

## **Nigerian English in the Determinant Triangle**

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**Abstract:** This paper investigates the present status of English in Nigeria. It is certain that there is Nigerian English and several researchers have polarized Nigerian English as either standard or non-standard. The paper argues that the classification of Nigerian English as standard and non-standard is based on the duo forces of conservatism and progressiveness. These conservative and progressive forces are determined by factors such as common core, interference and autonomy. Samples of data were collected from a non-standard nativized spoken form and the standard written form from a national newspaper all in Lagos, Nigeria. Our theoretical frame is drawn from 'the Triangle of Three Determinants' by Schneider (2003:180). This theory stipulates that the forces that churn out a variety of a second language are common core, interference and autonomy.

**Key words:** Second language; English; Nigerian

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Nigerian English has gone through several filters to attain its present status. In the quest to really carve out a niche for Nigerian English, different scholars have undertaken description and classification on this variety of English, amongst them Banjo (1971, 1995), Adesanya (1979), Jibril (1979, 1982), Akere (1982), Eka (1985,1993), Odummuh (1990), Jowitt (1991), Bamgbose (1995), Udofot (1993,1996a,1997,1999,2000,2002, 2003,2004,2005,2006,2007), Adetugbo (1997), and Ekpe (2006,2007). All these classifications polarized Nigerian English as either standard or non-standard varieties. The Standard and non-standard classifications of Nigerian English usage came about through the duo forces of conservatism and progressiveness.

### **1. CONSERVATIVE FORCES IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH**

The conservatives forces are the forces created and enforced by the rules of a language, set down by the native speaker of the language so as to avoid or reduce corruption or adulteration in the structure of the language at all levels of linguistic analysis. The codification of such rules is often overseen by an academy such as National Language Committee for Standard Mandarin, Dutch Language Union for Standard Dutch, Académie Française for Standard French etc., while the rules are implemented by language instructors by making sure that these rules are strictly complied by teaching them and the

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\*Received March 2, 2011; accepted April 5, 2011.

defaulters are corrected or marked down in examinations. Though English is the official language in Nigeria, one cannot forget the fact that English language has a somewhat peculiar and anomalous status that is unmatched with any of the Nigerian indigenous languages. It is apparent that those who look at English as a genuinely foreign language and a relic of the colonial past are unwilling to accept the emergence of a local variety of English in its own right. Thus, when a form that does not comply with standard in reference to standard British English (SBE) or Received Pronunciation (RP) is uttered or written, the conservatist react that such form or forms are ungrammatical and grammaticality refers to correctness based on set standard which has a reference point and this reference point is the SBE.

The conservative forces have exerted much influence on English as a language of education and instruction in schools. It is notable that in Nigeria, there is no target model for the teaching and learning of English in schools that is based on the concept of 'Nigerian English', as such 'British norms' or what is otherwise called 'received pronunciation' still form the language-pedagogical guidelines for the teachers and the learners of English in Nigeria. For example, in one of the Use of English Joint Matriculation Examination to Nigerian Universities, the candidates were tested on their competence of grammaticality with the following options: a) senior, b) older, c) elder, d) bigger, to fill in the given sentence, "Audu fought with his.....". The candidates that chose any option less than 'c' were marked wrong, because these options apart from 'c' do not comply with the rules of SBE which constitute the norm and reference point to grammaticality. However, in popular Nigerian English (PNE) option 'a' is acceptable and that was what most of the candidates chose and were marked wrong. According to Bourdieu (1993), in a linguistic market place, someone who uses a linguistic code that is highly regarded in a given context will possess large amount of symbolic capital. That is value on the metaphorical linguistic market might translate into real economic gain or loss for individual users of a given linguistic code: standard or non-standard. As earlier said, those who fail to comply with the conservative forces educationally are assessed with low grades which can affect future educational opportunities and career prospects. In language acceptable grammaticality and intelligibility are necessary, and of course these are what examiners and evaluators are concerned about when grading examination paper.

Another conservative force at play is the self-critical attitude of Nigerian speakers toward the local form or the non-standard form. This is what Kachru (1983, 2005) calls "linguistic schizophrenia", which is the attitude of using English as our own language, but the moment this is brought to our attention, we get into a flap and respond that, this is not our own language. This complaint syndrome is a typical phenomenon of the nativization phase and this still persists in present-day Nigerian English and it appears in commonly heard comments like 'standard of English has fallen in Nigeria'. Thus, the general preference for the native speaker's norm and the exonormative teaching model in particular is borne out of various objective descriptions among Nigerian speakers of English. The conservative forces as observed, work mostly at the functional and attitudinal levels.

## **2. PROGRESSIVE FORCES IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH**

The progressive force comes out of needs, curiosity and creativeness of a foreign language in a new environment. This is where an alien language is forced and structured to meet the needs of the people. This is what Adegbija (2004:20) calls 'domestication'; Ekpe (2006:29) names it 'glocalization', Bamgbose (1982) says it is 'nativization' and Chilwa (2002:95) 'Nigerianness'. The most important progressive force in present-day Nigerian English is the innovation of new forms and structures by Nigerian users of English. There are several researches on this endonormative structure in Nigerian English such as Ekpe (2006), Adegbija (2003), Bamiro (1994) and Omodiaogbe (2010). Most deviations and innovations in Nigerian English are found in the vocabulary. Igboanusi (2002) in his 'Nigerian English Dictionary' documents many lexical items that are peculiar to Nigerian English such as afa, abiku, ashewo, shakara, wahala, big chic, k-leg, egunje, jambite, kia-kia bus, okada, securityman etc. Nigerian speakers have also created new lexical items, compounds and phrases made up of restructured English materials such as bed sheet (BrE sheet), off-head (BrE by heart), half naked (BrE half dressed), luxurious bus (BrE luxury bus), last but not the least (BrE last but not least), you and me (BrE You and I).

Some lexical items that are archaic and extinct in British English, for example 'twice' are still in use in Nigerian English as superstrate retention (once part of the input variety) and are endonormatively stabilized and no longer based on contemporary BrE usage. From the point of view of evolution of New English varieties, superstrate retention is a progressive force at the structural level and as such a genuine innovation in language structure. The progressive force has also created lexical items which belong to common core, but shared by other varieties and it is used in Nigerian English grammatically and semantically. Morphologically, Nigerian English also deviates from the native variety in the use of affixation as exhibited in words with '-ee' as in *decampee*, *invitee*, *awardee*.

Syntax seems to be more stable in language change in general and in the emergence of English in particular. However, there are quite a few areas in which Nigerian deviates from BrE grammar. For example, the use of determiners is considered as a luxury in Nigerian English and is often avoided e.g. 'She has gone to market' (BrE: ...to the market). The more glaring of structural innovation of Nigerian English is at the level of pronunciation; this can be seen in the monophthongization of glides like /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ to /e/ and /o/ respectively (e.g. *gate* /gert/ → [get], *boat* /bəʊt/ → [bot]) and coalition of two consonant /z/ and /ʃ/ to /ʒ/ as in *measure* /mezə/ → [meʒə]. As well as replacing the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/ *thank*, /θæŋk/ → [tæŋk], *that* /ðæt/ → [dat]. Structural innovation also slows in the characteristic syllable-timed rhythm of a Nigerian Speaker of English (e.g. *CAL*culate → *calcu*LATE, *PET*rol → *pe*TROL). It is at the phonological level that regional accent appears strongly than any other level of English (e.g. *house*, /haʊz/ → [aʊz] (Yoruba), *palour* /pælə/ → [falə] (Hausa), *security* /sɪkjʊərəti / → [sekɔritɪ] (Igbo). This progressive innovation greatly surfaces in the increasing body of literary genres written by Nigerian writers as they write not only for local but international audience as well. As such, a great number of them are oriented towards exonormative principles as prescribed by the native speaker. Lot of endonormative words is used and this is where literary creativity actually surfaces and Nigerian writers write to reflect their world view, concepts and socio-cultural background.

These opposition forces at work in Nigerian English lead to our justification of contextualizing the present status of Nigerian English into the determinant triangle. The determinant triangle is characterized by three major factors which are: common core, interference and autonomy.

### 3. THE TRIANGLE OF THREE DETERMINANTS

The emerging World Englishes has made scholars like Kachru (1985) in his "three-circle model", and McArthur (1987) in his "wheel model" to conceptualize the emerging varieties of English using different parameters. Of recent Schneider (2003:18) introduces the 'Triangle of Three Determinant' to determine the impact of progressive and conservative forces on the emerging varieties of English. In his Triangle of Three Determinant, English as a second language is determined by three major factors: the "common core" (Quirk et al, 1985:16), "the interference variety" (Quirk et al 1972:26) and "norm developing" variety (Kachru 1985b:17).

The common core or nucleus is the norm adopted from the native speaker's variety which all varieties have in common. However esoteric a variety may be, it must have this strand running through it. It is on this premise the name "English" is attached to the different varieties like "Nigerian English, Cameroonian English, Indian English etc. Though grammaticality is mostly mentioned as a feature of 'common core', it is meant to cover all linguistic features at all levels of analysis that all varieties of English share. The reason that deviation from native norms are acceptable acculturations in norm developing varieties, as Nigerian English, brings in this variety into the third dimension of the triangle which ascertains its autonomy.

The interference variety in the determinant triangle stresses that many peculiarities that characterize the emerging varieties of English are based on the speaker's first language. Kachru (1982:45) posits that interference from one's first language (L1) in EFL context usually leads to a 'mistake' in the ESL context; it is 'deviation' because in this context, English is a transplanted nativized language. A

‘mistake’ according to Kachru may not be acceptable to a native speaker since it does not belong to the linguistic ‘norm’ of his language, but this cannot be justified with reference to the sociocultural context of a non-native variety. Thus, a ‘deviation’ is as a result of the new “un-English” linguistic and cultural context in which the language is used. Such interference can be found in lexical and phonological levels. Lexically, these are found in loan words and phonologically, in form of sound replacement, like the substitution of the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ and the voiced dental fricative /ð/ with the voiceless /t/ and voiced /d/ alveolar stops respectively, for example ‘thirty’ [ta:tɪ] for /θə:tɪ/ and ‘that’ [dæt] for [ðæt]. This equally affects the syllable-timed rhythm of Nigerian English.

The third dimension of the triangle is the “norm developing”, otherwise called autonomy. This is brought about by deviation from native varieties. In this situation, autonomy refers to the creative and interference-independent development of new forms and structures in Nigerian English. According to Ekpe (2006:31) these new forms and structures come in different ways and from different processes like neologisms, analogization, hybridization, transliteration, acronymization, blending, compounding, conversation and borrowing which are shaped to convey a new social, cultural and linguistic reality. Some of these creative forms and structural innovations are generally acceptable as Nigerian English features both by most native speakers and many Nigerian speakers (despite the linguistic schizophrenia that are present in various usages) as the major linguistic motivation for placing the label, “Nigerian” to this variety of English.

#### **4. NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN THE DETERMINANT TRIANGLE**

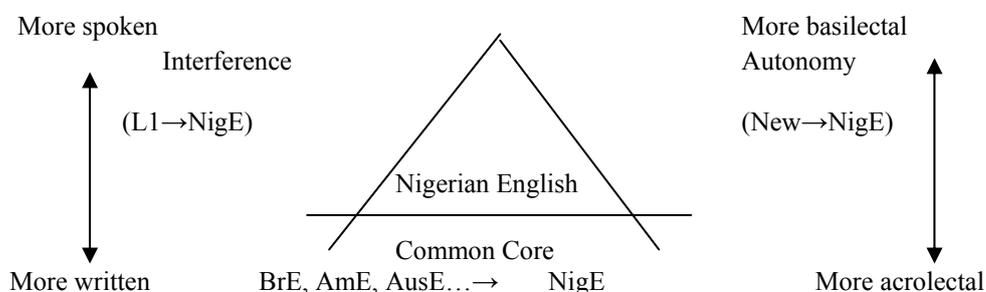
The present situation of English in Nigeria is determined by common core variety, the interference variety and norm developing variety (autonomy) and can rightly be situated within Schneider (2003:18) ‘Triangle of Three as a stabilized-semiautonomous variety, as presented in figure 1, in that:

- ✚ Nigerian English is a variety based on and including-the ‘Common Core’ as shown in the conservative forces in 1.1
- ✚ Nigerian English is an interference variety and,
- ✚ Nigerian English is a norm-developing variety, characterized by a number of linguistic innovations, peculiarities and deviations from other varieties that have developed autonomously, as exhibited in the ‘progressive forces in 1.2.

This is why Ekpe (2007:79) says,

*“the present day standard Nigerian English is in phase 4 variety. The process of nativization (in the sense of transplanting English to Nigeria and consolidating it in the new environment) is more or less over. This endonormatively stabilized variety has come to stay, though there are still some minor remaining features of phase 3, which is a proof that Nigerian English is gearing towards what Kachru (1983) calls “the inner core”.*

**Figure 1: Nigerian English in the Determinant Triangle**



Glancing at figure 1 above, the interference and other orientations toward the common core, which has been - and still is –which standard is mostly set by the native speakers of English impart certain flavour of ongoing nativization to Nigerian English. The conception of Nigerian English as a semiautonomous variety in a stable state is shown in a simplified triangle. The three sides of the triangle correlate, yet complementary labels to what have been described as Nigerian English in the passing as common core, interference and autonomy.

By common core, Nigerian English is a ‘non-native variety’ and as such depends on – and includes – the common core largely set by native speakers and shared by the native and the non-native speakers. Nigerian English is also an interference variety as it takes over the features, forms and structures from the local languages and an autonomous variety because it is norm developing variety as it displays new and innovative forms and structures which have no root on interference, but on Nigerian speakers’ L2 internal linguistic creativity.

The triangle model adopted shows that a language cannot develop by itself or in isolation; the triangle brings together and combines three dimensions of present-day Nigerian English. This triangle can also accommodate the entire range of variants in a speech form from the acrolectal standard Nigerian English to the basilectal Nigerian Pidgin or Broken English as shown by the right side of the gradient. This gradient at the same time correlates the typically written Nigerian English with the typically spoken Nigerian English as indicated by the left gradient. The two ends of the gradients are illustrated in the examples in data ‘a’ and ‘b’ below.

Data ‘a’ is taken from the speech form of a trader in a shopping complex in Oshodi, Lagos State, Nigeria. This shows there is a tendency for the basilectal spoken English to be strongly marked by interference and autonomy in terms of pidginization and to deviate remarkably from the common core to the extent that some of the utterances are no longer intelligible to some non-Nigerian speakers of English.

#### **Data ‘A’: The Localized Variety of Nigerian Pidgin**

The action governor of Lagos state, Raji Babatunde Fashola good so tey, i commot all area boys for road. Before to trek for Oshodi hard and thief boku but now person fit waka from Ikeja reach Oshodi with no wahala. True, true, Eko oni bajje.

These data exemplify the most localized variety of Nigerian Pidgin English. On the other hand, the acrolectal Nigerian English tends to be much less marked by interference as in data ‘b’ taken from ‘the Guardian Newspaper, Tuesday May 12, 2009.

#### **Data ‘B’ Acrolectal Nigerian English**

The country has lost about N124 billion to the global meltdown in the first three months of this year. The Government Agency which administers taxation in Nigeria had projected a collected figure of N477 billion for the first quarter of the year. But this projection at the end of March 2009 had suffered a shortfall of N124 billion due to dwindling revenue caused by global crisis.

In between data ‘a’ (spoken basilect) and ‘b’ (written acrolect), the whole range of mesolect can be arranged, depending on the extent to which common core, interference and autonomy interrelate. The important point about the situation of Nigerian English that the triangle visualizes is that as a non-native variety, Nigerian English is semiautonomous variety, semiautonomous in the sense that it has admixture of common core strands, interference input from L1 and autonomy in terms of new/innovative forms and structures which are not interference based, but on Nigerian speakers’ L2-internal linguistic creativity.

The status of English as a language of international communication, trade, commerce, education, law, research, science and technology with the needed international intelligibility is very important and this is maintained by the conservative forces at work. However, Nigerian speakers cannot stop adapting the English language to the Nigerian context to which it has been transplanted. These adaptive processes and creativity are as a result of progressive forces in Nigerian English. Thus, the concept of a

'semiautonomous' variety is a suitable label to denote the very 'tension' and 'balance' between the conservative and the progressive forces in stable state in which Nigerian English finds itself.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Nigerian English has gone through several filters to attain its present status. This variety of English is polarized as either standard or non-standard. The standard and non-standard varieties are the products of the combined forces of conservative and progressive forces which create a stable variety, which in turn are the products of common core variety, interference variety and autonomy or norm-developing variety, characterized by a number of linguistic innovations, peculiarities and deviations from other varieties that have developed autonomously. More importantly, Nigerian English speakers have the right to develop their own norms. However, the native speakers' norms still remain relevant because of 'ESL speakers' self-critical attitude and their orientation towards international intelligibility and acceptability.

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