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**A SEMANTIC STUDY OF NIGERIAN ENGLISH (A CASE STUDY OF ABUBAKAR TATARI ALI POLYTECHNIC, BAUCHI)**

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***Abstract***

*The paper discuss the semantic of Nigeria English which has been influenced by the local languages, customs, beliefs and culture using everyday utterance of Abubakar Tatari Ali polytechnic students (ATAP) Bauchi and its immediate environment in order to identify the problem areas and subsequently proffer possible solutions. The theoretical framework adapted for the study is the concept of semantics of Saeed (2003). The data collected for the study and arranged according to different grammatical features, such as semantic values, repetitions, faulty structuring of words, wrong use of phrasal verbs, the use of articles and lexizo –semantic features. The study therefore, proves the claims that semantics of any English variety in the work should be studied alongside the features of such English variety.*

***Keywords:*** *Semantics, Nigerian English, Mother Tongue, British Standard English.*

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**Introduction**

Over the years, Language researchers have been polarized by diverse opinion concerning the existence, or perhaps non-existence of the phenomenon known as Nigerian English. In the 1960s, linguists like Wash (1967) as cited in Awa (2008:2) narrowly defined Nigerian English as a variety of English made up of errors while some out rightly claimed that there was no such concept as legitimate Nigerian English. Not quite long, other language scholars like Salami (1968) came out to debunk such claims

with the introduction of expressions such as Standard Nigerian English (SNE), Non- Standard Nigerian English and Educated Nigerian English. From early 1970s until date, many exponents of the existence of a legitimate Nigerian English as a variety of world English have emerged. Adekunle (1974) describes Nigerian English as the Local colour variety of English developed within the Nigerian ethno- Linguistic environment. According to him Nigerian is a Nigerianized English which has been assimilated into the local culture in order to serve the community. Language scholars believe that English language in Nigeria has been influenced by the local languages, customs, beliefs systems and culture, which gives it a flavor and characteristics that could be distinctly identified as Nigerian (Ajani, 2007). Therefore, this paper seeks to analyzed issues in Semantics of the Nigerian English by analyzing everyday utterances of people.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

This paper intend to examines the regularity of use of spoken and written English amongst Nigerians and its attendant carryover in their speech and discuss its patterns in English as a result of its meaning as compare to Standard British English( SHE). The inability of speakers to differentiate between the two variety of English (i.e. NE & SBE) have affected many Nigerian students leading to their failure in the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE) and National Examination certificate (NECO) among others.

### **Objectives**

The objective of this paper is to carry out an analysis of the semantics of Nigerian English using every day utterances of Federal polytechnic, Bauchi Students and its immediate environment in order to identify the problem areas and subsequently proffer possible solutions. The study therefore, hopes to achieve its objectives by analyzing:

- i. The features of Nigerian English (SNE) that affects meaning of utterances.

- ii. The place of semantics in analyzing Nigerian English (SNE) as a variety of world Englishes
- iii. The possible solutions to addressing issues in the semantics of Nigerian English (SNE)

### Research Questions

This paper seeks to provide answers to the following questions:

- i. what are the characteristic features Nigerian English (SNE) that affect meanings of utterances?
- ii. what is the place of semantics in analyzing Nigerian English (SNE) language?
- iii. what are the possible solutions that can be proffered to issues of semantics in Nigerian English? (SNE)

### RELEVANT LITERATURE the Concept of semantics

Semantics simply implies the study of how meaning in language is produced or created (Ogbulogo, 2005). He further state that semantics encompasses how words, phrases and sentences come together to make a meaning in language. The term semantics simply means the study of meaning. Semantics is the area of linguistics dealing with the meaning of words or the meaning attached to words or symbols. This view places semantics at the core of communication in language. Indeed, there is no communication without the sharing of meaning.

According to Ullman (1957) as cited in Hcheloah (1995:17), 'Semantics is the theory of meaning" . He said, it is a self -contained and integral department of philology because the role of meaning is fundamental to any language system. Syal and Jindal (2001) state that "semantics attempts to relate meaning to logic and truth and deals with meaning as a matter primarily of sense relations within the language." Saeed (2007) further defines semantics as " the study of meaning communicated through language". Furthermore, semantics is the study of meanings of words ( lexical semantics) and fixed words combinations ( phraseology), and how these combine to form the meanings of sentences. It is also how meaning is inferred from words and concepts, (Wikipedia. Com, 2010)

### The Overview of Nigerian English

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 (Akere: 1982), Odumuh (1981), for example, having identified NE simply as one of the new varieties of English Language (EL) developing all over the world, proceeds to provide a theoretical basis to justify its existence - the development of variation studies. He then goes on to argue that the existence of a single super-ordinate variety of EL presupposes that of other forms of EL usage in the Nigerian speech community. This assertion answers to a certain degree, one of the questions posed above as to whether NE is a homogenous entity. Odumuh goes further to give some features that distinguish 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 contact situations-as in the case of Nigeria-a variety or varieties are bound to emerge that differ from that of Britain (the EL model for Nigeria). He also raises the issue of standardization and two other related issues: those of local acceptability and international intelligibility. NE, he believes, does satisfy these criteria to a great degree. Furthermore, Akindele and Adegbite (1999:145) state that; The phenomenon known as the NE is that variety of English that has developed in the Nigerian non-native English situation. This is as a result of colonial imposition of the language as well as the native culture on the country. The variety thus developed is not wholly native English type and not totally Nigerian it is a blend of two situations. Towards an acceptable definition of Nigerian English Okoro (2004) as cited in Awonusi and Babalola (2004:167) opines that:

Nigerian English is simply English the way Nigerians speak and write it. Nigerian English is made up, on the phonological level, of the peculiar forms of pronunciations typical of the Efix, the Hausa, the Igbo, the Yoruba, Urhobo, and the numerous other ethnic groups that make up Nigeria; on the semantic level of meaning broadening, narrowing, total shift, literal translation, and the creation of peculiar idioms; on the lexical of coinages, loans, blends, compounding, acronyms; on the syntactic level by transfer of mother tongue (MT) structures; and so forth.

Odumuh (1981) subdivided NE into three dialects arising from the influences of the three major (regional) languages of Nigeria, also referred to as national languages. These he categorizes as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo Englishes. It is these dialect types, he contends, that contribute to feed and enrich the super-ordinate NE. He also recognizes the immense contribution of written creative literature to the standardization of NE. He then suggests two ways to approach variety differentiation in NE. mode (written or spoken) and educational attainment (educated standard, semi-standard and non-standard). He nevertheless agrees that these are not clear-cut demarcations, but rather constitute a continuum of usages. The issue of intelligibility has also been variously dealt with. The most representative opinion on this, however, is that NE is indigenous to Nigeria and its most basic usage is intra-national, which it does well. On the question of international intelligibility, the opinion is that standard NE is to a large extent intelligible and that whatever difficulties encountered along those lines are not peculiar to NE alone, but also to users of all the other varieties of EL worldwide. The difficulties encountered by the NE speaker communicating with an American English speaker will be similar in many respects to that encountered by an Australian English speaker communicating with a New Zealander.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts the concept of semantics by Saeed (2003), and language variation and change by Weinreich (1953) as cited in Awa (2008:6) (who could be rightly regarded as the "Father" of modern day contact linguistics) presented a semantic framework for the categorization of the mutual influence and making "Mixing" that take place when languages come in contact (1953, 1968). Since then several linguists, sociolinguists and anthropological linguists have observed and analyze this phenomenon in different parts of the world. Each of the new Englishes has distinct characteristic as well as distinct linguistic and cultural identities, largely due to the different historical, geographical, political and socio-cultural factors that gave birth to them.

### Data Presentation

The data collected for this study are arranged on the table below. The first and second columns contain the serial number and raw data respectively. Twenty (20) data are presented on this table:

S/No	Raw Data
1.	"I want to enter bus to Dawaki" (I want to board a bus)
2.	"I want to branch at his house" (I want to call at his house)
3.	'Please don't make noise'
4.	'Jerome please buy me kunu" (please Jerome buy kunu for me)
5.	'Please, I am asking of Mrs. Ladi'
6.	"I went to class <u>under the rain yesterday</u> " (I went to class in the <u>rain yesterday</u> )
7.	"Sarah is an academician" (Sarah is a <u>learned person</u> ).
8.	'He wore agbada to the wedding yesterday....."
9.	"Please let's take okada to north gate... (Please let us bike to north gate).'
10.	'Due to me being a newcomer on campus. I did not know what to do'. _____.
11.	<u>The lecture you gave us we did not understand it.</u> " (we didn't understand your lecture)
12.	"I don't like too much talk talk."
13.	"These Hausa boys them like babanriga too much" (these Hausa boys like babanriga very much) _
14.	"It was me who sent for you" (it was I who sent for you)
15.	<sup>1</sup> "That security man is obviously an illiterate person." (that security man is obviously illiterate)
16.	Shit, Sheet, bid, bead.
17.	"I went to night vigil in chapel yesterday" (I went to vigil in the <u>chapel yesterday</u> ) "Mamma is on sabbatical leave."
18.	"Super story is very sweet" (super story is very interesting)
19.	'You had better written your registration number on the full-scap should in case it gets lost'
20.	"I want to enter bus to Dawaki" (I want to board a bus)

## Data Analysis

The analysis of data collected for this study is arranged according to different grammatical features. According to Wash (1967) as cited in devilfinder.com (2010), grammar means rules and rules are operative at all the levels of language analyses. It is a comprehensive term because it covers part of a sentence like subject, verb, object and complement, its rules of tense usage, structuring of affixes on words and the sound system of a language. English as we know it is a contact language in Nigeria and most Nigerians use it as a second language in addition to their first language or mother tongue. Some of the features that make English in Nigeria different from that of the neighboring environment or that of the native speakers are: different semantic values, unnecessary repetition of some words, phrases or clauses, misuse of pronouns, vowel merger/neutralization, faulty structuring of words, the wrong use of phrasal verbs, the use of articles and lexico-semantic features among others.

## Wrong Use of Pronouns

It is equally common to find the expression of educated Nigerian English containing the wrong forms of pronoun.

- It was me who sent for you. (it was I who sent for you)
- Due to me being a newcomer on campus. I did not know what to do

The objective case is being used where there is no object. The slot actually requires the use of the objective case.

## The lexico-semantic features of NE

Lexico-semantics is the lexically or semantically ordered list of words in a language, dialect or socio-lect or a list of terminology for a specific discipline. At the lexical level, it is observed that there are transfers from the local languages (especially the three major regional languages: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) and mostly from the following areas: music, clothing, indigenous foods, traditional religious beliefs, local institutions, flora and fauna, and others, as well as different creative strategies such as the lexification of acronyms, neologisms and semantic extension. Generally,

most of the items from music, clothing and foods are left intact in their substract forms for want of better terminology (Taiwo, 2007). Example:

- He wore agbada to the wedding yesterday. ....
- "Jeromeabeg buy me kunu" (please Jerome buy kunu for me)
- "Please let's take okada to north gate. . . (Please let us bike to north gate).

### Faulty structuring of words

Firstly, faulty structuring of words results from using the wrong form of verb or wrong usage of nouns and others. Example

- "That security man is obviously an illiterate person" ( that security man is obviously an illiterate)

*"that security man is obviously an "illiterate". Here 'illiterate' is an adjective but it is used here as a noun, hence, it takes the indefinite article 'an'. This rather should be: "that man is obviously an illiterate person" Or "He is obviously illiterate"*

### Inflectional Use of Words

Deviations here show no breaking of any grammatical rules. The problem with the expressions is, this expression will definitely not be used by native speakers to mean the same thing intended by the speakers of the following expressions:

- I want to enter a bus to Wuntin –Dada (I want to board a bus to Dawaki)  
What is intended here is "board" or "get on" "Enter" cannot be used in place of "board" or 'get on'. This is direct translation of an idea from the indigenous language.
- I want to branch at his house" (I want to call at his house) OR (I want to stop at his).
- I went to class under the rain yesterday" (I went to class in the rain yesterday).

One cannot move or walk under rain because there is nothing that covers humans from rain. This probably means that one is walking in the ground because ground seems to be the onlything that can prevent rain from wetting humans.



## Coinage

- Certain words or lexical items have meaning that are understood only in the Nigerian context and these lexical items are borrowed into or coined in local English to suit the Nigeria environment to such an extent that, when they are used, they immediately mark a statement or a piece of writing as characteristics of Nigerian English. Example:

- "Abeg who commot my cover-cloth from my bed" (please who take my bed sheet from my bed).

"cover-cloth" is a long piece of cloth usually wrapped around the body when one lies down to sleep as long piece of cloth used to dress bed. However, there are many other features that characterize Nigeria English which have not been discussed in this work.

### **i The Place of Semantic in Analyzing Nigerian English as a Language**

According to Yule (2002:114), semantics is the branch of linguistics study that deals with the study of the conventional meaning of words, phrases and sentences in a language. Moreover, before one attempts analysis of Nigerian English, the world view of Nigerians must be put into consideration. This worldview, according to Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis, is the cultural content of a people's language and their view of culture as the means by which members of the society express their thoughts and ideas to one another.

## Conclusion

The characteristics of Nigerian English appear in all the levels of language analysis. The grammatical characteristics of Nigerian English have to do with the deviation from rules of combining phrases, clauses, and sentences. These deviations can be seen in the areas of faulty structuring of words, wrong application of pronoun coinages and others. Though these mark out Nigerian English from that of a native speaker, it does not mean that Nigerian English is filled with errors but can be said to be filled with errors when compared with standard British English which is what Nigerians are been taught in schools. However, Nigerian English is not a standard for writing examination in Nigeria. Standard British English (SBE) is the

standard accepted in Nigeria; therefore, Nigerian students should be given adequate exposure by means of exchange programs between Nigerian students and lecturers, and reading of British lectures among others by Nigerian students. This study, therefore proves claim that semantics of any English variety in the world should be studied alongside the features that characterized such English variety.

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