



**LEXICO-SEMANTIC VARIATION IN NIGERIAN
ENGLISH USAGE IN OBAFEMI'S 'WHEELS'
AND GIMBA'S 'TOAST IN THE CEMETRY'**

Aishat Ahmad Iguda

Department of English

Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education Kumbotso, Kano

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to find out the manner in which the meaning of lexical items is extended, shifted, generalized, transferred or completely changed in Nigerian English using textual analysis as a method of data collection. Two literary texts are selected, 'Wheels' by Olu Obafemi and 'A Toast in the Cemetery' by Abubakar Gimba. The study adopts the model of Adegbija [1989] and Bamiro [1991] in describing the lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English. The findings point out that the meaning of English lexical items used in Nigeria sometimes appear to be different from those of Standard British English which brings about changes in the meaning of such lexical items. The changes come in the form of extension, transfer, shift, acronyms, and analogy.

Introduction

English in Nigeria is an influential second language which exhibits a high degree of linguistic characteristics that appear to be different in several respects from those found in the first languages of Nigerians. The features of Nigerian English make it a vibrant local variety, which

makes the language distinctive in the context of usage. The distinctiveness of the usage of English by Nigerians gives birth to what is today known as Nigerian English [NE]. Bamgbose [1995:24] calls this distinctiveness ‘the nativization of English language in Nigeria’. The distinctive nature of NE appears in both spoken and written forms, specifically in the areas of phonetics, phonology, semantics, syntax and lexis. One of the consequences of the use of English in a second language setting is divergence from the norm, which includes semantic extension, narrowing and change.

The changes in meaning that occur in Nigerian English usage are as a result of several factors. Although there are many changes of the meaning of certain lexical items that differ from native speaker usage, there are common grounds in which particular lexical items are used alike.

It has been noticed that there have been studies carried out on Nigerian English, particularly Nigerian lexis, but these have been essentially synchronic, leaving the field of diachronic study of Nigerian English almost untreated. Some of these works are Odumuh [1987], Banjo [1995], Adesoneye [1973], Jowitt [1990], etc. It is in the light of this realization that this researcher thinks it worthy to both diachronic and synchronic study of semantic change in Nigerian English lexis.

The variety of English usage brings about several distinctive linguistic features, which reflect the environment, culture, perception and attitude of the people of Nigeria. Several aspects of this variety have brought about so many misconceptions and

misinterpretations of certain lexical items and expressions. As a result, the researcher thinks it worthy to find the consequences of certain changes in Nigerian English expressions and lexical items and their possible divergence from English used elsewhere.

The aim of this paper is to offer an insight into how the meanings of lexical items of expressions are changed in Nigerian English usage. And the objectives of the paper are to find out the manifestation or instances of semantic change, to find the processes of semantic change among speakers of English in Nigeria and to find out the connotation of certain expressions or lexical items and their possible divergence from English used elsewhere.

A study of this nature is propelled by motives which to a high degree have to do with resounding interest the researcher has in the study of Nigerian English. It is important to obtain reliable data about Nigerian English, especially now that it is gradually being accepted both nationally and internationally. This paper, which is particularly on Nigerian English lexis [NE], is justified now that this variety of English, is gradually being taken more seriously even within Nigeria. Nigerian writers of English especially of literary works and mass media, are aware of happenings and occurrences in Nigeria; such phenomena bring out innovative tendencies, which may come out in the form of extension, restrictions, coinages, acronyms, analogy, idiomatic expressions or other forms of lexical items and expressions. These are then turned into popular use by the press and within a short space of time, the usage is heard on the lips of many Nigerians and also read on the pages of newspapers, magazines,

etc. It is, therefore, the thinking of the researcher that users of English would find paper valuable.

As part of this research activity, the paper examines literary works, such as novels by Nigerian writers 'Wheels' by Olu Obafemi and 'Toast in the cemetery' by Abubakar Gimba. It is hoped the material chosen will provide substantial evidence of lexical semantic change or otherwise of Nigerian English. It is expected that other scholars will in due course add to improve the evidence.

This paper has the following assumptions: the standard British English meanings of some of the items get changed in the Nigerian context of usage. The meaning of Nigerian English items change over time. Many Nigerian English lexical items or expressions are not seen as errors, but have become institutionalized. Some of the Nigerian English items are used in the same way as in Standard British English.

Nigerian English Usage

The unique nature of new Englishes poses several problems among which are those of definition, identification, classification, norm and intelligibility. The designation, 'Nigerian English', for instance, is somehow deceptive. Thus, the Hausa speaker of Nigerian English uses English exactly in the same way as a Yoruba or an Igbo speaker. If the answer is in the negative, which happens to be case in this instance, then the next question is: what then constitutes Nigerian English? The opinion ranges from outright rejection of

its existence to those who take its existence for granted and use the term without defining or questioning it. In between these two extremes is a continuum of various definitions and analysis.

Odumuh [1987] identifies Nigerian English as one of the new varieties of the language developing all over the world. He proceeds to provide a theoretical basis to justify its existence. And he argues, the existence of a single super ordinate variety presupposes that of other form of usage in the Nigerian speech community. This assertion answers, to a certain degree, one of the questions posed above as to whether Nigerian English is a homogeneous entity. He goes further to give some features that distinguish Nigerian English from other forms of English in other parts of the world. These he categorizes into lexical, semantic, syntactic and phonological usages at both the spoken and written levels. Using the theory of linguistic variation, he argues that in context situations, as in the case of Nigeria, a variety or varieties are bound to emerge which differ from that of Britain [the English language model for Nigeria]. He also raises the issue of standardization and two other related issues to local acceptability and international intelligibility. Nigerian English, he asserted, does satisfy these criteria to a high degree.

Furthermore, Odumuh [1987] sub-divides Nigerian English into three varieties arising from the influences of the three major [regional] languages of Nigeria also referred to as 'national language'. These he categorizes as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo English. It is these dialect types, he contends, that contribute, feed and enrich the

super ordinate Nigerian English. He also recognizes the immense contribution of written creative literature to the standardization of Nigerian English. He then suggests a two way approach to the differentiation in the Nigerian English mode [written and spoken] and education attainment [education standard, semi-standard and non-standard]. Thus, he concludes that these are not clear-cut demarcations, but rather constitute a continuum of usages.

Adekunle [1985], on one hand, uses the theory of change and linguistic variation to determine the notion of Nigerian English. He needs geographical and linguistic factors as responsible for changes in English language usage in Nigeria. These changes, according to him, are rapid and most far reaching in the semantic component of the languages. On the other hand, Akere [1982] posits that Nigerian English [NE] is an aggregate of heterogeneous grammatical structures common to Nigerian usage, having varying pronunciation peculiarities as well as socially constrained usage of some lexical items.

Semantic Change in Nigerian English

Adegbija [1989] views semantic change as semantic shift or semantic progression that describes the evolution of 'word' usage-usually to the point of that modern meaning, which is a radically changed meaning of 'words'. Every word has a variety of senses and connotations that can be added, removed or altered over time, often to the extent that it cognates across space and time. He identifies five types of lexico-semantic

variation in Nigerian English .Several of these variations most likely spring from a variety of sources that would hinder any systematic attempt at classifying them. These variations are: Transfer, Acronyms, Semantic shift or extension and Coinage or neologism. In analyzing the above variation, Adegbija [1989] illustrates the following

Transfer of meaning describes the types of variation in which meaning not present in English but present in the mother tongue is directly translated into English in many Nigerian languages. For instance, several meanings related to marriage and burial, which semantic fields cannot be conveyed in English, or their expression, would be adequate to indicate their Nigeria denotation and connotation. A literal translation often results as in the following examples:

Mother tongue	Nigerian English	Gloss
[Yoruba] <i>eran igbe</i>	bush meat	an edible animal <i>caught</i> in the bush
<i>Ijade</i> [Yoruba]	outing	a ceremony
<i>kos</i> [won] <i>n ijoko</i>	not on seat	used when an official is not available in the office

At times, an English equivalent may exist but is perceived to be cumbersome; that is to say, a simple field version of the mother tongue equivalent sense is conveyed through translation as in the following:

Mother tongue equivalent	Nigerian English	Native
<i>gborun</i> [Yoruba]	hear a smell	perceive an odour
<i>mo n bo</i> [Yoruba]	I am coming	excuse me I'll soon be back
<i>ina zuwa</i> [Hausa]	I am coming	excuse me I'll soon be back
<i>ya</i> [Yoruba]	branch	stop over

In the variation that deals with lexico-semantic analogy or generalization, it is described as the formation of new words on the basis of partial likeness or agreement in form or sense with already existing words either in the mother tongue as in English. Word formation processes in English, such as suffixation and prefixation, are very productive analogy models in Nigerian English. The newly formed items could be entirely English or a hybrid of English, the mother tongue. Some of these examples include: Azikiwe (person's name-mother tongue) but in Nigeria English it is often referred to Zikism. So also is the case with Awo (a person's name-mother tongue) and Awoism (Nigerian English)

Moreover, most non-plurizable mass nouns such as equipment, furniture, information, etc are made plural in Nigerian English by analogy with English regular patterns of pluralisation involving the simple procedure of the addition of the –s suffix to nouns to form their plurals. In native English context, lexical items, such as arrange, invitee, counselee, decampee, etc very common in Nigerian English, are based on analogy with words, such as addressee, examinee, etc. Items like broadcasted,

bursting, roasted, etc in English follow irregular past tense formation patterns in English.

In case of acronyms, the illustration indicates that the formation of new lexical items by the use of the initial letters or larger portions of existing words do produce typical English acronyms. These may include the following: NEPA- National Electric Power Authority, ASUU- Academic Staff Union of Universities, JAMB – Join Admission and Matriculation Board, WAI –War Against Indiscipline, etc. The extent to which these acronyms induced words have established themselves in Nigerian English is demonstrated by their ability to take suffixes and prefixes. Thus, one occasionally hears references to “Jambite” “anti-WAI tendencies”, etc.

The semantic shift and extension variation reveal that few lexical items in native English have their semantic range restricted, shifted or extended in Nigerian contexts. Some of these examples include: ‘dress’ (to move at the end of a row to create space for other persons), ‘station’ (the place where a person works), ‘machine’: a motorcycle, ‘locate’: to be assigned to a workplace after graduation from a school or completing a course.

He also states that, when observing the above example, the dictionary meaning differs from the Nigerian English sense glossed above.

In Nigerian English lexis, extension of meaning may refer to the meanings of actual English words that are extended to cover areas outside the original ones

(Adekunle, 1985:36). For instance, words like ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ are used to cover wide areas of meaning other than somebody with whom one shares or has the same father or mother or both. Other items in terms of kinship include ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘uncle’, ‘aunt’, etc. It, however, appears that all these extensions of the meaning of existing words do not seem to lead to confusion or ambiguity.

However, Robins (1971) argues that in the Nigerian situation, it is almost possible to extend meaning to a certain level in Nigerian English (lexis) that a user of English from another part may not understand. For example, the word ‘sorry’ (thought often used in spoken form) has so been extended in Nigeria that it may mean sympathizing with someone or may mean apology for an injury caused or offence committed and so on. It is doubtful if such meaning can be made out of the same word in any other situation outside Nigeria.

In addition to the above, a complete change of the meaning of lexical items is another aspect of Nigerian English (NE) lexis that may be said to cause problems in understanding the meaning of words. This means that the English item is so called in the Nigerian context that meaning is totally different from the way it is used in Standard British English (SBE): this, according to some scholars like Lyons (1981), may be due to the world view of Nigerian users of English being different from that of SBE. Some scholars have opined that the complete change in meaning of items is caused by culture influence. Todd (1973) gives instances of semantically changed items in Nigerian English (NE)

lexis as well as some West African usages, such as ‘balance’ i.e. change, ‘branch’ i.e. make a stop on a journey or call at someone’s house or office, ‘bush’ – unpolished, ‘go slow’ – traffic jam, etc.

The coinage or neologism variation indicates that the necessity for accommodating new experiences feelings, thought patterns, modes of life, culture and customs, etc. which English in Nigeria has encountered has compelled the creation or invention of lexical items with naturalized meanings. In fact, this category of lexico-semantic coinage or neologism cuts across all the other types of variation discussed in this study. Thus, three main bases can be recognized for lexical innovation (a) the existing lexical stock in English eg- ‘half-current’ (b) the existing lexical stock in the mother tongue , eg – *agbada* (Yoruba), *tuwo* (Hausa), *Abiku* (Yoruba) a reincarnated child and (c) a hybrid of the lexical stock of English and indigenous languages, e.g. ‘akara’ balls: a synonym of beancake, bukateria-a blend of Yoruba ‘*buka*’ (a place where food is sold, usually cheaply) and –eria (an invented English suffix).

There are items in the MT of Nigerians that are translated directly into English. Adekunle and Baimro (1991) cite examples of these, as in ‘tight friend’, ‘known face’, ‘morning meal’, ‘market women’, ‘draw soup’, etc. Adekunle (1985) concludes that ‘loan creation’ is also another attribute of Nigerian English. It means coinage involving the union of two English words in a new semantic relationship, e.g. ‘naira power’, ‘bottom-power’, ‘petty trade’, etc. which are all collocations.

Ibrahim (2009) investigates the linguistic expressions of colour in Nigerian English usage. The frequency of occurrence, the pattern of usage, symbolism and collocation of colour terms were examined by the researcher to find out how Nigerian English as a variety confronted the universal pattern and tendencies of colour mapping and naming in English of the Western world. The findings reveal that colour symbolism in Nigerian English usage shows some transfer of colour symbolism from indigenous Nigerian languages. The investigation also reveals that in Nigerian English usage, colour terms are derived from the colour of the same entity the in the world, which influence the way these colour names are assigned in Nigerian English usage, Example metallic, ash, milk, army green, ox blood, lemon green, etc. The main metonymic process that yields the semantic productivity is colours in Nigerian English usage is a part-whole relation where the colour of an entity is used to stand for the entity itself.

Models of Approach

This study adopts Adegbija and Bamiro's model (1991) in describing the lexico-semantic features of the Nigerian English. Bamiro (1991), on the one hand, asserts that the lexico-semantic variation of Nigerian English illustrates certain types of linguistic behavior among Nigerian users of English, such as translating directly with least effort and economy of expression, revealing the socio-cultural logic and imperatives of the Nigerian environment. He, however, suggests that the lexico- semantic features of Nigerian English are classified under ten categories, which include lexico-

semantic duplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, clipping, acronyms, translation equivalent, analogical creation and coinage.

Adegbija (1989: 168, 174), on the other hand, notes that the existence of direct lexical transfers, such as *eba*, *amala*, *ododo*, *tuwo*, *agbada*, *abiku*, etc. from Nigerian mother tongues into English is because of lack of precise equivalents in English. This also includes loan-blends, such as '*kiakia bus*', '*akara balls*' and '*bukateria*'. Adegbija (1989) refers to these lexical transfer and blends as lexical features of Nigerian English. He identifies five major classes of lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English. They are: transfer, acronyms, semantic shift or extension, analogy and coinage or neologism.

This study will adopt a combination of two lexico-semantic models by Adegbija (1986) and Bamiro (1991) to analyse the data. Variations from both theorists are relevant to the analysis of the lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English in 'Wheels' by Olu Obafemi and 'A Toast in the Cemetery' by Abubakar Gimba. These features are selected to suit the contexts and lexemes of these texts. These features are: direct lexical transfer, loan blend, coinage, loan shift, extension and analogical creation.

Textual Analysis of Nigerian English Usage in Olu Obafemi's "Wheels"

.....leaving my newly wife Abike behind with no child, no house no money, no food, no family, they gave me retire benefit of thirty pounds. P.12

The repetition of the word "No" in the above utterance by Sonja is a direct translation from her mother tongue. Expressions like these are very common in some Nigerian languages. Example in Hausa: *ba abinci* (no food), *ba gida* (no house) *ba kudi* (no money), *ba iyali* (no family) is accepted. But in Standard British English, such expressions would go like this....No child, house, money, food and family.

....." I started trading as I can no longer go to the farm. I manage to save little of this money to buy this my machine". P 12.

The word 'machine' in this utterance by Sonja is extended to cover the meaning of motorbike. In Standard British English, machine refers to all mechanical devices. In this utterance, there is an extension of meaning in Nigerian English. 'this my' on the same utterance is another example of a Nigerianism, which is a direct lexical transfer from the mother tongue.

" I now pay this long long dues and rites" P.14

There is also a transfer of usage from the mother tongue to Standard English as it is the tradition of many Nigerian languages where words are reduplicated in

order to show emphasis, which is absent in Standard British English .

There is also the transfer of usage from the mother tongue to Standard English, as it's the tradition of many Nigerian languages where words are reduplicated in order to show emphasis, which doesn't occur in Standard British English

The same page: many many soldiers, even officers 'kwa' many of them lost their wives and even their children to rich men during the war.

The use of "long long" and " many many" is a direct transfer of translation from the mother tongue. This indicates a sense of reduplication that is virtually absent in Standard British English variety; some lexical items can be repeated in order to depict emphasis.

Mago mago (to dupe), fallo fallo (follow), cry cry (cry), chop chop (eating), yanma yanma (rubbish), chin chin (cake), kuli kuli (cake like made from groundnut), waka waka (walk), moi moi (food made from beans), jedi jedi (pile), sharp sharp (quick), mu mu (dull), true true (true), touch touch (touch), talk talk (talk), holy holy (holy), jaga jaga (not in order), kia kia, (hurry up), maza maza (hurry up), haba haba (cheerful), scatter scatter (scatter), wuru wuru (maneuver), kabu kabu, (commercial motorcyle), pala pala (too many), worry worry (worry), quick quick (quick), laf laf (laugh), etc

"I sorry, I just dey smell small danger".p.16

The expression "smell small danger" is a direct transfer of meaning from the mother tongue where there is no distinction between the verbs "smell" and "perceive". Ideally, the expression should be to "perceive....danger", gbo oru-Yoruba 'hear smell', which means to perceive an odour.

First line of the paragraph "count the money, quick quick" p.19 is a direct translation similar to the expression Yoruba "*kia kia*"(hurry up) and Hausa "*maza maza*" (hurry up)

"He remembered the colonel and generals who gave all the big big orders" p.26

....big big orders is a direct transfer from the mother tongue; this example can be justified in the Hausa expression, such as *manya manya*.

"....mostly, I am thinking inside me and the story can be glimpsed between whispers and echoes and flurry of thought and sound...I am thinking as my father begins to mount his motor-bike in front of our face me I face you house. P 33

"... thinking inside me" is a direct translation of the mother tongue and the words "face me I face you" is one of the example of the three main bases of lexical innovation that were listed by Adegbiya (1989) under coinage or neologism: (a) the existing lexical stock in English (b) the existing lexical stock in mother tongue, and (c) a hybrid of lexical stock of English and indigenous language.

“Through the little alleys leading to their various walled estate and mansions in the street, you could smell all sorts of fine smells of foodchicken smell, bush-meat smell” p.34 Thus the compound word bush-meat is an example of coinage in which a new word is invented and it is as a result of mother tongue, e.g.

Yoruba
Eranige

Nigerian English
bush-meat

Bush meat refers to the edible animal caught from the bush

“....in a grass-stuffed mattress and put in the room and parlour apartment in the face-me-i-face-you rented house where we Sonja, mama Kofo, and myself live eat, sleep and wake up” p.37. The word ‘*parlour*’ in the above utterance by Kofo got its meaning completely changed compared to British Standard English, which denotes some types of shops, which provide a service, rather than selling things. In Nigerian English usage it means ”living room”.

On page 40, second paragraph “common let’s spend the rest of our recess time to play a little.”

The meaning of the word “common” is shifted here or extended to mean different expression from standard British English. It is used in Nigerian context to call attention of somebody or to command somebody to do something for you, e .g. common, shut up!

The word “common” (see come on) is used to called the attention of Kofo.

.....common Kafo, we all know there was a mistake somewhere

“.... .remarks Gbenga who usually steals away every evening from his rich and beautiful compound to listen to grandma’s nightly folktales on our but clean compound” p.69

The word ”steal” in this context is used to mean “sneak” in standard British English , but the above context, it is directly translated from mother tongue just like the Hausas say “*satar jiki*”.

These are civilized times. A modern king does not need to wear “*Agbada*” or “*Aso oke*” Gbenga replied, still beaming with the excitement. P. 70

There is borrowing of lexical items into English, which is one of the lexico-semantic elements of variation in Nigerian English usage.

“..... my parents who are very proud of their son who has now joined few from our village who will wear college tie, blazer and college *kaftan*” p 87

The word “*kaftan*” is borrowed from Hausa (originally from Arabic) refers to a long sleeved gown. “... the mechanics, the vulcanizers, rewires, saloonist and seamstresses, etc” p.96

There is coinage or neologism where the word ‘*saloonist*’ is invented from the word ‘saloon’.

“my fathers and mothers, invited guest, chairman, lady chairman, y colleagues. I greet all of you ” p.151 My fathers and mothers is an extension of kinship, because the words do not mean the biological parent of the speaker.

On the same page, the use of the word “invitee” is a coinage. In British English, the Master of ceremony (MC) will address the guest as: invited guest or simply guest.

“.....Ladies and gentle men, our illustrious children I thank you for inviting a poor , farm-going, yam-eating man like me into a gathering of educated people” p.152

There is coinage of new lexical items like farm-going, yam-eating man.

“Mama who is our mother of the day as well as the ‘lady chairman’ will now open the floor” the lady chairman is coinage which in standard British English means chairman or chairperson.

Textual analysis of Nigerian English usage in Gimba’s “A Toast in the Cemetery.”

The choice of *wanna-be-suitor* would not give her chance to study. P.59

The *expression* *wanna-be-suitor* is a coinage. It is a combination of American word ‘*wanna*’, meaning

“want to” and be-suitor. This is a coinage of which means would-be suitor.

...she too began to receive “small talks” about her growing not priority of being the “girl-about-town” p.59

The invention of the words ‘small-talks’ is a direct transfer of mother tongue into English as in Hausa “*kananan maganganu*” (gossiping) and the use of the compound word “girl-about-town” is a coinage or neologism.

“...slim and cocoa-butter complexion is a creation of new colour term to refer to somebody who is neither fair in complexion nor black in complexion. P.62

The invention of this colour term is not used as it is in British Standard English; therefore, it is a Nigerianism

...I wanted to quietly steal my way into any mosque nearby p.65

The expression “steal my way” is also transfer of what is in the mother tongue (Hausa) to English as “*na saci hanya*” (to sneak).

“sorry, sergent” it was the taller of the nurses, “ we have to interrupt you for few minutes” p.67

In the above expression the meaning of the word “sorry” is extended to cover a different meaning it possesses in a Standard British English. In the context the word is extended to cover the meaning of the word “excuse”.

....the even sometimes gave him some contract jobs, but these were incomparable to the lucrative, money – spinners from the central p.72 .The compound word ‘money- spinners is a coinage of new item to suit the Nigerian expression as money cannot be spin; it is a direct transfer as in Hausa expression “*masu kera kudi*” to refer to rich persons.

Discussion

The above analysis depicts the semantic change that occurs in Nigerian English using the texts “Wheels” by Olu Obafemi and “A Toast in the Cemetery by Abubakar Gimba”. The findings reveal that transfer features and coinages constitute the greater bulk of lexico-semantic features in the novel and the play selected. Anology and semantic shift are also present but with lower frequency of occurrence compared with transfer, coinages or neologism features.

The reason for the high frequency of transfer and coinages is due to the fact that the need for English to cater for the socio-cultural needs of Nigerian users during communication allows for meaning not found in Standard British English to be transferred to English and new words to be coined.

In essence, the analysis established the fact the features of lexico-semantic variation in Nigerian English helps the writers to situate their ideas adequately in the socio-cultural context they are expressing.

Conclusion

In this paper, the researcher presented the analysis of the data collected from selected texts. After analyzing the data, a discussion on the data was also presented. The evidence from the findings shows that there are some English lexical items that are used differently in both Standard British English and Nigerian contexts. There seem then to be changes in meaning when items are used differently by users in Nigeria, on the other hand, and different meanings when used in SBE, on the other hand. The changes in the meaning vary, for instance, such as changes in meaning may be due to transfer of meaning and the extension of the meaning of lexical items, as often the case in the Nigerian users or a take the form of coining of new lexical items. However, these usages and expressions are socially acceptable in the Nigerian context.

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