# NIGERIAN ENGLISH IN THE MIDST OF GLOBAL ENGLISHES: A CHALLENGE TO PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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## Abstract

*The global spread of English has transcended beyond the history of colonialism and imperialism and become predicated on its global use for technological advancements, politics, power and education, leading to its localization and homogenisation in different speech communities. This trajectory of use has metamorphosed into 'Global Englishes' where each speech community adopts English to suit its sociocultural experience. Nigerian English (NE) as part of 'Global Englishes' has been unconsciously homogenised, nativised and localised to suit Nigeria's diverse sociocultural and multilingual experiences. The Nigerian variety of English has reached the level of acceptability where students and people at different levels of the society unconsciously use it, irrespective of their social status and educational attainment. However, despite the internal unconscious acceptance of the domesticated use of Nigerian English and the large body of knowledge and research clamouring for its standardisation and recognition as a variety of 'Global Englishes', its use for classroom instruction poses some pedagogical challenges. This paper, discusses the features of Nigerian English, the status of English in Nigerian education system and, the challenges of the use of Nigerian English for pedagogical practice. The paper finally suggests the mainstreaming of Nigerian English into the education system to enable learners have access to its register in addition to that of the native speakers. This will enable them to avoid the use of pure 'errors' as Nigerian English and also forestall the confusion caused by the presence of the two codes in the classroom environment. The paper also suggests the use of Nigerian English for interactional purposes while the native speaker variety should be for pedagogical practices to engender international intelligibility and acceptability.*

**Key Words:** Global Englishes, Nigerian English, language of instruction, international intelligibility

## Introduction

The presence of English language was strikingly felt in different spheres of many continents of the world, most of which were former English colonies. As such, English came to be used as the official and even native language of most of these colonies. Many multilingual countries like Nigeria colonised by Britain embraced English as a means of intra/inter-regional communication. English fulfilled the function of *Lingua Franca* in such countries. English bridged the gap in communication created by mutually unintelligible languages which exist among the different linguistic/ethnic groups. Eze and Igwenyi, (2016) opine that English has acquired a genuinely global status owing to its developed

special role and significance, recognised in almost every continent, sub-regions and countries of the world. Similarly, Nwankwo, Mba, Nwodo & Ezekwesili, (2006), posit that English is spoken by more than 700 million people.

Internationally, English enjoys the prestigious role of international language of communication. Amadi (2019) notes that English is used as a means of communication in most international conferences, workshops and symposia. The contact of English with other languages across the globe developed and produced different varieties today referred to as 'varieties of English'. These varieties otherwise referred to as 'Global Englishes' authenticate Nigerian English as a variety of English.

Nigerian English was birthed through a language contact process between English language brought by the colonial administration, European merchants and missionaries, and Nigerian indigenous languages. With the advent of colonialism, English assumed prominent roles in the Nigerian society. Little wonder Amadi (2019) asserts that the colonisation of Nigeria by Britain left her with the only option of adopting English language as her *lingua franca,* due to her multi-ethnic and multi-lingual diversity. Eka (2000) had earlier noted that the colonialists came with English language which served as the language of government, education, commerce and general official intercourse. English predominantly serves as the official language and the language of intercultural and interethnic communications and discourse. It was also adopted as a language of education, science and technology, to accommodate the multilingual diversity of the Nigerian society. However, literature has shown that the English passed on by the colonialists is no longer the same as the one currently in use in Nigeria and other parts of the globe (Kaan, Amase & Tsaumbu 2013; Dangana, 2014; Eze & Igwenyi, 2016). The contact of English with other languages of the world brought about variations in the structure and use of English. These variations birthed a number of varieties of English used by different people in various parts of the world. The multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of Nigeria exposed English to intermingling with the various ethnic languages of the Nigerian society leading to its localization, indigenization and domestication. Thus, in the view of Omoroillion (n.d), Nigerian English denotes that variety of English that has distinctive phonological features and culturally based lexical items and nuances that are peculiar to Nigerian users. According to Omoroillion it is that variety that has been *Nigerianised* or *indigenized*. Nigerianisation or indigenization of English refers to the process of adapting the use of English to the linguistic peculiarities of the Nigerian environment. This is a re-echo of what Bamgbose (1995) and Adegbija (2004) refer to as nativisation and domestication of English in Nigeria respectively.

Kperogi (2010) refers to Nigerian English as the variety spoken and written by Nigeria's literary, intellectual, political and media elite across the regional and ethnic spectrums of Nigeria. In other words, it is the variety of English spoken and written by educated Nigerians. This presupposes that the yardstick for measuring Nigerian English is the standard acceptable among the educated class. Nigerian English is that variety which reflects the sociocultural and sociolinguistic experience of Nigeria as written and spoken by the elite. The Nigerian variety of English has reached the level of acceptability where students and people at different levels of the society unconsciously use it, irrespective of their social status and educational attainment. English has become a household medium of communication in most Nigerian homes because of its status. Little wonder parents also prefer it as a medium of instruction for their children irrespective of government policy (Amadi, 2012). However, the question of its use for pedagogical practice still poses a yawning gap in the acceptability of Nigerian English.

**Features of Nigerian English – A Recap**
The English language in Nigeria has gone through a lot of transformations as a result of sociocultural and multilingual influences from the Nigerian society. The contact of English with Nigerian indigenous languages produced a lot of variant structures in the phonological, lexical, semantic and pragmatic use of English in Nigeria. This gives credence to the fact that the English handed down by the colonialists is no longer the same in use today (Eze & Igwenyi, 2016). The variations in the structure and use of English in Nigeria characterise the features of Nigerian English as reported by scholars such as Ekpe, 2007, Kperogi, 2010, Alabi, 2012 and Amadi, 2019.

The phonological structure of Nigerian English is characterised by reduced vowel quality which is absent from standard British English. Nigerian English is syllable timed like most Nigerian indigenous languages while British English is stress timed. The phonetic sounds in Nigerian English seem to correspond with its spelling patterns just like the indigenous languages. Hence, Nigerian English speakers are known to insert sounds in between words where such sounds do not exist in British English. At the lexical level, a number of variations are found in terms of lexical items and their meanings. A lot of lexical items move into Nigerian English lexicon through the normal English word formation processes such as language transfer, extension, acronyms, and creativity. In terms of the pragmatic use of English in Nigeria, new words and expressions are created and coined to fill up the sociocultural gap between the indigenous languages and the received language and culture. Alabi, (2012) notes that the effect of multilingualism in Nigeria brought about the transposition of linguistic traits in local languages to fill the vacuum of a national language. Some scholars view these peculiar features of Nigerian English as deviant structures or the

results of mother tongue interference (Olushola, 2013). But to Omoroillion (n.d) since many Nigerians from diverse ethnic and linguistic background speak and write English, the richness of standard Nigerian English should be reflected in a reasonably organised way. There abound a lot of studies clamouring for the standardisation of Nigerian English for its functional and optimal fulfillment of the roles assigned to it, especially in the education sector (Bamgbose, 1995 Adegbija, 2004, Alabi, 2012).

**The Status of English in Nigerian Education System**
English assumes the prime position of lingua franca and official language in Nigerian society due to her multilingual setting. As such, English is used as a language of education, language of the elite as well as the medium of social interaction (Olaoye, 2007). Amadi (2019) reiterates that English serves as a unifying language of communication in Nigeria. The Nigerian National Policy on Education specifies the obvious and expected status of English in the Nigerian education system. The policy document stated that the language of immediate environment shall be used as the medium of instruction during the first three years of primary education while English shall be taught as a subject in the curriculum (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013). The document further stated that English shall be used as the medium of instruction from the fourth year.

The policy recognises the position of English as a medium of instruction and a subject in the curriculum in the Nigerian child's primary education. However, evidence abound that English has been used as the medium of instruction from early childhood education through primary education, irrespective of the government policy (Amadi, 2015). Parents are known to prefer the use of English medium of instruction for their children at all levels of education as against the use of indigenous language recommended for the first three years by government.

Throughout secondary education, English language also serves as a medium of instruction as well as a compulsory subject of study. A mandatory credit pass is required in English language for senior secondary school examinations organised by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) respectively before any Nigerian child can be qualified for entry into any Nigerian tertiary institution. Likewise, no matter the course one is aspiring to study in any Nigerian higher institution, English language is a compulsory subject to be written in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) organised by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB). English, therefore, is a prerequisite for admission into higher education in Nigeria.

To make up for the lapses in the teaching and learning of English during secondary education, the General Studies Division in all Nigerian tertiary institutions host an English course - Use of English/Communication in English - as a compulsory course for all first-year students. Students in some institutions also offer the course again in their second year. The course is adjudged a prerequisite for graduation for all students in Nigerian tertiary institution. This places a higher premium on the status of English language in Nigerian education system.

Owing to the outstanding status of English in the education system, the question of its effective teaching and learning becomes paramount. As noted earlier, the interaction of English with Nigerian indigenous languages produced the Nigerian English variety which is widely in use at varying degrees in Nigeria. Many scholars argue that Nigerian English is a dialect/variety of English and should be rightly classified as such (Bamgbose, 1995; Kachru, 1995, Adegbija, 2004; Alabi, 2012). They also suggest its harmonisation and standardisation so that obvious errors will be eliminated. However, despite the internal unconscious acceptance of the domesticated use of Nigerian English and the large body of knowledge and research clamouring for its standardisation, its use for educational purposes poses some pedagogical challenges.

**Challenges of the use of Nigerian English for Pedagogical Practice**
Though Nigerian English reflects the reality of English usage in multicultural and multilingual Nigeria, the norm to be adopted for educational purposes creates a pedagogical confusion. Issues of the standard to teach, content of the curriculum, teaching materials, content of teacher education programmes and the benchmark for assessment will not only affect teachers' motivation but also learners' ability to learn the prescribed standard.

The content of the English language curriculum in Nigerian educational system is designed based on the native speaker norm. Topics on grammar and lexis are drawn to reflect the theoretical principles and practices of traditional, and transformational generative grammars which are distinct from the grammar and lexis of Nigerian English. The purpose of the curriculum designers might be to train students whose language proficiency and communicative competence will reflect the standard norm. It could also be to produce learners whose English will be socially acceptable and internationally intelligible. However, the gamut of Nigerian English lexis and grammar which the learners bring into the teaching/learning environment introduces a lot of confusion in the system. Currently, Nigerian English is not yet reflected in the curriculum. Teaching the British/American English variety reflected and represented in the school curriculum seem to clash with

intervening Nigerian variety which learners bring into the teaching/learning environment. This poses a big hurdle to be surpassed in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria. English language materials and texts which are written based on the content of the curriculum reflect the native speaker norm. The language texts do not prepare learners for language variations they encounter in texts written in other disciplines which are sometimes locally produced. In using the language materials to teach, teachers might have technically carried out their duties by teaching the prescribed curriculum. Yet, learners are left without adequate training in British/American English or Nigerian English. They are left to choose between imbibing the standard found in their English learning materials, the standard found in texts in other disciplines, and the standard they socially acquire through interactions outside the texts and the classroom environment. This complex situation leaves the students more confused and the teachers less motivated.

English language teacher education programmes are predicated on the native speaker standard. The programmes rely on grammatical theories such as transformational generative grammar which is not applicable for teaching purposes, especially at the primary and secondary levels of education. They benefit neither educators nor students in the teaching reality. The programmes also draw from the prescriptive Traditional Grammars which are designed to train teachers on the various features that are used in different texts and genres which help them teach accordingly. However, teachers are not trained to know the different language resources learners will bring into the classroom due to their multicultural and multilingual experience. This poses a major problem because the teacher will keep struggling to unteach the child what he calls 'bad English' (Nigerian variety) by virtue of his training. The teacher is left at the crossroads of reconciling what the learner brings into the learning environment and what is expected in formal teaching/learning environment. Teachers' lack of knowledge of features of Nigerian English leaves them handicapped on the expertise with which to bridge the gap between language and approaches to learning which the learners bring into the learning environment and the standard they need to acquire and succeed in. To effectively teach English in Nigerian context, teachers need to be trained on the basic features of Nigerian English. This will serve as a tool they will use to analyse texts, identify features that reflect Nigerian English, use them to develop context appropriate teaching materials as well as reduce confusion in the language classroom.

The assessment benchmark/standard for English language in Nigeria is where the big rubble lies. The various examinations written by Nigerian learners of English as a second language are measured using the native speaker benchmark. Teacher-marked assessments are scored with the measuring rod of British/American English standard. The different

examining bodies (WAEC, NECO, JAMB) who moderate examinations rely on the yardstick of the native speakers in their standardisd test of English language. This gives credence to Mahboob's (2018) assertion that standardised English tests are based on static native speakers' measuring rod. For a realistic assessment in a second language context, adopting Gerson's (2008) proposition may suffice. Gerson suggests an assessment approach that recognizes language variation in different contexts which will be able to ascertain learners' ability to adapt their use of language to different situations as well as their ability to respond to assistance or feedback instead of their ability to respond to items based on static native speaker norms. Until this is done, Nigerian English will continue to constitute confusion in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria. Obviously too, learners will continue to carry over what they acquired outside the classroom into the purist standard being taught in school. Thus, failure in English language remains inevitable because of differences in the standard used for measurement.

## Conclusion

The pedagogical challenges posed by Nigerian English towards English language teaching in Nigeria demand sincere efforts towards its inclusion and use in the classroom. Mainstreaming it into the education system will not only hasten its standardisation but forestall the continuous inclusion of pure 'errors' as Nigerian variety of English. Adopting Mahboob's (2018) model of teaching English as a dynamic language which is a language proficiency that recognises the dynamic nature of language variation will be a way forward. With this, Nigerian learners of English can be trained on both the Nigerian variety and the native speaker variety and so have access to the register of the two codes. Nigerian English can then be used for social interaction, for solidarity and as an identity marker while the native speaker variety will be used for pedagogical purposes to engender international intelligibility.

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