nigeria and Britain. It states that such Nigerian English should be regarded as a full fledge English language as that of the British and American which exhibit their cultures.

Jibril (1982:12) spells out that Nigerian linguists have no 'citizen statuses of Nigerian English.' He buttresses that the local variety of English in Nigeria should be used as an autonomous language. Jibril argues that the English language in Nigeria does not have to be homogenous with that of the British English in order to qualify as indigenous language. Many scholars started analyzing Nigerian English using some linguistic features and literary features.

Eka (1985) carried out a study on Nigerian English intonation using a parametric model. He finds a distribution of 93.3% simple tones and 6.7% complex tones in a British control speakers. This indicates that Nigerian English has at least 93.3% tone features of the British English.

On the other hand, Bamiro (1991) examines the Nigerian English using examples drawn from the novel of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. This study lays emphasis on the polylectal speech situation in Nigeria. The study focused on the following: basilect, mesolect and acrolect to analyze Nigerian English. This study argues that it is not

adequate to use the word inappropriateness to explain Nigerian English. The findings indicate that literary contexts can provide a deep insight into the principles underlying the linguistic behavior of Nigerian users of the English language.

In the statement of Kachru (1992), the English language is classified into the concentric circles, the inner circle and the outer circle. Following his sayings, Nigeria belongs to the outer circle. Kachru made it clear that any country colonized by British belongs to the outer circle. This study articulates that in every outer circle; the English language is regarded as the language of empire and any other varieties deviated from the English of the native speakers. Such deviation could occur in phonology, grammar, lexis, idioms, discourse and styles.

Yule (1996) conducted a research on Nigerian English towards a pragmatic analysis of Bayo's poem. He discovered that the pragmatic features of Nigerian English unmasked the Nigerian literary and cultural heritage. It projects the cultural values of Nigerians to the world as the RP does to British culture.

Jowitt, (2000) studies the patterns of Nigerian English intonation. Jowitt describes the linguistic citation in Nigeria. The paper presents some of the findings of a new experimental study based on Cruttenden's model of intonation and using O'Connor and Arnold's pedagogical materials. The study indicates that such patterns having a high frequency constitute a system in Nigerian usage. Since English is used to teach intonation in Nigerian variety of English, it shows that the English language is growing geometrically while other foreign languages are growing arithmetically.

Cook (2003) supports the above assertion by showcasing that apart from four hundred million native speakers of English, it has increased to over a billion speakers or users in countries where the English serves the function of official language. Cook states that in so many countries, English is now used as the language of business, education accessing information, politics and as well as for social gatherings.

Kperogi (2010) classifies Nigerian English into: Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), Nigerian English (NE), and Nigerian Broken English (NBE). Kperogi defines the three varieties of English found in Nigeria. He said that Nigerian English should be domesticated and standardized as one of the varieties of English found in Nigeria. Nigeria English cut across members of social groups located in various contexts.

Seeing Nigerian English as a linguistic repertoire, Nnabuike (2013) has a research on comparative analyses of Nigerian and British Englishes. The study further finds out that British English and Nigerian English have some linguistic and sociolinguistic features in common irrespective that they approach it from different cultural backgrounds. The study is of the notion that since we have British English; we should accredit Nigerian English as an autonomous English variety found in Nigeria.



Ahamefula (2016) edited a text, *Glossary of slang on campus* to exhibit some of the slangs used by undergraduates. This textbook has many slangs, their meanings and organizations where they are used. Slangs in Nigeria are aspects of Nigerian English. It crops up from every nook and cranny in the world but mostly adopted Nigerian languages roles while using them. This shows that varieties of English are context bound and it is used among individuals in schools, church, market, and government house. This is the reason Nwoda studied the attitudes regarding the use of Nigerian Pidgin English among students at Coventry University. Nwoda's study proves that the Nigerian Pidgin English should be enrolled in Nigerian tertiary institutions across the country for Nigerian communicative ability and understanding.

From the foregoing, the English Language is regarded as the Received Pronunciation (RP). The RP has so many offshoots which Nigerian English is one of them. Nigerian English serves the same purpose in Nigeria as the British English does in Britain. Nigerian English is one of the varieties of the English language which cut across regional, social group and ethnic groups. The undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka belong to a regional and social group where Nigerian English has a high yield under sociolinguistics. Some of these linguistic features such as idioms, slang and Naija lexicons serve as nutrients for the growth of Nigerian English. In different ethnic groups or social groups, Naija lexicons obtained differ or vary and thereby classifying Nigerian English into more varieties.

This study looks at the variety of English as it is used among undergraduate students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka while engaging in everyday linguistic transactions. It also harvests the numerous Naija lexicons which come into play while interacting with other people in the Nsukka Campus.

### 3. Methods

This study adopts a descriptive survey design. A random sampling is used to ascertain the population of the study. The participant observation and copies of questionnaire are used to elucidate information. The sampling population of 220 undergraduate students from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is used. These respondents are selected based on gender variable and the study makes use of 120 female and 100 male undergraduates. It connotes every departments in nine faculties located in Nsukka campus of the university. Though, the participants were chosen randomly.

The data are analyzed descriptively. It also uses table to ascertain the percentage of male and female students that are significant to the study.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 The frequency and percentage of the population

Undergraduates	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males	100	45.5
Females	120	54.5
Total	220	100

From the above table, the study used one hundred male undergraduate students which denote 45.5%. The female respondents are one hundred and twenty female undergraduate students.

### 4.2 Responses for the research question one using five variables

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
SA	175	79.5 $\approx$ 80
A	10	4.5
SD	10	4.5
D	20	10
NA	3	1.36 $\approx$ 1 to 1d.p

From the above table, the following computations were realized from the responses obtained from the respondents in answering research question one. The detail analysis indicates that five variables are used. They are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D) and Not Answered (NA).

One hundred and seventy five respondents which signify 79.5% and approximately 80% strongly agreed that the undergraduates in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka communicate using Nigerian Variety of English (NVE). Ten respondents indicating 4.5% said that they agree that Nigerian English is used among the undergraduates of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). Strongly disagree is exhibited by ten respondents which is 4.5% and twenty respondents (10%) indicating 20 respondents disagree. Three respondents showing 1% did not attempt this particular question. This inferred that they do not know the type of English the undergraduates in UNN are using while communicating. The NA percentage is 1.36% and finally becomes 1% to one decimal place. The result obtained from the aforementioned frequencies and percentages show that Nigerian Variety of English (NVE) is common among undergraduates in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.



### 4.3 Types of world English dialect spoken in other parts of Nigeria

Seventy-five percent of the sampled population indicates that the variety of Nigerian English spoken among the UNN undergraduates differ from its kind obtained in the North and South West in Nigeria. The students prove that though Nigerian English (general) is spoken in UNN but the one mostly spoken in UNN is referred to as Nigerian Igbo English (NIE). Examples of these slang expression that originated from the Igbo speech communities as they are used by students of UNN are as follow:

- i. *Bọcháá* - My friend lets *bọchaa* for our dear lives.
- ii. *Dáchí* - Guy u bi *dachi!*

In the example one, *bọcháá* means go away from here. While in example two, *dáchí* means a thing that is reasonable or a productive thought. It is observed that there is letter deletion and sound of you is maintained. Other examples could solidify the existence of Nigerian Igbo English.

- i. *Éké/Ékélébé* – police
- ii. *Ékúké* – a village girl or insulting village girl
- iii. *Gbáwáà* door – keep going or leave
- iv. *Kéé* way? – How are you?
- v. *Kpémé* – die
- vi. *Mgbéké* – making fun of a naive girl
- vii. *Ndí ógò* - boys and men that visit girl's hostels.
- viii. *Nwánné nà nwánné* - homosexuals
- ix. *Òwù dey blow*- being cash strapped
- x. *Vúmì* – to run hurriedly in order to escape danger

The above examples showcase that the Nigerian Igbo English is obtainable in UNN and thereby indicating that such variety of English is context-bound in sociolinguistic platform. One sociolinguistic aspect of above utterances in italics proves that multiple codes used by students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka are obtainable in the target area of speakers.

### 4.4 The Nigerian English and its sociolinguistic influence on undergraduates in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Research question three and responses obtained from the respondents through copies of questionnaire. In a sociolinguistic platform, Nigerian English has some influence on the communicative ability of UNN undergraduates. Some of these influences are as follow:

- a. Code switching/borrowing
- b. Code mixing
- c. Phonological interference

- d. Jargon
- e. Slangs

These sociolinguistic phenomena should be explained to ascertain how they are used in the University Nigeria, Nsukka.

#### 4.4.1 Code switching/borrowing:

In the University of Nigeria, Nsukka most of the communication styles obtained among undergraduates in UNN. Code switching often occurs within a single sentence. Examples obtain in UNN among the undergraduates:

- i. My friend *ká'ányí bócháá*.
- ii. The guy *ná-ázá ùgbá*.
- iii. Today's lecture *ná dáchí*.

#### 4.4.2 Code mixing

The second sociolinguistic influence is code mixing. In code mixing, it occurs on lexical entities. For examples:

- i. *kolomental*
- ii. *mugufall*
- iv. *Arabachop*

#### 4.4.3 Phonological interference

Phonological interference occurs where the speaker has a first language precisely mother tongue and the speaker transfer some phonemes to the target language. Among some students, they have mimicked people from Ontisha and Uzo Uwani on how they pronounce some words in English.

- i. *naw* for law
- ii. *lice* for rice
- iii. *negosi* for Lagos

Examples (i) and (iii) are mostly found among Uzo Uwani axis of Nsukka senatorial districts. The example 'ii' is common with people from Onitsha in Anambra state.

#### 4.4.4 Jargon

Jargon is a special language for a particular group. Among the undergraduate in UNN, jargon exists in classrooms, outside classrooms, among their social groups and also among friends. It signifies a unique way of saying or communicating to the members alone. These are some examples among the palm wine club members:

- i. *Ókpékésòn* meaning a young girl

ii. *Nkásù* meaning the University of Nigeria

Another jargon which could be found among the undergraduate students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka include the following:

- i. *Tanker* – a girl that goes to men hostel around 7:00pm
- ii. *Tart up*- when a girl dresses in a cheap and provocative way.
- iii. *T-end* – toilet end
- iv. *Sir P* – it means a professor especially when it involves student- lecturer relationship.

#### 4.4.5 Slang

Slang could be lexical, phrasal or sentential in making. This study handles slang in phrasal and sentential forms as they are observed among undergraduates in UNN. Examples of slang among the undergraduate students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka:

- i. *Artificial bread* – it means sanitary pad
- ii. *Baby ókù* – when referring to a flirt or wayward girl
- iii. *Bash up* – to wound one severely by hitting him or her hard
- iv. *Boys follow me* – it is used when a girl did not dress properly
- v. *kàsàlà don bust* – there is a problem
- vi. *Kòtí don show* – police has arrived for arrest.
- vii. *Night crash* – to sleep in night class
- viii. *Nwánné ná nwánné* – it means homosexuals

#### 4.5 Naija lexicons and their usage among UNN undergraduates

Naija lexicons simply refer to those lexicons used by Nigerians as aspects of Nigerian English. Among UNN undergraduates, Naija (Nigeria) lexicons are common as these students are activators and motivators of such sociolinguistics repertoire. This study showcases some of Naija lexical entities as used by students of the University of Nigeria Nsukka. The lexicons these undergraduates are using are context bound. When you move to the Western and Northern regions, lexicons used by students of high institution differ. Examples:

- i. *Staffs* – Uchenna has seen the staffs
- ii. *Furnitures* – I have furnitures in my office.
- iii. *Bend corner* – The driver packed at bend corner
- iv. *Extreme end* – The executive is standing at the extreme end.
- v. *Yan* – The man dey yan us tori.
- vi. *White horse* – I am eating white horse
- vii. *Toast* – You want toast the girl?

The examples: (i) and (ii) above are ungrammatical when beckoning on British English Lexicons (BEL) while it is right among Nigerians using Nigerian English. These lexicons: *staffs* and *furnitures*, the users are not competent in forming plurals in English. They generalized the plural markers without taking cognizance on some exceptions. Tautology is the best grammatical concept for examples (iii) and (iv). Either one of the word should be used. That is *extreme* or *end* or *bend* or *corner*. In example (v) *yan* means talk or say something while *tori* means story.

Examples (vi) and (vii) denote a semantic shift in the English language due to a shift in the context of the users. This is to say that 'white horse' means an animal in the British variety of English while it means *semolina* among the UNN undergraduates. In the same vein, *toast* in its original semantic form implies slicing of bread and making it warm. But in this UNN locality, it means to woo or chat up a girl.

From the foregoing, it is obvious from the analysis of the above Naija lexicons that semantic shift abounds as a result of a context change.

## 5. Summary of the findings

The variety of English obtained among the University of Nigeria Nsukka undergraduate students is known as Nigerian Variety of English (NVE). This Nigerian Variety of English could be realized differently in every region found in Nigeria. The perception of people is that Nigerian English obtained in UNN is called Nigerian Igbo English (NIE). It is a high time that this variety of English was developed to enhance a common language in multilingual nation, Nigeria.

Every language deals with phones, phonemes, morphemes, lexical entities, sentences and utterances as building blocks for the development of such language. Naija lexicons come into play to enrich Nigerian Variety of English. Likewise, Nigerian Igbo lexicons address the issues on Nigerian Igbo English variety. These lexicons have some sociolinguistic influence on Nigerian English.

Some of this influence may be positive or negative depending on the users, source language and target language. Naija lexicons are linguistic ingredients to enrich Nigerian English and also to lift it to a prestigious state as that of the British English and the American English. It should be accorded a respect since it is a variety of Received Pronunciation (RP) and both are mutual intelligible.

### 5.1 Conclusion

It suffices it to say that what makes the British English, the American English and the Australian English what they are today is obtainable in Nigerian English. The English dialect obtained among the undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is very unique.

This variety of English has the same status with British English and some other variety found in the world. The Nigeria Igbo variety of English has many linguistic and sociolinguistic features to qualify it as an autonomous language which should be used in Nigeria the way the British English is used in Britain.

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